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# Laughing Them Into Religion: A Comparison of the Contexts, Causes, and Effects of Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of A Tub* and C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*

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LAUGHING THEM INTO RELIGION: A COMPARISON OF THE CONTEXTS, CAUSES, AND  
EFFECTS OF JONATHAN SWIFT'S *A TALE OF A TUB* AND C. S. LEWIS'S *THE SCREWTAPE  
LETTERS*

by

ALAN NEELY

Under the Direction of Randy Malamud, PhD and Malinda Snow, PhD

ABSTRACT

Jonathan Swift and C. S. Lewis had extraordinary similarities in their lives up to their respective writings of *Tale of A Tub* and *The Screwtape Letters*. Beyond the biographical parallels, there were great similarities in the religious, historical, and political contexts surrounding the two works, even though they were published 237 years apart. These facts have been ignored by scholars, yet more important than the similitude is what Swift and Lewis did differently *in spite of* it. These differences represent deliberate choices each author made and provide greater insights about them and these seminal works. Both of these brilliant men became convinced that their societies needed a rebirth of spirituality and chose highly creative religious satire to convey their respective messages and “laugh us into religion.”

INDEX WORDS: SWIFT, LEWIS, SATIRE, RELIGION, COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

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ALAN SANDERS NEELY

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Masters of Art  
in the College of Arts and Sciences  
Georgia State University  
2017

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**DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Helen “Butchie” Neely, who supported the effort in spite of countless inconveniences and offered encouragement constantly.

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## INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

“He endeavors to laugh us into religion,” John Boyle, fifth Earl of Orrery, once wrote of his contemporary, Jonathan Swift, “well knowing that we are often laughed out of it” (146).

Jonathan Swift published *A Tale of a Tub* in 1704 and, more than two hundred years later, in 1941, C. S. Lewis published, sequentially, the thirty-one *Screwtape Letters*. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the similar contexts under which these two committed churchmen were each motivated to produce a religious satire, what those works tell us about the authors, and the effects their works had on their respective careers. My approach, essentially new historicist, explores, with a chapter for each, the biographical, religious, and historical/political contexts that drove Swift and Lewis up to and including the publications of their respective satires. Next is a brief exploration of their differing satiric styles. I then examine the resulting changes in each of their lives: both would suffer professionally, but soar in popularity. This research, however, was originated by an observation that the parallels in their lives are, in fact, numerous, and the fact that they both attempt to “laugh us into religion.”

No research exists which compares the similarities in the two men’s lives and, indeed, it is unusual to do so with authors separated by more than two centuries. But my purpose is to show that, despite the time gap, these men were raised in similar circumstances and Lewis’s *Screwtape* and Swift’s *Tale* provide helpful understandings of the authors themselves at the time of their writing. Studied together, the two works bring to light, through their contextual parallels as religious satires, insights about the authors not previously advanced or, at least, not emphasized. My research does not offer a close reading of either *Tale* or *Screwtape*, which have both been analyzed frequently over many years. Instead, I focus on *Tale*’s religious allegory of the three brothers and *Screwtape*’s thirty-one letters. *Tale*’s numerous digressions, aimed at

satirizing learning at the time, are excluded. Specifically, then, the focus of this research is on Tale's Sections II, IV, VI, VIII, IX, and XI, which provide the plot of the story of the three brothers and their abuses in the name of religion. In addition, the research explores Swift's "Apology," which was printed for the first time in the 1710 fifth edition of Tale and included in the 1920 Guthkelch-and-Smith-edited version. It makes Swift's intent and the separation clear between plot sections satirizing religion and the digressions satirizing learning. In "Apology," the embattled author tries to explain himself and, most important, to claim that Tale glorifies, rather than demeans, his Anglican denomination. C.S. Lewis also offered a 'supplement' in The Saturday Evening Post in 1959 in the form of "Screwtape Proposes a Toast." However, Lewis uses his "sequel" to attack educators and proponents of egalitarianism, as opposed to Swift's clarifying (or apologizing for) Tale. Moreover, Lewis's subsequent work was written eighteen years after Screwtape was first published, long after Screwtape had established his message. Furthermore, this research will touch only briefly on Swift's Tale's possible influence on Lewis and Screwtape in the Conclusion. As we will see, there is inconclusive, but tantalizing evidence that Lewis read Swift's Tale.

## CHAPTER ONE: BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

The parallels between the lives of Lewis and Swift are remarkable. This is especially true up to and including the time when Lewis published *Screwtape* and Swift published *Tale*. The context of the lives the authors led influenced how these two works were written and when they appeared.

Both men were born Protestant in Ireland: Lewis in Belfast (1898), and Swift in Dublin (1667). Each man lost a parent early in his life. Both young men faced significant challenges in England as a result of the parent's death. Each man manifested symptoms of a debilitating disease early in life. Both were dislocated as a result of war when they were about twenty. Both had important surrogate parents. Both men were well educated and exposed, with unrestricted access, to large libraries and environments where reading and language mastery were encouraged. Each man finished a graduate degree at Oxford: Lewis at age twenty-seven, Swift at age twenty-five. Both men made religious commitments that changed the course of their lives. Both men burst onto the public, national, and later, international scene upon the publication of their highly relevant satires: Lewis's *Screwtape* (published in 1941 when he was forty-three) and Swift's *Tale* (published in 1704 when he was thirty-seven). As we have seen, each published a "supplement" to his seminal work. Each suffered professionally in his chosen career, yet began to gain immense popularity as a result of his seminal book. Finally, each man had a special perspective on the seemingly interminable conflict between England and Ireland. Lewis was born in Belfast, but spent about thirty-three years (77%) of his life in England before publishing *Screwtape*. Swift was born in Dublin, but spent about fifteen years (41%) of his life in England before publishing *Tale*. The preceding list of parallels is compiled from three biographies of Lewis: Alister McGrath, George Sayer, and Michael White; and three of Swift: Leo Damrosch, J.

A. Downie, and Irvin Ehrenpreis.

These parallel early lives produced, by the time Lewis published *Screwtape* and Swift published *Tale*, two men who were intellectually at the top of their games, prodigious readers, and appreciative of a well-turned phrase. They were keenly observant, religiously knowledgeable and committed, and, to some degree, idealistic. The unsteadiness of their youths after the early loss of a parent led to a shuttling back and forth between England and Ireland. The result for Lewis and, particularly, for Swift was a feeling of being an outsider in both countries. From the vantage point of looking at the English and Irish as an outsider, each became a careful observer of human nature. Given their religious framework of thought and change-the-world idealism, both men pondered the mystery of God's relationship with man and what God expects of us. *Screwtape* and *Tale* were their first widely read attempts to communicate a path that they believed led to salvation and heaven. But how to communicate the religious message and make it acceptable challenged both Lewis and Swift, as it would any writer. They each decided to use satire -- a natural choice for Swift, an odd choice for Lewis (as we will see later) -- with a message delivered humorously by a fictitious author behind whom they could hide.

The most pronounced difference between Lewis's and Swift's biographies and characters is how they relate to their Irish roots -- their "Irishness." Lewis embraces his Irishness; Swift is ambivalent at best. Their respective relationships with Mother Ireland were uncommon ground between them in the times when Lewis wrote *Screwtape* and Swift wrote *Tale*. This divergence had important implications for the different tone each man took in communicating his book's message. Therefore, more detail on the early lives of both men is necessary.

Many readers and critics consider C. S. "Jack" Lewis an English writer who happens to have been born in Northern Ireland. The *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (1998) lists Lewis as

an “English Literary Scholar” (1943) and the Dictionary of Irish Literature (1996) ignores him. Lewis was sent to England as a child, and his education and residences were almost exclusively English for the rest of his life, except during his service in World War I. His upbringing and later religious practice were essentially Anglican, which was then associated with England more than Northern Ireland. However, throughout his life, C. S. Lewis was guided by, and proud of, his Northern Irish rootstock which helped him pen *The Screwtape Letters* when and how he did. During Lewis’s fifty-plus years in England, Northern Ireland was continuously calling him back home. This emotion is expressed strongly in Lewis’s myriad letters to friends, colleagues, and relations, especially during the World War II years (1939-45), and in the writing of *Screwtape* (1940-41). Furthermore, Lewis’s biographical saga within the historical context helped shape him into the man who would produce *Screwtape*.

Jonathan Swift was born in Dublin in 1667 to English parents, Jonathan and Abigail Swift. His father was from Goodrich, Herefordshire, and his mother, Abigail Herrick, was from Frisby on the Wreake, near Leicestershire. Because of his parentage and because Swift, throughout his life, touted his English genealogy to the near-denial of his birth in Ireland, he is more often classified as an Anglo-Irish writer, rather than simply an Irish writer. Swift may have identified most closely with England, but his formative experiences mostly centered on Ireland: his birth, his education (Kilkenny and Trinity), his ordination (Church of Ireland, not Church of England), and his church assignments (Kilroot, Laracor, and St. Patrick’s). So why would this talented author probably prefer to be remembered today as an Englishman and English writer?

