



Internal Dualism and Moral Disintegration in C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*

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Abstract:

The dissertation analyses C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters* as a Christian Apologetic novel, which is presented in an epistolary form. It examines the intricacies of the inner dichotomy of self and the paradoxes presented as a result of contrary propositions made within the character. Through an interdisciplinary study of psychology and literature, this study draws on the theoretical framework of psychological dissonance to understand the internally and externally existing dualities. From a literary standpoint, satire and irony are employed in the text by the conspiring entities to add literary depth. This allows the reader to be deeply reflexive and consider morally upright stances and question ethics. This theological fiction contributes significantly to literature through literary technique, demonstrating how a narrative functions as means of persuasion, spiritual inquiry, and an exploration of the human condition.

Keywords: Morality, Dualism, Dissonance, Ambiguity, Irony.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Screwtape letters by C.S. Lewis occupy a unique position in the 20th century literary studies. This work is satire and an epistolary narrative, with subtle underlyings of moral psychology. In his early days, it was largely seen as devotional work that arose out of the wars in Britain. However, the complexity of the narrative was recognized later. The novel explored moral decline and gradual corruption of the self, all of which is presented through irony, satire and literary brilliance. Significant research has been conducted on this text, it has been explored from theological and moral frameworks through a reader response approach.

Research studies have indicated that the novel functioned as prose to encourage the modern era society during the time of war. The demonic perspective works in alignment with what is considered morally wrong, clarifying the importance of Christianity and its doctrine.

David C. Downing argues on the importance of the novel's form and inverted moral language. The literary technique can be seen as reverse psychology and the readers must continuously reverse and evaluate whatever that is presented. Interpretations and meaning are not just received passively, but reconstructed as the reader response to the text.

INTRODUCTION

Human existence and consciousness are experienced differently, and not as a unified whole. Human beings often find themselves in conflicting positions such as: encompassing desires and paradoxical moral obligations. This internal struggle is due to different societal expectations and ideologies of culture, theology, psychology, and philosophy. Which is evident in choices, judgements, and decisions made in everyday life. This leads to the construction of personal identity and the presence of co-existing internal forces. Which then coincides with the term internal dualism, presenting a struggle between reason, conscience, inclinations, and desires.

Aristotle said that when an individual makes a choice, there are always two things going on. One is what that the individual wants and the other is what that individual thinks is right. He believed that a person has a sense of what is right, and if you ignore it long enough then you completely extinguish whatever that is right. If you don't go that far then there is always this voice talking and telling you whatever that is right. C.S. Lewis asks the question, where does that come from. C.S. Lewis was a prominent British literary figure, philosopher and academician, being a deeply learned man he uses colloquial language to make his work accessible to the general public.

Lewis said, "Faith, in the sense in which I am here using the word, is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods." (Lewis, *Mere Christianity* 123)¹

In *Mere Christianity* he talks about why Christianity is good and plausible. After a point when you understand something is good, you ask why it's good and what it is that makes it good. To recognize what is good in humans is to recognize the being in them. There are standards and hierarchies, some are greater than others while some are lesser. Soon it is realized that humans cannot be the greatest thing in the universe, as they are mortals. They have the gift of reason, they learn through experience and order, but time is a barrier. What would a being be like who knew everything. He is the being that does not decay, eternal, and immortal.

Christianity was introduced to him early on, but he couldn't accept it until he thought that it was not self-contradictory. Christianity in its approach reconciles the universe with its claims of justice. God is good and represents everything good that is why he creates everything good, true, and loveable. This argues to prove that Christianity makes significant sense. Lewis talks about why Christianity and its moral stances are true. What is good and why is it good, what makes it good. The journey towards God begins with the understanding that seeing is what

would make sense to the world, but it's God who makes sense of what doesn't. God's nature, order and his ordinance of justice, and morality is what makes sense.

Clive Staples Lewis was born at the end of the Victorian Era. He lived through a tumultuous period of human history, through two world wars and the coming of nuclear age. With advancing technology he witnessed changes in British society and the roles of women and men. He focused less on sociological and political aspects of society and focused on matters of perennial concern, questions of God and humanity, the purpose of life, and what awaits us after we die. He had to face the changes and developments in society, but firmly focused on the unchanging challenges that affect all people, the theological moral questions all humans have to address.

He was born in a Christian family in the north of Ireland. His family was Anglican and he was always taken to church. He said, " I was taught the usual things and made to say my prayers" (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 7)². At his tender age of nine after his mother passed away, Lewis's father had chosen the worst of schools for Lewis to be educated in. It was an independent School in England. The school had a headmaster who could have stepped out of a novel by Charles Dickens like the wicked headmaster in *Nicolas Nickleby*. He was sadistic and was certified insane, he died in an Asylum. Lewis was more of a teacher's pet than a victim, but it took him years to overcome the trauma he faced from the school and the cruel headmaster.

Despite these struggles he didn't continue to stop being a Christian, but during this period was when he became an effective believer. He was taken to an Anglo catholic church as a kid, it acquainted Lewis with the " doctrines of Christianity as distinct from general uplift taught by clergymen who obviously believed them" he began to fear for his soul and he said, "I began seriously to read my Bible and to attempt to obey my conscience" (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*

34)² but this religious seriousness didn't last for too long cause of its excessive serious religiosity and duty to saying prayers.

