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Letters From Hell: The Symbolism of Evil in *The Screwtape Letters*

**Abstract**
Analyzes in detail the symbols of evil in *The Screwtape Letters*. Lewis presents evil as various forms of the privatio boni, or absence of good.

**Additional Keywords**
Devils in The Screwtape Letters; Evil in The Screwtape Letters; Lewis, C.S. The Screwtape Letters; Nancy-Lou Patterson; Christine Lowentrou
An apology for the devil: it must be remembered that we have heard only one side of the case; God has written all the books.

Samuel Butler, Notebooks

Following the example of Dorothy L. Sayers, who interpreted The Divine Comedy primarily the work of an "incomparable story-teller," the author of this essay will apply the same interpretation to C.S. Lewis's The Screwtape Letters. In this short epistolary fantasy, there are three compelling interwoven narratives: the life of the young human "patient" from his Christian conversion to his death; the diabolical efforts of his tempter Wormwood and the senior devil Screwtape to capture him for hell; and the role, implicit throughout and made evident in the end, of God in saving him for Heaven. The narrative is divided into three phases of temptation, the first by the World, the second by the Flesh, and the third by the Devil (that is, by spiritual means). In the presentation of this most human of all stories, Lewis makes use of the major and classic symbols of evil from the traditions of Western culture, including the animal motif, the fear of being devoured, and, most fundamental of all, the concept of defilement. In sum, he presents evil as defined by the doctrine of privatio boni, the absence of good, as he explores the mythic structures of the War in Heaven. He describes a bureaucratic hell in which Satan and his fallen angels, unable to create so much as a single pleasure, continually struggle to understand the intentions of their Adversary, God. Inaccurate to the last, they occupy the ultimately ridiculous position of created beings rebelling against their creator. From this ignoble posture, they reach out ravenously to draw each human being into the same contradiction. In The Screwtape Letters, the tempters meet defeat, and the "patient" meets his maker face-to-face: Lewis is telling the one tale his listeners most want to hear as their own.

On a human level, The Screwtape Letters tells a very simple but poignant story. At the onset of World War II, a young British convert to Christianity undergoes a series of temptations by the World, the Flesh, and the Devil; he meets and falls in love with a young Christian girl, begins to participate in defence work, acquits himself well in his first air-raid, and is killed in a state of grace, in his second. The efforts of his personal tempter, one Wormwood, having been reported to a senior devil, Screwtape, elicit letters of advice on the diabolical aspects of the process. From these we follow a second, spiritual level of events in which the emphasis is upon the infernal characters but includes a hint of the divine actions as well.

On the diabolical level, Screwtape advises, scolds, threatens, praises, and finally condemns the efforts of his nephew Wormwood, who, after unsuccessfully trying to betray his uncle and corrupt his "patient," becomes food for Screwtape in the saved soul's place. The work of God meanwhile has drawn the young man into the Church, defended him against temptation, provided him with a girl to love and Christians to befriend him, and taken him, still young and in spiritual health, to Himself. This taking, contrary to infernal practice, is not into a state of absorption, but into true and complete selfhood at the heart of Selfhood; the diabolical meal which Screwtape makes of Wormwood is an inverted parody (like the Black Mass) of the central Christian symbol of the relationship between human and divine: the Eucharist, the sacred meal in which the Body and Blood of Christ become the food of the faithful. Screwtape never learns what God wants from His creation; the idea that God wants to give Himself to His creatures — depicted in so absolute, stunning, and concrete an image as this — obviously cannot occur to the devil. But Lewis uses exactly this image as the operative symbol of his book.

It is instructive to summarize the story with a sentence for each of the thirty-one chapters. There is a young man who has a materialist friend. Even so, he becomes a Christian. He has problems with his mother, a difficult old lady who resents his conversion. He begins a prayer life in which he becomes aware of God's presence. War begins. He feels fear, loss, and
self-pity. In particular, he fears the prospect of military service. He does not know he has a tempter who will manipulate his fear towards a false pacifism. He underestimates the period of dormancy or "undulation" or rhythm in a convert's life. His tempter tries to make use of this. The young man is tempted by the World in the form of a couple who are fashionably liberal. They enjoy laughter but not of the healing kind. Although his soul is in danger, he still continues to attend church and make his communions. As a result, he repents, and undergoes a "second conversion." He gains a new humility and aid from God in keeping his mind off himself.

There is a lull in the war, and he feels a "natural" sense of ease. Happily, ever since his conversion, he has attended the same church. A new attempt is made on his soul through appetite, a special form of "delicacy" which he shares with his mother -- this is a temptation of the Flesh. His flesh is also tempted toward unchastity; this takes a strong form, playing upon his private obsessions. Through Grace, he falls in love with a virginal Christian girl of a family advanced on holiness. He meets many new, intelligent Christian friends. The girl's only flaw is that she naively sees non-Christians as a little ridiculous. But he is living a new kind of Christian life among truly charitable people. They are "mere Christians" for whom the faith is an end in itself, not conversion. He gains a new humility and aid from God in the World in the form of a couple who are fashionably liberal. They enjoy laughter but not of the healing kind. Although his soul is in danger, he still continues to attend church and make his communions. As a result, he repents, and undergoes a "second conversion." He gains a new humility and aid from God in keeping his mind off himself.

Now the devil prepares his final attack. While the young man's mother and young woman pray for him, he takes up defence work. The anticipation of bombardment awakens temptations to hatred, fear, and despair; but he feels shame at these expressions of incipient cowardice. In his first air-raid, he acquires himself well; he is afraid, and ashamed of his fear, but does his duty anyway. Finally, he is killed in another raid, simultaneously becoming aware of his tempters, of the angels who have protected him, and of Christ Himself who greets him, wearing "the form of a Man."

We do not learn the ultimate fate of his mother or his young woman, though they figure prominently in the story. Perhaps the unpleasant old lady will be saved by her son's intercessions, and the girl, made more mature and less naive by her bereavement, will one day meet him in Heaven, perhaps after a lifetime of marriage to someone else.

I have suggested in this summary, by my division of the narrative into three paragraphs, and by the language I have used, that the subject of The Screwtape Letters is tempted of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. For at least four centuries, Anglicans have prayed that newly baptized babies may "triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh." These terms refer to spiritual sin, social sin, and physical sin. In terms of the traditional Seven Deadly Sins, these categories might be divided into Pride and Despair (the Devil); Avarice, Envy, and Gluttony (the World) and Lust (the Flesh). Dorothy L. Sayers wittily entitled an essay "The Other Six Deadly Sins" because so few people have heard of any but the last (Lust), while she concluded that the first (Pride) was the fundament and ruler of the others.

Of luxuria (Lust), Sayers said briskly that it is indeed a sin; that until recently Caesar agreed with the Church in combating it, but now, no longer needing families, has ceased to care; and that people fall into it by "sheer exuberance of animal spirits" but equally easily by "sheer boredom and discontent." [1] Lust, along with ira (Wraith) and gula (Gluttony) Sayers calls the "warm-hearted, or disreputable sins." (Ibid., p. 159.) The others she acerbically calls "the cold-hearted or respectable sins." These are aversatio (Covetousness); invidia (Envy); aedia (Sloth) of which she says "In the world it calls itself tolerance; but in hell it is called despair," (Ibid., p. 176.) and superbia (Pride) which is "the sin of trying to be God." (Ibid., 177.) This last is, of course, the sin of Satan.