The true nature of Swift’s attitude towards his native country has long been the subject of controversy among critics. He often went out of his way to disparage Ireland. In his *Journal to Stella* in 1713, written prior to his assignment to St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Swift headed one letter

“Wretched Dublin, in miserable Ireland” (2: 662). Throughout his adult life, he corresponded with his dearest friend, Esther Johnson, whom he called Stella, complaining about his condemnation to a life in Ireland. Late in life, he grumbles to her concerning the accident of his birth that made him Irish: “I happened to be dropped here” (3: 287). Critics with a negative opinion about Swift’s attitude towards Ireland -- for example, Samuel Johnson, Lord Orrery, and Sir Walter Scott -- believed that Swift was depressed, unhappy with his truncated priestly career, and miserable in Ireland until his death in 1745. According to this school of thought, Swift is considered patently anti-Irish. Sir Walter Scott, for instance, describes his late-life sermons in Ireland as follows: “Swift’s misanthropic habits break out even from the pulpit; nor is he altogether able to suppress his disdain for those fellow [Irish] mortals... With such unamiable feelings towards his hearers, the preacher might indeed command their respect, but could never excite their sympathy” (Works 7: 403). In this light, Swift’s defenses of Ireland in the latter half of his life may be seen as merely selfish attempts to endear himself to Irish posterity. More modern critics, such as Irvin Ehrenpreis, Claude Rawson, and John Richardson, however, see Swift positively as an Irish patriot, in spite of his English bias, against England’s subjugation of Ireland for over eight hundred years. Nonetheless, the patriotic image was cultivated by Swift after the publishing of *Tale*, and, as we will see, Swift bordered on misanthropic as he wrote the work. Afrin Zeenat, in her article “Writing Irish Nationhood,” captures the more accurate middle ground. She writes, “Swift’s contempt for the Irish, imbibed from his Anglo-Irish community and his love for England, informs his writings on Ireland as he attempts to transcend his prejudices” (158). Indeed, Swift may never have completely transcended those prejudices though he certainly tamed them in old age, shifting his theme from religious differences to the mistreatment of the Irish by the English.

The fact that *Screwtape* was written to encourage the English and Irish to “keep the faith” during World War II is generally acknowledged. However, little scholarship exists documenting the continued Irish influence on Lewis beyond his childhood and early schooling. Likewise, almost no scholarship connects his “Irishness” to *Screwtape*. Even Ronald W. Bresland’s insightful exploration of Lewis’s deep ties to Ireland, *The Backward Glance: C. S. Lewis and Ireland*, does not link Lewis’s Irishness to *Screwtape*. However, Lewis’s dual identities of Northern Irishman and Englishman eventually ingrained in him a desire to keep in mind the best interests of both England and Northern Ireland. This mindset imbued *The Screwtape Letters* with a conciliatory message built on what Lewis believed to be a common Christian faith, playing down denominational differences. In Lewis’s lifetime, those differences came violently into play in Northern Ireland far more than in England, making Lewis’s ecumenical message especially directed to Ulster.

*Screwtape* came into being, in part, as a result of Lewis’s unusual biographical circumstances, including his religious reawakening. Two excellent biographies of C. S. Lewis by Sayer (1988) and McGrath (2013) are in agreement regarding his early years, both following Lewis’s autobiographical work *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (1955). They track the story of his first nineteen years, which molded him into a man who loved Ulster, in spite of its problems, and had trouble relating to England and the English. An alternating pattern developed with good experiences associated with Northern Ireland and difficult or, at best, mixed experiences associated with England. It is important to understand this formative stage of Lewis’s life, and what follows is based on the above three sources, but I am particularly indebted to McGrath’s *C. S. Lewis: A Life*. As Lewis’s most recent biographer, McGrath takes full advantage of all previous research to produce a well written, well documented summary of the

writer's life.

Born in 1898, Lewis had an idyllic early childhood with his older brother, Warnie, as they grew up in the Belfast area. In the family's home, Little Lea, they enjoyed, without restriction, all the books of a well-stocked library. Both their reserved but supportive father and their loving mother encouraged the boys intellectually, and reading had a high priority in the home. But only two weeks after his mother died, in 1908, Jack, who was nine, was sent away to boarding school in England where he was traumatized by an unstable principal (later declared insane) at Wynyard House school. After two miserable years there – his first real taste of England -- Wynyard was closed. Jack's father brought him to Campbell College in Belfast, a mile from Little Lea, in 1910. Though very happy to be back in Ulster, Jack became ill and dropped out to recover, living at home for several months. In 1911, his father sent him back to England to Cherbourg School (near Southampton), then Malvern College (near Worcester) where he suffered under a "fagging" system (seniors treating underclassmen as their slaves -- apparently a common practice at the time). Although some masters were helpful at Malvern, Lewis naturally associated England with unhappy experiences again. He retreated further into himself and his imagination, taking refuge in the library at Malvern. He also lost his faith and became an atheist.

Not until Lewis moved to Surrey and was put under the private tutelage of W. T. Kirkpatrick (The Great Knock), a hard-nosed, intellectual Northern Irishman, did his love for learning, high-level debate and intellectual discourse flower. A retired Lurgan College (N. Ireland) headmaster, Kirkpatrick tutored Jack and another resident student from Ulster. So this transformational, intellectual experience took place within a Northern Irish "cocoon" in England. Kirkpatrick's insistence on logical, rational thought continued to subdue, for a while, Lewis's

belief in God, but the three-year experience got Lewis accepted to Oxford, a place in England he would finally enjoy. However, his initial undergraduate career lasted less than one term.

After starting at Oxford in 1917, Lewis volunteered to fight in World War I. Even though the English did not conscript the Irish, he joined 132,000 Irishmen on active duty in the war. That dangerous and decisive step created the circumstances that would perpetuate Northern Ireland's future influence on his life. At the front, he developed a deep friendship with a fellow Northern Ireland native, Paddy Moore from County Armagh. He and Paddy promised each other that if one of them was killed in the war, the other would take care of his bereaved family. After Paddy was killed, Lewis returned to Oxford in January 1919 and contacted Mrs. Jane Moore, Paddy's mother. She moved to Oxford with her daughter, Maureen (age twelve), and soon became Lewis's own surrogate, Northern Irish mother. Lewis moved in with them in 1921 and, in 1931, Lewis's brother, Warnie, joined them when they all moved into and shared a house near the University of Oxford, where Lewis would teach for almost 30 years. There, at the home they called the Kilns, this foursome formed a tight-knit, Northern Irish community -- another "cocoon." Meanwhile, until his death in 1963, Lewis continued a long-term correspondence with a childhood friend, Arthur Greeves, who remained in Belfast. These connections reinforced Northern Ireland's ongoing influence on Lewis during and beyond the writing (1940-41) and publishing (1941 and 1942) of *Screwtape*.

From 1919 to 1942, Oxford and England welcomed Lewis, and gradually his ingrained prejudices began to subside. In a letter to Greeves on Christmas Eve, 1930, he confided

But there is one odd thing I have been noticing since we came to our new house [the Kilns], which is much more in the country, and it is this. Hitherto there has always been something not so much in the landscape as in every single visual

impression...in Ireland, which I lacked in England: something for which homeliness is an inadequate word. This something I find I am now getting in England – the feeling of connectedness, of being part of it. I suppose I have been growing into the soil here much more since the move. (They Stand 397)

As a student, finishing his degree at Oxford with distinction, then as a don there, Lewis flourished. Surely, the 1932 establishment of the Inklings, Lewis's hand-picked, all-English literary group at Oxford, which included J. R. R. Tolkien and Owen Barfield, helped him feel more like an insider. That would change upon the publication of *Screwtape*.

In contrast to Lewis's experience, Swift's early life followed a pattern associating Ireland with unhappiness and hardships, while England represented the promise of a better life. The following account of Swift's Anglo-Irish life is derived mainly from A. C. Elias's *Swift at Moor Park* (1982), Irvin Ehrenpreis's *Swift, Vol. I* (1962), and an essay by Andrew Carpenter, "A Tale of a Tub as an Irish Text" (2005). Further disrupting Swift's fatherless childhood, his unnamed nurse kidnapped him and took him to England (Whitehaven, Cumberland) and was attentive enough to teach him to read, according to Swift, by the time he was three. While Jonathan was gone, his destitute mother left Ireland and moved to Leicester, England. The nurse returned Jonathan to his family (probably his uncles) after three years, and he spent some time in Dublin before he was sent to Kilkenny College at age five. Swift would not reunite with his mother until he saw her in Leicester in 1689 when he was twenty-two. It is easy to assume that a child growing into a young man under such circumstances would have a sense of abandonment and insecurity in Ireland. Swift's only sense of family connection in Ireland may have been his uncle, Godwin Swift, who financed Swift's education at two fine Irish schools, but about whom Swift makes virtually no mention.