He had intellectual doubts about the true claims of Christianity, it arose from the study of classics of Ancient Greek and Rome, as he was told these classics and myths weren't true but Christianity was true and the only true faith trustworthy. He was not troubled by the fact that Christianity was the only true religion but he was troubled by how every other tradition was false and that is what perplexed him. Lewis gradually fell away from the faith due to these reasons, abandoning Christianity " with the greatest relief " (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 66)² and remained in this state until his late 20s until he regained his faith.

Lewis was first and foremost an academic and not a Christian Apologist or a philosopher. He taught at Oxford for thirty years and finished his career at University of Cambridge. His subject for his academic career was English literature, he had studied classical philosophy in UG but also taught philosophy. We would oversimplify Lewis if we think of him as just an English critic or a writer of children's fiction or a Christian Apologist. He also was a philosopher, an ethicist and his first lecture series at Oxford was titled "the good and it's position among the values" and the importance of "Moral good." (Evans 163)⁵

The main thing he spoke about is how morality and moral values are objective. Moral value is universally held to be objective and we learn moral value by practice.

Just as there is an objective physical environment comprised of three dimensions: the ground, the sky, and the near and far so there is an objectively real moral environment. It is not something we have invented of ourselves, it is something we have learned and discovered. To recognize what is objective moral reality, is part of what defines us as human beings.

Morality is found and not made, its objectively there whether we subjectively like it or not. In Lewis's book *Miracles*, he talks about morality and said, " it is because all morality is based on

such self-evident principles that we say to a man, when we would recall him to right conduct, Be Reasonable." (Lewis, *Miracles* 44)³ cause reason is the organ of morality.

Lewis argues that what makes us all human beings is this awareness of certain irrefutable and axiomatic moral truths, which he calls the first principles of practical reason " THE TAO" summary term for the basis of good and evil and this is not confined to Christianity or the west.

Coming to the second point, moral values are universally held to be objective. All cultures exhibit some awareness to this fact, to ground his stance he quotes multiple historical figures like Plato, Aristotle, Saint Paul, Jesus John Locke, Shelly etc. saying the human family is a real family with certain core values in common, it's united in its roots. To say that morality is subjective is to withdraw oneself from a tradition of human wisdom. To have subjective morality is to fundamentally work on a person's willpower, but it's not always sustained, it's irrational by rationality but it's motivated by impulses, motivations, weather or random association of ideas.

Lewis admired George Orwell's allegory on Animal farm. In Russian communism all animals rise and overthrow wicked human beings who run the farm, and the animals trust the pigs to run the farm for them, and they do it better than the humans. It works for some time but gradually things turn south, it ends with the bitter realization that the pigs are not better than humans. The pigs were interested in only acquiring power, not to further make anything good. So they turn out just like the wicked humans. The solution to this is " a dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny and an obedience which is not slavery." (Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* 73)⁴ If we give up on universal morality, we are on a short road to prison, madness, and tyranny.

Moral value is to be practiced and participated in, it's not an inert system of thought rather a matrix of goodness, a way of life. Another name for Tao is practical reason. It is something

you must exercise practically. Moral action is not understood under rigidities of concepts, it is dynamic, either you are courageous or not, you are honest or not, chaste or not. We are humans and we are subjects, we have perspectives, but there is also objective value and we can agree to it for better or worse.

The question of dualism according to Lewis is: the belief that there are two equal and independent powers at the back of everything, one of them is good and other is bad, and that this universe is a battlefield in which they fight out an endless war. If this stance of dualism is true then both these powers of good and evil should be equally powerful and equally eternal. They are independent of each other. Why should we side with good or evil, as each of these stances regards itself as the right way to approach reality, which is superior? The inference is that, one is actually the right way of approaching reality, one of the powers is wrong and the other is right. However, when you say that you are introducing into the universe a third thing along these two powers, you put in a measure and standard of goodness where one power matches this standard. So, if this third entity judges these powers it has to be in itself more original and fundamental than either of the two powers. Lewis did not regard good and evil, and heaven and hell as two equal and opposite things. If they are not equal and opposite then who is the opposite of the devil?

It's not God because the devil is a created being, a fallen angel. The opposite of this fallen created being cannot be the opposite of an eternal perfect being we call God. The opposite of Satan is Micheal the archangel, the leader of the unfallen angels. Hell and heaven are not opposite places for human beings, and hell was never made for men at all.

Hell in Screwtape letters is not a bottomless pit of sulphur and fire but a government department, a bureaucracy with secretaries and undersecretaries filling memorandums. The main character Screwtape is a demon depicted in an unfamiliar way, we do not have an

insinuating thorned figure in red delighting in his wickedness, instead we have a serious-minded bureaucrat who is a pedantic and sententious uncle, presumably giving advice to his nephew Wormwood - the junior tempter.

The book is a satire; the two epigraphs make it plain at the outset of the book. Martin Luther said " the best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to texts of scripture, is to meet and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn." (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* vii)⁶ Thomas More wrote "The devil... the proud spirit... cannot endure to be mocked." (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* vii)⁶

There is some humor involved in the choice of these two sources: Luther and More. As these two personas were on the opposite sides of the reformation. They did not agree on God and the Church, but they did agree about the devil which is ironic. The patient is the main objective of the book, whom these devils try to tempt and pull down to the kingdom of hell, the government bureaucracy. Lewis satires not just the demons but human beings in general, through which he exposes our own moral compromises and evasions. One does not expect so much wisdom through a satirical book, yet it offers wisdom beyond our expectations securing its place as a classic.

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