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Diabolical ventriloquism: A Case study in rhetorical transcendence with C. S. Lewis's infamous imp Screwtape

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DIABOLICAL VENTRILOQUISM: A CASE STUDY IN THE
RHETORIC OF ETERNITY WITH C.S. LEWIS'S
INFAMOUS IMP SCREWTAPE

by

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Bachelor of Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
2007

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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with C. S. Lewis's Infamous Imp Screwtape**

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ABSTRACT

**Diabolical Ventriloquism: A Case Study in the Rhetoric of Eternity
With C.S. Lewis's Infamous Imp Screwtape**

by

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Most religious discourse is predicated on the assumption that our choices in life have eternal implications. For those who subscribe to a belief in an afterlife, rhetoric which exploits eternity to form attitudes and induce actions can be especially persuasive. This study performs a detailed analysis of a particularly compelling case of the rhetoric of eternity during the twentieth century: C.S. Lewis's fictional demon Screwtape. In *The Screwtape Letters* and "Screwtape Proposes a Toast," Lewis offers readers an eternal, though diabolical, perspective of the "modern" intellectual climate during the twentieth century. By puppeteering a demon in prose, Lewis satirically lampoons secular humanism and attempts to inculcate his version of Christianity in his readers. This analysis utilizes a theoretical framework based in ancient rhetorical figure *prosopopoeia* and the work of Kenneth Burke, specifically his notions of perspective by incongruity and ultimate terms. The Screwtape discourses constitute an artistically resourceful attempt to transform an audience's worldview from the *temporal* to the *eternal*.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Hmm. . . Could it be . . . Satan?”

Church Lady,

Saturday Night Live

In his now notorious March 1983 “Evil Empire” address to the National Association of Evangelicals, President Ronald Reagan cited a curious novel from the 1940s to bolster his nuclear policy:

It was C.S. Lewis who, in his unforgettable *Screwtape Letters*, wrote: ‘The greatest evil is not done . . . in concentration camps and labor camps. In those we see its final result. But it is conceived and ordered; moved, seconded, carried and minuted in clear, carpeted, warmed, and well-lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voice.’

Reagan follows this reference with an urgent warning to his audience:

So, I urge you to speak out against those who would place the United States in a position of military and moral inferiority. You know, I've always believed that old *Screwtape* reserved his best efforts for those of you in the Church. So, in your discussions of the nuclear freeze proposals, I urge you to beware the temptation of pride --the temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and label both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of

an evil empire, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.¹

G. Thomas Goodnight observes that in this address, Reagan engaged in the rhetorical act of spiritualization, “transform[ing] administration policy from the secular to the spiritual realm.”² Although the president’s casual allusion to *The Screwtape Letters* is often eclipsed by his famous “evil empire” expression, the reference was, for his immediate audience, of particular significance. C.S. Lewis’s fictional demon Screwtape embodied the intangible notion of evil in a unique and rhetorically significant way. Reagan’s facetious and seemingly inconsequential mentioning of “Old Screwtape,” therefore, served as a point of identification with the audience and, more importantly, a foundation for his spiritualization of the nuclear debate. By framing the proposals for a nuclear freeze as the demonic ploy of Screwtape, Mr. Reagan demonized his opposition and thereby claimed that *his* politics were vouchsafed by God. The president’s strategic reference to Screwtape recalls Lewis’s wider rhetorical use of the imaginary demon years earlier during World War II.

Originally published as a thirty-one part serial in the British daily *The Guardian* in 1941, *The Screwtape Letters* (*TSL* hereafter) became an immediate best-seller in Britain and the United States.³ As an exercise in imaginative satire, the novel assumes the form of personal letters written from a veteran demon, Screwtape, to his novice-nephew Wormwood. Throughout *TSL*, Screwtape proffers advice in the art of temptation, instructing Wormwood on how to subtly lead his “patient” (a British man) away from “The Enemy” (God) and into the clutches of “Our Father Below” (Satan).

Lewis conceived of the *TSL* one Sunday in 1940 while sitting in church. In a letter to his brother Warnie, Lewis explained that he was “struck by an idea for a book which I think would be both useful and entertaining . . . The idea would be to give all the psychology of temptation from the *other* point of view.”⁴ Throughout the thirty-one “letters,” *Screwtape* broaches a variety of topics from the perspective of Hell, including modern philosophy, prayer, dating, war, and death, thus penetrating what Lewis called the “veil of familiarity” and exposing the “true” nature of reality. In so doing, Lewis satirically erects a specific worldview - namely his own *Lewisonian* version of Christianity. The unique novel quickly propelled Lewis to international fame, eventually landing him on the cover of *Time Magazine* (September 8, 1947), where he was pictured with a little devil standing on one shoulder.⁵ *TSL* has experienced a resurgence of interest in the twenty-first century, evidenced by a recently released dramatic audio recording by Radio Theater, a theatrical stage adaptation and talk of a big-budget motion picture.

Eighteen years after the initial appearance of *TSL*, Lewis once more utilized the technique of what he called “diabolical ventriloquism” in the short essay titled, “*Screwtape Proposes a Toast*” (SPT hereafter). SPT originally appeared in the popular right-leaning American magazine *The Saturday Evening Post* on December 19, 1959.⁶ Whereas *TSL* primarily satirizes the life of the individual, SPT lampoons the much more political issue of public education in America during the Cold War – an especially controversial topic after the launch of *Sputnik 1* in 1957. The text records *Screwtape*’s toast at the banquet for a graduating class of junior tempters. *Screwtape* delights in the lack of excellence in Western culture, pointing to poor education standards as the culprit.

Thus, through the guise of *Screwtape*, Lewis argues that the two major voices of the public education debate during the Cold War really represented “good” – traditional pedagogical practices - and “evil” – progressive education tendencies.

These two texts, *TSL* and *SPT*, comprise what I henceforth refer to as the “*Screwtape* discourses.” Lewis’s rhetoric offers readers “equipment for living” in the modern age. The *Screwtape* discourses erect a bifurcated world of Good versus Evil, thereby spiritualizing virtually every aspect of the modern human experience. Lewis ultimately offers a rhetoric of *eternity* which attempts to transcend material temporality.

Purpose and Rationale

Despite the popularity of *TSL* and rhetorical richness of Lewis’s “diabolical ventriloquism,” no study has yet accounted for the overtly suasory qualities of Lewis’s “*Screwtapian*” prose. This thesis offers such a critique by performing a comprehensive analysis of Lewis’s *Screwtape* discourses with respect to their rhetoricity. While popular reception does not necessarily make a discourse worth studying,⁷ I argue that *Screwtape*’s lasting cultural ubiquity emanates directly from the rhetorical artistry displayed in the texts. Through *Screwtape*, Lewis offers an impressive satirical argument which stupefies and transcends the “modern” secular worldview and replaces it with Lewisonian Christianity.

This project aims to explore Lewis’s rhetorical strategy in the *Screwtape* discourses and discuss the implications of his spiritualization of otherwise secular topics. Through studying *Screwtape*, I hope to offer further insight into the power of religious

rhetoric – specifically the rhetoric of eternity. I should note that this is *not* a study of C.S. Lewis himself. Detailed biographical accounts of Lewis can be found on the bookshelves of any university library – this will not be one of them. While Lewis’s life is interesting and even inspirational to some degree, I mention biographic material only insofar as it illuminates the texts. As such, I do not claim to be a so called “Lewis scholar,” but rather a *rhetorical* scholar. Furthermore, I make no attempt to credit or discredit Lewis’s views of modernism or religion. That is, I do not intend to preach Christianity, atheism, or anything in-between. Instead, my goal in this project is to elucidate Lewis’s Screwtapian strategy and to discuss its implications.

The Screwtape discourses warrant a comprehensive critical treatment for several reasons. First and most important, the discourses reveal an especially fascinating instance of the interaction between rhetoric and religion. Notwithstanding the widespread disregard of religion in academia, Christianity continues to represent a significant force in twenty-first-century Western society and politics.⁸ Recent scholarship has begun to acknowledge this fact. According to American historian George Marsden, much of the accepted historical scholarship is unsubstantiated because of its lack of regard for religion. He claims that, “the standards for much of the study of humanity were shaped around the assumption that religion would not have to be taken seriously in order to understand the modern world,” yet, as Marsden demonstrates in his work, this assumption has been proven false: “Explaining political and social phenomena without regard for religious underpinnings proves incomplete and, much of the time, inaccurate. Academics, however, are often slow to abandon their interpretive traditions.”⁹ Thus, both

historians and rhetoricians would greatly benefit from understanding the presence and function of religiously charged discourse in Western society.

Religious doctrine, ritual, and practice depend on the strategic use of language. Indeed, religion is but a construct of human-symbols.¹⁰ Moreover, most religions purport to be founded on what we might call *deistic ventriloquism* – instances where humans speak as the mouthpiece of God(s). Foundational religious documents including the Torah, the Christian Bible, and the Qur'an clearly illustrate the alleged divine practice of puppeteering mortals; modern day prophets, oracles, mystics, pastors, and even laymen still claim to hear the celestial voice of God or the malevolent murmurs of Satan pressing them towards specific ends;¹¹ and, as evidenced by Reagan's speech earlier, even political argumentation intermittently employs appeals to "righteousness" as support for policy. Consequently, the study of religious texts like the Screwtape discourses can greatly enhance our understanding of how religious rhetoric shapes modern culture.

Second, the Screwtape discourses illustrate, perhaps more than any other modern religious text, the advantages and pitfalls of rhetorical *demonization*. In an effort to make sense of the needless pain and suffering in the world, most cultures affirm the existence of "evil." Jeffery Burton Russell, a leading expert in demonology, finds that most cultures feel evil as a "purposeful force" and, therefore, typically personify it in some malevolent entity.¹² In the popular Western imagination – heavily influenced by Judeo-Christian beliefs – the notion of evil is regularly personified in the persons of Satan (the Devil) and his demons. For centuries, religious leaders and politicians have popularized the belief that individuals, factions, and even entire countries can be manipulated by the forces of

Hell. Scholars regularly refer to this practice as *demonization*. Russell argues that whether or not the Devil *actually* exists is of minimal significance; Demons are *real* insofar as their presence in human thought and discourse. Despite regular efforts to disparage rhetorical demonization, (e.g. Dana Carvey’s sardonic and iconic character the “Church Lady” from *Saturday Night Live*, as quoted in the epigraph above), it remains a viable strategy in twenty-first century discourse, as illustrated by George W. Bush’s foreign policy (discussed below).

Throughout both *TSL* and *SPT*, Lewis clearly engages in the rhetorical strategy of demonization with his puppet Screwtape. Although Lewis by no means invented the art of demonic impersonation, he certainly made the most ample use of the trope.¹³ It should be noted that Lewis’s Screwtape is not Satan; he is a mere servant of his “Father Below.” I contend that this choice actually works to Lewis’s advantage. As one demon among many, Screwtape carries all the clout of ultimate “evil” while allowing Lewis to be a bit more playful and jocular. Lewis can attribute any “errors” in the character’s judgment to his subservient role in Hell’s hierarchy.

Third, Lewis’s Screwtape discourses represent exceptionally resourceful and artistic responses to significant rhetorical problems. As a proponent of the “Old Western Order,” Lewis faced the considerable challenge of relating “archaic” Christian principles to a modern audience. Lewis packages an ancient message of “truth” in a fresh and engaging form – demonic letters. Additionally, both Screwtapian discourses were written to audiences experiencing intense anxiety and uncertainty: *TSL* was published during World War II, specifically amidst the Battle of Britain in England; *SPT* appeared in the

United States during the height of the Cold War and the arms race. As I shall illustrate, the discourses function to transcend the *temporal* anxieties of war by providing an *eternal* perspective.

Finally, this project offers a much needed rhetorical examination of the rhetoric of C.S. Lewis – one of the twentieth century’s most popular and beloved religious figures. Lewis displayed great aptitude in reaching a variety of target audiences – a rhetorical feat which few achieve. He published critically acclaimed works in three generically diverse areas of study: literary criticism; Christian apologetics, and fantasy fiction.¹⁴ As an authority on Medieval Literature, Lewis produced influential pieces of literary criticism including *The Allegory of Love*, *The Discarded Image*, and a substantial body of evaluative essays. As a result of his conversion from atheism to Christianity in 1930, Lewis began applying his creative and argumentative skills to the writing of Christian apologetics and imaginative novels. Following the international success of *TSL*, Lewis published his celebrated theological treatise *Mere Christianity* which quickly established him as a prominent apologist in the twentieth century. This defense of the faith, marked by Lewis’s use of memorable analogies and simple reasoning, continues to be a staple of Christian literature.¹⁵ Later works, including *A Grief Observed* and *Miracles*, further substantiated his apologetic prowess. His fantasy-fiction, including the acclaimed *Space Trilogy* and the ever-popular *Chronicles of Narnia* series, offered a more creative outlet for Lewis to allegorize his theological convictions.

According to Walter Hooper’s count, Lewis’s writings consist of 58 books, 4 short stories, 149 essays, 74 poems, 40 book reviews, 84 published letters, along with

various other book edits and prefaces.¹⁶ His work as a Christian author continues to impact twenty-first-century readers, with many still finding his theology relevant and his fiction compelling.¹⁷

While Lewis is most well-known today for his *Narnia* series and *Mere Christianity*, I argue that *TSL* along with *SPT* constitute the author's most brilliant rhetorical works. Of all Lewis's prose, the *Screwtape* discourses most clearly demonstrate his skill and style as a rhetor: the creativity of his fantasy, the theological certitude of his apologetics (transposed through *Screwtape*), and the biting evaluative tone of his literary criticism. Thus, this analysis will contribute to an overall understanding of Lewis's abilities as a rhetor.

Literature Review

Although no one has yet published a rhetorical analysis of the character *Screwtape*, considerable work has already been done on Lewis, Christian rhetoric, the rhetoric of fiction and rhetorical spiritualization. In the following sections, I survey this literature to lay the groundwork for my analysis of diabolical ventriloquism.

Previous Work on Lewis

Lewis remains, to this day, one of the most studied authors in the realm of Christian apologetics. Mounds of books and articles on Lewis fill the shelves of bookstores and libraries, including biographies,¹⁸ literary analyses of his work, edited collections, and even a Lewis encyclopedia.¹⁹ Bruce Edwards recently published the most comprehensive study of Lewis: a four-volume edited collection of bio-critical essays

entitled *C.S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy*.²⁰ This massive effort to chronicle Lewis's life and works offers extensive biographical information from those who knew Lewis best. The critical essays in the anthology analyze Lewis's work from a literary or theological angle, focusing on his literary influences and the validity of his apologetics.

Yet, despite the overt persuasive quality of Lewis's apologetic and literary efforts, very little scholarship approaches his prose from a *rhetorical* perspective. In *C.S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics*, Chad Walsh attempts to define Lewis's rhetoric by examining all his works.²¹ Although Walsh claims to evaluate Lewis's prose in terms of style, he rarely gets past structure and theological content. Richard Cunningham's 1967 study, *C.S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith* also only evaluates Lewis's rhetoric from a theological standpoint.²² Thomas Lessl's survey "The Legacy of C.S. Lewis and the Prospect of Religious Rhetoric" begins a discussion of the persuasive nature of Lewis's work but fails to offer any substantive criticism. His essay provides little more than a rhetorical biography.²³

Gary Tandy's recently published analysis of Lewis's non-fiction prose, however, begins to fill the void in Lewisonian criticism. *The Rhetoric of Certitude* evaluates Lewis's nonfiction with traditional-Aristotelian tools, focusing on Lewis's rhetorical style. In direct opposition to the modern tendency toward subjectivism, Lewis wrote with an aphoristic tell-it-like-it-is quality. Tandy finds that the uniting stylistic feature of Lewis's rhetoric – specifically his nonfiction prose – is his "tone or attitude of certainty."²⁴ In terms of critical approach, Tandy's analysis alone begins the arduous

work of reading Lewis's work *rhetorically*. The present project, in part, seeks to extend the work begun by Tandy in *The Rhetoric of Certitude*.

Christian Rhetoric

At their core, the Screwtape discourses are works of Christian apologetics. Through the inverted perspective of Screwtape, Lewis defends and promotes the objective worldview of traditional Christianity. As one reviewer puts it, Lewis "tells the truth upside down."²⁵ The Screwtape discourses, therefore, flow from the tradition of Christian rhetoric. This tradition has been explored by several prominent figures in rhetorical scholarship.

During the rise of the Christian Church in the fourth and fifth centuries, the perennial epistemological debate over objective versus subjective truth intensified.²⁶ Whereas the Greeks and Romans conceived of rhetoric as a way to determine truth, Christians claimed to use rhetoric simply to communicate *a priori* truths found in Scripture. St. Augustine, typically regarded as the "savior" of rhetoric after the fall of Rome, sought to legitimize rhetorical principles in a Christian world. In his well known treatise *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine recasts the role of rhetoric in public life, transforming its function from "persuading" to "teaching." Augustine argued that rhetorical principles ought to be learned so that preachers might defend their faith effectively and competently *teach* the "Truth" of the Bible.²⁷ He acknowledged the influential power of language and sought to harness that power for "good." Since then, religious rhetors have largely continued to subscribe to Augustine's notion of Christian rhetoric – teaching rather than persuading. Still, whether advocates of Christianity speak

from the pulpit or puppeteer demons in prose, their discourse intrinsically advances a sense of “right” and “wrong,” a social order, and a worldview, and is thus rhetorical.

Mainstream rhetorical criticism of religious discourse has primarily focused on the rhetoric of sermons and Scripture. Michael Calvin McGee offers first-rate analyses which examine both genres. In his critique of nineteenth-century American sermons, McGee traces the generic trend of what he calls “thematic reduplication” – where the theme of sermons are first developed by deductive analysis (biblical quotation) and then supported by inductive synthesis (everyday examples).²⁸ He ultimately argues that Christian rhetoric, deriving its “truth” from the absolute authority of Scripture, subsists on a different plane than secular rhetoric which develops “truth” from experience. Working with Allen Scult and J. Kenneth Kuntz, McGee also performs a close textual analysis of the Biblical account of creation found in Genesis.²⁹ They find that Genesis actually tells the creation story from two different perspectives, arguing that these two perspectives coalesce to form a potent moral rhetoric. Michael P. Graves and Kathleen Hall Jamieson both analyze sermons in terms of the recurrent metaphors, offering insight into the rhetorical common places for Quaker preachers and papal authorities.³⁰

The scholarship described above exemplifies the typical type of religious texts analyzed by rhetoricians. As such, little if any quality attention has been devoted to works of Christian apologetics. This is surprising given the fact that apologetics constitutes a significant rhetorical genre. Moreover, no rhetorical analysis has accounted for the persuasive qualities of religious fiction. These more creative works, such as Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Lewis’s fiction, offer rhetorically rich texts

which allow for novel insight into the functionality of rhetorical theory at large. This project hopes to spark future rhetorical analyses of modern religious texts that can co-exist with mainstream “secular” critiques.

Fiction as Rhetoric

That this project purports to critique *literature* from a *rhetorical* perspective elicits some explanation. Eighty years ago, a project of this magnitude proposing to *rhetorically* analyze a text similar to *TSL* would likely meet staunch opposition. The Screwtape discourses are in fact works of creative fiction; they fit nicely under Aristotle’s distinction of *poetics* rather his traditional sense of *rhetoric*.³¹ Since the 1960s, however, the field of rhetorical-communication studies has undergone major developments.