After his three years in England with his nurse/abductor, Swift did not get to return until he was forced to leave Ireland in February 1689. Just as James II was about to land in Ireland to attempt to retake the throne from William and Mary, ten fellows of Trinity College decided to leave Ireland for their safety and took most of the students, including Swift, with them. Swift went to live briefly with his mother in Leicester. Little is documented about this reunion, whether it was warm or cold, but Swift quickly moved out when he found a patron in Sir William Temple, for whom he worked as secretary and amanuensis. Temple was a revered, recently retired English diplomat who was well-connected all the way up to the throne. Swift's association with Temple lasted from 1689 until Temple's death in 1699. Swift spent much of that time living at Temple's country estate, Moor Park, in Surrey. Swift's time with Temple gained him access to political and royal officials in England which, combined with living on a beautiful estate, must have been intoxicating at first -- further reinforcing his infatuation with England. Temple occasionally treated him as a subordinate, as revealed in a letter to Stella: "I would not be treated like a schoolboy -- I had felt too much of that in my life already (meaning from Sir William Temple)" (Journal 1: 230-31). Yet, Swift saw Temple as a father figure or, at least, a positive role model. According to Ehrenpreis, "For the virtues implicitly recommended by A Tale of a Tub, the eminent person is of course most often Sir William Temple, and for the vices, Temple's chief antagonists, William Wotton and Dr. Richard Bentley, along with some lesser foes" (1: 189). Elias's Swift at Moor Park makes it clear that Swift often sniped at Temple (as young men often do with their father figures) but, overall, admired and defended him (2).

Temple could not support the young writer in the manner to which Swift hoped, someday, to become accustomed. Swift took three breaks from Temple's residence between 1689 and 1699. The first was to return to Ireland on his doctor's orders for health reasons in

1690-91 after he began having dizzy spells, which scholars today believe to have been the onset of Meniere's disease. His next break was to attend Oxford (1692) to gain an advanced degree in preparation for the priesthood. His third break was in 1694-95 when he returned to Ireland to take deacon's and then priest's orders in the Church of Ireland, and then visit the parish of Kilroot, near Belfast, his first assigned flock. The tiny congregation in Kilroot required little of Swift's personal attention and he felt threatened by the dominant and proliferating Scottish Presbyterians. So, he returned to Moor Park in 1696. From 1695 to 1699, Swift most probably composed the majority of *Tale and Battle of the Books*, both books written partially in defense of Temple in his *Ancient vs. Moderns* controversy against Wotton and Bentley. But *Tale's* "main plot" was predominantly written then as a satirical examination of competing Christian denominations.

Unlike Lewis before writing *Screwtape*, Swift developed some bitterness in Kilroot and in his last days at Moor Park, while writing *Tale*. The bitterness had three causes, according to Andrew Carpenter in his essay "A Tale of a Tub as an Irish Text" (37-40). First, Swift was experiencing setbacks as an author. He had paid to have his poem "To the King" published, which was designed to gain him a higher position in the Church in England but failed to attract any notice. Later, he was duped by writer John Dunton into thinking the Athenian Society was a real society of brilliant intellectuals, and Swift wrote an ode of fawning tribute to the non-existent group and, uncharacteristically, signed his real name, resulting in public embarrassment. Second, Carpenter believes Swift was beginning to bridle at living such a modest, second-class life under Temple. Third, Carpenter writes,

[B]etween 1689 and 1697, Swift came to realize that prejudice rather than a search for truth lay behind all the activities of all Christian churches of the day; he

grasped the significance of this gross and dangerous corruption. The fanaticism of Presbyterianism (which he experienced at Kilroot and elsewhere) frightened him, as did the smug arrogance of Catholicism (which he learned more about from books than in life); and he saw at first hand the disastrous effect of egotism in the entrenched Anglican churches, stuffed with constipated bishops and political place-savers. (38-39)

As we will see later, Swift actually felt physically threatened in Kilroot. To Carpenter's three reasons, I would add that, on the personal front, in Kilroot, Swift had fallen in love with the daughter of a deceased Church of Ireland clergyman. Her real name was Jane Waring, though he called her Varina, and Ehrenpreis, among others, believed that she spurned two marriage proposals that Swift made around 1696 (1: 166-68).

The simultaneous negative experiences Swift had just prior to and during the composition of Tale reinforced his feeling of being an outsider, unable to gain traction in either England or Ireland. They also made him willing to lash out in Tale at the sins he perceived in all Christian denominations. Of course, in the later "Apology," he claimed to be defending the Church of England and the Church of Ireland as the denomination offering the moderate, correct, middle road. This, in my opinion, is Swift trying to rewrite history, since his depiction of the brother Martin, representing the Church of England and the Church of Ireland, was as harshly critical as he was of the other two (representing Catholicism and Dissenters). The caustic derision of Swift's narrator in Tale is akin to that of Lewis's devil Screwtape, only Lewis's message is the reverse and offers hope, Lewis believed, to all Christians. During the writing of Tale, I contend, Swift was in no mood to be charitable or forgiving of the transgressions of his fellow man -- Irish or English. He chose satire to unleash his witty venom, hiding only slightly behind the persona of

his pseudo-naïve narrator. His goal, in other words, was to vent as much as to correct the behavior of his targets.

Screwtape's strongly Christian message raises an immediate question: if Christ preached a turn-the-other-cheek philosophy, is Lewis against war and promoting a pacifist agenda? The answer is that Lewis believed some wars to be justified. In his talk "Why I Am Not a Pacifist," published in 1965 in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, Lewis states, "Thus, if A is wrongly attacked by B, our helping A may involve doing some degree of violence to B" (42). Lewis hoped his Screwtape would help humans understand their conflicted feelings, even when war was justified. Advising his junior, Wormwood, about his human subject, Screwtape writes:

In his anguish, the patient can, of course, be encouraged to revenge himself by some vindictive feelings directed towards the German leaders, and that is good so far as it goes....The results of such fanciful hatred are often most disappointing, and of all humans the English are in this respect the most deplorable milksops. They are creatures of that miserable sort who loudly proclaim that torture is too good for their enemies and then give tea and cigarettes to the first wounded German pilot who turns up at the back door. (35-36)

Lewis, thus, makes us laugh at our own tendency to be conflicted, even in an imposed and justified fight -- on the one hand proclaiming "give no quarter," then, on the other, feeling mercy for the enemy. Note that Lewis did not use the Northern Irish in this example, because they were, to his mind, not prone to show mercy or forgiveness especially to local enemies. This distinction is succinctly addressed by David Clare of University College Dublin, who writes in the *Irish Studies Review*:

As an outsider in England, even at his beloved Oxford, Lewis was forced into the

role of observer of the English. Like other Irish writers before him (Sheridan, Goldsmith, Wilde, Shaw, etc.) Lewis was able to see the English more clearly than they could see themselves and was able to comment on their peculiarities with insight, wit, and, if the situation demanded it, praise. Nowhere is this clearer than in the book that may be Lewis's greatest work of fiction, *The Screwtape Letters*. (29).

Further reflecting on the war, *Screwtape* counsels Wormwood to beware the higher calling some humans experience in war.

Of course a war is entertaining. The immediate fear and suffering of the humans is a legitimate and pleasing refreshment for our myriads of toiling workers....But if we are not careful, we shall see thousands turning in this tribulation to the Enemy [God], while tens of thousands who do not go so far as that will nevertheless have their attention diverted from themselves to values and causes which they believe to be higher than the self....And how disastrous for us is the continual remembrance of death which war enforces. One of our best weapons, contented worldliness, is rendered useless. (29-30)

While the reader laughs at the senior devil's perverse motivations, these insights provide a perspective on war that humans can understand and use. According to Lewis, speaking "in reverse" through *Screwtape*, we are all exhorted to seek and maintain the higher ground of behavior, regardless of faith.

Seeing our foibles and peccadilloes through the eyes of the Devil's henchman forces painful insights, even though they are humorously exposed. Lewis writes, perhaps autobiographically, in *Screwtape's* Letter 3, likely referring to the experience of living with his

surrogate mother, Mrs. Janie Moore. Mrs. Moore had become petty and manipulative by 1940, declining into dementia. Screwtape counsels Wormwood that the patient (Lewis?) can be encouraged to hate his mother (Mrs. Moore?). With Wormwood's help, Screwtape instructs, the mother's sins can be interpreted by the patient "to mean any of her actions which are inconvenient or irritating to himself....Work on that" (16-17). Lewis is cautioning himself while teaching this lesson and, by the way, he looked after Mrs. Moore daily and lovingly until her death in 1951.

