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Irony and Reader in *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis

São José do Rio Preto
2020

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Dissertação apresentada como parte dos requisitos para obtenção do título de Mestre em Letras, junto ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, do Instituto de Biociências, Letras e Ciências Exatas da Universidade Estadual Paulista “Júlio de Mesquita Filho”, Câmpus de São José do Rio Preto.

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For my mom, whose sense of humour
has modelled me as self, and for my
dad, who has been benefitted by my
jokes.

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“The person who doesn’t read lives only one life. The reader lives 5,000. Reading is immortality backwards.”

Umberto Eco

RESUMO

Este estudo analisa a interação interpretativa entre ironia e leitor na ficção satírica *The Screwtape Letters*, de C. S. Lewis. Partimos do nível afetivo da ironia presente nas cartas do demônio Screwtape, e utilizamos as noções de cooperação interpretativa e funções da ironia de, respectivamente, Umberto Eco e Linda Hutcheon, para, então, discutir a hipótese de que a inversão irônica que estrutura a obra de Lewis não apenas veicula ideias consideradas importantes, em tempos de guerra, pelo autor, mas também gera seu efeito cômico. Assim, a análise de elementos textuais e contextuais que a constituem e refletem a fé cristã e criatividade ficcional de C. S. Lewis revelam que, uma vez que a inversão irônica é inferida e avaliada pelo leitor a partir de seus movimentos cognitivos e do grau de afetividade em relação às funções irônicas daquela, *The Screwtape Letters* tem proporcionado uma perspectiva Cristã (por meio de inversão) e fruição literária à comunidade leitora de C. S. Lewis desde sua publicação semanal.

Palavras-chave: Interpretação da ironia. Sátira religiosa. Literatura e Cristianismo. Recepção literária.

ABSTRACT

This study analyses the interpretive interplay between irony and reader in satirical fiction *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis. It parts from senior devil Screwtape's affective level of irony and uses Umberto Eco's and Linda Hutcheon's notions of, respectively, interpretive cooperation and functions of irony to discuss the hypothesis that ironic inversion functions as a structured whole in Lewis's work, in the sense that it not only conveys religious ideas regarded as important in wartime by the author, but also raises its comic effects. Thus, the analysis of textual and contextual elements which constitute it and reflect C. S. Lewis's Christian faith and fictional creativity will reveal that, once ironic inversion is inferred and evaluated by the reader from his/her cognitive movements and degree of affectivity in relation to its ironical functions, *The Screwtape Letters* has provided a Christian perspective in reverse as well as literary enjoyability to C. S. Lewis's community of readers since its weekly publication.

Keywords: Interpretation of irony. Religious satire. Literature and Christianity. Reader reception.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 – Roles and messages from Douglas C. Muecke	21
Figure 2 – The functions of irony from Linda Hutcheon	35
Figure 3 – Satirical victims in <i>The Screwtape Letters</i>	99
Figure 4 – Functions of Irony in <i>The Screwtape Letters</i>	103

SUMMARY

1	INTRODUCTION	11
2	IRONY AND READER	16
2.1	An Introduction to Irony	16
2.2	The Reader of an Ironical Work	28
2.3	Irony and Reader in (Religious) Satire	39
3	C. S. LEWIS, IRONY AND READER	47
3.1	C. S. Lewis: The Critic, the Fictionist, the Apologist	47
3.2	<i>The Screwtape Letters</i>	57
3.2.1	Context, Publication and Reception	58
3.2.2	Devilish Plot, Characterisation and Style	61
3.2.3	Ironical Inversion: From Satire to Apologetics	73
4	IRONY AND READER IN <i>THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS</i>	79
4.2	An Interpretive Walk Through the <i>Letters</i>	79
4.2	Levels of Irony and the Role of the Reader	98
4.3	Functions of Irony: The Reader's Evaluation	101
5	CONCLUSION	111
	REFERENCES	115

1 INTRODUCTION

This study was born out of my first experience in reading satirical, epistolary fiction *The Screwtape Letters* (1942) by C. S. Lewis. Undersecretary Screwtape's advisory letters and arrogant and satirical tone towards an Englishman, religion and his nephew, the junior tempter Wormwood, have motivated this study in these senses: since Screwtape is a devil, how is he able to make the reader laugh *in spite of* his uttering of truths about the essence of humankind and religion in his satirising the Patient, and have him/her optionally regard those as corrective?; and, once the reader has realised the contradiction in Screwtape's letters, how can the senior devil be self-deprecated by scorn which does not seem to have himself as a target?

Critics have argued that *reading experiences* which may allow questions such as these are only possible through interpreting the *ironic inversion* which underpins C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*. Since it requires a double interpretation of the senior devil Screwtape's ironical utterances for religious and contextual purposes, a double-edged irony can then be elicited, to the extent that there may be multiple interpretations – from disguise to comedy or morality – and multiple targets of those utterances (Schakel, "The Satiric Imagination of C. S. Lewis"; Chou, "The Devil in Disciplines").¹ As the act of reading and interpreting irony in the *Letters* cannot be one-sided – from the ironist's point of view only –, the present study focuses on the *irony* of the work, which enables us to raise these and other questions, as well as on the *reader's* walk as an interpreter and his/her level of empathy towards the double-edged irony applied to the *Letters* – which can also take *him/her* as a target. The study is therefore divided into three chapters: my theoretical discussion, "Irony and Reader"; an introduction and contextualisation, "C. S. Lewis, Irony and Reader"; and, finally, my analysis, "Irony and Reader in *The Screwtape Letters*".

Chapter two, "Irony and Reader", begins with an "Introduction to Irony". The Greek root of irony early characterises *eironeia* as a mode of behaviour or figure of speech, which is to say, dissimulation, and praising to blame or blaming to praise, respectively; while the Latin *ironia*, in its turn, was used as a rhetorical figure by Roman writer Cicero and a strategy by Quintilian. Despite colloquial terms with derisive meanings which worked as "embryonic irony" (Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 16), it was

¹ The present study follows the norms set out in the *MLA Handbook*, Eighth Edition (2016).

only in 1502 that “irony” first appeared in English, and its meanings were developed throughout four stages which range from an ironic victim or an interpreter who can see the contradiction in circumstances, time or in life, to the idea that irony “activates not one but an endless series of subversive interpretations” (31).

The former concept of irony as a “contrast of appearance and reality” (Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 33) may be incomplete, since it seems to imply *something more* through indirection or contradiction. In fact, history and the development of the meanings of irony lead irony to be conceived of, in a literary work, as a structuring element (Brait 54) which contains an *argumentative value* through a reverse (117), meant to be interpreted by the reader from his/her “personal *performance*”² (Eco, *The Open Work* 21, emphasis by the author). Accordingly, textual and contextual signals must be considered in the decoding of irony and in the reader’s performing its comical effects. Thus, the intrinsic argumentative value in an ironic work must vary in style, effects and, most importantly, interpretation.

In this sense, the second part of my second chapter focuses on “The Reader of an Ironic Work”. As argued by Eco, the reader’s interpretation of a literary text happens at the level of the unsaid, through textual and contextual inferences (*Lector in Fabula* 36); by doing so, his/her interpretive cooperation confirms or builds him/her up as a textual strategy which puts the work into motion. Since that work is structured by irony, its argumentative value – intended by a Model Author – must be inferred as well being *felt*, because irony bares a transideology whose edges overcome the binary understanding of irony, that is, praising to blame or blaming to praise (Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge* 38). As illustrated by Hutcheon in what I call her “temperature scale”, the functions of irony must be evaluated from the *reader’s* point of view (45): the degree of affection between him/her and the ironic text, and positive or negative charges may vary according to the ironical functions inferred by the reader. I highlight the functions of irony at the top of Hutcheon’s scale – namely, the Assailing and the Aggregative functions – in my final discussion in the second chapter of this study.

² According to Eco, the reader is a *performer* of the text, in the sense that he/she is “bound to supply his [or her] own existential credentials, the sense conditioning which is peculiarly his [or her] own, a defined culture, a set of tastes, personal inclinations, and prejudices. Thus, his [or her] comprehension of the original artefact is always modified by his [or her] particular and individual perspective. In fact, the form of the work of art gains its aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed and understood” (*The Open Work* 3). Throughout the present study, the terms *performer* and *to perform* are utilised in the sense defined by Eco.

Subtopic “Irony and Reader in (Religious) Satire” firstly seeks to demonstrate the use of irony for pragmatic purposes from satirical tradition to contemporary satire – and, from this point, I deal with satire in its *textual* form, although it can also involve contemporary satires, such as satire shows on celebrities and politics, like *Dead Ringers*, broadcast on *BBC Radio 4*. According to Elliott, satirical tradition is early headed by poetry and orality, under the influence of Classical Greek Comedy’s picturing the ridiculous by means of iambic-metered invectives. In around 2000 B.C., in Ireland, the satires of poets called the *filid* had a public value in the sense that they granted or destroyed one’s honour – and even life – by means of bitter language. The Roman satire, in its turn, contributed to its structured metre and to the distinction between comical and tragical satires, noticeable in, respectively, Horace’s and Juvenal’s monologues. The power of satire can also be observed in late sixteenth-century England, when the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London prohibited the printing of satires and decreed the burning of those which had already been published. Thus, wit and irony have been useful in guaranteeing the acceptance of satire and the maintenance of its destructive and corrective functions, which is to say, to ridicule as well as to denounce the discrepancies between ideal and reality.

Religious satirists have employed such devices since ancient times, when Hebrew prophets used their moral and spiritual vocation along with witty language to attack their targets (Lindvall, *God Mocks* 3). Considering that “no believer could jest about truth” (Highet 45) and there were, consequently, few satires in the Middle Ages, it is just before Reformation, with the publication of German Sebastian Brandt’s *Das Narrenschiff, The Ship of Fools* (1494), that religious satires began to be written and published again. Here, Lindvall emphasises a distinguishing feature in Brandt’s work which would influence the new trend in religious satirists: “A true satirist sits in the dock with those who are guilty and identifies as an integral member of the satirized community” (*God Mocks* 3). Indeed, the shipmate cannot prevent the religious satirist from conveying the truth by means of ironic language, which approaches the reader’s emotions, leading him/her to laughter or harm, and to correction. In fact, Hutcheon’s scale suggests that satiric irony is placed exactly where “a contemptuous bitter laugh is produced” (*A Theory of Parody* 56).

Given the above, the third chapter of this study, “C. S. Lewis, Irony and Reader” focuses on C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) as a great satirist for both religious and non-religious readers in his ironical *The Screwtape Letters*. Lewis’s experiences as a

frontline soldier in the British Army in the Great War between 1917 and 1918; an atheist from youth until 1929; a practitioner Christian from 1931; and a writer of creative fiction since his childhood, enabled him to face World War II, along with British society and his religious community, and to share his faith and encourage his readers by means of devilish, humorous letters, published weekly in the Church of England's magazine, *The Guardian*, from 2 May through to 28 November 1941. In Screwtape's *Letters*, Lewis adapted his Christian faith and the context of the war during which the letters were written, and translated them into *reversed irony*, that is, through senior devil's distorted point of view, which can only praise and support what favours Our Father Below and himself. Despite a negative reaction from some Oxford dons (McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis* xi), the positive reception of the *Letters* by common readers reflects its value as a creative and well-articulated work (Huttar 90), and a religiously "symbolic" and joyfully allegorical work for those who did not share the ideals conveyed or inferred (Nilsen 174). Hence, international interest in Lewis's successful work first turned him into a popular writer (Schakel, "The Satiric Imagination of C. S. Lewis" 138).

In subtopic "Ironic Inversion: From Satire to Apologetics", it will be pointed, from previous studies on the subject, that Screwtape's devilish nature also contributes to the accomplishment of ironic inversion as a structuring element in *The Screwtape Letters*. Since senior devil not only utters "straightforward statements [which] are accurate summaries of Christian truths, expressions of what Lewis believed and regarded as important teaching" (Schakel, "The Satiric Imagination of C. S. Lewis" 139), but also inconsistent truths from a distorted and humourless perspective throughout the whole work, Screwtape's scorn towards the Patient, religion and the junior tempter Wormwood does not exempt *himself* from being affected by it: supposedly superior to his targets, Screwtape becomes the victim of a double-edged irony (Chou, *The Problem of Faith and the Self* 96). In fact, the publication of the book-formatted editions of the *Letters* gave some *light* to its readers: epigraphs by Martin Luther and Thomas More which recommend that the devil be satirised, and a fictional preface by Lewis which warns the readers about the untrustworthy nature of the devil seem to serve as clues – along with many others throughout the work – for the readers to follow.

Accordingly, the fourth chapter which entitles the present study, "Irony and Reader in *The Screwtape Letters*", begins by taking "An Interpretive Walk Through the *Letters*". In doing so, I do not aim to explain the reasons *why* Screwtape's *Letters* may

be comical and/or apologetical for the reader, since these routes were already well traced by theorists such as Schakel ("The Satiric Imagination of C. S. Lewis") and Chou (*The Problem of Faith and the Self*; "The Devil in Disciplines"). I rather aim to demonstrate, based upon my theoretical approach, *how* the *Letters* gradually select or build up the reader as a Model Reader by means of textual and contextual elements, to the extent that he/she will be able to make cooperative movements in Lewis's satire to, then, (not) *enjoy* such an ironic work for its satirical effects and, optionally, *use* it as instruction. In this sense, in subtopic "Levels of Irony and the Role of Reader", I elicit the affective and cognitive levels of irony in the *Letters*, by emphasising the role of the reader and his/her possible emotions in such a process, by means of the analogy of the work of releasing arrows towards an archery target illustrated in the "Satirical Victims in *The Screwtape Letters*" (Figure 3) – recognisable at both affective and cognitive levels of irony. Based upon a discussion of irony's transideological edges and a concern on how the reader is affected by irony, that image is helpful in eliciting the "Functions of Irony" resulting from "the Reader's Evaluation" of doubled-edged irony in *The Screwtape Letters*: as the reader's viewpoint varies in his/her aiming at the archery target, so do the "Functions of Irony in *The Screwtape Letters*" (Figure 4), which is to say, positive and negative charges of the Assailing and Aggregative functions of irony.

Finally, the concluding section of this study recapitulates the main points in my discussion of the interplay between irony and the reader in C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*. From the theoretical perspective presented in my second chapter, I present some other routes, possible interpretations of the work's satirical meanings, and functions of irony by religious, non-religious, twentieth-century, contemporary and foreign readers – who constitute the community of readers of the ironical *The Screwtape Letters*.

2 IRONY AND READER

a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,

—Ecclesiastes 3:4 (NIV), *The Holy Bible*

2.1 An Introduction to Irony

Before the literary use of the English word “irony”, the first recording of the Greek term *euroneia* was in Plato’s (428–347 BC) *Republic*, in which it “no longer meant straightforward lying, . . . but an intended simulation which the audience or hearer was meant to recognise” (Colebrook 6). This term and its equivalent, *eiron*, can also be found in works of other philosophers, namely, Socrates, who employed the former for “a smooth, low-down way of taking people in” (Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 15); Demosthenes, who believed an *eiron* was one who avoided citizenship responsibilities by the pretension of unfitness; Theophrastus, for whom an *eiron* was an evasive and insincere person to his/her friends and enemies; and Aristotle, who understood *euroneia* to be a “self-depreciative dissimulation” (16). These concepts imply that irony is basically a mode of behaviour. Unlike the Greek understanding of the word, the Roman writer Cicero recognised *ironia* as a rhetorical figure or, like Socrates, a “pervasive habit of discourse”, that is, a mode of behaviour *in an argument*; and, finally, Quintilian used it as a rhetorical strategy (15).

The Greek concepts are closer to deception and pretence, whilst the Romans comprehended irony or *ironia* as both a mode of behaviour *and* a figure of speech that not only implied ‘blaming as praising’ and ‘praising as blaming’, but also a means of teaching (or learning) something, although another Latin word for irony, *dissimulatio*, reveals a closeness to its Greek meaning as well. Moreover, as will be demonstrated, irony can be associated to an *alazon* – the opposite of an *eiron* –, who had some “confident unawareness” (Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 37), and is a blind dissembler – commonly, to him/herself. Thus, roots of irony and its earliest concepts are to be found in its fundamental feature, “contrast[s] of appearance and reality” (33), and from ideas of a mode of behaviour (optionally, in an argument) and a rhetorical strategy.

“Irony” first appeared in English in 1502, yet colloquial terms such as “flee”, “flout”, “gibe”, “jeer”, “mock”, “scoff”, “scorn” and “taunt” work as “embryonic irony” in

verbal usages until irony became a general literary term at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 16). The concept has had a slow development in England and some other European countries; Cicero and Quintilian's concepts of irony – a mode of behaviour in an argument and a rhetorical strategy –, whom “the most recognised definitions of irony came from” (Colebrook 8), were ignored until the first half of the eighteenth century. So, by then, irony had been simply considered to be a figure of speech. According to Muecke:

The word was defined as ‘saying the contrary of what one means’, as ‘saying one thing but meaning another’, as ‘praising in order to blame and blaming in order to praise’, and as ‘mocking and scoffing’. It was also used to mean dissimulation, even non-ironical dissimulation, understatement, and parody (*Irony and the Ironic* 17).

However, an exception must be made for Henry Fielding, who applied irony to a satirical strategy in 1748, by depicting a foolish character who supports a view that is condemned by the author; such self-betraying irony was only recognised in the twentieth century.

Many a new meaning was attributed to irony in the late eighteenth and in the early nineteenth century. Muecke explains that, beyond the concept of intentionality and instrumentality – someone being able to realise a purpose in an ironical message by means of ironic language –, there is the possibility of irony occurring unintentionally, being observable and, consequently, being “representable in art” (*Irony and the Ironic* 19). The new meanings irony acquired during that period are, mainly (and most importantly), due to German philosophical and aesthetic speculation, conducted by “ironologists” of the time, Friedrich Schlegel, his brother, August Wilhelm Schlegel, Ludwig Tieck and Karl Solger.

The first stage in the development of new meanings of irony made possible to see irony passively, not just actively – someone being ironic; this turns the focus of the word “ironic” from an “ironist” to an ironic victim, who may be either the butt of irony (an unsuspecting victim of certain events or circumstances) or one who cannot interpret it (an uncomprehending victim) (Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 20). A. W. Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck related this new concept to, respectively, Irony of Events and Situational Ironies in Shakespeare's *King Henry V* (1599), given the inversion in time and the unawareness of some characters in the work.

The second stage takes place in the Romantic period. Brait defines Romantic Irony as “the means which art has to represent itself”³ (34), since man seeks unity and infinity in a finite world through human creation and human-to-human engagement (Colebrook 47). For Karl Solger, this contradiction is the centre of life, and results in self-destruction so that the universal and the infinite are achieved (Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 25). Friedrich Schlegel, in his turn, sensed that irony is the element which guarantees the author’s liberty of spirit; he established two contrary (though complementary) phases which demonstrate the artist’s ironic attitude towards his/her artistic creation: an expansive phase, in which the artist is “naïve, enthusiastic, inspired, imaginative”, yet also blind; and a contractive phase, in which he/she is “reflective, conscious, critical, ironic”, yet “dull or affected”, since irony has no “ardor” in that context (24). Colebrook points out that “Romantic irony therefore extends both irony and poetry to include all life and perception” (50).

Only *the reader* will be able to realise the transcendent and ironic relationship between the artist and his/her creation (Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 25). That is why the second stage in the development of new concepts of irony represents a universalisation of local and particular ironies. Besides Instrumental Irony, it includes to its new concepts Observable Irony, that is, “things seen or presented as ironic” (22). Due to a confident unawareness or a lack of reflectiveness, here lies alazony and, hence, the alazon, who is thus the victim of irony of character; an Irony of Events, on the other hand, represents an “irony of fate, of circumstances, of time and of life”. In this sense, Karl Solger suggests Observable Irony may also arise out of an “unpromising but surprisingly” situation or event (29). Thus, Observable Irony expresses the concept of objectivity of irony, given its “non-one-sidedness” or the observation and interpretation of it by the reader. Brait points out, regarding this stage:

the idea of contradiction, of duplicity as an essential feature of a means of discourse dialectically articulated; the detachment between what is said and what the enunciator intends should be understood; the expectation of the existence of a reader who can capture the purposely contradictory ambiguity in such a discourse (34, emphases by the author).⁴

³ “o meio que a arte tem para se auto-representar”.

⁴ a ideia de contradição, de duplicidade como traço essencial a um modo de discurso dialeticamente articulado; o distanciamento entre o que é dito e o que o enunciador pretende que seja entendido; a expectativa da existência de um leitor capaz de captar a ambiguidade propositalmente contraditória desse discurso.

Other concepts of irony had also been developed by the end of the nineteenth century. Conforming to Muecke (*Irony and the Ironic* 26-30), the idea of opposition – introduced by German Romanticism – was defended by I. A. Richards as a key to equilibrium; for Kierkegaard, as he stated in his *Concept of Irony* (1841), irony is part of spiritual development, and seen as an attitude; A. W. Schlegel argued that irony has a satiric and moral function; the Englishman, Connop Thirlwall, defined a new concept, Dramatic Irony, as “the irony of a character’s utterance having unawares a double reference” (Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 29); despite his nihilistic concept of irony, Heine recognised its self-protective function; and Hegel saw the universality of irony – along with its incompatibilities – as being dialectic.

Finally, whereas the predominant concept of irony during the post-Romantic nineteenth century is nihilistic, it is relativistic in the twentieth century. Muecke explains:

Irony in this latest sense is a way of writing designed to leave open the question of what the literal meaning might signify: there is a perpetual deferment of significance. The old definition of irony – saying one thing and giving to understand the contrary – is superseded; irony is saying something in a way that activates not one but an endless series of subversive interpretations (*Irony and the Ironic* 31).

Thus, modern concepts of irony foresee an interpreter or one who can see something ironic as being necessary for it to happen at all. However, ancient meanings of irony contribute to understanding it as more than a process of contrast or a contradiction. Since *euroneia* could be a mode of behaviour in an argument, it was therefore considered to be a rhetoric figure. For Aristotle (1, 1355b 25), rhetoric is “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion”, that is, a means of manipulating words, not persuasion itself. Corbett (20-21) explains that “The Greek words *rhema* (‘a word’) and *rheto* (‘a teacher of oratory’), which are akin, stem ultimately from the Greek verb *eiro* (‘I say’)”. Irony is, thus, firstly rooted in discourse and the manipulation of words – which makes it closely related to Cicero’s concept of irony –, and rooted in “dissimulation and interrogation” (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* 53). Besides, this art can be employed in different contexts and language forms, in which irony would work as a structuring element of the whole text (Brait 54) – such a concept of irony may remind us of Quintilian’s. Thus, to the idea of contrast, should be added that of manipulation of words in an ironic text so that there may be one or more interpretations by the reader, elicited through Eco’s concept of “*inferential walks*”, which is to say, interpretations “elicited by discursive structures and foreseen by the

whole textual strategy as indispensable components of the construction of the *fabula*" (Eco, *The Role of the Reader* 32).

As demonstrated in the previous paragraph, the Greek roots of irony and Eco's "*inferential walks*" justify the semantic and pragmatic functions of irony suggested by Hutcheon, which is why irony cannot be summarised as a contrast between an appearance and a reality alone (*A Theory of Parody* 53). Although it does have a semantic inversion such as praising in order to blame, Hutcheon explains that inversion can denote a judgment along with it – the pragmatic function of irony –, given the edges it bears (*Irony's Edge* 63). Thus, more than dissimulation, irony functions "as both antiphrasis and as an evaluative strategy that implies an attitude of the encoding agent towards the text itself, an attitude which, in turn, allows and demands the decoder's interpretation and evaluation" (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* 53).

Despite dealing with an ironic text *formally*, the pragmatic function of irony constitutes part of the interpretation process in the form of a response to the ironic message; without that, "it has only the sound of one hand clapping" (Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 39). When such a response is expected, irony, or, specifically, Instrumental Irony, works like a game, which is, consequently, supposed to be performed by two players – the author/ironist and the reader/interpreter, in the case of a literary text. This comparison serves to make the difference between irony and other deceptions clearer, and its definition does not seem simplistic: regarding irony, recognition, not reversal, is intended.