During the formative years of our discipline in the early twentieth century, critics solely featured oral discourse in their critiques. Scholars limited themselves to the analyses of historically impactful speeches in light of traditional Aristotelian precepts. Presumably, rhetorical criticism was unfit to analyze the universal themes of literature; rhetoric was, according to Herbert Wichelns, “not concerned with permanence, nor yet with beauty” but rather only, “concerned with effect.”³² The written word, whether poetry or prose, was largely considered the province of literary criticism – a well established discipline during the infancy of Communication scholarship in the early twentieth century. For several decades, rhetorical scholars did little outside of describing, classifying, and explaining speeches through a Greco-Roman lens. This traditional approach in the field was radically challenged during the 1960s by a variety of theorists led by the work of Edwin Black. Black’s revolutionary call for new approaches to

rhetorical criticism paved the way for innovative analytical theories which deviated from the “neo-Aristotelian” focus.³³ Rhetoricians began exploring a variety of methodological perspectives including dramatistic criticism based on the work of Kenneth Burke, narrative criticism largely developed by Walter Fisher, feminist criticism, and revised versions of the Aristotelian framework.³⁴ These new approaches to rhetorical artifacts generated deeper insight into the operation of persuasion in discourse.

As criticism stretched theoretically, it also expanded textually. As Martin Medhurst and Thomas Benson observe in their introduction to *Rhetorical Dimensions in Media*, scholars disagree on the utility of the rhetorical analysis of “untraditional” texts. Herbert Wichelns’ classic argument for a clear separation between literature and oratory came under heavy fire in the 1960s. Rhetorical criticism of literature, with which this project deals, received special treatment from scholars such as Edward P.J. Corbett, Donald C. Bryant, and Wayne Booth. In his edited anthology *Rhetorical Analyses of Literary Works*, Corbett demonstrates the utility of applying rhetorical precepts to literature, stating that rhetorical criticism acceptably “regards the work not so much as an object of aesthetic contemplation but as an artistically structured instrument for communication.”³⁵ Toward this same end, Bryant reinforces the bridge between the rhetorical and poetic (literary) realms. Although not willing to accept all symbolic action as rhetorical, Bryant observes that “rhetorical dimensions in the theory and criticism of poetry have been evident almost from the beginning of the formulation of the art.”³⁶ Literary works inherently advance basic assumptions about the nature of reality and, much of the time, provide commentary on concurrent political and social happenings.

In his seminal book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth extends this idea to its extreme, arguing in the same vein as Kenneth Burke that all human communication is inherently rhetorical.³⁷ Booth explicates the rhetoricity of various types of fiction, including satire. In a subsequent essay, Booth promotes the need for rhetorical analysis of all popular art forms:

If all good art has no rhetorical dimension, as so many have argued, then the ‘rhetoric’ is left to those who will use it for the devil’s purposes. . . How much better it would be if we could develop a way of understanding how great literature and drama does in fact work rhetorically to build and strengthen communities. Reading *War and Peace* or seeing *King Lear* does change the mind, just as reading *Justine* or taking a daily dose of tv fair changes minds. . . If sheer quantity and strength of pressure on our lives is the measure, the rhetoric of such works, though less obvious, is more in need of study than open aggressive rhetoric of grounds like *The Living Theater*.³⁸

As a result of this prodding by Booth and others, critics have applied rhetorical tools to analyze the persuasive aspects of social movements, newspapers and magazines, novels, music, television, and film.³⁹ Critiques of untraditional texts like the Screwtape discourses can reveal important insight into the function of persuasion in culture.

Spiritualization in Political Rhetoric

During the early 1980s, rhetorical scholarship experienced a surge of interest in political discourse containing religious undertones. This attention was no doubt caused by the election of Ronald Reagan and the rise of the Religious/Christian Right. Scholars

began mining American foreign-policy history to explore the political usage of “the will of God.” The most notable of these rhetorical investigations is Philip Wander’s landmark essay on the rhetoric of foreign policy. Wander identifies the recurrent argumentative framework of “prophetic dualism” in presidential discourse, particularly that of President Eisenhower, and provides a clear explanation of how it works: “In its perfect form prophetic dualism divides the world into two camps. Between them there is a conflict. One side acts in accord with all that is good, decent, and one with God’s will. The other acts in direct opposition.”⁴⁰ Wander argues that leaders often adopt this mode of argumentation in the midst of national crises: “It is in such moments that a figure, which for the unbeliever counts as a rhetorical convention, may become a source of political influence, a Presence above and beyond what the Enlightenment or ‘secular humanism’ celebrates as the Rule of Reason.”⁴¹ Thus, prophetic dualism offers a way for rhetors to transcend political squabbles by symbolically constructing a Manichaeistic world. Moreover, the act of labeling oppositional ideologies as “evil” accomplishes another goal of political leaders: unifying their audience.

While argument by spiritual transcendence may appeal to a public initially, it does create significant rhetorical constraints for future deliberation. Enacting the “Will of God” precludes any rational discussion of policy decisions. It also disallows the option of compromising with an enemy at a later date – for who could justify cutting a deal with the devil? Whereas Wander hints at these limitations, subsequent studies have fleshed them out.

Denise Bostorff and Steven Goldzwig find that Kennedy's idealistic rhetoric about Vietnam, his version of prophetic dualism, provided him with short-term persuasive success but (would have) faltered in the long-term due to the binding limitations constructed through absolute principles.⁴² The result of Kennedy's morally-charged idealism can be seen in the struggles of Lyndon Johnson. In another study, Thomas Hollihan argues that during the Panama Canal situation in 1978, the "Cold War drama," the quintessential model of prophetic dualism, failed to prevail over arguments based in political realism. The Manichean worldview oversimplifies the complexities of the modern world, presenting a rhetoric that is too "strident" for the general public to accept.⁴³ As noted earlier, G. Thomas Goodnight observes the practice of spiritualization in president Reagan's addresses. The Reagan administration committed itself to the eradication of "evil" communist regimes from the world by spreading the "good" or "Godly" ideals of democracy – a political philosophy that became known as the *Reagan Doctrine*. In so doing, Reagan often curtails legitimate debate over policy by claiming that his course of action is in line with the "will of God."

Much has been written about Bush's early use of spiritualization in the so-called "War on Terror," especially in days immediately following the 9/11 attacks. One of the most compelling critiques of Bush's religiously charged rhetoric comes from Joshua Gunn. Gunn convincingly argues that Bush's post 9/11 rhetoric mirrored the generic mold of demonic exorcism.⁴⁴ Bush effectually demonizes terrorists groups and seeks to expel the demons from the political bodies they inhabit. Denise Bostorff also notes appearances of religious forms in Bush's rhetoric following 9/11. Instead of exorcism,

Bostorff identifies similarities between the president's discourse and Puritan rhetoric of "covenant renewal."⁴⁵ Just as puritan preachers tried to unify and their congregations through blaming external sources (the English, the Indians, etc.), Bush pointed toward the "evil" terrorists as the cause of injustice in the world. Although Gunn and Bostorff disagree on the religious genre that Bush's rhetoric parallels, they both identify spiritualization as the root of Bush's appeal and short-term success following 9/11, evidenced by his high approval rating through the first several months of the War on Terror.

Plan of Study

The remainder of this thesis is composed of four chapters. In Chapter Two, I lay the foundation for the study of *Screwtape* by examining the context in which Lewis wrote and the stance he adopted in reaction to the intellectual and social trends of the twentieth century. World War II presented a significant constraint for Lewis in *TSL*. British citizens, his initial target audience, were dealing with the potent emotions of bereavement for lost loved ones, fear of bombardment by the Germans, and anxiety over whether to support the war effort. In his *Screwtape* essay *SPT*, originally written for Americans, Lewis had to overcome his status as a foreigner and adapt his argument to intense anxiety caused by the threat of nuclear holocaust during the Cold War. Because public education policy is an especially heated political topic, Lewis also had to conceive of a way to strongly argue his case without being dismissed as offensive. Furthermore, for both discourses, Lewis dealt with the overwhelming task of overcoming the "modernist"

paradigm. How might one attack the very intellectual foundation from which his audience operates?

Chapter Three constructs the theoretical method from which the textual analysis flows. I construct a theoretical apparatus comprised of three major rhetorical strategies: *prosopopoeia* (impersonation), and Kenneth Burke's notions of perspective by incongruity and ultimate terms. I merge these theoretical precepts to form a critical framework I call *inverted transcendence*.

Based upon the theory and context, Chapter Four performs two distinct textual analyses of *TSL* and *SPT* respectively. I apply the theoretical lens of *inverted transcendence* to draw conclusions about Lewis's rhetorical strategy and evaluate its merit in terms of his rhetorical problems. Through his demonic impersonation, Lewis creates a rhetorically powerful satire which demonizes modern attitudes and "Godifies" eternity.

Finally, Chapter Five summarizes the project's analysis and considers the ethical implications of Lewis's Screwtapian rhetoric. I outline how this study offers a unique contribution to contemporary rhetorical theory and suggest future areas of study.

Notes

¹ See Ronald Reagan's speech to the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals," delivered March 8, 1983 in Orlando, Florida. A full transcription can be found at: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreaganevilempire.htm>

² G. Thomas Goodnight, "Ronald Reagan's Re-formulation of the Rhetoric of War: Analysis of the 'Zero Option,' 'Evil Empire,' and 'Star Wars' Addresses." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72, (1986): 390.

³ C.S. Lewis, Preface to *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), *The Screwtape Letters and Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, London England, Bles, 1961.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Letters of C.S. Lewis* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993), 355.

⁵ "Don v. Devil," *Time*, September 8, 1947. A copy of the cover and the article on Lewis can be found at: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,804196,00.html>

⁶ C.S. Lewis, "Screwtape Proposes a Toast." *Saturday Evening Post*, December 19, 1959. 232, no. 25: 36, 86-89. SPT has been printed in tandem with the *Letters* in most editions since 1961.

⁷ In his critique of John Jay Chapman's "Coatesville Address," Edwin Black demonstrates that a text's immediate reception is not indicative of its critical value. Chapman's address received little public attention, yet Black identifies great rhetorical artistry in the speech. See Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (1965; reprint, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 177.

⁸ For example, modern rhetorical criticism tends to neglect the historical importance of religious rhetoric in the public sphere. That we currently have a separate journal specifically for "religious rhetoric," *The Journal of Communication and Religion*, demonstrates the common disregard of the role of explicitly religious rhetoric in the public sphere; we detach analyses of religious discourse from the rest of rhetorical criticism, thus separating the "spiritual folk" from the "real" critics. While many rhetoricians note the prevalence of religiously tempered rhetoric in politics, few mainstream critiques actually explore the primary source from which this influence flows.

⁹ George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001).

¹⁰ This is not to discredit religious belief systems, but rather call them what they are. Kenneth Burke explores the symbolic-linguistic makeup of religion in *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

¹¹ For an extensive study in the history of the ensuing debate about hearing divine voice(s), see Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

¹² Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 17.

¹³ Consider, for example, the Biblical account of the “Fall of Man.” The author puts words in the mouth of Satan, the snake, thereby making them evil. Readers are guided to reject what the snake says to Eve as lies. Milton’s *Paradise Lost* also attributes words and attitudes to Satan which readers

¹⁴ Peter Kreeft, *C.S. Lewis: A Critical Essay* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1969). In this analysis of C.S. Lewis’s life, Kreeft frames Lewis’s career as consisting of three distinct personas: Lewis the literary scholar; Lewis the Christian apologist; and Lewis the fantasy author.

¹⁵ *Mere Christianity* was actually voted the “best book of the twentieth century” by the popular Evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* in 2000.

¹⁶ Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).

¹⁷ This is evidenced by continued publication of and the recent motion picture adaptations of *The Chronicles of Narnia* series.

¹⁸ For a superlative Lewis biography, see Alan Jacobs, *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C.S. Lewis* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005).

¹⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Quotable Lewis*, ed. Wayne Martindale and Jerry Root (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers Inc, 1989).

²⁰ Bruce L. Edwards, *C.S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy* (Westport: Praeger, 2007).

²¹ Chad Walsh, *C.S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).

²² Richard Cunningham’s 1967 study, *C.S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967).

²³ Thomas M. Lessl, “The Legacy of C.S. Lewis and the Prospect of Religious Rhetoric.” *Journal of Communication & Religion*, 27 (2004): 117-137.

²⁴ Gary L. Tandy, *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C.S. Lewis's Nonfiction Prose* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2009), 122.

²⁵ Devin Brown, "Telling the Truth Upside Down," in *C.S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007).

²⁶ The rhetorical tradition locates the origin of this debate over truth in Plato's altercation with the Sophists. This controversy over the epistemological function of rhetoric can be found in virtually any discussion of ancient rhetoric. With the rise of the Christian church, the epistemological argument persisted under different headings: *Verbum* (Word of God) and *verbum* (word of man).

²⁷ James J. Murphy, "Saint Augustine and the Debate About a Christian Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 46, no. 4 (1960): 400.

²⁸ Michael C. McGee, "Thematic Reduplication in Christian Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 56 (1970): 196-204.

²⁹ Allen Scult, Michael Calvin McGee, and J. Kenneth Kuntz, "Genesis and Power: An Analysis of the Biblical Story of Creation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72, (1986): 113-131

³⁰ Michael P. Graves, "Functions of Key Metaphors in Early Quaker Sermons, 1671-1700," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69, (1983): 364-378; Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "The Metaphoric Cluster in the Rhetoric of Pope Paul VI and Edmund G. Brown, Jr.," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66, no. 1 (1980): 51-72.

³¹ Although typically bound together in modern publications, a quick gloss over Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* clearly reveals his distinct separation between the two arts. See Aristotle, *Rhetoric and Poetics*, ed. W. Rhys Roberts and Ingram Bywater (New York: The Modern Library, 1954).

³² Herbert A. Wichelns, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory" in *Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking in Honor of James Albert Winans* (New York: The Century Co., 1925), 181-216.

³³ Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*.

³⁴ These and other theoretical approaches can be found in a variety of edited article collections. See *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, 3rd Edition, ed. Carl R. Burgchardt, (State College, PA: Strata Publishing Company, 2005), 22.

- ³⁵ Edward P. J. Corbett, *Rhetorical Analyses of Literary Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. xxii.
- ³⁶ Donald C. Bryant, *Rhetorical Dimensions in Criticism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), p. 31.
- ³⁷ Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).
- ³⁸ Wayne Booth, "The Scope of Rhetoric Today" in *The Prospect of Rhetoric*, ed. Lloyd Bitzer and Edwin Black (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971), 221.
- ³⁹ This list is adapted from Martin J. Medhurst and Thomas W. Benson, *Rhetorical Dimensions in Media: A Critical Casebook*, 2nd Edition (Dubuque: IA, Kendall/Hunt, 1991).
- ⁴⁰ Philip Wander, "The Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70 (1984): 350.
- ⁴¹ Wander, "Foreign Policy," p. 353.
- ⁴² Denise Bostdorff and Steven Goldzwig, "Idealism and Pragmatism in American Foreign Policy Rhetoric: The Case of John F. Kennedy and Vietnam," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 24 (1994): p. 515.
- ⁴³ Thomas Hollihan, "The Public Controversy Over the Panama Canal Treaties: An Analysis of American Foreign Policy Rhetoric," *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 50 (1986): 368-387.
- ⁴⁴ Gunn, Joshua. "The Rhetoric of Exorcism: George W. Bush and the Return of Political Demonology." *Western Journal of Communication* 68, no. 1 (2004): 1-23.
- ⁴⁵ Bostdorff, Denise. "George W. Bush's post-September 11 rhetoric of covenant renewal: upholding the faith of the greatest generation." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89, no. 4 (2003): 293-319.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXTUALIZATION

*“Demons do not exist any more than gods do, being only
the products of the psychic activity of man.”*

Sigmund Freud

The general time frame in which Lewis wrote was characterized by unparalleled global conflict. All discourse, even that which deals with spiritual or “unchanging” truths, is colored by the circumstances in which it was written or spoken. Accordingly, in order to fully grasp the significance and meaning of any rhetorical act, one must understand the contextual features which motivated and constrained the rhetor. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Thomas R. Burkholder refer to the extrinsic conditions surrounding a particular text as an author’s “rhetorical problem,” comprised of a constellation of the “historical-cultural context, the rhetors themselves, the audience, and other persuasive forces operating in the context.”¹ Lloyd Bitzer’s notion of the “rhetorical situation” proves useful in conceptualizing these textually-external factors. The content and style of a discourse, argues Bitzer, largely emanates from the exigencies, audience and constraints that a rhetor encounters.² Without properly positioning a text in its surrounding situation, the critic risks making false assumptions and may consequently arrive at erroneous conclusions about the aims and motives of the discourse. A proper rhetorical evaluation of Lewis’s deistic impersonation, therefore, begins with understanding the context from which the two discourses emerged.

This chapter explicates Lewis's rhetorical problem for each Screwtapian discourse. My present aim is to reconstruct the cultural climate in which Lewis operated and so interpret each discourse as an "artistic, strategic attempt to respond to a particular set of circumstances."³ I begin by sketching the historical-social context of *TSL* with attention to the cultural and emotional situation in Britain during World War II and Lewis's *ethos* Britain. Next, I engage in a similar discussion of the milieu in the United States surrounding SPT: the Cold War and public education. Finally, I devote the bulk of this chapter to framing the "controlling exigency" of both discourses: the modern intellectual climate.

TSL: World War II

The most palpable cultural exigency surrounding Lewis's initial publication of *TSL* was the Second World War. A cursory reading of the *TSL* might suggest that Lewis merely sought to instruct his audience in the universal principles of the Christian life. That is, one might construe the text as a memorable theological treatise simply concerned with Christian spirituality, operating outside of any political dimensions. Dismissing the immediate social exigencies which motivated Lewis, however, renders any reading of either Screwtape discourse incomplete and uninformed.

War colored every political and social aspect of British life during the early 1940s. Disillusioned by the calamity of World War I, the so called "war to end all wars," the majority of Britains in the 1920s and 30s turned toward pacifism. In his historical survey of British morale during World War II, Robert Mackay describes this widespread

attitude toward war following World War I: “Pacifism became a mass movement of international dimensions. Millions of people, seasoned politicians among them, placed their trust in the newly formed League of Nations as their safeguard against the recurrence of the disaster of war.” Mackay contends that this movement toward peace was most flagrant in Britain, where “successive governments maintained the national role of stalwart of the League and where signed-up pacifism became a pervasive part of domestic political discourse.”⁴

But as the military strength and fervor of Germany grew, Britain’s hopes of peace waned. During the late 1930s, the threat of German invasion prompted Parliament to initiate Operation Pied Piper - a colossal evacuation of Britain’s largest urban centers. This massive undertaking resulted in the temporary displacement of over 1.5 million metropolitan residents to rural areas, most of whom were women and children. Following a lull in military activity, Germany began a sweeping air campaign frequently called *the Blitz*. From September 1940 to May 1941, the German *Luftwaffe* tactically bombed major British cities, targeting military installations and civilian housing. Although the British Royal Airforce officially won what became known as *The Battle of Britain*, victory came at a heavy price. The attacks destroyed or damaged acres of government facilities, factories, national monuments and, most depressingly, over one million homes. The landscape of Britain’s major cities vastly changed as a result of the air raids.