The lesson most clearly aimed at the Northern Irish comes in Letter 16 when Screwtape expounds to Wormwood on the schisms between denominations in Christianity. "The real fun is working up hatred between those who say 'mass' and those who say 'holy communion' when neither party could possibly state the difference between, say, Hooker's doctrine [Anglican] and Thomas Aquinas' [Catholic]" (96-97). In addition, the Germans had bombed London and other key cities in England from September of 1940 through May of 1941. However, they added a surprise Belfast and Dublin blitz bombing in April and May of 1941. The Irish had been lulled into believing the bombing would not hit them. Letter 29, published in November of 1941, makes specific reference to the pervasiveness of this indiscriminate devastation when Screwtape writes, "Now that it is certain the Germans will bombard your patient's town and that his duties will keep him in the thick of danger, we must consider our policy. Are we to aim at cowardice -- or at courage, with consequent pride -- or at hatred of the Germans?...[R]emember, the act of cowardice is all that matters" (171).

So, *The Screwtape Letters* was written by a man who never lost his deep affection for his homeland, Northern Ireland, though he lived his last forty-four years in England. His upbringing imprinted on him an early dislike of England that gradually dissipated, and his views were

buffered by the “island” or “cocoon” of Irish living companions and correspondents he created for himself while working at Oxford and Cambridge. His life-long frustration with politico-religious infighting in Northern Ireland often spurred him to ignore the day-to-day reality of those tumultuous events and to retreat into literature and imagination. Yet, when world conflict arose, Lewis could not ignore the threats to England and Ireland, and he became completely engaged. He volunteered and fought as an officer in World War I, but he was ineligible to fight at the front during World War II because of previous war wounds. Instead, he contributed by writing more passionately than ever on the subject of the war. He volunteered for the Home Guard in Oxford, broadcast messages of faith renewal on the BBC, addressed the RAF on the same subject, wrote numerous friends and family on the issues, and wrote and published *Screwtape*. He was compelled by the religious, political/historical, and biographical events that preceded 1941 to produce something of value for the war-traumatized citizens and troops to give them hope and renewed spiritual strength. He chose satire and the inverted philosophy of a humorless devil to laugh them into what Lewis insisted was a common Christian religion. But, as the letters in *Screwtape* demonstrate, a special message to Northern Ireland comes through: Put aside denominational differences and rally to the common cause of defending free societies from subjugation or even annihilation. Fame came quickly after *Screwtape*. That fame as a “British” writer and scholar would only be enhanced later when he published *The Chronicles of Narnia* (beginning in 1950) and *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (1954). But, contrary to the assumptions of his vast following and many scholars, Northern Ireland remained his heart’s home. His sense of his own “Irishness” continued to influence and inform his life and his works.

## CHAPTER TWO: RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

Both Tale and Screwtape are overtly religious writings that promote the Christian faith. Yet Swift was promoting his Church of Ireland/Anglican denomination over Catholicism and Dissenter offshoots such as Presbyterians, Anabaptists, and Quakers. Swift saw religion as a controlling mechanism, a way of holding society together in spite of the outrageous foibles and pride of man. On the other hand, Lewis wanted to promote a non-denominational Christian faith, playing down the differences, to pull society together in the face of the threatening German war machine. This represents the greatest difference between the two writers' philosophies -- is Christianity to be inclusive or exclusive?

Swift's exclusive Tale involves three brothers: Peter (from St. Peter), representing Catholics; Jack (from John Calvin), representing Calvinists and other Dissenters; and Martin (from Martin Luther), representing Anglicans. They are bequeathed identical coats based on a will (the New Testament) from their father (Jesus Christ) and instructed by him not to change the simple coats in any way since the coats, as they are, will meet all their needs. Having set the stage, Swift takes great delight in describing the pettiness and jealousy that develop among the brothers and their elaborate, imaginative justifications for altering the coats to make them more stylish and elaborate. Though no brother is perfect, Swift claims in his "Apology" of 1710 that he tried to portray Martin (Anglicans) as the most upright and Peter (Catholics) and Jack (Calvinists/Dissenters) as less than perfect (6). To many contemporaries, later critics, and to me, Swift could not effectively take back or erase his criticism of Anglican abuses by publishing his "Apology." As we will see in Chapter Five, Swift's description of Martin's behavior was just too damning.

Swift knew, I contend, that his denominational exclusivity was against Christian

teachings. In *Tale*, when the father (Christ) is dying, he commands his sons to “live together in one House like Brethren and Friends, for then you will be sure to thrive, and not otherwise” (74). The sons do as he commands, and “for the first seven Years [representing the first seven centuries of Christianity’s history],...they carefully observed their Father’s Will, and kept their Coats in very good Order” (74). Upon their discovery of the allure of societal trends, however, the brothers begin competing with each other and working to make themselves more attractive. To Swift, this period represents the divisions of his Christian Church with participants willing to spin off if the Church did not match their specific beliefs. As a result, the crown-backed, evolving domination by Swift’s Anglican denomination is threatened. Swift uses this development to justify his vitriol against Catholics and Dissenters. But, in his heart, he knew better.

Ironically, Swift’s *Tale* was religiously out of date when it was finally published in 1704. When he wrote the work in 1695-96, the Protestant Ascendancy was well underway, but the dominance of the Anglican Church was not assured as the established, national denomination. Swift’s stated intention while writing *Tale* was to defend his Church vigorously against the vestiges of Catholic advances under James II and the rebellious Scottish Presbyterians he encountered at Kilroot. But, by 1704, his Anglican Church under Queen Anne had certainly returned to domination and neither “enemy” posed a serious threat. In 1696, Swift resorted, according to Harth, to an old tradition of “Anglican rationalist polemics against Catholics, Puritanism, and atheism” (154). This strong, old-fashioned attack which spilled over into ridiculing his own denomination must have been received by the readers of Swift’s day as overly venomous, especially since by 1704 the religious situation was relatively stable.

Swift’s commitment to become a priest was practical and not nearly as dramatic as

Lewis's spiritual epiphany and conversion to Christianity, as we will see. Swift saw the Church as a last-resort livelihood for himself, but a very effective vehicle to keep society together. He described himself in a 1727 birthday poem to Stella as "not the gravest of divines" (Swift: Satires 475), which exacerbated the post-Tale controversy about his sincerity as a priest. Further, the choice of the title, *A Tale of a Tub*, was a practical matter. "Sea-men have a Custom when they meet a Whale," Swift explained in his preface to the book, "to fling him out an empty Tub, by way of Amusement, to divert him from laying violent Hands upon the Ship" (40). Editors Guthkelch and Smith surmise correctly that "he writes a tale of a tub in order that the wits of his age may be diverted from sporting with the commonwealth or ship of state" (xxvi). Thus, Swift committed himself, rationally and realistically, to keeping "his team" in charge. His spirituality was not his foremost motivation, nor dominant in his personality. Otherwise, he would have avoided the profane, often bawdy irreverence so common in the book. The message he brings us with *Tale* is one of exclusion. In his mind, there was but one denomination that had the right to lead.

On the other hand, Lewis is inclusive. Appropriately, the inspiration for *Screwtape* occurred to Lewis in church. In July of 1940, he wrote Warnie, "Before the service was over... I was struck by an idea for a book wh. I think might be both useful and entertaining. It wd. be called *As One Devil to Another* and would consist of letters from an elderly retired devil to a young devil who has just started work on his first 'patient.' The idea wd. be to give all the psychology of temptation from the other point of view" (Collected 2: 426-27). The title, of course, was later changed, but Lewis uses the terms "both useful and entertaining", alluding, probably consciously, to the Horatian type of satire he was to write, in which the purpose is to instruct and entertain. Thus, *Screwtape* not only instructed and humorously engaged a war-weary

England and Ireland, but gave birth to a vast amount of literature that continues to the present that teaches what Lewis believed to be a universal catechism for Christians, regardless of denomination. An excellent example of this is Marlon De La Torre's *Screwtape Teaches the Faith: A Guide for Catechists* in which the author explains each letter of Lewis's work as a part of a catechism in which, Lewis hoped, all practitioners of Christianity can find agreement. The *Screwtape* message was calculated not only to draw the vast majority of English and Irish together as they faced the bombing blitz by Germany, but also to encourage Northern Ireland to rise above denominational differences.