For Eco, the text – not only an ironic text – is incomplete and lazy – even one which is apparently completed. Its complexity lies between *unsaid* and already said elements, so the text should be executed by the interpreter according to his/her "personal performance" (*Lector in Fabula* 35-37; *The Open Work* 21). Thus, as well as an ironic text carrying an unstated message, it is open to the reader's interpretation, and invites him/her to its game, a literary text – a work of art which is open to the reader's cooperation – functions as a game of recognition and response, considering it is:

the end product of an author's effort to arrange a sequence of communicative effects in such a way that each individual addressee can refashion the original composition devised by the author. The addressee is bound to enter into an interplay of stimulus and response which depends on his unique capacity for sensitive reception of the piece. In this sense the author presents a finished product with the intention that this particular composition should be appreciated and received in the same form as he devised it. As he reacts to

the play of stimuli and his own response to their patterning, the individual addressee is bound to supply his own existential credentials, the sense conditioning which is peculiarly his own, a defined culture, a set of tastes, personal inclinations, and prejudices. Thus, his comprehension of the original artifact is always modified by his particular and individual perspective (*The Open Work* 3).

Eco's ideas on the open work confirm the necessity for dealing with an ironic text formally – by the author, who arranges the ironic message so it is recognised – and pragmatically – by the reader, who follows the “*inferential walks*” within the text and executes it subjectively. Besides, since an ironic work is, primarily, a two-level message – semantically and pragmatically – which only occurs when and if the interpreter discerns the two levels, and since it may also be a work of art “*to be completed*” (Eco, *The Open Work* 19), its openness will be, consequently, doubly complex, inviting and challenging to the reader. As Booth points out, by following conventional formulae such as that of a figure of speech – based on the idea of contrast between an appearance and a reality –, “no great act of reconstruction is required” by the reader (34). Hence, it is conceivable to question who the “ironist” may be other than the author or, at least, consider the reader as a co-producer of the ironic text and an interlocutor of the ironic discourse (Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge* 11; Brait 126).

In this sense, Muecke suggests that there is more than one role and more than one message in coding and decoding an “irony-work” of Instrumental Irony, by which is meant “(a) the transformation of the real meaning or intent into the ironic message, e.g. blame transformed to seeming praise; (b) the establishment of the required degree of plausibility; (c) the provision of signals (if any)” (*Irony and the Ironic* 40-41). Muecke illustrates such a process through the following diagram:

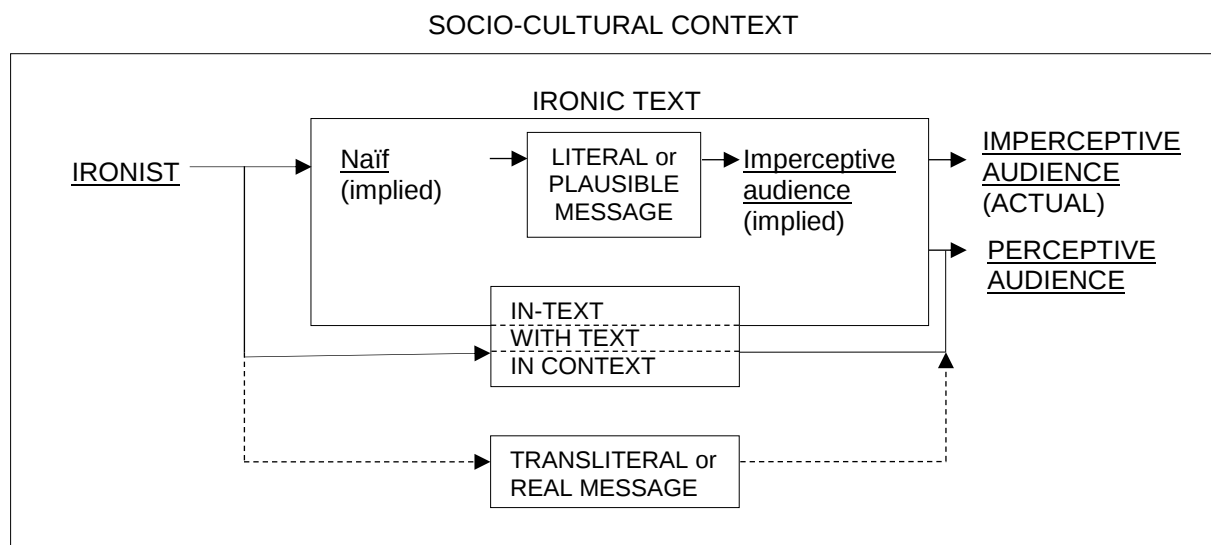


Fig. 1. Roles and messages from: Muecke, Douglas C. *Irony and the Ironic*, London and New York, 1995, p. 40.

Firstly, the author pretends him/herself to be naïf through a “literal or plausible message” so the text gets to an implicitly imperceptive audience; the butt of irony can be an object, the ironist or the audience. The ironic text may contain or be accompanied by some signals *in the text* through contradictions or exaggerations, that is, “expressions that are perceptibly inappropriate to or not required by the apparent content” (Muecke, “Irony Markers” 368); or by signals *with the text* by establishing a verbal context over the title, epigraphs or other prefatory clues so there is a shared context between the author and the reader; or by signals *in a context* upon which the ironist may optionally rely (Booth 53-55), “vary[ing] from a single fact to a whole socio-cultural environment, from what is known to or felt by the addressor and addressee alone to what is universally accepted” (Muecke, “Irony Markers” 367), that is, in a context where the ironist may count on his/her audience’s values to his/her coding and their decoding of irony, respectively. As stated by Colebrook, “Irony, even at its most obvious, is always diagnostic and political: to read the irony you do not just have to know the context; you also have to be committed to specific beliefs and positions *within* that context. Irony must be partial and selective” (11-12). Thus, it can be observed that the first part of the process of coding Instrumental Irony – a naïf ironist and a “literal or plausible message” with some signals – is primarily formal – as already discussed by reference to Eco and Hutcheon –, although with pragmatic intentions.

The audience has the role of responding to the ironic message as an actual imperceptive or perceptive audience. A “transliterated or real message” cannot arrive at an actual imperceptive audience, and that is why, I argue, it does not happen – unless the actual imperceptive audience is also part of the text in the form of a character as a butt of irony, and there is a reader who interprets the ironic message conveyed by the ironist. In the case of a perceptive audience which can interpret the ironic text, that is due to their recognising textual and/or contextual signals along with the “literal or plausible message”, and due to their reversing of the real meaning intended by the ironist. Thus, Muecke’s diagram demonstrates that such a recognition and reversal of the ironic message works as a performance by the audience which is formally foreseen by the ironist, who “provides them with the means for arriving at it” as an author does in his/her work of art for his/her reader (Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 41).

Since Observable Irony is ready-made, it does not involve the complex process of Instrumental Irony, and complicity between the ironist and the audience can be afforded by the latter, whilst the former lacks intention. If the audience or the receiver of Instrumental Irony accepts one of its messages, literal or figurative, alone, the ironic text would not be interpreted nor would there be any effects such as humour, since ambiguity and duplicity are what constitute *irony* (Brait 107). The act of reading and interpreting irony is, then, linguistic and textual – because irony is conveyed through the text which carries textual and/or contextual signals –, and discursive – because the text counts on the cooperation of the reader, who must accept such an invitation by reading and attributing irony to an ambiguous and contradictory message from those elements which may be shared by the author and him/her, and from his/her own values (Brait 126, 138-39).

However, both Instrumental Irony and Observable Irony imply a feeling of paradox, which is a result of the ambiguity of irony, and/or a feeling of liberation by the interpreter, whose pleasure would be to be aware of the contradiction underlying the ironic message/situation (Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 45-46). In his *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), Sigmund Freud relates an effect of irony – specifically of Instrumental Irony – to comedy, “probably because it [comic pleasure] stirs him [the hearer] into a contradictory expenditure of energy, which is at once recognized as being unnecessary” (qtd. in Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 46). Although Freud recognises that what I have presented as the semantic level of irony may raise different feelings in the interpreter, the reason why I do not completely agree with that statement is because it seems to be true for Observable Ironies, yet I believe that, just as Instrumental Irony is intended by the ironist, so may its effects – whether they be pleasure or harm. As will be demonstrated, this means that the ironist (or even the interpreter) may not recognise those effects as “unnecessary”, but as a result of the interpretation of an ironic message which contains an argumentative strategy and, therefore, value through reverse (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* 55; Brait 117).

Henri Bergson, on the other hand, proposes, in his collection of essays on *Laughter* (1911), the concept of *interference of series*, which is not exclusive to irony, yet also expresses its semantic function: “A situation is invariably comic when it belongs simultaneously to two altogether independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time” (48, emphasis by the author). In other words, it is possible to obtain a comic effect “by transposing

the nature expression of an idea into another key" (61). Such a process can occur in irony, which turns out to be a trope, that is, "a deviation from the ordinary and principal signification of a word . . . a transference of meaning" (Corbett 427). In Instrumental Irony, this transposition is supposed to be *made* at a semantic level and, then, *recognised*: when the ironist sets up the ironic – ambiguous and contradictory – message by contrasting an appearance and a reality through textual and contextual elements, the interpreter can recognise these and perform the text, enjoying a feeling of paradox and liberation. Bergson states:

Summing up the foregoing, then, there are two extreme terms of comparison, the very large and the very small, the best and the worst, between which transposition may be effected in one direction or the other. Now, if the interval be gradually narrowed, the contrast between the terms obtained will be less and less violent, and the varieties of comic transposition more and more subtle. *The most common of these contrasts is perhaps that between the real and the ideal, between what is and what ought to be.* Here again transposition may take place in either direction. *Sometimes we state what ought to be done, and pretend to believe that this is just what is actually being done; then we have IRONY.* Sometimes, on the contrary, we describe with scrupulous minuteness what is being done, and pretend to believe that this is just what ought to be done; such is often the method of HUMOUR. Humour, thus denned [sic], is the counterpart of irony. Both are forms of satire, but *irony is oratorical in its nature*, whilst humour partakes of the scientific. *Irony is emphasised the higher we allow ourselves to be uplifted by the idea of the good that ought to be: thus irony may grow so hot within us that it becomes a kind of high-pressure eloquence* (63, emphases added).

The comic effects of Instrumental Irony only occur when the ironic message is performed by the interpreter, and the resulting pleasure – a feeling of liberation – may be given to the complicity between the ironist and the interpreter (Brait 69). Besides, since I partially disagree with Freud's idea of pleasure as an unnecessary comic effect, Hutcheon proposes that effects such as emotions can be also foreseen by the author when encoding the text, and motivated in the reader in decoding and performing the text (*A Theory of Parody* 55). That is why Bergson's *interference of series* seems pertinent to this study: comic effects can be foreseen in the semantic level of irony, in which there is the transposition of an expression to another key, which is performed at a pragmatic one. This process of foreseeing a given reaction is called *ethos* by Hutcheon:

By ethos I mean the ruling intended response achieved by a literary text. The intention is inferred by the decoder from the text itself. In some ways, then, the ethos is the overlap between the encoded effect (as desired and intended by the producer of the text) and the decoded effect (as achieved by the decoder). Obviously, my use of the term ethos is not like Aristotle's, but it is

closely related to his concept of *pathos*, that emotion with which the encoding speaker seeks to invest the decoding listener. An ethos, then, is an inferred intended reaction motivated by the text [sic] (55, emphasis added).

Furthermore, comic effects vary since the features of irony are varied as well. Because the words “comic” and “liberation” suggest, respectively, “distance” (from the comic object) and “detachment” – which is the archetypical stance of irony –, Closed Irony is characterised by feelings of superiority, amusement and freedom; these symbolise the condition of “looking down from a position of superior power or knowledge” (Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 47) – probably shared between the ironist and the interlocutor, as suggested in the previous paragraph. On the other hand, an open, relative and paradoxical stance of irony, Open or Paradoxical⁵ Irony is indeed detached, though involved, and critical, though sympathetic and benevolent; this state of irony, “in a self-critical and relativist age . . . tends, as Kierkegaard and Booth have shown, to develop galloping relativism, from which it can be saved from on high, but more probably by the practical exigencies of life” (50).

Classes and features of irony – Instrumental and Observable Ironies, and Closed and Open or Paradoxical Ironies – have been presented as the concepts of irony and their evolution have been discussed. Muecke outlines – and somewhat modifies – three criteria established by Knox⁶ which distinguish these classes based on sympathy, outcome and concept of reality:

- 1 Attitude towards the victim of the irony, ranging from a high degree of detachment to a high degree of sympathy or identification.
- 2 Fate of the victim: triumph or defeat.
- 3 Concept of reality: whether the ironic observer thinks of reality as reflecting his values or as hostile to all human values (*Irony and the Ironic* 51).

Knox's criteria also distinguish four other classes of Closed Irony, as outlined by Muecke:

- I Reality reflects observer's values:

⁵ The word “paradoxical” was proposed by Knox (*'Irony'*, *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, Vol. II, 1973, 627).

⁶ Knox proposes, in fact, four variable factors in the classification of ironies: “(1) the field of observation in which irony is noticed; (2) the degree of conflict between appearance and reality, ranging from the slightest of differences to diametrical opposites; (3) an inherently dramatic structure containing three roles – victim, audience, author; (4) the philosophical-emotional aspect” (53). Modification by Muecke seems to merge Knox's criteria 1 and 2 into a first criterion, and clarify criterion 4 in the second criterion listed by Muecke; criterion 3 may be implied, given the diagrams previously presented in his work. I have chosen to use Muecke's scheme as it is sound and reviewed by theorists whose concepts I have used from the beginning of my study.

- (a) '*Comic irony* ['comic' in the happy-ending sense] reveals the triumph of a sympathetic victim.' (That his confidently gloomy expectations are defeated makes his situation comic in the ordinary sense as well.)
- (b) '*Satiric irony* reveals the defeat of an unsympathetic victim.'
- II Reality hostile to all human values (defeat therefore inevitable):
- (c) '*Tragic irony*, sympathy for the victim predominates.'
- (d) '*Nihilistic irony*, satiric detachment counterbalances or dominates sympathy, but a degree of identification always remains since [the observer] necessarily shares the victim's plight.' (*Irony and the Ironic* 51)

Instrumental Irony can occur in (a) and (b), only, in the form of a figure of speech, that is, "blaming in order to praise" or vice versa, whilst Observable Irony can occur in all of them; that is further evidence that irony depends on its interpreter or observer in order for it to occur in the first place. Besides, Knox's criteria distinguish Paradoxical Irony as being open or ambivalent, since it "counterbalances the tragic with the comic, or one limited point of view with another. This is the irony that joins 'both-and' to 'neither-nor,' refusing to resolve itself" (Knox 53).

As has been set out above, there are different roles and sorts of signals in an ironic work, and there may also be complicity between the ironist and his/her interlocutor, a resulting pleasure and comic effects probably due to what Bergson calls *interference of series*, yet this does not explain why some different types of irony are more effective than others (Brait 75; Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 45-46; Bergson 48). Muecke points out some principles and factors which can determine that: the more economic in signals, and the wider the contrast between ideal/expected and reality and the investment of emotional capital in areas such as "religion, love, morality, politics and history", along with its compositional, contradictory elements, the more effective irony will be (*Irony and the Ironic* 52, 55). It can then be noticed that Aristotle's emotional appeal, that is, *pathos*, also forms part of an irony-work, and contributes to the idea of an ironic process whose semantic level – that of contrast – necessarily implies the pragmatic one, which has been explained from Hutcheon's *ethos* (*A Theory of Parody* 55). Thus, an ironic text is effective as long as it carries a degree of disparity between its topics through textual elements, signals and an emotional approach, which assist co-operation by and cause effects on the reader.

Brait points out that an ironic, literary text is not a work made up of isolated ironic sentences, but rather "a whole structured according to a formal principle" (37).⁷ I have argued that the Greek etymological relation between *euroneia* and rhetoric – which is

⁷ "um todo estruturado segundo um princípio formal".

“the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” through discourse (Aristotle, 1, 1355b 25) – may as well be related to an ironic work which functions as a structuring element of an entire literary text, since that is the work of an author/ironist who has a rhetorical strategy, as proposed by Quintilian with regard to irony (Brait 54). Brait explains that such a strategy is applied by means of the contradiction between two elements in the same proposition – like Bergson’s *interference of series* –, which has an argumentative value (117). I have also demonstrated Cicero’s association of irony to a mode of behaviour *in an argument*, so the relationship between irony and rhetoric and its importance to writing and interpreting a literary text is clear.

If the use of irony in literature may be a rhetorical strategy which has an argumentative value through a reverse in structuring a whole text when employing the devices mentioned and aiming at the effects discussed, its purpose may be to denounce something or someone. Brait explains:

The appliance of the ludic, the interference of series, the dialogue between discourses and texts are, in general, used with the purpose of a denunciation, a critique of attitudes which are detected, but not necessarily made explicit. It is often precisely such an appliance that will disclose an enunciator who, by setting up various speakers, incites a humour whose underlying elements update representations of a given mentality, values that are characteristic of a given moment or a given culture, even though . . . the last thing that matters is the author’s intention (46).⁸

Thus, the semantic and pragmatic functions of irony in a literary text lead us to the conclusion that Instrumental Irony implies evaluation, contrast, argumentation and cooperation. Firstly, an author adopts a rhetorical strategy for the development of an evaluative argumentation through the discrepancy between an appearance and a reality, and for eliciting the cooperation of the reader of the work and interpreter of the irony through “*inferential walks*” – so that the work is completed and irony can take place. Secondly, this textual cooperation and semantic interpretation bring about comic effects which may be also foreseen by means of textual elements of such a strategy over the reader/interpreter. Finally, the reader/interpreter evaluates the ironic work and

⁸ O recurso ao lúdico, a interferência de séries, o diálogo entre discursos e textos são, em geral, utilizados com a finalidade de denúncia, de crítica a atitudes entrevistas, mas não necessariamente explicitadas. Muitas vezes, é precisamente esse recurso que vai revelar um enunciador que, instaurando vários locutores, deflagra um humor cujas entrelinhas atualizam representações de uma dada mentalidade, valores característicos de um dado momento ou de uma dada cultura, ainda que . . . a última coisa a interessar seja a intenção do autor.

the evaluation implied along with the rhetorical strategy according to those textual elements and, also, his/her own cultural knowledge. Having focused on these four elements in general, and having demonstrated that the third part of the ironic process is that of the reader in evaluating the ironic work and its evaluation – just as it starts with an evaluation by the ironist –, I shall now focus on the cooperation and evaluation by the reader of an ironic work.

2.2 The Reader of an Ironic Work

I have argued that irony can structure a whole text for the purpose of argumentation by means of a rhetorical strategy, and that the interpreter has an active role in the interpretation process. Since it is a work of art, which is both *closed* and *open*, the literary text expects to be *interpreted* and *performed* by the reader, and to have “countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity” (Eco, *The Role of the Reader* 49). Besides, actualisation⁹ of the text, interpretation and cooperative movements by the reader should happen at the level of the “unsaid”, so linguistic knowledge would not be the only competence needed in the act of reading and interpreting (Eco, *Lector in Fabula* 36). Thus, the work of art structured by an ironic message – two-levelled in its essence – tends to be even more challenging and demanding for the reader/interpreter, since it not only counts on his/her cooperation and interpretation, but also on his/her evaluation, given the emotional appeal and evaluative feature on its pragmatic level.

Until the 1960s, reception aesthetics or reception theories were developed as a reaction to structuralism – whose methodologies were limited to the objectivity of the linguistic object, which, in their turn, were prone to a debate on the abstraction of various extratextual factors – and to sociological approaches supported by empiricism (Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* 4). Based on C. S. Peirce’s concept of unlimited semiosis, that is, “The interpretant of a sign becomes in turn a sign, and so on *ad infinitum*”, Eco developed the theory of the Model Reader, which will be used, for the purposes of the present study, to elucidate the act of reading and performing an ironic work (35-36).

⁹ By reference to Eco, this term is employed in the sense of the reader’s decoding the meaning-contents of a text and filling in its gaps.

As previously mentioned, active, conscious, cooperative movements by the reader are expected in his/her decoding and performing the text, since its actualisation is not given on the surface, but on the level of the unsaid (Eco, *Lector in Fabula* 36). Hence, these cooperative movements can differ according to the type of text the reader is dealing with, whether it is open or closed, as Eco suggests:

Those texts that obsessively aim at arousing a precise response on the part of more or less precise empirical readers . . . are in fact open to any possible 'aberrant' decoding. A text so immoderately 'open' to every possible interpretation will be called a closed one (*The Role of the Reader* 8).

The closed text, which is open – in the sense of an open work – to various interpretations and does not postulate “precise responses” nor empirical readers, is of interest to the present study and a key in the development of Eco’s theory, so it will be called “text” hereafter. For Eco, it is a strategy whose execution is that which generates the text itself during the reader’s performance:

Let us say that the text postulates the reader’s cooperation as its own condition of actualisation. It is better to say that the text is a product whose interpretive destination is supposed to be part of its own generative mechanism. Generating a text means executing a strategy which includes forecasts of the movements of others – like any other strategy in fact . . . in a text, the author usually wants the adversary to win, rather than to lose. *But this is not said* (*Lector in Fabula* 39, emphasis added).¹⁰

In order to decode the text by filling in, through an “*inferential walk*”, its gaps intentionally and strategically left by the author, the reader is supposed to have some competences, linguistic and circumstantial, which are foreseen in the text (Eco, *Lector in Fabula* 39), yet used or built up to fill the gaps with “intertextual support” (*The Role of the Reader* 32), that is, outside the text. Such a textual strategy is the reason why sender and addressee must be considered, in this sense, as “‘actantial roles’ of the sentence” (10), which is to say, a Model Author and a Model Reader, respectively. If, on the one hand, the latter can be presupposed and selected from competences according to “the choice of a language . . . the choice of a type of encyclopedia . . . signs of genre which select their audience . . . the geographic field” (Eco, *Lector in*

¹⁰ Dissemos que o texto postula a cooperação do leitor como condição própria de atualização. Podemos dizer melhor que o texto é um produto cujo destino interpretativo deve fazer parte do próprio mecanismo gerativo. Gerar um texto significa executar uma estratégia de que fazem parte as previsões dos movimentos de outros – como, aliás, em qualquer estratégia . . . num texto, o autor costumeiramente quer levar o adversário a vencer, ao invés de perder. *Mas isto não é dito*.

Fabula 40)¹¹, on the other hand, “a well-organized text . . . works to build up, by merely textual means, such a competence” (Eco, *The Role of the Reader* 8).

Postulated as a textual strategy, the performance of the Model Reader, selected and/or built up, is what determines the text’s success in its complete actualisation (Eco, *Lector in Fabula* 45), yet saying “that every text designs its own Model Reader . . . [implies] that many texts aim at producing two Model Readers, a first level, or a naïve one, supposed to understand semantically what the text says, and a second level, or critical one, supposed to appreciate the way in which the text says so” (Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* 55). Eco exemplifies some “pragmatical devices”, such as an “interplay of perlocutionary and illocutionary signals, displayed all along the discursive surface”, in the process of building up a Model Reader as an interpretive strategy in Alphonse Allais’s *Un drame bien parisien* (1890):

Grammatically speaking, the text is dominated by a first person (the narrator) who at every step reiterates the fact that someone is reporting (tongue in cheek) events that are not necessarily to be believed; in other words, *these interventions of the first grammatical person are stipulating a mutual contract of fair distrust . . .* (*The Role of the Reader* 206-07, emphases added)

The image of a Model Author, however, is formulated by the *empirical* reader, whose hypothesis is given from the textual strategy he/she was able to perform. Eco observes that such a hypothesis turns out to be “more guaranteed” than that of the Model Reader formulated by the author, since the latter is supposed to produce the image and an interpretive strategy for the Model Reader by means of the text, whilst the former can make deductions from what already exists in it (*Lector in Fabula* 46). Thus, these actantial roles must be considered as textual strategies, since both are possibly present in the enunciation.

In this sense, any intentions which can be recognised in an open work, during the formulation of hypotheses from the reader’s knowledge, are intended by the text or Model Author, lest the empirical reader interpret it by relying on the information about the empirical author only (Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* 59; *Lector in Fabula* 46). Nonetheless, such “an oriented insertion into . . . the world intended by the author” is foreseen in the formulation of hypotheses regarding the Model Reader and his/her

¹¹ “a escolha de uma língua . . . , a escolha de um tipo de enciclopédia . . . sinais de gênero que selecionam a audiência . . . o campo geográfico”.

pragmatic response (Eco, *The Role of the Reader* 62) – intended by the empirical author before both Model Reader and Model Author become textual strategies:

We can say that, in setting up a fictional text, its author formulates many hypotheses and forecasts *apropos* of the *pragmatic behavior* of his Model Reader. But this is a matter of the author's intentions. These intentions can be extrapolated from the text . . . but they are intentions, wishes, projects belonging to the 'actual' world and to this actual speech act which is the text (Eco, *The Role of the Reader* 246, emphases added).