To Lewis, one need not look past one's own experience to have a knowledge of sin:

In all but a few writers the "good" characters are the least successful, and every one who has ever tried to make even the humblest story ought to know why. To make a character worse than oneself it is necessary to release imaginatively from control some of the bad passions which, in real life, are always straining at the leash .... [2]

Indeed, the voice of Screwtape (by intention a character worse than oneself) is the voice of the young Lewis as revealed in his own early letters: supercilious, mocking, cruelly calculating, belittling, and anxious for position, and certainly he drew upon his own life, his own temptations, in The Screwtape Letters.

The character of Wormwood's patient is not quite Everyman. He resides in a town large enough to undergo bombardment, rather than a village or on a farm. He lives with his mother (an echo, surely of Lewis's surrogate mother, Mrs. Janie Moore), and has several contrasting circles of friends who reflect the intellectual currents of the of the day, including Christianity. He is Anglican, (not a mere Christian), a member of a specific parish of the Church of England. We do not learn how his living but suspect it is not as a labourer. Perhaps he works at a desk in a large bureaucracy, so that Wormwood is his infernal counterpart: a junior tempter for a junior clerk! His private life of relationships with family, friends, and courted girl are depicted, but his life as a worker, which would have occupied most of his daylight hours, is not discussed in the story. The bureaucratic Hell which has been created may have taken its place, setting forth the diabolical aspects of this lifestyle with vigour. It is also possible that the young man, like Lewis's friend Arthur Greaves, had no employment, but lived with his mother on the proceeds of her inheritance, whether from her family or her husband. Although he is of an age for military service, the young man does not volunteer and is not called; he serves instead at home in defence work, and indeed, dies at his post. Perhaps he is slightly disabled, as Greaves reportedly was, by a faulty heart.

Despite these specifics, however, his youth, his lack of particular employment, and his membership in the state church, give him a partially generalized identity. Lewis must have wanted a character specific enough to be believable but general enough to be understandable by the majority of his readers. The book began as a series printed in the Manchester Guardian
early in World War II, and was intended for readers aware of intellectual currents.

I have suggested above the autobiographical element in the patient's difficult mother; another feature, available to us since the publication of the Lewis-Greaves correspondence, is hinted in the temptations to unchristianity. These include references to masturbatory fantasy — "solitary vice" and "personal obsession" — which for the youthful Lewis took the form of imagined sadism. He may also have been unchaste, as he hints in *Surprised by Joy* (his dancing teacher) and *The Pilgrim's Regress* (the brown girl). As far as we know, he never won the love of a virginal Christian girl, but he had a number of friendships with young women of the type he describes in the character of the patient's "young woman," female cousins and family acquaintances of his Belfast youth, including Jane McNeill. His wife, as befitted his maturity, was a brilliant divorced woman who offered him intellectual equality and experienced sexual partnership. But that lay ahead of him when he wrote The Screwtape Letters.

The book is an epistolary narrative in a form characteristic of a number of Victorian works of fantasy including *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins. This form was also used by religious writers and Lewis's specific source has been stated to have been *Letters From Hell* (1885) by Waldemar Adolph Thisted. Lewis wrote from Great Bookham, where he was being tutored for Oxford, to his friend Greaves on 18 July, 1916: "I wonder what a book called 'Letters from Hell' published at 1/- by Macmillan would be like?" [3] By 25 July he had learned that the specific letter to be used by "George MacDonald, already known to him from *Phantasies*, when the book so breathlessly awaited was finally read, Lewis wrote to Greaves that he had given it "to a jumble sale for the red cross or something" and that "I am at present enjoying the malicious pleasure of expecting that the buyer will be as disappointed as I was." (Ibid., 151.)

This book begins "I felt the approach of death." No wonder the young Lewis had felt so attracted to it when he first opened it! But what follows is a dry memoir recorded during a sojourn in hell, interspersed with bizarre visions of symbolic import: a city with a nightly "auto-dafe," a city of Politicians where the statesmen fall to bickering. These images suggest motifs which reappear in *That Hideous Strength*. All the while, the light slowly fades, as it does in hell in *The Great Divorce*. There is a wronged maiden, who finds her way to heaven, without the protagonist, a hint of the Christian girl in The Screwtape Letters, perhaps. Indeed, at the end, the dammed soul meets his own mother on the stygian shore and they sink into a final despair, providing at least the germ of the mother in The Screwtape Letters. The style is ornate, even elegaic, but the contents are extremely diffuse. Presumably Lewis had chances beyond this to observe the City of Dis: his brother Major Warren Lewis wrote in his diary of a part of Liverpool (the sad seaport to which the Blendells were ferried at the end of each holiday from Belfast to his terrible school in England): "I, after a siesta, went for a more extended stroll in Birkenhead than I have yet had; it is exactly Hell described by J in the opening chapter of *Grand Divorce*. How can any government expect content from the inhabitants of such a place?" [4]

But Lewis did, perhaps, derive a very concrete, and finally more important, idea from the Introduction to the book by George MacDonald, who wrote that *Letters from Hell* was "full of truth." In his comments, MacDonald penned this powerful statement:

Men, in defacing the image of God in themselves, contrive for themselves a world of horror and dismay; that of the outer darkness our own deeds and character are the informing or inwardly creating cause; that if a man will not have God, he never can be rid of his weary and hateful self. [5]

In the essay, "Screwtape Proposes a Toast," (1961) which Lewis composed two decades after The Screwtape Letters, he makes Screwtape say that the damned would possess "a hard, tight, settled core of resolution to go on being what it is." This consists of "a very small core," Lewis reiterates, and, drawing upon the most terrible image he knew: "almost, in its own way, pris and demure; like a pebble, or a very young cancer." [6] In this passage we see in an ultimate nutshell, Lewis's teaching on sin. He was close, by then, to his own death.

Michael Paternoster points out that while Charles Williams can "manage without a personal devil," his friend C.S. Lewis... clearly does not mean evil spirits as a literary device but believes that their existence helps to explain the phenomenon of everyday experience." [7] The purpose of the present essay is to examine Lewis's depiction of evil, by using images (as one must for the expression of all psychic or spiritual phenomena) in The Screwtape Letters. In this work, and this work only (excepting its very late "chapter" just quoted) evil appears personified in precisely diabolical form. Lewis had already written book-of-the-devil characters — *Dymer* (1929); *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933) and *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938) — and he was to write *Perelandra* (1943) with the Un-man as a human being possessed by "macrobics." The White and Green Witches of the Narnia Chronicles (1950-1955) are evil female beings, while Tash is modelled upon a malevolent Near Eastern divinity, and in the last fantasy, *Till We Have Faces* (1956) there are no such characters.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, however, we have devils depicted as themselves, personified as individual spiritual beings. Without trying to define evil in itself, we can agree with Jeffrey Burton Russell's definition of *The Devil*: "Evil is frequently and in many societies felt as a personalized force, and it is perceived as personified... Evil is never abstract. It must always be understood in terms of the suffering of an individual." [8] This latter idea is explored by Lewis in *The Problem of Pain*. The being Lewis was depicting is based upon "that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world," who "were cast out with him," as is reported in Revelation 12:9.

