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By Elena Forman

## Studying the author's works in a C. S. Lewis class inspired me to write my own epistolary fiction, that is a narrative comprised of characters' correspondence. An assignment requiring that I write a letter

**Forward** 

junior tempter, receiving letters of advice from a devil still lower in the Lowerarchy. That would take us back earlier in time than World War II when The Screwtape Letters was set—perhaps to the early 1800s, when Mr. Edward Rochester was tormenting Jane in Charlotte Brontë's masterwork Jane Eyre. In my Slubgob Collection, a project that I completed for a senior thesis for my English major, I address characters from A Tale of Two Cities, Sense and Sensibility, and Jane Eyre, applying ideas from Puritan writer Thomas Brook's Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices, and especially concepts from Lewis's works, such as The Great Divorce and, most importantly, The Screwtape Letters. I emulate its form and style. A beloved Christian classic, The Screwtape Letters represents a

satire in the tradition of Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," an essay recommending cannibalism

in order to solve poverty. Just as Swift risked engendering public outrage with his Proposal—which

he did—Lewis risked derision by his fellow academics by revealing his belief in the existence of

demons. The Screwtape Letters is an epistolary novel where a senior demon, Screwtape, writes letters of advice to his nephew and underling, Wormwood. These letters are full of help for how to tempt whom they call the "patient" to his ultimate damnation. Being a satire makes it an inoffensive warning and a way to startle readers into seeing likenesses between themselves and the devils' "patient." An example of its satire is God's being called the Enemy, and Satan, "Our Father below." Note that this book has very little ordinary plot. We hear of only a few common doings of the man, activities such as attending church, meeting a girl, etc. The action is mostly internal, regarding his thought life and how the tempters work. Meanwhile, hints of a plotline among the demons emerge from the impassioned letters. Wormwood tattles on Screwtape's referencing God's love—something the demons deny. In the Slubgob Collection, there is further development of the devils' conflicts and ambitions.

preface his sincere belief in actual demons. The book is meant to warn people of their spiritual danger by startling them with a supernatural premise. The stakes could not be higher: one's eternal status is under consideration. Therefore, the true believer should learn to discern the temptations without and within in an endeavor to serve Christ Jesus wholeheartedly. On the discerning of temptations, Puritan writers have made thoughtful contributions. Thomas Brooks is a seventeenth century Puritan who, like Lewis, believes in the existence of demons and their active, effective tempting of mankind. Brooks wrote Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices (1652) to expose various ways that the devils tempt us, like Lewis's The Screwtape Letters. Brooks details how demons tempt us to sin, on one hand wishing us to justify our sinful actions and on the other accusing us of being beyond forgiveness, over-emphasizing God's holy anger in an attempt to make us

despair. Brooks claims that "[b]ecause Satan hath a greater influence upon men, an higher

resisting, and happy in conquering" (4). I have enjoyed attributing many of these insights to

In the following letter, Screwtape has been transferred to the temptation of Edward Fairfax

Slubgob, as he writes letters for the downfall of famous characters.

hatred repeatedly bubbling over in ever-increasing insults.

of whom return to hell.

and to themselves.

My dear Screwtape,

the consequences.

advantage over them ... than they think he hath, and the knowledge of his high advantage, is the

highway to disappoint him" and also that the reason for his book is "to render the soul strong in

Lewis wrote The Screwtape Letters as a humorous satire, but for all that artifice, he states in his

Rochester. He is the troubled love interest in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre. Her classic treatment of an orphan girl's growing up in the late 1700s tells of her eventual work as a governess. She had been about to marry her employer, Mr. Rochester, when she discovered he was already married to a crazed woman. To escape his advances, she left her home. Mr. Rochester exemplifies various concepts that I contemplated in my Lewis class: in particular Sehnsucht and the assuming of a false front; the latter of which is demonstrated in The Great Divorce. Lewis describes Sehnsucht in Surprised by Joy: Before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, ... the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing that had just ceased. It had taken only a moment of time; and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison. (16) Lewis describes Sehnsucht as a longing. Mr. Rochester's tempters manipulate that longing, trying to

satisfy it by wrongdoing. I consider it helpful for readers studying temptation to examine Rochester's

thinking and some of his errors. Studying Rochester opens the way for much demonic propaganda.

