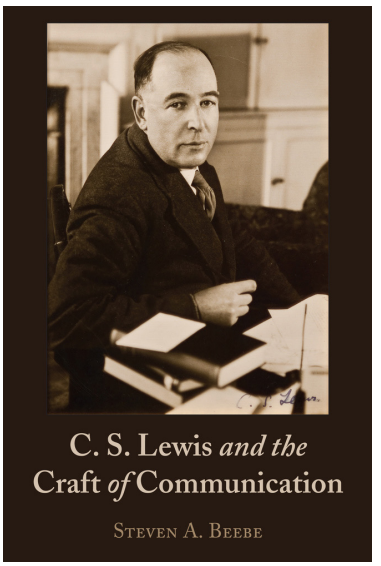
Notes

[1] "The thought at the back of all this negative spirituality is really one forbidden to Christians. They, of all men, must not conceive spiritual joy and worth as things that need to be rescued or tenderly protected from time and place and matter and the senses. Their God is the God of corn and oil and wine. He is the glad Creator. He has become Himself incarnate. The sacraments have been instituted. Certain spiritual gifts are offered us only on condition that we perform certain bodily acts. After that we cannot really be in doubt of His intention. To shrink back from all that can be called Nature into negative spirituality is as if we ran away from horses instead of learning to ride" (Lewis 214).

Work Cited

Lewis, C.S. *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*. Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Steven A. Beebe, *C.S. Lewis and the Craft of Communication*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2020).



Like so many others overwhelmed by the growth industry called C.S. Lewis studies, I find it difficult to keep up with the sheer volume of books published on, about, by, or with C.S. Lewis over the last two decades. So it came as a surprise to learn that a book had been written about Lewis as a communicator and a double surprise to find myself not merely reading, but quite enjoying, the book. Steven A. Beebe is a fan, an enthusiast, a scholar, a lover, and a database of all things Lewis. From the obscure and hidden aspects of Lewis's lifelong friendships to the clichés that show up on bookmarks and tea towels ("*You can never get a cup of tea large enough . . .*"), Beebe knows his Lewis inside and out. And while it is not the primary aim of his book to do so, he offers a sort of bird's eye view of not just Lewis, but of much of the best that has been said about him since his death. While Beebe's work is not quite a one-stop shop for all one needs to know about Lewis, it does nevertheless scratch many of the itches one might have to know the man, his biography, and his method.

The book's preface starts with the story of Beebe's claim to fame in Lewis scholarship: through his archival research at the Bodleian Library, he discov-

ered an incomplete manuscript, which was the *Language and Human Nature* project that Lewis and Tolkien were to co-author but never did (the fragment was later published in *VII* Volume 27).

Beebe's actual purpose in this book is to add another category to the list of things you think about when you think about Lewis. We already know Lewis as poet, children's author, fantasy novelist, science-fiction writer, theologian, medievalist, autobiographer, and literary scholar. But did you know he was also a master communicator? That may sound like a title invented by a doctoral student looking to justify yet another dissertation on Lewis. But in the hands of Emeritus Professor Beebe, it is the stuff of elegant simplexity and a joy to read. This is Lewis sifted, sorted, reflected, and deeply considered: the best of what's worth knowing and considering in the life and output of this unique character, personage, and intellect. And because its starting point is neither data nor information nor knowledge about Lewis, but wisdom, it actually reads as a magisterial comprehendium of what is worth holding onto that Lewis has bequeathed us. It is also, quite slyly, a really good pitch for being a communication major, because the only way Beebe can make his claims about Lewis as a master communicator is to delve into the substance of his theology, fantasy, sci-fi, poetry, and medieval and literary scholarship. In other words, by discussing the *form* of Lewis's *content*, Beebe shows us the *how* to Lewis's *why*, revealing the *wherefore* to Lewis's *what*.

Lewis had seven key influences, according to Beebe, and these are 1) family, 2) education, 3) war experience, 4) Mrs. Moore, 5) friendship with Tolkien, 6) conversion, and 7) marriage. Four of those seven are fairly universal; it's the other three that make it interesting.

Beebe asserts that Lewis also had four major themes, evident in "almost everything he wrote or said" (72), and while his book is about *how* Lewis communicated, a look at the *what* of the four themes makes a strong introduction to understanding Lewis's overall project: 1) Longing—the quest to find home, 2) the Tao, or Universal Truth, 3) Christianity, Lewis's primary sense-making lens, and 4) Language—metaphorical shaper of thought and meaning.