Since *Screwtape* is essentially a religious piece, the conversion (or reversion) of Lewis to Christianity was crucial, obviously, to his creating the work. In a now-famous story, he became a believer again in 1931 while riding in the sidecar of a motorcycle being driven by Warnie on the way to Whipsnade Park Zoo, eighty miles from the Kilns. In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis declares, "When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did" (237). The fact that Lewis returned to the religion of his childhood serves to build a further case for the impact of Lewis's Northern Irish heritage on the writing of *Screwtape*. In the inverse of what Lewis's senior devil preaches, Lewis promoted a return to a Christian faith that plays down denominational differences. To Dom Giovanni Calabria, he wrote that Northern Ireland was charming in terms of landscape and climate, but "dreadful because of the strife, hatred and often civil war between dissenting faiths...I think almost all crimes which Christians have perpetrated against each other arise from this, that religion is confused with politics. For, above all other spheres of human life, the Devil claims politics for his own, as almost the citadel of his power" (Latin 85). Though written in 1953, well after *Screwtape* was published, this letter underlines his lifelong frustration with his beloved native land and connects politics with the

Devil.

Lewis depicts his senior devil, Screwtape, as a purveyor of perverse advice to his nephew, Wormwood, identifying (accurately) the frailties of man and how to manipulate “subjects” using their weaknesses. Lewis portrays Screwtape as having amazing insights into the selfish motivations of men, but the senior devil is almost invariably commenting on all men, not a denomination. Thereby, in the reverse of what the pure-evil devil is advising, Lewis is making a point that the enemy is not the other Christian denomination next door, but rather Hitler and the Nazis who are threatening the entire world. MacCulloch summarizes (941-50) that Hitler, though raised a Catholic, had turned on his own Church after signing a 1933 concordat with Pope Pius XI, agreeing to preserve Catholic freedoms in the new Third Reich. His racist and murderous actions towards Jews and Catholics during various invasions had become public knowledge in 1940, as Lewis wrote Screwtape. (Rumors of German concentration camp atrocities were not confirmed until liberation of the first one in Poland in July 1944.) Hitler’s neo-paganism was taking hold and somehow appealing to some devout Christians whose complacency allowed Hitler to continue to gain momentum. Lewis calls Christians to action in Letter 7 as Screwtape sermonizes, “Some ages are lukewarm and complacent, and it is our business to soothe them yet faster asleep” (41).

Screwtape’s character is a combination of Hitler and more traditional devils such as those Lewis gleaned from Dante and Goethe. In his Preface to the 1961 edition of Screwtape, Lewis expounds on his belief in devils: “Those of Dante [The Divine Comedy] are the best. Before his angels we sing in awe. His devils...in their rage, spite, and obscenity are far more like what the reality must be than anything in Milton....But the really pernicious image is Goethe’s Mephistopheles. It is Faust, not he, who really exhibits the ruthless, sleepless, unsmiling

concentration upon self which is the mark of Hell” (xxxv). Hitler’s charisma was strangely compelling to Lewis. In a July 1940 letter to his brother, he confessed that with his friends, “we listened to Hitler’s speech together. I don’t know if I’m weaker than other people: but it is a positive revelation to me how while the speech lasts it is impossible not to waver just a little....Statements which I know to be untrue all but convince me” (Collected 2: 425). Screwtape’s manner of manipulating humans clearly mirrors the Fuhrer’s compelling style.

Screwtape’s final letter (number 31) gives Lewis’s vision of the heaven that awaits Christians of all denominations. Throughout the letters, he has been careful to describe the patient as a Christian without reference to denomination. When the patient is killed suddenly by a German bomb, Lewis speaks from experience, having been wounded by a bomb that killed the two men next to him in World War I. The patient dies, having resisted the inept temptations of Wormwood, and, as Screwtape bitterly summarizes, the patient sees angels:

But when he saw them he knew that he had always known them and realized what part each one of them had played at many an hour in his life when he had supposed himself alone, so that now he could say to them, one by one, not ‘Who are you?’ but ‘So it was you all the time.’...He is caught up into that world where pain and pleasure take on transfinite values and all our arithmetic is dismayed.

Once more, the inexplicable meets us. (186-87)

This was a message of hope that all Christians, indeed all people in England and Ireland, desperately needed while engaged in a war that would claim 70+ million lives and last four more years.

Lewis saw the physical threat of Hitler and, similarly, Swift felt physically threatened in Kilroot (1695-96). The Presbyterian Scots, who had been so successful at overthrowing the

Anglican establishment in Scotland (1688-90), were arriving in County Antrim in great numbers with the goal of overthrowing the Church of Ireland's dominance there. In Christopher Fox's essay, "Swift and the Rabble Reformation: A Tale of a Tub and the State of the Church in the 1690s," he writes, "By the time Swift arrived [to serve the Kilroot congregation], Antrim had the densest population of Presbyterians in Ireland...One index of this mass Scottish invasion of Ulster was the expansion of ministers and congregations by about fifty percent between 1689 and 1707" (115). This was not an invasion with soldiers and guns, but the Scots' methods were ritualistic and involved a mob taking the local Anglican ministers out of their homes and publicly humiliating them, physically abusing them, and stripping them of their robes and dignity with the intent of running them out of town. The process was very effective in Scotland and was beginning in Antrim when Swift repaired to Moor Park. The ritual of tearing the episcopal priest's gown was notably reflected in *Tale*, according to Fox, who wrote, "When Swift states Jack 'Rent the main Body of his Coat from top to bottom,' an eighteenth-century reader glossed this passage as 'removing Episcopacy, and setting up Presbytery in its place'" (109).

So, to Swift, the religious context of his day was a battleground among Christian denominations vying for supremacy. His inclination, in spite of Christ's teachings, was to join the fray and relentlessly attack other Christians. Lewis's religious context was a battleground as well, one that threatened him and other Europeans mortally. But for Lewis nationalistic ideologies were vying for supremacy, and religion was the solution to strengthening his countrymen.

### CHAPTER THREE: HISTORICAL/POLITICAL INFLUENCES

We have seen the biographical and religious contextual parallels in the lives of Swift and Lewis. The historical and political contexts also have similarities as Swift and Lewis grappled with potential subjugation. For each author, the times were tumultuous, and commenting on the situation at hand meant taking a stand that might not be popular and might even result in reprisals. For their own protection, it was, therefore, important to convey their messages through personae. In Lewis's case, this was a conniving devil, and, in his preface to *Screwtape*, Lewis playfully states, "I have no intention of explaining how the correspondence which I now offer to the public fell into my hands" (xlvi). Then he adds, "The history of the European War, except in so far as it happens now and then to impinge upon the spiritual condition of one human being, was obviously of no interest to *Screwtape*" (xlvi). Thus, the distance between Lewis and the devil's work is lightly and humorously established.

For Swift, the distance between himself as author and *Tale*'s pseudo-naïve narrator was necessarily more distinct. As we will see, the political and religious factions in his time, especially 1694 to 1704, were numerous, and Swift's wit and venom spared none completely. Therefore, he denied authorship of *Tale* publicly, although his pride in it caused a few private admissions to its origins by his pen. Walter Scott notes that, late in life, Jonathan was listening to his *Tale* being read and, as related by cousin Theophilus Swift, exclaimed, "Good God! What a genius I had when I wrote that book" (89). Politically, *Tale* brought a quick and vehement reaction, particularly from the opponents of Swift's mentor and patron at the time, Sir William Temple. Swift's own Anglican Church leaders suspected strongly it was Swift's work. They were not amused -- nor appeased by his later "Apology" -- and thwarted his clerical career, a

reaction Swift had not anticipated.

In Swift's Ireland, religion was inextricably combined with politics. For Lewis, on the other hand, religion was an answer for England and Ireland in a politically polarized world. To Lewis, the threat in 1941 was straightforward and immediate: the Germans were bombing London and Northern Ireland as a prelude to a land invasion. Among other motivations, Lewis realized that there was a need for something to laugh about. *Screwtape* is laden with humor. Even non-believers are typically captivated and thoroughly entertained. The seasoned devil, *Screwtape*, with his perverted advice to his protégé, provides black humor while ironically underlining the need for faith through the battle at hand.

Swift had seen the Glorious Revolution of 1688 pit Protestants under William of Orange against Catholics under James II and correctly feared that Ireland would suffer from this rift for years to come. Ordained an Anglican priest in 1695, Swift set out in *Tale*, as he explained in "Apology" (1710), to make other denominations laughable while extolling the virtues of his church, as we have seen. Essentially, he attempted to help his Anglican Church continue to dominate. Swift felt that the practical purpose of religion was to create a moral structure to control society. But the Catholics and the full range of Dissenters were apparent threats to his Anglican Church and its ability to continue to dictate that moral structure.