For example, the demons particularly detest Rochester's virtuous, intended spouse, Jane Eyre, their

Another book influenced my writing: The Great Divorce, a Christian classic by Lewis. This novel is

written in the tradition of the Divine Comedy, the first Christian book in which a man (Dante Alighieri,

the author himself) travels from hell through purgatory and then into heaven by following guides: first

Virgil, then Beatrice. The Great Divorce follows its author, Lewis (in pretend), and his heavenly

guide, George MacDonald, on Lewis's fictional journey from hell into heaven. The Great Divorce

reveals many temptations and sins of various other travelers seen over the course of the book, most

One such traveler is called the Dwarf/Tragedian. He is divided into two personas, bonded by a

chain. One, the tall, talkative one, is the Tragedian, or the manipulative actor who pressures his

wife, and that part wins out in the end. The other part, the near-silent Dwarf, is the man's reason and true self, which retains the ability to sense the ridiculous. Like the Tragedian, Brontë's Rochester presents a false front, which the devils may use to turn him into a Dwarf/Tragedian. He acts as a gypsy, presenting Jane with a false self. To make her jealous of Blanche Ingraham, he acts again in his own house, in front of Jane, a mock wedding in a play. Moreover, he keeps faking being unmarried. Such falsifying could split him into an increasingly

large mask and a correspondingly shrinking self. Since he seems to enjoy concealing his true self

(up to a point), the demons can use that behavior to their advantage—shrinking Mr. Rochester and

Readers of this letter will only fully understand the conceit if they have previously read Jane Eyre,

since I write as though my audience knows these beloved, famous characters and their life stories. I

do add plot, but only in the shadowy realm of hell, where cutthroat demons vie with each other in

wickedness. They are servants of the Father of Lies who work to bad effect, lying to their patients

building up his false front. Neither Rochester, nor Jane Eyre, nor any of the characters in this

collection are aware of the hidden efforts of Slubgob and his tempters.

Now I will tell you about something very useful that is often overlooked. Our job as servants (and colleagues) of Our Father Below is to tempt and to accuse. The Training College, in fact, should instead be named The Tempter and Accuser's College, since both fruitful arts are taught there. I will say, though, that accusation is greatly overlooked, which means that a review of temptation and accusation is in order here. Let us begin with temptation. Temptation leads our patients to compare their lives to other people's and be miserable with jealousy or despondent with despair of ever living as well as they. You can even tell them they deserve better or that "playing by the rules" (i.e. being

despicably moral) does not pay. We also tempt people into sinning because they think

themselves immune from any consequences. Sometimes, we can puff them up to such a degree

that they think they do nothing wrong! We show these creatures short-term pleasure and hide

The best temptations are when our patients decide that their wrongdoing is actually righteous,

wise, or at least innocent. You know how that works: "I'm not greedy; I'm thrifty." "I'm not a

womanizer; I'm a Casanova." And if some person whom the patient looks up to sins, we may

confuse him into thinking imitation of that sin is not wrong. Perhaps the most common temptation is what I call the "bank account." Humans love to think that because they are "good people" in certain categories of their life, they can earn forgiveness for lapses, that certain sins—or, sometimes, all of them—are pardoned because of their virtue. Unfortunately, if they read the Enemy's Bible, that thinking will be proved untrue. Still, they often forget or ignore its invalidity. Now at last we turn to the art of accusation. Accusation is a useful tool, and that blasted

Thomas Brooks wrote down in Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices not only all our

strategies for tempting but also all our strategies for accusing. (Don't worry; the Lowerarchy is

still studying how this secret knowledge came into that awful human's possession, and every

whereabouts of a copy, report it to the authorities immediately.) Now, to explain accusation,

consider carefully what I am about to tell you. The Enemy gave humans a conscience. When

they do wrong, our job is to accuse them nonstop. Incessant accusation can sometimes lead to

a delicious suicide when we prevent them from forgiving themselves and make them obsess over

the irreparable. Let them wallow in guilt, keeping the Enemy's mercy out of their minds. Instead,

play up His wrath and His justice. Tell them that He cannot and does not forgive and is solely

concerned with punishing them. Do not allow them to put their sins behind them and move on

with life. That is what He wants. If they continue in this mindset, as it is your job to make sure,

Some accusations can be rather tricky. In the story of Job, the Enemy makes it very clear that

troubles are not always punishment, but nevertheless, humans tend to feel that they are. Keep

they will come to resent the Enemy and become amoral.