More devastating than the physical destruction of cities was the psychological disarray caused by the German attacks. Hoping to preserve civilian morale, *The London Times* mostly avoided reporting the explicit tragedies of *The Blitz*; the newspaper focused

rather on stories that might boost public confidence.⁵ One report appearing after a night of bombings gives an astonishingly heartening view of the situation:

The effect of the bombing of London, even on a small scale, has been what might have been expected. On all hands, in the street, in restaurants, in trains, have been heard the words: 'Hit them back!' with suggestions that Berlin should pay dearly for all London damage. There has not been the slightest sign of fear or panic.⁶

Many found assurance in the confident rhetoric of Winston Churchill. That *The Battle of Britain* was Hitler's first real defeat did not go unnoticed in Europe. A growing civilian patriotism supplied the British military with much-needed social support. Increasing American involvement in the war also raised British spirits.

Subsequent narrative accounts from civilians, however, paint a much bleaker picture of the wartime situation in Britain. In *I Saw England*, Ben Robertson laments over witnessing the first major attack on London,

When night came, we went back to the haystack and watched the most appalling and depressing sight any of us had ever seen. We were horrified by the sight. It almost made us physically ill to see the enormity of the flames which lit the entire western sky. The London that we knew was burning- the London which had taken thirty generations of men a thousand years to build- and the Nazis had done that in thirty seconds . . . It almost broke our hearts to think of what the world had to lose in that city, to think of all the people living there, to think of the ruthlessness, the barbarity... The Battle of London had started, and on that first Sunday it seemed to all of us like the end of civilization.⁷

Barbara Nixon, a volunteer air warden during the *Blitz*, describes the psychological result of the air raids on the public similarly:

At last people realized that there was a serious war on – a war that meant visible death and destruction, not only newspaper articles and recruiting posters and war memorials. And they did not like the realization. . . . The British public had not any training, physical or moral, to help it to withstand the nervous strain of being bombed.”⁸

Hence, the newspapers failed to tell the whole story. Notwithstanding the evacuations, the *Blitz* resulted in over 43,000 civilian casualties and 51,000 injured.⁹ Families were forever broken, friends were never reunited, and homes were ruined. Although Hitler did not completely crush British morale, the *Blitz* certainly provoked intense anxiety and sadness in the hearts of the public.

It was in this overarching context of hope and fear, national confidence and personal uncertainty that Lewis published *TSL*. He faced the intricate challenge of communicating his message to an emotionally ambivalent audience: those simultaneously feeling the sorrow of personal loss while knowing that their country defended a worthy cause; those realizing a profound doubt in the goodness of mankind even while they fought to preserve it. The experience caused many to question their perceptions of reality, particularly the notion of good and evil.

Bereaved individuals often look toward religion to frame devastating events. National pride commonly coincides with religious fervency. Lewis, therefore, had to be sensitive in his depiction of the war and Christianity. To not address the war in some

capacity, even in a theological discourse, would render his message inconsiderate and irrelevant. Thus, much of the content in *TSL* reflects the British experience of the war and attempts to transcend death.

Lewis's Ethos in Britain

The ethos of a rhetor plays an important role in contextualizing any discourse. During the months that the *TSL* ran in *The Guardian*, Lewis gave a series of radio lectures broadcasted on BBC titled "Right and Wrong." As a result of his radio presence, Lewis became the second most recognizable voice in Britain after Winston Churchill. Lewis would later publish this lecture series along with two subsequent talks as the celebrated apologetic book *Mere Christianity*. That a religious figure like Lewis could become so popular in Britain may seem unfathomable to readers today; but one must not forget the state of mediated communication during World War II. Lewis lived in a world that was far less saturated with public discourse than the twenty-first century. Television was in its infancy and the Internet was a long way off. Lewis's world was much less cluttered with messages than our mediated society today.

His voice stood out to the public because of his adept ability to reach his target audience. The indisputable success of Lewis's array of prose illustrates his awareness of audience. The *Narnia* series communicates basic Christian themes to children through talking animals in an alternate universe. *Mere Christianity* offers the basics of a seemingly complex religion in approachable language and logic. And while his literary criticism might make little sense to a school boy of ten, the prose is on par with the top

literary critics of his day. Indeed, Lewis was gifted in his ability to write *to* a specific audience with specific intentions.

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Lewis's authorial ethos was that he never claimed to be an "expert" on the subject of Christianity. Despite the staunch certitude of his works, Lewis always aimed to be an "everyman." That Lewis earned a living speaking from a lectern rather than preaching from a pulpit enhanced his ethos with the un-churched. He represented no political party but rather (what he believed to be) the Christian God. His aim in *TSL*, therefore, appeared genuine and innocent to his readers – what else could his purpose be but to help others understand life, religion, and the war?

While much of Screwtape's "advice" remains relevant to readers today, Lewis's rhetorical intent cannot be made clear without placing the text in its wartime context. Correspondingly, Lewis's motivations for writing *SPT*, published almost two decades after *TSL*, derived largely from its socio-political milieu. Lewis's immediate audience also shifted from Britons during World War II to Americans at the height of the Cold War.

SPT: Education and the Cold War

In his preface to *SPT*, Lewis notes that he had no intention of reanimating Screwtape after publishing *TSL* because the process was quite arduous. Writing from the perspective of a demon required an extraction of "every trace of beauty, freshness, and geniality" from the author's mind. But as the years went on, "the stifling experience of writing the 'Letters' became a weaker memory, reflections on this and that which seemed

somehow to demand Screwtapian treatment began to occur to me.”¹⁰ Those issues on which Lewis reflected, made clear by the text, were the dangerous rise of communist ideology and the resulting corrosion (in Lewis’s mind) of the modern educational system.

At the time of SPT’s publication in 1959, the Cold War was heating up. Western fears of communist takeover from without and within were extremely high. Although the cacophony of McCarthyism was fading in the United States by the late 1950s, the “Red Menace” remained a legitimate concern for American citizens. The continual threat of nuclear devastation wrought by the Soviet Union pervaded American thought. Several global events, including the Suez Crisis, the rising conflict in Vietnam, the Cuban Revolution, and the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles reinforced fears of communist attack. The Soviet launch of *Sputnik 1* on October 4, 1957, widely cited as the beginning of the Space Race, led to further competition and opposition between the United States and the Soviet Union.¹¹ The stunning fact that Russia beat America to space sent shock waves through Western culture. Americans, once confident in their superiority to all other nations, began questioning their presumed supremacy.

Many cited education as the weak link in our race with the Russians. Criticism of the United States education system, a topic of growing concern in the 40s and 50s, flooded newspapers, magazines, and book shelves immediately following the launch of *Sputnik 1*. To simplify the complex educational policy dispute during the mid-twentieth century, I frame the debate as a contest between two intellectual camps: the “progressivists” versus the “traditionalists.”¹²

In the early twentieth century, advocates for progressive education argued for a more student-centered approach to teaching. Traditional school curriculum, thought the progressivists, failed to engage the *whole* student. Rather than the customary textbook and lecture classroom format, progressivists opted for a more “active” educational style which focused on teaching students through hands-on projects, group work, and other “real-world” experiences. John Dewey, considered the father of progressive educational thought, saw this as a more “democratic” approach to education.

Dewey sought to extend the political model of democracy into the classroom. In his widely influential book *Education and Democracy*, Dewey argues that “a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.”¹³ He promoted an education which fostered the individual talents of each student through sharing common experiences:

In order to have a large number of values in common, all the members of the group must have an equable opportunity, to receive and to take from others. There must be a large variety of shared undertakings and experiences. Otherwise, the influences which educate some into masters, educates others into slaves.¹⁴

Dewey’s philosophy filtered into American schools which soon began experimenting with new approaches to teaching.

Not everyone agreed with Dewey’s “democratic” approach to education. Traditionalists blamed the ideals of progressive education for the deficiencies in American education, even before *Sputnik*. They perceived progressive educational practices as a threat to the integrity of the school system. Progressive education tended to

grade students based upon *individual* accomplishment rather than *universal* standards.

Ann L. Crockett, a blatant anti-progressivist, condescendingly explained the progressive attitude in her 1940 *Saturday Evening Post* article:

The standards of traditional education are clear. Those who are incapable, or underprepared, fail. Not so with the modern public school, the only institution this side of heaven that rewards intention as generously as it does accomplishment . . . Let me explain how this beautiful sleight-of-hand is accomplished. Johnny is a very bright boy, but Bill is dull. Do we Progressive teachers grade them competitively, one against the other? Not at all, for then Bill would fail, and the new schools have no failures.¹⁵

Crockett's concern for the deteriorating standards of education was shared by others. As evidenced by C. Winfield Scott and Clyde M. Hill's anthology of critical articles written from 1942 through 1952, trends in American public education were questioned by many long before anyone conceived of a "Red" hunk of metal orbiting the globe.¹⁶ Following the Soviet launch, the debate got even more heated. In 1958 *Life* magazine printed a five-part series on the "crisis of education."¹⁷ The tone for the series was set in the lead article by Sloan Wilson. Wilson argued that U.S. schools had "denigrated into a system for coddling and entertaining the mediocre," blaming poor educational standards for the apparent American inadequacies in the arms race.¹⁸

Another voice which held more sway than *Life* was that of Admiral Hyman Rickover, the "father" of the atomic submarine. Throughout his numerous books, articles, and interviews on education, Rickover lobbied for more attention to be paid to children of

“superior intellect.”¹⁹ The Admiral interpreted *Sputnik* as a “providential warning” to America with regard to educational standards.²⁰ Rickover, along with many likeminded supporters of educational reform, eventually accomplished their goal of national legislative action with the passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in September of 1958. The act, passed almost a year after *Sputnik* appeared, served as the Eisenhower administration’s official legislative response to Soviet advancement. The NDEA provided government funding to institutions at all education levels, with most of the funds concentrated towards math, science and modern foreign languages.²¹ While the passage of the NDEA proposed to “fix” our perceived inadequacies to Russia, arguments continued to flare about where the country should aim in educational practices.

It was within this socio-political calamity that Lewis penned SPT. Lewis clearly belonged to the traditionalist camp, advocating an educational curriculum of *universal* rather than *individual* standards. But because “democracy” and “education” were such sensitive subjects during this time in American history, Lewis had to tread lightly when condemning progressive practices, lest he should appear un-democratic. Given that most American students at the time were enrolled in public schools, the direction of education was an immense concern to a great many citizens. Most parents care deeply about the quality of material being taught to their children. Additionally, the fears of communist invasion heightened the sensitivity to problems in education. Consequently, rhetors delving into the subject of educational policy and practice needed to exhibit a conscious understanding of the emotional relationship that readers might have with the subject.

Lewis's Ethos in the United States

In a subsequent preface to SPT, Lewis describes the “tactical difficulty” in writing to his immediate audience:

If I had been writing “straight” my article would have been an attack on the “public schools” of America. It would indeed have raised nothing that educated Americans do not fully admit. But it is one thing for them to say these things of their own country and another to hear them said by a foreigner! I therefore thought it neither good manners nor good tactics to make my point quite nakedly.

Lewis's commentary reveals a major constraint for SPT. It explains the formidable challenge of writing to a foreign audience. Despite his popularity in America from *TSL* and the *Narnia* series, Lewis still had to account for his position as an outsider in American political affairs. At the time of the initial publication of SPT, the *Post* was one of America's most popular magazines, largely due to Norman Rockwell's legendary depictions of American life printed on many issue covers. In order to reach his audience, Lewis had to overcome the barrier of rejection based upon perceived ignorance. Some readers might discard his assessment of the educational debate on the grounds that Lewis knew nothing of American life.

These contextual factors for SPT, including oppositional progressivist argument and his position as a foreigner, constituted a significant rhetorical problem for Lewis. He was obviously aware of the challenges presented by his rhetorical situation and strategically sought to overcome them through diabolical ventriloquism.

Challenging Modernity

Aside from the immediate contextual factors of each discourse, Lewis dealt with the infinitely more difficult challenge of undermining the dominant intellectual climate during the twentieth century: “modern” thought. Twentieth-century intellectualism can be broadly understood as a struggle between “traditional” and “progressive” ideals. It was against so-called “progressive” thought that Lewis waged his most emphatic rhetorical battle and, consequently, where he met the most resistance.

The practice of periodization – categorizing history into successive phases (e.g. the “Ancient World” or the “Medieval Period”) – has become a common approach to studying the evolution of human thought. During the twentieth century, historians and cultural scholars began superciliously notating their own period as the “modern age.” Historians, however, tend to disagree on which historical event(s) mark the transition into the modern period. Indeed, what one means by “modern age” or “modernism” is often exasperatingly ambiguous. Sociologically, scholars generally denote the beginnings of modernity during the eighteenth century marked by a transition from agrarianism to the rise of industrialism, capitalism, the nation-state, and secularization.²² This “progress” mirrored changes in prevailing intellectual thought.

The philosophical roots of a society master the public’s conception of reality, thereby steering political deliberation, educational practices, religious systems, and virtually all other forms of human action.²³ The prevailing modern philosophies during the time Lewis wrote the *Screwtape* discourses deeply influenced public behavior. Peter Childs identifies six figures of the nineteenth and early twentieth century that shaped the

modern intellectual climate: Freud, Marx, Darwin, Einstein, Saussure and Nietzsche.²⁴

Most cultural historians would concur with Childs' assemblage of key modern thinkers. Determining the primacy and ramifications of their philosophical contributions, however, is largely a matter of opinion.

Lewis makes clear his opinion about the modern intellectual climate throughout his corpus of writing, and, for the purposes of this study, *his* perspective of modernism is of primary importance. Lewis's personal view of modern thinking helps to illuminate the content and form of the Screwtape discourses. This project does not intend to evaluate Lewis's arguments as "right" or "wrong." That is, I make no effort to validate or invalidate Lewis's theology, politics, or view of modernity. Instead, I mean to explain his perception of society in the mid-twentieth century in order to elucidate the texts. As I illustrate below, Lewis's negative impression of modernism constitutes the major impetus behind both Screwtape discourses.

Given the range of Lewis's work, it appears difficult to unite all of his prose under a single theme. Yet, Gary Tandy notes a recurrent motif throughout Lewis's writing: "a basic distrust of modernity and preference for older patterns of thought are the threads that run through and unite his large body of prose work."²⁵ Lewis's massive collection of works can, therefore, be read as his resourceful attempt to illuminate, from a variety of perspectives, the pitfalls of the modern worldview and give his audiences a dose of "truth" from the pre-modern world.

As a medieval literary scholar, Lewis intensely concerned himself with the model, or the general intellectual paradigm, in which a text was written. His final published

work, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, seeks to reconstruct and rehabilitate the Medieval model. Lewis explains that, “in every period the Model of the Universe which is accepted by the great thinkers helps to provide what we may call a backcloth for the arts . . . Thus our own backcloth contains plenty of Freud and little of Einstein.”²⁶ In his 1954 inaugural lecture as the professor of medieval and Renaissance English literature at Cambridge, Lewis plainly demarcates the modern period as beginning in the early nineteenth century with the birth of machines. This technological milestone, Lewis argues, was on the same level as the change “from stone to bronze, or from a pastoral to an agricultural economy.” For several reasons, including the growing political trend toward democracy, unprecedented changes in the arts, increased mechanism, and the transition to what he calls a post-Christian society, Lewis labels the modern period as “the greatest change in the history of Western Man.”²⁷ For Lewis, this change was largely negative. In the conclusion of the lecture, Lewis characterizes himself as a dinosaur, the last of the “Old Western thinkers.” He viewed himself as a defender of the traditional order, constantly fighting to reawaken a respect for older ways of thinking.

Bruce Edwards asserts that Lewis adopts a rehabilitative stance as an author, which “manifested a reverence for the past, a principled skepticism of one’s own period’s mores and dogma, and a profound propensity for recovering and preserving lost values and ideals.”²⁸ Much of Lewis’s rhetoric attempts to usurp the dominant paradigm and reawaken a respect for pre-Enlightenment thinkers. Peter Kreeft goes so far as to call Lewis “the prophet Amos against the modern world,” arguing that his quarrel with

modernity represents “the main source of Lewis’s historical significance.”²⁹

Consequently, Lewis faced a major rhetorical difficulty throughout his career which Tandy frames as such: “how does a writer communicate his ideas to his audience when every social, cultural, and intellectual force is at work to undermine the very concepts he presents?”³⁰ Moreover, how does one critique the dominant pattern of thought without appearing prudish, offensive, and thus disregarded by the intended audience? In short, Lewis’s major rhetorical problem in the Screwtape discourses was Modernity, in all its forms.

Although not normally made explicit in public discourse, the general intellectual climate heavily influences political and social action. In other words, the dominant epistemological, ontological, and axiological underpinnings of a culture permeate the social fabric of the everyday. Amid the twentieth century’s smorgasbord of competing philosophies, Lewis viewed the theories of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Darwin as the most dangerous. The influence of the first, Karl Marx, has been discussed in detail in terms of communism. What remains to be discussed is the affect of the remaining three. The collective vision of reality constructed by these four figures represented a substantial rhetorical challenge for Lewis’s aims in the Screwtape discourses. The following discussion outlines the salient aspects of Lewis’s philosophical opposition.

Subjectivism: Nietzsche and Freud

In Lewis’s mind, the most threatening aspect of modern thinking was the deepening doubt in the existence of objective reality, specifically in terms of morality. The supreme advocate of subjectivism during the early twentieth century was Friedrich

Nietzsche. Throughout his work, Nietzsche rejects any belief in objective morality and aggressively attacks the basic precepts of Plato and orthodox Christianity. He instead promotes what has become known as “perspectivism.”³¹ Nietzsche argues that reality – what we know to be “true” - is a construct of an individual’s perspective, thus nullifying any notion of objective-universal laws; “there is only a perspectival seeing, only a perspectival ‘knowing.’”³² Although most scholars did not entirely subscribe to Nietzsche’s philosophy, fragments of it filtered into twentieth-century thought. His sophisticated worldview coupled with Freud’s psychoanalytical approach to explaining human action caused a major shift in Western thought. Perspectivism gained considerable traction during the mid-twentieth century, inspiring postmodern philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Lewis feared that the spread of subjectivism would result in the destruction of everything “good” in society.

In an essay entitled “The Poison of Subjectivism,” Lewis describes the modern world as he saw it:

Until modern times no thinker of the first rank ever doubted that our judgments of value were rational judgments or that what they discovered was objective. The modern view is very different. It does not believe that value judgments are really judgments at all. They are sentiments, or complexes, or attitudes, produced in a community by the pressure of its environment and its traditions, and differing from one community to another.³³

The modern fixation on the “self,” beginning with Descartes and carrying out through Freud, led to the decline of traditional rationality. As a result of the fashionable method

of psychoanalysis, reasoning turned from focusing on the *argument* to the *arguer*. In modernity, to win an argument means to neutralize opposing views on the basis of psychological motives. For example, many moderns dismiss Christianity on the grounds that “individuals believe in God to satisfy the need for security.” While this could very well be the case, this method of invalidating religion precludes any rational discussion. Lewis finds this Freudian approach circular in the sense that “all can play all day long” – labeling *any* position on *any* subject as a result of some complex while “it gets us not one inch nearer to deciding whether, as a matter of fact, [the position] is true or false.”³⁴ This becomes especially problematic in determining public moral codes. If all ideas can be attacked on the basis of their interpretive nature, then we can conceivably never come to agreements about “right” and “wrong.”

