

*Sehnsucht*: The C. S. Lewis Journal

# **Sehnsucht: The C. S. Lewis Journal**

Volume 13, 2019

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**Typesetting**  
*William Gentrup*  
Tempe, Arizona

**Society Treasurer**  
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ISSN: 1940-5537

ISBNs: 978-1-7252-5508-1 (pbk); 978-1-7252-5509-8 (hdbk); 978-1-7252-5510-4 (e-book)

See back of this volume for submission details, copyright, and subscription form.

Published by Wipf and Stock Publishers, 199 West 8th Avenue, Eugene OR, 97401  
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## General Editor's Note

Last year's volume of *Sehnsucht* included a Call for Papers inviting scholars to submit essays on the topic of variant readings in the works of C. S. Lewis. A few of these variant readings are better known among Lewis readers. For example, in his 1952 Preface to *Mere Christianity*, Lewis acknowledged that he inserted additions to his BBC radio broadcasts scripts before those talks were initially published as three individual volumes and further adjustments made as those three volumes were combined into one book. Walter Hooper has pointed out that one of the "most substantial alternations" Lewis made in this process was not an addition but a shortening of the "Shocking Alternative" argument he made against the idea of Jesus being simply a "great human teacher."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Paul F. Ford precisely detailed the differences between American and British versions of the Narnia stories, especially in the case of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.<sup>2</sup> Yet apart from these notable examples, variant readings within the Lewis corpus are often unfamiliar fields, if not entirely untilled soil, when it comes to Lewis scholarship. The first two articles in the present volume of *Sehnsucht* are intentionally set in that neglected terrain.

First, Brenton D. G. Dickieson and Charlie W. Starr uncover for us "The Archangel Fragment," an imaginative attempt by Lewis to create angelic correspondence as a counterpoint to *The Screwtape Letters*. If Lewis had not abandoned this project, would the words of heavenly counsel have been focused on the very "patient" Screwtape wanted to deceive and devour? Would there have been a second, and greatly expanded, edition of *The Screwtape Letters*? Second, Arend Smilde explores two different

<sup>1</sup> Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1996), 308.

<sup>2</sup> Paul F. Ford, *Companion to Narnia: A Complete Guide to the Magical World of C. S. Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia, Fifth Edition* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 471-2.

versions of Lewis's sermon "Transposition." Why did Lewis make a change to it and what light does that change shed on his other writings? The historical essay by Joel Heck, on the interaction between Lewis and Alec Vidler, and the literary essay by Lauren Spohn, on *The Pilgrim's Regress*, round out our first section.

This year's poetry section marks the official entry of Randall VanderMey as our new Poetry Editor. Four poems by both new and returning *Sehnsucht* authors are quickly followed by an extensive reviews section. Review Editor Crystal Hurd has amassed a total of twenty-one reviews covering new books, new play productions, and the Hollywood movie *Tolkien*. The efforts of the entire Editorial Body are significant, and I remain grateful for what each editor contributes as well as for the labors of each author. As always, *Sehnsucht* remains committed to the collaborative goal of upholding the highest of academic standards while fostering new work on the life and writings of C. S. Lewis.

BRUCE R. JOHNSON  
October 2019  
St. Crispin's Day



*Articles*





# The Archangel Fragment and C. S. Lewis's World-Building Project

BRENTON D. G. DICKIESON AND CHARLIE W. STARR

When it comes to writing books, we usually cannot know about the paths not taken—a life principle Aslan reminds Narnian heroes of from time to time. Archival research, however, sometimes allows us to discern something of the direction an author might have gone. In this article, we argue that, from a few hints in the Bodleian archive and elsewhere, we have discovered C. S. Lewis's singular attempt at an Archangelic sequel to *The Screwtape Letters*. By analyzing this small fragment and its contextual clues, we can hear the heaven-scented voice of this anti-Screwtape world. Through this discovery we can unlock hidden links among Lewis's fiction project of the late 1930s and early 1940s and the ways he created the speculative worlds of those stories, including a spirit of playfulness and discovery, themes critical to his theological perspective, and potential links that draw his 1937–1945 work together into a cohesive whole. Finally, considering this fragment provides an opportunity to test the Lewis Handwriting Chart and open possibilities for further archival research.

## ***The Screwtape Letters: The Wrong Kind of Book***

*The Screwtape Letters* is one of C. S. Lewis's most beloved books; it was not so loved by Lewis himself. "On my own view," Lewis wrote in a 4 July 1955 letter to Fr. Peter Millward, "*Perelandra* is worth 20 *Screwtapes*."<sup>1</sup> This

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 4 July 1955, in C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. by Walter Hooper, 3 vols. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004-7), 3:627.

antipathy toward *Screwtape* might have been born of the book's popularity and the fact that Lewis's personal favorite of the period, *Perelandra*, never had the same response. Or it may simply have been that he found it painful to write.<sup>2</sup> When asked to follow up *Screwtape* with a sequel, Lewis showed great restraint, admitting that it was a "stunt" with limited possibilities and best in small doses.<sup>3</sup> Though Lewis sometimes referred readers to the text for spiritual advice, he rarely showed anything more than patient endurance with the book that gave him his first popular audience.