This personified evil and the suffering of an individual are precisely what The Screwtape Letters is about. To the often-put question of whether he really believed in the devil, Lewis wrote this reply: "if by 'the Devil' you mean a power opposite to God and, like God, self-existent from all eternity, the answer is certainly No." But, he continued, as to whether he believed in devils, "I do. That is to say, I believe in angels, and I believe that some of these, by the abuse of their free will, have become enemies to God and, as a corollary, to us." [9] Interestingly, one of Lewis's critics agrees with him, on aesthetic grounds. Diana Waggoner remarks that "It is an artistic mistake to
invent an evil being who exists purely to do, and to represent, 'evil'; it puts the subcreator in the same position as a God who deliberately creates the Devil in order to make things more interesting." [10] Screwtape is no invention. He is an image, and stated to be an image, of the diabolical forces so many cultures have detected. As Russell puts it, "The Devil is the hypothesis, the apotheosis, the objectification of a hostile force or hostile forces perceived as external to our own consciousness." (Russell 1979 p. 34.) This being is "no outmoded figure, but a phenomenon of enormous and perennial power in, or over, the human spirit." (Ibid., p. 35.)

In the New Testament this figure is called Satan: a Hebrew term carried over from the Old Testament. The word refers to "a being who hinders free, forward movement," an adversary or accuser." [11] The Greek word also used in the New Testament as the equivalent of Satan, is Diabolos, which is translated into English as "Devil." Literally, it too means "to throw across." As John Sanford puts it, "It is as though the diabolos throws something across our path to interfere with our progress." The Satan of the New Testament causes both physical and mental illness, and "strives to turn man from God by inciting him to sin and rebellion." (Ibid., p. 37.) This diabolos or Satan figure is the pattern from which Lewis's Screwtape is cut.

The best commentary on the depiction of evil in The Screwtape Letters is by Lewis himself, in the Preface he prepared to a new edition which included the essay "Screwtape Proposes a Toast." Admitting that he believes in angels and consequently in devils, he offers five paragraphs of sophisticated commentary on the depiction of angels and devils in Western art and literature. He summarizes the traditional methods in this pithy and witty remark: "Devils are depicted with bats' wings and good angels with birds' wings... because most men like birds better than bats." (Lewis 1962 p. viii.) Most tellingly, he states of angels, "They are given human form because man is the only rational creature we know. Creatures higher in the natural order than ourselves... must be represented symbolically if they are to be represented at all."

After referring specifically to the devils in Dante (which "are the best"), Milton (which "have done great harm"), and Goethe (whose Mephistopheles is "the really pernicious image"), (Ibid., p. ix.) Lewis remarks (of himself) that "a little man may sometimes avoid some single error made by a great one," and that he hoped "my own symbolism should at least not err in Goethe's way." As to his own method in The Screwtape Letters, "I like bats much better than bureaucrats... the greatest evil is not now done in... dens of crime... [or] even in concentration camps and labour camps." Rather, "it is conceived and ordered... in clean, carpeted, warmed, and well-lighted offices." In short, "my symbol for Hell is something like the bureaucracy of a police state or the offices of a thoroughly nasty business concern." (Ibid., p. x.) Lewis published these words in the England of 1961. Reversal of the evil, he thought, would depend on two things: the Diabolos would have no reason to dispute his choice of symbol and perhaps recognize his remarkable powers of prophecy!

Screwtape, then, is the embodiment of evil conceived as one of a group of fallen spirits. The devils are fallen angels, beings created good but free, who have chosen to rebel against their maker. Lewis, in a book published in the same year as The Screwtape Letters, discussed the meaning of Satan. He states in A Preface to Paradise Lost (1942) that "Milton has chosen to treat the Satanic predicament in the epic form and has therefore subordinated the absurdity of Satan to the misery which he suffers and inflict." [12] The Screwtape Letters, then, is a work complementing Milton's method: "it is a mistake to demand that Satan... should be able to rant and posture through the whole universe without, sooner or later, awaking the comic spirit." Screwtape is, and is intended to be, a comic figure: "mere Christianity commits every Christian to believing that 'the Devil is (in the long run) an ass.'" (Ibid., p. 96.)

The devil an ass? Why? Because "a creature revolting against a creator is revolting against the source of his own powers." (Ibid., p. 96.) The devil is a created being, as was the Adversary, Satan, in the Old Testament. The rebellion of such a being is ultimately laughable because what is attempted is in the end impossible. Why, then, would a spiritual being of the highest created order turn to such hopeless rebellion? Lewis has an answer — quoting Paradise Lost I, 98 — Satan suffers "a sense of injur'd merit." A Preface to Paradise Lost is dedicated to Charles Williams, whose thoughts on Milton influenced Lewis just as his thoughts on Dante influenced Sayers. In his Preface to The Poetical Works of Milton (1940) Williams stated: "much of Paradise Lost can be felt to revolve, laughingly and harmoniously, round the solemn and helpless image of pride." [13] This is the sin of Pride, which goes at the head of the list in Sayers's comments on the Seven Deadly Sins. It is "one of the supreme ultimate level. As Williams puts it, "He is full of injured merit... He is the full example of the self-loving spirit." (Ibid., p. 30.)

Charles Williams's commentary, which provided Lewis with his central insight into Paradise Lost, contains one of his most famous opinions: Hell is always inaccurate," (Ibid.) This is the theme of The Screwtape Letters. As Hell struggles and fails to comprehend the divine intentions. It is a self-willed failure: having gotten the basic order of the premise — creator-created — wrong, how could an accurate conclusion be drawn from it? Lewis calls this inaccuracy "this doom of Nonsense," and uses the same theme in his bouquet scene in That Hideous Strength.

But what has this war in Heaven, this spiritual rebellion in high places, to do with earth and humankind? What interest has the devil in us? Lewis explains this in his summary of Milton's Satan:

He begins by fighting for "liberty," however misconceived; but almost at once sinks to fighting for "Honour, Dominion, glory and renown." Defeated in this, he sinks to that great design... of ruining two creatures who had never done him any harm... This brings him as a spy into the universe, and soon not even a political spy, but a mere peeping Tom leering, and withing in pruriency as he overlooks the privacy of two lovers... as "the Devil," -- the salacious grotesque monster, which has more of popular tradition. From hero to general, from politician to politician to secret service agent, and thence to a thing that peers in at bedroom or bathroom windows, and thence to a toad, and finally to a snake -- such is the progress of Satan. [14]

In my Epigraph, I quote a famous utterance of Samuel Butler's, complaining that we do not hear Satan's side of the matter. Mark Twain also took this whimsical
viewpoint in an essay: "It may be that I lean a little his way, on account of his not having a fair show. All religions issue bibles against him, and say the most injurious things about him, but we never hear his side." These statements are, of course, tongue-in-cheek. They imply that such an inverted point of view is intrinsically comic, just as Lewis says.