For Lewis, this foretold the doom of mankind: “a philosophy which does not accept value as eternal and objective can lead us only to ruin . . . If ‘good’ means only the local ideology, how can those who invent the local ideology be guided by any idea of good themselves?” Subjectivism, in this sense, is extremely hazardous to the well-being of a society. Lewis no doubt had the consummate example of the Nazi party in mind when discussing the ruinous nature of subjectivity. With deepening subjectivity as the basis for his rejection of modernity, Lewis identifies further troubles with the model.

Chronological Snobbery: Darwin and Ford

“Progress” is plausibly the word which most epitomizes the modern age. The theory of evolution, largely propagated by Charles Darwin, resulted in the unequivocal endorsement of progress and development. Whether or not evolutionism is true, Lewis

found that its precepts had massive cultural implications. Evolutionary thought led to the modern obsession with the *new*. In the realm of technology, for instance, *newer* is always better and *older* quickly becomes clumsy and obsolete. This standard of novelty naturally filtered into the psychological milieu of twentieth-century thought, causing an escalating dismissal of older products, art, people, philosophies and patterns of thought. Lewis saw the fixation with the novelty and the future as one of the principal defects of his contemporaries. To describe this intellectual phenomena, Lewis coined the term “chronological snobbery,” which he defines as the “uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever had gone out of date is on that account discredited.”³⁵ As chronological snobbery sets in, wisdom of past ages quickly becomes archaic, outdated, and irrelevant.

Henry Ford, founder of the Ford motor company, typified the modern attitude of chronological snobbery with his commitment to the *present* age. He famously stated in an interview with the *Chicago Tribune* that “history is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present, and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history that we make today.”³⁶ *New* societies discard the *old* and, thus, lose valuable insight into the nature of human life.

According to Lewis, the problem of chronological snobbery could be solved by delving into the models of past ages. He sought to help the deficiencies of his modern readers by providing them with some perspective. Lewis observed that “every age has its own outlook. It is specially [sic] good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic

mistakes of our own period.”³⁷ Lewis’s own work offers such a corrective. In terms of reading ancient literature, he produced *The Discarded Image*. In terms of Christianity, politics, and social life, Lewis offers *Screwtape*. The *Screwtape* discourses represent Lewis’s most creative effort to revive the inert sense of objective morality in the minds of his modern audiences.

Religion

Although Lewis is generally recognized for his apologetic defense of the Christian faith, he regularly reserved his most arduous attacks for the church. The two chief issues of the modern church, argued Lewis, were the approach to the bible and the division of religion from the rest of public life. Because British and American church leaders were brought up in the modern world, their theology and approach to the Bible naturally adopted modern characteristics. Tandy observes that Lewis’s reason for opposing the clergymen of his day “becomes clearer when we recognize that the central goal of liberal theologians was to reconcile the Bible and modern thought.”³⁸ Lewis attacked modern theologians on the basis of their arrogance. His contemporaries often supposed that the teachings of Christ were misunderstood by previous generations, claiming that the “true” meaning of the text had been recovered by the tools of modern investigation.

For Lewis, this belief was just another ill-effect of chronological snobbery. He argued that it was the modern person who was ignorant of biblical teachings purely because we could not understand the mindset in which the texts were written. The tendency to “explain away” everything in the Bible through scientific inquiry or Freudian

psychoanalysis was pure foolishness to Lewis. The Gospels were not written in the modern intellectual climate and thus any “fashionable” approach to study them has severe limitations.

Whereas it is common for us today to think of religion as merely *one* aspect of life among others (e.g. education, politics, sports, etc), it was not always so. It is one of the great secularizing achievements of modernity to have created the category we call “religion.” In the modern mind, questions about God, judgment, purpose, sin, and redemption are all put into a drawer labeled “Religion.” For Lewis, this compartmentalization threatened the integrity of the entire faith system. His endorsement of the medieval model derived from his sense that, for our ancestors, religion infiltrated every aspect of social life. Lewis sought to repair the “damaged” decentralization of religion in the modern mind. But he found little help from those professing to lead the church. In Lewis’s eyes, clergymen taught in such a fashion as to perpetuate the modern fracturing of religion from the rest of the public sphere. For two hundred years, theologians, retreating from the advance of scientific and philosophical debunking, have taken refuge in the sphere that modernity graciously set aside for religion. Lewis sought to halt this retreat. He labored to persuade his audience that *real* Christianity encompasses every facet of an individual’s life. By offering a rhetoric of eternity to an open-ended audience, he attempted to do the authentically public thing that many theologians had lost the nerve to do.

The Rhetorical Problem

Burgeoning subjectivism, pervasive chronological snobbery, and modernistic tendencies in the church prompted a resourceful rhetorical response from Lewis, the ardent defender of the medieval mindset. To make any impact in bolstering “traditional” thinking, Lewis had to couch his vision of reality in a vehicle that could both relate to the general public while undermining the very “progressive” philosophical roots on which modern society stood. Moreover, for both *TSL* and *SPT*, Lewis dealt with audiences experiencing times of great political and social instability. In order for Lewis to successfully dislodge the modern mindset during World War II, he had to first identify with his war-ravaged British audience. Because Lewis was a foreigner to his audience reading *SPT*, he needed to offer an especially compelling argument against American educational practices.

These overarching contextual factors - the wars and the intellectual climate – comprise the impetus which prompted Lewis to don the mask of Screwtape. Rather than directly confronting these rhetorical challenges with proof and logic, Lewis utilizes a curious strategy of impersonating a demon. Accordingly, the following chapter outlines a unique theoretical method for examining and evaluating the Screwtape discourses.

Notes

- ¹ Karlyn Korhs Campbell and Thomas R. Burkholder, *Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1977) 50.
- ² Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968), 1-14.
- ³ Campbell and Burkholder, 50.
- ⁴ Robert Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain during the Second World War* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 17.
- ⁵ A brief review of newspaper stories from October 1940 through May 1941 reveals this.
- ⁶ *The Times*, August 26, 1940; pg. 5; Issue 48704; col B.
- ⁷ Ben Robertson, *I Saw England* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1941), p. 176.
- ⁸ Barbara Nixon, *Raiders Overhead: A Diary of the Long Blitz* (Scolar Press, London, 1980), p. 18.
- ⁹ Christopher Haigh, *The Cambridge Historical Encyclopedia of Great Britain and Ireland*. (New York: Cambridge University Press. (1990) p. 317
- ¹⁰ C.S. Lewis, Preface to "Screwtape Proposes a Toast" in *The Screwtape Letters and Screwtape Proposes a Toast* (London England, Bles, 1961).
- ¹¹ Andrew Hartman, *Education and the Cold War: The Battle for the American School* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
- ¹² Without question, there was much more happening during the 1950s with regard to public education (e.g. integration as a result of Brown vs. Board of Education and the very charged topic of prayer in schools). I omit these from the discussion because Lewis gives no heed to them in the text. His primary concern was the method of instruction in schools.
- ¹³ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1916), p. 101.
- ¹⁴ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 97.
- ¹⁵ Ann L. Crockett "Lollipops Vs. Learning," *Saturday Evening Post*, March, 16 1940, pp. 29, 105, 106.

- ¹⁶ C. Winfield Scott and Clyde M. Hill, *Public Education Under Criticism* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1954).
- ¹⁷ Howard Sochurek and Stan Wayman, "Crisis in Education," *Life* 44, no. 12-16 (March 24-April 21, 1958).
- ¹⁸ Sloan Wilson, "It's Time to Close the Carnival," *Life* 44, no. 12 (March 24, 1958): 37.
- ¹⁹ Admiral Hyman Rickover, *Education and Freedom* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1959), 6.
- ²⁰ "Rickover Offers New School Plan," *New York Times*, November 23, 1957, 8.
- ²¹ Hartman, *Education and the Cold War*.
- ²² For instance, see Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, (London: Sage, 2005).
- ²³ Take for example the considerable cultural impact of John Locke's philosophy of the "self" on eighteenth-century American life. His philosophical empiricism heavily influenced America's founding fathers, evidenced by the numerous Lockean quotations found in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Consequently, the routine practices of American citizens in the eighteenth century – buying real estate, raising children, negotiating family roles – were largely determined by the common man's notion of the world and his place in it (and at this time in history it was always the common *man*).
- ²⁴ Peter Childs, *Modernism: The New Critical Idiom*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008).
- ²⁵ Gary L. Tandy, *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C.S. Lewis's Nonfiction Prose* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2009), p. 3.
- ²⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 14.
- ²⁷ C.S. Lewis, "De Descriptione Temporum" (1954), in *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).
- ²⁸ Bruce Edwards, "Rehabilitating Reading: C.S. Lewis and Contemporary Critical Theory" in *The Taste of Pineapple: Essays on C.S. Lewis as Reader, Critic, and Imaginative Writer* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988), 30.

- ²⁹ Peter Kreeft, *C.S. Lewis: A Critical Essay* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1969), p. 13.
- ³⁰ Gary L. Tandy, *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C.S. Lewis's Nonfiction Prose* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2009), xi.
- ³¹ Steven D Hales and Rex Welshon. *Nietzsche's Perspectivism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).
- ³² Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*, trans. Maudemarie Clarke and Alan J. Swenswen (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998.)
- ³³ C.S. Lewis, "The Poison of Subjectivism," in *Christian Reflections*, Ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1967).
- ³⁴ C.S. Lewis, "Bulverism" in *God on the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), p. 273.
- ³⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (London: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1966), 214.
- ³⁶ Henry Ford, Interview in *Chicago Tribune*, May 25, 1916.
- ³⁷ C.S. Lewis, "On the Reading of Old Books," in *God on the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), p. 181.
- ³⁸ Tandy, *Rhetoric of Certitude*, p. 16.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD: INVERTED TRANCENDENCE

“There is no neutral ground in the universe; every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counter-claimed by Satan”

C.S. Lewis

Christian Reflections

Just as music critics ground their judgments of a symphony in theories of musical composition, rhetorical critics situate their analyses in theories of persuasion. Rhetorical theories equip critics with the necessary tools for explaining and scrutinizing persuasive texts. This chapter constructs the theoretical framework from which the subsequent textual analysis of Screwtape flows. In what follows, I develop a unique critical approach which merges a piece of classical rhetorical theory with the work of Kenneth Burke. I begin by discussing the most basic aspect of the Screwtape discourses: Lewis’s demon-impersonation. Ancient discussions of the rhetorical figure *prosopopoeia* supply a conceptual framework for studying Lewis’s Screwtapian mask. Next, I turn to Kenneth Burke’s notion of *perspective by incongruity* to account for the satirical aspect of the text: inverting the standard religious viewpoint (God) with its diametric opposite (Satan through Screwtape). Finally, I delve further into Burke’s rhetorical theory to explain Lewis’s use of “ultimate terms.” Speaking as a demon in Hell, Lewis spiritualizes otherwise secular issues which provides audiences with a higher context for viewing everyday activities. These three theoretical components, (1) *prosopopoeia*, (2) perspective by incongruity and (3) ultimate terms, coalesce to form the critical apparatus

that I call *inverted transcendence*. To borrow again from the musical idiom, my theoretical approach functions much like a three part harmony; each conceptual voice layers into the next to form a coherent method for examining the texts.

Prosopopoeia

At their most basic level, the Screwtape discourses are works of fictional impersonation; Lewis linguistically masquerades as a demon. This fundamental strategy Lewis adopts in the discourses parallels the ancient rhetorical practice of *prosopopoeia*. Since the time of the poet Homer, rhetors have strategically utilized rhetorical impersonation in an effort to influence audiences. Descriptions of the device frequently appear in both rhetorical and literary theory, discussed at times under the headings of “personification,” “*fictio personae*,” “anthropomorphism,” “*conformatio*” or “characterization.” Etymologically, the Latin term *prosopopoeia* denotes “mask,” “face” or “person.”¹ The author of *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* describes *prosopopoeia* (*conformatio*) as the occasion “when a person not present is feigned in some way as if they were, or when something silent or formless is made to speak.”² Quintilian further explains the device in *Institutes of Oratory*:

A figure which is still bolder, and requires, as Cicero thinks, greater force is the personation of characters, or *prosopopoeia*. This figure gives both variety and animation to eloquence, in a wonderful degree . . . In this kind of figure, it is allowable even to bring down the gods from heaven, evoke the dead, and give voices to cities and states.³

One could conceivably adjoin to this list the Screwtapian *prosopopoeia*: “to bring *up* the *demons* from *hell*.”

Rhetorical historians of antiquity note the prominence of *prosopopoeia* in Greco-Roman pedagogy.⁴ Students were assigned to create speeches from the perspective of another person or character in a specific situation. The goal was to compose a *credible* speech in the persona of a character. Thus, the persuasive impact of *prosopopoeia* depends largely on a rhetor’s ability to believably portray the feigned entity, even if that entity is the author’s own creation. Quintilian stresses this point in his discussion of the device:

Our inventions of that sort will meet with credit only so far as we represent people saying what it is not unreasonable to suppose that they may have meditated; and so far as we introduce our own conversations with others, or those of others among themselves, with an air of plausibility; and when we invent persuasions, or reproaches, or complaints, or eulogies, or lamentations, and put them into the mouths of characters likely to utter them. . . . But great power of eloquence is necessary for such efforts, for what is naturally fictitious and incredible must either make a stronger impression from being beyond the real or be regarded as nugatory from being unreal.⁵

When impersonating another being, human or otherwise, the rhetor must speak in a manner appropriate to the adopted persona. Contradicting the audience’s expectations for a character effectually breaks the “spell” of *prosopopoeia*. This notion of believability strongly correlates with Walter Fisher’s concept of “narrative fidelity.”⁶

Prosopopoeia has three major rhetorical advantages: blame shifting, *ethos* enhancement, and control. Rhetors often utilize the strategy to transfer the burden of an antagonistic message onto the shoulders of an imaginary character. Audiences are inclined to direct negative reactions toward the figment rather than the speaker or writer. In Cicero's famous forensic speech *Pro Caelio*, for example, he impersonates the deceased politician Appius Claudius Caecus in order to rebuke Clodia, his opposition. Before beginning his rebuke via *prosopopoeia*, Cicero reveals his purpose for rhetorically raising a dead man:

First I would like to ask her: "Shall I deal with you severely and strictly and as they would have done in the good old days? Or would you prefer something more indulgent, bland, sophisticated?" If in that austere mode and manner, I shall have to call up someone from the dead, one of those old gentlemen bearded not with the modern style of fringe that so titillates her, but with one of those bristly bushes we see on antique statues and portrait-busts. And *he* will scold the woman and *speak for me* and *keep her from getting angry with me* as she might otherwise do. [*emphasis added*].⁷

Cicero readily admits to his motives for impersonation; the imaginary Appius Claudius will absorb the anger of Clodia that Cicero's rebuke will no doubt elicit.

Those employing *prosopopoeia* may also access another of its advantages: *ethos* enhancement. Cicero's *prosopopoeia* exemplifies this feature; he chooses to impersonate Clodia's ancestor Appius Claudius Caecus, a well-respected political figure from the third century B.C.:

Doubtless if he rose among us he would say something about like this: "Woman, what business did you have with Caelius, a man scarce out of his teens, a man not your husband? . . . Did I bring in the Appian Aqueduct that you might put its waters to your dirty uses? Did I build the Appian Way that you might ride up and down with other women's husbands?"

In assuming the persona of Caecus, Cicero also borrows his authority. "Caecus's" reference to his own accomplishments bolsters the credibility of his "testimony," thereby strengthening Cicero's ultimate argument. The *ethos* enhancing feature of rhetorical impersonation also appears in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, where Antony rhetorically resurrects Caesar to support his viewpoint.⁸ Wearing the rhetorical mask of a powerful figure allows a rhetor to simulate that figure's power.

Finally, speakers and authors can utilize *prosopopoeia* as a way to rhetorically control their opposition. By impersonating the "other side," rhetors can guide mock debates in their favor. Plato's dialogues are perhaps the most well-known ancient examples of this strategy. Readers encounter various characters throughout the dialogues which represent wisdom (e.g. Socrates) and folly (e.g. Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles in *Gorgias*). Plato, the author, acts as the authorial puppeteer; he nullifies the arguments of his *real* opposition by manipulating their *fictional* representations. This component of Plato's prose significantly contributes to the persuasive impact of his message. The narrative structure of each dialogue functions to "hypnotize" readers, baiting them to believe that the conversations *actually* occurred and that Plato's narrative representation of each character depicts *reality*.

More recently, American politicians have employed the device in campaign rhetoric. Michael Leff and Jean Goodwin discuss *prosopopoeia* in Lincoln's presidential campaign rhetoric in 1859 and 1860, "where in addressing Northern audiences, he constructs a putative debate by personifying the South, representing it as speaking in opposition to the Republican Party and then, in his own voice, offering a response."⁹ Leff and Goodwin argue that Lincoln's *prosopopoeia* of the South, coupled with the figures of *prolepsis* and *correction*, allow Lincoln to rhetorically transcend an otherwise "monologic" discourse. In other words, by impersonating his opposition and "putting words in their mouths," Lincoln outmatches the "straight" arguments of the South. Thus, a rhetor utilizing *prosopopoeia* effectually controls the "debate" for their audiences, making their position appear the stronger.

The Screwtape discourses demonstrate the art of *prosopopoeia* taken to the extreme. In Chapter Four, I address how Lewis's rhetorical impersonation accessed all three of the potential advantages listed above. Unlike Plato or Lincoln who feign their direct opponents - the Sophists and the South respectively - Lewis mines Christian mythology for his characters. Rather than impersonating Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, Lewis dons the mask of a fictional demon. This choice supplied Lewis with unique possibilities for presenting his message, but also created immense challenges. Lewis was constrained by the historical tradition of demonology discussed in Chapter One; to achieve a believable impersonation, Lewis had to display "great powers of eloquence" and conform to basic audience expectations for demonic behavior.

Lewis's *prosopopoeia* gives readers a new viewpoint on their modern model of the universe. The Screwtape discourses erect a peculiar orientation to human life; they

provide for readers a refashioned *perspective*. By choosing to rhetorically puppeteer a demon, Lewis engages in yet another layer of rhetorical artistry – satire. Virtually everything that Screwtape says must be inverted by the reader; Screwtape’s positive is our negative, his black our white. Because of this, the Screwtape discourses are often described as a “Christian satire.”¹⁰ Good satire functions in part by creating what Kenneth Burke calls “perspective by incongruity.”

Perspective by Incongruity

Burke’s profound impact on rhetorical criticism over the past seventy years cannot be overstated. His dramatistic approach to human communication continues to be explored, expanded, and critiqued in twenty-first century scholarship. Burke’s prose, however, is complex, eclectic and with the passage of time, increasingly obscure. Fortunately, rhetorical scholars have sifted through his writing to sort out coherent and feasible rhetorical theories. While this project does not require a complete explanation of Burke’s theory, it does necessitate a brief orientation to his basic understanding of rhetoric. Bernard Brock notes that Burke’s rhetorical philosophy “evolves from the view that language is a strategic response to a situation.”¹¹ Burke defines rhetoric as “the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce action in other human agents.”¹² Language, he argues, reveals the underlying *motives* for human action. The way that we talk about happenings in the world structures the way that we view reality. Words essentially construct a dramatistic society, a society complete with scenes, plots (acts), characters (agents), instruments (agency) and purpose. Inherent in this rhetorically

constructed society is an individual's basic sense of the world and their place in it, what Burke calls an "orientation."