Thus, the pragmatic behaviour that occurs during the interpretive cooperation is stimulated conforming to the competence intentionally selected or built up by the author, yet it does not mean that such intentions, belonging outside the text, do not matter. In fact, these intentions are performed within the text afterwards.

According to Eco, there are three sorts of intention, *intentio auctoris*, *intentio operis* and *intentio lectoris*, which have a dialectical relationship among each other, recalling the “hermeneutic circle” (*The Limits of Interpretation* 50, 59). Since the *intentio operis*, that is, the intention of the text, works to build up textual strategies such as Model Reader and Author for its own interpretation, the *intentio lectoris* takes place as interpretive conjectures by the reader which may or may not be approved by the coherence of the text; as Eco points out, “It is possible to speak of text intentions only as the result of a conjecture on the part of the reader” (148). Besides, as I have mentioned, the *intentio auctoris* or the intention of the author is produced by the text by means of a Model Author as a textual strategy, so *intentio operis* and *intentio auctoris* seem to concur. Thus, an empirical reader – whose knowledge and other competences contribute to interpreting the text – makes conjectures about the intentions of the text and responds to these, depending on the chosen strategies.

In such a complex process of coding and decoding the text and its pragmatic intentions by means of textual strategies, a more challenging type of text, the ironic one, also functions according to a structuring and strategic principle, which is irony. Brait explains that the principle of contradiction or opposition of irony as a semantic inversion and, hence, a two-levelled enunciation, “governs the definition of time, space and characters”¹² of the text (119). This means that the interpretive cooperation of the ironic work is expected to be more complex than a non-ironic text, and, because of that, presupposes a “relationship of connivance” between author and reader in a given

¹² “rege a instauração do tempo, do espaço e das personagens”.

context, as demonstrated in Muecke's diagram on coding and decoding an ironic work (Brait 120; Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* 40).

Such a relationship of connivance is established through textual strategies which select or build up specific competences for the interpretation of the text, such as encyclopedic and ideological ones (Eco, *Lector in Fabula* 40): encyclopedic, because of the context in which irony, through language, occurs, that is, the reader "must, in short, have not only a knowledge of the texts but also a knowledge of the world, of circumstances external to the texts" (Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* 89); and ideological, because, in conveying irony to a community of readers who are able to interpret it, the author can produce "a crisis and to induce the reader to specify more complex actantial and ideological structures" (Eco, *Lector in Fabula* 154).¹³ Brait explains that the reader's response to those strategies sets up intersubjectivity in this process:

The content, therefore, will be subjectively marked by values attributed by the enunciator, but presented so the participation of the receptor is required, as well as his/her perspicacity towards the enunciate and its signs, sometimes extremely subtle. Such a participation sets up intersubjectivity, presupposing not only shared knowledge, but also points of view and personal values shared culturally and socially or even constituting a collective imagination. It is the discursive-textual organisation that allows this calling of attention to the enunciate and especially to the subject of the enunciation (138-39, emphases added).¹⁴

Hutcheon suggests that this sharing and consequent interpretation or inference of irony is only possible because of the existence of "discursive communities", which are "those different worlds to which each of us differently belongs and which form the basis of the expectations, assumptions, and preconceptions that we bring to the complex processing of discourse, of language in use" (*Irony's Edge* 85). She adds that "it is precisely the mutual contexts that an existing community creates that set the scene for the very use and comprehension of irony" (87). Thus, since irony is understood as a "'performative' happening" of its two levels – semantic and pragmatic –, the ironic text foresees a discursive community for such a process (117). According

¹³ "uma crise e induzir o leitor a especificar estruturas actanciais e ideológicas mais complexas".

¹⁴ "O conteúdo, portanto, estará subjetivamente assinalado por valores atribuídos pelo enunciador, mas apresentados de forma a exigir a participação do enunciatário, sua perspicácia para o enunciado e suas sinalizações, por vezes extremamente sutis. Essa participação é que instaura a *intersubjetividade*, pressupondo não apenas conhecimentos partilhados, mas também pontos de vista, valores pessoais ou cultural e socialmente comungados ou, ainda, constitutivos de um imaginário coletivo. É a organização discursivo-textual que vai permitir esse chamar a atenção sobre o enunciado e, especialmente, sobre o sujeito da enunciação".

to Hutcheon, irony's "identifying rhetorical nature lies in its indirection, as well as its edge. This is why not only context but discursive community figures in the comprehension of irony markers" (146).

This reveals an indirect argumentative value and an evaluative attitude which are intrinsic to the ironic text. Intention is present anyway, whether in its encoding by the ironist/author, or in its interpretation/attribution by the interpreter/reader or both (Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge* 113): by means of opposition (Brait 119) – the semantic level of irony –, the author can convey an ironic message which evaluates something or someone – the pragmatic level of irony – and, by means of textual strategies, can guarantee that his/her Model Reader will infer it and be affected by feelings and emotions which are result from irony, such as laughter and/or harm (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* 55). Although an ironic text seems precisely to involve the interpretive cooperation process of an open work, it also seems that its underlying evaluation implies a relationship of *affectivity* between author and Model Reader, who, from his/her interpretation, will evaluate the elements applied afterwards, according to those feelings or emotions (Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge* 35). Thus, the difference between an open work and an ironic one is the latter's double complexity in that "hermeneutic circle" and double response, that is, cooperative and evaluative, by the reader (Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* 59).

In this sense, the second part of this chapter regarding the role of the interpreter in performing an ironic work through reading relies upon his/her evaluation of it according to the effects of irony on him/her. As mentioned on the levels of irony, in addition to its humoristic effects an ironic work can produce in the receptor of the interference of series which constitutes the semantic level of irony, the pragmatic one – evaluative – affects the reader by means of its *edges*, as proposed by Hutcheon:

Unlike metaphor or metonymy, irony has an edge; unlike incongruity or juxtaposition, irony can put people on edge; unlike paradox, irony is decidedly edgy. While it may come into being through the semantic playing off of the stated against the unstated, irony is a 'weighted' mode of discourse in the sense that it is asymmetrical, unbalanced in favor of the silent and the unsaid. The tipping of the balance occurs in part through what is implied about the attitude of either the ironist or the interpreter: irony involves the attribution of an evaluative, even judgmental attitude, and this is where the emotive (Meyers 1974: 173) or affective dimension also enters (*Irony's Edge* 35).

Hutcheon notices that the edges of irony make its functions much more complex than that binary comprehension of praising or blaming something or someone by

means of the opposite, and that these cannot only be interpreted, but also attributed without an encoder of irony (*Irony's Edge* 38). The “transideological nature of irony” enables irony to be “provocative when its politics are conservative or authoritarian as easily as when its politics are oppositional and subversive: it depends on who is using/attributing it and at whose expense it is seen to be” (15). Intention, then, also makes part of the attribution or inference of irony by the interpreter/observer at the semantic and pragmatic levels of irony; Hutcheon explains that “specific semantic meaning itself and the evaluative edge of irony are also inferred, in a way. And these inferences too are intentional acts” (116). Eco explains in regarding to the Model Reader and the encyclopedic competence:

the spectator with whom the text establishes an implicit agreement . . . is not the ingenuous one (who can be struck at most by the apparition of an incongruous event) but the critical one who appreciates the ironic ploy of the quotation and enjoys its desired incongruity. In both cases, however, we have a critical side effect: aware of the quotation, the spectator is brought to elaborate ironically on the nature of such a device and to acknowledge the fact that one has been invited to play upon one's encyclopedic competence (*The Limits of Interpretation* 89).

Thus, since the functions which an ironic text can assume will vary according to the reader/interpreter's performance and evaluation of the irony-work, it seems that the responsibility for *if* irony happens and *how* it happens lies with him/her.

Given the above considerations, I will present Hutcheon's contribution to this question. She outlined the functions of irony, in the sense of an “*attributed or inferred operative motivation*” (Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge* 43, emphasis by the author), from the angle of the *interpreter*:

The functions discussed here are not my inventions: they are all present and easily accounted for in the vast amount of commentary on irony throughout the centuries. It is only the ordering – the schematic, pragmatic organization – for which I am responsible . . . I have organized them on a kind of sliding scale, from the most benign both in tone and in inferred motivation (on the lower end) to a middle ground where the critical temperature, so to speak, begins to rise, and on to the more contentious zones where irony is generally accepted as a strategy of provocation and polemic. Each of these functions turns out to have both a positive and a negative articulation, for critics have presented each in both approving and disapproving terms (Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge* 43-44).

Hutcheon illustrates this in the form of a “temperature scale” showing the positive and negative articulations of the functions of irony:

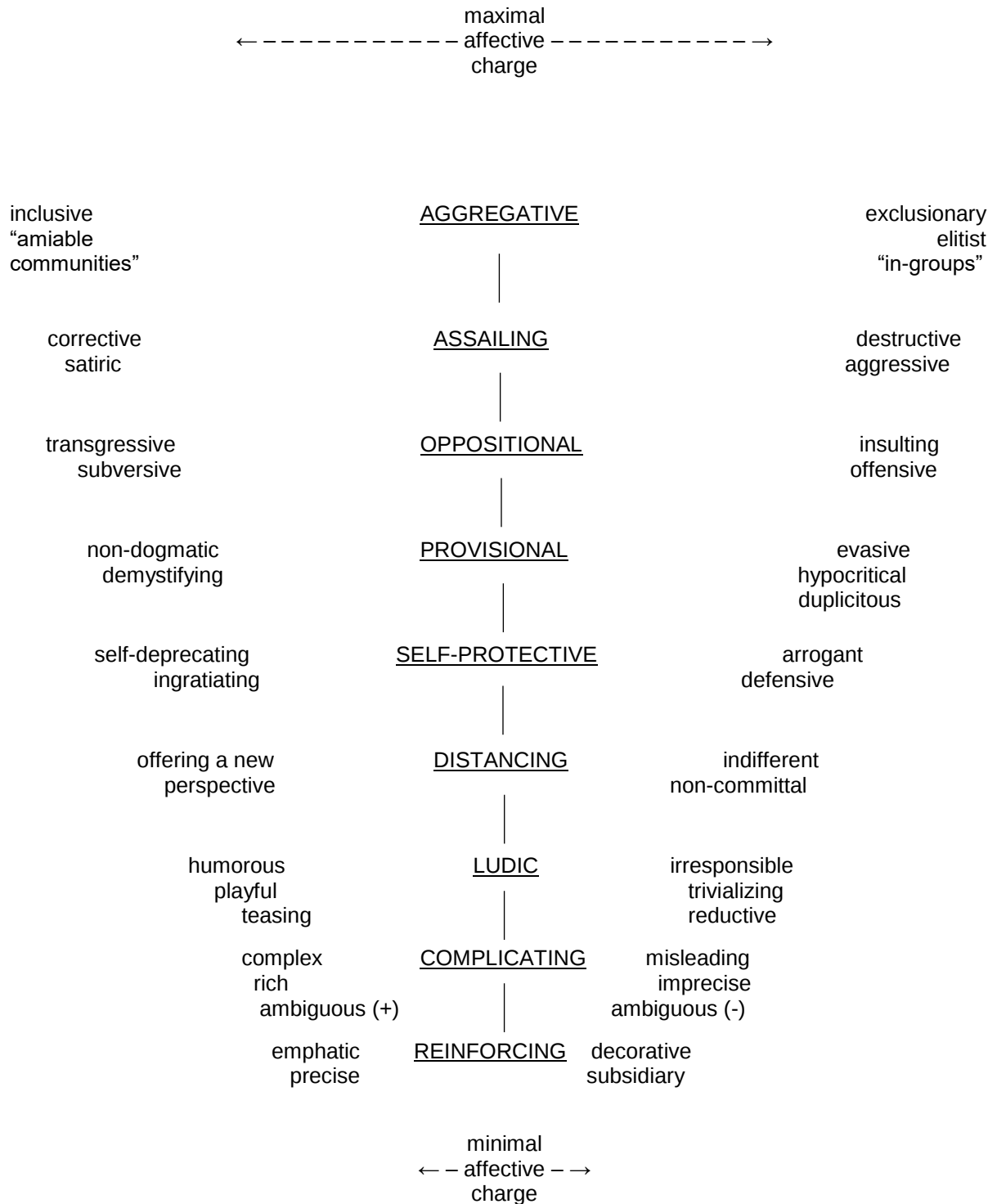


Fig. 2. The functions of irony from: Hutcheon, Linda. *Irony's Edge*, London and New York, 1995, p. 45.

As may be observed at the bottom of Hutcheon's figure, the “REINFORCING” function of irony seems to have “relatively little sense of much critical edge” (Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge* 44), given its minimal affective charge; yet, since it can be used or

interpreted as a means “to underline a point in, say, everyday conversation”, it has different functions: its positive articulation would be for the need of emphasis and/or precision in communication, whilst its negative function would be seen as decorative, subsidiary, “non-essential”. Hutcheon explains the disposition of the Reinforcing function of irony in her schema and the consequent implications regarding affectivity:

I think that even approval or disapproval of the assumed cleverness of the ironist might constitute some sort of emotional involvement, or at least response, through evaluation (N. Knox 1961: 76). Because of this, I have left some space, however minimal, at the bottom of the diagram for that arc of ironic affect to ‘discharge’ (Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge* 46).

Somewhat near the REINFORCING function and used or interpreted in verbal or structural operations, the not so sharp-edged COMPLICATING function of irony can be considered as complex, rich and/or positively ambiguous; on the other hand, its complexity can be negatively valued as misleading, imprecise and/or ambiguous in the sense of “lack of clarity in communication” (46). Furthermore, the LUDIC is another “benign function” of irony, since it can be positively seen as humorous, then playful, and/or teasing; however, it can also imply, negatively, irresponsibility and the trivialising of “the essential seriousness of art”.

From this point of Hutcheon’s schema, the affective charge regarding irony increases conforming to its function. Although the DISTANCING function is often associated to detachment, being negatively valued as indifferent and/or non-committal, it can also be positively viewed as “a means to a new perspective from which things can be shown and thus seen differently” (Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge* 47). As SELF-PROTECTIVE function demonstrates, to this degree of Hutcheon’s schema, “the terms used in discourses about irony to describe both the positive and negative evaluations of the functions are becoming much more ‘loaded’ ones”. That is why the SELF-PROTECTIVE can be a “defense of mechanism” and, then, positively used or interpreted as self-deprecating and/or ingratiating, or negatively viewed as arrogance and/or, as Hutcheon demonstrates from negative connotation of Greek word, *eiron*, defence (48). From self-protection and *eiron*, it goes up to the PROVISIONAL function of irony, “in the sense of always offering a proviso, always containing a kind of built-in conditional stipulation that undermines any firm and fixed stand” (48); negative evaluation of this function can be evasiveness, hypocrisy and/or duality, which are also associated with deception; positively interpreted, it can be undogmatic (though also

reticent) or demystifying when seen as valuable. In this sense, and because it is closer to the top of the scale, “where its transideological nature may be most clear, where the critical edge can be seen to cut both ways . . . the same utterance may have opposite pragmatic effects” in the OPPOSITIONING function of irony, so it can favorably be transgressive to some whilst insulting to others, as well as subversive to some though offensive to others (49).

Based on its Latin root, *assillire*, “to leap upon”, the ASSAILING function is the one which has the “sharpest edge” of the scale (Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge* 49). Its negative charge is interpreted and felt as a “destructive attack”, yet this can be associated with a “positive motivation” for correction through satiric irony (50), which may take different forms:

Arguably all irony can have a corrective function (Muecke 1970/1982: 4), but since satire is, by most definitions, ameliorative in intent (Highet 1962: 56), it is satire in particular that frequently turns to irony as a means of ridiculing – and implicitly correcting – the vices and follies of humankind. There is, however, a very wide tonal range possible within this corrective function, from the playfully teasing to the scornful and disdainful (Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge* 50).

Given the association of satire with a “conservative impulse”, there has been some discussion on whether the moral function of irony is pertinent to contemporary society or not, and that is why there has also been a neutralising of that association by American New Criticism. According to Hutcheon, “[commentators] argue either that there is certainly a lot around today for irony to correct, or that the very idea of correctable folly or error has given way to a skepticism about the very possibility of change” (*Irony’s Edge* 50); she argues that “it is necessary to insist, none the less, on the continued existence of some emotive accent to irony as well as the continuing presence, even after New Criticism, of some satiric, corrective functioning of irony”. Besides, another negative evaluation of the ASSAILING function of irony is the aggressive, which happens to be authoritative though sometimes by means of playfulness; however, “The negativized rhetoric of disapproval that circulates around this ASSAILING function of irony is one of cutting, derisive, **destructive** attack or sometimes of a bitterness that may suggest no desire to correct but simply a need to register contempt and scorn” (51, emphasis by the author).

Finally, at the top of Hutcheon’s figure, lies the AGGREGATIVE function of irony. As was stated above, the discursive communities may precede irony and make

it possible at all, and this aspect is the reason why such a “social functioning of irony” is associated with inclusion and exclusion (*Irony’s Edge* 51): “it is discursive communities that are simultaneously inclusive and exclusive – not ironies” (92). Hence, Hutcheon positions this function at the top of her figure for its high level of critical and affective charges:

Issues of power and authority are clearly going to be involved in this AGGREGATIVE functioning of irony, and it is for this reason that I have positioned it in Figure 2.1 at the top end of the affective scale with the maximal critical and emotive charge: this is where it is felt, where it is inferred and sometimes intended (*Irony’s Edge* 52, emphasis by the author).

In the sense of irony playing to in-groups, the AGGREGATIVE function is, then, negatively evaluated as exclusionary and/or elitist; since “there are those who ‘get’ it and those who do not” and there may be a feeling of superiority and inferiority during the performance of irony, there may as well be anger and irritation by those who do not get it (52). On the other hand, such an exclusionary function of irony can also include and create what Booth calls “amiable communities” (28) between “ironist and interpreter and thus recalling the pleasures of collaboration, even collusion” (Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge* 52).

Thus, in observing all these functions of irony, it can be said that the pragmatic effects of an ironic text are more than response through interpretive cooperation by the reader: he/she feels and evaluates the edges of irony which constitute the work as a structured whole, and this may be determinant in his/her reading. Besides, a non-dual comprehension of the functions of irony – such as blame or praise in order to lead the interpreter to laughter or harm – allows us to conceive that possible plurality of interpretations (and, sometimes, inferences) of an ironic work, foreseen and performed as a textual strategy:

Irony’s edge, then, would seem to ingratiate and to intimidate, to underline and to undermine; it brings people together and drives them apart. Yet, however plural these functions, we still seem to want to call the thing itself by a single name: irony. *This pragmatic decision doesn’t at all mean that we should forget the complexities of irony’s inferred motivations, though:* an awareness of the range of operations that irony can be interpreted as carrying out may help resist the temptation to generalize about either the effects of which irony is capable or the affect to which it can most certainly give rise. *Retaining this complexity is important because edge is the primary distinguishing feature of irony as a rhetorical and structural strategy, no matter how protean its actual manifestations* (Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge* 53, emphases added).

In the following topic, I shall demonstrate how irony works in the structuring of a specific type of text which seems to have, by means of indirection, multiple levels and functions, that is, satire. Besides, I shall also present some ways in which the reader may be encouraged to perform the satiric text and respond, pragmatically, to it.

2.3 Irony and Reader in (Religious) Satire

I have sought to demonstrate irony's functionality as a rhetorical and structural strategy in an open work. An ironic work is performed during interpretive cooperation by the reader, who, given the semantic and pragmatic composition of irony, may endure and evaluate its different effects and functions. In order to elucidate these ideas, I shall conclude this chapter in relation to satire, which is, generally, an ironic type of work, and approaches the reader (or a community of readers) with pragmatic intentions. For the purposes of the present study, I shall contrast the features of satire with those of religious satire, which conveys its message to a specific community and may also turn the reader into the one it foresees in the first place.

Although I shall deal with the satirical *text* later on, it must be said that the origins of satire lie in poetry and the oral tradition. According to Elliott, Classical Greek Comedy, which used to picture the ridiculous by means of iambic-metered invectives, satires or lampoons, originated in "improvisations of the authors or leaders of the Phallic Songs" (4). Despite its fertility purposes, it was believed that those songs could influence people's attitudes, even leading them to death. In this sense, the first recording of a satirist is given by the Greek poet Archilochus in about 700 B.C.: he wrote and recited his iambic meters to Lycambes and his daughter Neobule, to whom Archilochus had once been betrothed though never married; it is said that both the listeners died by hanging themselves (7). Sixth-century B.C. poet Hipponax wrote the first choliambics to curse two sculptors, who "made a statue of him, exaggerating his [body] deformity and exposing it to public ridicule", yet they survived Hipponax's verses. Elliott thus highlights a common "hate and desire for revenge" between these two Greek satiric tales, and the power of the iambics (13):

the iambic verses of a major poet, expressive of his hate, his will to destroy, his mockery, were believed to exert some kind of malefic power. The power seems to have resided, not in secret, esoteric spells or in the mechanics of sympathetic magic, but in the character of the poet himself – in his command

over the word. The word could kill; in popular belief it *did* kill (14-15, emphases by the author).

From poems of heroic sagas, oral tradition and eighth-century texts, Pre-Christian Ireland's history is dated from about 2,000 B.C. These sagas were told by poets called the *filid*, whose role was, according to Elliott, that of "prophets, medicine-men, historians, genealogists, lawgivers, encomiasts, 'hard-attackers,' and much else besides", and whose function was praise and blame (21). Due to their hostility and to social problems derived from their satiric tales, there were many attempts to banish the *filid* from early Ireland, which reduced their numbers and restrained the exercise of their satire by law, that is, by linking it with "physical crimes as bodily assault, sexual attack on a man's wife, or theft of his castle" (Elliott 24-25). On the other hand, there was also lawful satire, whose "public value" guaranteed the collecting of taxes by the *filid*. Despite satire's social value in early Ireland, which survives in figurative expressions such as "die of shame" which imply physical damage through the ridicule and, hence, destruction of one's honour, language reflects the Irish conception of satire (28):

These tales are unquestionably products of a 'shame' culture – a culture in which man literally lives by his good name. If his name is enhanced, he flourishes; if it is defiled, he dies. In such a culture the poets are *truly creative*. By their encomium they create honor; they make good names. But they are also *truly destructive*, for their satire eats honor, which is to say, it *destroys life itself* (30, emphases added).

As Classical Greek Comedy influenced the first Roman satirist, spirit and social functions of satire are present in it, yet it is primarily comprehended as a *form* of art from Latin term *satira*, whose original meaning is, according to Quintilian, *mixture* or *medley* (Elliott 101-02). Satiric verses by Lucilius (180-103 B.C.), Horace (65-68 B.C.) and Juvenal (about 60-after 127 A.C.) used to be metrically structured, along with "ethical and social premises to the Greek philosophies of conduct, cynicism and stoicism" and "Socratic irony and Old Comedy rigor", and framed by situations which contributed to its moral purposes (105):

so the satire will be framed by a conflict of sorts between the satirist . . . and an adversary. The adversary usually has a minor role, serving only to prod the 'I' into extended comment on the issue (vice or folly) at hand; he may be sketchily defined, a completely shadowy figure, or he may be as effectively projected. . . . Similarly, the background against which the two talk may be barely suggested or it may form an integral part of the poem. . . . In any event,

the frame is usually there, providing a semi-dramatic situation in which vice and folly may reasonably be dissected (Elliott 110-11).

Besides the satirical form, Horace and Juvenal represent two kinds of approach to the listeners in Roman satire, comical and tragical (Elliott 117). According to Highet, their satiric verses expressed their “different beliefs about evil”: Horace’s conversational letters used to convey “the truth with a smile, so that he . . . cure[d] them of that ignorance which [was] their worst fault”, whilst Juvenal’s monologues aimed at the punishment and destruction of mankind through laughter (235) – that is why Highet associates the latter with a misanthropic satirist, who “looks at life and finds it, not tragic, nor comic, but ridiculously contemptible and nauseating hateful” (236).