I referred above to several works in the epistolary manner from the Victorian era. In fact, the Edwardian period yields even more precise counterparts to Lewis's method in The Screwtape Letters, and though there is no evidence he read them, a description of two such works, popular religious treatises purporting to give the devil's point of view, may give a sense of the attitudes which informed Lewis's youth. They have just that jaunty, comic element which characterizes nearly all popular works on religion. Lewis's ability to take this stance and yet write works of surpassing power is what I suppose most infuriates his critics.

In Sermons by the Devil (1904), the Rev. W. S. Harris explains his plot: 'The part that Satan plays in the drama of a human life is often larger than a person will admit. Each of us is partly existing, but we are constantly acted upon by one or the other of two great influences. The Good Spirit endeavours to lead us to the skies, and its angels are ever willing to minister to any real needs. The Evil Spirit, either openly or under cover, seeks to destroy our mind with the untruth by preaching to us his black sermons of death.' Each 'sermon' is a little drama in which a human character undergoes temptation (countered by responses from 'a good angel'). Advising parents in child-rearing, for example, Satan suggests, 'Certainly, tell him, by your actions and your words, that religion is not intended to give a man greater liberty than he would otherwise enjoy, but, on the contrary, it often tends to narrow a man down to a set of hard rules.' [15] In 'An Essay Delivered to the Devil and his Cabinet by a Theological Specialist,' the essayist cheerfully reports that 'You will all agree with me that things are drifting in the right direction.' (Ibid., p. 247.) He proposes a series of guidelines for modern pastors, concluding with words that Screwtape had been uttered by Screwtape: 'If you cannot succeed with the speculative argument, then try the sensational fad. There are not a few who can be turned off at this angle, and, instead of putting a little spice into the sermon, they can be persuaded to make it nearly all spice.' (Ibid., p. 256.)

A similar book, by the Rev. J. R. Miller, The Devil of Today (1903) is written in the form of an allegory, with characters including not only Satan and A Guardian Angel, but Miss Sincere, Widow Faith, Mr. Hypocrite, and Evangelist, as well as pastors like the Rev. Mr. Good and the Rev. Mr. Please-All. Satan is provided with aides: Deception, Belial, Faultfinder, and Heresy. The book begins: 'In my vision it was morning.' [16] In a typical passage Satan and Heresy discuss attacks on the Bible: 'Let us bend our united energies towards confusing the faith of Christians in their old book,' added the fiend. (Ibid., p. 262.) Worthwith Hypocrite gives Miss Sincere a book 'in the hope of liberalizing her simple faith. He spoke glibly of the sidelights recently discovered by modern investigation and science, which had somewhat changed the landmarks of historic faith.' At the conclusion of the book, Miss Sincere and Widow Faith are last seen entering Heaven: 'Standing within the doorway with their guide, they beheld before them a cloud in which shone the glory of the world invisible, and within it were a host of celestial beings, chanting the song of the triumphant.' (Ibid., p. 454.) The resemblance of this image to the last chapter of The Screwtape Letters will be apparent.

In discussing the human plot of Lewis's book we reduced it to a series of sentences summarizing chapters. Insights into the diabolical world of Screwtape can be gained by applying a similar method. In Chapter I, Screwtape writes to Wormwood, the "patient's" tempter. Thereafter, he expresses anger and promises penalties for Wormwood's performance in letting his patient become a Christian. Screwtape shows Wormwood the resemblance of this image to the last chapter of The Screwtape Letters will be apparent.

The senior tempter recommends fear or over-confidence as a new approach. He says Wormwood's record so far is not good: the patient still attends the same church. Screwtape accuses Wormwood of ignorance on the subject of Gluttony, referring to Glubose again. He makes additional slighting remarks about Slubgob, and in the next letter he anxiously insists that he didn't mean that God really loves humans or that Slubgob is incompetent, but he tells his nephew to hide his letters anyway. He expresses impatience that God helps defend the patient against attacks on his chastity, and declares that Satan will surely win this soul through conquest. The Secret Police now visit Screwtape after Wormwood has informed on him. When confronted with the patient's newly-set "young woman," a sweet Christian girl, Screwtape becomes so overwrought that he turns into a centipede and is signed for by Toadpipe.

World and Flesh having failed, Screwtape proposes corruption through the spirit. He advises on how to corrupt through the courtship, and wishes that Slumtriglet, the tempter of the girl, would curb her sense of the ridiculous. Screwtape remarks that Wormwood is doing very little good in his efforts, and
insists on reports, not on war itself, but on its effect on the patient. He foresees that Germany will soon bombard the town. When this comes to pass, while Wormwood has enjoyed the bombardment, the Secret Police report on the patient's performance (most unsatisfactory from the diabolical point of view). Screwtape openly warns Wormwood: "Bring us back food or be food yourself." And in Letter XXXI he rapturously and ravenously greets his nephew, because, having lost the patient, he will now become a meal in hell.

In the story outlined above, we learn the names of eight devils:

Wormwood (the patient's tempter)
Screwtape (His Abysmal Sublimity, Under Secretary, T.E., B.S., etc. and Wormwood's uncle)
Glubose (the tempter of the patient's mother)
Scabtree (a high-ranking diabolical theorist)
Slubgob (the head of the Training School)
Triptweeze (who informs upon Wormwood to Screwtape)
Toadpipe (Screwtape's secretary who signs for him when he turns into a centipede)
Slumtrumpet (the tempter of the patient's "young woman")

Lewis's talent for inventing names is richly exercised in these characters: Wormwood's is the only one directly and entirely derived in its precise form not only from nature itself but from the Bible. Wormwood is a substance used because of its content of salicin, as a vermifuge (to expell worms), and to give its characteristic flavour to Absinthe. Referring to any of the genus Artemisia, and in particular to the Eurasian perennial Artemisia absinthium, Wormwood is a dark green oil with a bitter taste. In its secondary definition it means any "bitter, unpleasant," or, significantly, "mortifying experience." References to Wormwood — Deuteronomy 29:18, Proverbs 5:4, Jeremiah 9:15, 23:5, Lamentations 3:5, 13, and Amos 5:7 — in the Old Testament relate both to the bitterness of it, literally and figuratively, and to its use in intoxicating substances. The Proverbist says of the "strange woman" (a Near Eastern temple prostitute): "her end is bitter as wormwood," and the Lamentations speak of being made "drunk with Wormwood." These are the senses of the famous New Testament image in Revelation 8:11, "And the name of the star is called Wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter." Wormwood, in other words, poisons his patient's mind, or tries to. Perhaps Screwtape's most significant advice is that since God made the pleasures it is the intent of hell to diminish or spoil them: Wormwood is to embitter his patient's simple joys and render all his experiences into wormwood. This is the thrust of the temptations against chastity, in which the object must be a corrupted figure, like the strange woman of Proverbs, for the patient's sexual attraction to his "young woman" only serves God's will. Indeed, this sweetly natural physical attraction is so contrary to Screwtape's wishes that he metamorphoses to a centipede in contemplation of the girl in all her purity.