In *Permanence and Change*, Burke argues that it is difficult for a rhetor to alter an audience's pre-established orientation.¹³ One's orientation is largely made up of a "sense of what goes with what;" Burke calls this *piety*. Because pious assumptions reside deep within the psyche, traditional-rational arguments attempting to dislodge a mindset often fall on deaf ears. Naomi Rockler explains that,

People may become angry and upset when a rhetor challenges the assumptions that help bind together their symbolic understanding of the world . . . A meat-eater may become upset when it is suggested that her everyday eating habits contribute to the destruction of the rain forests; to the meat-eater, the hamburger is congruous with sustenance, not destruction.¹⁴

Instead of traditional logic, Burke argues that rhetors can better disrupt an audience's orientation through more artistic means. These means include metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony.¹⁵ Burke suggests that these "four master tropes" offer a new way of looking at reality, seeing "something *in terms of* something else." Thus, the new vision of reality becomes incongruent with the old.

Rhetorical scholars have identified manifestations of perspective by incongruity in a variety of discourses. Denise Bostorff argues that political cartoonists employed the four master tropes to publically critique the anti-environmentalist actions of James Watt, providing audiences with a new way to view Watt's politics.¹⁶ Bonnie Dow finds that AIDS activist Larry Kramer successfully utilized perspective by incongruity to persuade gays that gay identity was congruous with political action. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell offers

an excellent example of perspective by incongruity in her discussion of Gloria Steinem's treatment of menstruation. Campbell sketches the symbolic reversal that Steinem produces by imagining how menstruation would be viewed if men could menstruate and women could not. Steinem's creative use of parody and irony helps "raise consciousness by calling received wisdom into question."¹⁷ In a more recent study, Don Waisanan suggests that the comedic news-show parodies of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert make important contributions to the public sphere by providing new perspectives on political events.¹⁸

Waisanan's assessment of *The Colbert Report* is especially relevant to this project. Rather than making "straight" arguments against conservative philosophies, Colbert plays the part of the "smug Republican" – taking right wing philosophies to ridiculous extremes. In so doing, Colbert presents a comedic yet powerful rhetoric of incongruity which requires that the audience participate by inverting everything Colbert's conservative façade says. Each of these analyses listed above propose Burke's theory of incongruity as a way to interpret modern satirical acts.

Cultural Satire

Political and social satires serve an important function in the public realm; they humorously critique the "taken-for-granted" in human life. M.H. Abrams defines satire as "the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation."¹⁹ By reading an inverted perspective as one does with satire, the audience gains new insight into a social problem and is thus *educated*. According to Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, satire "blends ironic humor and wit with criticism for the purpose of ridiculing folly, vice,

stupidity—the whole range of human foibles and frailties—in individuals and institutions.” Satire is closely related to irony. In fact, Morner and Rausch claim that the “chief device of satire is irony.”²⁰

In *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Wayne Booth argues that irony requires intense audience engagement, more so than other literary forms.²¹ Booth describes the effect of audience engagement, stating, “the essential structure of this irony is not designed to ‘deceive some readers and allow others to see the secret message’ but to deceive all readers for a time and then require all readers to recognize and cope with their deception.”²² Thus, for an ironic text to achieve its rhetorical aims, the audience must participate with the author in the creation of meaning.

Booth claims that the process of audience participation requires four steps of textual reconstruction: (1) the audience must reject the literal meaning of the text; “if he is reading properly, he is unable to escape recognizing either some incongruity among the words or between the words and something else he knows.”²³ This step “is not peculiar to irony, only essential to it.”²⁴ (2) The audience tests alternative interpretations of the text which are incongruous with its literal meaning. (3) The audience must decide about the author’s knowledge or beliefs. “Note, that the first two steps by themselves cannot tell us that a statement is ironic. No matter how firmly I am convinced that a statement is absurd or illogical or just plain false, I must somehow determine whether what I reject is also rejected by the author, and whether he has reason to expect my concurrence.”²⁵ Only then can (4) the audience choose a new meaning with which they can be comfortable. Booth concludes: “Once I begin to think about this four-step act of reconstruction, I see that it completes a more astonishing communal achievement than most accounts have

recognized. Its complexities are, after all, shared: the whole thing cannot work at all unless both [the rhetor and audience] have confidence that they are moving together in identical patterns.”²⁶

While satire allows a rhetor to express incongruities in a memorable forum, the genre also can also constrain persuasive messages. Booth’s blueprint for audience engagement with ironic texts reveals the most obvious limitation: confusing the audience. The most vital requisite for an audience to “get” a satirical discourse is their recognition of the inversion. If the audience fails to reject the literal meaning of the text, the author has little hope of persuading them. Furthermore, the audience must understand the existential issues that the satirist critiques. Brian A. Connery and Kirk Combe note that “satire, more than other genres, emphasizes—indeed, is defined by—its intention (attack), an intention that again refers the reader to matter outside the text.”²⁷ Reading Swift’s absurd suggestion to eat children in “A Modest Proposal,” for example, makes little sense until one understands the issue of poverty and oppression in Ireland during the early eighteenth century. Without understanding those cultural issues surrounding the text, audiences run the risk of misinterpreting the satire.

In their analysis of James Garner’s satire *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*, Lisa Gring-Pemble and Martha Solomon Watson note another potential setback of satirical texts: the audience may find the discourse amusing but neglect to adopt the author’s perspective.²⁸ That is, an audience might laugh at the novel perspective afforded by the satire but still not be persuaded.

Given that audiences engage satirical texts more intensely, rhetors also run the risk of inspiring a more passionate opposition. George A. Test describes this limitation in his analysis of the genre:

In addition to making associations, the audience is expected to assimilate the special mixture of aggression, play, laughter and judgment that is set before it.

Each of these alone can create difficulties. Aggression may cause resentment or other unfavorable reactions. Differences of opinion concerning the judgments are potential sources of contention. The playfulness of satire, especially when yoked to serious questions, may disconcert some.

Satire can therefore cause trouble for a rhetor, “not merely because it is an attack and a judgment, but also because satire, at its most complex, demands its audience be sophisticated, sensitive, and sympathetic.”²⁹ It is, therefore, risky for rhetor to mask a cultural critique in satire - it could just inspire anger and resentment in the audience.

Prophetic Persona

Despite these limitations of the genre, rhetors still utilize satire for its unique method of critiquing social problems. The goal of satire, according to Morner and Rausch, is “to correct, improve, or reform through ridicule.”³⁰ J.A. Cuddon confirms this “admonitory” function of satire by highlighting the moralistic undertones of the genre:

The satirist is thus a kind of self-appointed guardian of standards, ideals and truth; of moral as well as aesthetic values. He is a man (women satirists are very rare) who takes it upon himself to correct, censure and ridicule the follies and vices of society and thus to bring contempt and derision upon aberrations from a desirable and civilized norm.³¹

Most satire compares the current social situation to that of the “ideal.” Typical satirists are therefore what one might call “secular prophets;” they imply a set of standards with which they judge human behavior.

The aims of the satirist closely resemble those of the traditional religious prophet. In the modern mind, the title *prophet* typically corresponds with “fortune teller,” but this is a far cry from the original role. As Christian theologian Brian McLaren observes,

Modern people usually think of prophets as predictors of the future, but the ancient idea of a prophet was more along the lines of a charismatic leader, a person seized with passion from God to convey a message from God. Often they confronted the people about their moral and ethical failures . . . the prophets cried for justice and genuineness, and would confront hypocrisy wherever it appeared – even in the powerful.³²

Rhetorical scholar James Darsey validates this traditional notion of a prophet. “It was the prophet’s task to reassert the terms of the covenant to a people who had fallen away, to restore a sense of duty and virtue amidst the decay of venality.”³³ Hebrew prophets offered perspective to the Jewish society by speaking on behalf of God; they recalled the past, explained the present, and foretold the future of Israel. Assuming the persona of a prophet requires one to speak with eloquence, authority, and certitude.

In essence, prophetic discourse transcends temporal social and political issues by offering an “eternal” viewpoint. To explain the timeless perspective of the prophetic persona, Burke quotes William Loftus Hare:

‘Not only is the seer removed from the *place* he normally occupies on earth, but in the order of *time* also – and this is its special feature – he is removed backwards

to a period so remote that he is able thence to look forward over the whole expanse of history, past, present, and to come. In doing this he gains an understanding of the events in a perspective which makes known to him their relation to the past and the future.’³⁴

Prophets concern themselves with the bigger picture of human history. Of the potential power of this stance Burke writes,

The desire to re-characterize events necessarily requires a new reading of the signs – and though men have ever ‘looked backwards,’ the backward looking of the ‘prophets’ is coupled with a new principle of interpretation, a new perspective or point of view whereby the picture of ‘things as they *really* are’ is reorganized.³⁵

The idea of “reorganization” hinted at here previews Burke’s subsequent discussion of *Order* in later works. The obvious difference between satirists and traditional prophets is that one promotes his own opinion while the other claims to speak on behalf of God. Still, prophets, both secular and religious, function as agents of perspective by incongruity.

Thus far I have explored the two major theoretical precepts that help to account for the rhetorical artistry of Lewis’s *Screwtape*: (1) the ancient practice of *prosopopoeia* and (2) Burke’s concept of perspective by incongruity through satire. The blending of demonic *prosopopoeia* and satirical inversion creates a complex discourse with more persuasive power than either component independently; when harmonized, the two devices create a synergistically-potent discourse. Lewis’s combination of *prosopopoeia* and satire produces a “photographic negative” of ancient prophecy. Audiences who participate in the satirical inversion of “the word of *Screwtape*,” those who correctly

reverse everything Screwtape says, effectually obtain (Lewis's version of) the "Word of God."

Lewis, therefore, adopts the persona of prophet. Prophetic language inherently implies a hierarchical structure, one wherein the "Word of God" trumps or transcends all other discourse. For the final component of my theoretical apparatus, I turn to Burke's concept of Order to explain the transcendent appeals of Lewis's satirical-*prosopopoeia*.

Rhetorical Transcendence

Burke's concept of identification - the inducement of cooperation through symbols - is usually believed to be his most significant contribution to rhetorical theory. Rhetoric as identification implies that one person can persuade another "only insofar as you can talk his [sic] language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his."³⁶ Rhetoric builds social communities by enabling persons divided by opposing interest to "identify" with and thus become "consubstantial" with one another. Whereas many rhetorical critics scrutinize discourses in terms of identification, Burke merely uses the concept as the starting point for a wider discussion of rhetoric. Identification, in its most basic sense, causes division; the process of creating new groups through finding common interests inevitably leads to separation from other groups. A close reading of Burke's early work reveals that his interest in rhetoric emanated from a desire to solve the ever-present conflicts in partisan politics.³⁷ Burke formulates a solution to the divisive nature of rhetoric in the final section of *Rhetoric*, on "Order," where he finds that language couched in "ultimate" (transcendent) terms can solve the problem of "partisan advantage seeking."³⁸

Burke begins his discussion of “Order” by suggesting that language consists of three distinct types of terms: positive, dialectical, and ultimate. These terms provide a hierarchical structure for organizing social action. *Positive terms* are the fundamental labels we give to things in the natural world. These types of words have a visible and tangible referent; they are terms “capable of empirical recording.”³⁹ This first category of terms includes words like *chair*, *book* or *dog*. This vital level of language functions to establish a basic sense of order between members of a society; positive terms allow us to communicate coherently with other human agents. *Dialectical terms*, on the other hand, belong to the “realm of ideas and principles,” those with no positive referent. Examples of dialectical terms include political titles such as “socialism” or “capitalism,” and vague words like “help” or “love.” They are “titular” words, with meaning contingent upon the context in which they appear. Discussing, for example, “socialism” in contrast to “capitalism” would produce a much different description of the political concept than juxtaposing it against “totalitarianism.” Burke notes the limitations of dialectical terms: “It being the realm of ideas or principles, if you organize a conflict among spokesmen for competing ideas or principles, you may produce a situation wherein there is no one clear choice.”⁴⁰ Ideological disagreements fall in the realm of dialectical terms. Typically, a compromise must be made between competing arguments because, in dialectical terms, one is not “right” or “wrong.”

Burke argues that another subset of terms often resolves the problem of opposing dialectical terms:

The “dialectical” order would leave the competing voices in a jangling relation with one another; . . . but the “ultimate” order would place these competing voices

in a *hierarchy, or sequence, or evaluative series*. . . . The “ultimate” order of terms would thus differ essentially from the “dialectical” . . . in that there would be a “guiding idea” or “unitary principle” behind the diversity of voices.⁴¹

Competing ideologies can only be overcome through a rhetorical ascension to the “ultimate” realm which orders the whole of human experience. *Ultimate terms* “resolve the wrangle” between two or more opposing positions. They name values which “nearly all can swear allegiance to; few would wish to identify with [their] opposite.”⁴² This realm of “higher synthesis” subsumes dialectical tensions, thus constructing a hierarchical order for all human action in a given society.

Barry Brummet offers further clarification on the transcendent nature of ultimate terms, observing that, “an important resource of language is the strategy of transcendence. ‘The process of transcendence, basic – to thought,’ takes place when one redefines some action as part of a new, higher context.”⁴³ Brummet provides an example which illustrates the organizing principle of ultimate terms:

For instance, a person in the habit of casually giving money to a beggar might come to define that action as “meeting my social responsibility,” a higher, transcendent way of looking at it. Transcendence is a result of religious conversion, for instance. One sees actions which were formerly thought of in terms of some secular frame as fraught with theological significance. What was once merely tossing a dollar to a beggar in the name of social responsibility is transcended again and becomes “doing God’s work.” Thus people may have several ways of naming what has happened to them, with each one transcending the usage before it.⁴⁴

It bears noting that ultimate terms are not necessarily religious. They often appeal to the higher order of moral standards or “shared cultural values.” Robert Ivie’s analysis of presidential motives for war illustrates a concrete instance of the “secular” usage of ultimate terms (“god-terms”).⁴⁵ Virtually all presidential war rhetoric from the War of 1812 through the Vietnam War contains appeals to three universal American values: “rights,” “law,” and “democracy.” Presidents justify going to war based upon an enemy’s violation of these unifying ultimate terms. Because all Americans generally value individual “rights,” leaders can rhetorically exploit the term to garner public support.

Burke notes that ascension into the ultimate order often culminates in myth. The Platonic dialogues exemplify the process a rhetor follows toward the ultimate realm of “pure persuasion”:

First, the setting up of several voices, each representing a different “ideology,” and each aiming rhetorically to unmask the opponents; next, Socrates’ dialectical attempt to build a set of generalizations that transcend the bias of the competing rhetorical partisans; next, his vision of the ideal end in such a project; and finally, his rounding out the purely intellectual abstractions by a myth.⁴⁶

We see this process clearly in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, where Plato concludes with the “myth” of the chariot ascending to the heavens. In the *Screwtape* discourses, Lewis utilizes the Christian mythos of angels and demons as the backdrop for his satirical critique of modern society.

While Burke generally discusses rhetorical transcendence in a secular sense, the concept’s connection with Christian discourse, like the *Screwtape* discourses, is rather obvious. Prophets, preachers, and apologists ground their messages in ultimate terms.

Whereas secular discourse is characterized by *socio-political* “god-terms” (e.g. *rights, freedom, equality*, etc.), Christian discourse is distinguished by *literal* “God-terms” (e.g. *the Will of God* or *the Word of God*). The words of the Biblical prophet Isaiah, for example, were authoritative because they supposedly represented the thoughts of God; Isaiah was a “mouthpiece” for God. The prophets worked to spiritualize the corporeal experiences of the Israelites. Burke discusses the rhetorical advantage of spiritualizing natural phenomena in an essay subsequent to *Rhetoric*:

Are things disunited in “body ?” Then united them in “spirit.” Would a nation extend its physical dominion? Let it talk of spreading its “ideals.” Do you encounter contradictions? Call them “balances.” Is an organization in disarray? Celebrate agreement on ends. Sanction the troublously manifest, the incarnate, in terms of the ideally, perfectly invisible and intangible, the divine.

In a society beset by many conflicts of interests and aiming with the help of verbal tactics to transcend those conflicts, the uses of spiritualization as a device are endless. Spiritualization the device par excellence of the Upward Way—vibrant with the gestures of unification, promise, freedom.⁴⁷

This type of spiritualization is found in both political and religious rhetoric. James Zappen argues that Burke’s *dialectical-rhetorical transcendence* “merits a place alongside identification as a major contribution to rhetorical theory.”⁴⁸

The Screwtape discourses constitute a satirical rhetoric which spiritualizes everyday human activity, terministically raising his arguments against modernity to the ultimate realm. Of course, there are ethical judgments that one must make when a rhetor spiritualizes a subject. What are the pragmatic aims of the rhetor? What is the result of

claiming God's support for your own viewpoint? What if your opponent uses the same tactic of spiritualization – how might you come to any agreement? I consider these ethical issues for the Screwtape discourses in Chapter Five.

A Unified Theory: Inverted Transcendence

This chapter has explicated three distinct but interrelated theoretical schemas: (1) *prosopopoeia*, (2) perspective by incongruity through satire, and (3) Burke's notion of Order. These rhetorical theories fuse together to construct a cohesive critical apparatus which I call *inverted transcendence*. The Screwtape discourses present an artistic rhetoric of anti-modernity which can best be explained and analyzed through this critical lens. By delivering his message via demonic *prosopopoeia*, Lewis amplifies the perspective by incongruity obtained through satire and in so doing, attempts to achieve rhetorical transcendence. Said differently, the *prosopopoeia* breeds the satire which produces a transcendent perspective by incongruity.

Inverted transcendence explains the interworking of Lewis's artistic anti-modern rhetoric while also generating criteria for critical analysis. Each of the three components implies a set of standards with which I judge Screwtape discourses. First, the texts must display artistry and accuracy with respect to a demonic *prosopopoeia*. In order for Lewis's impersonation to be convincing, the character Screwtape should conform to customary expectations for demon behavior. Second, Lewis's satirical inversion must be easily understood by readers. If his audience is to truly experience perspective by incongruity, then they must clearly apprehend Lewis's intended meaning of the satire. Finally, the audience's acceptance of Lewis's vision of reality primarily depends on

which ultimate terms he features. To transcend oppositional worldviews, Lewis must identify with his audience's deep-rooted values. In the following chapter, I evaluate the Screwtape discourses in light of the criteria suggested by *inverted transcendence*.

Notes

¹ Merriam Webster, *Collegiate Dictionary*,

² (Cicero.) *Ad C. Herennium de Ratione Dicendi (Rhetorica ad Herennium)*. Translated by Harry Caplan. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954.

³ Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*. Ed. Lee Honeycutt. Trans. John Selby Watson, 2006 <http://honeyl.public.iastate.edu/quintilian/> (accessed Aug. 8, 2009).

⁴ See George A Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*. 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). Before delivering complete practice orations (*gymnasmata*), classical instructors required students to engage in a sequential set of rhetorical exercises called *progymnasmata*. George A. Kennedy's discussion and transcription of Greek *progymnasmata* shows *prosopopoeia* appearing on most ancient and medieval lists for rhetorical drills, typically the tenth or eleventh exercise in the sequence. Some ancient teachers of *progymnasmata* make clear the distinction between *ethopoeia* and *prosopopoeia*, with the former a speech from a real person and the latter one from a fictitious entity.

