

## “C.S. Lewis’s Gay Best Friend, Arthur”<sup>1</sup>

*Journal of Homosexuality*

### **An Unmarked Grave in Belfast**

There are a handful of significant cemeteries in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Flora Hamilton and Albert Lewis, the parents of C.S. Lewis (1898–1963)—the famed Oxford scholar and author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*—are buried in the Belfast City Cemetery, alongside other members of the Hamilton and Lewis families. When I first visited the cemetery, I found their grave surprisingly unkempt and covered in weeds, making it hard to find. Since my first visit, however, the premises have been tidied up rather nicely.

The parents of Lewis’s oldest and most intimate friend, Arthur Greeves (1895–1966), are buried in the much smaller Dundonald Cemetery in East Belfast. According to public records, Arthur is buried *with* his parents in Section E, plot 67.<sup>2</sup> Anyone who visits their grave, like me, will be confused: there are no markings for Arthur—neither on this plot nor adjacent ones where other members of the Greeves family, including some of Arthur’s closest confidants, have been buried after his death. No engravings or plaque commemorate his life. Not even a name. I left the cemetery feeling perplexed and not a little sad. Later I confirmed with my local friend, the Director of the C.S. Lewis Institute in Belfast, that what I had seen—or not seen—was correct.

In this paper, I wish to explore the untold story of Arthur’s sexual self-understanding. I had initially planned to run with the title “Six Moves in Arthur Greeves’s Sexual Self-Understanding,” but decided instead on the present title “C.S. Lewis’s Gay Best Friend, Arthur” to highlight what most people do not know about at all. What readers must be thinking is: Was Arthur *really* ... Lewis’s best friend? I will say something about that in a moment, although the word *best* will not be my main focus.

---

<sup>1</sup> [*Acknowledgments omitted for peer review*].

<sup>2</sup> The burial record is available here: <https://online.belfastcity.gov.uk/find-burial-records/BurialRecordDetails.aspx?RecordID=8705.3859>. More details, including the 1901 Census records of the Greeves household, can be found here: [https://www.sinton-family-trees.com/ft\\_main.php?rin=2327&utm](https://www.sinton-family-trees.com/ft_main.php?rin=2327&utm).

But first, a couple of thoughts on the other word in the title—*Arthur*. Except for readers and scholars of C.S. Lewis, the name Arthur Greeves will probably say nothing. He was indeed Lewis’s oldest and most intimate friend. Lewis talks about him movingly in his partial autobiography *Surprised by Joy* (1955).<sup>3</sup> A few years older than Lewis, Arthur lived just across the road from Lewis’s childhood home in Belfast. In his earliest letters Lewis calls Arthur “Galahad”—a playful reference to what the young Lewis, himself a committed atheist at the time, perceived as his friend’s faith and sexual innocence. Galahad was “The Pure Knight” from Arthurian romance, including in Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* (1485), which Arthur and Lewis both read, and bonded over. Lewis would later playfully question both, Arthur’s faith and his purity.

### C.S. Lewis’s *Best Friend*?

In his short book on their friendship, Kohm proposes that “it was Arthur Greeves—not Owen Barfield, not J.R.R. Tolkien, and not even Lewis’s brother Warnie—who was C.S. Lewis’s best friend.”<sup>4</sup> But is he correct?

Was it not Barfield who Lewis called his “wisest and best unofficial teacher,”<sup>5</sup> or Tolkien who Lewis called “a very great man” and “my very old friend”<sup>6</sup>? Surely if Lewis even had a best friend it would have been his own brother, Warren (Warnie)?<sup>7</sup> And why are Charles Williams and George Sayer not even listed? After all, Lewis called Williams “my friend of friends,”<sup>8</sup> and Lewis’s student-turned-

---

<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955), see esp. chapter 8. Anyone wishing to know more about Arthur Greeves should turn to this and to their primary sources—above all C.S. Lewis and Arthur Greeves, *They Stand Together: The Letters of C.S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves (1914–1963)*, ed. by Walter Hooper (New York: Macmillan, 1979), which includes Lewis’s 296 letters to Arthur and Hooper’s helpful introduction and notes. Lewis’s published diary *All My Road Before Me: The Diary of C.S. Lewis, 1922–1927*, ed. by Walter Hooper (1991; repr. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2017) and the unpublished *Arthur Greeves Diaries Collection* (held at the Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Illinois) are also illuminating. Among the secondary sources relying on these primary sources, one might read Joseph Kohm’s *The Unknown Garden of Another’s Heart: The Surprising Friendship of C.S. Lewis and Arthur Greeves* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022) and Joel Heck’s chapter on Arthur in *No Ordinary People: 21 Friendships of C.S. Lewis* (Winged Lion Press, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Kohm, *Unknown Garden*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1936). The quote is from Lewis’s dedication of the work to Barfield.

<sup>6</sup> Letters to Charles Brady on 29 October 1944 and Edward Allen on 12 March 1949 in C.S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters*, 3 vols., ed. by Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollins, 2000–2006), 2:631 and 2:925.

<sup>7</sup> According to his brother Warnie, Lewis was *his* “most intimate male friend since the days when we used to play robbers together.” See Warnie’s letter to Edward Allen on 18 June 1949 in C.S. Lewis, *Collected Letters* 2:944.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Mary Neylan on 20 May 1945 in *Collected Letters* 2:652.

friend and early biographer Sayer has said, “We talked in the frankest way as friends should. I have never known a man more open about his private life.”<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps, however, Lewis did not have one best friend but several, at different stages of his life. In a letter to Arthur in 1935, Lewis wrote: “I am v. [very] fortunate in that respect [to live near my friends], and you much less so. But even for me, it wd. [would] make a great difference if you (and one or two others) lived in Oxford” (29 Dec 1935).<sup>10</sup>

I have come, however, to agree with Kohm. Lewis’s brother Warnie is admittedly a close contender, but if the standards against which we evaluate intimate friendship-love are those Lewis outlines in *The Four Loves* (1960)—mutual appreciation, vulnerability, consistency (what Lewis calls “appreciative love,” “need-love,” and “gift-love,” respectively) and above all shared meaningful interests<sup>11</sup>—it is hard to top Arthur. He was there at the beginning, and he was there at the very end. Lewis loved many friends who shared his interests and passions, if not always his views, but Arthur surpasses them all, even Warnie, as the depository of his most intimate and vulnerable secrets. The level of honesty and transparency seems not to have been surpassed in any of his other friendships.

Almost three hundred letters from Lewis to Arthur have survived from a friendship that lasted nearly fifty years (1914–1963), more than any other person he wrote to by a large margin. (In contrast, only four letters from Arthur to Lewis have been preserved.<sup>12</sup>) Many of Lewis’s letters to Arthur discuss sensitive topics—such as masturbation, sadomasochism, and their *diverging* sexual interests—so candidly that Arthur scribbled over many passages before donating them to Oxford University’s Bodleian Library after his death in 1966.<sup>13</sup> Almost all of his expurgations were later restored.<sup>14</sup> Especially in a long, almost completely destroyed 1930 letter to Arthur ending with the

---

<sup>9</sup> George Sayer, “Jack on Holiday,” in *C.S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table and Other Reminiscences*, ed. by James T. Como (London: Collins, 1980), 202–209, here 207.

<sup>10</sup> All dated quotations from Lewis’s letters to Arthur specifically are from *They Stand Together*.

<sup>11</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1960). See also Jason Lepojärvi, “Brilliance and Blindspots: New Light on C.S. Lewis’s *The Four Loves*,” in *The Heythrop Journal*, Vol. 63, Issue 6 (2022), 1109–1123, and “Companions in Shipwreck: J.R.R. Tolkien’s Female Friendships,” in *Apprehending Love*, ed. by Olli-Pekka Vainio and Pekka Kärkkäinen (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 2019), 339–365, esp. 351–355.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Hooper recounts how these four letters came into his possession in *They Stand Together*, 42.

<sup>13</sup> Against Arthur’s wishes, Lewis’s brother sent them to what is now the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College in Illinois instead (*They Stand Together*, 40).

