

***As One Devil to Another: A Fiendish Correspondence in the Tradition of C.S. Lewis's The Screwtape Letters*, by Richard Platt**

C.S. Lewis Society of California Bay Area Book Club, September 23 and 27

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Letter I:

Introduction to the main characters, Slashreap and Scardigger, younger brother and cousin respectively to Screwtape and Wormwood, assigned to the American Sector.

Letter II:

Review of the Seven Demonic Virtues, 4 earthly, 3 spiritual—parody on the 4 cardinal virtues and the 3 theological virtues (outlined in *Mere Christianity*).

Letter III:

Introduction to the client: female postgraduate in English department of a prestigious university (hotbed of arrogance, spiritual erosion, social vanity). Critique of current trends, including infection by scientific methodology of 19th Century German Universities, focus on literary criticism yielding jargon instead of disciplined study of the historical *corpus*, rise of Deconstructionism and focus on response

Letter IV:

Prosperity is more favorable to the devils' work versus being meek and poor. The Devil offers "Nothing". Danger of contrition. Case study of Itchgrit's client (the industrialist and his little son) to remind need for vigilance.

Letter V:

Discussion of "First Principles" involving the role of pain and suffering in the human's world, the world as dress rehearsal, the real show is on the other side—a truth to be hidden from clients. Economy and intentionality of Adversary's world, in which He submitted to death by torture.

Letter VI:

Introduction of the client's aunt, a Lewis reader (living her whole life with good literature) and wise, old servant of the Adversary. She puncture's the client's vanity and pride by her honest critique of the client's dissertation.

Letter VII:

Encounter with the gardener, opening the client's receptivity to the world's beauty that she had been overlooking for too long.

Letter VIII:

First Principles 2.0: deflect clients from Adversary's direction of pushing. Adversary's world is uncomfortable, distract clients with lure of happiness turned inward, encouraged by charlatans to

misdirect away from gratitude, genuine prayer and into increasing despair. Speculation on Adversary's ideal world, Chesterton's remark about Adversary's instructions being found difficult and not tried. Humans don't see the whole picture as lit by the Light of Grace and eternity.

Letter IX:

What do you think of the author's portrayal of contemporary female sexuality? What role (if any) does vanity, provocation, competitiveness for scarce resources, "sexual equality" and imitation of male promiscuity play in motivate current female sexual behavior? Is atheism today really "provocative" or is sloth and socialization/indoctrination more common as motivators towards atheism? How successful have been the devil's efforts to "eliminate the concept of sexual union as sacramental and holy, and with it the destruction of fertile, monogamous, and mutually beneficial marriages"?

Letter X:

Technology as two-edged sword. The technological imperative versus moral judgment. Malign influences of television.

Letter XI:

The University: corruption from locus of Fellowship to a hotbed of competition and jealousies, growing out of the long-inculcated desire for approval and approbation and perpetual grading rooted on the desire for recognition which is the antithesis of God's purposes: "Perfect service to Him creates, ultimately, a mindset which is indifferent to recognition. The central point is not who has done Good Work, but that Good Work has been done". The destructive potential of "peer review" turning into mutual back scratching, with success based more on perception than on reality. Apotheosis of "original" work—versus work as adding to a corpus of historical effort (*c.f.* Hippocrates "Life is short but *the Art* is long"). Allusion to ownership (*c.f.* *The Great Divorce*).

Letter XII:

Political correctness as distortion of reality: characterized by "not calling anything by its rightful name" and muzzling "dissenting voices of those who will not be deceived". Manipulation of virtues such as empathy, gratitude to evoke guilt and thereby gain power (example of "cripples"). Imposed characterization of homosexuality as "Valid Alternative Lifestyle" and the corruptions in relationships that results, turning tolerance into a demand first for acceptance and then for approval—and finally creating a new "unconditional truth". Political correctness creates division in the church, elevates Spiritual Pride and subverts prayer and forgiveness (receiving and accepting). Last paragraph is excellent coda: "Political correctness gives us the advantage...reducing the issues of spiritual life and death to semantics, etymology, and catchphrases"—intellectual laziness.