However, C. S. Lewis did return eventually to the modern world's favorite demonic pedant with *Screwtape's* "Toast," first published in *The Saturday Evening Post* in December 1959. In the preface to a later edition of *Screwtape* that includes "Screwtape Proposes a Toast," Lewis admitted that

I had, moreover, a sort of grudge against my book [*Screwtape*] for not being a different book which no one could write. Ideally, *Screwtape's* advice to Wormwood should have been balanced by archangelical advice to the patient's guardian angel. Without this the picture of human life is lopsided.<sup>4</sup>

Why, then, did Lewis not write *The Michael Letters* or some such counterpoint to *Screwtape*? He answers the question, at least partially, within this New Preface:

But who could supply the deficiency? Even if a man—and he would have to be a far better man than I—could scale the spiritual heights required, what 'answerable style' could he use? For the style would really be part of the content. Mere advice would be no good; every sentence would have to smell of Heaven.<sup>5</sup>

We see within this note the same predicament to be found in scholarly attention to Milton's Satan: the problem of scaling "spiritual heights" in imaginative literature. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton's Satan is such "a magnificent poetical achievement which engages the attention and excites

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 2:830.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 3:345.

<sup>4</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters, with Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, rev. ed. (New York: Collier Books, 1982), xiv.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, xiv.

the admiration of the reader” that all good in the poem pales next to Satan’s malevolence.<sup>6</sup>

Why was Lewis able to write the character of Screwtape so well and understand the intimate nature of temptation? It was neither theological training nor socio-psychological research, but, as Lewis says in the New Preface, “‘My heart’—I need no other’s—‘showeth me the wickedness of the ungodly.’”<sup>7</sup> This quotation, from the Book of Common Prayer version of Psalm 36:1, is a tight summary of Lewis’s argument in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*:

It remains, of course, true that Satan is the best drawn of Milton’s characters. The reason is not hard to find. Of the major characters whom Milton attempted he is incomparably the easiest to draw. Set a hundred poets to tell the same story and in ninety of the resulting poems Satan will be the best character. In all but a few writers the ‘good’ characters are the least successful, and every one who has ever tried to make even the humblest story ought to know why. To make a character worse than oneself it is only necessary to release imaginatively from control some of the bad passions which, in real life, are always straining at the leash; the Satan, the Iago, the Becky Sharp, within each of us, is always there and only too ready, the moment the leash is slipped, to come out and have in our books that holiday we try to deny them in our lives. But if you try to draw a character better than yourself, all you can do is to take the best moments you have had and to imagine them prolonged and more consistently embodied in action. But the real high virtues which we do not possess at all, we cannot depict except in a purely external fashion.<sup>8</sup>

Lewis argues that we cannot know what it is like to be significantly better than ourselves, for the “whole inner landscape” of a truly good person is one we have never seen.<sup>9</sup> It is clear from literature, Lewis argues, that “Heaven understands Hell” while “Hell does not understand Heaven.”<sup>10</sup> It is “Napoleonic” blindness that we all share as limited human beings, whereas

<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 94.

<sup>7</sup> Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, xiii.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis, *Preface to Paradise Lost*, 100-1.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis, *Preface to Paradise Lost*, 101.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis, *Preface to Paradise Lost*, 101.

projecting ourselves into a wicked character is simple. John Milton has never truly experienced an angelic point of view, but, as a normal human being, he “has trodden the burning marl, pursued vain war with heaven, and turned aside with leer malign.”<sup>11</sup>

Why could Milton draw Satan so well? Because he knew his own heart. And what deficiencies there are in imagining the divinely good characters—and Lewis thinks the gap of literary quality overdrawn by modern critics—are due to the imaginative leap Milton needed to make in creating sympathetic portrayals of them. This was the predicament of Lewis’s own treatment of angels and demons. There was a kind of spiritual danger in writing *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis admits, for he remained too long in “the diabolical attitude,” a world that “was all dust, grit, thirst, and itch.”<sup>12</sup>

Writing *Screwtape* presented Lewis with two authorial challenges: first, there was the spiritual cramp of writing from the miserific point of view; second, there was the imaginative difficulty of answering *Screwtape* with the angelic perspective. Readers connect with the spiritual advice and cultural criticism of *The Screwtape Letters*, including its wit, humor, immediacy, and subversive point of view. But how could Lewis capture the opposite—a heavenly point of view of unbounding light—with either the wisdom or rhetorical skill required to honor both the exercise and the perspective?

### The Archangel Letters: The Book Which No One Could Write

The answer to this question is the reason *Screwtape* was never “balanced by archangelical advice” as Lewis desired. There is evidence, however, to suggest that Lewis tried to write a book along the lines of *The Gabriel Correspondence* or something like it. Lewis admits to another author, Harry Blamires, that “I had thought of having letters to the guardian angel from an archangel side by side with those from *Screwtape* to *Wormwood* in my *Letters* but funk’d it.”<sup>13</sup> This note suggests that Lewis at least attempted to write from an archangelic point of view, even if failing to bring it to fulfillment.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis, *Preface to Paradise Lost*, 101.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, xiv.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 3:440.