<sup>14</sup> I have offered a quantitative and qualitative analysis of these expurgations in a forthcoming paper.

words “you are my only real Father Confessor,” Lewis probably “unveils himself to Arthur with a transparency he showed to no other person.”<sup>15</sup>

Lewis says of Arthur that he “was the most faithful of friends, and carried the innumerable secrets of my own furtive and ignoble adolescence locked in a silence.”<sup>16</sup> “There are a great many subjects,” he tells Arthur, “on which you are the only person whom I can write to or be written to by with full understanding” (29 July 1930). Lewis talks to Arthur about his brother’s secrets, such as his alcoholism, but never to his brother about Arthur’s secrets. “Let me have your prayers; I am tired, scared, & bewildered” (15 Aug 1954), he asks Arthur during one of Warnie’s terrifying alcohol binges. Arthur was effectively *another brother* to Lewis, but one in whom he could confide about anything.<sup>17</sup> After Arthur’s death in 1966, Warnie wrote in his diary: “I do not suppose that with the exception of myself he [Lewis] ever had a more loved friend. Indeed I can hardly except myself” (1 Sept 1966).<sup>18</sup>

I will not press the case further here. It is not my main argument and ultimately not that important either. But it provides a helpful bridge to the questions that interest me in this paper: Was Arthur gay? How do we know, and what difference does it make? How did it affect their friendship? I do not intend to say anything very controversial: my approach will be historical and biographical, not ethical or theological. Lewis did have things to say about homosexuality from ethical, theological, anthropological, and legal perspectives as well, which I cannot go into in this paper.<sup>19</sup> But as noted above, Arthur’s sexual self-understanding developed—and possibly even oscillated—so we will certainly learn fascinating things about Arthur’s views on homosexuality and about their friendship along the way.

### C.S. Lewis’s *Gay* Friend?

---

<sup>15</sup> Kohm, *Unknown Garden*, 63.

<sup>16</sup> This comes from a private portrait of Arthur written around 1935. See *Lewis Papers: Memoirs of the Lewis Family 1850–1930* (Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL), Vol. X, 218–220, quoted in *They Stand Together*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> I thank Debra Baty for helping me put to words what I now think best describes what Arthur meant to Lewis—*another brother*.

<sup>18</sup> Warren Lewis, *Brothers and Friends: The Diaries of Major Warren Hamilton Lewis*, ed. by Clyde S. Kilby and Marjorie Lamp Mead (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 266.

<sup>19</sup> I am working on a separate study on Lewis’s eclectic views on homosexuality.

Was Arthur Greeves attracted to men? Well, who cares whether he was or was not, we might ask. What difference does it make? The question and answer do matter and make a difference, I would propose, to *any* biographer of Lewis and *many* readers and scholars of Lewis’s life, thought, and lasting influence, because they help to make sense of his letters and to better understand his views on sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular.

Lewis himself was understandably protective of Arthur’s private life. In the United Kingdom homosexual acts were only partially decriminalized in 1967, a year after Arthur’s death. Lewis says in a private family document: “I know more of him than any historian has the right to know of his subject, and therefore leave him to those [who] can discover his faults more properly and his virtues less partially than I.”<sup>20</sup> Lewis told Arthur that he found “modern” biographies tedious and did not want to know about people’s “*vie intime*” (3 Dec 1957). He thought people confided in him because he had “no natural curiosity about private lives” (12 Sept 1948). He was no gossip. Yet as a scholar, Lewis supported discussing and publishing such material. Most famously, he voted to publish “the whole, unexpurgated” diary of Samuel Pepys (1633–1703), Magdalene College Cambridge’s most prized treasure. “I think it wd. be pusillanimous and unscholarly,” he wrote to his college president, “to delete one syllable” out of fear of spite or ridicule.<sup>21</sup>

A brief note on terminology before we continue. I do not wish to enter what has been called the “terminology wars.”<sup>22</sup> The noun *homosexual* fell out of preference after the 1990s, but it was Lewis’s standard, never pejorative, term. He could speak of “a homosexualist,” “a pious male homo[sexual]” and “the persecuted Homo[sexual].”<sup>23</sup> As one author, himself a celibate gay man, writes, “For Lewis, the gay person could not be reduced to their sexual orientation or to sexual temptation.”<sup>24</sup> I will use *gay*, *homosexual*, and *same-sex attracted* interchangeably, aware that each carries different assumptions for different people, but I use them simply to mean a more or less consistent romantic or sexual attraction to one’s own sex, without further metaphysical or ethical assumptions. Some of Lewis’s eclectic assumptions—both traditional and progressive for his time—lay close to the surface in such

---

<sup>20</sup> *Lewis Papers*, Vol. III, 305, quoted in *They Stand Together*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to Sir Henry Willink on 17 June 1960 in *Collected Letters* 3:1164.

<sup>22</sup> See Greg Johnson, *Still Time to Care: What We Can Learn about the Church’s Failed Attempt to Cure Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 191–193.

<sup>23</sup> See Lewis’s diary note on 26 January 1923 in *All My Road Before Me*, letter Sheldon Vanauken on 14 May 1954 (*Collected Letters* 3:472), and letter Delmar Banner on 27 May 1961 (*Collected Letters* 3:1154).

<sup>24</sup> Johnson, *Still Time to Care*, 7.

phrases as “the genuine Homosexual”<sup>25</sup> or “the man of good will, saddled with an abnormal desire he never chose.”<sup>26</sup>

Well, was Arthur gay, was he homosexual, did he experience more or less exclusive and consistent same-sex attraction? The answer is Yes. How exactly do we know this? We know it from Lewis’s letters to Arthur, Arthur’s unpublished diaries, and other supportive sources. I will be focusing on the letters and occasionally dipping into the unpublished diaries. Even before scholars learned about these diaries, a few letters in particular gave away the secret and provided the interpretive key that unlocks many peculiarities and euphemisms used in the letters. Lewis’s earliest biographers either ignored or denied the fact, but C.S. Lewis’s best friend was indeed gay.<sup>27</sup>

Reading Lewis’s letters in sequence, carefully, supported by Arthur’s diaries from 1917, 1918, and 1922, has convinced me that our present understanding of Arthur’s sexuality, his journey, and his friendship with Lewis, needs more nuance. Leading biographies, I will propose, have got some things wrong. Below I have outlined what I call Arthur’s “six moves,” six joints in his openness and self-understanding of his sexuality and identity. A few of them can be quite accurately dated; others are more processes than events.

1. First move (1917): Out of the closet.
2. Second move (1918): Pride moment.
3. Third move (1922): Psychoanalysis as conversion therapy.
4. Fourth move (1923): Re-affirmation of desire.
5. Fifth move (1933): Religious crisis.
6. Sixth move (1935): Break-up.

Some of this will be speculation but (hopefully) well-reasoned and leaning on the best available evidence. I am not sure that I am correct in all of the details, but I do think this outline is largely correct. And it goes without saying that the “moves” are porous, there were probably many more

---

<sup>25</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The C.S. Lewis Recordings: The Four Loves and C.S. Lewis Speaks His Mind* (Atlanta: Alliance for Christian Media, 2007), “Friendship.” These talks were first recorded in London in 1958. My transcript capitalizes “Homosexual” to reflect its spelling in Lewis’s published letters.

<sup>26</sup> Letter to Dom Bede Griffiths on 28 May 1952 in *Collected Letters* 3:195.

<sup>27</sup> Walter Hooper and Roger Lancelyn Green must have known, but they ignored it both in *C.S. Lewis: A Biography* (London: Collins, 1974) and *C.S. Lewis: The Authorized and Revised Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 2002). George Sayer denied it in both *Jack: A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 153, and its revised edition *Jack: A Biography* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 100, despite having by then read Lewis’s unexpurgated letters. I am working on a separate paper on the reception by Lewis biographers of the homosexual revelations in *They Stand Together*.

than just six, and Arthur possibly oscillated between different, even contrary positions throughout his life. Arthur knew the Church's teaching on the subject, and he knew what the courts and society at large believed too.

We will next turn to these six stages in more detail.

### **First Move (1917): Coming out (“clear up the mystery”)**

For the first years of their friendship, Lewis was apparently completely oblivious to Arthur's budding same-sex attraction. He seems to have taken it for granted to Arthur shared his interest in women—if not his interest in mild sadomasochism. The young Lewis talks openly about his heterosexual desires, and even fabricates a romance with a Belgian girl (e.g. 2 Feb 1915), a lie that he later confessed (see 1 Oct 1931).

The early letters suggest that Lewis assumed Arthur, too, was straight. “I think I shall nominate a suitable damosel [...] to besott and bind you” (11 May 1915). And elsewhere—I am surprised that Arthur did not try to censor *this*—Lewis writes: “I am sorry to hear of your infatuation (very much inFATuation) for a certain lady, but you need not despair, nor do I propose to call you out; we will divide mother & daughter between us, and you can have first choice!” (29 Nov 1916). Either Arthur experienced a genuine attraction to a woman, or he played along to Lewis's expectations. While both explanations are certainly possible, notably, his diaries record infatuations with men only. They never speak of women in comparable terms.

There is no persuasive evidence for Lewis ever being a serious object of Arthur's desires. Some biographers have suggested otherwise,<sup>28</sup> and I have discussed the proposed evidence more carefully elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> Here I simply note, again, that Arthur's diaries are candid about his homoerotic interests; his best friend “Jack” (which was Lewis's nickname) is never mentioned in this way.