Although satiric verses were more common among the first satirists of whom there is record, monologue, parody and narrative have also become a means to ridicule society or a given community, a literary work and its characters, respectively, with corrective intentions or not (Highet 13-14). Variety of satirical forms and tones is a result of public disapproval of the ridicule which characterises satire for its influencing of people’s behaviour – as may be observed in Greek and Irish satires. Elliott also illustrates this from late sixteenth-century England, in which the printing of satires was prohibited by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London, and works already published had to be burnt (261). Hostility was, then, conveyed through wit:

Once wit has been brought into the service of the satiric spirit, then all the rhetorical maneuvers by which the literary satirist achieves his end become available: *irony*, innuendo, burlesque, parody, allegory – all the *devices of indirection which help make palatable an originally unacceptable impulse*. It is a nice complication, however, that the devices which make satire acceptable to polite society at the same time sharpen its point (Elliott 264, emphases added).

Besides Horace’s and Juvenal’s monologues, Jonathan Swift’s *A Modest Proposal* (1729) is an example of an eighteenth-century English satiric monologue; also from that time, Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela: or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* (1742) represent prose fiction “parodied, in humors and leers” (Highet 143); Evelyn Waugh’s *Decline and Fall* (1928) and George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945) are examples of English twentieth-century satirical narratives. Those works demonstrate a variety of forms and functions of satire through wit and devices of indirection, such as “irony, paradox, antithesis, parody, colloquialism, anticlimax, topicality, obscenity, violence, vividness, exaggeration”, which convey

ridicule in such a way people will accept the satirical work – or even understand it (Highet 18). Regarding such a variety, Clark points out:

It swings backwards and forwards, on an ellipse about the two foci of the satiric universe, the exposure of folly and the castigation of vice; it fluctuates between the flippant and the earnest, the completely trivial and the heavily didactic; it ranges from extremes of crudity and brutality to the utmost refinement and elegance; it employs singly or in conjunction monologue, dialogue, epistle, oration, narrative, manners-painting, character-drawing, allegory, fantasy, travesty, burlesque, parody, and any other vehicle it chooses; and it presents a chameleon-like surface by using all the tones of the satiric spectrum, wit, ridicule, irony, sarcasm, cynicism, the sardonic and invective (qtd. in Pollard 5).

Given the above, the essence of satire seems to be, then, “its relation to reality. Satire wishes to expose and criticize and shame human life, but it pretends to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth” (Highet 158). This means, on the one hand, that satire “is both moral and social in its focus and ameliorative in its intention” (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* 16); on the other, it also implies a position of moral superiority of the satirist in presenting his/her – most commonly, “his” – truth, which society cannot (supposedly) see (Highet 18), “from its [the satire’s] own obliquely critical angle and through its own distorting mirror” (Pollard 7). Hence, although discrepancy between an ideal and a reality is presented by means of reverse and wit, that is, a negative example, and usually followed by the suggestion of a “positive action” (Elliott 111), the relationship between satirist and society can be still of dubiousness:

On the most obvious level it points to the inevitable discrepancy between the ideal image, projected by rhetorical convention, and what it takes to be the actual fact. . . . Despite society’s doubts about the character of the satirist, there may develop a feeling that in its general application his work has some truth in it – or the feeling that other people may *think* that it has some truth in it. Individuals who recognize characteristics of themselves in the objects of attack cannot afford to acknowledge the identity even privately. So they may reward the satirist as proof of piety, while inwardly they fear him (Elliott 266, emphasis by the author).

It must be added that the satirical meaning of a work can arise, according to Pollard and his use of Aristotelian concept of drama or “character in action” (24): out of what one does or fails to do, what others do towards and say about him/her, what he/she says about him/herself, and/or what the author says about him/her. The satirist “is constantly required to maintain a fine balance between literature and life. When he fails, he can so easily decline into the mere preacher or moralist” and have his/her work miss its satirical meaning (26). However, the satirist will reach that balance with an

approach of controversial subjects in satire, such as money, sex and religion, which will depend, in the first place, on the relationship between him/herself and audience, and on how the satirist will attack those subjects and the victim (10).

The problem is that, although “the satirist usually claims that he does not attack institutions; he attacks perversions of institutions”, Elliott argues that “an attack by a powerful satirist on a local phenomenon seems to be capable of indefinite extension in the reader’s mind into an attack on the whole structure of which that phenomenon is part” (271). Thus, even if the satirist overcomes these challenges, that is, the audience’s dubiousness by creating a balanced work and so obtaining an intended satirical meaning, his/her position of superiority in attacking perversions in an institution by means of ironic language and the ridicule can still affect “the most powerful-seeming structures” and, hence, the reception of the satirist’s work by his/her audience (274).

With regards to religious satire, the attacks have not been traditionally against God, but against the religious institution or hypocritical leaders and followers who called the satirist’s attention to “discrepancy between [their] profession and practice” (Pollard 10, 12). By assuming “the mantle of holy mocking”, Hebrew prophets from ancient biblical times “attacked their targets with this incisive wit *and* an overpowering sense of spiritual vocation” (Lindvall, *God Mocks* 2, 3). Such a vocation or call for the maintenance of morality by means of wit was first developed in the form of rhetorical art by Augustine of Hippo (345-430 C.E.), derived from pagan Greek and Romans:

so their *principles and practices of wit* would contribute to an evolving art of Christian satire. Satirists would employ techniques of humor and attempt various ploys to tweak the consciences of their targets. Christian satire would flash throughout history *with unbridled wit and moral indignation*, aiming to correct the corruption and folly of the saints. Its function was to provide a redemptive art that cleansed the infection of the ailing religious body (Lindvall, *God Mocks* 6-7, emphases added).

Nevertheless, in the Middle Ages, “throughout the long centuries when the church was converting the western world”, there were only a few satires – verse, monologue or prose: “no believer could jest about truth, since truth was divinely revealed; and no churchman could be content to smile, or even to sneer, at sinners” (Highet 44). During that time, the “satiric impulse” was mostly expressed by means of sermons which contained anecdotes, tales or fables with moral intentions (45).

It was in 1494, before the Reformation, that the German scholar Sebastian Brandt wrote his *Das Narrenschiff*, *The Ship of Fools*, which depicts, by means of wit,

a community of fools in a floating tub. Lindvall points out that, being a “faithful Roman Catholic, Brandt skewered those causing the decay of his beloved church, but he did it with humility, knowing himself to be a shipmate” (*God Mocks* 1). Following Roman Catholic Desiderius Erasmus’s *In Praise of Folly* (1511), Lindvall explains that, whilst the Reformation period influenced the “earthy coarse language of Martin Luther and Sir Thomas More” – given its “free-wheeling spirit” –, Renaissance Humanism was represented by cleric François Rabelais’s satires, which had “lively, vulgar humor” (2, 8). During and after the Enlightenment, there were not only religious satirists such as Alexander Pope who wrote *religious* satires, but also secular ones who had an “eye and ear for the folly of religious poseurs”, such as Voltaire and nineteenth-century writer Ambrose Bierce (2).

From his time and later, admittedly Christian satirists still used irony and wit for moral purposes. Danish Lutheran Søren Kierkegaard “served not only as a spy of God, but as a moral assassin” for, respectively, churchgoers and readers of his pseudonym Johannes Climacus (Lindvall, *God Mocks* 10). In the early twentieth century, English Roman Catholic G. K. Chesterton used paradoxical laughter in “defense of orthodoxy” (11) in his works, as he, C. S. Lewis points out, “was not afraid to combine serious Christian themes with buffoonery. In the same way, the miracle plays of the Middle Ages would deal with a sacred subject such as the nativity of Christ, yet would combine it with a farce” (Lewis, *God in the Dock* 259). So it can be seen that religious satirists have made use of wit or humor for moral purposes, which may extend to ridicule or rage to bring about entertainment and/or reform (Lindvall, *God Mocks* 7).

Apart from secular satirists who also wrote religious satire, Lindvall emphasises Brandt’s “shipmate” as a distinguishing feature between secular and religious satire:

However, the biblical satirist shares in the blame and shame of his defendants. He may be God’s prosecutor, but he is also entwined with the people he ridicules. *A true satirist sits in the dock with those who are guilty and identifies as an integral member of the satirized community.* The identification of satirist and his target occurs in the trope of a mirror. The mirror offers a comic frame in which to look at and to look through the heart; the satirist finds that none are righteous, including himself (*God Mocks* 3, emphasis added).

Although the main difference between secular and religious satirists is, apparently, “the object of their wit”, the fact that the latter have “evolved throughout history, altering their strategies and emphases as the times have changed themselves” in such a way that they can as well be the object of their own satire, it seems to explain the audience’s

dubiousness regarding the satirist, who would no longer be in a position of superiority, but would convey his/her witty and corrective message to their “fellow people of God” (5). Moreover, since critic and writer T. S. Eliot observed that religion and fiction share *influencing behaviour* as a common assumption, I would add that a religious, satiric message can be reinforced, given the (supposedly) trustworthy voice – of a “fellow believer” (my own term) – through fiction and wit, that is, satire:

Our religion imposes our ethics, our judgment and criticism of ourselves, and our behavior toward our fellow men. The fiction that we read affects our behaviour towards our fellow men, affects our patterns of ourselves. When we read human beings behaving in certain ways, with the approval of the author, who gives his benediction to this behaviour by his attitude towards the result of the behaviour arranged by himself, we can be influenced towards behaving in the same way (Eliot 100-01).

However, the functions of satire, as previously outlined, are not limited to wit and the correction of behaviour: satire is also aggressive, so it may intend to destroy or may be seen as destructive, depending on the satirist’s approach to the reader’s emotions. As Highet points out, the satirist “intends to shock his readers. By compelling them to look at a sight they had missed or shunned, he first makes them realize the truth, and then moves them to feelings of protest. Most satirists enhance those feelings by careful choice of language” (20). Since satire and irony are closely related, the satiric function of irony is set at the top of the ironic scale proposed by Hutcheon (*Irony’s Edge* 45), which considers the functions of irony according to the reader’s point of view and his/her emotions, that is, ethos, and also considers the satiric functions of wit, aggression and correction:

Satire, like irony, possesses a marked ethos, one that is even more pejoratively or negatively coded (Morier 1961, 217). This can be called a scornful or disdainful ethos. It is that kind of encoded anger, communicated to the decoder through invective. . . . Satire should not be confused with simple invective, however, for the corrective aim of satire’s scornful ridicule is central to its identity. While satire can be destructive (Valle-Killeen 1980, 15), there is also an implied idealism, for it is often ‘unabashedly didactic and seriously committed to a hope in its own power to effect of change’ (Bloom and Bloom 1979, 16). There is, nevertheless, an aggressive side to satire’s ethos, as Freud and Ernst Kris (1964) noted. When we come to discuss the overlapping of satire with irony, we shall see that it would be *at the end of the ironic scale of ethos where a contemptuous bitter laugh is produced that satire weds irony most fiercely* (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* 56, emphasis added).

In this sense, some considerations on religious satire, irony and the reader must be made. Firstly, religious satire seems necessarily to count on a discursive community

which precedes irony (Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge* 85); since such a religious community is a reference for the satirist regarding ideals and reality, it tends to determine the satirist's approach to specific subjects with specific pragmatic effects. According to Pollard, the use of distorting irony in a work which deals with reverse and exaggeration – like satire – “requires a select and responsive audience to recognize its peculiar direction of meaning”, since “Beneath its surface of detachment irony conceals a passion of the deepest involvement. Because it is so involved, its effects are often best obtained over the broad scope of a whole work” (67-68). Thus, as presented at the top of Hutcheon's scale, the satiric functions of irony vary from laughter to harm, and/or from correction to destruction, and, as irony in religious satire or its discursive community aggregates a religious group along with its values, the aggregative function of irony also excludes those readers who cannot understand irony in that specific context.

I conclude this chapter by proposing that irony as a structured whole and a rhetorical strategy can be used in religious satire for enjoyability and, optionally, apologetics, in the sense that irony not only conveys a religious message to a select group, but can also lead the readers to laughter and/or can even recommend that community's values to other types of reader, by considering (or constructing) them as Model Readers and, therefore, letting them interpret and personally perform the religious, satirical work (Brait 37; Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge* 53; Eco, *The Open Work* 4). Umberto Eco uses irony in his *The Name of the Rose* (1980) as a “metalinguistic play, enunciation squared”, because it can “break down the barrier that has been erected between art and enjoyability”, since, by means of it, “reaching a vast public and capturing its dreams . . . does not necessarily mean encouraging escape: it can also mean haunting them” (Eco, *The Name of the Rose* 48, 72). In this sense, the use of irony in religious satire would not *exempt* those readers from outside a religious community *from* the possible pragmatic effects of such a work, but could invite them to an open game which is the interpretation and performance of irony, whether its effects be enjoyable and/or corrective. Having that in mind, the next two chapters will, therefore, observe irony as a rhetorical and structural strategy in C. S. Lewis's religious satire *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), and will analyse its different pragmatic effects on and evaluations by different types of readers.

3 C. S. LEWIS, IRONY AND READER

It is a continual demonstration of the truth that we are composite creatures, rational animals, akin on one side to the angels, on the other to tom-cats. It is a bad thing not to be able to take a joke. Worse, not to take a divine joke; made, I grant you, at your expense, but also (who doubts it?) for our endless benefit.

—C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*

3.1 C. S. Lewis: The Professor, the Fictionist, the Apologist

Clive Staples Lewis was born on 29 November, 1898, in Belfast, Northern Ireland. He was “the son of a solicitor and of a clergyman’s daughter” (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 12), namely, Albert Lewis and Flora Hamilton, who were married on 29 August, 1894, at St. Mark’s Church, in the suburb of Dundela. Born on 16 June, 1895, older brother Warren was Lewis’s ally in their early, imaginative childhood: he “had already made India ‘his country’; Animal-Land was mine” (14). Such a close relationship enabled Warren to remember that, in 1903 or 1904, Lewis rejected his name “Clive”, preferring to being called “Jacksie”, “gradually abbreviated to ‘Jacks,’ and finally to ‘Jack.’” (McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life* 9). As the Lewis family moved to “Leeborough House”, “Leaboro” or “Little Lea” – the “New House” (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 17) – on 21 April, 1905, and Warren was sent to Wynyard School, Watford, England, in May in that year, Lewis developed a close relationship with reading instead:

I am a product of . . . endless books. My father bought all the books he read and never got rid of any of them. There were books in the study, books in the drawing-room, books in the cloakroom, books (two deep) in the great bookcase on the landing, books in a bedroom, books piled as high as my shoulder in the cistern attic, books of all kinds reflecting every transient stage of my parents’ interests, books readable and unreadable, books suitable for a child and books most emphatically not. Nothing was forbidden me. In the seemingly endless rainy afternoons I took volume after volume from the shelves (18).

Thus, Lewis’s first experiences of writing, which started at the age of ten, may be associated with the absence of his brother: “But solitude was nearly always at my command, somewhere in the garden or somewhere in the house. I had now learned both to read and to write; I had a dozen things to do” (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 19).

Lewis’s mother died of abdominal cancer on 23 August, 1908. Although he was used to specific prayers at specific times – as his father was a follower of the Church

of Ireland –, his first religious experience occurred when he became aware of Flora's illness and, then, faced her death. Lewis observes his approach to God: "He was, in my mental picture of this miracle, to appear neither as Saviour nor as Judge, but merely as a magician . . . I imagine that a 'faith' of this kind is often generated in children and that its disappointment is of no religious importance" (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 27). In this sense, Flora's death represents the end of Lewis's "settled happiness" as well as of settled home and faith (29).

In September that year, Lewis was sent to Wynyard School to join his brother Warren. McGrath points out that "Lewis simply does not seem to have fitted in to the public school culture of the Edwardian Age. What others saw as necessary, if occasionally distasteful, preparation for the rigours of life in the real world was dismissed and vilified by Lewis as a 'concentration camp.'" (C. S. Lewis: *A Life* 26). However, for Lewis, Wynyard School *did* seem to lack some educational rigour: "I was already doing Latin exercises (as taught by my mother) when I went there in 1908, and I was still doing Latin exercises when I left there in 1910" (*Surprised by Joy* 32). When it closed, Lewis was sent to preparatory Cherbourg School, Malvern, where he stayed from January, 1911, to June, 1913. He then won a scholarship to Malvern College, where he studied from September 1913 to July 1914, and learned Latin and Greek with his classics master, Harry Wakelyn Smith – "Smewgy". Regarding that time, McGrath points out Lewis's condition of "being an Irishman in exile in a strange land" and his "explicit loss of any remnants of a Christian faith" (McGrath, C. S. Lewis: *A Life* 29). Lewis explains such a process – of settling a home and lack of faith – by calling Cherbourg School "Chartres" and Malvern School "Wyvern":

Wyvern itself healed my quarrel with England. The great blue plain below us and, behind, those green, peaked hills, so mountainous in form and yet so manageably small in size, became almost at once my delight. And Wyvern Priory was the first building that I ever perceived to be beautiful. And at Chartres I made my first real friends. But there, too, something far more important happened to me: I ceased to be a Christian (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 62).

On 9 September, 1914 – the second month of Warren's training at the army of Sandhurst, as Britain "declared war against Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire on 4 August" (McGrath, C. S. Lewis: *A Life* 37) –, Lewis was sent to Great Bookham, Surrey, to study with William Thompson Kirkpatrick, whose academic career at Queen's College, Belfast, had been "distinguished" (40), and who turned out to be

Albert Lewis's former headmaster: "At Bookham I was met by my new teacher – 'Kirk' or 'Knock' or the Great Knock as my father, my brother, and I all called him" (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 128-129). Kirkpatrick's archaic, though challenging, educational methods had Lewis learn living and dead languages, such as Greek, Latin, German and Italian, to the extent that he could read the original texts of Homer's *Iliad* and Dante's *Inferno* (McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life* 41). Although Kirk's Atheism and Rationalism did not directly influence Lewis's Atheism and Pessimism, since these were "fully formed" before he went to Bookham, yet they indirectly served Lewis as a basis for argumentation (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 134):

What I got there was merely fresh ammunition for the defence of a position already chosen. Even this I got indirectly from the tone of his mind or independently from reading his books. He never attacked religion in my presence. It is the sort of fact that no one would infer from an outside knowledge of my life, but it is a fact (134-35).

Thus, Lewis acknowledges the importance of his masters in the development of his language and rhetoric skills: ". . . Smewgy taught me Grammar and Rhetoric and Kirk taught me Dialectic" (142). In October, 1916, for example, Lewis wrote about his lack of faith in a letter to a Christian friend from Belfast, Arthur Greeves, with whom he debated by the exchange of six letters within a month (McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life* 42).

From January, 1916, conscription gained force by the Military Service Act, which included between eighteen- and twenty-one-year-old men, and exempted those who were "resident in Britain only for the purpose of their education" (McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life* 43). Although Lewis considered enlisting inevitable, he expressed to his father that he first wished to try to get into New College, Oxford University, since he was aware of his own skills, as put by Kirkpatrick to Albert Lewis: "You may make a writer or a scholar of him, but you'll not make anything else. You may make up your mind to *that*." (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 175). On 1 December, Lewis was aware that "he was formally exempt from the Act, provided he register immediately", and, on 5 December, he took the entrance examinations in the Hall of Oriel College (McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life* 45). Lewis did not gain a place at New College, but, on 13 December, he was notified, in a letter from the master of University College, Reginald Macan, that he had won a scholarship at University College. Nevertheless, some days later, Macan wrote to Lewis to present him with the "moral impossibility" which eighteen-year-old men from

Oxford were under, that everyone “in that category was now expected to enlist in the forces” (46). The alternative was, then, to pass an additional examination at Oxford: “Though I was now a scholar of my College I still had to pass ‘Responsions’, which involved elementary mathematics. To prepare for this I returned after Christmas for one last term with Kirk” (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 177). As an Oxford student from April, 1917, Lewis therefore had to join the Oxford University Officer’s Training Corps so he could finally start his studies at Oxford.

Lewis summarises his journey as a frontline soldier in the British Army in France in a single paragraph:

I passed through the ordinary course of training (a mild affair in those days compared with that of the recent war) and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Somerset Light Infantry, the old XIIIth Foot. I arrived in the front line trenches on my nineteenth birthday (November 1917), saw most of my service in the villages before Arras – Fampoux and Monchy – and was wounded at Mt. Bernenchon, near Lillers, in April 1918 (*Surprised by Joy* 179).

Such a concise report on the Great War in his autobiography *Surprised by Joy* (1955) – compared to those on his experiences at Cherbourg and Malvern – seems to have been foreseen when Lewis dealt with war as it was in the future: “I put the war on one side to a degree which some people will think shameful and some incredible. Others will call it a flight from reality. I maintain that it was rather a treaty with reality, the fixing of a frontier” (152). McGrath offers us a plausible explanation for Lewis’s approach to war in the past:

Lewis could not bear to remember the trauma of his wartime experiences, whose irrationality called into question whether there was any meaning in the universe at large or in Lewis’s personal existence in particular. The literature concerning the Great War and its aftermath emphasises the physical and psychological damage it wreaked on soldiers at the time, and on their return home. Many students returning to study at Oxford University after the war experienced considerable difficulty adjusting to normal life, leading to frequent nervous breakdowns. Lewis appears to have ‘partitioned’ or ‘compartmentalised’ his life as a means of retaining his sanity. The potentially devastating memories of his traumatic experiences were carefully controlled so that they had a minimal impact on other areas of his life. Literature – above all, poetry – was Lewis’s firewall, keeping the chaotic and meaningless external world at a safe distance, and shielding him from the existential devastation it wreaked on others (C. S. Lewis: *A Life* 50-51).

On 13 January, 1919, Lewis returned to Oxford to conclude his undergraduate studies, being excused from Responsions, as he had served in the British Army for more than six months. Inspired by “war poets” such as Siegfried Sassoon (1886–

1967), Robert Graves (1895–1985) and Rupert Brooke (1887–1915), Lewis published a collection of war poems under the title *Spirits in Bondage* – formerly entitled *Spirits in Prison* –, and the pseudonym “Clive Hamilton”, in March 1919. However, McGrath points out that “over half of the poems in this collection were written before Lewis actually went to France and saw active service”, and that *Spirits in Bondage* reveals Lewis as a “failed poet who found greatness in other spheres of writing . . . Lewis succeeded as a writer of prose – a prose saturated with the powerful rhythms and melodious phrasing of a natural poet” (*C. S. Lewis: A Life* 63, 64).

Lewis studied classical languages and literature – *Literae Humaniores* –, which “was the diamond in Victorian Oxford’s academic crown, and was still seen as the intellectual flagship of Oxford’s undergraduate academic degrees up to about 1920” (McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life* 80). In his Trinity Term, 1920, he started his studies of the Greats and philosophy; in April 1921, Lewis was recommended for the Chancellor’s Essay Prize, which “was to be awarded for the best English essay by an undergraduate on a topic set for discussion – in this case, ‘Optimism.’” (86). On 24 May, Lewis heard that he had won the prize; he then had the opportunity to read an extract of his essay to guests of honour such as Georges Clemenceau – the prime minister of France from 1917 to 1920 – at the Sheldonian Theatre. Lewis took his final exams for Greats from 8 to 14 June, 1922, whose papers included “Roman history, logic, an unseen Greek translation from Philostratus, and an unseen Latin translation from Cicero” (91); by that time, Lewis was working on some cantos of his epic poem *Dymer*, which would be published in 1926.

In 1922, amidst the political tensions in Ireland which would later result in the creation of the Irish Free State on 6 December, Lewis faced unemployment and a difficult financial situation. On 12 October, Lewis was informed that he had not obtained a fellowship at Magdalen College, Oxford, so, the next day, he started his studies in English Language and Literature at Oxford’s School of English Language and Literature. McGrath observes that this was an exhausting experience for Lewis, since he “was doing a course in less than nine months that was designed to be studied over three years” (McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life* 101). On 10 July, 1923, Lewis took his final examinations, which happened to be oral; on 16 July, Lewis discovered that he had not only been approved, but had also gained First Class Honours – six out of ninety students had –, which guaranteed him a “Triple First” on his academic journey. In May, 1924, Lewis was offered a temporary job as philosophy tutor at University College,

Oxford; in May, 1925, he applied for an official fellowship as a tutor in English Language at Magdalen College, and was elected to be an Oxford don.