⁵ Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*, Book IX, Chapter II, 27.

⁶ By "narrative fidelity," Fisher means that a rhetorical narrative holds water only insofar as the story rings true with the stories that an audience holds to be true in their own lives. If an impersonation, a form of storytelling, fails to meet audience expectations, the narrative becomes insignificant. See: Walter R. Fisher. *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1987).

⁷ Cicero, *The Basic Works of Cicero*, ed. Moses Hades (New York: Modern Library, 1951), 312.

⁸ See Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, Katrin Ettenhuber (eds.), *Renaissance Figures of Speech* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁹ Michael Leff and Jean Goodwin, "Dialogic Figures and Dialectical Argument in Lincoln's Rhetoric," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 3, no. 1 (2000): 62.

¹⁰ Peter J. Schakel, "The Satirical Imagination of C.S. Lewis," *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, Vol. 22 Issue 2, 1989: 129-148.

- ¹¹ Bernard Brock, "Rhetorical Criticism: A Burkeian Approach Revisited," in *Methods of Rhetorical Criticism: A Twentieth Century Perspective* (3rd Edition), Ed. Bernard L. Brock, Robert L. Scott, James W. Chesebro (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), p. 183.
- ¹² Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950): 41.
- ¹³ Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 3rd ed. (1935; reprint Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 74.
- ¹⁴ Naomi R. Rockler, "Overcoming 'It's Just Entertainment': Perspective by Incongruity as Strategy for Media Literacy," *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 30, no. 1 (2002): 16-22.
- ¹⁵ Kenneth Burke, "Four Master Tropes," in *A Grammar of Motives* (1945; reprint Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 503.
- ¹⁶ Denise M. Bostdorff, "Making Light of James Watt: A Burkean Approach to the Form and Attitude of Political Cartoons," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 43-59.
- ¹⁷ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell "Inventing Women: From Amaterasu to Virginia Woolf," *Women's Studies in Communication* 21 (1998): 114.
- ¹⁸ Don J. Waisanen, "A Citizen's Guides to Democracy Inaction: Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert's Comic Rhetorical Criticism," *Southern Communication Journal* 74, no. 2 (2009): 119-140.
- ¹⁹ M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th ed. (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace, 1999), s.v. "Satire."
- ²⁰ Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Co., 1991), 194.
- ²¹ Wayne Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 117.
- ²² Booth, 106.
- ²³ Booth, 10.
- ²⁴ Booth, 10.
- ²⁵ Booth, 11.

²⁶ Booth, 13.

²⁷ Brian A. Connery and Kirk Combe, *The Politics and Philosophy of Political Correctness* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 4–5.

²⁸ Lisa Gring-Pemble and Martha Solomon-Watson, “The Rhetorical Limits of Satire: An Analysis of James Finn Garner’s Politically Correct Bedtime Stories,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 89, no. 2, (2003): 132–153.

²⁹ George A. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1991), 32.

³⁰ Morner and Rausch, *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 194.

³¹ J.A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4th ed., rev. C.E. Preston (Williston, VT: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 780.

³² Brian McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In* (San Francisco; Jossey-Bass, 2003): 78.

³³ James Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997). This identity of a prophet is further validated in 2 Chronicles: “the LORD sent prophets among them to lead them back to him. They warned the people, but they would not pay attention.”

³⁴ Burke, *Permanence and Change*, p. 180.

³⁵ Burke, *Permanence and Change*, p. 180.

³⁶ Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 21.

³⁷ See James P. Zappen, “Kenneth Burke on Dialectical-Rhetorical Transcendence,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 42 (2009). Zappen provides extensive examples from Burke’s *Attitudes Towards History* and *Permanence and Change*. He argues that Burke’s early work “glimpsed in Hegel and even Marx the possibility of bridging conflicting ideologies via transcendence, but he turned to Plato in the *Grammar* and again in the *Rhetoric*” to eventually explain how one might truly transcend partisan points of view.

³⁸ Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 183.

³⁹ Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 183.

⁴⁰ Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 185.

⁴¹ Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 187.

⁴² Barry Brummet, "Burkean Transcendence and Ultimate Terms in Rhetoric By and About James Watt," *Central States Speech Journal*, 33 (1982): 550.

⁴³ Brummet, "Burkean Transcendence," 549.

⁴⁴ Brummet, "Burkean Transcendence," 550.

⁴⁵ Robert Ivie, "Presidential Motives for War," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 60 (1974): 337-45. 12.

⁴⁶ Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 200.

⁴⁷ Kenneth Burke, "Rhetoric – Old and New," *Journal of General Education* 5 (1951): 209.

⁴⁸ Zappen, "Dialectical-Rhetorical Transcendence," 280.

CHAPTER 4

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

So farewell, hope; and with hope farewell, fear;

Farewell, remorse! all good to me is lost;

Evil, be thou my good

Milton's *Satan*

Paradise Lost, IV 108-110

Thus far I have outlined Lewis's rhetorical problems and a theoretical framework with which I will judge his responses to those problems. To review, Lewis faced the considerable challenge of unseating the dominant twenty-first-century intellectual paradigm of modernity – an amalgamation of the philosophies of Freud, Nietzsche, and Darwin. Lewis viewed modern thought as detrimental to society and sought to reinvigorate the “truths” of traditional Christianity. Moreover, both texts were constrained by their respective climates of war. Lewis originally penned *TSL* for a British audience amid the horrors of World War II. The relentless German air raids on British communities caused widespread public fear and political volatility. In *SPT*, Lewis encountered a similar cultural milieu of fear and anxiety – this time in American during the Cold War. Public panic was heightened by the possibility of global nuclear annihilation or Soviet take-over. This short Screwtapian essay concentrated on the explosive issue of public education after the Soviet launch of Sputnik. As an “outsider” from Britain, Lewis needed a way to broach a sensitive topic and offer a compelling argument for educational reform. Such a rhetorical situation motivated Lewis to couch

his arguments in a startling satire. The Screwtape discourses represent two calculated efforts to undermine modern thought and comfort anxiety-ridden audiences.

These efforts can best be explained and scrutinized through the theoretical lens of what I have called *inverted transcendence*. This theoretical amalgamation consists of *prosopopoeia*, perspective by incongruity, and ultimate terms. In what follows, I apply the standards suggested by *inverted transcendence* to Lewis's discourses.

This chapter consists of two major sections. The first methodically evaluates *TSL* in relation to the rhetorical problems of modernity and World War II. While *TSL* covers a multitude of topics (e.g. war, prayer, sexuality, churchgoing, etc.), I focus my analysis on the issues most relevant to the exigencies discussed in Chapter Two. With the analytical method outlined in the discussion of *TSL*, section two performs a more sinuous analysis of SPT. Because Screwtape's "toast" is much more political in nature, this critique hones in on the advantages and disadvantages of Lewis's Screwtapian lampooning in issues of public policy. Following these two analyses, I draw conclusions about the implications of Lewis's satirical rhetoric.

TSL: Textual Analysis

TSL certainly represents one of the most inventive and original instances of rhetorical spiritualization in the history of Western discourse. Through impersonation, satire, and ultimate terms, Lewis seeks to alter his reader's perception of the modern world. The purpose of this study is not to summarize the texts, but rather illuminate Lewis's rhetorical strategy, to explain how it works, and to evaluate its merit. As such, I

move freely rather than chronologically between the thirty-one letters to identify the salient features of Lewis's "diabolical ventriloquism."

The Screwtapian *Prosopopoeia*

From Screwtape's first salutation to his final rebuke of Wormwood, Lewis engages readers with a jarring *prosopopoeia*, remaining "in-character" for over 175 pages (over 30,000 words). In order to actuate the rhetorical advantages of *prosopopoeia*, including blame shifting, ethos enhancement, and control, a text must exhibit an "air of plausibility" to its audience. To be sure, readers with any aptitude quickly discover that Screwtape is a fictional character. Still, a rhetor need not feign *factual* beings to successfully use the device; a *potentially factual* impersonation – a demon in Lewis's case – works just as well. Throughout *TSL*, Lewis establishes a plausible *prosopopoeia* in three major ways: (1) the structure of his impersonation, (2) the narrative arc of the book, and (3) consistency with the demonic tradition.

The initial feature the reader notices upon opening a copy of *TSL* is the novel's aesthetic structure. Lewis simulates a familiar communicative medium: personal letters. Each of the epistolary chapters begins with, "My dear Wormwood," and concludes with, "Your affectionate uncle, SCREWTAPE." Although readers only see Screwtape's side of the correspondence, the epistles suggest an ongoing two-way conversation between student and teacher: "I am delighted to hear...;" "I wonder you should ask me [sic]...;" "You mentioned casually in your last letter..." By replicating the contours of an epistolary correspondence, Lewis enhances the authenticity of the *prosopopoeia*. The author's original preface even maintains the simulation: "I have no intention of explaining how the correspondence which I now offer to the public fell into my hands."¹

Using “letters” as his communicative medium also allows Lewis to engage in more colloquial language than might otherwise be accepted in written work. For example, Screwtape describes the conflict between God (The Enemy) and Satan (Our Father Below) in Heaven using a very casual vernacular:

Our Father very naturally sought an interview and asked for an explanation. The Enemy gave no reply except to produce some *cock-and-bull story* about disinterested love which He has been circulating ever since. This Our Father naturally could not accept. He implored the Enemy to *lay His cards on the table* and gave Him every opportunity [*emphasis added*].²

This sort of everyday language strengthens the legitimacy of the impersonation; it adds a sense of realism to Lewis’s *prosopopoeia*. Lewis’s aesthetic and linguistic style pull readers into Screwtape’s universe, allowing them to suspend the fictionality of novel.

The narrative arc of the book also functions to maintain Lewis’s impersonation. *TSL* chronicles the story of a young man, whom Screwtape calls “the patient,” from just before his conversion to Christianity to his death in the Battle of Britain. “The patient” functions rhetorically as a referent for Screwtape (Lewis) to discuss truths about the world. Throughout the narrative, the patient abides typical life-events (e.g. making new friends, going to church, dating, eating, etc.) and struggles with the proverbial sins (e.g. lust, pride, greed, etc.). He also experiences the emotional ambivalence of the common British citizen during the war: feelings of anxiety and fear, choosing between patriotism and pacifism, and the awareness of death. As such, each letter begins with Screwtape addressing some banal occurrence in the patient’s life, using the concrete event as a springboard for discussing principles about temptation. Letter #1, for instance, begins

with a reference to the patient's relationship with his "materialist friend." Screwtape moves on to discuss the "danger" of allowing humans to engage in rational argument. In this way, Lewis identifies with the familiar experiences of his audience, adding yet another level of relevance and authenticity to Screwtape's words. Without "the patient," *TSL* would lack both a coherent structure and, more importantly, points of identification with the audience.

In order for Lewis's *prosopopoeia* to "be met with credit," his depiction of Hell and its inhabitants must fit within the tradition of Christian demonology. In the Christian mythos, demons are believed to be fallen angels who followed Lucifer (Satan) in his rebellion against God.³ The cryptic descriptions of Satan and his demons throughout Biblical texts have led to the curious theological branch of demonology. Demonology, based in scripture, holds basic truths about the qualities of Satan and his demons.

First, demons are sentient beings; they can think, feel, speak and act for themselves: "Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, saying, 'Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God!'" (Mark 1:23). Lewis's demons embody this characteristic. The whole premise of *TSL* - one demon *instructing* another - suggests that demons can think and act independently, and do so with devious ingenuity. Screwtape's insidious advice to Wormwood also echoes the so-called "Fall of Man," where Satan assumes the form of a serpent to deceive Eve.

Second, demons fear the power of God. They become weak at the mere mention of his name: "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble!" (James 2:19). While Lewis's demons mock God and obey the mandates of

their “Father Below,” they still display a healthy fear of “The Enemy” – both God and his angels. The presence of angels is “blinding,” “suffocating,” and even “asphyxiating” to Wormwood. Any contact with the “other side” is to be avoided if possible.

Lastly, just as scripture suggests an angelic hierarchy (archangels, angels, and cherubim), it indicates a similar chain of command for demons.⁴ *TSL* frequently alludes to this hierarchical theme. Lewis portrays Hell as a vast bureaucracy wherein tempters attend school and earn promotions based upon their performance. As “secretary,” Screwtape assumes an authoritative rank in Hell’s “Lowerarchy” where Satan, “Our Father Below,” sits on the throne. To illustrate this pecking order, Lewis has Screwtape refer to rules of conduct established by his superiors. He reminds Wormwood that demons should not reveal themselves to their patients, for this issue, “at least for the present phase of the struggle, has been answered for us by the High Command. Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves.”⁵ While Screwtape outranks Wormwood, he still follows established policy in Hell. Thus, Lewis offers his own version of the infernal hierarchy suggested by scripture.

Artistic depictions of Satan and his imps throughout human history also influence public conceptions of demons, thereby constraining Lewis’s *prosopopoeia*. While portrayals of Satan and his minions are manifold, those found in the work of Dante and Milton are perhaps the most significant. Dante’s torturous Hell of bestial monsters best illustrates the tradition of the grotesque. Milton, on the other hand, established the first popular portrayal of Satan as a psychologically sophisticated autocrat.⁶ Both Milton and Dante influenced Lewis’s Hell. While Lewis had little tolerance for Milton’s sympathy for and glorification of Satan, he did embrace the poet’s notion of Satan and his demons

as brilliantly cunning.⁷ Screwtape also regularly refers to the “admirable work” of Hell’s “Philological Arm,” the department which has subtly appropriated words for diabolical purposes, including altering the meaning of the word *real*, giving a negative connotation to *Puritanism*, and substituting the negative word *unselfishness* for the positive *Charity*. Through these and other means, Lewis’s demons demonstrate a cunning shrewdness.

Lewis also pays tribute to the grotesque tradition in demonology exemplified in Dante’s *Inferno*. In perhaps the most humorous and outrageous episode in *TSL*, Screwtape, in a fit of rage against Wormwood’s incompetence, suddenly finds himself transformed into a large repugnant insect, which I reproduce below:

Meanwhile *you*, disgusting little –

[*Here the MS. Breaks off and is resumed in a different hand.*]

In the heat of composition I find that I have inadvertently allowed myself to assume the form of a large centipede. I am accordingly dictating the rest to my secretary. . . . In my present form I feel even more anxious to see you, to unite you to myself in an indissoluble embrace.

(SIGNED) TOADPIPE

*For his Abysmal Sublimity Under Secretary Screwtape, TE, BS, etc.*⁸

This memorable incident enhances Lewis’s *prosopopoeia* in two ways. First, it acknowledges the grotesque depictions of Hell so prevalent in popular imagination. Second, the episode reinforces the epistolary simulation further fostering a sense of realism.

Lewis also invents a few demonic characteristics of his own which elaborate on traditional demonology. Jeffrey Burton Russell argues that “Lewis’s most original

contribution” to the demonic tradition in literature is “the suggestion that demons are motivated both by fear and hunger.”⁹ Lewis’s demons thrive on the consumption of human souls. Success in temptation provides the imps with sustenance much akin to indulging in an exquisite wine. In a striking instance of parallelism, Screwtape describes the difference between their motivation for winning souls and that of God:

To us a human is primarily food; our aim is the absorption of its will into ours. We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in, He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over. Our war aim is a world in which Our Father Below has drawn all other beings into himself; the Enemy wants a world full of beings united to himself but still distinct.¹⁰

Screwtape also compares the indulging of human souls to enjoying a quality wine, a “brim-full living chalice of despair and horror and astonishment which you can raise your lips as often as you please.”¹¹ This creative addition to the demonic persona helps to clarify *why* demons tempt, thereby giving the impersonation more substance.

As I have illustrated, Lewis’s *prosopopoeia* establishes and maintains credibility due to its aesthetic structure, the running “patient” narrative, and the novel’s consistency with the demonic tradition. Given his believable *prosopopoeia*, Lewis effectually accesses the advantages of impersonation which include blame shifting, ethos enhancement, and control. At various points throughout the rest of this analysis I illustrate how Lewis exploits these three advantages.

Perspective by Incongruity

Whereas readers and critics might interpret *TSL* as an attempt to promote belief in demons, Lewis admits in his 1961 preface that, while he personally believes in the existence of something like Screwtape, the book was not written to speculate about devils but “to throw light from a new angle on the life of men.”¹² Through his Screwtapian *prosopopoeia*, Lewis offers his audience a wholly unique viewpoint of human life – a perspective by incongruity. Burke argues that irony, like that found in satire, often functions as an avenue for altering an audience’s “orientation.” The satirical inversion of *TSL* functions to dislodge the “modern” worldview by offering an “outside” perspective.

In order for the satire to work, the readers must first, to recall Booth’s four-step blueprint for audience engagement in irony, reject the literal meaning of the text. To be sure that his audience completes this step, Lewis puppeteers Screwtape to utter blatantly diabolical incongruities. What we would typically view positively, Screwtape judges negatively; whatever he welcomes we should dread. For instance, Screwtape labels the commonly endorsed virtues of human charity, courage, and contentment as great “evils;” He describes the positive pleasures of everyday human life (e.g. taking a walk outside, genuine laughter with friends, reading a good book) as “dangerous” and “unsafe;” Whenever the patient moves toward God, a direction which most would deem positive, Screwtape fumes. He admonishes Wormwood for allowing the patient to go the “wrong way.” Through these blatant reversals of positive and negative judgments, Lewis makes his approach of satirical inversion plainly obvious to his audience. Readers with any sense soon acknowledge that they must reject the literal meaning of the text.

These blatant inversions in value-judgment prime the audience for the substantive anti-modern arguments found in the text. While *TSL* broaches a wide array of subjects through perspective by incongruity, my analysis hones in on those issues most relevant to the rhetorical problem of modernism outlined in Chapter Two – specifically subjectivism, chronological snobbery, and the modern church. Through Screwtapian treatment, Lewis attempts to defuse twentieth-century patterns of thought.

Subjectivism

Lewis's chief problem with modernism was the death of objectivity and the rise of subjectivity through *perspectivism* (Nietzsche) and materialistic psychoanalysis (Freud). The tendency for moderns to reject any sort of objective or ultimate truth deeply troubled Lewis. Consequently, *TSL* lampoons the notion of subjectivity by having Screwtape endorse its usefulness in deceiving humans.

Throughout the narrative, Lewis begins his Screwtapian assault on subjectivity by grounding his Hell in an objective reality. All of Screwtape's advice is predicated upon the existence of universal laws. While Screwtape's values are diametrically opposed to those of humanity, the devil's counsel nonetheless assumes that some things are "right" and others "wrong," some "good" and others "bad." This assumption of the text, although easily overlooked, is significant. Because Screwtape is an eternal entity, he is privy to understanding the *true* nature of the world. And while demons may "fuddle" their patients with subjectivism, they themselves nonetheless operate in a world of black and white.