During the Christmas holiday of 1916, I think, the boys began more openly to talk about sexual fantasies—on what Lewis later calls their “breathless night walk” (15 Feb 1917) when they “first broached the ‘nameless secrets of Aphrodite’” (18 Feb 1918)—for there is a proliferation of open

---

<sup>28</sup> Most notably, see Alister McGrath, *C.S. Lewis: A Life* (Tyndale House: Carol Stream, IL), 72; Harry Lee Poe, *Becoming C.S. Lewis: A Biography of Young Jack Lewis (1898–1918)* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 188–190; and Johnson, *Still Time to Care*, 6.

<sup>29</sup> [omitted for peer review], forthcoming.

references to sex in subsequent letters. Masturbation is often referred to as “That,” “It,” “fallen,” or “going North.” This is a turn in their relationship—although not still what I call Arthur’s first move. From here the number and frequency of scored passages surge; there had been only one prior deletion. Lewis now opens a letter with “My dear Galahad, (If you are still be Galahad after all)...” (28 Feb 1917), and reference to “the lash” multiply. So do Arthur’s deletions. But Arthur himself is still safely in the closet, so to speak. Lewis still has no idea.

But then something happens. Lewis’s letter of 31 January 1917 seems to be the final straw that prompts Arthur to muster his courage to confess something to his friend. In what I call Lewis’s “Good night, old sinner” letter, Lewis writes: “Good night, old sinner, <and imagine yourself the slave of some Eastern queen who whips you—I mean when you next go North>” (31 Jan 1917). (Walter Hooper, the editor of Lewis’s letters to Arthur, used chevrons to indicate successfully restored deletions.) Something about this letter seemingly upset Arthur, for Lewis complains in his next letter: “It is most exasperating of you to say you have come to a conclusion which will disappoint me, but you don’t want to put in in paper. [...] I will be really annoyed if you don’t clear up the mystery in your next letter” (7 Feb 1917). But Arthur still does not spit it out. The following week, Lewis continues to coax it out of him and asks whether Arthur took umbrage to the “whip”: “<If the whole mystery was that you didn’t love the Rod as I do—well there’s no mystery about that. Very, very few are affected in this strange way and I am only surprised that you can enter into my feelings even so much as you do>” (15 Feb 1917). It turns out, Arthur’s problem was not the rod. It was the queen.

Arthur comes out to Lewis, to use our modern idiom, sometime between Lewis’s back-to-back letters of 15 February and 6 March 1917. I think probably closer the former, because the latter does not sound like Lewis’s *first* response to Arthur’s vulnerable revelation but rather like a follow-up or afterthought. I think a letter or two are missing between these two letters, perhaps destroyed completely if it (or they) discussed Arthur’s confession to a length not easily purged more surgically.<sup>30</sup> The relevant passage in Lewis’s long letter of 6 March 1917 reads:

“Cher ami, I think sometimes that we have spoiled everything by starting this subject. For one thing, we always are like the ladies in Jane Austen, who each want to talk about her own concerns and neither to hear the other’s. <I mean, you are interested in a brand of *That* [i.e. sexuality] which doesn’t appeal to me, and I in one that doesn’t appeal to you.> But it is not only that: [...] when I had read your letter this evening I felt that something was wrong. [...]

---

<sup>30</sup> See [omitted for peer review], forthcoming.

You understand what a sudden shock it gave me <to think of anyone approaching him [Catullus] from your point of view. It was blasphemy>: mind, I don't blame you in the very least, still less do I suggest that I wouldn't have felt just the same in your position <(I may remark in passing that in the parts of Catullus I have read there is no allusion to your particular taste.)> [...] Let us talk of these things when we want, but always keep them on the side that tends to beauty, and avoid everything that tends to sordid-ness <and beastly police court sort of scandal out of grim life (like the O. Wilde story).> Cher ami, please, please don't think this is preaching. I don't pretend that I have done so any better than you, but I am only suggesting plans for the future: I am sure you have felt at times as I do now." (6 March 1917)

By this time, Lewis knows about Arthur's "particular taste," the "brand of sexuality" that does not appeal to Lewis and might possibly be criminal. Without wanting to moralize, Lewis thinks that something is wrong and that the boys have "spoiled" their paradise. Arthur had referred to the Latin author Catullus, a god to Lewis, in supposedly homoerotic terms which felt "blasphemous." And the mention of Oscar Wilde who was arrested and convicted in 1895 for "gross indecency"—sexual acts between men—is particularly revealing.<sup>31</sup> The subject of sex in either of their tastes or brands, should not be taboo. But Lewis hopes their talk could be reinfused with some of their old innocence and high standards of beauty and goodness.

Lewis ended his 6 March 1917 letter with: "I wish there wasn't a week to wait for your next letter, make it as long as long as long. Good night, mon vieux"—no longer goodnight, old sinner, but good night, my friend. At first, Arthur does not respond properly, for Lewis ends his next letter with: "P.S. I wonder what you *really* thought of my last letter" (14 March 1917), gently angling for a more proper and honest response. I suspect that in Arthur's next letter he *did* tell Lewis "what he really thought," and that we are missing Lewis's response to *that* letter, as well, for the subject has disappeared from Lewis's next surviving letter that comes over a month later (28 April 1917) at a time when the friends were corresponding weekly.

Whatever the case, Arthur's confession changed nothing fundamental. Their intimacy and candor continued. Lewis writes: "I am sorry 'Tommy' is gone as he must have brightened up your 'circle' a good deal. <Are you still bound to him by the chains of desire as well as by 'pure' friendship?>" (12 Feb 1918). And later: "<[Benvenuto Cellini's *Autobiography*] touches in one place tho' very briefly on

---

<sup>31</sup> Lewis would later read Wilde's works and discuss them and his time in prison with Arthur: "He must have suffered terribly in prison, more perhaps than many a better man" (18 Sept 1919).

your penchant, and is from time to time interesting in ‘that way’.> I expect you are now heartily sick of the subject!” (21 Feb 1918).

With these thinly veiled remarks, we slide towards Arthur’s second move.

### **Second Move (1918): Pride moment (“something natural and virtuous”)**

Arthur’s second move happens in 1918 and could be called his “Pride moment.” Earlier he had confided in Lewis about his same-sex desires, but seemingly not yet embraced them. Now he has learned to accept them as something natural and virtuous. He shares this second step with Lewis sometime between Lewis’s letters of 21 February and 23 May 1918, possibly in mid-May, because Lewis’s letter of 23 May 1918 is a direct response. Incidentally, we learn from Arthur’s diary that at the time he had been reading the works of Edward Carpenter (1844–1929), an early activist for homosexual rights. “E. Carpenter the first man I have ever heard of who I think would understand me properly, am so thankful to know about him. Bless God for it” (Memo for week 10–16 March 1918). On 8 May 1918, Arthur notes in his diary that he has ordered more books by Carpenter.

Lewis’s letter of 23 May 1918 could be called his “Congratulations old man” letter. Like his earlier February letters about “Tommy” and Benvenuto Cellini, it too was written from the hospital: Lewis had recently been wounded in France by friendly fire. To use biblical metaphors both men were extremely familiar with: While Lewis “wrestled against flesh and blood” (Ephesians 6:12), back at home Arthur had decided to make peace with his “lusts of the flesh” (1 Peter 2:11) and told Lewis about it. “Congratulations old man,” Lewis replies,

“I am delighted that you have had the moral courage to form your own opinions <independently,> in defiance of the old taboos. I am not sure that I agree with you: but, as you hint in your letter, <this penchant is a sort of mystery only to be fully understood by those who are made that way—and my views on it can be at best but emotion.>” (23 May 1918)<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> The following paragraph continues: “You will be surprised and I expect, not a little amused to hear that my views at present are getting almost monastic about all the lusts of the flesh. They seem to me to extend the dominion of matter over us: and, out here, where I see spirit continually dodging matter (shells, bullets, animal fears, animal pains) I have formulated my equation Matter=Nature=Satan. And on the other side Beauty, the only spiritual & non-natural thing that I have yet found. Does this all bore you?” (23 May 1918). It would take Lewis years to formulate a more Christian view of the body and sex.

The kind and sympathetic tone of this response to Arthur's second move, even in humble disagreement, reinforces my conviction that the 6 March 1917 letter was *not* Lewis's *first* response to Arthur's first move. Lewis's next letters, also written from hospital while recovering from his wounds, also speak to this development in Arthur's view of his own sexuality. His very next letter is from 29 May 1918, untypically written less than a week after the previous "Congratulations old man" letter, very briefly mentions the topic: "<I admit the associations of the word paederasty are unfortunate but you should rise above that. As well as what does 'Uranian' mean—it ought to mean 'Heavenly as far as my knowledge goes, and I will stick to the word that I understand in preference>" (29 May 1918). "Uranian" was a fairly common word for homosexuality, which Arthur likely learned from Carpenter who probably adopted it from Plato's *Symposium*.<sup>33</sup>

Lewis's long letter of 17 June 1918 is mainly about literary matters, but again very briefly returns to the topic of "Uranianism."