The theme of Church of England against Catholics and Dissenters was deeply ingrained in the mind of Jonathan Swift. Before his birth, the Civil War in England (1642-51) had already set Protestants against Catholics, after Charles had taken a Catholic queen. When Parliament beheaded Charles I in 1649, Charles II, his son, ascended the throne in title, but was defeated by a Parliament led by Oliver Cromwell, a Puritan, and fled to France in 1651. Cromwell enforced a brutal Interregnum, which he termed the Commonwealth of England, and established his

Protectorate. His bloody campaigns to bring Ireland and Scotland into line resulted in up to 300,000 deaths, to say nothing of reprisals in England. After Cromwell's death, Parliament, tired of the bloodshed, invited Charles II back from exile in 1660, but Parliament had new powers by the time of Swift's birth in 1667. In this uneasy time, Swift grew up watching James II (Catholic), succeed his brother, Charles II, only to be ousted in the Glorious Revolution (1688) by Anglicans William of Orange and Mary, James's eldest daughter. Thereafter, Catholics were no longer allowed to ascend the throne, and English monarchs were no longer allowed to marry Catholics. The subsequent Penal Laws commenced in 1695 and continued for many years the gradual Anglican domination of Catholics and Dissenters, as well as non-Christians. This brief history summarizes J. C. D. Clark's comments on the times in his *English Society 1660-1832* (63-83).

Finishing at Trinity in 1688, Swift was forced to move to England to escape the brief war during which James II tried unsuccessfully to retake the throne from William and Mary by invading Ireland. In Moor Park (Surrey) England, his position of secretary to Sir William Temple afforded him a modest income and a place to begin writing *Tale* in approximately 1695. Temple was both a titled, English statesman (Baronet) and an essayist, who actually served for some time in the Irish Parliament, making him, like Swift, capable of a dual perspective. Among other advances during the reign of William and Mary (1689 to 1702), were greater availability of published reading materials and greater public discourse on principles of decorum. In 1690, Temple published *An Essay Upon the Ancient and Modern Learning*, a treatise proposing that ancient (Roman and Greek) thinking and culture was superior to modern, science-based thinking and culture. Critics Richard Bentley and William Wotton took issue with Temple and published scathing responses. Swift came to his employer's defense and began writing *Battle of the Books*

and Tale, both of which satirized “Moderns” and defended “Ancients” in numerous ways. These works were written at the time, first, for the eyes of Sir William Temple, and only later for publication. But Temple did not enjoy satire and, perhaps as a concession to him, Swift delayed publication until 1704, five years after Temple’s death and about three years after the Ancients vs. Moderns controversy had died down.

By 1704 and the publication of Tale, Swift had been ordained a priest in 1695 and was appointed Vicar of Laracor in County Meath, Ireland. Hoping to break into politics as his best chance of securing a higher appointment in the Church of England, the “big brother” of the Church of Ireland, he decided to dedicate his Tale to Lord John Somers, who was a distinguished politician and principal writer of the Declaration of Rights. Damrosch writes: “No doubt Swift believed that the entire Tale would appeal to Somers and his colleagues since it embodied a cynical wit very congenial to the style of the rakish grandees” (159). But in March 1702, William III (predeceased by Mary) died and was succeeded by his sister-in-law, Anne. Melancholy, sickly, and occasionally vindictive, Queen Anne, crowned at thirty-seven, was not a predictable monarch, nor one to forget grudges or slights. A staunch practitioner of her Anglican faith, she took offense at the Tale’s perceived denigration of her Church and was advised, unfortunately, that Swift was the probable author. She never forgot Swift’s transgression and, until her debilitating illness in 1713 (she died the next year), she insured that Swift was blocked from promotion in the Church. While Swift was, in fact, elevated in 1713 to Dean of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin and would later become a beloved figure in Ireland and England, the stigma remained, and he stayed at St. Patrick’s in that role until his death, thirty-two years later.

For Swift and for many of his contemporaries, politics were intertwined with religion. As he wrote Tale, Swift was well aware of the rampant Williamite confiscation of Catholic-owned

land in Ireland from 1690 to 1703. The source of excruciating resentment from Catholics in Ireland, the confiscation helped Swift's Church maintain dominance but, initially, had also assisted Scottish Presbyterians in gaining significant lands in Ulster. Hence, *Tale*, with its religious allegory of the three brothers, sought to reinforce the superiority of Anglicans over Catholics and, especially, Presbyterians, as well as other Dissenters.

There were key historical and political events that occurred in C. S. Lewis's lifetime: the ongoing Home Rule debate (beginning in 1914), the Easter Rising (1916), the Irish War of Independence (1919-21) resulting in partition (1920), the Irish Civil War (1922-23), and the approval of the modern Constitution of Ireland (1937). Strikingly, few of Lewis's letters and writings even acknowledged these events, since Lewis was, by nature, not a political person and despised the largely sectarian divides in his homeland. Almost unbelievably, his letters to his childhood friend still in Ireland, Arthur Greeves, in the weeks following the Easter Rising of April 1916 made no mention of the bloody and politically important event. Rather, Lewis's missives focused on literature, drama, and music. Perhaps the fact that the action was in Dublin made the bloodshed seem less relevant to Lewis. However, in a letter to Greeves from Oxford in May of 1917, Lewis wrote, "Today (Sunday) [fellow Ulster student at Oxford, Theobald] Butler had brekker with me and afterwards we...had a long discussion on the rival merits of Swinburne and Keats, the improbability of God, and Home Rule. Like all Irish people who meet in England we ended by criticisms on the invincible flippancy and dulness [sic] of the Anglo-Saxon race. After all, there is no doubt, ami, that the Irish are the only people: with all their faults I would not gladly live or die among another folk" (*They Stand* 187). While Lewis may have been discussing the Home Rule issue locally, he does not elaborate on his views to his best friend in Belfast, or anywhere in writing, for that matter. After all, there was a war underway, and that felt more

immediate and pressing to Lewis. He was sent to the front in France with Paddy Moore in November of 1917, wounded in battle at Riez du Vinage in April 1918, and repatriated to England for convalescence the next month. He returned to his studies at Oxford in January 1919. Thereafter, again, there is no mention of the Easter Rising's aftermath -- partition, the Irish War of Independence, the Irish Civil War, or Ireland's new constitution of 1937 -- in Lewis's letters or in his diary during the years 1919 to 1923. Even the Belfast Riots of 1935 draw no comment.

The best explanation for this phenomenon of Lewis's apparent neglect of political comment on important events in his homeland comes from Ronald Bresland in *The Backward Glance: C. S. Lewis and Ireland*.

The letters between Jack and Arthur Greeves at this time [1915 to 1917] show little concern for the wider political events surrounding them: their correspondence is filled with a youthful fervor of literary discovery and plans for imaginative collaboration....This is a recurring feature in Jack Lewis's life: regardless of his private, social, or political circumstances, there was always the impulse to transcend the ordinary and everyday world through literature" (46-51).

Jack's brother, Warnie, in his own *Memoir of C. S. Lewis* included in his edition of *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, describes their childhood home as filled with one-sided grumbling from their Protestant-Unionist father on political events, such as the Home Rule debate. "[T]he long term result was to fill him [Jack] with a disgust and revulsion from the very idea of politics before he was out of his teens" (6). Even a careful review of Jack's diary, kept from 1922 to 1927 and during the entirety of the tumultuous Irish Civil War and aftermath, uncovers no mention of those struggles associated with partition (May 3, 1921).

It was not until World War II began, directly and ominously threatening both Northern

Ireland and England, that Lewis became engaged in the conflict, both in writing and in action. During the war years of 1939 to 1945, Lewis broke his silence on the subject of political conflict. He unleashed some sixty-one letters addressing war issues or events and twelve more separately discussing Hitler's and the Nazis' behavior. In a letter to Greeves, dated May 1941, he desperately asked how Arthur and other Belfast friends had weathered the recent bombing blitz, writing, "It's like the end of the world to think of bombs near Schomberg [east Belfast]" (They Stand 485). Enrolled in the Home Guard protecting Oxford, Lewis began a series of radio talks on the BBC to the general populace. His radio talks, later compiled and published as *Mere Christianity* in 1952, were aimed at reinvigorating his listeners' faith. The popularity of those broadcasts brought him an invitation to address Royal Air Force troops all over England, which required his travelling regularly and extensively during the war years to help renew their faith. Meeting with these beleaguered men gave Lewis a strong sense of the moral struggle they were experiencing as they lived a kill-or-be-killed life. It was in the midst of this very busy and war-engaged period for Lewis -- he still carried a full teaching load at Oxford -- that *The Screwtape Letters* was conceived, written, and published.

