

2021 Classical Literature Scholarship—2nd Place

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The Captivation of C.S. Lewis's The Screwtape Letters

I remember fondly a story my grandfather used to tell me when I was little, about a great battle that took place thousands of years ago—a battle that determined the fate of the world between good and evil. Of course, the good side won in some desperate last-ditch attempt to secure victory. It was here that I first was exposed to the notation of some evil being always in pursuit of the degradation of the quality of human existence. Obviously I didn't think that as a four year old; it was somewhere along the line of "some evil man is always after me and I have to watch out".

As I continued into young adulthood, I quickly forgot this story and busied myself with what I thought to be more important things. I continued to learn about the nature of good and evil, but it never affected me as much as it did when I was younger. I substituted my belief in good and evil with girls, friends, anything really that made me not think any more than I had to. These two things had almost no relation to one another, and I tried to fit a square peg into a round hole. In an attempt to shield myself from the realities of life I created an illusion that I only ever needed to concern myself with things that had an immediate effect on me. Pain was uncomfortable and that is what I avoided at all costs. It caught up to me, of course it did. Something that was so fundamentally flawed could have never stood before the towering judgement of the very nature of life.

It was my junior year of high school, and I was climbing the main stairway enroute to Directed Readings. Earlier in the summer before school started, I picked out my classes. I have always heard about the joys and wonders of Mr. Simmons's Directed Readings class. I was determined to take it. Though I picked the class because of Mr. Simmons and my friends that would be in there—I ultimately grew out of it more than I would have even thought possible. Through Directed Readings, I was able to spark my long-awaited educational awakening. Most importantly, through Directed Readings I was exposed to C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*.

C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*, focuses on two demons corresponding with each other through a series of letters. Screwtape, the mentor of the young Wormwood, sends letters giving advice for Wormwood to more effectively do his job. As I first began to read the book, I was in the opening stages of my new found love for learning. I was annotating furiously at almost every sentence, I discussed my ideas with mentors and friends, and eventually purchased a journal that I soon quickly filled with mine and others thoughts.

I hate pondering back on this relatively short time in my life, as I went through the motions of what I believed I should have been doing and not what I really needed to do. Luckily I caught myself, or rather something greater than me caught my attention. Late on a school night I was quickly trying to catch up on my reading in the book. I was sleepy, hangry, and generally reading without attentiveness to the formation of letters on the paper. It was then that I dropped my book on accident, angrily bending over to pick it up and looking at the page there seemed to be a highlighter slowly going across a specific sentence: "To be greatly and effectively wicked, a man needs some virtue" (159). Never in my life has a sentence resonated with me that much, not even when in discussion of the scriptures or other great classics.

A sentence so little, that it's almost glanced over, directly sparked me back to life. I was sleepwalking for 17 years of my life and didn't know it. What was once something so trivial to me as the nature of good and evil became a keystone of my life, living to be good and no longer projecting my personal views of what is evil onto other's actions. I finished the book, and continued on to rediscover principles that were once known to me. Without *The Screwtape Letters* I would still be sleepwalking through my life, unaware of the personal responsibility to continuously strive to better myself and my community every day.