"By the way, <if you have alone established 'Uranianism' in your own mind as something virtuous and natural, I must remind you that for men in ordinary sexual arrangements, a promiscuous desire for every beautiful person you meet is usually disapproved of. Your talk about continually meeting people and having to conceal your feelings suggests that you have no intention of confining yourself to one love: but perhaps I have misunderstood you.>" (17 June 1918)

Arthur's diary around this time reveals a rather anxious, lonely, depressed, physically ill young man, seemingly out of control, and longing desperately for meaningful male community, whether friendly or romantic. Sometimes these were difficult to separate, as could be seen in Lewis's comment about "Tommy." A characteristic diary note at the time is: "Oh, if I could only find a friend" (Memo after 6 April 1918). "Very tired" is repeated often. In July 1918, Arthur possibly had a brief non-sexual affair or one-sided infatuation with a man, also called Arthur: "myself fallen head over heels" (6 July 1918). "[W]oke thinking of him. [...] Is it possible he could like me?" (7 July 1918). "Pray God I may keep pure minded" (8 July 1918). "Tried to tell him a little of what I felt. Oh weary of misery. He's gone and how have I behaved myself? No hope" (8 July 1918). In the midst of this he is very lonely. "No word from Jack or any one. I think I shall die if this loneliness [sic] continues. God forgive me for being so discontented" (12 July 1918).

---

<sup>33</sup> This is the first—and only—time Lewis uses the word *paederasty* in his surviving letters to Arthur. Given the defensiveness and feel of an *ongoing* discussion, Lewis possibly used it in yet another missing letter.

Arthur apparently spends a weekend in Dublin with a group of men and is still infatuated by one of them, but the feeling is not returned (3 Aug 1918). Later in August, Arthur—an aspiring artist—is thinking of returning to Dublin for painting lessons. It might also have been a relational search,<sup>34</sup> because on 23 August 1918 he admits in his diary that Dublin is “no better” than Belfast. On 31 August 1918, Lewis reaches out: “In spite of the loneliness and melancholy of which you complain I must begin by congratulating you on the excellent time you had in Dublin and the interesting people whom you met” (31 Aug 1918). Lewis encourages Arthur to focus on his many blessings while half the world is at war, and asks questions about his new friends. Lewis, sympathetic but cautious, warns him not to lose himself in a cult:

“Between your other penchant . . . and the Irish school [a coterie of artists] you might get into a sort of little by-way of the intellectual world, off the main track and loose yourself there. Remember that the great minds [...] are always sane before all and keep in the broad highway of thought and feel what can be felt by all men, not only by a few.” (31 Aug 1918)

This letter is one of three letters to Arthur with *undecipherable* deletions. The four periods after “penchant” indicate 5–7 missing words that have been scribbled over by Arthur, including penchant, in fact, though no chevrons mark it.<sup>35</sup>

Arthur’s second move was an affirmation of his same-sex desires as something natural and virtuous. Lewis’s response to this move could be summarized thus: While he respected Arthur’s courage to form his own opinions, he could not share them or join the “Pride parade,” as one might say today, and he would continue to encourage Arthur towards standards of sexual morality otherwise shared by “men in ordinary circumstances.”

### **Third Move (1922): Psychoanalysis as conversion therapy (“curing cases like myself”)**

Mrs. Janie Moore (1873–1951) was Lewis’s one-time secret lover turned adopted mother. After Lewis returned to Oxford from the front, he moved in with her and her daughter Maureen Moore (1906–1997). Arthur first met Mrs. Moore in 1919, and they both liked each other. Arthur was possibly the only person who knew about their secret love affair at the time. Over the next few years, he would occasionally visit the family for a fortnight.

---

<sup>34</sup> I thank Brenton Dickieson for suggesting this to me.

<sup>35</sup> For an analysis of the three unsuccessfully restored passages in Lewis’s letters, see [omitted for peer review], forthcoming.

Interestingly, in July 1922, Lewis borrows and reads the “With volume of Havelock Ellis’s [*Studies in the] Psychology of Sex* which,” Lewis records in his diary, “is curious” (26 July 1922).<sup>36</sup> Ellis treated same-sex attraction (which he called *sexual inversion*) as a natural human variation rather than a disease. Volume six is a social, ethical, and legal synthesis of the earlier volumes. It argued against criminalization of consensual homosexual behaviour, emphasizing privacy, harm reduction, and social tolerance. What made Lewis want to read it at that particular time in July 1922? Were they discussing homosexuality with Arthur again?

Arthur had, as a matter of fact, just spent another two-week holiday with Lewis and Mrs. Moore in Oxford. Arthur’s third and last unpublished diary, more substantial than the first two pocket diaries of 1917 and 1918, runs for two months from 28 June to 28 August 1922. It begins with Lewis and Arthur meeting in Oxford to launch their vacation together. Lewis’s own diary had begun in April that same year, so perhaps he had encouraged Arthur to begin his anew. Arthur is noticeably much less lonely and anxious. In addition to a good time in Oxford, he meets lots of people daily at home for various pleasant activities.

The visit to Oxford started off swimmingly and Lewis’s diary records Arthur’s high spirits: “Arthur is tremendously improved: nearly all the nonsense is gone” (28 June 1922). What nonsense? Lewis does not say, but the evidence suggests Arthur’s earlier affirmation of homosexual desire as something natural and virtuous. Arthur meets Lewis and Mrs. Moore’s friends, including a doctor. Arthur notes in his diary that he told the doctor “nearly everything about myself—he advises flirting! and to encourage everything in the right way—[...] I am getting better” (30 June 1922). The next day the doctor lent him a book on psychoanalysis, “which I eventually found most interesting” (1 July 1922). Apparently, the doctor later told Lewis about his chat with Arthur because Lewis writes in his own diary that same day: “and (of course) [Arthur] used him as a father confessor” (1 July 1922).

Soon Arthur was reading psychoanalytic literature and applying it to himself as a form of self-help. He adopts key terms in psychoanalysis, like subconscious, repression, suggestion, and reaction. But self-help for what precisely? This is not entirely clear, but either his general anxieties, unwanted homosexual desires, or (most likely) both at different times. Back in Belfast after his Oxford jaunt,

---

<sup>36</sup> Lewis’s diary note of 26 July 1922 continues: “The most interesting part was quotation especially from Hindu and Persian books. [H]e quotes an amazing case of an American girl who was homosexual and was twice married (in disguise) to other women, neither of whom ever realised that she was not a man.”

Arthur notes in his diary that one author (it is not clear who) “would seem very hopeful of P.A. [psychoanalysis] helping—in fact—curing cases like myself!” (30 July 1922). Arthur is likely thinking of homosexual desires for he adds: “My subconscious mind has been pushing ‘that’ up all day—this won’t do.” The very next day, he writes: “I ended in the usual way last night [i.e. presumably masturbation]—but with the help of Suggestion I must try to keep from it as long as possible. Ended up by the vision of a woman!—this may only be a reaction.—However, I got to sleep in the end which was the main thing” (31 July 1922). He studies psychoanalysis to help with “that.” The mention of “ending up” with a vision of a woman shows that he usually fantasized and dreamt about men.

The remark “this may only be a reaction” is curious. By “reaction,” Arthur likely means *reaction formation*, the psychological defense against unacceptable impulses. He recognized that a heterosexual fantasy might not signal cure but repression. Psychoanalysis was often viewed (both by doctors and by self-taught readers) as a possible way to understand and “treat” homosexual inclinations, which were then widely considered pathological or developmental arrests. So, if Arthur was studying psychoanalysis to “cure” himself, he would have been monitoring his desires—and dreams—closely for signs of either persistence of homosexual desire (a bad sign) or emergence of heterosexual imagery (a hopeful sign). When he says his onanistic imagery ended with a woman but this may only be a “reaction,” he is cautioning himself: “I should not interpret the appearance of the girl as evidence that I’m changing—that I’m being cured—because this transformation may merely be a defensive reaction, not a genuine shift in my desires.” Arthur is denying himself the hopeful interpretation (“Look, I fantasized about a girl”) and insisting on the more cautious one (“No, that’s just my unconscious mind reacting against the anxiety of desiring men, against my deeper unacceptable wish”). In short, the vision was a defense, not a cure.

The very next day (1 Aug 1922), Arthur has an erotic dream about being with a man in a hotel room, but they are interrupted by a string of people—including, tellingly, a policeman.

“Then I kissed him—perfectly charming & held his hand which was so tender and soft—all [I] remember is that after kissing etc. we seemed to be in *my* own room [...] also remember, at the end, after kissing him he seemed to turn into a girl. Altogether I can only identify him as the young man-boy I saw in church last Sunday. Of course Mother came in and broke off my dream” (1 August 1922).