Beebe's main claim is that through his acronym HI TEA, you can get to the essence of what made Lewis a master communicator: Lewis was Holistic, Intentional, Transpositional, Evocative, and Audience-centered. All of these are illustrated with specific examples and references to letters, lectures, books, comments, and so on, drawn from the rich cornucopia of existing Lewisiana. Each one of the five aspects gets its own chapter. Some of them are fairly straightforward and/or self-explanatory if you've read enough Lewis. But not the Transpositional. Lewis understood deeply that the ineffable and the sublime—the stuff that makes life worth living—is very hard to communicate without similes, metaphors, analogies, and other uses of symbolism that both *translate* the experience and simultaneously *transpose* the experience from a higher register to a lower one. Even when done right, it is usually

done poorly, fragmentarily, and fleetingly, and it often ends in the speaker saying something like, "I can't explain it with words!" because what they are trying to communicate is a feeling that is too large to transmit through the shabby little vocables our mouths make. Thus, the very insufficiency of language to accurately symbolize our ineffable experiences becomes one of the strongest proofs that they are quite real. Here is Beebe, quoting Michael Ward, on the 27 similes and comparisons Lewis used in *Mere Christianity* to describe what becoming a Christian is like:

> Joining a campaign of sabotage
> Falling at someone's feet
> Putting yourself in someone's hands
> Taking on board fuel or food
> Laying down your rebel arms and surrendering
> Saying sorry
> Laying yourself open
> Turning full speed astern
> Killing part of yourself
> Learning to walk or write
> Buying God a present with his own money
> A drowning man clutching a rescuer's hand
> A tin soldier or statue becomes alive
> Waking after a long sleep
> Getting close to someone
> Becoming infected
> Dressing up or pretending or playing
> Emerging from the womb
> Hatching from an egg
> A compass needle swinging to the north
> A cottage being made into a palace
> A field being plowed and re-sown
> A horse turning into a Pegasus
> A greenhouse roof become bright in the sunlight
> Coming around from anesthetic
> Coming in out of the wind
> Going home.
> … Each of these comparisons illustrates the principle of transposition—making the ineffable, hard-to-describe experience effable. (180-81)

Here, I believe, lies the key to the heart of both a great mystery and the simplest of questions: What makes a book worth re-reading? Why do you keep re-reading the Bible? Why do you keep re-reading Lewis? Is it not

the age-old adage that you get something new from it every time? Well, if that is so, how do authors create a book with that quality? What do they consciously know that we only subconsciously intuit while reading, and only consciously become aware of after repeated reading and re-reading? And what does that have to do with Scripture, and with the four ways of reading at the literal, analogical, tropological, and anagogical levels? Lewis understood this, both deeply and assuredly, and I think Beebe does a decent job of beginning to explain it: "Transposition helps people experience the aroma of a fragrance beyond their senses, hear a unique melody composed for their ears only, or receive news for which they have been longing their entire lives" (185). "Keep going" is all I could think when this chapter ended, for I wanted to learn more, know more, understand more.

Beebe's style is very much the teacher's approach to communication: tell you what to expect, then tell it to you, then summarize what he told you. You get it three ways. Then you really get it. You got that? This has the effect of being exquisitely clear, so that you can use his notes and phrases as your own teaching tools, but it also has the effect of making portions of the book redundant, didactic, and predictable—not a flaw, just something to be aware of.

To my knowledge, Beebe's book is the very best book on Lewis as a master communicator because it is the only book on this topic. I made the same claim about my co-authored introductory book to the life and thought of Jacques Ellul—at the time it was the best because it was the only one. But I think Beebe's book will stand the test of time and be used by future communication scholars as an excellent starting point for their own deeper dives into some areas that they would not have known about without Beebe's pioneering entry into this field.

The last chapter of the book is on application and how to imitate Jack's master communicator tricks, methods, and techniques in one's own communication. And so, while providing a very rich biography and analysis of Lewis, Beebe's work also provides multiple practical takeaways that will help communicators and educators who admire Lewis address a major question: "How can I work a Lewis quote into a speech or essay in a way that hasn't already been beaten to death?" Answer: by NOT quoting Lewis, but by imitating his style and seeing who in the room can interpret and translate what's just been done.

Read Schuchardt
Associate Professor of Communication
Wheaton College
Wheaton, Illinois