Historically and politically, then, the primary finding is that Swift and Lewis were under very palpable stress due to then-current events. Lewis faced not only a threat to his own life, he and his countrymen faced the potential destruction and subjugation of their entire cultural fabric. Swift's circumstances may not have been immediately life-threatening, but he felt unsteady in his place in society with his denomination's threat from a potential ascendancy of the Catholics and/or Dissenters. That stress led to their respective choices of satire to make the message palatable, entertaining while hiding behind a comical persona, yet speaking, ironically, of serious subjects.



## CHAPTER FOUR: SATIRIC CONTEXT AND STYLES

Lewis often quoted from memory Swift's definition of satire that appears in the preface to *Battle of the Books*. "Satyr is a sort of Glass wherein Beholders do generally discover everybody's Face but their Own; which is the chief Reason...that so very few are offended with it" (*Battle 2*). It is ironic, then, that very many people who were offended by *Tale*, were, unfortunately, those who could and would negatively influence Swift's career because of it.

In the mid-1690s, Swift had very strong precedent for choosing satire as his *Tale's* vehicle. Hermann Real of the Ehrenpreis Center for Swift Studies writes:

Between 1660 and 1740, nearly all European nations witnessed an abundance of long and intractable wars....England seems to have been different from 'the rest of Europe' in the way it disproved the time-honored adage that 'the Muses ever follow peace' (*inter arma silent Musae*)....In England, the contrary was the case....From the early days of the Civil War (1642), satire, and a host of affiliated squibs, libels, lampoons, invectives, diatribes, prophecies, and broadside ballads, more often than not vituperative, scathing, and aggressive, permeated the literature of the times....[S]atire always thrives on the collapse of norms, the moral turpitude of society. (76)

So, Swift's choice of satire was not only in keeping with the popular writing of the time, satire would become his stock-in-trade for most of his future writing.

When writing *Screwtape* in late 1940 and early 1941, Lewis chose satire as the method to convey a serious message, during dangerous times, with humor and wit to reach an audience with little to laugh about. The serious message, according to biographer Sayer, was "to clarify thought, to sharpen our knowledge of the distinctions between good and evil, to increase our

desire to be virtuous, and through much practical advice to make it easier for us to become so. It is truly a devotional work” (276). But, unlike Swift, Lewis chose satire as his vehicle in a period when satire was not a common genre. Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*) and George Orwell (*Animal Farm* and *1984*) were the only important contemporaries who ventured often and successfully into satire. Evelyn Waugh and Malcolm Muggeridge, also contemporaries, made occasional ventures in that direction. But even Lewis’s famous literary fellowship, *The Inklings* (mainly J. R. R. Tolkien, Owen Barfield, and Charles Williams), had no satirists. So, satire was an odd choice for Lewis and a genre to which he would seldom revert in his future writings. But it suited his purpose at that strange, threatening time in England and Ireland: to give creative, comic relief to his audience, through *Screwtape*, while drawing his fellow citizens back to what he believed was religious bedrock to fortify them against the fierce German onslaught.

An episode, going back to Swift’s university days, also affected the style of Swift’s *Tale*. At Trinity’s graduation ceremonies, there was a tradition called “tripos” that Swift surely witnessed. He may even have participated as a contributing writer. Tripos was a speech, delivered at commencement by a designated student, who abusively satirized the program, the students, and the faculty. It was a mock lecture that had no structure and randomly combined the varied writings of many other students. According to Carpenter, it inter-mixed the language of the lecture hall (in Latin and English) with that of the latrine. Full of lengthy digressions, the lecture, Carpenter writes, was “not a single speech but an assembly of separate scenes, speeches, poems, and dialogues written with varying degrees of wit” (32). I believe, along with Carpenter, that Swift took this style to use in *Tale* and may well have conceived the work while at Trinity, perhaps even writing portions of it there. Though the poor student who delivered the tripos was often censured for bawdiness and profanity, the school condoned the tradition, and Swift would

likely have felt justified in assuming its digression-ridden, unstructured style and derisive tone in the writing of Tale.

Thus, Swift's Tale is a classic example of Juvenalian satire. It is derived from the personal bitterness and willingness to attack that had welled up in Swift, as described in Chapter One. It is contemptuous and savage, regarding the behavior of his enemies to be not only misguided, but reprehensible. As Rawson concludes in *The Character of Swift's Satire* while commenting on Tale, "Swift's official attitude is one of uncompromising censure" (25). In his literary essay "Addison," Lewis comments on the satire of Swift and his contemporaries: "[E]very enemy...becomes a grotesque. All who have, in whatever fashion incurred their ill will are knaves, scarecrows, whores, bugs, toads, bedlamites, yahoos....It is good fun, but it is certainly not good sense, we laugh and disbelieve" (Selected 155). Lewis, for one, believes Swift goes too far in the wholesale skewering of others. In Swift's "Apology," he attempts to smooth over the offenses Tale's "anonymous" author had so liberally heaped upon specific enemies: "[H]e thought the numerous and gross corruptions of Religion and Learning might furnish matter for a satire that would be useful and diverting" (6). It is thoroughly ironic that Swift uses words that define Horatian satire ("useful and diverting") and echoed by those Lewis used 237 years later ("useful and entertaining"), to try to cast his Tale's sometimes vicious, Juvenalian satire as a more good-natured Horatian satire.

Lewis's *Screwtape* is an excellent example of Horatian satire. In keeping with Lewis's motivations for creating the work, he ridicules the follies of men and women universally, so that they might identify with those mocked, laugh at themselves, and move toward improving themselves and society. Because Lewis wants Europeans to gather together in the name of religion, he needs to be gentler in his approach than Swift. Several quotes from *Screwtape*

already given in Chapter Two exemplify this Horatian style: useful and entertaining; painfully insightful, yet forgiving and uplifting. We are all included in Lewis's observations of our flawed nature by his devil, but laugh at ourselves without taking offense, and try to do better.

These different choices of satiric style, as much as any other comparison, define who Swift was as he wrote *Tale*, following Juvenal, and who Lewis was at the writing of *Screwtape*, following Horace.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CAUSES HAVE EFFECTS

The effects of publication of both writings on the authors themselves were stark and had undeniably negative effects on progress in each of their chosen careers – Swift as an Anglican priest, Lewis as an Oxford scholar. Swift fell out of favor when the powerful leaders in his Anglican church saw Tale as an attack on their church as well as the others. He was relegated to the post of Dean of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin as his highest post achieved. Thus, Swift spent his later years depressed about his truncated career path.

Swift was unable to change the first impression of Tale drawn by the Church of England hierarchy even with his famous 1710 “Apology” in which he claimed that Tale “celebrates the Church of England as the most perfect of all others in Discipline and Doctrine, it advances no Opinion they reject, nor condemns any they receive” (6). There was good reason to believe, however, that the damage to his career was done and hung over him for life and that Queen Anne, though she died in 1714, succeeded in keeping him from ever becoming a bishop. The most damning passage (of many) in Tale is his grouping of all three brothers, including Martin in the following description of their common activities: “Being now arrived at the proper Age for producing themselves, [the three brothers] came up to Town and fell in love with the Ladies, but especially three, who about that time were in chief Reputation, The Dutchess d’Argent [representing covetousness], Madame de Grands Titres [representing ambition], and Countess d’Orgueil [representing pride]...[T]hey quickly began to improve in the good Qualities of the Town: ...They Drank, and Fought, and Whor’d, and Slept, and Swore, and took Snuff;...beat the Watch, lay on Bulks, and got Claps; they bilkt the Hackney-Coachmen, ran in Debt with Shopkeepers, and lay with their Wives; they killed Bailiffs, kick’d Fidlers down Stairs” (74-75). Could Swift reasonably expect an apology written six years later to appease the stringently

devout Anglican Queen Anne?

Similarly, Lewis paid dearly for writing the very popular *Screwtape* (and, later, children's books). Originally, the thirty-one letters of *Screwtape* were published sequentially in a weekly Anglican Church magazine called *The Guardian* from May 2nd to November 28th in 1941. The response was so positive that the letters were quickly compiled into a book, published in the U.K. in February, 1942, and in the U.S. a year later. The book touched readers internationally with its humorous, highly original approach to dispensing solid and traditional spiritual advice. Critics scrambled to find out who this C. S. Lewis was, in spite of the fact that he had already published four other books, and *Screwtape* gained him great attention. This attention was not received well back at Oxford. McGrath, in *C. S. Lewis: A Life*, writes:

Yet Lewis's academic reputation at Oxford was not well served in this way. He had unwisely declared himself to be a 'Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford' on the book's title page. There was much grumbling and sniping in Magdalen's Senior Common Room about the devaluation of the economic currency by such a rampantly populist book. Lewis won the hearts and minds of many through this book; yet he also alienated many whose support he might need if he were to secure an Oxford Chair in the future. (218)

It is easy to imagine the reaction of those same colleagues when, in 1950, Lewis published *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, a "children's book" that was the first of the *Chronicles of Narnia* series. Lewis continued to be denied a chair at Oxford, rekindling his longing for the sense of security he knew in Northern Ireland. In August of 1953, he wrote to his dear friend, Dom Bede Griffiths, a Catholic monk canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1999 as Saint Giovanni Calabria, "[T]omorrow I am crossing over (if God so have pleased) [for a five

week visit] to Ireland: my birthplace and dearest refuge” (Latin 53). In 1954, Lewis turned his back on Oxford’s rejection and accepted the position of Chair of Medieval and Renaissance English at Cambridge University. He thrived in his new professional community, commuting from his “Irish” home, the Kilns, to Cambridge until his death in 1963.