A week later he meets his old crush, the other Arthur:

“Arthur greeted me in the [*illegible*]—looking absolytely [sic] brilliant—his face ravishingly beautiful—the eyes looked into my & I did so long to take him in my arms & kiss him. However I was very good restrained myself only shaking hands. [...] Arthur is perfectly sweet—Why does he attract me so? We talked of P.A. [psychoanalysis] at tea—Mrs P. agrees that the first few years of a child’s life are the most important. [...] Good night Arthur my love” (8 August 1922).

Arthur’s third move, then, was an attempt—perhaps futile—to “cure” his homosexuality through psychoanalysis. We might call it a form of conversion therapy. But “futile” and “cure” are of course loaded terms, and it is hard to judge what counts as “success.” Many people take an all-or-nothing approach to same-sex attraction—either you are only attracted to the same sex or only attracted to the complementary sex. Sometimes these feelings and desires ebb and flow in intensity over time. In any case, this is not the place to discuss the efficacy of what today might be called conversation therapy. Suffice to say that Arthur’s story does not end here.

From here on, however, we can no longer lean on Arthur’s diaries for support. If he continued to keep one, none have survived or been made public. Lewis continued to write his diary until 1927 when he gave it up the habit for good. As mentioned, it is possible that it was Lewis who encouraged Arthur to start journaling more properly in 1922. If so, Lewis’s lost interest in diary-keeping may have discouraged Arthur too.

So much for Arthur’s move three.

#### **Fourth Move (1923): Re-affirmation of desire (“following nature”)**

I am less confident about what I call his fourth move. We no longer have Arthur’s diaries for comparison or contrast. But we do have Lewis’s diary and letters, and I cannot help thinking that this move is worth recording.

In July 1923, so exactly year after his psychoanalytical turn, Arthur again visits Lewis and Mrs. Moore for two weeks in Oxford. Lewis is less pleased with the visit this time. “I was delighted to see him,” Lewis records in his diary at first, “we renewed our earlier youths and laughed together like two schoolgirls” (11 July 1923). But later, Lewis records his private disappointment. It is worth reading at length.

“Arthur was with us for a fortnight. He is greatly changed ... Someone has put into his head the ideal of ‘being himself’ and ‘following nature’. I tried on one occasion to point out to him the ambiguity of that kind of maxim: but he seems to attach a very clear meaning to it—

namely that the whole duty of man is to swim with the tide and obey his desires ... He has taken over from psychoanalysis the doctrine that repression in the technical sense is something quite different from self control. I tried to put him on to [Leo] Baker's distinction between will-men and desire-men but he took no interest in it. I argued that immortality—which he believes in [note: Lewis did not]—was not likely to fall to the lot of everyone, since 'gift is contrary to the nature of the universe'. He on the other hand is confident that we should all be immortal anyway: he gave me the impression of believing in heaven but not in hell, nor in any conditions attaching to heaven. On morals he thought that our whole duty consisted in being kind to others. I pointed out that a man who was 'natural' could not be kind except by accident. I soon introduced him to Parson's Pleasure [note: where men bathe nude] and after that he spent a good deal of his time bathing and sketching. [...] His old besetting sin of greed came out several times at our table. [...] Another good example of 'nature' occurred in the first two days of his visit when we had tropical weather. [Mrs. Moore], being the most free and easy of mortals, had made no objection to Arthur wearing pyjamas till lunch time. It was left to Arthur to take the one step further from freedom to beastly familiarity by taking off his slippers in the dining room and laying his bare feet on the table. His feet are very long and he perspires freely [...] often (unintentionally) very rude and objectionable—miserably changed since last year." (13–25 July 1923)

A brief note on the redacted material marked by ellipses. The cuts within square brackets are mine and record mundane daily events. But the first two sets of ellipses are original. They are already there on the page in the *Lewis Papers* (where editor Walter Hooper found the transcript of Lewis's diary) but longer.<sup>37</sup> This indicates that Warnie, Lewis's brother, redacted this content from Lewis's original handwritten diary as he transcribed it. The original diary was destroyed, so we will never know for sure what was omitted. But the immediate context of the deletions is very suggestive. "He is greatly changed..." It is possible that here the original text described the nature of the change in more detail. "Obey his desires..." Again, the omitted part may have named these desires. This is speculation, of course, and I do not rest my case on it alone.

Arthur's fourth move is not obviously connected to sexuality itself. Rather it seems more like an *extenuation* or broadening in scope of a philosophy ("someone has put into his head") that treats one's desires and impulses as "natural" and therefore "good." It is a re-affirmation of desire: a return to move two, but in fuller force. It would be unfair to "blame" Arthur's *sexuality* for this, and in the non-redacted text Lewis never hints at it. But he does make it clear that he thinks Arthur has fallen to logically, ethically, socially, and religiously problematic philosophies which he is now acting out—*presumably also in the realm of sexuality*. This fourth move seems to have put a real strain on their

---

<sup>37</sup> *Lewis Papers*, Vol. VIII, 141.

friendship. It may have contributed in part to what Hooper called “a temporary ‘cooling-off’ in their relationship.”<sup>38</sup>

Lewis’s portrait of the Greeves family some ten years later around 1933 might shed light on how Lewis, by then a Christian like Arthur, had understood or came to understand the 1923 phase in Arthur’s psychological make-up and journey. In short, Lewis blames Arthur’s Puritan upbringing. Such lapses into “naturalness,” which Lewis witnessed in Arthur, bore the “ugly marks of ex-Puritanism.” Here is the relevant passage from the *Lewis Papers*:

“The [Greeves] children all (I believe) abandoned the [Plymouth Brethren] religion of their parents. [...] Certainly all, except Willie, bore the ugly marks of ex-Puritanism—of those who are brought up in a crude antithesis of Grace and Nature, and who therefore, when they abandon Grace, straightway become startlingly natural. All revealed each passing sensation of greed, jealousy, anger, pleasure, or disappointment in an almost savage nakedness. Their upbringing gave them no HUMANE tradition to turn to when once their theology was gone.”<sup>39</sup>

Theologically, already by 1923, Arthur had seemingly discarded the predestinarian beliefs of his upbringing and swung to the opposite extreme of *universalism*, the belief in salvation for all regardless of creed or conduct. Theology alone does not explain—or explain away—his fourth move, but his new religious beliefs would have been more palatable and compatible with his sexual desires, as well.

Here it is helpful to remember that what I have called Arthur’s moves or stages are porous, liminal, and nonexhaustive. We can responsibly surmise only part of his journey. His views changed and would change again. There is much that we do not know and never will. But we do know that the story of Arthur’s sexual self-understanding does not end here either.

### **Fifth Move (1933): Religious crisis (“God understands our temptations”)**

Lewis’s 296 surviving letters to Arthur are not spread evenly over their friendship. There are two noticeable peaks, a few smaller clusters, and more fallow periods. The two peaks are their early friendship when they were each other’s only friends (108 letters between 1914–1920) and the years around Lewis’s conversion to Christianity (85 letters between 1929–1933). The letter correspondence lapsed between those periods and again from the mid-1930s onward, but each man

---

<sup>38</sup> Hooper writes in *They Stand Together*, 294: “Alone they usually found much to say, but Lewis’s diary makes it clear that he was often embarrassed *for* Arthur when others were about.”

<sup>39</sup> *Lewis Papers*, Vol. III, 304, quoted in *They Stand Together*, 18.

felt, according to Lewis, “no diminution of the friendship” (25 March 1933). But Lewis felt that something had changed. “I often feel that you are the one who has changed,” he tells Arthur (1 Sept 1933).

In reply, Arthur writes what Lewis tells him is “the longest and one of the most interesting letters I have ever had from you” (12 Sept 1933). Lewis’s reply to Arthur in turn is very long and thoughtful, as well. He says that he has spent “all morning” thinking about Arthur’s question about “God and evil, which is very far from being ‘elementary’ to me” (12 Sept 1933). Lewis’s multi-page letter, much longer than any other letter written to Arthur around this time, is concerned almost only with this question. What was it? And why was Lewis moved to grapple with and answer it so thoroughly?

I think Lewis took it seriously because he sensed that it was personally important to Arthur—and perhaps urgently so. In short, Arthur’s question was about whether God can “understand” or “sympathize” with our *temptations*. Given certain details in Lewis’s letter, I suspect that Arthur was wrestling with his sexual desires again, and that Lewis intuited as much. In any case, given what Lewis has written elsewhere, something like what he put in this letter *would* be part of Lewis’s answer to Arthur had Arthur asked bluntly: “Does God understand or sympathize with my same-sex desires?” So, this letter deserves a closer look.

First, Lewis recognizes that Arthur is not primarily concerned with the *logical* problem of evil but with “a more personal, practical, and intimate problem” (12 Sept 1933). Some of Lewis’s reply to this problem would later find its way into his first philosophical book *The Problem of Pain* (1939). In Lewis’s private reply to Arthur’s “personal, practical, and intimate problem,” he offers an analogy of man walking his dog—something Lewis did daily at the time—who gets looped around the post, forcing the owner to pull *back* when it wanted to go *forward*. The owner, thinks Lewis, sympathizes and even *shares* his companion’s “real wish” to proceed but understands that this requires backtracking.