Wormwood's name also invokes echoes of wood-worm, worry wood, woriness and woodenness. These suggest images of hidden weakening, of borings from within in old houses, furniture, and artifacts. Old wood is generally full of worm-holes in England, [17] and the wood-worm was a threat in British experience both to the wooden pilings of docks and to the wooden ships that docked there. I cannot agree with Norman Bradshaw that this choice of name has some special resonance for Lewis because of an obsession he purportedly had with worms, attributed by Bradshaw to Lewis's imagining of the "worm-like action of devouring the body" in the cancer which consumed his mother. [18] Lewis was quite capable of using cancer as an image in itself, as we have seen. One need not be the victim of an obsession to feel the resonance of these images, which are — at least for the literate — a part of the inheritance of Western culture. Not only is the word "wormwood" deeply fixed in the vocabulary of the Old and New Testament, so too is the concept of the devouring worm, in its spiritual sense: Mark 9:44, 46, and 48 reiterates Christ's terrible refrain upon hell: "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Furthermore, the worm — that is, the maggot which devours carrion — is a symbol of bodily corruption and a reiterated figure in European thought. Both devouring and defiling are ancient operative images of evil, as will be shown below.

The rest of the eight diabolical names are clever portmanteaux, combinations of images of Lewis's own coinage: Screwtape, Glubose, Scabtree, Slubgob, Triptweeze, Toadpipe, and Slumtrumpet. Most of these words have an unpleasant sense — "trip" must refer to tripping up, not taking a trip — and invoke a variety of things people don't like. As Lewis says, "I aimed merely at making them nasty." (Lewis (1962), p. xiii.) He elaborates:

I fancy that Scrooge, screw, thumbscrew, tape-worm, and red tape all do some work in my hero's name, and that slob, globber, slubber, and gob have all gone into Slubgob. (Ibid.)

Following Lewis's method we may suggest the possible association of the other diabolical names:

Glubose: glue, glucose, glob, verbose
Scabtree: scab, scabby, tree, crab, scrabble, scabies, crabtree
Triptweeze: trip, tweezer, tease, tip, tease, tweeze
Toadpipe: toad, pipe, peer, tape, toper
Slumtrumpet: toad, slim, trumpet, slum, trim, trip, scrip, slip, lump, limpet, slump, limp

Screwtape's infernal titles include two given by initial only — "T.E., B.S." — for which I suggest Tempter Emeritus and Banished Spirit as possible meanings which are not ribald. When Screwtape proposes his toast at the "Annual dinner of the Tempter's Training College" (under the direction of Dr. Slubgob), he addresses his audience as "Mr. Principal, your Imminence, your Disgraces, my Thorns, Shades, and Gentledevils." The only other specific spiritual beings of whom we learn the title are Satan himself: "Our Father Below," and God, called by Screwtape "the Enemy." But we do learn of a number of infernal institutions, as befits a bureaucratic hell: "the office," the Secret Police, the House of Correction for Incompetent Tempters, the Philological Arm, the Infernal Police, and the Training College. And hell

On the other hand the names of human subjects are few — in addition to the Name of Jesus, we read of Paul, Apollos, Maritain, Hooker, Thomas Aquinas, and Socrates — all eminent warriors who have forced the infernal forces to take account of them. "Fr. Spike" is presumably a sobriquet; this is not the Inferno, in which Dante placed everybody he disliked or disapproved of. The human characters who actually appear in the story are not named at all: the patient (ironically called after the inmate of a hospital or mental institution), his mother, his young woman, a worldly couple, and a Christian family. Perhaps the "Christian" names of humans are not generally known to devils, having been given in Baptism in the presence of the Trinity, which would have been a suffocating cloud of silence to the newly-assigned tempter. Only in "Screwtape Proposes a Toast" do we learn the names of any human inmates or friends of hell: Parina, Henry VIII, Hitler, Messsaline, Casanova, Rousseau, and Hegel. Only Aristotle is mentioned in what we would regard as a favourable sense, and that twice. Screwtape has to look up every record in records and dossiers; apparently only an individual tempter is in contact with an individual human: devils are not omnipresent as God is. Screwtape looks up churches "in the office" where presumably a diabolical file of them is kept.

Lewis is at pains to indicate that his infernal subject is spiritual: "You, being a spirit," Screwtape begins one letter to Wormwood. He uses a delicately disguised synonym in the suggestion of spirits. When Wormwood (an agent of one form of liquor, remember) writes that he is "delirious with joy" over the new war, Screwtape tartly retorts: "You are not delirious; you are only drunk." [19] Wormwood has "tasted that wine which is the reward of all our labours — the anguish and bewilderment of a human soul." His success with his patient will be rewarded with "a brimful living chalice of despair and horror and astonishment which you can raise to your lips as often as you please." (Ibid., p. 30) And Screwtape at the infernal banquet notes that a few bottles of the "old sound vintage Pharisee" have been preserved, with its mingled flavour of "Dark fire." (Lewis [1962], p. 171.) The reference to a toast (an offering of wine) reminds us that wine in other hands is an element of the Sacrament, but the life-blood it contains is divine and is partaken by a human soul, not the other way around as in hell's inverted parody.

Hiddenness, a trait of the spiritual, is to be sought by devils: "Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves." (Lewis [1962], p. 39.) Indeed, "If any faint suspicions of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that, ... he therefore cannot believe you." (Ibid., p. 40) The laughter aroused by this image is of course not a pleasant sound; laughter is "disgusting and a direct insult to the realism, dignity, and austerity of Hell." (Ibid., p. 58.) Screwtape is offended by the patient's young woman because she is "the sort of creature who'd find ME funny!" (Ibid., p. 112.) The hiddenness of the diabolical world may be an imitation of their blinded perception of the Divine: grace all around, but the trap all across, "the ashtray which prevents your attacking the patient on his walk from the Old Mill." (Ibid., p. 66.) When the soul of his patient slips away from him into the Presence of God, "You reeled back dizzy and blinded," -- but "what is blinding, suffocating fire to you, is now cool light to him . . . and wears the form of a Man." [20]

The bureaucratic image, of a nether hierarchy, or as Lewis reverses it, "Lowerarchy," receding downwards in reflection of the upward-seeking altitudes of heaven, is drawn in part from Dante's Commedia Divina, but the modern touches are Lewis's own. Hell seems to be an institution devoted to data: what fun Lewis could have had with the idea of an infernal computer! In the effort to understand what the Enemy (God) is really up to, "more and more complicated theories, fuller and fuller collections of data, richer rewards for researchers who make progress, more and more terrible punishments" (Ibid., p. 98.) for failure are needed. Is there an academic of the eighties who has not already visited these halls? Certainly, this bureaucratic nightmare will be a familiar habitat to many of its inmates; of those who care more for "meetings, pamphlets, policies, arguments, causes, and crusades" (Ibid., p. 42.) than for "prayer and sacraments and charity," Screwtape says "I could show you a pretty cageful down here." (Ibid., p. 43.)