By that time, Lewis had already read George MacDonald's fantasy novel *Phantastes* (1858) – in 1916 – and admired it, although he was not aware of MacDonald's mixing of Christian and imaginary motivations yet: "That night my imagination was, in a certain sense, baptised; the rest of me, not unnaturally, took longer. I had not the faintest notion what I had let myself in for by buying *Phantastes*" (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 173). The novel only came to influence him a decade later, along with G. K. Chesterton's – another Christian writer – argumentative and humorous works:

Liking an author may be as involuntary and improbable as falling in love. I was by now a sufficiently experienced reader to distinguish liking from agreement. I did not need to accept what Chesterton said in order to enjoy it. His humour was of the kind which I like best – not 'jokes' imbedded in the page like currants in a cake, still less (what I cannot endure), a general tone of flippancy and jocularly, but the humour which is not in any way separable from the argument but is rather (as Aristotle would say) the 'bloom' on dialectic itself (181).

Indeed, Lewis's Atheism was in trouble: "In reading Chesterton, as in reading MacDonald, I did not know what I was letting myself in for. A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere . . ." (182). Moreover, poets such as George Herbert (1593–1633) and Thomas Traherne (1636–1674) had influenced Lewis in the sense that they "did not persuade Lewis to believe in God; rather, they led him to think that such a belief offered a rich and robust vision of human life, making him wonder whether there might, after all, be something to be said for their way of thinking" (McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life* 134). Thus, from readings like these – as well as his experiences in the Great War –, it can be said that Lewis abandoned, in the early 20s, Atheism for Realism: "All the books were beginning to turn against me. Indeed, I must have been as blind as a bat not to have seen, long before, the ludicrous contradiction between my theory of life and my actual experiences as a reader" (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 203).

During his period at Oxford, Lewis developed a close friendship with Owen Barfield, who studied English at Wadham College, and who discredited Lewis's "chronological snobbery" and idea of a reality judged by the senses (McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life* 102). Accordingly, in 1926, Lewis gave up Realism:

Barfield convinced me that it was inconsistent. If thought were a purely subjective event, these claims for it would have to be abandoned. If one kept (as rock-bottom reality) the universe of the senses, aided by instruments and co-ordinated so as to form 'science', then one would have to go much further – as many have since gone – and adopt a Behaviouristic theory of logic, ethics, and aesthetics (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 197-98).

As Lewis's biographer George Sayer points out, by 1926 "he was a practicing theist who had no belief in the gospel story or in the doctrine that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (222). On 24 September 1929, Albert Lewis died of cancer, yet Lewis points out that his "father's death, with all the fortitude (even playfulness) which he displayed in his last illness, does not really come into the story I am telling" (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 205). In fact, Lewis supported a theistic Idealism: "I thought the business of us finite and half-unreal souls was to multiply the consciousness of Spirit by seeing the world from different positions while yet remaining qualitatively the same as Spirit" (213). Nevertheless, Lewis realised that his "Idealism can be talked, and even felt; it cannot be lived" (214); then, in analysing historicism in G. K. Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man* (1925) and in the Gospels, and finding *sense* in those, he turned to actual theism. Thus, between March and June 1930,¹⁵ at Trinity College, Lewis finally admitted he believed in God:

You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape? The words *compelle intrare*, compel them to come in, have been so abused by wicked men that we shudder at them; but, properly understood, they plumb the depth of the Divine mercy. The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation (*Surprised by Joy* 217).

Although Lewis's conversion to theism was *rational*, in October 1930, he started attending a parish church on Sundays and college chapel on weekdays. By that time, being a Roman Catholic and an Oxford colleague since 1925, J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973) was a "second class" friend of Lewis's (McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life* 143) – not

¹⁵ As Lewis's dating may be unreliable – due to a faulty memory –, I have used the chronology proposed by McGrath (*C. S. Lewis: A Life* 142).

as close as Arthur Greeves and Owen Barfield were to him. On 19 September 1931, after a dinner together with Tolkien and Hugo Dyson (1896–1975) at Magdalen College, they discussed the nature of myth stretching their legs on Addison’s Walk, “a circular footpath following the River Cherwell within the college grounds” (147). McGrath observes Tolkien’s approach:

Tolkien helped Lewis to realise that the problem lay not in Lewis’s *rational* failure to understand the theory, but in his *imaginative* failure to grasp its significance. The issue was not primarily about *truth*, but about *meaning*. When engaging the Christian narrative, Lewis was limiting himself to his reason when he ought to be opening himself to the deepest intuitions of his imagination (149, emphases by the author).

Accordingly, Lewis ought to be as open to the Gospels as he was to pagan myths, yet from a “treaty with reality” (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 152), since those would relate a *fact*, that is, the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ: “Here and here only in all time *the myth must have become fact*; the Word, flesh; God, Man. This is not ‘a religion’, nor ‘a philosophy’. It is the summing up and actuality of them all” (223, emphasis added). Thus, in September 1931, Lewis became a Christian, and, in August 1932, published an allegory of his intellectual journey which led to his conversion to Christianity, *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (1933).¹⁶

Among his Oxford colleagues, Lewis had finally been recognised for his academic role as a scholar and critic. In 1935, he was formally appointed as a “faculty lecturer in English Literature”, and, in 1936, as a “University lecturer in English literature” at Magdalen College (McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life* 167). In May 1936, Lewis published his *The Allegory of Love* – started in 1928 –, which led Oxford dons to recognise Lewis as a great literary critic – especially of Medieval studies; from his Ballard Lectures on John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667) in December 1941, Oxford University Press published, one year later, his *A Preface to Paradise Lost*; in May 1944, Lewis gave some lectures which, in 1954, would seal his mastery of historicism in his volume in the Oxford History of English Literature series, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*; in 1961, Lewis published his *An Experiment in Criticism*; and, in 1964 – a year after his death –, his two sets of lectures, “Prolegomena to Medieval Studies” and “Prolegomena to Renaissance Studies”, were published under the title *The Discarded Image*.

¹⁶ Its title is a parody of John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678).

At the same time, Lewis's new faith had influenced him in his imaginative, literary writings. As McGrath points out, in December 1938, "Lewis expressed his growing realisation that the forms of science fiction hitherto used to promote various forms of atheism and materialism could equally well be used to *critique* these viewpoints and advocate an alternative" (*C. S. Lewis: A Life* 235). Accordingly, to serve as a contrast to authors such as H. G. Wells, he published his Space Trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelandra* (1943) and *That Hideous Strength* (1945). His creativity and fantasy may also be observed in the religious satire *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), the allegorical *The Great Divorce* (1945), his mythological masterpiece *Till We Have Faces* (1956), and his seven-volume children's series *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956), all of which – except for *Till We Have Faces* – directly or indirectly reveal the World War II context and a consequent need to raise the readers' faith and longing to learn. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), for example, is the result of the opening of *The Kilns* – Lewis and Warren's home, three miles from Oxford – to children evacuated from London, given the possibility of bombing raids. In his sermon "Learning in War-Time", preached in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford, in 1939, Lewis points out:

Before I became a Christian I do not think I fully realised that one's life, after conversion, would inevitably consist in doing most of the same things one had been doing before, one hopes, in a new spirit, but still the same things. Before I went to the last war I certainly expected that my life in the trenches would, in some mysterious sense, be all war. In fact, I found that the nearer you got to the front line the less everyone spoke and thought of the allied cause and the progress of the campaign; and I am pleased to find that Tolstoi, in the greatest war book ever written, records the same thing – and so, in its own way, does the Iliad. Neither conversion nor enlistment in the army is really going to obliterate our human life. Christians and soldiers are still men; the infidel's idea of a religious life and the civilian's idea of active service are fantastic. *If you attempted, in either case, to suspend your whole intellectual and aesthetic activity, you would only succeed in substituting a worse cultural life for a better. You are not, in fact, going to read nothing, either in the Church or in the line: if you don't read good books, you will read bad ones. If you don't go on thinking rationally, you will think irrationally. If you reject aesthetic satisfactions, you will fall into sensual satisfactions.* There is therefore this analogy between the claims of our religion and the claims of the war: neither of them, for most of us, will simply cancel or remove from the slate the merely human life which we were leading before we entered them (Lewis, *God in the Dock* 51-52, emphasis added).

It will be noticed that – despite Tolkien’s helpful input at Addison’s Walk and during their Thursday evening meetings in the *Inklings*¹⁷ –, Lewis had decided to join the Church of England. McGrath explains:

For Lewis, the Church of England represents a distinctly English vision of Christianity, adjusted to the social and cultural realities of this specific region, in much the same way as recent scholarship has emphasized how the Enlightenment – once thought of as a universal movement – is known to have adapted to the specifics of local contexts (*The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis* 148).

However, it cannot be said that Lewis’s writings, from that point on, were aimed at a particular audience – in this case, the Anglican community. Instead, they provided “a consensual, non-clerical, trans-denominational vision of the Christian faith, which we now know as ‘mere Christianity.’”, in Lewis’s “. . . noting the need to focus on shared beliefs rather than divisive differences” in wartime (148-49).

In this sense, since the war “brought changes to many British institutions, including the state broadcaster, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)” in 1940, and since this involved the BBC in offering religious instruction during such a difficult period, a “voice of faith” was needed (McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life* 205). McGrath points out the BBC’s requirement: “(The) BBC began to prefer speakers who would not speak from any denominational agenda or platform, but would simply present a transdenominational vision of Christianity to the nation as a whole” (206). In 1941, Lewis – who had already published *The Problem of Pain* (1940) – was invited, by commissioning editor at the BBC Dr. James Welch, to present the Christian faith as a layman and in an “uneducated language”, in four talk series (207).¹⁸ Given the popularity of Lewis’s broadcast talks between August 1941 and March 1944, these became his classic *Mere Christianity* (1956), which, according to Nilsen, “contain a great deal of wit” (179).

Indeed, Lewis kept sharing his faith by giving lectures and sermons, publishing apologetical works, such as *The Abolition of Man* (1943) and *Miracles* (1947), and teaching. On 1 October 1954, he accepted a chair at Cambridge, as the first professor

¹⁷ Founded in 1933, the Inklings was a group of friends who met to share their literary and intellectual production. It also included Warren Lewis, Hugo Dyson, Dr. Robert E. Howard and Charles Williams.

¹⁸ Series 1, “Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe”, was broadcast from 6 August to 6 September 1941; series 2, “What Christians Believe”, from 11 January to 15 February 1942; series 3, “Christian Behaviour”, from 20 September to 8 November 1942; and series 4, “Beyond Personality: The Christian View of God”, from 22 February to 30 March 1944.

of Medieval Renaissance English. During that productive time – which includes the creative works I have mentioned –, Lewis published declaredly Christian works *Reflections on the Psalms* (1958) and *The Four Loves* (1960), and the reflective *A Grief Observed* (1961), which contemplated the pain of the death of his wife, American Helen Joy Davidman Gresham (1915–1960) – whom he had married on 23 April 1956. McGrath summarises Lewis’s production between 1954 and 1963: “Lewis wrote thirteen books and forty-four articles during his Cambridge years, not to mention numerous book reviews and several poems, and he edited three collections of essays” (*C. S. Lewis: A Life* 320).

Lewis resigned his chair at Cambridge in October 1963 due to ill health – an “enlarged prostate gland” and failing kidneys and heart – with which he had been dealing from July 1961 (McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life* 348). On Friday, 22 November 1963 – on the very day on which John F. Kennedy was murdered –, at around 5:30 p.m., Lewis died at his home: “His death certificate would give the multiple causes of his death as renal failure, prostate obstruction, and cardiac degeneration” (358); he was buried at Holy Trinity Church, Headington Quarry, Oxford. Lewis’s literary afterlife has included the posthumous publication of his collected essays, *Screwtape Proposes a Toast* (1965), *Of This and Other Worlds* (1966), *Christian Reflections*, *Fern-Seed and Elephants* (1975) and *God in the Dock* (1979); collected letters edited by Walter Hooper; and well-written biographies. Accordingly, readers have been able to get to know C. S. Lewis as a great professor, fictionist and even apologist, and then to come to the conclusion: “My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through those of others. . . . In reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself” (Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* 140-41). The present dissertation is concerned with one of Lewis’s most remarkable work of fiction, which merges his humorous creativity with reversed apologetics, *The Screwtape Letters* (1942).

3.2 The Screwtape Letters

I have argued that C. S. Lewis used simple theology to approach British society which faced World War II during the early 1940s, through the broadcasting of his Christian talks on the BBC, so that his listeners could have something which to rely on. My focus, however, is on *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), which, being a diabolical satire of mankind, religion and 20th-century England, had a different impact on Lewis’s

audience, resulting in his work becoming widely known in the Western World. Such a satiric and religious work also had the function of communicating with Lewis's own society and religious group, though through a *reversed irony*, which he described as "diabolical ventriloquism" and whose "humor involves a sense of proportion and a power of seeing yourself from the outside" (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 180 [2000]; Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* ix [1960b]). However, he explains that writing the *Letters* was both an easy and a difficult task:

Though I had never written anything more easily, I never wrote with less enjoyment . . . But though it was easy to twist one's mind into the diabolical attitude, it was not fun, or not for long. The world into which I had to project myself while I spoke through Screwtape was all dust, grit, thirst and itch. Every trace of beauty, freshness and geniality had to be excluded. It almost smothered me before I was done. It would have smothered my readers if I had prolonged it (*The Screwtape Letters* 183 [2000]).

It is precisely Lewis's use of reversed irony in *The Screwtape Letters* that ensures that the possible meanings of his irony and humour continue to resonate – in the sense that they can still be perceived by the most varied readers of the *Letters*.

3.2.1 Context, Publication and Reception

World War II started with Hitler's invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939,¹⁹ and Lewis's writings can be related to the war during the 1940s. On 19 July 1940, Lewis listened to Hitler's speech to the Reichstag,²⁰ which addressed Great Britain in an appeal to "reason", lest the British Isles were attacked; its English translation was broadcast on the BBC at 6 p.m. that day. In a letter to his older brother Warren Lewis on 20 July 1940, Lewis detailed his impressions of Hitler's speech:

Humphrey came up to see me last night (not in his medical capacity) and we listened to Hitler's speech together. I don't know if I'm weaker than other people: but it is a positive revelation to me how *while the speech lasts* it is impossible not to waver just a little. I should be useless as a schoolmaster or a policeman. Statements which I *know* to be untrue all but convince me, at any rate for the moment, if only the man says them unflinchingly (*Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis* 2:425, emphasis by the author).

¹⁹ Lewis shared his writings on *The Problem of Pain* (1940) with the Inklings in November of that year.

²⁰ Adolf Hitler, "My Last Appeal to Great Britain: A Great Empire Will Be Destroyed: A Speech Made to the Reichstag, July 19, 1940," *Vital Speeches of the Day* 6:20 (Aug 1, 1940): 20, 617-25.

Later, Lewis confessed he had neglected communion until the morning of that day: “I resume at coffee-time on Sunday morning. I have been to Church for the first time for many weeks owing to the illness, and considered myself invalid enough to make a mid-day communion” (426). Following his confession, he shared his ideas about a book which he intended to write:

Before the service was over – one cd. wish these things came more seasonably – I was struck by an idea for a book wh. I think might be both useful and entertaining. It wd. be called *As One Devil to Another* and would consist of letters from an elderly retired devil to a young devil who has just started work on his first ‘patient’. The idea wd. be to give all the psychology of temptation from the other point of view. e.g. ‘About undermining his faith in prayer, I don’t think you need have any difficulty with his intellect, provided you never say the wrong thing at the wrong moment. After all, the Enemy will either answer his prayers or not. If he does *not*, then that’s simple – it shows prayers are no good. If he *does* – I’ve always found that, oddly enough, this can be just as easily utilised. It needs only a word from you to make him believe that the very fact of feeling more patient after he’s prayed for patience will be taken as a proof that prayer is a kind of self-hypnosis. Or if it is answered by some external event, then since that even will have causes which you can point to, he can be persuaded that it would have happened anyway. You see the idea? Prayer can always be discredited either because it works or because it doesn’t.’ (*Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis* 2:425-26, emphasis by the author).

Lewis’s ideas on *The Screwtape Letters* seem to have been born that weekend – 19-21 July 1940 –, probably during Sunday’s communion. Although it cannot be assured that Hitler’s figure and speech served Lewis as an inspiration, it is worth noting that Lewis’s ideas on a devilish work of literature were developed in the voice of senior devil, undersecretary Screwtape, who turns out to be as authoritarian and unreliable as the former (or worse): Screwtape would send his nephew, the junior tempter Wormwood, advisory letters on how to tempt an Englishman, the “patient”, leading him to the corruption of his faith and, hence, soul. As the *Letters* were written between July 1940 and February 1941, and typed from November 1940 by Lewis’s then retired brother (Dickieson, “The Devil Is the Don”), they were finally and serially published in an Anglican newspaper of which Lewis used to be a subscriber, *The Guardian*,²¹ from 2 May through to 28 November 1941. Lewis’s thirty-one letters earned him £2 per each, yet he gave the editor a list of widows and orphans to whom £62 was to be donated (Lewis, *Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis* 2:483).

²¹ Founded by Richard William Church and Thomas Henry Haddan in 1846, *The Guardian* was a weekly newspaper of the Church of England until 1951.

It was during that time that Lewis gave his “Right and Wrong” lectures which would later become the first part of *Mere Christianity* (1952). Coyle points out that, “as a result of his radio presence, Lewis became the second most recognizable voice in Britain after Winston Churchill” (29). One week before the first publication of the *Letters*, that is, on 25 April 1941, the editor of *The Guardian* included a two-column ad that credited them to a “Fellow of *Magdalen College*” who was also known for his *The Problem of Pain* (1940), *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (1933) and *The Allegory of Love* (1936) – in that order –, and that expressed some hopefulness on their weekly publication: “A keen demand is expected; order *The Guardian* now!”. As stated by Lewis’s biographer George Sayer, “many people who had never heard of *The Guardian* before sought it out just for the letters” (273). For this reason and due to the social effects of the World War II, the Anglican newspaper announced, on 9 May 1941, that, “due to the scarcity of paper”, copies should be acquired under subscription or direct order, only.

Dedicated to his friend J. R. R. Tolkien – who found it, however, “disturbing” (Birzer 89) –, *The Screwtape Letters* was first published in book format and as an epistolary, satirical fiction by Geoffrey Bles of London on 9 February 1942 (Lewis, *Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis* 2:508). According to Nilsen, the humoristic style of the *Letters* had an important role in Lewis’s approaching of subjects like war and religion in such a way that different readers would enjoy those, and Lewis would become well known:

Humor gave Lewis the objectivity he needed to allow him to approach war and death that was imminent to his English readers of 1942. It allowed them to see the humor of their situations, and to lighten their burdens, and to give them hope. The book is symbolic for believers, because they believe in Hell, and the words therefore carry a sense of immediacy and truth. For non-believers, the book is an allegory. But the widespread popularity of the book is not based on either of these factors, but is rather based on the book’s humor, which undercuts the humorless antagonist, Screwtape . . . (Nilsen 174).

On the other hand, the reception of *The Screwtape Letters* by Lewis’s colleagues did not follow the stream of his common readers:

The Screwtape Letters (1942), however, alarmed many of his Oxford colleagues. How could such a trivializing tale of satanic incompetence have been written by an Oxford don? It was probably the immense popular success of this work, as much as its populist tone, that irritated many of his colleagues. A question mark now hung over Lewis’s academic credentials in Oxford, leading to him being passed over for at least two significant preferments during the late 1940s (McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis* xi-xii).

An article entitled “Don v. Devil”²² – which played with Lewis’s status in Oxford – was published in the Religion section of the September 8, 1947, edition of *Time Magazine* – whose cover pictured C. S. Lewis and a devil²³ under the heading, “Oxford’s C. S. Lewis, His Heresy: Christianity”. In the article, anonymous author (ironically) explains that “Lewis (like T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, *et al.*) is one of a growing band of heretics among modern intellectuals: an intellectual who believes in God”. The author highlights that “With *Screwtape*’s success, Lewis became a celebrity. A man who could talk theology without pulling a long face or being dull was just what a lot of people in war-beleaguered Britain wanted”, and fairly includes Lewis’s humorous defense: “I certainly never intended being a hot gospeler. If I had only known this when I became a Christian!”.

Regarding the first American edition, Kilby observes that American poet Leonard Bacon, for example, “called it an ‘admirable, diverting, and remarkably original work... The most exciting piece of Christian apologetics that has turned up in a long time... A spectacular and satisfactory nova in the bleak sky of satire’” (37).²⁴ Nearly two decades later, when “the Cold War was heating up” (Coyle 31), Lewis’s short sequel to the *Letters*, “*Screwtape Proposes a Toast*”, was written for an American audience and published in *The Saturday Evening Post*’s December 19, 1959, edition; in 1960, it was published in book format, along with other essays, in *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays*.

Although the article in *Time Magazine* – mentioned above – also contributed to sealing and expanding, respectively, Lewis’s popularity in England and the United States in the 1940s (Dickieson, “The Devil Is the Don”), *The Screwtape Letters* seems to be the work “which *first* made Lewis well known, in America as well as in Britain as a popular writer” (Schakel, “The Satiric Imagination of C. S. Lewis 138, emphasis added), given its humorous approach to difficult subjects such as war, death and religion. In order to demonstrate what makes *The Screwtape Letters* a popular work of literature, its plot, characterisation and style must now be presented.

3.2.2 Devilish Plot, Characterisation and Style

²² Read the article on this link: content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19470908,00.html.

²³ See the article on this link: content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,804196-1,00.html.

²⁴ Leonard Bacon’s review was published by *Saturday Review of Literature* on April 7, 1943.

Since the plot of *The Screwtape Letters* can be schematised according to the three types of temptation suggested by Screwtape and tried by Wormwood, “by the World, by the Flesh and by the Devil”,²⁵ I will summarise the most important events of its narrative from the three phases of temptation endured by the Patient (Patterson 47). Between the first and second letters, the Englishman has been converted to Christianity, which is noted by the senior devil “with grave *displeasure*” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 5 [2000], emphasis added); as the noun “displeasure” indicates, Screwtape’s language reflects his distorted point of view – although that example may appear subtle. With this new perspective in mind – that of a Christian Patient –, Screwtape advises Wormwood to invest in the Patient’s view of the Church, which is, for Screwtape, “One of [their] great allies” (5) in the sense that it carries its supposedly hypocritical members, and to invest in his view of the Enemy – the Christian God, which happens to be a better example of Screwtape’s distortions, although also a tricky one; Screwtape also advises his nephew to invest in a bad relationship between the Patient and his mother, by “build[ing] up . . . a good settled habit of mutual annoyance; daily pinpricks” with the help of their colleague Glubose (11). When the “European War”²⁶ starts and there is a possibility of the Patient being called up for military service, Screwtape reproaches Wormwood’s demonstration of delight: despite the amusement the war brings to the devils, it does them no good – Screwtape completes – “unless we make use of it for bringing souls to Our Father Below” (22); otherwise, it may represent “thousands turning in this tribulation to the Enemy” (23). As regards the Patient, the senior devil, then, considers pacifism or patriotism as another distraction, and decides for pacifism as he considers it more adequate for the Patient to focus on religion – rather on the Enemy –, which is to say, “the more ‘religious’ (on those terms) the more securely ours” (35). Indeed, Wormwood observes that the Patient seems to be less interested in religion than before; however, Screwtape reproaches this naivety by blaming the Training College’s head Slubgob, and warns the junior tempter of the law of Undulation, that is, “the repeated return to a level from which they repeatedly fall back, a series of troughs and peaks . . . his [the Patient’s] interest in his work, his affection for his friends, his physical appetites, all go up and down” (38); the danger –

²⁵ In the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity, The Collect, it reads: “Lord, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to *withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil*, and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee the only God . . .” (emphasis added).

²⁶ A reference to World War II, since neither the United States nor Japan had joined it by the time the *Letters* were written.

from Screwtape's point of view – lies in that the best work of the Enemy is done during His sons' and daughters' difficult periods, since, Screwtape points out, "all the talk about His love for men" is "an appalling truth".