In a similar way, Lewis says, there is *something* even in our human evil wills and in every sin that God “understands” and even “shares” in this way: that is, our “real wish” at the *root* of them: “[T]he desire for complete and ecstatic happiness.” God shares this desire for us. However, thinks Lewis, God “knows that most of *my* personal attempts to reach it are actually putting it further and further out of my reach. With these therefore He cannot sympathise or ‘agree’: His sympathy with my *real* will makes this impossible. (He may *pity* my misdirected struggles, but that is another matter.)”

From Lewis's use of "pity" we might jump straight to his 1958 radio talks on love where he says, "How a man can feel anything but bewildered pity for the genuinely Homosexual I've never been able to understand"<sup>40</sup>; or to his letter to another friend about "a terribly familiar pattern: the man of good will, saddled with an abnormal desire which he never chose, fighting hard and time after time defeated."<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, Lewis continues his reply to Arthur by applying the dog analogy to "a sin of Lust" (12 Sept 1933).

He may have been thinking of his own youthful interest in sexual cruelty, or he may have been thinking of Arthur's "penchant." Lewis writes: "The overarching thirst for *rapture* was good and even divine: it has not got to be unsaid (so to speak) and recanted. But it will never be quenched as I tried to quench it" (12 Sept 1933). The practical solution is the same as the dog's: stopping and following the owner's lead. "If I refrain—if I submit to the collar and come round the right side of the lamp-post—God will be guiding me as quickly as He can to where I shall get what I really wanted all the time." Lewis believes that this promise is not a cheat or self-deception: "[I]t will be the real thing, not a consolation prize or substitute." Lewis ends his reply to Arthur's question encouragingly: "Thus you may well feel that God understands our temptations—understands them a great deal more than we do."

Some four-fifths of Lewis's reply to Arthur's "longest and one of the most interesting letters" is devoted to one question that Lewis had "been thinking all morning over" (12 Sept 1933). As a result of this, Lewis apologizes to Arthur that he had "not time left for the rest of the letter." Out of the apparently many topics in Arthur's letter, Lewis homed in on this one. Why? One plausible reading, as suggested above, is that Lewis might have divined that Arthur's question about God's sympathy with our temptations came from a personal place of vulnerability and perhaps urgency.

Unfortunately, we no longer have Arthur's diaries for support. But the several clues in Lewis' emphatic letter discussed above in the broader context of their friendship and personal histories, point in this direction.

Lewis ends the letter by turning from doctrine to friendship. He acknowledges that Arthur's strength is sympathy, just as his own danger is pride. Arthur's capacity to mirror others' feelings, Lewis suggests, has helped Lewis avoid becoming "a hardened bigot shouting every one down till he has

---

<sup>40</sup> Lewis, *The C.S. Lewis Recordings*, "Friendship."

<sup>41</sup> Letter to Dom Bede Griffiths on 28 May 1952 in *Collected Letters* 3:195.

no friends left” (12 Sept 1933). This anticipates Lewis’s later reflections on the distinctive gifts that some homosexual Christians might bring to the church: heightened sympathy, relational attentiveness, and moral humility.<sup>42</sup>

Arthur’s fifth move, then, is a kind of theological deepening of earlier struggles. Sexual desire is no longer addressed through affirmation or cure, but through questions about divine understanding and moral obedience. The answer Lewis offers does not resolve the tension, but it reframes it. Desire becomes a site of vocation rather than mere conflict. This reframing sets the stage for the final and most enigmatic move. In a way, Arthur’s sixth move picks up on where his fifth move left him.

### **Sixth Move (1935): Possible break-up (“Sympathy and congratulations”)**

Arthur’s last identifiable move is the most enigmatic one, full of unanswered questions. It might be better to say that it is full of *unasked* questions. It has never received the scholarly attention that it deserves. It is possible that Arthur’s one-time lover or romantic infatuation, and their identity, has been laying in plain sight all these years.

Some scholars have assumed that in December 1935, when Arthur would have been forty, he ended a romantic relationship with a man and unburdened to Lewis about it. For example, in his *Still Time to Care: What We Can Learn from the Church’s Failed Attempt to Cure Homosexuality* (2021), author Greg Johnson, writes: “Upon hearing that Arthur had just ended an unhealthy relationship with another man, Lewis takes pains to validate Arthur’s feelings of loss.”<sup>43</sup> Is this what happened? These are Lewis’s own exact words:

“As regards your news—sympathy and congratulations. Sympathy on the wrench of parting and the gap it will leave: congratulations on having done the right thing and made a sacrifice. The chief consolation at such times, I think, is that the result, however unpleasant, must be a kind of relief after the period of saying ‘Shall I really have to—no I won’t—and yet perhaps I’d better.’ There is always *some* peace in having submitted to the right. Don’t spoil it by worrying about the *results*, if you can help it. It is not your business to succeed (no one can be sure of that) but to do right: when you have done so, the rest lies with God—and Will!” (29 Dec 1935)

---

<sup>42</sup> Letter to Sheldon Vanauken on 14 May 1954 in *Collected Letters* 3:472. I will return to this letter at the very end of my essay.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson, *Still Time to Care*, 6.

What has happened? There is a lot to unpack here. But to have the full picture, we must also read what Lewis says next. It provides an important clue.

“I don’t think you exaggerate at all in your account of how it feels. After all—tho’ our novels now ignore it—friendship is the greatest of wordly goods. Certainly to me it is the chief happiness of life. If I had to give a piece of advice to a young man about a place to live, I think I shd. say, ‘sacrifice almost everything to live where you can be near your friends.’ I know I am v. fortunate in that respect, and you much less so. But even for me, it wd. make a great difference if you (and one or two others) lived in Oxford.” (29 Dec 1935)

Again, what has happened? We can be fairly confident that Arthur made some personally costly sacrifice that cut him off (“the wrench of parting”) a beloved friend, presumably “Will.” Will—short for William—might be his real name because Lewis provides no inverted commas as he did with “Tommy.” What is more, this sacrifice appears to have been *morally* motivated (“submitted to the right”). There is a sense of moral quality that makes Lewis sure that obedience was worth the personal loss. Has Arthur ended a romantic relationship? This cannot be ruled out as a possibility, but there must be more to the story.

Lewis’s follow-up thoughts about living “near your friends” imply that Arthur’s friend Will has *moved away* and that Arthur has supported this move somehow, or that Arthur has refused to move with him, or both. This is part of the “sacrifice,” regardless of the nature of the relationship. Arthur has not merely lost a friend’s physical proximity, he has somehow assisted or abetted it (“made a sacrifice”). Lewis says that ordinarily he would advise people to live near their friends. This is highly revealing. Because he does not advise so now, it implies that Arthur and Will’s circumstances were not ordinary. Perhaps that advice would not be wise or appropriate in Lewis’s view.

There is more. What does Lewis mean by “the results” that are not fully in Arthur’s control and by it not being Arthur’s business “to succeed”? To succeed in what? Read against the horizon of the Romantic Breakup Theory, the results and success might both refer to *remaining sexually chaste*. This reading is certainly possible. We remember Arthur’s earlier struggle with his friend “Tommy,” Arthur’s “chains of desire” and attempt to keep the friendship “pure” (12 Feb 1918). But there is another possible, perhaps complementary explanation.

Lewis says that the results and success depend partly on Arthur (“to do the right thing”), God, and Will. Will *shares* some responsibility for the success of whatever they are trying to accomplish. Another clue is dropped in Lewis’s next letter which returns to the subject two months later:

“For yourself I expect the days are pretty dim at present. *Do you bear good news of the boy?* As I said before, I am sure you have done the right thing, and I’m afraid that is all the comfort I can offer.” (26 Feb 1936, emphasis added)

Lewis expects Arthur to be still grieving the loss of the relationship, whether friendship or romantic: Will must have played an important role in Arthur’s daily life. Asking “Do you hear good news of the boy?” tells us three things about Arthur’s friend. First, the letter reinforces the idea that his friend has moved, to another city or country perhaps (“Do you hear”). Second, some result is expected of the friend in a possibly difficult situation (“good news”). Third, the friend is probably younger than Arthur and Lewis (“of the boy”). Sometimes, of course, “boy” denotes local familiarity not age—as in “Our boy from Boston became Pope” or “Our boy from Nazareth turned out to be God”—but probably not here. Arthur seems generally to have been interested in younger men. We remember Arthur’s diary note about “the young man-boy” (1 Aug 1922) and Lewis’s letter about “the associations of the word paederasty” (29 May 1918).

Who is Arthur’s younger friend “Will” who has apparently left Belfast and whose seemingly morally necessary “wretched parting” has left “a gap” in Arthur’s heart and life? What kind of good news are Arthur and Lewis hoping to hear from him, and were they friends or lovers? There is a veil of mystery here, and while I cannot know for certain, I believe I know what has happened.