Letter XIII:

The Aunt, alas! Client moves in with aunt to assist her and thus subject to her influence. Creation and sub-creation—ordering one’s thoughts accordingly; gratitude for what has been given by the Creator, growing intimacy with God and purifying through the process of sub-creation.

Letter XIV:

Now the client is in a Bible Study group (a consequence of Scardagger’s disdain for religious believers as silly and ignorant). The Pharasee, the enthusiast, the irritable old bachelor—how true are these portrayals? Slashreap’s explanation of the Gospel message and rejection of it as foolishness (*c.f.* I Cor 1:18+).

Letter XV:

Visit to the art museum: client’s laughing at preposterousness of examples of modern “art”. The triumph of the Subjective over the Objective. Disabling of art’s function to elevate and uplift the human soul by the Big Lie. Intimidation of “clear-sighted humans” who acquire taste and judge by objective standards.

Letter XVI:

Tripped up by a squirrel: the client meets the scientist when both took their eyes off themselves, mediated by observing nature, and start to see each other as they really are, having evaded the “sleeping dragons.”

Letter XVII:

The client and scientist take a stroll down Addison’s Walk, leading to Slashreap’s agonized retelling of the conversion of C.S. Lewis. The moral: “never allow your client even a moment of innocuous merriment,” employ distraction from the *now* lest the human learns the revolting habit of seeing beauty in the Commonplace and the Everyday, which draws them to see the Creator through seeing Creation.

Letter XVIII:

Slashreap evades Scardagger’s curveball (so to speak)—reminder of the climate of Hellish society. Panegyric to competition: its diabolical economy, focus on scarcity, turning away from “liberal education” to pursuit of profit as highest good (How true is this dichotomy?), diversion from the Eternal by the worldly.

Letter XIX:

No such thing as Chance, in His Creation, “all is presented for a reason”. “Reviewing the situation” (*c.f.* Fagan in *Oliver*)—progression of prior events, plus bachelor developing a warming relationship with the aunt, a healthy man-women interaction for the client to witness. The aunt diagnosed with cancer, giving the client the opportunity to see the face of genuine Faith and the prospect of observing spiritual beauty emerging through the aunt’s travails.

Letter XX:

Technology trends: the internet, the Virtual Community, Reality Television, cellular phone and their usefulness to Hell.

Letter XXI:

Growing influence of the client on the Bible study group, the scientist has started coming with his skeptical mind, signs that the warmth between the two may soon blossom into Love. The scientist starts to recognize limits on empirical evidence and the ultimate futility of seeking for mathematical certainty. Approaching decision for the scientist regarding a Leap of Faith—the chasm behind as well as the one before, not to decide is to decide against.

Letter XXII:

Aunt's advancing cancer defers the progress towards marriage between the client and the scientist. Family history of the scientist, adversity of a disengaged father, mother's love, embrace of loyalty and straight talk, a strong foundation for successful marriage. Moral: "just as we can bend pleasure to our purpose, so can He bend pain to His". Postscript: the scientist has bought a ring with the intention to propose marriage to the client.

Letter XXIII:

Petitionary prayer in the face of pain, how the aunt's advancing cancer will refine the faith of her, the client, and the bachelor, temptation to focus on poor ol' me and my loss rather than God's promises and provision.

Letter XXIV:

Competition and back stabbing between tempters: the minx and the client go their separate ways. Sexual revolution focus attention of the human form, turning a woman's beauty into a spiritual burden, overdependence on attracting male interest through their bodies, which later on as they age can turn inwards into increasing anxiety, insecurity, resentment, and if unchecked—hatred. Humor deflates puffed up pride.

Letter XXV:

Hellish perspective regarding love and its indecipherability, even as He says it is quite simple. "Love one another" is not romantic love, not primarily a feeling, but a duty and a choice, to apply the principle of self-love to each other's good. Hell cannot comprehend "love" beyond aggrandizement.