Screwtape delights in the tendency of modern humans to dismiss the "plain antithesis between True and False."¹³ As a result of demonic exploitation of "the weekly

press and other such weapons,” modern humans have largely lost the faculty of reasoning. Screwtape notes that the patient “has been accustomed, ever since he was a boy, to have a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside his head.” Consequently, “he doesn’t think of doctrines as primarily ‘true’ or ‘false,’ but as ‘academic’ or ‘practical,’ ‘outworn’ or ‘contemporary,’ ‘conventional’ or ‘ruthless.’”¹⁴ Screwtape, therefore, advises Wormwood to avoid allowing the patient to think a philosophy is *true*, but to rather “make him think that it is strong, or stark, or courageous.”¹⁵ Recalling that Screwtape’s “good” is actually our “bad,” readers can determine Lewis’s intended meaning in these passages. Lewis means to exploit the shortcomings of subjectivity by framing it as a demonic perversion.

To further reinforce this theme, Lewis has his puppet Screwtape locate the epistemic debate in a historical example, one with particular relevance to the discipline of rhetorical studies:

Humans must not be allowed to notice that all great moralists are sent by the Enemy not to inform men but to remind them, to restate the primeval moral platitudes against our continual concealment of them. We make the Sophists: He raises up a Socrates to answer them.¹⁶

Screwtape claims that the demons “made” the Sophists, a party of Greeks who promoted of their own brand of subjectivity. Lewis utilizes this same strategy of perspective by incongruity to mock what he calls “chronological Snobbery.”

Chronological Snobbery

Lewis believed that one of the greatest blunders of his contemporaries was the arrogant assumption that the modern period had nothing to learn from the “outdated” past. He challenges this “chronological snobbery” in *TSL* by having Screwtape endorse it.

According to Screwtape, demons regularly inculcate patterns of thought in the human mind to lead them away from God. One of the primary means by which demons promote a false belief in subjectivism, says Screwtape, is through “The Historical Point of View.” Put briefly, The Historical Point of View means that when a learned man is presented with any statement from an ancient author, “the one question he never asks is whether it is true.” Instead, says Screwtape, the man asks who and what influenced the writer, compares the statement to those of the author’s contemporaries, and researches what others have said about it (quite similar in fact to the approach of this project).¹⁷

Indeed, writes Screwtape,

To regard the ancient writer as a possible source of knowledge – to anticipate that what he said could possibly modify your thoughts or your behavior – this would be rejected as simple-minded. And since we cannot deceive the whole human race all the time, it is most important thus to cut every generation off from all others... thanks to our Father and the Historical Point of View, great scholars are now as little nourished by the past as the most ignorant mechanic who holds that ‘history is bunk.’¹⁸

Because Screwtape encourages The Historical Point of View, readers completing the satirical turn begin to question the validity of its assumptions. The mechanic to which Screwtape refers here is none other than Henry Ford – one of the fathers of “modern”

progress (Ford's original statement is quoted in Chapter Two). By having Screwtape call Ford "ignorant," Lewis directly challenges a figurehead of modernism, thereby creating an incongruity which disrupts the dominant attitudes of his audience.

Lewis further lampoons chronological snobbery in Screwtape's twenty-fifth letter, where the demon discusses another more subtle demonic cultivation in the modern attitude which he calls "The Horror of the Same Old Thing." He claims that the modern obsession with "progress" and "newness" is a successful demonic campaign. Demons, according to Screwtape, have taken the natural desire in humans for change and twisted it into "a demand for absolute novelty." He claims that this demand is entirely the workmanship of demons.¹⁹ The old demon relishes this attitude, declaring it "one of the most valuable passions we have produced in the human heart – an endless source of heresies in religion, folly in counsel, infidelity in marriage, and inconstancy in friendship."²⁰ Through the Screwtapian inversion, Lewis disparages "The Horror of the Same Old Thing" as a dangerous attitude for modern humans. Once again, Lewis attempts to dislodge the intellectual patterns of his day by providing an eternal-demonic perspective. Through ridicule, Lewis offers a rhetoric of correction to his audience.

Modern Religion

Lewis directs some of the most vigorous satirical attacks in *TSL* toward those most likely to pick up the book – Christians. The modern church, as Lewis saw it, had succumbed to the "evils" of the contemporary intellectual climate in two major areas: biblical interpretation and religious dedication. As satirical prophet, Lewis seeks to correct by condemnation.

Much like the prophetic role of Moses, Lewis, through Screwtape, damns the “golden calf” of modernism.²¹ The *prosopopoeia-ic* advantage of blame shifting serves Lewis especially well in his admonishment of his Christian brethren. While Lewis was never one to shy away from a heated debate, the reproving message of *TSL* works to make his message(s) palatable, simply because the words are uttered by Screwtape and not Lewis. By placing accusations against modernity in the mouth of a demon, Lewis rhetorically eschews culpability for his admonishments.

Once again, Screwtape applies handy labels for modern patterns of thought in relation to these issues: “the historical Jesus” and “Christianity And.” Screwtape notes that his compatriots’ efforts to infiltrate the church with the Historical Point of View have culminated in the construction of the “historical Jesus.” Throughout the church’s history, Christians have engineered different versions of Jesus: “In the last generation we promoted the construction of such a ‘historical Jesus’ on liberal and humanitarian lines; we are now putting forward a new ‘historical Jesus’ on Marxian, catastrophic, and revolutionary lines.” Screwtape finds a significant advantage to these demonic constructions of Jesus,

They all tend to direct men’s devotion to something which does not exist, for each ‘historical Jesus’ is unhistorical. The documents say what they say and cannot be added to; each new ‘historical Jesus’ therefore has to be got out of them by suppression at one point and exaggeration at another.²²

That Screwtape wants to encourage Christians to use the “historical Jesus” in biblical interpretation indicates Lewis’s objection against it. This passage serves as a prophetic

warning to Lewis's Christian audience. In effect, Lewis preaches a Christianity which approaches the Bible without the modern "historical" lens.

To further drive home his point, Lewis has Screwtape identify the "historical" attitude in the writing of a modern Christian author:

Only today I [Screwtape] have found a passage in a Christian writer where he recommends his own version of Christianity on the ground that 'only such a faith can outlast the death of old cultures and the birth of new civilisations' [sic]. You see the little rift? 'Believe this, not because it is true, but for some other reason.' That's the game.²³

Here, Screwtape quotes American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr in the book *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*.²⁴ Through Screwtape, Lewis manages to peg Niebuhr, in this case, as one batting for the other team. This reference functions as supporting material for Lewis's argument against the modern Christian attitude. Screwtape's delight in Niebuhr's "mistake" reveals Lewis's contempt for it.

Lewis's second major issue with the modern church was the tendency for individuals to undervalue their faith, categorizing it with other "equally important" aspects of life.²⁵ Screwtape calls this modern tendency "Christianity And": "You know – Christianity and the Crisis, Christianity and the New Psychology, Christianity and the New Order, Christianity and Faith Healing, Christianity and Psychological Research, Christianity and Vegetarianism, Christianity and Spelling Reform."²⁶ The joining of Christianity with another cause works, says Screwtape, to adulterate the patient's spirituality. This inevitably leads to the transformation of a person's Christianity from an end in itself to a means for some worldly ambition:

Certainly we do not want men to allow their Christianity to flow over into their political life, for the establishment of anything like a really just society would be a major disaster. On the other hand we do want, and want very much, to make men treat Christianity as a means; preferably, of course, as a means to their own advancement, but, failing that, as a means to anything – even to social justice. The thing to do is to get a man at first to value social justice as a thing which the Enemy demands, and then work him on to the stage at which he values Christianity because it may produce social justice.²⁷

Participating in the inversion, Lewis's Christian audience discovers the apparent absurdity in making their faith a means rather than an end in itself. Lewis wants his audience to be merely Christian, a phrase he would later use to title his apologetic masterpiece. Rather than giving it to them "straight," he requires the audience to interact with the text, thereby making it more powerful.

Through his Screwtapian treatment of the defining characteristics of modernism, Lewis offers his audience with an alternate perspective. Seeing the world through the eyes of a demon creates incongruities with the audience's "pious" orientation. Lewis acts as both a cultural and religious prophet, calling his audience to change their ways of thinking and acting. The perspective gained through the ironies and "truths" in the text work to symbolically reorder readers' perceptions of reality.

Ultimate Terms: Eternity

Lewis's *prosopopoeia* presents readers with an "inhuman" perspective of the seemingly banal occurrences of everyday life. But Screwtape offers more than just an alien viewpoint of human behavior - as a demon he embodies an *eternal* perspective.

Through this spiritual-eternal perspective, Lewis's rhetoric intends to supplant oppositional philosophies. Kenneth Burke's notion of ultimate terms supplies the theoretical framework needed to analyze such a rhetoric. Aside from critiquing the modern intellectual climate, *TSL* contemplates the infinitely more physical and emotional exigencies caused by World War II; his audience struggled with losing loved ones, experienced intense fear and apprehension, and contemplated whether to support or oppose Britain's war effort. In short, Lewis attempts to rhetorically transcend *temporal* concerns with an *eternal* order.

Lewis establishes the organizing principle *eternity*, *TSL*'s ultimate term, by having Screwtape encourage its opposite – temporality. To discourage the patient from the eternal mindset, Screwtape instructs Wormwood to guide the patient's thoughts toward the Future:

In a word, the Future is, of all things, the thing *least like* eternity. It is the most completely temporal part of time-for the Past is frozen and no longer flows, and the Present is all lit up with eternal rays. Hence the encouragement we have given to all those schemes of thought such as Creative Evolution, Scientific Humanism, or Communism, which fix men's affections on the Future, on the very core of temporality. Hence nearly all vices are rooted in the future.²⁸

Screwtape's warnings about the patient gaining an *eternal* perspective materialize in his discussion about Patriotism versus Pacifism. He concludes that it matters very little which political position the patient assumes:

Whichever he adopts, your main task will be the same. Let him begin by treating the Patriotism or the Pacifism as part of his religion. Then let him, under the

influence of partisan spirit, come to regard it as the most important part. . .The attitude which you want to guard against is that in which temporal affairs are treated primarily as material for obedience.

Inverting Screwtape's counsel reveals Lewis's aim to promote an eternal perspective of the war. While there are, to be sure, very serious physical implications to war, the audience is encouraged to symbolically transcend those concerns and see the war as an occasion to pursue God. This was especially relevant for his audience struggling with war anxiety.

In the latter letters of *TSL*, Lewis, through Screwtape, broaches the subject of death in war. Wormwood is advised to keep the patient safe from death because, "men are killed in places where they knew they might be killed and to which they go, if they are at all of the Enemy's party, prepared."²⁹ From Screwtape's *eternal* perspective, the only thing that matters is Hell's acquisition of the human soul. Thus, premature human death, especially in war, is strongly guarded against.

In *TSL's* the most jarring rhetorical incongruity, Screwtape appropriates the human fear of death as a result of demonic influence: "[Humans], of course, do tend to regard death as the prime evil and survival as the greatest good. But that is because we have taught them to do so." From the eternal perspective, the viewpoint which Screwtape himself adopts, death in war is envisioned quite differently: "How disastrous for [demons] is the continual remembrance of death which war enforces. One of our best weapons, contented worldliness, is rendered useless. In wartime not even a human can believe that he is going to live forever."³⁰

Screwtape strongly prefers that a patient live out “the long, dull, monotonous” years of middle age, finding them to be “excellent campaigning weather.”³¹ The decay of youth, the experience of repeated failures, the drabness of everyday life – these all provide demons with “admirable opportunities of wearing out a soul by attrition.” Prosperity in middle age can also be used for diabolical purposes. Monetary success “knits a man to the world,” thereby distracting him from eternal concerns. Indeed, “the safest road to hell is the gradual one -- the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.” Here again, Lewis inversely critiques worldliness. He demonizes the temporal worldview and, thus, Godifies, if you will, *eternity*.³²

Screwtape’s final letter describes the agony of losing the patient to “The Enemy” after he is killed during one of the German air bombardments. Here Lewis exploits the “control” advantage of his *prosopopeia*. Lewis’s authorial choice to kill the patient allows him to, through Screwtape, give an eternal perspective of death. In the climax of the epistolary narrative, Lewis frames death in war as a *positive* thing by having Screwtape rail against it. After the patient’s death, Screwtape recounts what happened spiritually, raging at how the patient “got through so easily.” He experienced “no gradual misgivings, no doctor’s sentence, no nursing home, no operating theatre, no false hopes of life; sheer, instantaneous liberation.”³³ Lewis’s *inverted transcendence* culminates by the redefinition of death as “liberation,” a sharp difference from the normal understanding of human loss.

By transcending the natural aversion to death, Godifying Christian casualties, Lewis attempts to restructure his audience’s perspective of World War II. Furthermore,

the *eternal* viewpoint afforded by Screwtape serves as an evangelical appeal to readers. *TSL* gives readers “good reasons” to become Christian – for who wants to spend eternity with Screwtape? Thus, readers willing to accept Lewis’s depiction of the world in *TSL* acquire “equipment for living” which allows them to transcend the banalities of temporal life with an order of *eternity*.

TSL has the potential to alter a reader’s perspective on the human condition and so affect change in actions. If humans live amid an epic battle of Good and Evil, a perpetual war over our souls between heaven and Hell, then virtually every otherwise-meaningless occurrence in life becomes significant. This perception of the world, however, may also lead readers to replace anxiety over the war with demonic paranoia. The end of this chapter discusses the full implications of Lewis’s rhetoric in *TSL*. For now, I proceed to discuss the infinitely more political of the two Screwtapian discourses, SPT. While the character Screwtape gained popular notoriety from *TSL*, the SPT represents a much more focused and arousing rhetorical effort by Lewis.

SPT: Textual Analysis

Written eighteen years after *TSL*, SPT exhibits a much more refined and biting tone. Lewis’s choice to “resurrect” Screwtape was largely determined by consideration of his immediate audience. In SPT, Lewis, a Brit, faced the more substantial rhetorical problem of writing to foreign American readers. As an outsider, Lewis utilizes the advantage of “blame shifting” afforded him by *prosopopoeia*. Lewis criticizes the American education system through Screwtape and offers a transcendent alternative of *eternity*.

The same basic rhetorical strategy found in *TSL* appears in *SPT*. Given the thorough application of *inverted transcendence* already applied to *TSL*, the following analysis moves more fluently through the application of the theory to the text. *SPT* attempts to debunk so-called “progressive” educational practices through spiritualizing teaching methods – demonizing and Godifying the conflicting ideologies.

Inverted Transcendence

Aesthetically, *SPT* departs from the epistolary structure of *TSL*. Instead, *SPT* feigns an epideictic speech. Lewis offers a brief prologue to acquaint his audience with the setting: “The scene is in Hell at the annual dinner of the Tempters’ Training College for young Devils. The principle, Dr. Slubglob, has just proposed the health of the guests. Screwtape, a very experienced Devil, who is the guest of honor, rises to reply.”³⁴ Screwtape’s pleasantries immediately establish the *prosopopoeia* which carries the entire essay, an impersonation noticeably more comical than *TSL*: “Mr. Principle, Your Imminence, Your Disgraces, my Thorns, Shadies and Gentledevils.”³⁵ Whereas *TSL* discussed specific methods of temptation, here Screwtape wishes to offer his audience of novice devils a “moderately encouraging view of the strategical situation as a whole.” Screwtape illustrates how political concept of ‘democracy’ has been socially perverted and, as a result, caused human beings to become “dull,” “insipid,” and “hardly worth damning.”

In *SPT*, Lewis amplifies his imaginative notion of demons feasting upon damned human souls by setting the “toast” at a demonic banquet. Screwtape expresses sorrow over the poor quality of “food” recently dished up in Hell. He laments over the loss of such succulent sinners as Henry the Eighth and Hitler, recalling that “there was real

crackling there; something to crunch, a rage, an egotism, a cruelty only just less robust than our own. It put up a delicious resistance to being devoured. It warmed your inwards [sic] when you got it down.”³⁶ Conversely, the souls arriving lately in Hell have been “gastronomically” deplorable: a “lukewarm Casserole of Adulterers”; a “municipal authority with Graft sauce”; a “trade unionist garnished with sedition.” Yet, whereas the *quality* of sinners has lowered, the *quantity* has never been higher. And Screwtape finds this “a change for the better,” reasoning that,

The great – and toothsome – sinners are made out of the very same material as those horrible phenomena, the great saints. The virtual disappearance of such material may mean insipid meals for us. But is it now utter frustration and absolute famine for the Enemy? He did not create the humans – He did not become one of them and die among them by torture - in order to produce candidates for Limbo.³⁷

As stated above, successful *prosopopoeia* largely depends on the rhetors ability to speak in character, according to regular expectations for the impersonated entity. Lewis (re)establishes a character that, while absurdly fantastical, has an “air of plausibility” about him. That is, *if* demons were real, it might be expected that they would find pleasure in damning souls, similar to human gratification of eating. Screwtape’s colorful description of the demonic situation constitutes a stylistically impressive *prosopopoeia*, superior to that found in *TSL*. Lewis’s mastery of linguistic clarity and imaginative narrative immediately engages readers. The opening section of the SPT works to gain audience attention and compliance for the major focus: the state of education in America.

After establishing his impersonation, Lewis guides the reader on a path of perspective by incongruity. Following his description of the blandness of human souls, Screwtape explains how the humans arrived in their present state. Thus, Lewis engages in a bit of historiography where he, through Screwtape, romanticizes the past while denouncing the present “modern” phase of humanity. Screwtape attributes the origin of humanity’s qualitative decline with Rousseau’s “perfect democracy.” He explains that “from that starting point, via Hegel (another indispensable propagandist on our side) we easily contrived both the Nazi and the Communist states.”³⁸ This passage represents the first of Lewis’s political allusions. That Nazism and Communism were “contrived” by Hell effectively demonizes Hitler’s Germany and, more importantly for his audience, the Soviet Union. This serves as a point of identification with the American audience, for they had been accustomed to this sort of demonization of communism by the rhetoric of President Eisenhower and Joseph McCarthy.³⁹

Screwtape proceeds to discuss how the diabolical usage of the term “democracy” can lead a political democracy (like England or the United States) to ruin. He instructs the junior tempters by suggesting that,

‘Democracy’ is the word with which you must lead them by the nose . . . You are to use the word purely as an incantation; if you like, purely for its selling power. It is a name they venerate. And, of course, it is connected with the political ideal that men should be equally treated. You then make a stealthy transition in their minds from this political ideal to a factual belief that all men *are* equal.⁴⁰

Here, Lewis reveals the cunningness of demons. As a result of the appropriation of the term “democracy,” individuals adopt the attitude of “I’m as good as you.” This is a very

useful attitude for demons which, according to Screwtape, causes individuals to resent and reject any superiority in other people, thus promoting a “vast, overall movement toward the discrediting, and finally the elimination, of every kind of human excellence – moral, cultural, social or intellectual.”⁴¹ As readers complete the satirical turn, they find a biting critique of the modern model. This disparagement surpasses *TSL* in that it locates a problem not only in an orientation, but in modern people themselves. In a word, Lewis calls his contemporaries, his audience, *ignorant*. This would generally be a suicidal argument for a rhetor to put forward, but because Lewis strategically places the judgment in the mouth of Screwtape, he shifts the blame of the unfavorable message onto the shoulders of an imaginary character.

Screwtape’s historiography climaxes in the subject of education, the primary concern in the essay. Lewis viewed the “progressive” education movement as a threat to the integrity of society as a whole. Through Screwtape, Lewis argues that the “democratic” spirit of *I’m as good as you* has worked its way through the education system.