Walter Hooper, I think, has either hinted at or inadvertently pointed to the answer in a footnote to Lewis’s letter of 28 March 1937.<sup>44</sup> In that letter, we learn that Arthur has been to America. The trip probably took place already in the previous summer of 1936, because Lewis’s letter indicates that the friends had not spoken for a very long time and Lewis’s previous known letter to Arthur is from May 1936. On 28 March 1937, which happened to be Easter Sunday, Lewis writes: “I suppose I shall hear more from you about America when we meet. Am I right in concluding from your mere list of towns that on the aesthetic side—as regards mountains, rivers and woods etc.—it made no impression?” Here Hooper provides a long footnote for context. Arthur had been to America, Hooper tells us, by invitation of a certain William McClurg (1907–1988?).<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> *They Stand Together*, 481, n3.

<sup>45</sup> See *They Stand Together*, 481, n3. The National Archives of Ireland (<https://nationalarchives.ie/>) provide an image of the form used in the 1911 Census of Ireland, with “McClurg, William” at presumably age two or three (the handwriting is unclear). At the time, the McClurg family lived on 31 Bloomfield Street in Belfast. According to Hooper, William’s second name was “Moncrief,” but some documents say “Moncrieff.” I have in my possession a copy of the crew and passenger list of the ship *Caledonia* that departed from Belfast and arrived in New York on 19 January 1936, with a William Moncrieff McClurg onboard, his final destination listed as Kirksville, Missouri.

Arthur and McClurg had first met in the 1920s, when McClurg was a teenager, and over the years they took a number of trips together. We do not know when or how often, apart from presumably the summer of 1936. In McClurg's letter to Hooper dated 25 April 1978, when Hooper was preparing *They Stand Together* for publication, McClurg says he had wanted to become an osteopath but could not afford the training, so Arthur and his extended family supported his medical studies at Kirksville College of Osteopathy and Surgery in Kirksville, Missouri.

In this letter to Hooper, which Hooper paraphrases and quotes liberally, McClurg described Arthur's 1936 summer visit to America. William would have been twenty-eight and Arthur forty-one. This would have been roughly half a year after "the wretched parting" with "Will." What is slightly confusing is that McClurg says Arthur visited during McClurg's "second years summer vacation." This is a most interesting detail. If "Will" is indeed William McClurg, and if he started his studies in Missouri in the spring of 1936, McClurg's second year's summer vacation should presumably have been in 1937, not 1936. It is possible that McClurg simply misremembers the year or that Arthur made several trips to see him in America. Indeed, according to Lewis's letter of 15 June 1938, Arthur was planning a trip to America for that summer (1938) as well. In any case, it now looks almost certain that "Will" is "the boy" is William McClurg.

Hooper deposited McClurg's letter in the Bodleian Library at Oxford<sup>46</sup> presumably sometime in the late-1970s, but at the time it was not catalogued and Bodleian Special Collection archivists have not been able to sleuth it—yet.<sup>47</sup> So possibly no-one except Hooper has ever read it in full. Had the letter spoken more openly about a possible romantic attachment between Arthur and McClurg, I am certain that Hooper would have suppressed *those* parts of the letter. His tenure as Lewis's editor and biographer was consistently protective about aspects of the sexual lives and sins of his subjects that Hooper considered too private for public knowledge, whether it was Lewis's relationship with Mrs. Moore, Arthur's homosexuality, or Lewis's brother Warnie's alcoholism.<sup>48</sup> But from Hooper's

---

<sup>46</sup> *They Stand Together*, 481, n3.

<sup>47</sup> I thank Bodleian Special Collection archivists Nicola McQuillan O'Toole and Rachael Marsay for their valiant attempts.

<sup>48</sup> Being the Southern gentleman that he was and given many things he says about propriety and privacy, I do not think Hooper would have "exposed" anyone—whether Arthur, Mrs. Moore, or Lewis himself—unnecessarily. For example, Hooper knew the truth about Lewis's sexual liaison with Mrs. Moore for years but only confessed it in an interview recorded in 2009 and released posthumously in 2021, according to Hooper's wishes. Although Hooper restored Arthur's deletions in *They Stand Together*, he left the deciphering of their euphemisms to others. And Hooper knew about Warnie's alcoholism since at least 1963 but only spoke about it publicly after the publication of *They Stand Together* in 1979 (see *They Stand Together*, 41). I have discussed Hooper's editorial choices at length in [omitted for peer review], forthcoming.

paraphrase and quotes from McClurg’s letter we do learn one more possibly relevant bit of information about their American summer together.

Arthur and McClurg bought a used car from New York and took it around several states. At Cape Cod in Massachusetts, McClurg recounts, there was “quite an artist colony” and they saw “a Ballet performed by Ted Shawn and his dancers—a small male company and very athletic and exciting it was.”<sup>49</sup> Ted Shawn (1891–1972) is a well-known figure in American LGBTQ cultural history. His lead dancer and long-term partner Barton Mumaw (1912–2001) talks openly about their relationship in his 1986 memoir.<sup>50</sup> The group “Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers” toured the United States in the 1930s, and it just happens that there exists a recording of the show performed at Jacob’s Pillow chusetts—in the summer of 1936.<sup>51</sup> It would be silly to read too much into this. But certainly in the 1930s, it would have taken a particularly open-minded male friendship to enjoy bare-chested all-male dance performances together. It is difficult to imagine Arthur inviting his friend *Jack* to such a show. Bringing all these strands together, I believe that by “the results” and “success” Lewis meant *at least* the success of McClurg’s move to pursue a medical degree and establish a life in the United States, which Arthur generously supported at great personal cost of finance and friendship. Arthur did his part, putting his friend’s vocational dreams above his own desires—McClurg said “Arthur helped me towards the only profession I could ever want”<sup>52</sup>—now it was up to God and Will to do theirs. But given the moral gravity behind such language as “submitted to the right” and “Shall I really have to—no I won’t—and yet perhaps I’d better,” there was probably more at play than mere charity and professional success. Arthur made a real sacrifice against a strong desire to do otherwise. I think it very likely that Arthur was also trying to break off a romantic attachment or prevent one from budding. One might say that Arthur wanted to “submit to the collar.”

We do not know if he succeeded. We know independently that he would soon join McClurg in America and was already planning another trip soon after. We also know that after the Second

---

<sup>49</sup> Letter to Walter Hooper on 25 April 1978, quoted in *They Stand Together*, 481, n3.

<sup>50</sup> Barton Mumaw and Jane Sherman, *Barton Mumaw, Dancer: From Denishawn to Jacob’s Pillow and Beyond* (New York, NY: Dance Horizons/Princeton Book Co. Pub, 1986). Shawn was for many years married to a woman, but it was possibly partly a marriage of convenience and profession. Shawn and Mumaw were romantically involved in the 1930s and 1940s.

<sup>51</sup> “Ted Shawn’s Men Dancers: Finale from *The New World*,” recorded at Jacob’s Pillow, MA, in August 1936: [https://danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org/ted-shawns-men-dancers/finale-from-the-new-world/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org/ted-shawns-men-dancers/finale-from-the-new-world/?utm_source=chatgpt.com). For a solo performance by Ted Shawn, see “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen” from *Four Dances based on American Folk Music*, recorded at Jacob’s Pillow, MA, in 1938: <https://danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org/ted-shawn/nobody-knows-the-trouble-ive-seen/>.

<sup>52</sup> *They Stand Together*, 481, n3.

World War, McClurg set up practice in London where he hosted Arthur whenever Arthur was in England.<sup>53</sup> They were still close friends in the 1960s. Some of Arthur's letters to Lewis, among the handful of letters that have survived, talk about McClurg: "I am [...] staying with my friend Will McClurg" (6 May 1961).<sup>54</sup>

### Summary and Conclusion: A Concealed Vocation

This paper has argued that Arthur Greeves's sexual self-understanding developed through at least six discernible stages between 1917 and 1935: disclosure, affirmation, attempted cure, philosophical expansion, religious crisis, and costly sacrifice. These stages do not form a linear narrative of progress or resolution. They overlap, recur, and at times contradict one another. Arthur oscillated between competing interpretive frameworks—romantic, therapeutic, philosophical, and pastoral—each offering partial insight and partial consolation. What might appear as instability reflects the limited and often conflicting resources available to a man negotiating same-sex desire in early twentieth-century Britain.

I have not discussed C.S. Lewis's mature views on homosexuality—its causes, morality, legality, or theology—but I do want to close with one crucial idea from a 1954 letter. It is the idea of a concealed vocation. In a letter to an American friend who asked for advice about mentoring Christian homosexuals, Lewis writes:

"In homosexuality, as in every other tribulation, [God's] works can be made manifest: i.e. that every disability conceals a vocation, if only we can find it, wh. will 'turn the necessity to glorious gain.'<sup>55</sup> [...] What shd. the positive life of the homo. be? I wish I had a letter wh. a pious male homo., now dead, once wrote to me—but of course it was the sort of letter one takes care to destroy. He believed that his necessity could be turned to spiritual gain: that there were certain kinds of sympathy and understanding, a certain social role which mere men and mere women cd. not give. [...] Perhaps any homo. who humbly accepts his cross and puts himself under Divine guidance will, however, be shown the way."<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> *They Stand Together*, 481, n3.