His Abysmal Sublimity Under Secretary, TE, BS

**Afterword** 

copy on earth is being discovered and destroyed. If you should become aware of the

them feeling that way, and you'll have the cat in the bag. Another important accusation you can perform on Christians is to tell them that they cannot be Christians because they are struggling. That, too, can lead to sinful despair—excellent food. Since I have laid out temptation and accusation for you, you should understand me now when I say that the Tempter's Training College is foolishly named. It ought to be called the Tempter's and Accuser's Training College, and it certainly will be if ever anyone intelligent is placed at its head. Yours, Slubgob

C. S. Lewis fulfilled many roles during his lifetime: scholar, lay theologian, creative writer, and poet.

His works are divided into many different categories, which rarely mix and commonly lead to widely

varying opinions on their merits. In his day, Lewis's steady rise to academic fame was temporarily

hurt by the publication of The Screwtape Letters. While many speculate it was the outspokenly

Christian outlook that was distasteful to his academic peers, Alastair McGrath, in his book The

work, as much as its populist tone, that irritated many of his colleagues" (xi). Regarding Lewis's

by the mainstream academic theologians" (3). His poetry, too, has been discounted. Those who

desire a better understanding of Lewis's contribution, however, will not abandon his poetry and

Eyre. Evidences of this claim are Michael Ward's cosmological discoveries concerning The

The best example of this fruit from cross-pollination is that of Michael Ward, the scholar who

discovered that the unifying theme of the seven planets of medieval cosmology (Jupiter, Mars, Sol,

Luna, Mercury, Venus, Saturn) undergirds the seven Narnian chronicles. One evening, Ward was

[w]hen the thought occurred to me [Ward] that it would be useful to compare and contrast

Chronicles of Narnia and also the creation of The Slubgob Collection.

reading "The Heavens" in Lewis's The Discarded Image,

theological works (or others of his works infused with theology), Robert MacSwain, in his

Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis, asserts that, "It was probably the immense popular success of this

introduction to The Cambridge Companion to C. S Lewis, claims, "[Lewis] has been ignored, at least

books of religious thought, such as The Screwtape Letters, because more fruit is to be revealed and

created with robust cross-pollination across the span of Lewis's works, including his works with Jane

Lewis's academic understanding of the subject with his poetic treatment of the same, so I took up my copy of his collected poems and began reading "The Planets." The phrase 'winter passed / And guilt forgiven' sprang from the page, demanding attention. I had come across the passing of winter and the forgiving of guilt elsewhere in Lewis's writings: those things formed the centrepiece of his first Narnia tale. Could there be a link somewhere between poem and Chronicle? That thought was the stray spark connecting Jupiter to The Lion in my mind, and one by one the other planet-to-book relationships began to be lit up in its train. (251) To reveal this scholarly fruit, Ward serendipitously combines three of Lewis' roles which do not commonly intersect: Lewis the creative children's writer, Lewis the chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge University, and Lewis the poet. Ward notes of his discovery, "I had not been looking for the books' governing idea: the thing was entirely unexpected and fortuitous" (244). It is startling to see now that The Chronicles of Narnia is akin to Gustav Holst's Planets Suite, which is a well-known symphonic work (in seven movements), commonly played on classical music stations and also regularly performed by college and high school symphony orchestras (74). In the same way as Ward's revelations exemplify fruit arising from cross-pollination at the

intersection of previously separate works, The Slubgob Collection synthesizes a wide swath of

Lewis's writings as well as some 19th century English classics, with the main vehicle being an

Slubgob doubly imitative: of Screwtape and also of Lewis's imitating other authors.

authors and generations—there are many spinning plates. Being juggled are ideas from several of

imitation of The Screwtape Letters. Just as Lewis imitated The Divine Comedy (in The Great Divorce)

and Pilgrim's Progress (in The Pilgrim's Regress), so does Slubgob imitate Screwtape. This makes

The Screwtape Letters is difficult to categorize; with its epistolary, satirical, and theological subject

matter, it fits in no neat category. New insight is provided in a helpful article by Joseph Cassidy in

Letters and Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer. The two epistolary books are much more similar

Cassidy asserts, "The book is obviously similar to Screwtape in form, but also—not so obviously—in

content" (132). Cassidy encourages his audience to read these two books as a brilliant experience