The end of all the endeavors of hell is two-fold: first, "Our war aim is a world in which Our Father Below has drawn all other beings into himself." (Ibid., p. 46.) This is a perversion of the saying of Jesus, "I, if I be lifted up, from the earth, will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32) When people are drawn unto Jesus they find themselves members of the Church which is His Body, a One which is nonetheless many. If every being were drawn into Satan there would be only one being, because he would have eaten all the others. The second end is to comprehend the purposes of God, which though rejected by Satan nonetheless preoccupies him. Indeed, "If we ever came to understand what He means by Love, the war would be over and we should re-enter Heaven." (Ibid., p. 98.) To gain this end, or rather, to find out what God is really up to, since, Screwtape decides that "He cannot really love; nobody can," (Ibid.) the lowerarchy labours to produce its complicated theories. And they imagine that God for His part hasn't "the least inkling of that high and austere mystery to which we rise in the Miserific Vision," (Ibid., p. 112.) the vision being the intention of Satan to absorb all things into himself. As Lewis puts it, "His dream is of the day when all shall be inside him and all that says 'I' can say it only through him." (Lewis [1962], p. xii.)

The suggestion above that an understanding of God's true purpose would return the fallen angels to Heaven is the one clear spot in his cloudy vision. The idea that even fallen demons can be redeemed seems to be a peculiarly Anglican notion. Roger Lloyd, in his Christian fantasy The Troubling of the City (1962) depicts the archdemon Vittros of the Select College of dark spirits (surely modelled after Lewis's creation). He is sent to earth in human form (causing him to feel "diminished" and "chafed"). [21] With the aid of the familiar demons of Winchester, — Mandrill, Vilifor, Snître, and Sloombane — and a group of vivified gargoyles, he attempts to subvert the city. At the climax of the book there is a confrontation of St. Swithun and these adversaries at Winchester Cathedral. First, a gargoyles repents and is forgiven: "As he stood there, the scarred stone body, the mis-shapen face, the gnarled tail and red feet, he tried to say 'I'm sorry, as the sun... like a dirty scab from a healed cut." (Ibid., p. 206.) This image must be modelled upon the climactic freeing of Wormwood's patient from his diabolical infestation,
"as if a scab had fallen an old sore." (Lewis (1942), pp. 156-57.) Then, Vilifor, an "original fiend" -- one of the company of angels who fell from Heaven along with Lucifer -- steps forward. He repeats of "the supreme sin of rebellion," (Lloyd (1962), p. 208.) and, quickening, transfiguring as he goes, he runs into the outstretched arms of "the Christ of the great redeemer" (ibid., p. 211.) which gather him into "enfolding light." This, too, echoes Lewis's image of the encounter of Wormwood's patient with "Him," the "cool light" which "wears the form of a Man." Lloyd has transferred the image of a saved soul to the image of a saved demon, a risky but attractive conjecture to those (like George MacDonald) with a taste for Universalism.

As Lewis himself has suggested, his images of the diabolical are drawn from the wellsprings of Western culture despite his use of modern dress (or more accurately, modern organizational technique and modern technology). In his study of mythology devoted to The Powers of Evil, Richard Cavendish lists three major supernatural beings associated with evil: the Devil, Death, and Fate. Motifs used in expressing the evils include "the connections between evil and the animal world... the dread of being devoured, the contradictory attitudes to the devil, the links between death, evil, and sex, the fear of disorder, [and] the refusal to believe in chance." [22] From this list, Lewis has chosen only two. The first is his use of one animal motif, the centipede. In contemplating the patient's "young woman," Screw tape writes (via his secretary) that "I find I have inadvertently allowed myself to assume the form of a large centipede." (Lewis (1942), p. 114.) Lewis indeed made use of a personal obsessive fear.

The image is given full force in Perelandra (1943). As Ransom confronts the Un-man for the final time, his adversary, crawling out of a hole, is followed by "a huge, many legged, quivering deformity" -- described in horrible detail and containing every feature that is detestably insectile. When the Un-man dies, this apparition is rendered merely an "animated corridor train." Lewis says "All that he had felt from childhood about insects and reptiles died that moment." [23] This passage was an exercise for Lewis of his own childhood "insect fears," first evoked by a nursery book illustration of Tom Thumb threatened by a stag beetle with moveable mandibles, as he tells us in Surprised by Joy. [24] In The Silver Chair (1953) the centipede of The Screwtape Letters (1942) recurs: on reaching the domain of the Green Witch, the children and their guide confront a huge bow-shaped bridge, richly carved with "mouldering faces and forms of giants, minotaurs, squids, centipedes, and dreadful gods." [25]

As Cavendish has suggested, it is not the animal form per se that creates revulsion, but the idea of metamorphosis. The human turned cockroach of Franz Kafka's story is a well-known example. Screw tape himself hints at a Miltonic source for his experience: in Book X, 11. 505-546 of Paradise Lost, the assembled demons metamorphose into serpents and thus greet Satan with unexpected hitches:

A greater power
Now rul'd him, punish in the shape he sinn'd,
According to his doom. (11. 515-517)

What sins Screw tape has committed in the shape of a centipede, we are not told, and perhaps do not wish to enquire!

The second motif used by Lewis from Cavendish's catalogue of mythological evils is the fear of being devoured. Cavendish chronicles a number of these images: the vultures of Catal Huyuk (before 6000 BC) who are accompanied by headless corpses (Cavendish (1975), p.112); Ammut, the "eater of the dead" and Baba the "Eater of Shades," from ancient Egypt, and a Coptic Christian hell with a ditch of seven-headed serpents and a giant snake which "chewed on the dead five days a week... but took the weekend off." (Ibid., p.113) (suggesting the refrigerator depicted by Lewis in The Great Divorce). The Delphic demon Euryonous ate the flesh of corpses, and Besiod's Tartarus, a "gigantic yawning-throat," received the descending dead (Ibid., p.116), while various earthly giants and ogres (including Polyphemus) eat people in Greek mythology as they do in that other branch of Indo-European peoples, the Norse, from which Lewis drew many of his images in the Narnian Chronicles.

Hell, too, with its yawning hell-mouth (Ibid., p.156) so commonly depicted in Medieval dramas and the art derived from it, and the Devil himself, is "a huge, devouring monster," partake of this image. Indeed at the nethermost pit of hell, frozen in the icy sea, Dante's Satan forever devours (with the mouths of his three heads) three archetypal traitors including Judas. Cavendish even quotes a secular image from Carlyle's Sartor Resartus: the universe itself is perceived as "the boundless jaws of a devouring Monster, wherein I, palpitating, waited to be devoured." (Ibid., p. 157)

In his use of this very image in The Screwtape Letters, Lewis is perfectly clear: Screw tape says to Wormwood: "Bring us back food, or be food yourself." (Lewis (1942), p. 151) The event is depicted entirely in spiritual terms: that is, we read of the hungry anticipation of one spirit as he prepares to devour another. Screw tape, having addressed Wormwood as "My dear, my very dear, Wormwood, my puppet, my pigeon" (that is, my delicious bitter drink, my doll, my pixie), announces, "I think they will give you to me now, or a bit of you. Love you? Why, yes. As dainty a morsel as even I grew fat on." Lewis, of course, knew perfectly well what he was doing. He wrote in his Preface of 1961: "I feign that devils can, in a spiritual sense, eat one another; and us. Even in human life we have seen the passion to dominate, almost to digest, one's fellow; to make his own intellectual and emotional life merely an extension of one's own -- to hate one's hatreds and resent one's grievances and indulge one's egoism through him as well as through oneself." (Lewis (1962), p. xi) There is evidence that some of Lewis's students in the late 1930s thought that he was trying to do this to them! He continues, "On earth this desire is often called 'love.' In Hell I feign that they recognize it as hunger." (Ibid.)