Another Lewis scholar has discovered evidence of an attempt by Lewis to write spiritual direction from an angelic perspective. In Edwin Brown's *In Pursuit of C. S. Lewis*, he mentions Lewis owning a book called *Here Are Ladies* by James Stephens, from which Dr. Brown has published a few notes and photos.<sup>14</sup> On a blank page at the end of the Stephens book, where the open space was apparently tempting, Brown found this cryptic note written in Lewis's hand:

I tried v. hard to get hold of the letters on the other side—from the archangel to the guardian angel. But the only bit that ever came through didn't make much sense. It was "The children continued instructing their bears in the bend of the great river."<sup>15</sup>

Brown concludes, "I have yet to find a Lewis scholar who can interpret that mysterious response from the heavenly realm."<sup>16</sup> We believe that we are able to offer at least a partial answer here by linking this note with other archival materials for a discovery of what we call the Archangel Fragment.

Of particular interest here is Lewis's language of artistic discovery: Lewis tried to "get hold of the letters on the other side" but only some "ever came through." What does this mean that the letters failed to come through? Part of the answer to this question is that artistic production is a process of discovery as much as invention, material that "bubbles up" in an author's

<sup>14</sup> Edwin W. Brown, *In Pursuit of C. S. Lewis: Adventures in Collecting His Works* (Indianapolis: Proleptikos, 2006), 113. James Stephens, *Here Are Ladies* (London: Macmillian, 1913). As a teenager, Lewis had encountered James Stephens's writings, but it is unclear when after 1913 he encountered *Here are Ladies*, a collection of short stories and poems. "The Threepenny-piece" is a short story about a scoundrel, Brien O'Brien, who is given a threepenny-piece at his wake to take beyond the grave. As he is dragged to hell he drops his threepenny-piece, which is found by a young seraph named Cuchulain, who finds this threepenny-piece compellingly beautiful. Convinced he was robbed of his last coin, O'Brien becomes so fixated at the injustice of it that he cannot properly experience his hellish tortures. His cries of injustice win over the hoards to sympathy and unrest, so that "ten million billions of voices" in hell are raised in protest (129). When hell petitions paradise for the return of the lost coin, Cuchulain finds he cannot give it up. As the wills of Cuchulain and O'Brien are destructively set, the judge Rhadamanthus chooses a Solomon-like solution to the problem of the lost-and-found coin. While it is possible that the Archangel Fragment discussed below is a response to this story, it is more likely that the character of Screwtape is a counterpoint to the impatient, bureaucratic efficiency of Rhadamanthus.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, *In Pursuit of C. S. Lewis*, 113.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, *In Pursuit of C. S. Lewis*, 113.

mind and then is poured into a form<sup>17</sup>—not merely a process of where an author “makes things up,” but a mysterious convergence of emerging idea or image and personal shaping.<sup>18</sup> Beyond this, if we think back to *Screwtape* itself, we find a connection to the language Lewis uses about that writing process and this note that Brown discovered. In the handwritten preface to *The Screwtape Letters*, dated 5 July 1941 and published in 2013 by one of the authors of this article, Brenton Dickieson, Lewis uses similar language: “Nothing will induce me to reveal how my friend Dr. Ransom got hold of the script which is translated in the following pages.”<sup>19</sup> The published preface suggested that the *Screwtape* correspondence *fell* into Lewis’s hands. In the original handwritten preface, where Lewis’s fictional character Dr. Ransom is described as the translator of the demonic letters, the same “got hold of” language. This language is mirrored in the cryptic sentence discovered by Brown. Moreover, we learn in the handwritten preface that *The Screwtape Letters* were originally written in Old Solar and that Ransom has translated that “primitive speech of all rational creatures inhabiting the solar system”<sup>20</sup> into English for WWII-era readers. In both this note and the handwritten preface, there is a sense of discovery and the elusive nature of correspondence from another world.

The manuscript evidence is tantalizing, providing interesting but limited help in interpreting the Lewis marginalia that Brown discovered. Still, the note about children and bears is critical to the query about Lewis’s attempt to write an angelic letter series. Much of his own relationship to *Screwtape* is known, such as the initial ease and growing discomfort of writing and yet his willingness to play with the idea by writing the handwriting preface, the “Toast,” and at least an attempt at the archangelic advice letters. It was this last bit of information from Brown that proved a key to a startling discovery. We believe we have found within a Bodleian archive notebook Lewis’s attempt to pen a letter from the angelic point of view.

<sup>17</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to be Said,” in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, ed. by Walter Hooper (New York: Harvest, 1994) 35.

<sup>18</sup> C. S. Lewis, “It Began with a Picture...,” in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, ed. by Walter Hooper (New York: Harvest, 1994) 42.

<sup>19</sup> Brenton D. G. Dickieson, “The Unpublished Preface to C. S. Lewis’s *The Screwtape Letters*,” in *Notes and Queries*, 60. 2 (2013), 297.

<sup>20</sup> Dickieson, “The Unpublished Preface,” 297.