After some letters on temptations by the World, Screwtape considers the ones by the Flesh, starting with sensual temptations, including that of sex. Since the Patient has been going through a period of sexual "dryness", the senior devil suggests that the less pleasure the Patient gets, the more prone he may be to perversions and, hence, a decreasing of his spirituality. The Patient's closeness to "worldly friends" is also encouraged, so that he may develop a critical view of his fellow believers in church, and a sense of humour different from theirs, and, if possible, keep looking for a suitable church (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 52 [2000]). In his twelfth letter, Screwtape highlights the importance of the Patient's ignorance of his own condition; yet, in the following one, the senior devil cannot hide his disappointment about the news given by Wormwood, who would not be "shield[ed] from the consequences of [his] inefficiency" (63): the Patient has recognised his sin in experiencing a real pleasure, which has somehow showed him the emptiness of those enjoyed along with his new friends. This condition of real humility of the Patient leads Screwtape to suggest to Wormwood pride, false modesty and self-pity, and, regarding the advantages of the War, he recommends fostering a concern about the future, instead of about the present and eternity, by means of vices, which "are rooted in the future" (76). However, in the nineteenth letter, the senior devil finds himself obliged to explain his words on the Enemy's love for humans, which would be considered a "heresy" among the devils; he then tries to ensure his reliable position by adding that his earlier assertion "is an impossibility . . . All His talk about Love must be a disguise for something else – He must have some *real* motive for creating them and taking so much trouble for them" (100). Furthermore, despite Screwtape's reflections on sex, love, marriage and selfishness, the Patient has been in love with a girl who happens to be "Not only a Christian but such a Christian – a vile, sneaking, simpering, demure, monosyllabic, mouse-like, watery, insignificant, virginal, bread-and-butter miss. The little brute" (117). In Screwtape's writing this letter, his anger causes him unexpectedly to transform himself into a centipede, which he believes to be "a glorious manifestation of that Life Force which Our Father [Satan] would worship if he worshipped anything but himself" (121).

Due to the Patient's love relationship, he has been often introduced to many other Christians, who are – to Screwtape's surprise – very intelligent. Accordingly,

Screwtape suggests that his faith has been undermined by means of the “historical Jesus” point of view or political implications in Christianity (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 124 [2000]). A source of the senior devil’s also points out a Christian girl’s feeling which may be advantageous in the sense that the Patient can reproduce it as well: that of superiority over non-believers. Screwtape argues that, consequently, that pride can falsify the Patient’s spirituality during and after his prayers, since the results of these may be interpreted from the historical point of view. However, responding to Wormwood’s excitement about the possibility of air raids in the city of the Patient, Screwtape claims that the Patient’s death would be no advantage for them, given his current spiritual condition. In this sense, since the devils cannot produce any virtues but only corrupt them, Screwtape reflects on courage, cowardice or hatred for the Germans; he then decides in favour of the second, so that the Patient may learn to trust himself, instead of in the Enemy. Nevertheless, the Patient’s conduct during the first air raid was “the worst possible”, given his actual humility; Screwtape then warns the junior tempter, “Bring us back food, or be food yourself”, and advises him to work on the Patient’s fatigue, that is, to have him create false hopes about the air raids and, consequently, feel frustrated in the next attack (165).

Screwtape’s thirty-first letter, however, reveals *his* frustration and anger, as it ironically begins: “My dear, my very dear, Wormwood, my poppet, my pignie” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 171 [2000]). Since the junior tempter has not been efficient enough to save the Patient from death during another air raid, the young Englishman, “This animal, this thing begotten in a bed”, faces his guarding Angels and the Enemy (174). This makes Screwtape wonder once more what the Enemy’s purposes for human beings are, since His love for them is an impossibility. Meanwhile, the senior devil does not let Wormwood forget what consequences he will suffer for having been such a useless tempter who has not brought Screwtape food: “I think they will give you to me now; or a bit of you” (171).

From this summary, may be elicited a theological triangle, that is, “human creature, the loving Creator/God, and the treacherous devils” (Chou, “The Devil in Disciplines” 189). As devils, Screwtape and Wormwood would represent a threat to any human being, yet in the first letter the only “clutches” hinted at are the Enemy’s (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 1 [2000]). From the pure-spirited²⁷ devils’ point of view,

²⁷ A reference to the following excerpt: “He is cynically indifferent to the dignity of His position, and ours, as *pure spirits* . . .” (Lewis, 2000, 17, emphasis added).

the Enemy is that loving Creator/God in the sense He preserves a mystery from them, “what is the most repellent and inexplicable trait in our Enemy; He *really* loves the hairless bipeds He has created”, though this kind of assertion would have Screwtape fall into heresy and later get into trouble (72). The Patient, in his turn, is presented as a hybrid or an amphibian, that is, “half spirit and half animal”, so he is supposed to, *patiently*, endure Wormwood’s corruptive temptations which may affect his physical health, mind and soul (37); since he is the object of Screwtape’s letters, the attacks he endures are also expressed by means of ruthless language: the Patient is a “fool”, “vermin”, a “beast”, a “little brute” and so on,²⁸ which seems to justify – from Screwtape’s point of view – the fact that he has no name and lacks characterisation in the letters:

He is an abstraction – not even a character type, after the fashion of a certain style of storytelling that preceded the Age of Realism. Some critics have faulted the book on this account, and it is one reason I refrain from calling it an epistolary ‘novel’. But that lack of vividness in the Patient’s characterisation results inevitably from Lewis’s choice of the viewpoint character. We know the Patient only through the speculations of Screwtape, who, having digested the field reports submitted by his subordinate, draws on his general knowledge of human nature to theorise about how the Patient might behave, or might by Wormwood’s guidance be drawn to behave (Huttar 107).²⁹

Nonetheless, on the Patient’s lack of characterisation as Lewis’s fault, I understand that, besides Screwtape’s logic and viewpoint, there is also that of what and how the Englishman is indeed regarded and treated as a Patient in the sense that he is supposed to be physically, mentally and – devilish wise –, spiritually cured, but also a Patient in the sense of a passive condition – if picturing a hospital is helpful –, which is to say that *no voice* or *personality* is considered, whilst it is his body, mind and soul that matter, only – and there would be no reason for it to be otherwise.

From that theological triangle, it will be seen that there is a double plot in *The Screwtape Letters*, “involving what happens to the ‘Patient’ – his spiritual journey, one might say – and, alongside this, what happens to the tempter Wormwood – the progress of his career” (Huttar 90). An implied narrative, regarding the Patient, is only enabled by Wormwood’s reports, which are also inferred from the openings of

²⁸ These terms can be respectively found on pages 6, 7, 94 and 117 of the edition used.

²⁹ As Huttar (107) “refrain[s] from calling [*TSL*] an epistolary ‘novel’” due to what some critics have seen as a “lack of vividness in the Patient’s characterisation”, I have decided to call *TSL* a “fiction”, although I agree that that seems to be a conscious and logical decision by Lewis, given Screwtape’s characterisation and point of view, and the epistolary form of such a work.

Screwtape's letters. Huttar attributes the success of a certain realism in the plot and narrative of the *Letters* to its epistolary form:

These stories are presented to us from a single point of view, Screwtape's, in the one-sided correspondence of which the book consists. The letters and reports from Wormwood, to which these letters are responding, are not included. But the fact that a new letter often responds to a new development in the plot – as is typical in epistolary novels, and in real-life letter writing as well – imparts a kind of realism and explains the author's principle of organization in what otherwise seems a rambling and inartistic discourse (90).

The way by which the letters are first introduced in the work, that is, in Lewis's preface, sets up its fictional and literary features, as Lewis – the author – presents himself as the *editor* – not the author – of the diabolical *Letters*: “I have no intention of explaining how the correspondence which I now offer to the public fell into my hands” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* ix).³⁰ Thereby, Lewis warns his readers of the nature of the devil – that he is a liar – and explains that the chronology of the letters may be mistaken, although he does not try to clear this up. Huttar observes that this literary device can be found in early English epistolary novels such as Samuel Richardson's *The History of Sir Charles Grandison, in a Series of Letters, Published from the Originals by the Editor of Pamela and Clarissa* (1753), in whose preface “the Editor declines to reveal ‘how such remarkable Collections of private Letters *fell into his hands*’” (90-91, emphasis by the author).

It seems, however, that a more direct source of inspiration for Lewis's *Letters* would be Valdemar Adolph Thisted's *Letters from Hell* (1885). Patterson mentions some ideas in the book which may have been adopted in the *The Screwtape Letters*:

This book begins ‘I felt the approach of death.’ No wonder the young Lewis had felt attracted to it when he first opened it! But what follows is a dry memoir recorded during a sojourn in hell, interspersed with bizarre visions of symbolic import: a city with a nightly ‘auto-dafe,’ [sic]³¹ a city of Politicians where the statesmen fall to bickering . . . There is a wronged maiden, who finds her way to heaven, without the protagonist, a hint of the Christian girl in the *Screwtape Letters*, perhaps. Indeed, at the end, the damned soul meets his own mother on the stygian shore and they sink into a final despair, providing at least the germ of the mother in *The Screwtape Letters*. The style is ornate, even elegaic [sic], but the contents are extremely diffuse. Presumably Lewis had chances beyond this to observe the City of Dis (49).

³⁰ As pointed out by Dickieson, a typed manuscript of *The Screwtape Letters* whose preface is dated 5 July, 1941, and whose cover is dated 20 October, 1941, has been acquired by The Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College, IL. Its unpublished preface has a different beginning: “Nothing will induce me to reveal how my friend Dr Ransom got hold of the script which is translated in the following pages” (“The Unpublished Preface to C.S. Lewis” 296).

³¹ The term presumably a typographical mis-spelling of “auto-fade”.

It is important to note that the introduction of *Letters from Hell* was written by the author of *Phantastes*, George MacDonald (Patterson 49) – whom Lewis had admired since his youth. Considering that “to be stories at all there must be a series of events: but it must be understood that this series – the *plot*, as we call it – is only really a net whereby we catch something else”, MacDonald’s comments on *Letters from Hell* as it being a work “full of truth” may also have influenced Lewis’s *Letters* (Lewis, *On Stories* 17; MacDonald vi):

the awful verity . . . that men, in defacing the image of God in themselves, construct for themselves a world of horror and dismay; that of *the outer darkness*; our own deeds and character are the informing or inwardly creating cause; that if a man will not have God, he never can be rid of his weary and hateful self (vi-vii, emphasis by the author).

If Lewis was indeed familiar with *Letters from Hell* then he may have chosen Screwtape’s figure and unreliable voice to represent and tell the *truth*. As Sandford points out, the Hebrew term for Satan – used in the Old Testament – refers to “a being who hinders free, forward movement, an adversary or accuser”, and its Greek equivalent, *Diabolos* (“devil”) – commonly used in the New Testament –, infers “to throw across”, that is, “as though the diabolos throws something across our path to interfere with our progress” (36). The consequences of this interference with a human being’s life and spirit would be, respectively, “both physical and mental illness” and spiritual corruption, as the devil “strives to turn man from God by inciting him to sin and rebellion” (Patterson 50; Sandford 37). Thus, Lewis’s choice for Screwtape and Wormwood towards the Patient should sound contradictory in the sense that the devils treat the latter as if he was *making* some progress.

Despite having delivered the Ballard Matthews Lectures on John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* at the University College of North Wales in 1941, and published those as the book entitled *A Preface to Paradise Lost* in 1942, Lewis avoids Milton’s depiction of Satan in *The Screwtape Letters* as it would create the “wrong image”, that is, Satan as an epic hero (Kilby 43). Even Goethe’s Mephistopheles from *Faust* (1829) is avoided, as Lewis explains in his *Original Preface to The Screwtape Letters*:

Milton’s devils, by their grandeur and high poetry, have done great harm, and his angels owe too much to Homer and Raphael. But the really pernicious image is Goethe’s Mephistopheles. It is Faust, not he, who really exhibits the ruthless, sleepless, unsmiling concentration upon self which is the mark of

hell. The humorous, civilized, sensible, adaptable Mephistopheles has helped to strengthen the illusion that evil is liberating (*The Screwtape Letters* ix [1960b]).

Thus, he justifies his choice due to the lack of “reality” in Milton’s and Goethe’s depictions of Hell and Satan; this would sound ironic – in the sense that there could be no perfect depiction of such a religious symbol and figure – if Lewis had not “managed to give *Screwtape* and *Wormwood* *reality* and to convey a *thoughtful conception* of what hell might be like”, and made “it very clear that neither of these novels is intended to teach any doctrine about the actual details of the after-world” (Kilby 51, emphases added).

Lewis’s picturing of Hell is not, however, entirely based on theology, but also on himself, as he explains by quoting the first verse of Psalms 36:

Some have paid me an undeserved compliment by supposing that my Letters were the ripe fruit of many years’ study in moral and ascetic theology. They forgot that there is an equally reliable, though less creditable, way of learning how temptation works. ‘My heart’ – I need no other’s – ‘showeth me the wickedness of the ungodly.’ (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* xiii [1960b], emphasis added).

Lewis also points out why he believes that “wickedness” would be inherent to human nature, including *Wormwood’s Patient*: “A reasonable (and traditional) guess, based on our own experiences of going wrong, can, however, be offered. The moment you have a self at all, there is a possibility of putting yourself first-want to be the center-wanting to be God, in fact. That was the sin of Satan: and that was the sin he taught the human race” (Lewis, *Mere Christianity* 40). Lewis thus concludes: “What Satan put into the heads of our remote ancestors was the idea that they ‘could be like Gods’ – could set up on their own as if they had created themselves - be their own masters – invent some sort of happiness for themselves outside God, *apart from God*” (41, emphasis added).

Accordingly, *The Screwtape Letters* is pictured “as a state where everyone is perpetually concerned about his own dignity and advancement, where everyone has a grievance, and where everyone lives the deadly serious passions of envy, self-importance, and resentment” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* ix [1960b]). Lewis’s “symbol for Hell is something like the *bureaucracy* of a police state or the offices of a thoroughly *nasty business* concern” (x, emphases added). In this sense, there is an underground “Lowerarchy” – a nasty or inverted version of a hierarchy – among the

devils, which contains different departments: a Training College, “field workers such as Wormwood and their supervisors such as the undersecretary Screwtape” – which explains Screwtape and Wormwood’s business relationship, although the ending of the letters ironically maintain their familial connections by “Your affectionate *uncle*” –, record offices, research departments, a Philological Arm, an Intelligence Department, a Secret Police and the Infernal Police, the High Command, and, finally, Our Father Below (Huttar 104).³² Furthermore, according to Lewis’s idea of Hell and Our Father Below, who is ironically placed at the top (or bottom?) of *The Screwtape Letters*’s Lowerarchy, Lewis seems to retain the distinguishing feature of Milton’s Satan, that is, “in the midst of a world of light and love, of song and feast and dance, he could find nothing to think of more interesting than his own prestige” (Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* 96): “Our Father [Below] would worship [that Life Force] if he worshipped anything but himself” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 121 [2000]).

As Lewis depicts Hell through a nasty – though invisible – bureaucratic Lowerarchy, he admits that “mere Christianity commits every Christian to believing that ‘the Devil is (in the long run) an ass’”, in the sense that “a creature revolting against a creator is revolting against the source of his own powers” (*A Preface to Paradise Lost* 95, 96). Despite Screwtape’s reversed point of view, Lewis represents this doctrine as it is, as Kilby explains: “He is sure that the devil is not like God, a power self-existent from eternity and God’s opposite, since God alone is uncreated. Like most theologians, he regards evil not as a thing-in-itself but rather the *absence of good*” (43, emphasis added). *Mere Christianity*’s second chapter of its Book Two,³³ “The Invasion” – a subtle reference to World War II, given its broadcast on the BBC on 18 January 1942 –, demonstrates Lewis’s view on goodness and badness personified in Good and Bad Powers:

this Bad Power, who is supposed to be on an equal footing with the Good Power, and to love badness in the same way as the Good Power loves goodness, is a mere bogey. In order to be bad he must have good things to want and then to pursue in the wrong way: he must have impulses which were originally good in order to be able to pervert them. But if he is bad he cannot supply himself either with good things to desire or with good impulses to pervert. He must be getting both from the Good Power. And if so, then he is not independent. He is part of the Good Power’s world: he was made either

³² Except for Wormwood and Screwtape, these departments can be found respectively on pages 37, 53, 159, 79, 175, 117, 165, 31 and 6 of the edition used (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* [2000]).

³³ “What Christians Believe”, which was Lewis’s second series of Christian talks, broadcast on the BBC between 11 January and 15 February 1942.

by the Good Power or by some power above them both (Lewis, *Mere Christianity* 37).

In the *Letters*, Screwtape cannot ignore this rule and even tries to elicit other possibilities for the act of tempting the Patient: “No natural phenomenon is really in our favour”, “Everything has to be *twisted* before it’s any use to us . . . Nothing is naturally on our side” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 79, 118-19 [2000], emphasis by the author). However, despite the devil’s twist in viewing things, the Good Power remains; as Huttar points out, the “involuntary” capitalisation of “Enemy” – an ironical twist with reference to God – demonstrates that “Though the devil may radically alter the Name, he is still forced in some fashion to hallow it” (113). Furthermore, this devilish twist also reveals a parody of Heaven: “no square inch of infernal space and no moment of infernal time has been surrendered to either of those abominable forces, but all has been occupied by *Noise* . . . The *melodies and silences* of Heaven will be shouted down in the end” (*The Screwtape Letters* 120 [2000], emphases added); a parody of religious elements such as the Eucharist, that is, “the central Christian symbol of the relationship between human and divine” (Patterson 47), by the end of Lewis’s fiction, when Screwtape suggests that he will eat the junior tempter Wormwood; and, hence, a parody of love – the Enemy’s mystery –, since “In Hell I feign that they recognize it as hunger” for human souls and even devils themselves (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* xi [1960b]): “We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons”, “Love you [Wormwood]? Why, yes. As dainty a morsel as ever I grew fat on” (*The Screwtape Letters* 39, 171 [2000]).

Lewis had once considered creating a counterpart of Screwtape’s *Letters*, yet he did not accomplish it for stylistic reasons:

Ideally, Screwtape’s advice to Wormwood should have been balanced by archangelical advice to the patient’s guardian angel. Without this picture of human life is lop-sided. But who could supply the deficiency? Even if a man – and he would have to be a far better man than I – could scale the spiritual heights required, what ‘answerable style’ could he use? For *the style would really be part of the content*. Mere advice would be no good; every sentence would have to smell of Heaven . . . (At bottom, every ideal of style dictates not only how we should say things but what sort of things we may say.) (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 184 [2000], emphasis added).

On the other hand, through language and by following the “tradition of Fielding’s Allworthy, Swift’s Gulliver, and Richardson’s Lovelace”, Lewis did manage to make his

devils *sound* nasty – like the functioning of their bureaucratic Lowerarchy – through their names (Huttar 108):

The names of my devils have excited a good deal of curiosity, and there have been many explanations, all wrong. The truth is that I aimed merely at making them *nasty* – and here too I am perhaps indebted to Lindsay – by the sound. Once a name was invented, I might speculate like anyone else (and with no more authority than anyone else) as to the phonetic associations which caused the *unpleasant effect*. I fancy that Scrooge, screw, thumbscrew, tapeworm, and red tape all do some work in my hero's name, and that slob, slobber, slubber, and gob have all gone into slubgob (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* xiii [1960b], emphases added).

Regarding Wormwood's name, Patterson points out that, being "a substance used because of its content of santonin, as a vermifuge (to expel worms), and to give its characteristic flavor to Absinthe . . . Wormwood is a dark green oil with a bitter taste"; besides, such a bitterness can also represent an unpleasant or "mortifying experience" (52). Indeed, there are literal and figurative references to wormwood in the Old Testament,³⁴ yet a biblical source for Wormwood's name could be that in the New Testament, in Revelation 8:11, which reads: "the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter" (New International Version). Patterson concludes: "Wormwood . . . poisons his patient's mind, or tries to . . . Wormwood is to embitter his patient's simple joys and render all his experiences into wormwood" (52). In Lewis's allegorical *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933), he writes a poem in which "Wormwood" is referred to: "Thou only art alternative to God, oh, dark / And burning island among spirits, tenth hierarch, / Wormwood, immortal Satan, Ahriman, alone / Second to Him to whom no second else were known . . ." (*The Pilgrim's Regress* 177, emphasis added).

Given the above, Lewis's employing such stylistic devices contrasts with Screwtape's belief that the devil is superior to the Good Power that rules his (lack of) logic: "[The Enemy] has been shown for centuries to be greatly the inferior of Our Father Below", "Ever since Our Father's first great victory . . ." (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 2, 93 [2000]). In this sense, it can be noticed that Screwtape is not only unreliable, but also enslaved to his own lie, as depicted in Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "I do not know whether we can distinguish his conscious lies from the blindness which he

³⁴ Patterson (1985, p. 52) mentions Deuteronomy 29:18; Proverbs 5:4; Jerimiah 9:15, 23:5; Lamentations 3:5, 13; and Amos 5:7.

has almost willingly imposed on himself . . . but it is possible that he now believes his own propaganda” (*A Preface to Paradise Lost* 97). Thus, from such a contradiction, *humour* is begotten and left for the reader, and its effect is even more powerful than a simple joke, since “laughter is a leap. It is easy to be heavy; hard to be light. Satan fell by the force of gravity”, which is to say, the “ruthless, sleepless, *unsmiling* concentration upon self which is the mark of Hell” (Chesterton 121; Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* v [1960b], emphasis added).

Screwtape manifests his lack of humour by pointing the modern picturing of devils in the form of comic figures: “The fact that ‘devils’ are predominantly *comic* figures in the modern imagination will help you” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 32 [2000], emphasis by the author). His dislike can also be observed in his eleventh letter, in which the senior devil does not encourage humour as such in the act of corrupting the Patient: “I trust this does not mean that you are under the impression that laughter as such is always in our favour” (53). Notwithstanding Robert Benchley’s claim that “defining and analyzing humor is a pastime of humorless people”, I shall add that Screwtape divides *human laughter* into Joy, Fun, the Joke Proper and Flippancy (qtd. in Lindvall, *Surprised by Laughter* 6). The senior devil explains that, as Joy is the real cause for laughter which is produced from the “smallest witticisms” in a gathering of friends and lovers, only emotion may be added to Fun so that it can be distinguished from Joy; the Joke Proper or Humour, Screwtape continues, is more than bawdy jokes, since it can be used “as a means of destroying shame”; and, finally, Flippancy – Screwtape’s favourite – is economical (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 53, 55 [2000]):

No one actually makes it; but *every serious subject is discussed in a manner which implies that they have already found a ridiculous side to it*. If prolonged, the habit of flippancy builds up around a man the finest armour-plating against the enemy that I know, and it is quite free from the dangers inherent in the other sources of laughter. It is a thousand miles away from joy: *it deadens*, instead of sharpening, *the intellect*; and *it excites no affection between those who practise it* (56, emphases added).

Screwtape’s preference for Flippancy is noticeable throughout the *Letters*, in his discussion of human psychology and other questions – such as domestic relationship, hypocrisy and the feeling of pride among “Christian equals” –, philosophical issues and morality.

There is no need for Screwtape to be funny – as he cannot –, since “a ridiculous side” about what he writes is always *implied*. However, his contradictory position, that

is, a liar who believes his own lies to be true, is also implied. This consequently allows the reader to see Screwtape's ridiculous side in his showing others', which consequently brings satire to mind. Thus, bearing in mind that "hell cannot endure . . . ridicule of itself" and that, in doing so by means of a work of literature, Lewis has been able to obtain comic effects as well as conveying his religious beliefs, the following subtopic examines the essence of the comic efficacy of *The Screwtape Letters* (Kilby 44): its ironic inversion.

3.2.3 Ironic Inversion: From Satire to Apologetics

I have separated this section from my introduction to the plot, characterisation and style of *The Screwtape Letters* in order to demonstrate how *ironic inversion* works as a constituting element of Lewis's work *without* the clues available in its book-formatted editions – such as prefaces and quotations –, but by the devil's logic, which I have proved, in Lewis's own terms, mistaken and, given Screwtape's viewpoint, ironic in reverse. My focus is therefore on ironic inversion in *The Screwtape Letters* in relation to reader reception and the possible interpretive implications of the fiction.

In fact, as the *Letters* were published weekly in *The Guardian*, there was *no preface* so the readers could not be certain about Screwtape's reliability. Hence, understanding the comic effects represented a hermeneutical challenge. Regarding the way in which Screwtape was first introduced to Lewis's readers, Dickieson observes:

The lights are dim, the print a bit smudged, the layout old even for its time, the copies few. And the readers: Screwtape first came to the world for those who had ears to hear. And he remains this way to us now: strange and alienating to some, a piece of quaint literary trivia to others, and yet so very transformational to those who can truly find their way to this unusual book ("How Screwtape Was Introduced to the World").

In his Preface to the second edition of the *Letters*, Lewis explains that "they [the letters] had a reception [he] had never dreamed of. Reviews were either laudatory or filled with that sort of anger which tells an author that *he has hit his target*" (*The Screwtape Letters* v [1960b], emphasis added). He gives one example:

It was during the second German War that the letters of Screwtape appeared in (now extinct) *The Guardian*. I hope they did not hasten its death, but they certainly lost it one reader. A country clergyman wrote to the editor, withdrawing his subscription on the ground that 'much of the advice given in

these letters seemed to him not only erroneous but positively diabolical' (*The Screwtape Letters* v [1960b]).