As I have hinted above, this theme of devouring has an awful and macabre application often expressed in the figure of the devouring worm. I wish I could write that today most people are only familiar with the action of maggots upon carrion through experiences like my childhood examination of a dead bird, in which I made the horrified discovery of the cheerfully active "worm"-life within. Unfortunately, many people in today's world understand well enough the effect, through the production of corpses left for discovery by various malignant and warring states. Maggots are not, strictly speaking, worms, but insect flies, which offer carrion the same service they offer excrement. Beelzebub, the only historical devilish name invoked by Screw tape, means "the Lord of the Flies," and works of
literature from Golding's novel of that name to studies of the Amityville Horror have exploited this fact.

Consumption by worms is a natural figure reiterated in the Bible: In Exodus 16:24 manna kept too long against God's wish "bred worms," and in Deuteronomy 28:59, vineyard keepers are warned that they shall plant but never drink of these grapes, "for the worms shall eat them." These images, of corrupted bread and wine, as it were, are followed by more solemn pictures: Job, presumably describing the nastier results of gangrene, complains that "by flesh is clothed with worms" (Job 7:5) and the action of moth larvae is not neglected: Isaiah 51:8 says of those opposed to his hearers that worms "shall eat them like wool." Specific images of maggots consuming the dead appear in Job, including the ironic phrase, "the worm shall feed sweetly on him." (Job 24:29) God prepares a worm to smite the gourd giving shade to Jonah (Jonah 4:7) and Herod is "eaten of worms" in Acts 12:23. But these are all natural images which occur every day and are but one part of the characteristic honesty and openness about natural phenomena which makes the Bible the vigorous document that it is.

It is the supernatural image not of bodily death but of spiritual death which Screwtape depicts. As Jesus says in Matthew 10:28 — "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." This is Screwtape's wish.

Probably the most important study of my subject is Paul Ricoeur's The Symbolism of Evil. Ricoeur proposes a theme not mentioned by Cavendish, which is a third major image in The Screwtape Letters, this is the symbolism of "defilement," which Ricoeur calls one of the "Primary Symbols." The Old Testament begins its discussion of evil with symbols: "the profound language of fault [is]...based on imagery." [26] Ricoeur states, "Sin, as alienation from oneself, is an experience even more astonishing, disconcerting, and scandalous, perhaps, than the spectacle of nature, and for this reason it is the richest source of interpretative thought." (Ibid., p. 8.) In this long-lasting sequence of questions, the idea of defilement is more archaic than the idea of sin. Defilement is "spoken of under the symbol of a stain or blemish." (Ibid., p. 9.) It is the "idea of a quasi-material something that infects as a sort of filth, that harms by invisible properties, and that nevertheless works in the manner of a force in the field of our individually psychic and corporal existence." (Ibid., pp. 25-26.) Ritual washing of hands or feet in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, together with the washing away of sins in Baptism, are based upon this primitive viewpoint. Ricoeur suggests that we feel we have left this concept behind, (Ibid., p. 26.) but that in the area of sex it is still functional: sex is considered the "primordial defilement." (Ibid., p. 29.) Even so, it is a symbolic stain: "Defilement is not a stain, but like a stain." (Ibid., p. 36.)

Lewis uses this image, and one of its related motifs, in the climactic scene of The Screwtape Letters, as Screwtape describes the saved soul's release from Wormwood. "Just think (and let it be the beginning of your agony) what he felt at that moment, as if a scab had fallen from an old sore, as if he were emerging from a hideous, shell-like tetter, as if he shuffled off for good and all a defiled, wet, clinging garment. By Hell, it is misery enough to see them in their mortal days taking off dirtied and uncomfortable clothes and splashing in hot water and giving little grunts of pleasure — stretching their eased limbs! What, then, at this final stripping, this complete cleansing?" (Lewis (1942), p. 157.) The ruling image here is of defilement by mud or bodily excretions, but there is the addition of the image of a scab (injury) and theetter (skin disease): one thinks of poor Job sitting upon his dunghill and scratching his afflicted skin with a potsherd! The commonplace phrase, "raddled whore," which Lewis uses in the same chapter, is based on the sores caused by venereal disease, but any skin disease was a figure of defilement in the Bible, especially the forms of psoriasis and other diseases lumped together as the whiteness of "leprosy" in both Testaments.

The image of defilement is given a final expression in The Screwtape Letters as Lewis introduces his famous hint of the possibility of Purgatory, which he was to express even more clearly in The Great Divorce. Michael Paternoster in his study of the afterlife, Thou Art There Also, makes considerable use of quotations from C.S. Lewis, and of The Screwtape Letters: "the tempter says of the victim who has escaped: 'Pains he may still have to encounter, but they embrace those pains.'" [27] He regards Lewis as an example of "modern popular religious writers" who seem to take the doctrine of Purgatory "for granted." (Ibid., p. 64.) Lewis was to use the figures of Purgatory as the cleansing of defilement with vigour in other places, but his mention of it following his paean to final cleanliness is powerfully suggestive.

So far we have addressed these images as depictions of spiritual reality; as Lewis says in his Preface to later editions, "this is all only myth and symbol." (Lewis (1962), p. xiii.) One aspect of the spiritual realm must be its role in psychic reality, the contents of the human mind. In the human psyche, as described by John A. Sanford, a Christian writer who uses the categories of C. G. Jung, there are a number of forces short of absolute or totally personified Evil, which must be dealt with. Most important is the Old Testament Adversary of Job, a created being who, because God has made him precisely for the purpose which he performs, apparently shows the "dark side of God," who comes to humans as an "adversary" or "dark
power" may be destructive but "cannot be said to be intrinsically evil," (Sanford (1981), p. 126.) This idea can be found in the writings of George MacDonald and Charles Williams, both of whom influenced Lewis. This is not a God who is really a devil, or a devil who is really a God. This is the action of God who, like a surgeon must wound in order to heal.

An idea related to this but not the same, is the "happy fault," the felix culpa — the evil depicted in the Gospels which is bent by God to "some Divine Purpose." Jesus predicts woe for the perpetrators of such evil, but while this "evil is really evil, there is nevertheless an overriding Purpose, which it must serve." (Ibid., p. 127.) The primary image in this category is, of course, the Resurrection as the result of the Crucifixion.

Again, there is "the human Shadow," an aspect of the personality which seems to act out evil when split from the whole, but which can be made conscious and lose its satanic character. In Jungian thought, the Shadow is the part of one's own personality which one dare not or cannot see, those traits which appear "dark" because we do not know we have them. They are a figure for the invisibility or the cloak of darkness which shrouds the entire unconscious from us, and when we begin to come to terms with this adversary, we can begin to "see" what has been hidden before.