Screwtape's patient is never named and therefore exists as Everyman, leading the reader to reflect

upon himself rather than on a fictional personality. Referencing a passage in Screwtape, Cassidy

Letter 19 ... reveals an important aspect of discernment. Screwtape, when pressed to say

whether falling in love were good or bad in itself, says, "Nothing matters at all except ... to

move a particular patient at a particular moment near to the Enemy or near to us." In terms of

The Cambridge Companion entitled "On Discernment." Cassidy addresses both The Screwtape

than they are different, the unique satire of Screwtape notwithstanding. Speaking of Malcolm,

in imaginative self-discernment, not as a source of credal theology or as an aid to worship.

explains,

Previous

The Start of a Great Friendship

discernment of spirits this is key: experiences are to be judged not only on their own peculiar merits, but on whether they are part of a larger pattern of moving us closer to—or further from— God. (135) Screwtape in particular forms an imaginative handbook on how to discern oneself, how to think about or judge oneself, and how to detect what motivates oneself. Discernment of self leads to discernment of "classic selves" in The Slubgob Collection, famous selves in English literature. Slubgob riffs on Lewis's The Screwtape Letters in a way that morphs into a surprising blend of fiction and literary criticism, with demons as the literary critics. This literary facet of Slubgob is not part of the original Screwtape; it is a creative development and not a feature of the original. In Slubgob, something interesting is happening in a literary sense, not just a theological one. While being essentially fiction, Slubgob provides a reading—a creative discernment—of beloved nineteenth century fictional characters, such as Edward

Fairfax Rochester, using Lewis as a lens and the imitation of Screwtape as a vehicle. Though

Slubgob keeps the discerning character of the original Screwtape, readers are free to use

discerning powers on another's soul. The self-discernment required for entering into what the

offered by the imitation, Slubgob. The act of knowing oneself can feel like the knowing of a

original Screwtape is doing is also needed for the discernment of characters in the literary criticism

character in literature with whom one relates. Nineteenth century characters from English literature

are known commodities. In a way, these known commodities are real personalities. Discerning

Screwtape forms an imaginative handbook for discerning oneself, Slubgob, by applying Lewis's

Groundbreaking discoveries such as Ward's and creations such as The Slubgob Collection are

examples of the fruit that comes from reading Lewis. Reading Lewis will open one's imagination;

schema of demonic temptation to Jane Eyre, forms a model for discerning fictional personalities and

oneself is like discerning the self of a sympathetic fictional personality. In the same way that

suggests the question of whether characters could be worked upon by the supernatural.

reading widely in Lewis will reveal how "high and deep" is the thing Lewis created (Eph. 3:18). MacSwain posits of Lewis that [h]e has ... expanded the genre of theology to include the imaginative works for which he is so famous ... Lewis might ... be seen as a deliberately "indirect" theologian, one who works by "thick description" or evocative images, operating in multiple voices and genres, through which a single yet surprisingly subtle and complex vision emerges. Lewis cannot possibly count as a theologian on the Barthian model, but he may nevertheless offer a model of theological expression which needs to be appreciated on its own terms. (8-9)

Lewis's "thick" and "evocative" visions will continue to bear surprising fruit for those who read a wide range of works in the Lewis canon and who have eyes open to discern Lewis's vision, through the literary context of the west in which Lewis was immersed. McGrath explains further that "[t]his deep immersion in the Western tradition underlies Lewis's creative synthesis of theological reflection and literary imagination" (1). Malcolm Guite, writing in The Cambridge Companion, reflects, "There is an internal coherence between all [Lewis's] efforts in every field" (308). How then should we judge Lewis? MacSwain hints at the answer, positing the following conclusion: "It is ... fair to ask whether the importance of a figure is best judged by their standing in the academy or by influence outside of it ... academic theology ignores Lewis at its peril" (2). Many kinds of people, both in and out of the academy, will continue to resort to Lewis for insight, even if only within their isolated silos. The whole of his contribution is both broad and penetrating; those who read him will have their imaginations come alive.

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POWERED BY SQUARESPACE

from Screwtape to his nephew concerning the temptations the demons were currently trying on me set me thinking in a new strain. Suppose there was an earlier time when Screwtape was himself a

The Slubgob Collection (excerpted)

Claude McKay: A Literary Revolutionary

Next