Screwtape gleefully explains the effect of progressive approaches on education. The following passage embodies Lewis’s critique of progressive education. Though quite lengthy, I deem it necessary to reproduce here because it represents the main rhetorical thrust of the essay and Lewis’s response to his opposition:

The basic principle of the new education is to be that dunces and idlers must not be made to feel inferior to intelligent and industrious pupils. That would be ‘undemocratic.’ These differences among the pupils – for they are odiously and nakedly *individual* differences – must be disguised . . . At schools the children

who are too stupid or lazy to learn languages and mathematics and elementary science can be set to doing the things that children used to do in their spare time. Let them, for example, make mud pies and call it modeling. But all the time there must be no faintest hint that they are inferior to the children who are at work. Whatever nonsense they are engaged in must have – I believe the English already use the phrase – a “parity of esteem”. . . Children who are fit to proceed to a higher class may be artificially held back, because the others would get a ‘trauma’ – Beelzebub what a useful word! – by being left behind. A bright pupil thus remains democratically fettered to his own age group throughout his school career . . . All incentives to learn and all penalties for not learning will vanish . . . We shall no longer have to plan and toil to spread imperturbable conceit and incurable ignorance among men. The little vermin will do it for us.

In its essence, this passage works to unseat the progressive educational approach by replacing its dialectical term *parity of esteem* with *excellence*. Lewis quite forcefully argues against the position of the progressive education movement. His satirical lampooning renders the progressive education movement laughable and, more importantly, dangerous. The hyperbolic example of academically praising mud pies as modeling heightens the absurdity of allowing each individual student to determine their own standards. Once again, he is able to sharply condemn through the camouflage of Screwtape.

With the new organizing principle of *excellence* established, Lewis, through Screwtape, transcends policy decisions in state education. The “democratic” (diabolical

sense) spread of ignorance would not follow “unless all education became state education.” But Screwtape is sure that it will:

That is part of the same movement. Penal taxes, designed for that purpose, are liquidating the middle class . . . The removal of this class, besides linking up with the abolition of education, is fortunately an inevitable effect of the spirit that says ‘I’m as good as you.’⁴²

According to Screwtape, “democracy,” in the diabolical-social sense, “leads to a nation without great men, a nation mainly of subalterns [sic], morally flaccid from lack of discipline in youth, full of cocksureness which flattery breeds on ignorance, blustering or whimpering if rebuked.”⁴³ This type of society is what Hell hopes for.

This section of the SPT attempts to stupefy the arguments made by John Dewey. Although not explicitly stated by Lewis, perceptive readers quite easily see through Lewis’s Screwtapian disguise to the author’s political commitments. Still, by framing the societal infection of “I’m as good as you” as an incursion from demonic forces, Lewis appears as the friendly informant with good intentions, rather than the foreign faultfinder. To reinforce “delusions” of progressive education, Lewis has Screwtape reference the political explosion in America after the launch of Sputnik:

The Democracies were surprised lately when they found that the Soviet Union had got ahead of them in science. What a delicious specimen of human blindness! If the whole tendency of their society is opposed to every sort of excellence, why did they expect their scientists to excel?⁴⁴

This explicit allusion to the Cold War education race sharply criticizes progressivists' value for *equality*. For Lewis, *excellence* should be the driving force behind education, not *equality*.

But Lewis does not stop with the dialectical order of terms. Rather, as he does in *TSL*, Lewis, through Screwtape, attempts to transcend temporality with the *eternal* order: "The overthrow of free peoples and the multiplication of slave states are for us a means – besides, of course being fun – but the real end is the destruction of individual souls."⁴⁵ Inculcating the spirit of "I'm as good as you" has a far deeper value for demons than merely ruining societies – it "turns a human being away from every road which might finally lead him to Heaven."⁴⁶

Hence, *eternity* becomes SPT's organizing principle, the ultimate term, by which political decisions about education should be made. And since, according to Lewis, one's eternal destination is based on them stepping out from the crowd of demonic mediocrity, an educational policy encouraging *excellence* becomes the best way for nations to foster an *eternal* focus. By speaking in the "ultimate" terms of supernatural forces, Lewis rises above the "dialectical" argument over educational policy. Lewis takes what would typically be a conversation in the political realm of contingency and raises it to the religious, transcendent realm.

With SPT Lewis constructs a far more compelling and focused argument than those found in *TSL*. Lewis's satirical *prosopopoeia* disguises his potentially controversial argument against social (not political) notion of democracy and the corresponding progressive educational philosophy. By having Screwtape approve the spread of the "I'm as good as you" attitude, Lewis inversely argues for schooling which promotes *excellence*

over *equality*. Furthermore, he transcends the modern obsession with equality by making individual excellence a trait of *eternal* significance. Lewis's Screwtapian rhetoric of *eternity* effectually reorders the reader's "orientation" to the world.

Diabolical Ventriloquism: Rhetorical Merit

In a subsequent issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* the editor printed several reader responses to SPT. Although it is virtually impossible to measure the "success" or "effectiveness" of Lewis's Screwtapian rhetoric, these reactions hint at some advantages and limitations of diabolical ventriloquism. One reader wrote, "It is difficult to calculate the great good that will come from exposing your readers to such an important question as mass mediocrity and Christian principle. Screwtape must be howling with displeasure at seeing his script in print."⁴⁷ Others praised the article as "Renaissance vintage" and "devilish good dope."⁴⁸ But not every reader appreciated Lewis's demonization. One respondent contemptuously asked, "must we be subjected to the snobbishness (running mate to envy) of an 'individual' whose exalted professorship raises him above the 'Little Man'? . . . Even us 'Just Folks' are capable of understanding morality and righteousness without having it translated into a satirical invective by a Screw (ball)."⁴⁹ Another reader condescendingly called Lewisonian Christianity as presented in SPT a "technicolored theology."⁵⁰

These disparate responses suggest an important limitation to Lewis's rhetoric. For Lewis's Christian readers – those who approach the texts with a firm belief in supernatural entities – the Screwtape discourses present a powerful re-interpretation of modern life. Both SPT and *TSL* positively challenge and stretch a Christian's perception

of their faith. For the non-Christian reader, however, the Screwtape discourses fail to inculcate a new perspective of the world. While this portion of Lewis's audience may enjoy the texts and even chuckle at the incongruities it introduces, many readers may disregard the text as antiquated religious nonsense. Additionally, as George A. Test contests, satire often "causes trouble" and disconcerts readers.⁵¹ Demonization always produces enemies. In Lewis's case, these enemies are individuals who might have otherwise been willing to reconsider their perceptions but were instead insulted. This is especially true for Lewis in SPT. Were a progressivist to read the essay, it might very well annoy and frustrate them, further cementing their liberal views of education.

Still, in terms of his target audiences, I deem Lewis's technique of diabolical ventriloquism a brilliantly resourceful response to a substantial set of rhetorical problems. Lewis strategically exploits the Christian belief in demons, using the Screwtapeian mask to subvert his opposition (modern-liberal-progressive thought). The Screwtape discourses present a functionally sound *prosopopoeia* which imaginatively engages readers. Through his demon-puppet, Lewis both enhances his ethos (speaking as an eternal authority) and shifts the blame for unfavorable arguments. As cultural and political satires, *TSL* and SPT lampoon the dominant "modern" humanist perspective by creating incongruities. Through Screwtape, Lewis adopts a (inverse) prophetic argumentative mode which calls for readers to return to a "Godly" lifestyle centered on a belief in objective "truth." Both discourses transcend the temporal-minded worldview through the ultimate god-term *eternity*. This rhetorical reordering of human life was of special significance because of the looming fear of death during both WWII and the Cold War.

The Screwtape discourses are anomalous in terms of their rhetorical strategy, but not in their appeal to *eternity*. In the following chapter, I consider the implications of this analysis and discuss possible directions for future studies.

Notes

¹C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters and Screwtape Proposes a Toast* (London England, Bles, 1961). Because of the multiplicity of *TSL* publications, all subsequent references denote the Letter (chapter) number rather than page number.

² Letter #19.

³ This mythic battle is said to be described in chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation: “Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. . . And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him” (Revelation 12:3-9). Some demonologies make a clear distinction between “fallen angels” and “demons,” claiming that they are two separate entities.

⁴ In some demonologies, various demons are given names and assigned to specific sins. Those demons which embody the Cardinal sins are ranked higher than those representing venial sins. Other depictions of the demonic hierarchy discuss different classes including Chief Princes, Generals, Legions, Strongmen, and Imps.

⁵ Letter #7.

⁶ For an enlightening study which compares Milton’s Hell to Lewis’s, see Chad P. Stutz, “No ‘Sombre Satan’: C.S. Lewis, Milton, and Re-presentations of the Diabolical,” *Religion and the Arts*, 9:3-4, (2005): 208-234.

⁷ Lewis took issue

⁸ Letter #22.

⁹ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 271.

¹⁰ Letter #8.

¹¹ Letter #8.

¹² C.S. Lewis, “Preface,” in *The Screwtape Letters with Screwtape Proposes a Toast* (London: Geoffry Bles, 1961), p. x.

¹³ Letter #9.

¹⁴ Letter #1.

¹⁵ Letter #1.

¹⁶ Letter #23.

¹⁷ Based upon the intended meaning of this passage, Lewis would most likely disapprove of this thesis. The field of rhetorical criticism clearly approaches discourses from the “Historical Point of View.”

¹⁸ Letter #27.

¹⁹ Letter #25.

²⁰ Letter #23.

²¹ The “golden calf” refers to the idol made by the Israelites during Moses’ absence (Exodus chapters 32- 34). Moses returns to find the misdirected Israelites worshipping the golden sculpture. He quickly rebukes the people for their blasphemous actions and orders the calf to be melted down.

²² Letter #23.

²³ Letter #23.

²⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987; 1963), 39. I am unaware of any rebuttal from Niebuhr.

²⁵ For a more recent example of this, consider the categories on an individual’s Facebook profile. “Religious Views” is just one category among many (e.g. Political Views, Relationship Status, Favorite Music, Interests). For Lewis, this would signify a larger problem. A person’s faith, according to Lewis, should subsume all other aspects of life – not just be a part of it.

²⁶ Letter #25

²⁷ Letter #23.

²⁸ Letter #15.

²⁹ Letter #5.

³⁰ Letter #5.

³¹ Letter #28.

³² By “Godify” I mean two things. Obviously, *eternity* is inextricably bound to notions of the Christian God. But I also use the term “Godify” to refer to any use of ultimate “god-terms.” For example, American presidents regularly Godify “freedom” or “democracy” – claiming that these principles are of Heaven. For a further study in presidential “god-terms,” see Robert L. Ivie, “Presidential Motives for War,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 60 (1974): 337-345.

³³ Letter #31.

³⁴ “Toast,” 36.

³⁵ “Toast,” 36.

³⁶ “Toast,” 36.

³⁷ “Toast,” 86.

³⁸ “Toast,” 88.

³⁹ See Philip Wander’s discussion of Eisenhower’s *prophetic dualism* in “The Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70 (1984).

⁴⁰ “Toast,” 88.

⁴¹ “Toast,” 88.

⁴² “Toast,” 88-89.

⁴³ “Toast,” 89.

⁴⁴ “Toast,” 89.

⁴⁵ “Toast,” 89.

⁴⁶ “Toast,” 89.

⁴⁷ Edward R. Gaines, “Letters.” *Saturday Evening Post*, January 23, 1960. 232, no. 30: 4.

⁴⁸ James Ball and Hans R. Poulsen, “Letters.” *Saturday Evening Post*, January 23, 1960. 232, no. 30: 4

⁴⁹ Mrs. J. W. Gibbs, "Letters." *Saturday Evening Post* , January 23, 1960. 232, no. 30: 4.

⁵⁰ Donna Treloar, "Letters." *Saturday Evening Post* , January 23, 1960. 232, no. 30: 4.

⁵¹ George A. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1991).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This project began as an attempt to understand the merit of Lewis's rhetorical strategy in the Screwtape discourses. Lewis's technique of "diabolical ventriloquism" certainly represents one of the most fascinating and resourceful cases of spiritualization in Western history. *TSL* and *SPT* erect a compelling rhetorical vision of the world characterized by spiritual *eternity* rather than secular *temporality*. In this final chapter I review the material covered in this study, discuss the implications of both Lewis's rhetoric and this analysis.

Review

Chapter One introduced Screwtape and the notion of spiritualization. I defined spiritualization as the attempt of a rhetor to shape an audience's reality by claiming that specific patterns of thought or actions are "vouchsafed" by God. Written from the perspective of a veteran demon in Hell, Lewis's Screwtape discourses uniquely utilize this rhetorical strategy. This chapter provided a clear rationale for studying Screwtape from a rhetorical perspective, arguing that analyzing the texts ultimately aids in understanding religious rhetoric, demonization, and Lewis as an author. The literature review concentrated on Christian rhetoric, the rhetoric of fiction, and instances of spiritualization in American politics. I contended that a meticulous rhetorical critique of the Screwtape discourses bridges gaps in existing scholarship and provides an interesting case study in the rhetoric of eternity.

In an effort to understanding the factors motivating Lewis to write the Screwtape discourses, Chapter Two placed the *TSL* and *SPT* in their corresponding contexts. *TSL* was shaped by the enveloping exigency of World War II in Britain. Specifically, Lewis originally wrote to a British audience coping with the tragedies and uncertainties of warfare during the German air raids known as “The Battle of Britain.” Written to an American audience during the Cold War, *SPT* also needed to attend to an audience feeling the consternation of war, specifically global nuclear extinction. This chapter also illuminated the less obvious though more important exigency of “modern” patterns of thought. Lewis took issue with the basic assumptions of twentieth-century thinking and sought to correct these perceived inadequacies. More particularly, Lewis took issue with the modern tendencies toward subjectivism, (what Lewis calls) chronological snobbery, and the corruption of religion. The combination of modernity and war created considerable rhetorical problems for both discourses, motivating and constraining Lewis’s aim at promoting his own *Lewissonian* Christianity.

Chapter Three detailed the analytical method utilized in the subsequent textual analysis. The theoretical apparatus fashioned in this chapter consists of three major rhetorical strategies: *prosopopoeia*, perspective by incongruity, and transcending opposing arguments through ultimate terms. The art of impersonation, commonly called *prosopopoeia*, affords rhetors significant advantages but also requires stylistic mastery. Burke’s notion of perspective by incongruity informs the Screwtape discourses’ satirical qualities. The Burkean notion of “order” also helps to illuminate the interworking of the Screwtape discourses. These three precepts coalesce to form the theoretical apparatus with which I analyze the Screwtape discourse: *inverted transcendence*.

Finally, Chapter Four performed a comprehensive textual analysis of *TSL* and *SPT* respectively, evaluating them through the lens of *inverted transcendence*. The analysis ultimately concluded that the Screwtape discourses were appropriate and inventive responses to considerable rhetorical problems. Through appealing to an *eternal* order, Lewis presents a potent rhetorical argument against the modern model while providing comfort to his war-ridden audiences. Lewis's choice to couch his argument in demonic satire rather than "straight" talk renders his message more memorable and powerful.

Results and Implications

This analysis of Screwtape has produced several valuable insights for the field of rhetorical studies. First and most broadly, this thesis demonstrates the centrality of language in culture. The texts remind us that our world is, as Kenneth Burke notes, merely a construct of symbols.¹ More specifically, the Screwtape discourses illustrate how spiritualized messages potentially shape our overarching understanding of human life. To the extent that the Screwtape discourses had any effect on readers' perception of reality, it was because of Lewis's strategic use of spiritualizing language. I have argued here that Lewis's Screwtape discourses resourcefully utilize the strategies of demonization and Godification to discredit modern attitudes and practices. By presenting Hell's perspective on modernism and war, Lewis demonizes specific human behavior and, thus, Godifies the opposite. In effect, Lewis claims that *his* worldview and *his* politics are *God's* worldview and *God's* politics. If accepted as legitimate, Godification will actively structure the consciousness of an audience. It rhetorically fashions a

bifurcated world of Godly versus demonic forces, good versus evil. This strategy, therefore, affords rhetors the advantage of claiming God as “supporting material” (a backer with some clout, to say the least).

But what are the ethical implications of such a rhetoric? Despite the cultural ubiquity and potential persuasiveness of rhetorical Godification, it is dangerous business. The abuse of *rhetorical* Godification often leads to *corporeal* atrocities. History proves this point. Unthinkable “evils” have been committed under pretense of doing “God’s work” (e.g. The Crusades, Holy Wars, Terrorist attacks, genocidal “cleansing,” etc.). In many cases, what would generally be called “evil” by society comes from those purporting to do “good.” The conviction and assurance which characterizes the bulk of religious rhetoric can influence audiences to make literal life or death decisions. There can never be absolute assurance that a spiritualized position on an issue *actually* represents the true will of God. Consequently, rhetoric which Godifies particular human thoughts and actions should be used with extreme caution. Fortunately, Lewis uses prudence in his Screwtapian treatment of society. He restricts his Godification in *TSL* to the moral life of the *individual*; and while SPT discusses a polemically charged political topic (public education), Lewis in no way advocates violence or hatred.

Second, this project illuminates the utility of three distinct theoretical schemas. While the collective theoretical framework of *inverted transcendence* might be just as anomalous as the Screwtape discourses themselves, aspects of its three components can be applied to a variety of texts. *Prosopopoeia*, as discussed here, can assist in understanding the rhetoric of fiction and acting. Future studies of satirical or ironic texts can benefit from the application of Burke’s perspective by incongruity to Screwtape,

especially with respect to the prophetic persona of satirists. Critics exploring religiously charged rhetoric will also find Burke's notion of "ultimate terms" valuable.

With respect to Lewis's "ultimate term" of choice, this thesis also functions as a preliminary study in the rhetoric of eternity. The Screwtape discourses revolve around the notion that *every* choice an individual takes has spiritual consequences which either them toward Heaven or Hell. Like Lewis, other religious rhetors often order their rhetorical visions in the ultimate term *eternity*. Throughout the history of the Christian church, leaders have preached the centrality of Heaven – life after death. What we do on earth, according to the Christian tradition, affects our eternal destiny. By suggesting that one's actions may affect their eternal destiny adversely, rhetors access a powerful mode of argumentation. "Lie," says the preacher, "and you are in danger of the Hell fire;" "support my policy," argues the politician, "and we will position our nation on a path toward righteousness." Appeals to an *eternal* order are especially powerful during times of war, hot or cold, where death becomes a palpable reality. The war-time context of both *TSL* and *SPT* give more weight to Lewis's attempt to transcend temporality. The rhetoric of eternity has yet to be fully explored – a viable direction for future studies of religious discourse.

Lastly, this analysis partially accounts for the lasting presence of C.S. Lewis in twenty-first century religious circles. Those unfamiliar with the style, wit, and clarity of Lewis's prose get a taste of it in the Screwtape discourses. His mastery over language coupled with his rational argumentation, as revealed in this study, explain his lingering ubiquity over forty years after his death.

To this day, Screwtape remains an icon in Christian culture. The fictional character has influenced popular perceptions of demons and the supernatural. Despite its satirical limitations, diabolical ventriloquism offers a potent, engaging, and entertaining rhetoric of eternity. In an age which demands immediacy, busyness, and progress, Screwtape reminds us to slow down, take a breath, and consider life from an *eternal* perspective.

Notes

¹ See Kenneth Burke, “Definition of Man,” chapter in *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley CA: UC Press, 1966).

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