In another sense, the devil image can be understood as "a personification of the power drive of the ego." This, too, turns out to be a force of the personality which may be necessary for ego differentiation. (In Jungian thought the Ego is not the center of the personality but one aspect of it.) Finally, "the devil becomes a kind of collective shadow figure . . . whose darkness compensates a too rigid and one-sided conscious attitude." All of these elements are relative, apparent evils, not true evil.

But Sanford does not deny the existence of evil. He turns to the doctrine of the privatio boni suggested by Aristotle and favoured by Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, and, indeed, by C.S. Lewis. In Sanford's words: "The basic idea of the doctrine . . . is that good alone has substance, and that evil has no substance of its own, but exists by means of a diminution of the good." (Ibid., p.135.) Jung seems to have thought that the origin of evil would have to be sought in God Himself, and that the Christian idea of a God who is solely good is too one-sided. Sanford sets forth the objection of Jung to the doctrine of privatio boni, and, in the true spirit of a Jungian disciple, argues with his teacher in "A Critique of Jung's View of the Privatio Boni." Sanford defines evil thus: "He can assert evil is a force of destructiveness that destroys wholeness." (Ibid., p. 145.) He defends the privatio boni as a doctrine which affirms both the reality of evil and the ultimate power of God, and concludes by emphasizing the "basic optimism in the Christian attitude toward evil." (Ibid., p. 151.)

The concept of evil as a diminution of, or a corruption of good, is made clear in The Screwtape Letters. As Screwtape says, "No natural phenomenon is really in our favour," (Lewis (1942), p. 80.) and "Nothing is naturally on our side." (Ibid., p. 113.) Indeed, "Everything has to be twisted before it's any use to us." (Ibid., p. 112.) Even the organization of hell is a parody of Heaven, and the tempter an inverted version of the guardian angel: only at the end of The Screwtape Letters does Screwtape admit the presence of

angelic adversaries: as the patient died, "he also saw Them." (Ibid., p. 152.)

But there is a further application of this doctrine, which is reflected in George Macdonald's declaration in Weighed and Wanting: "He who is parted from God has no original nothingness with which to take revenge. He is a death fighting against life." [28] In the early 1960s a brilliant addition was made to the theology of evil by Brother Dunstan Jones of the Anglican religious order, the Community of the Resurrection, in his essay, "Creation and the Fall." He begins by suggesting that the Fall is related to Creation not as a single event perpetuated, through Satan, in humankind, but begins much earlier in the process revealed by the fossil record. He finds a specific motif which runs through the Bible — "Creation through conflict." [29] Discussing this idea and its Near Eastern mythological antecedents, he links it with creation out of "nothing," (Ibid., p. 124) an idea which is the invention of Judaism. In Jewish thought, the Creation is revealed by God as being ex nihilo. When, then, comes the Fall? Not only humankind, but the entire Creation suffers in the creation process, which when apprehended in time, is on-going. The corruption is not based in materiality, for everything made by God is good, (Ibid., p. 131.) Even the Fall began as good, since God made them too. But Creation is not a "point in time," to use a current barbarism — it is an event outside of time and hence ever-present. All resistance to God is resistance to creation sub specie aeternitatis — "If then the world or some of its parts resist their creation, they resist their creation in the timeless acts of their being created," (Ibid., p. 136.) This resistance takes the form of "the desire to un-be." Brother Dunstan continues: "Sin is basically the determination to resist Creation." The rebellion in its fullness we attribute to spiritual creatures." (Ibid., p. 137.) Indeed, "God's perfect intention for the Creation is not obtained except by overcoming the resistance of some creatures to their own creation and their corrupting of the rest of creation through this resistance." (Ibid., pp. 137-38.) It is the spiritual effort to break the will to be in a single human that is depicted in The Screwtape Letters. When this effort is overcome, the soul "can stand upright and converse with spirits before whom you, a spirit, could only cower," Screwtape angrily tells Wormwood. (Lewis (1942), p. 156.) The soul has faced death and in dying it has become a free citizen of Heaven.

It is God's purpose to complete His Creation, by allowing all its members to choose freely to be part of it. When every being affirms and accepts its own existence and the existence of all other beings (loving neighbor as self), God's Creation will be complete. The fulfillment of His plan will be the fulfillment of the being of all His creatures. In this manner every creature will utter "I" through Him, for He who made them called Himself by name, "I am." Jesus, when interrogated upon his identity, made the same reply, and all God's creatures are free to say the same.

Lewis explains his own meaning thus: "God turns tools into servants and servants into sons, so that they may be at last reunited to Him in the perfect freedom of a love offered from the height of the utter individualities which he has liberated them to be." (Lewis (1962), p. xii.) But this end is hidden from
Screw tape, whose lament, "If we could only find out what He is really up to!" is one of the last sentences he pens in *The Screw Tape Letters*.

NOTES


5 *Letters From Hell* (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1885), with a Preface by George MacDonald, pp. vi-vii. I am happy to say that I found this book at a jumble sale myself!


12 C.S. Lewis, A Preface to *Paradise Lost*, p. 95.


15 W.S. Harris, *Sermons by the Devil* ([Simultaneously published USA and United Kingdom; privately published], 1904), p. 92. Also found in a jumble sale!

16 J.R. Miller, *The Devil of Today* (no place: no publisher, 1903/1906), p. 41. This book was lent to me by Jane Urquhart, and is gratefully acknowledged.

17 And in Canada during the writing of this paper, the table being used was unexpectedly discovered to be undergoing attack by a colony of woodworms.

18 Norman Bradshaw, "The Extraordinary Being," *The Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* (Spring 1983), p. 12. As for Bradshaw's assertion that "an obsession with 'the vermicular'... and 'the Worm'... was hammer home so persistently, in both 'Screw tape' books," I searched *The Screw Tape Letters* for the word "worm" outside of Wormwood's name, and could not find it.


20 Ibid., p. 159. This passage is suggestive of Daniel 3:25: "Lo, I see three men... walking in the midst of the fire,... and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."


Saruman, continued from page 44

This is supposed to be a nickname modified to fit the Common Speech (in the English text anglicized), based on orkish *sharku* "old man".

4 This sense may well be the Western colloquial derogatory meaning, as it has been in English for more than 300 years.

5 These volumes were issued by the Society of Biblical Archaeology, of which the Oxford Professor of Comparative Philology, A.H. Sayce, was president. Tolkien's writings indicate familiarity with Sayce's *Principles of Comparative Philology* (1874) and also with many other of his works on the ancient Near East.

6 See, for example, *Weekley* (op. cit.), p.1333.

7 Other (semantically neutral) borrowings on this root include: *saracenet, sarasset* (a thin silk); *sarsen* (earlier *Saracen's stone*), etc. Thus there is further evidence of the common translation of Arabic *sh-* to English *s-*.


10 Perhaps a hint of Arabic science and medicine which was at its height as early as the ninth century A.D.