<sup>54</sup> *They Stand Together*, 555.

<sup>55</sup> This is a quote from William Wordsworth's poem "Character of the Happy Warrior" (1807), lines 1–14:

Who is the happy Warrior? [...]  
It is the generous Spirit [...]  
Who, doomed to go in company with Pain,  
And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train!  
Turns his necessity to glorious gain.

<sup>56</sup> Letter to Sheldon Vanauken on 14 May 1952 in *Collected Letters* 3:472.

Whatever else Arthur's vocation included, posterity may see it chiefly as the vocation of friendship. Without Lewis, we would not know about Arthur Greeves; but without Arthur, would the C.S. Lewis we know be the C.S. Lewis we know? We can imagine a counterfactual of the cynical and priggish young Jack having never befriended Arthur. Lewis might have remained the rather intolerable, self-satisfied boy he himself and his biographers describe—one even quipping, hyperbolically, he had “all the makings of an ax murderer.”<sup>57</sup> Lewis's father and brother had worried about his isolation and arrogance.

Arthur helped change that. In his portrait of Arthur from around 1935, Lewis wrote:

“I could give concepts, logic, facts, arguments, but he had feelings to offer, feelings which most mysteriously—for he was always very inarticulate—he taught me to share. Hence, in our commerce, I dealt in superficialities, but he in solids. I learned charity from him and failed, for all my efforts, to teach him arrogance in return.”<sup>58</sup>

Lewis certainly learned a great deal from Arthur. From Arthur, he learned affection for “the homely,” love for ordinary things that became his introduction to Christian love (“charity”). In a 1933 letter, Lewis told Arthur that “*sympathy* is your strong point,” adding that Arthur had helped him avoid becoming “a hardened bigot shouting everyone down till he has no friends left” (12 Sept 1933). Lewis also learned generosity from Arthur (see 24 Aug 1927) and to speak plainly about complex ideas. Biographer Harry Lee Poe puts it well: “Because Arthur was not a deep intellectual, Jack had to learn to talk about huge ideas in small ways.”<sup>59</sup> For years, the less educated and “very inarticulate” Arthur was his almost only audience. Their friendship rekindled Lewis's imagination and in its own way slowly thawed his cold atheism. “I am gradually becoming converted to all your views,” Lewis wrote in 1916. “Perhaps one of these days you may even make a Christian of me” (7 March 1916). Though said this in jest and many years before Lewis's actual conversion, Arthur played his part. Lewis would conclude in his thirties that Arthur had been right all along about the existence of a loving God.

I want to suggest that at least part of Arthur's vocation, so to speak, was to be a friend, and especially a friend to an arrogant neighborhood boy called Jack who became known internationally

---

<sup>57</sup> Poe, *Becoming C.S. Lewis*, 93.

<sup>58</sup> *Lewis Papers*, Vol. X, 220, in *They Stand Together*, 25.

<sup>59</sup> Poe, *Becoming C.S. Lewis*, 107. Poe continues: “He might have learned this skill later in some other way, but most of his colleagues at Oxford and Cambridge never did. They might have done so, but their friends tended to be like them” (107).

as C.S. Lewis—one of the most influential 20<sup>th</sup>-century authors with lasting influence deep into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the man who encouraged and downright *compelled* J.R.R. Tolkien to unleash his hobbits into the world,<sup>60</sup> the man with university student societies named after him and dedicated to his ongoing legacy.<sup>61</sup> What would have become of this man—and of Tolkien and many others—without Lewis’s gay best friend, Arthur?

Lewis and Arthur’s very last letters are brief but tender. “The party gets thinner and I suppose you and I shall be leaving soon,” Lewis wrote (8 May 1961). Arthur replied, “Yes, I wonder how much longer? Aren’t I four years older” (12 May 1961).<sup>62</sup> They met once more that June: “Our little reunion was one of the happiest times I’ve had for many a long day” (30 June 1961), Lewis wrote. Arthur noted in the margin of this letter, “He was looking very ill.”<sup>63</sup>

By 1963, both were failing, and their plans for a last summer holiday together were dashed. “I don’t mind—or not much—missing the jaunt,” Lewis wrote, “but it is a blow missing you” (11 July 1963). His final letter ends heartbreakingly: “[I]t looks as if you and I shall never meet again in this life. This often saddens me v. much. W. [Warnie], meanwhile, has completely deserted me[,] I suppose, drinking himself to death. [...] But oh Arthur, never to see you again!...” (11 Sept 1963, final ellipses Lewis’s own). These are Lewis’s very last words to Arthur. Lewis died on 23 November 1963, the same day as both President Kennedy and Aldous Huxley.

If a single inscription were to be added to Arthur’s unmarked grave, it need not define his sexuality or resolve his struggles. Lewis already supplied the most fitting epitaph. Arthur Greeves, he wrote, was “*the most faithful of friends.*”

## Bibliography

---

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Tolkien’s letter to Dick Plotz on 12 September 1965 in J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Collected Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), letter 276: “The unpayable debt that I owe to him [C.S. Lewis] was not ‘influence’ as it is ordinarily understood, but sheer encouragement. He was for long my only audience. Only from him did I ever get the idea that my ‘stuff’ could be more than a private hobby. But for his interest and unceasing eagerness for more I should never have brought *The Lord of the Rings* to a conclusion.”

<sup>61</sup> The first C.S. Lewis Society in the world was founded in New York in 1969, followed by Portland (1972), Oxford (1982), and dozens more.

<sup>62</sup> *They Stand Together*, 557.

<sup>63</sup> *They Stand Together*, 559, n2.

- Arthur Greeves Diaries Collection*, Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL.
- Lewis Papers: Memoirs of the Lewis Family 1850–1930*, Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL.
- Heck, Joel, *No Ordinary People: 21 Friendships of C.S. Lewis* (Winged Lion Press, 2021).
- Hooper, Walter, and Green, Roger Lancelyn, *C.S. Lewis: A Biography* (London: Collins, 1974).
- Hooper, Walter, and Green, Roger Lancelyn, *C.S. Lewis: The Authorized and Revised Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 2002).
- Johnson, Greg, *Still Time to Care: What We Can Learn about the Church's Failed Attempt to Cure Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021).
- Kohm, Joseph, *The Unknown Garden of Another's Heart: The Surprising Friendship of C.S. Lewis and Arthur Greeves* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022)
- Lepojärvi, Jason, "Brilliance and Blindspots: New Light on C.S. Lewis's *The Four Loves*," in *The Heythrop Journal*, Vol. 63, Issue 6 (2022), 1109–1123.
- Lepojärvi, Jason, "Companions in Shipwreck: J.R.R. Tolkien's Female Friendships," in *Apprehending Love*, ed. by Olli-Pekka Vainio and Pekka Kärkkäinen (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 2019), 339–365.
- Lewis, C.S., *All My Road Before Me: The Diary of C.S. Lewis, 1922–1927*, ed. by Walter Hooper (1991; repr. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2017).
- Lewis, C.S., *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955).
- Lewis, C.S., *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1936).
- Lewis, C.S., *The Collected Letters*, 3 vols., ed. by Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollins, 2000–2006),
- Lewis, C.S., *The C.S. Lewis Recordings: The Four Loves and C.S. Lewis Speaks His Mind* (Atlanta: Alliance for Christian Media, 2007),
- Lewis, C.S., *The Four Loves* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1960).
- Lewis C.S., and Arthur Greeves, *They Stand Together: The Letters of C.S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves (1914–1963)*, ed. by Walter Hooper (New York: Macmillan, 1979).
- Lewis, Warren, *Brothers and Friends: The Diaries of Major Warren Hamilton Lewis*, ed. by Clyde S. Kilby and Marjorie Lamp Mead (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982),
- McGrath, Alister, *C.S. Lewis: A Life* (Tyndale House: Carol Stream, IL).
- Mumaw, Barton, and Jane Sherman, *Barton Mumaw, Dancer: From Denishawn to Jacob's Pillow and Beyond* (New York, NY: Dance Horizons/Princeton Book Co. Pub, 1986).

Poe, Harry Lee, *Becoming C.S. Lewis: A Biography of Young Jack Lewis (1898–1918)* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019).

Sayer, George, *Jack: A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1988)

Sayer, George, *Jack: A Biography* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994).

Sayer, George, “Jack on Holiday,” in *C.S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table and Other Reminiscences*, ed. by James T. Como (London: Collins, 1980), 202–209.

Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Collected Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981),