Indeed, reversed irony in the *Letters* may be tricky for the reader since it takes the form of a “moral inversion – the blacks all white and the whites all black – and the humor which comes of speaking through a totally humorless *persona*” –, that is, senior devil Screwtape, as demonstrated in the previous topic (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* xii [1960b]). Lewis acknowledges his debt in employing such a device to Stephen McKenna's *Confessions of a Well-Meaning Woman* (1922), although by means of a “diabolical ventriloquism” which engages us, readers, to the extent that we “laugh at Screwtape's peevishness, temper, and cringing fear of blackmail” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 180 [2000]; Glover 127). It can, then, be noticed that it is this inversion which guarantees the success of *The Screwtape Letters* as a humorous and open work of literature, in the sense that it has been inviting religious and non-religious readers' interpretations from its obscure, weekly publication to its book-formatted editions.

As mentioned previously with regard to the structure – bureaucratic Lowerarchy – and nomenclature – Our Father Below, Wormwood, the Enemy and the Patient – of the world of the *Letters*, ironic inversion is first noticeable by the readers in Screwtape's opening and ending his letters with, respectively, “My dear Wormwood” and “Your affectionate uncle”. As I have demonstrated, the *Letters* contain a devilish, nasty, bureaucratic tone which does not admit a familial approach and a positive demonstration of affection, unless ironically. Furthermore, Screwtape employs a rhetorical strategy of argumentation which always begins from a logical misconception. Lewis calls it “Bulverism”, as he explains:

. . . you must show that a man is wrong before you start explaining why he is wrong. The modern method is to assume without discussion that he is wrong and then distract his attention from this (the only real issue) by busily explaining how he became so silly. In the course of the last fifteen years I have found this vice so common that I have had to invent a name for it. I call it Bulverism. Some day I am going to write the biography of its imaginary inventor, Ezekiel Bulver . . . ‘Assume that your opponent is wrong, and then explain his error, and the world will be at your feet. Attempt to prove that he is wrong or (worse still) try to find out whether he is wrong or right, and the national dynamism of our age will thrust you to the wall.’ That is how Bulver became one of the makers of the Twentieth Century (*God in the Dock* 273).

In the previous topic, I demonstrated that, as the senior devil once fell into heresy, Screwtape tries to persuade Wormwood about the impossibility of the Enemy's love

for humans, and he does so by using the rhetorical technique of Bulverism. It seems that he also recommends it in Wormwood's persuading the Patient about the inexistence of devils: "If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that (it is an old textbook method of confusing them) he therefore cannot believe in you" (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 32 [2000]). Hence, the reader can soon observe that Screwtape teaches the junior tempter how to tempt his Patient by *not* using logic: "Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him from the Church" (1). Later, Screwtape advises Wormwood to induce his patient to believe in the Historical Point of View: "The 'historical Jesus' then, however dangerous He may seem to be to us at some particular point, is always to be encouraged" (126). Ironically, Screwtape *himself* is deceived by such a strategy, since "The trouble about argument is that it moves the whole struggle onto the Enemy's own ground", that is, the senior devil is incapable of arguing *logically* because he is a *devil* (2). Thus, logic put aside, Screwtape's worldview and rhetorical strategy, which I have related to ironic inversion, turn out to be taken on the affective level, not on the cognitive; however, as observed by Huttar, "adding the pervasive irony that comes of using an unreliable and intellectually challenged speaking voice, Lewis was able to capture a much larger audience than if he had cast his ideas in the usual form of moral and theological discourse" (125).

Accordingly, to "have a senior devil writing letters of advice to his junior-level nephew reverses our normal expectations and values" (Schakel, "The Satiric Imagination of C. S. Lewis" 138). Such a moral inversion of a devilish worldview and its humorous effects makes satire acceptable to twentieth-century readers, considering that Screwtape analyses and criticises, respectively, the Patient's mind, and social and religious life. Cunningham explains:

The technique of inversion allows Lewis freedom to satirize and condemn anything he wants by the simple expedient of having Screwtape praise it; or he may advocate a certain value or practice or belief by having Screwtape condemn it. And the correspondence covers a wide gamut of life and behavior. To accomplish his purpose, Lewis probes the human psyche and levels devastating blasts at certain aspects of contemporary society (160).

Yet, although satirical works were traditionally constituted by a frame which was customarily utilised to present a negative example in order to go on to suggest a positive one in its second part, it seems impossible that *The Screwtape Letters* could

do likewise, given its devilish nature. In fact, “Lewis does not include positives (since Lewis intends the book for spiritual instruction, it is essential that he get beyond ironic reversals)” (Schakel, “The Satiric Imagination of C. S. Lewis” 140). If, on the one hand, ironic inversion is revealed in Screwtape’s not being able to conceive divine truths, on the other, “much of the time what Screwtape writes is accurate description, straightforward statement or fact: the irony comes not through reversal, but in seeing the truth for what it is” (139). Schakel thus observes this as an improvement by Lewis in comparison to Swift’s satirical works:

In Swift’s satire, it seems inconsistent when a speaker utters straightforward truths, it breaks the spell for a moment; but in *The Screwtape Letters* it seems entirely necessary and believable that Screwtape should utter truths as part of the process of educating Wormwood in essentials he missed at Training College (140).

This, therefore, makes the constitution of Lewis’s work even more challenging for the reader, who should take the “negative point of view to lift up the positive” by means of *inference* (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* xxi-xxii [2013]). As Lewis had considered creating a counterpart of his devil, that would not only have been a difficult task stylistically, but could have diminished the comic effects of the *Letters* and Lewis’s satirical purposes.

Moreover, it is by means of ironic inversion and accurate descriptions that Lewis could – and can – express “many ideas that would find their way into his more directly expository works”, since irony may have an argumentative strategy (Huttar 112) – as demonstrated in the second chapter of the present study. Despite Screwtape’s one-sided and unreliable presentation of religious doctrines, Cunningham points out that their apologetic value does not lie in “any argument for the existence of devils”, since “it is not the devil but himself he [the reader] has seen . . . a part of numerous devilish devices that keep one from facing the ultimate question of human existence – the relationship of man to God” (161). Thus, Lewis’s religious satire seems to be an open work in the sense that its ideas, meanings and effects depend on the participation by the reader in performing it:

The value of this kind of satire does not depend on whether the reader agrees with the satirist at every point . . . *The value comes from the total effect mediated from the book.* Satire cannot reach every man. Satire uses humor and, as Lewis says, ‘humor involves a sense of proportion and a power of seeing yourself from the outside.’ It requires a willingness to look at oneself,

to laugh at oneself, to learn about oneself. *That possibility is not open to the devil* (Cunningham 161, emphases added).

Raising satirical positives and apologetics from, respectively, the negatives of the *Letters* and Lewis's ideas is not the only possible role of the reader in his/her interpretive cooperation. Ironic inversion also seems to affect Screwtape himself. Chou points out that a hermeneutical exercise by the reader is needed, in the sense that *The Screwtape Letters* counts on an interdisciplinarity between literature and theology in order to turn such a self-reflexive irony into a *self-deconstructive* one ("The Devil in Disciplines" 187). Chou explains:

the 'object of divine love,' which is supposed to be the status of human souls in supernatural reality, becomes the target of preying to the devils, now that they are rivals against God. Such a self-justifying theory of Screwtape's, with a view to making plain to its far less acknowledgeable junior the existential meaning of being a devil as well as the philosophy of their agency of temptation, is indeed ironical in the sense that instead of justifying the devil's state of being, the discourse unintentionally yet revealingly exposes the manifold depravities of devil-hood ("The Devil in Disciplines" 192).

Thus, interdisciplinarity allows *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis to be both "entertaining and useful" for the reader by means of its ironic inversion (Chou, *The Problem of Faith and the Self* 103). It can be entertaining, since it is a satire whose supposed satirist, that is, senior devil Screwtape, aggressively targets the human being whilst his discourse also targets himself; and it can be useful, since, by interpreting and inferring this, the reader can be instructed by Lewis's religious beliefs – presented in reverse –, if convenient to him/her.

Finally, as ironic inversion sustains the *Letters* as a double-levelled satire, it consequently carries a "double-edged irony" which leads the reader to uncover another satirist. In other words, "the possibility of re-examining the devil's selfhood along with re-reading its ironic discourse in a deconstructive approach can be associated with the enterprise of the real author of these diabolic letters, namely, C. S. Lewis the fantasy writer of *The Screwtape Letters*" (Chou, *The Problem of Faith and the Self* 96, 103). This, however, does not mean that Lewis himself and his ironic play should be associated with the devilish level along with its ironical functions, as he jocularly observes in one of his sermons:³⁵ "The Devil, I shall leave strictly alone. The association between him and me in the public mind has already gone quite as deep as

³⁵ "The Inner Ring" was Lewis's Memorial Lecture at King's College, University of London, in 1944.

I wish: in some quarters it has already reached the level of confusion if not identification" (Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* 55-56). In this sense, I have observed that, whereas Screwtape's level of irony lies in the affective, Lewis's employment of ironic inversion as a structuring element of his satirical work consequently lies at a deeper level, that is, the cognitive, considering the interpretive cooperation and "*inferential walks*" which the reader is supposed to provide and follow so that he/she can attain it (Huttar 111). I shall now analyse the levels of irony in *The Screwtape Letters* by eliciting its prefatory and textual clues as an epistolary fiction, and then evaluating its double-edged irony, which is to say, its various functions, from the reader's viewpoint.

4 IRONY AND READER IN *THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS*

“Laugh and fear not, creatures. Now that you are no longer dumb and witless, you need not always be grave. For jokes as well as justice come in with speech.”
 So they all let themselves go. And there was such merriment that the Jackdaw himself plucked up courage again and perched on the cab-horse’s head, between its ears, clapping its wings, and said:
 “Aslan! Aslan! Have I made the first joke? Will everybody always be told how I made the first joke?”
 “No, little friend,” said the Lion. “You have not made the first joke; you have only been the first joke.” Then everyone laughed more than ever . . .

—C. S. Lewis, “The First Joke”, *The Magician’s Nephew*

I have demonstrated that ironic inversion functions as a structuring element in *The Screwtape Letters*, in the sense that it enables the work to have two distinguishing levels as a satire – and, hence, two satirists –, various comic effects, and, given the argumentative feature of irony, an apologetical value. In the first topic of this chapter, I shall present, in six letters – specifically, 1, 2, 8, 19, 22 and 31 –, some elements which seem to concur for the ironical constitution of Lewis’s narrative as a rhetorical strategy, and for the reader’s cooperation in his/her interpretation and performance of its comic effects, as “we must recognize the kind of reader that the text not only presupposes but also produces through the use of given linguistic strategies” (Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* 128). Subsequently, I propose the levels of irony and satirical elements which the reader may have, respectively, attained through his/her interpretive walk and elicited from his/her reading. Finally, I propose, from Hutcheon’s affective scale of irony and from the reader’s point of view, the ironical functions which I believe to be in accordance with the possible levels of irony and to result from the reader’s cooperation in *The Screwtape Letters*.

4.1 An Interpretive Walk Through the *Letters*

As the reader opens *The Screwtape Letters*, reads its title, bibliographic information and dedication to J. R. R. Tolkien, the following elements should call his/her attention: two epigraphs by important religious figures – and satirists. They read: “The best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to texts of Scripture, is to jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn”, by Luther, and “The devil . . . the prowde spirite .

. . cannot endure to be mocked”, by Thomas More (*The Screwtape Letters* vii [2000]). These are the first textual clues which point to the satirical feature of C. S. Lewis’s work, although the reader has not yet been told about who the satirist of the letters really is. It is in the Preface that Lewis presents himself as being responsible for editing and spreading the *Letters* for public learning: “I have no intention of explaining how the correspondence which I now offer to the public fell into my hands” (ix). Lewis, then, presents the devilish character of the *Letters* which makes his task of editing difficult: “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the *devils*. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them” (ix, emphasis added), “I have made no attempt to identify any of the human beings mentioned in the letters . . .” (ix), “. . . no effort has been made to clear up the chronology of the letters” (x). Accordingly, by quoting John 8:44,³⁶ Lewis *warns* the readers in the sense that they “are advised to remember that *the devil is a liar*. Not everything that Screwtape says should be assumed to be true even from his own angle. . . . I think it very unlikely that the portraits, say, of Fr Spike or the patient’s mother, are wholly just. There is wishful thinking in Hell as well as on Earth” (ix, emphasis added). That said, unless the reader proceeds to Screwtape’s first letter, the elements he/she has found may lead him/her to nothing but confusion: the devil is a liar; Screwtape is a devil; thus, Screwtape is an unreliable *author* of his letters; furthermore, actual or not, people are mentioned; yet, who will eventually be *mocked*?

In the first letter, the reader should apprehend the Patient as the main object of Screwtape’s discussion, which, on the other hand, offers him/her *valuable* clues – in the sense that they reveal values – from the senior devil’s language. As a “materialist” friend could be seen as a “good deal” by the junior tempter Wormwood, Screwtape observes that this might encourage the exercise of “argument” by the Patient – which I demonstrated to occur on the Enemy’s ground –, by censuring Wormwood’s naivety: “It sounds as if you supposed that *argument* was the way to keep him out of the enemy’s clutches” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 1 [2000]). Indeed, the reader may start to suspect the Enemy *not* to be what his/her moral would sense it to be: it could be the reverse instead, that is, the Christian God. He/she now may be certain: “Jargon, not argument, is your best *ally in keeping him from the Church*” (2, emphasis added).

³⁶ “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, *for he is a liar* and the father of lies” (NIV, emphasis added).

Once the reversal is done, the terms emphasised suggest and summarise the devil's (lack of) logic throughout the book. Thus, hereinafter, the terms I have presented in quotation marks and the following elements may sound ironical and comic to the reader.

In Letter 1, the reader may notice the expression of such an ironic inversion along with its main religious implications. Despite the "trouble" of argument, Screwtape highlights the Enemy's inferiority by first referring to Satan as a twisted version of "Our Father in heaven" from the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9: "He can argue too; whereas in really practical propaganda of the kind I am suggesting he has been shown for centuries to be greatly the inferior of *Our Father Below*" (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 2 [2000], emphasis added). On the other hand, the senior devil cannot but recognise what should be well-known by Lewis's religious readers, which is to say, the doctrine of Incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ – although, I should add that, in the fourth letter, the reader can realise Screwtape's own contradiction in his calling it "the discreditable episode known as the Incarnation" (18): "Remember, he [the Patient] is not, like you, a pure spirit. Never having been a human (Oh that abominable advantage of the Enemy's!) you don't realise how enslaved they are to the pressure of the ordinary" (2).

The ordinary, in its turn, is accurately depicted by Screwtape throughout the *Letters* as well as being carried by that ironic inversion which makes the reader laugh, although with some caution:

I once had a patient, a sound atheist, who used to read in the British Museum. One day, as he sat reading, I saw a train of thought in his mind beginning to go the wrong way. The Enemy, of course, was at his elbow in a moment. Before I knew where I was I saw my twenty years' work beginning to totter. If I had lost my head and begun to attempt a defence by argument I should have been undone. But I was not such a fool. I struck instantly at the part of the man which I had best under my control and suggested that it was just about time he had some lunch. The Enemy presumably made the counter-suggestion (you know how one can never *quite* overhear what He says to them?) that this was more important than lunch. At least I think that must have been his line for when I said 'Quite. In fact much *too* important to tackle at the end of a morning', the patient brightened up considerably; and by the time I had added 'Much better come back after lunch and go into it with a fresh mind', he was already half way to the door. Once he was in the street the battle was won. I showed him a newsboy shouting the midday paper, and a No. 73 bus going past, and before he reached the bottom of the steps I had got into him an unalterable conviction that, whatever odd ideas might come into a man's head when he was shut up alone with his books, a healthy dose of 'real life' (by which he meant the bus and the newsboy) was enough to show him that all 'that sort of thing' just couldn't be true. He knew he'd had a narrow escape and in later years was fond of talking about 'that inarticulate sense for actuality

which is our ultimate safeguard against the aberrations of mere logic'. He is now safe in Our Father's house (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 2-4 [2000]).

In fact, the excerpt above may be comic to the reader – specially to English readers – in the sense that, while it depicts a seemingly “casual” situation for a human being in his/her dealing with work, lunch *and* doubt, Screwtape and the Enemy wage a battle in that patient's mind which is finally won *not* by argument, but by his routine as a pretext: “‘Much better come back after lunch and go into it with a fresh mind’” (3). Besides, that may be a contained laugh in the sense that the excerpt may also overcome a dubious or careless reader on what concerns ironic inversion in *The Letters*: Screwtape's patient and his fate are presented with regard to what pleases the devil's side, such as a “*sound* atheist”, a “*narrow escape*” and his “*safe*” state in Our Father's house; and, although subtle, this excerpt displays the first unintentional capitalisation of the subject pronoun “he” for referring to the Enemy, as occurs in Christian texts: “you know how one can never *quite* overhear what *He* says to them?” (3, second emphasis added).

Finally, by the end of the first letter, the reader may also confirm an ironical treatment by Screwtape of his nephew Wormwood. As in each of the senior devil's *Letters*, it starts with his opening “My *dear* Wormwood”, and concludes with “Your *affectionate* uncle”. Yet, Screwtape does not seem affectionate to Wormwood at all, quite the opposite: “Do remember you are there to fuddle him. From the way some of you young fiends talk, anyone would suppose it was our job to *teach*!” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 4 [2000]). The reader may learn, from the first letter, that his “nasty” devilish condition makes Screwtape competitive and aggressive to the extent of not being able to express affection even to devils. Thus, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, the senior devil's approach in his *Letters* is summed up in bureaucratic terms – not familial, as the reader would first suppose.

Although Screwtape's mocking tone is somewhat restrained in Letter 1, the senior devil redoubles it with regard to the Patient and his new religion at the beginning of his second letter. If the reader was still in doubt about the blacks and whites in the *Letters*, now he/she can no longer be, given Screwtape's evaluation: “I note with grave displeasure that your patient has become a Christian. Do not indulge the hope that you will escape the usual penalties . . .” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 5 [2000]). The senior devil completes that they consequently “must make the *best* of the situation” (emphasis added) by using “One of [their] great allies . . . the Church itself”. This may sound

contradictory to the reader, considering the first assertion in the letter, yet Screwtape explains: “I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans” (5). Subsequently, Screwtape employs a mocking tone in one of his best straightforward statements to prove his point:

All your patient sees is the half-finished, sham gothic erection on the new building estate. When he goes inside, he sees the local grocer with rather an oily expression on his face bustling up to offer him one shiny little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands, and one shabby little book containing corrupt texts of a number of religious lyrics, mostly bad, and in very small print. When he gets to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbours whom he has hitherto avoided. . . . Make his mind flit to and fro between an expression like ‘the body of Christ’ and the actual faces in the next pew. . . . Your patient, thanks to our father below, is a fool. Provided that any of those neighbours sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous. At his present stage, you see, he has an idea of ‘Christians’ in his mind which he supposes to be spiritual but which, in fact, is largely pictorial. His mind is full of togas and sandals and armour and bare legs and the mere fact that the other people in church wear modern clothes is a real – though of course an unconscious – difficulty to him. Never let it come to the surface; never let him ask what he expected them to look like. (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 5-7 [2000])

From the excerpt above, the reader may first notice that the potential of ironic inversion in the *Letters* comes up to such an extent that it is *ironical* that Screwtape can picture that religious stereotype which – easily – lays on one’s mind for his/her first impressions inside the building of a church when compared to his/her earlier expectations, although that is not made explicit. Indeed, the senior devil does not put his cutting viewpoint aside in order to expose the Patient’s religious context to ridicule: he describes the Priest as a “local grocer with . . . an oily expression” (5), who gives the Patient a confusing “shiny little book” (5-6) with the liturgy – probably, *The Book of Common Prayer*³⁷ –, and who gives a questionable and almost unreadable “shabby little book . . . of a number of religious lyrics” (6) – an edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern for Use in the Services of the Church* (of England). Besides, Screwtape thinks the Patient to be “a fool” in the sense that the young Englishman is not able to tell that what he sees in his neighbours – by the way they sing or dress – should not be contrasted to

³⁷ *The Book of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, According to the Use of the Church of England: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David, Pointed as They Are To Be Sung or Said in Churches, and the Form or Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests and Deacons.*

what he unconscious and pictorially expected them to be – “full of togas and sandals and armour legs” (6). Thus, the reader may also learn that the Patient and his religion are topics about which Screwtape writes to Wormwood with a view to mocking as well as “mak[ing] the best of the situation” (5), that is: “Keep everything hazy in his mind now, and you will have all eternity wherein to amuse yourself by producing in him the peculiar kind of clarity which Hell affords” (7).

It is also in his second letter that Screwtape, in demonstrating how to “make the best of the situation”, disdains the idea of the Enemy’s love for human beings, to whom the senior devil, in his turn, makes no effort to manifest scorn by means of animal language (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 5 [2000]): “. . . He has a curious fantasy of making all these disgusting *little human vermin* into what He calls his ‘free’ lovers and servants – ‘sons’ is the word He uses, with His inveterate love of degrading the whole spiritual world by unnatural liaisons with the *two-legged animals*” (7, emphases added). The reader should also notice that this love is carefully expressed as a “curious fantasy” of the Enemy’s, since the devils cannot understand it (“curious”) and so it would not be possible (“fantasy”) in the first place, had it not been “inveterate”. Hence, anything which comes from such an idea must be emphasised so it sounds ironical from Screwtape’s viewpoint: “two-legged animals” as the Enemy’s “*free*’ lovers” and “*sons*” are the real cause for the degradation of “the whole spiritual world”. Detestable and, for this reason, worthy of the devil’s interest as the Patient seems to be, the reader should start to suspect what Screwtape and Wormwood *really* do with him for: “What he says, even on his knees, about his own sinfulness is all parrot talk. . . . and [the Patient] thinks that he is showing great humility and condescension in going to church with these ‘smug’, commonplace neighbours at all. *Keep him in that state of mind as long as you can*” (8-9, emphasis added).

In the eighth letter, the European War has already started and the Patient has been through “a series of troughs and peaks” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 37 [2000]). The reader should notice that the animal imagery by means of which Screwtape expresses his hate for humans also explains the devils’ interest in patients like the young Englishman: “To us a human is primarily *food*; our aim is *the absorption of its will into ours*, the increase of our own area of selfhood at its expense” (38, emphases added). If only language could give the reader subtle clues on the implications of Screwtape’s devilish nature, hereinafter, he/she cannot be but aware of this. It follows the senior devil’s train of thought:

One must face the fact that all the talk about His love for men, and his service being perfect freedom, is not (as one would gladly believe) mere propaganda, but an appalling truth. He really *does* want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of Himself – creatures whose life, on its miniature scale, will be qualitatively like his own, not because he has absorbed them but because their wills freely conform to His (38-39, emphasis by the author).

It can be observed that, here, Screwtape acknowledges the Enemy's love as *real*. It is only by doing so that he can demonstrate what the devils' intentions are:

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 Him but still distinct (39).

Therefore, the reader may conclude that this devilish desire in the form of hunger is due to their lack of divine *love*: whilst the devils are used to work contrarily – although somewhat accordingly – to the Enemy's side by *absorbing* human will and, therefore, souls, that is, "sucking in" one's selfhood instead of "filling him/her in" with perfect freedom, at the same time, they reveal they are *empty*. Selfishness has been chosen at the expensive of letting that divine, true love go, which could not but be irresistible to the devils, if it were not "appalling".