Letter XXVI:

The aunt dies in faith, the heavenly flash and apprehension of the failed tempter. The bachelor's extreme grief takes the client's mind off herself and helps the two bond over their shared memories of the aunt. Grief as an agent to clarify the human mind, intensifying the reality of Love and focusing their mind on death and the need to prepare for what is beyond. The fact that "in grief, as in any other deeply felt emotion, they are profoundly awake and alive". Slashreap

momentarily entertains the heresy that Love is not delusion but truth, but swiftly dismisses it (*c.f.* King Agrippa “almost converted” in Acts 26:28).¹

Letter XXVII:

The client reaches a crossroads, whether to accept the scientist’s marriage proposal, and whether to accept a position at the university (which has long been her intent) or teaching literacy to intellectually limited children. In this hour, she seeks counsel with the gardener, who turns out to be a good listener and a fount of wisdom about marriage and her career choice (p. 166).

Letter XXVIII:

The client falls ill in new grief, and in bed she has a numinous encounter with her aunt and a link to the land of music and silence (*c.f.* Screwtape’s paean to noise in *The Screwtape Letters*) inhabited by the Adversary and his Servants, experience of *awe*. Her aunt speaks that all is well and that she will be with the client always. Meanwhile, Scardagger experience fear and pain from the brush with the divine presence. The client experiences real *joy*, probably for the first time in her life, as her aunt bestowed on her a transformation of faith, the protection of divine grace, and *knowledge* that *He is there*. Failure for Scardagger with the expectation that he will be food soon.

Letter XXIX:

Scardagger so far has evaded Infernal Security. Slashreap exalts in the extraordinary honor by His Infernal Majesty of being given “a once-in-a-millennium Special Emergency Mission, Top Secret” commission that is puzzling to Slashreap but which the author telegraphs to the reader as a mission to Narnia.²

Letter XXX:

What in French would be called a *bouleversement*: a letter from “Driptweak” to Scardagger informs the reader that the commission was a forgery and a trap for Slashreap. Balancing the criminality of Slashreap’s theft/forgery versus the diabolical cleverness, the Infernal Majesty promotes Slashreap to a professorship (no escape from the university—is this an ironic punishment?) accompanied with grave warnings and the leftover reject scraps of Scardagger (shades of the “horse’s head in the bed” scene from *The Godfather!*).³

End Notes:

¹ In retrospect, does Letter XXVI represent a final effort by God, reaching down even into Hell, to take Slashreap past the suffocating barrier and encompass him for a moment within his protection to offer him his grace and salvation? (*c.f.* The Harrowing of Hell).

² How would you compare the diabolical character of Slashreap that we encounter in these letters with Lewis’ portrayal of Screwtape? Who is better able to explicate the Adversary’s position? Who provides more useful guidance on how to combat the Adversary? Who shows more endurance or determination in the face of setbacks? How reliable or accurate is Slashreap’s portrayal of Scardagger in his letters? If you were to assess Slashreap’s mentoring of Scardagger, what grade would you give him?

³ Read over the excerpt from C. S. Lewis’s “Preface to the *Screwtape Letters*” that follows on the next page, paying particular attention as to how Lewis symbolizes Hell (“something like the bureaucracy of a police state or the offices

Letter XXXI:

Scardagger gives tribute to Screwtape, who remains unnamed. And by extension, this is the author's tribute to C.S. Lewis.

of a thoroughly nasty business concern”) and characterizes his devils as absolutely lacking humor, which “involves a sense of proportion and a power of seeing yourself from the outside”.

Remembering also the author's final admonition that “There is still wishful thinking in Hell as there is on Earth, and the Devil is still a liar”, how credible do you find the narrative in Letter XXX? Does it pass the giggle test? Was a low-echelon fugitive really able to penetrate Satan's inner sanctum to steal his stationery, forge his handwriting for hundreds of pages, and manage to deliver it to Slashreap through official channels, for instance? Or is the narrative itself a devilish deception?

In other words, is perhaps this narrative just an elaborate charade orchestrated to cover-up the disastrous failure of the mission to Narnia that Slashreap had undertaken at the actual behest of Satan?

Or is perhaps this narrative a cover-up of a secret purge of Slashreap? A scheme cooked up by Screwtape?

Or is some other devilry going on behind the scene?

And if so, does Letter XXXI also signal, *sub rosa*, Scardagger's understanding of what's really going on and affirm his ongoing cooperation with the regime?