Though Swift’s and Lewis’s careers were hurt, respectively, by publishing *Tale* and *Screwtape*, these works were pivotal in launching their literary careers and reputations as intellectual forces. Undergoing four printings in the first year, Swift’s *Tale* caught the attention of the public with his cutting wit and razor-like attacks on religious pretensions. It became widely known that Swift had written *Tale*, in spite of his smiling denials. *Screwtape*, following Lewis’s broadcast talks on Christianity, was a perfectly engaging discussion of good versus evil that satisfied the spiritual needs of the war-beleaguered English and Irish. The work underwent six printings in 1942 alone. Both men were on their way to becoming admired and respected authors for generations.

## CONCLUSION

Swift and Lewis had extraordinary similarities in their lives up to their respective writings of *Tale* and *Screwtape*. Though this fact has been ignored by scholars, more important than the similarity is what Lewis and Swift did differently in spite of having led parallel lives. These differences represent deliberate choices they made and provide greater insights about the authors and these seminal works.

Emotionally, the two related to Ireland differently. Lewis embraced Northern Ireland as his soul's home. Swift felt trapped in Ireland. These attitudes directly affected the tone of their respective works. During his tutelage by W. T. Kirkpatrick and throughout his many years at Oxford and Cambridge, Lewis succeeded in creating "cocoon" of fellow Irish for himself. With the notable exception of the Inklings (Barfield, Williams, and Tolkien were all English citizens), almost all of Lewis's intimate social life and correspondence was associated with Irish friends and family. His attitude towards the English mellowed enough by 1941 to allow him to address *Screwtape* to citizens of both countries as well as the rest of the Christian world. Lewis was operating from a secure base in terms of his family/friends, financial prospects, and living conditions. Though the approach of Hitler threatened all of these aspects of his life, Lewis was certain of his Christian faith, and confident that he could help others cope with war and tragedy through deeper spiritual engagement. Not angry with humanity as Swift was, Lewis saw the need for change in a society facing a would-be conqueror. Thus, *Screwtape* offered for others the universally Christian path Lewis had discovered for himself, one which called for unity and a return to "the faith."

Swift, however, was going through a difficult and misanthropic period when he created *Tale*. His future as an author was unsure, his quality of life was below his expectations, his

confidence in the motivations of all Christian denominations was shaken, and his matrimonial prospects had just been thwarted. Furthermore, Swift had fled Kilroot and returned to Moor Park, fearful of the Scottish Presbyterians, who were threatening every Anglican minister in Ulster. In spite of his affinity for “things English,” Swift was without solid support, English or Irish, with the exception, of course, of Sir William Temple’s financial help. Temple would die in 1699 and was showing his age (almost seventy) in 1695-96 when Swift wrote *Tale*. As a result, Swift continued to look longingly at England as a land of promise, while Ireland seemed like a prison. Like Lewis, his attitude mellowed later and he would become a great defender of Ireland as it continued to be subjugated by the English. But when he wrote *Tale*, he was full of resentment, insecurity, and misanthropy. He was also, however, still eager to showcase his abilities as a writer (albeit “anonymously”) and perhaps the wildly creative act of writing *Tale* gave Swift an opportunity to “laugh himself back into religion.” In his article “The Mood of the Church and *Tale of a Tub*,” Robert M. Adams agrees that Swift was a “distinctly bitter man” during the writing of *Tale* (72), though critic John Middleton Murry, in 1955, described *Tale* as “genial, not savage; exuberant, not destructive” (86). It is difficult to imagine that Murry is correct. Swift’s genius lies in his ability to use his superior wit and irony to keep us laughing while he savages his targets.

Perhaps Lewis’s broader, more accepting worldview allowed him to restart his career successfully at Cambridge when he was blocked at Oxford. His fame, by that time (1754), was established as a published university don, as a writer of fantasy books, and as a renowned Christian apologist. He was marketable. Swift, however, having unleashed his venom in *Tale*, could not recover from the perceived disparagement of his Church and remained trapped in his Dean’s role. In spite of rising fame as a writer after *Gulliver’s Travels* was published (1726),

Swift was not marketable as a cleric. He made the most of his St. Patrick's Cathedral position as a visible platform from which to rail about English subjugation, but he would never be advanced to bishop.

Another important difference between Lewis and Swift was in the inclusivity or exclusivity of their interpretation of the Christian faith. Swift perceived exclusivity to be in his best interests as he wrote *Tale*, championing his denomination over others. Lewis was inclusive as he attempted to bring his fellow Christians together to defend their land. Swift's exclusivity message fomented passionate controversy between those who perceived themselves to be winners or losers in his parable of the three brothers. But in so doing, Swift generated popular debate on the religious and educational issues he addressed in *Tale* and gained himself the notoriety and readership that became the basis for the success of *Gulliver* and later writings.

Lewis had an easier time defining the enemy than Swift. They were the people dropping bombs nightly on innocent English and Irish citizens in 1940 and 1941. Lewis's choice of satire, though extraordinary for him as a writer and for his times, was a brilliantly light delivery system for a serious, unifying message. Swift was mired in factions and a literary atmosphere of lampooning as opposed to constructive debate. In *Tale*, he leapt into the fray using the prevalent style of the day, withering Juvenalian satire. His choice of genre was natural for him and his times, and he would continue to use satire for the rest of his career. The fact that *Tale* was successful as a popular, contemporary piece has more to do with Swift's brilliant and creative wit than his vituperative messages. He was one of many who were splitting hairs in the interpretation of church doctrines in order to categorize competing denominations as "the other" and, therefore, inferior.

Was Lewis influenced by Swift? Lewis admired Swift, especially his *Gulliver's Travels*,

and he took important cues from Swift in composing *Screwtape*. In Lewis's correspondence, Swift is mentioned often, including at least twice as one of his favorite and recommended authors (Collected 3: 1541 and 1571). There are several references to *Gulliver*, but no mention of *Tale*. However, in the Hooper-edited correspondence, Lewis mentions having read Swift's *Battle of the Books* (Collected 3: 863), which was invariably published in the same volume with *Tale*, implying, tantalizingly, that Lewis had a logical opportunity to study *Tale*. Lewis's decision to take a conciliatory tone on denominational differences may have been reinforced by understanding the boiling controversy Swift's *Tale* incurred by taking the opposite approach to those differences. *Gulliver* directly influenced *Screwtape*, as Lewis acknowledges in a 1953 letter to a friend, Vera Gilbert: "Screwtape as a 'stunt' idea (like Swift's *Lilliput* and *Brobdinag*) is only good for a short use. I never showed more discretion, I believe, than in cutting that book short and never writing a sequel. The very fact that people ask for more proves it was the right length" (Collected 3: 345). This letter was written in July 1957, and Lewis did, of course, write a playful "sequel" in December 1959 for *The Saturday Evening Post* entitled "Screwtape Proposes a Toast." But that brief, comical toast, given at a gathering of devils, was more of a goodbye from *Screwtape* than a reprise of his then-famous letters.

*Screwtape* is the more timeless work. It is read, studied, and discussed in C. S. Lewis Societies, church groups, and literary circles all over the world today. It is also timeless because the Devil, as a symbol of evil, continues to plague humans and our imperfect nature. Its message, as Hitler advanced, was as relevant then as it is now. Yet, *Tale*, after over 300 years of critical analysis, is still the subject of debate on the meaning of its convoluted structure, the explication of many of its allusions, Swift's questioned sincerity as a cleric, etc. To the degree that there is still debate, *Tale* is timeless, but the content is focused on the conditions of his Church in the

contexts of history and politics of the 1690s, when his message was exclusionary and extremely complex. Further, his work is more engaged in the then-current debates and winning the arguments (ancients versus moderns and denomination versus denomination) than in speaking universally for future generations. Swift would present a more universal message with Gulliver when his bitterness, though not his wit and willingness to skewer flawed mankind, had subsided. Both of these brilliant men, however, became convinced that their societies needed a rebirth of spirituality and chose highly creative religious satire to convey their respective messages and “laugh us into religion.”

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