Since the reader does not have access to Wormwood's full responses, he/she should sense that the junior tempter is not only an inefficient tempter, but is also conniving at his uncle's contradictory utterances. At the beginning of Letter 4, Screwtape reproaches Wormwood by quoting the junior tempter and using their familial and hierarchic relationship: "You might have spared the comment that my advice about his prayers for his mother 'proved singularly unfortunate'. That is not the sort of thing that a nephew should write to his uncle – nor a junior tempter to the under-secretary of a department" (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 15 [2000]). In Letter 8, the same is done, although, this time, Screwtape blames the devil Slubgob for teaching at the Training College: "So you 'have great hopes that the patient's religious phase is dying away', have you?" (37). Regarding Screwtape's expectations and Wormwood's inefficiency, the reader may have found: "But are you not being a trifle *naïve*?" (1), ". . . if you know your job he will not notice the immense improbability of the assumption" (13), "The amateurish suggestions in your last letter warn me that . . ." (15), "It is a little bit disappointing to expect a detailed report on your work and to receive instead such

a vague rhapsody as your last letter" (21), "I always thought the Training College had gone to pieces since they put old Slubgob at the head of it, and now I am sure" (37). However, between Letters 10 and 12, Wormwood seems to have improved his achievements: "I was delighted to hear from Triptweeze that your patient has made some very desirable new acquaintances and that you seem to have used this event in a really promising manner" (49), "Everything is clearly going well" (53), "Obviously you are making excellent progress" (57). Nevertheless, from Letter 13 until 18, Wormwood is constantly reproached by senior devil: "The situation is very grave, and I really see no reason why I should try to shield you from the consequences of your inefficiency" (63), "The most alarming thing in your last account of the patient is that he is making none of those confident resolutions which marked his original conversion" (69), "May I ask what you are about? Why have I no report on the causes of his fidelity to the parish church? Do you realise that unless it is due to indifference it is a bad thing?" (81), "The contemptuous way in which you spoke of gluttony as a means of catching souls, in your last letter, only shows your ignorance" (87). It is from such a background that the reader may suppose that what follows seems to be a sort of *retribution* by Wormwood.

One of Wormwood's responses has led Screwtape to explain what he meant about the Enemy's really loving humans in Letter 19:

I have been thinking very hard about the question in *your last letter*. If, as I have clearly shown, all selves are by their very nature in competition, and therefore the Enemy's idea of Love is a contradiction in terms, what becomes of my reiterated warning that He really loves the human vermin and really desires their freedom and continued existence? I hope, *my dear boy*, you *have not shown my letters* to anyone. Not that it matters of course. Anyone would see that the *appearance of heresy* into which I have fallen is *purely accidental*. . . . You can *trust me* to look after your interests. But do keep everything *under lock and key* (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 99 [2000], emphases added).

Even a careless reader should notice that Screwtape's "carelessness" in his previous letters and Wormwood's remarking upon it make the senior devil uneasy – to the reader's surprise. Although Screwtape tries to make the junior tempter believe he accidentally "slipped", the reader may see that he *fell* by the force of the inevitable truth of divine love. Hence, here lies a comic effect in the *Letters*: Screwtape is obliged to fall back on an intimate approach by calling Wormwood "my dear boy" in a *business* letter so that his nephew does not denounce him for what he claims to be "the appearance of heresy", and so Wormwood, eventually, *trusts* Screwtape "to look after [his] interests".

By this stage the reader may suppose how *distrustful* Screwtape can be in his presenting reasons for the Enemy's loving humans and for how the devils have been affected. In fact, Screwtape cannot prove that the Enemy cannot really love humans, so he uses devilish logic – probably acceptable to Wormwood –, which is to say, that of corrupting things, to claim that “All His talk about love must be a disguise for something else – he must have some *real* motive for creating them and taking so much trouble about them” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 100 [2000]). Indeed, Screwtape has changed the word “truth” in letter 8 for the word “talk”, which, by means of no argumentation, implies an inference of an idea – not a *fact* – worthy of doubt: “The reason one comes to talk as if He really had this impossible love is our utter failure to find out that real motive”. As the senior devil tries to avoid such a difficult matter, he sustains his position by telling Wormwood a story:

I do not see that it can do any harm to tell you that this very problem was a chief cause of Our Father's quarrel with the Enemy. When the creation of man was first mooted and when, even at that stage, the Enemy freely confessed that he foresaw a certain episode about a cross, Our Father very naturally sought an interview and asked for an explanation. The Enemy gave no reply except to produce the 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. He admitted that he felt a real anxiety to know the secret; the Enemy replied ‘I wish with all my heart that you did’. It was, I imagine, at this stage in the interview that Our Father's disgust at such an unprovoked lack of confidence caused him to remove himself an infinite distance from the Presence with a suddenness which has given rise to the ridiculous Enemy story that he was forcibly thrown out of Heaven (100-01).

This should be recognised as an inverted – and, thus, comic – version of the doctrine of the Fallen Angels³⁸ – as depicted in Milton's *Paradise Lost* –, with a reference to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Although Screwtape has told it in order to explain to Wormwood, in devilish terms, the Enemy's love, the only “cock-and-bull story” the reader may apprehend is that of the devil's fall, considering he/she should remember Lewis's warning that “the devil is a liar. Not everything that Screwtape says should be assumed to be true even from his own angle” (ix). In this sense, the senior devil does so as a pretext for circumventing. Accordingly, the reader may also notice that, if divine love was “an appalling truth” (38), and later a “talk” (100), now it comes up as a “secret” which drives the devils to despair:

³⁸ This can be read in Isaiah 13:12-19.

Since then, we have begun to see why our Oppressor was so secretive. His throne depends on the secret. Members of his faction have frequently admitted that if ever we came to understand what He means by Love, the war would be over and we should re-enter heaven. And there lies the great task. We know that He cannot really love: nobody can: it doesn't make sense. If we could only find out what he is *really* up to! Hypothesis after hypothesis has been tried, and still we can't find out. Yet we must never lose hope; more and more complicated theories, fuller and fuller collections of data, richer rewards for researchers who make progress, more and more terrible punishments for those who fail – all this, pursued and accelerated to the very end of time, cannot, surely, fail to succeed (101).

In Letter 19, the reader may observe that: since Screwtape is a devil, and is therefore not allowed to acknowledge the Enemy's love as *real* so he does not fall into heresy again nor be denounced by Wormwood, he cannot argue reasonably. Reason demands a commitment to seeking the *truth*, which the devil has avoided and twisted from the beginning. Thus, the reader should laugh at Screwtape's attempts to reach to the conclusion that "all this, pursued and accelerated to the very end of time, cannot, surely, *fail to succeed*" (101).

By this stage, the reader has already become a Model Reader in the sense that he/she can interpret and perform Lewis's *Letters* according to the comical dynamics of the devils proposed by the author and work, which are textually and serially presented in order to confirm and/or construct such a model by means of his/her following possible clues and filling intertextual gaps. I choose "becoming" a Model Reader, since he/she may laugh at Screwtape's seeing things ironically from the beginning of the fiction, although, now, his/her interpretive cooperation also allows him/her to laugh at the senior devil's *not* seeing things ironically; this does not seem to depend on the reader's knowledge and values, yet these may determine his/her performance of irony's comic effects. The epigraphs by Luther and Thomas More – regarding the devil as a satirical victim –, before the fictional preface, may now make sense to the reader.

Such a strategy – performed by author, work and reader – is confirmed by what I understand to be the climax of the narrative as well as of the potential of irony in Lewis's satire: it is in Letter 22 that the reader finds out that Wormwood's "man is in love – in the worst kind he could possibly have fallen into", which has Screwtape's arrogance towards Wormwood, contempt for humans and the Enemy, and ignorance about his devilish condition *take form* (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 117 [2000]) – in a concrete sense. As Screwtape does not forget that he was once denounced for "some unguarded expressions", the senior devil firstly emphasises – to Wormwood's regret – that "the *little misunderstanding* with the secret Police which [he] tried to raise

. . . has been tided over” (emphasis added). Here, the reader may notice that Screwtape approaches his falling into heresy as a minor subject which, from the senior devil’s distorting viewpoint, has been forcibly brought about by the guilty Wormwood: “If you were reckoning on that to secure my good offices, you will find yourself mistaken. You shall pay for that as well as for your other blunders”. Accordingly, Screwtape finds his way to retribute the junior tempter by a professional though ironical means: “Meanwhile I enclose a little booklet, just issued, on the new House of Correction for Incompetent Tempters. *It is profusely illustrated and you will not find a dull page in it*” (emphasis added). The reader may, then, see that the *booklet* is the first concrete element which reveals Screwtape’s anger for what, in classical literature, is called *peripeteia*,³⁹ that is, for the appearance of the Patient’s girlfriend, given Wormwood’s inefficiency.

Screwtape expresses real hate for the girl by means of aggressive, cruel language, since he is aware of what factual and ideal implications come from her:

I have looked up this girl’s dossier and am horrified at what I find. Not only a Christian but such a Christian – a vile, sneaking, simpering, demure, monosyllabic, mouse-like, watery, insignificant, virginal, bread-and-butter miss. The little brute. She makes me vomit. She stinks and scalds through the very pages of the dossier. It drives me mad, the way the world has worsened. We’d have had her to the arena in the old days. That’s what her sort is made for. Not that she’d do much good there, either. A two-faced little cheat (I know the sort) who looks as if she’d faint at the sight of blood and then dies with a smile. A cheat every way. Looks as if butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth and yet has a satirical wit. The sort of creature who’d find *ME* funny! Filthy insipid little prude – and yet ready to fall into this booby’s arms like any other breeding animal. Why doesn’t the Enemy blast her for it, if He’s so moonstruck by virginity – instead of looking on there, grinning? (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 117-18 [2000], emphasis by the author)

From the excerpt above, the reader may perceive that the Patient’s description has never been put into words as the girl’s has: precisely, ten adjectives are needed for Screwtape to describe what he means by “such a Christian” girl, and twelve sentences, for the senior devil to negatively evaluate her. In devilish terms, the girl is worthy of Screwtape’s animosity, since she is *disgusting* to the point of having him vomit, *repulsive* even in her dossier, and a “two-faced little *cheat*” for being a mere Christian who represents a challenge which – the reader may suppose – Wormwood cannot overcome. Despite the ironical use of those terms to describe the girl, it may be ironical, to the reader, that these can equally well be used to describe a devil, yet, in that case,

³⁹ “A sudden change of fortune in a drama or in life” (Oxford 1080).

they would be *true*. Perhaps the girl's "satirical wit" would sense this, had she been in the reader's position and performed the comic effect of such a conclusion: "The sort of creature who'd find *ME* funny!". Luther's and Thomas More's words may return to the reader's mind once more – respectively, "he cannot bear scorn" nor "endure to be mocked" (vii) –, which, from Screwtape's viewpoint is, indeed, "horrifying", and from the reader's, literal and literary.

The Enemy is the root of what Screwtape most hates about the Christian girl, that is, her sense of humour, and this is due to pleasure, which has been created by Him:

He's a hedonist at heart. All those fasts and vigils and stakes and crosses are only a façade. Or only like foam on the sea shore. Out at sea, out in His sea, there is pleasure, and more pleasure. He makes no secret of it; at His right hand are 'pleasures for evermore'. Ugh! I don't think He has the least inkling of that high and austere mystery to which we rise in the Miserific Vision. He's vulgar, Wormwood. He has a bourgeois mind. He has filled his world full of pleasures. There are things for humans to do all day long without his minding in the least – sleeping, washing, eating, drinking, making love, playing, praying, working (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 118 [2000]).

A careful reader may notice how ironical the word "hedonist" sounds when used by a senior devil who encourages the formation of vices in Wormwood's Patient. Yet, it does not seem to be intentional on the part of Screwtape, but, rather, a consequence of ironic inversion. In fact, the senior devil sustains his point by mentioning unpleasant, religious elements such as "fasts and vigils and stakes" as a "façade"; and, by quoting Psalm 16:11 – which reads ". . . in thy presence is fulness of joy; *at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore*" (King James Version) –, he claims that the Enemy "makes no secret of it". Here, the reader may remember that, in Letter 19, Screwtape suggests that the Enemy's love for humans is a "*disguise* for something else" (100, emphasis added); pleasure, on the other hand, is *visible* in a "vulgar" and "bourgeois" sense. That is why Screwtape implies the devil's superiority in the Miserific⁴⁰ Vision – which would be the opposite of a "beatific vision"⁴¹: apart from God, there is only misery.

According to Screwtape, "To decide what the best use of it is, you must ask what use the Enemy wants to make of it, and then do the opposite" (*The Screwtape Letters*, 38 [2000]). In this sense, the senior devil recommends the diminution or even elimination of pleasures: "Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition

⁴⁰ "Miserific" is a neology created by Lewis for something that causes misery.

⁴¹ In Christian theology, a beatific vision is the ultimate connection between a human being and God.

of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural, least redolent of its Maker, and least pleasurable. An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula. It is more certain; and it's better *style*. To get the man's soul and give him *nothing* in return – that is what really gladdens Our Father's heart" (44-45), ". . . as habit renders the pleasures of vanity and excitement and flippancy at once less pleasant and harder to forgo (for that is what habit fortunately does to a pleasure) you will find that anything or nothing is sufficient to attract his wandering attention" (59). Nevertheless, the trouble – in Screwtape's terms – lies in that "Everything has to be *twisted* before it's any use" (118-19) to the devils, so Screwtape observes the "cruel disadvantages" under which they fight, although without exempting Wormwood from his present inefficiency: "(Not that that excuses *you*. I'll settle with you presently. You have always hated me and been insolent when you dared.)" (119, emphases by the author). Besides these disadvantages, the girl's family imposes itself as another handicap on the devils:

The whole place reeks of that deadly odour. The very gardener, though he has only been there five years, is beginning to acquire it. Even guests, after a weekend visit, carry some of the smell away with them. The dog and the cat are tainted with it. And a house full of the impenetrable mystery. We are certain (it is a matter of first principles) that each member of the family must in some way be making capital out of the others – but we can't find out how. They guard as jealously as the Enemy Himself the secret of what really lies behind this pretence of disinterested love. The whole house and garden is one vast obscenity (119).

The reader may observe that "that *deadly* odour" (emphasis added), which is acquired even by the family's gardener, dog and cat as "taint", is a perceivable sense of *smell* to devils, who, on the other hand, cannot penetrate, in the sense of *touch*, the mystery that lies behind it. Here, it can be inferred that that secret is a *reality* to the devils, although, if related to love – as the reader may suppose it is –, their "first principles" make them *certain* of a state of competition in the form of that "pretence of disinterested love" among the family members, yet, contradictorily, the devils "can't find out how", since the secret is "jealously" guarded by each of them. Devilish principles seem, then, mistaken; Screwtape cannot admit this, but see "The whole house and garden [as] one vast obscenity" instead.

However, as I have pointed out regarding Letter 22, Wormwood's failure in letting the Patient fall in love with a Christian girl has made Screwtape *concretely* manifest arrogance to his nephew tempter by means of a booklet for incompetent tempters. Accordingly, as the senior devil writes, "Noise, the grand dynamism, the

audible expression of all that is exultant, ruthless, and virile – noise which alone defends us from silly qualms, despairing scruples, and impossible desires. We will make the whole universe a noise in the end”, he cannot forget Wormwood: “Meanwhile *you*, disgusting little –”. To the junior tempter’s consternation – and, perhaps, the reader’s –, what follows is someone else’s handwriting, specifically, the devil Toadpipe’s: “[*Here the MS breaks off and is resumed in a different hand.*]” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 120 [2000]). This is how Screwtape explains such a sudden change:

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. Now that the transformation is complete I recognise it as a periodical phenomenon. Some rumour of it has reached the humans and a distorted account of it appears in the poet Milton, with the ridiculous addition that such changes of shape are a ‘punishment’ imposed on us by the Enemy. A more modern writer – someone with a name like Pshaw – has, however, grasped the truth. Transformation proceeds from within and is a glorious manifestation of that Life Force which Our Father would worship if he worshipped anything but himself (120-21).

Hence, given “the heat of composition”, which I have pointed out from Screwtape’s anger towards Wormwood, a second concrete demonstration of it is in the senior devil’s assuming the “form of a large centipede”, which turns out to be – he explains – “a periodical phenomenon”. The reader may notice two satirical references in this excerpt. Screwtape first disregards some rumour that has received, through the poet Milton, the “*ridiculous* addition that such changes of shape are a ‘punishment’ imposed on us by the Enemy” (emphasis added); a careful reader would find that the English poet depicts such an idea in his Book 10 of *Paradise Lost* (1667), in which the devils were turned into snakes for rebelling against God. Screwtape then mentions a “more modern writer” whose ideas interest him most, since the “truth” has been, finally, grasped: in fact, Screwtape’s transformation into a centipede reveals a “glorious manifestation” of a “Life Force”. A reader familiar with Lewis’s *Mere Christianity* (1952) may remember that that “Life Force” is the philosophy of Creative Evolution or Emergent Evolution whose “view says that the small variations by which life on this planet ‘evolved’ from the lowest forms to Man were not due to chance but to the ‘striving’ or ‘purposiveness’ of a Life-Force” (Lewis, *Mere Christianity* 21).⁴² As Bernard Shaw defended it in his works, the reader may notice the author’s ironical tone in an indirect and miswritten

⁴² “What Lies Behind the Law”, Book 1, Chapter 4, originally broadcast on 20 August 1941 in Lewis’s Christian talks on the BBC.

reference to him as “*someone* with a name like *Pshaw*” (emphases added), whose ideas grasp the *truth* about the transformation of devils as they evolve, in *competition*, for a *purpose* – which they seem to misconceive. In this sense, such a philosophy would be “worshipped” by Our Father Below “if he worshipped anything but himself”, and excuse Screwtape’s taking the *form* of a centipede, had the reader not perceived his forcible ignorance. Therefore, to “gloriously” conclude Letter 22, and to offer the reader a comic effect from the elements I have presented as objects of Screwtape’s anger and distorting viewpoint, Screwtape closes it by approaching Wormwood in a *physical*, though *affectionate* – then, ironical –, way to refer to earlier matters: “In my present form I feel even more anxious to see you, to unite you to myself in an indissoluble *embrace*” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 121 [2000], emphasis added).

As the reader would expect, Wormwood has not been able to be any more efficient since the Patient’s new love relationship: “Through this girl and her disgusting family the patient is now getting to know more Christians every day, and very intelligent Christians too. For a long time it will be quite impossible to *remove* spirituality from his life. Very well then; we must *corrupt* it” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 123); “You seem to be doing very little good at present. . . . That means you have largely failed” (147); “In so far as the war really concerns the spiritual state of the patient, I naturally want full reports. And on this aspect you seem singularly obtuse” (153); “I sometimes wonder whether you think you have been sent into the world for your own amusement. I gather, not from your miserably inadequate report but from that of the infernal Police, that the patient’s behaviour during the first raid has been the worst possible” (165). Indeed, Screwtape has considered to use, in their favour, “the strongest and most beautiful of the vices – Spiritual Pride” (130), and even the European War, yet with some caution, since death is not (currently) desirable: “Do you not know that bombs kill men? Or do you not realise that the patient’s death, at this moment, is precisely what we want to avoid?” (153). The idea between Letters 24 and 30, is, then, to corrupt the Patient’s virtues and induce, in him, vices from religion and the probability of air raids in his town: “. . . the great thing is to make Christianity a mystery religion in which he feels himself one of the initiates” (133); “Now that it is certain the German humans will bombard your patient’s town and that his duties will keep him in the thick of the danger, we must consider our policy. Are we to aim at cowardice – or at courage, with consequent pride – or at hatred of the Germans?” (159). Nevertheless, it seems it has had no good results in a devilish sense –, considering the affective tone – exaggerated, as the

reader may suppose from Letter 22 – with which Letter 31 is started: “My dear, my very dear, Wormwood, my poppet, my pignie . . .” (171). Unlike Screwtape’s earlier letters, the first paragraph is not related to his impressions on Wormwood’s job with regard to the situation of the Patient, but it rather presents the senior devil’s affection towards the junior tempter in its most extreme form of expression:

How mistakenly now that all is lost you come whimpering to ask me whether the terms of affection in which I address you meant nothing from the beginning. Far from it! Rest assured, my love for you and your love for me are as like as two peas. I have always desired you, as you (pitiful fool) desired me. The difference is that I am the stronger. I think they will give you to me now; or a bit of you. Love you? Why, yes. As dainty a morsel as ever I grew fat on (171).

From this excerpt, the reader has the clue that “all is lost” lest he/she wonder whether “the terms of affection in which [Screwtape] address[ed] [Wormwood] meant nothing from the beginning”. These terms of affection *do* mean something. Firstly, the reader should remember that the devils cannot love – “nobody can: it doesn’t make sense” (101) –, to, then, infer how ironic the use of the term “love” – in “my love for you and your love” – sounds; in fact, it is their *lack* of divine love that makes them “always desire” each other in the competitive – “I am the stronger” – and gastronomic senses – “a bit of you” –, as Screwtape – still ironically – points out: “*Love you? Why, yes. As dainty a morsel as ever I grew fat on*” (emphases added).

The reason for such a demonstration of affection is developed within some implications in the following paragraph. As Wormwood “ha[s] let a soul slip through [his] fingers”, Screwtape pictures the receiving of the news in the devilish kingdom as hunger causes despair (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 171 [2000]): “The howl of sharpened famine for that loss re-echoes at this moment through all the levels of the Kingdom of Noise down to the very throne itself” (emphases added). Besides, the senior devil’s picturing the cleansing of the Patient’s soul also demonstrates it, yet in a tone of *disgust*, given the new condition of the Englishman:

It makes me mad to think of it. How well I know what happened at the instant when they snatched him from you! There was a sudden clearing of his eyes (was there not?) as he saw you for the first time, and recognised the part you had had in him and knew that you had it no longer. Just think (and let it be the beginning of your agony) what he felt at that moment; as if a scab had fallen from an old sore, as if he were emerging from a hideous, shell-like tetter, as if he shuffled off for good and all a defiled, wet, clinging garment. By Hell, it is *misery enough* to see them in their mortal days taking off dirtied and uncomfortable clothes and splashing in hot water and giving little grunts of

pleasure – stretching their eased limbs. What, then, of this final stripping, *this complete cleansing*? (171-72, emphases added)

Here, the reader may observe an ironical situation in that, although the Patient is the one who died during an air raid, it is Wormwood who agonises. It starts from a subtle reference to the counterparts of the devils, that is, the angels – identified by subject pronoun “they” –, who “snatched [the Patient] from” the junior tempter, letting the Englishman see him “for the first time” and recognise “the part [Wormwood] had had in him and . . . that [Wormwood] had it no longer”. This disclosure can be ironically compared to one’s “taking off dirtied and uncomfortable clothes”: whilst the human being gives “little grunts of pleasure”, the devil thinks it “*By Hell . . . a misery enough*” (emphasis added), yet, it is anything but a miserable experience. Eventually, the reader may conclude that the negative feeling of being stripped is *Wormwood’s* for his having been revealed to the human being, and conclude that, therefore, more painful – and comic to the reader – than this, is “this final stripping, *this complete cleansing*” (emphasis added) – supposedly, in purgatory – of the *Patient*.

The Patient’s transition from a mortal life to the eternal has been, for Screwtape, easy: “The more one thinks about it, the worse it becomes. He got through so easily” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 172 [2000]). From the senior devil’s viewpoint, if *that* was supposed to be the Englishman’s fate, he should have, at least, suffered more:

No gradual misgivings, no doctor’s sentence, no nursing home, no operating theatre, no false hopes of life; sheer, instantaneous liberation. . . . Defeated, out-manoeuvred fool! Did you mark how naturally – as if he’d been born for it – the earth-born vermin entered the new life? How all his doubts became, in the twinkling of an eye, *ridiculous*? I know what the creature was saying to itself! ‘Yes. of course. It always was like this. All horrors have followed the same course, getting worse and worse and forcing you into a kind of bottle-neck till, at the very moment when you thought you must be crushed, behold! you were out of the narrows and all was suddenly well. The extraction hurt more and more and then the tooth was out. The dream became a nightmare and then you woke. You die and die and then you are beyond death. How could I ever have doubted it?’ (172-73, emphasis added)

The reader may notice that, for Screwtape, such a transition is not only *unfair* in the practical sense, but mainly for all devilish attempts, in form of the Patient’s “doubts”, having become “ridiculous” from the viewpoint of “the earth-born vermin”. Accordingly, the senior devil curses at Wormwood as a “Defeated, out-manoeuvred fool!”, since the Patient would not deserve the death he had nor be allowed to find out and see the devil’s part as “ridiculous”, not to say obvious. Yet, he has, and the senior devil

foresees it by giving voice – though from his own – to the Patient in a *fair* way, as if there were no devilish or ironical interventions: the Patient would see Wormwood’s attempts as “horrors”, but would soon realise “all was suddenly *well*” (emphasis added) like a “nightmare” ends as he wakes up in his trespassing “death”.

However, Screwtape tries to ignore the ridiculous side of this situation as far as the devils are concerned by relating it to the junior tempter, only:

As he saw you, he also saw Them. I know how it was. You reeled back dizzy and blinded, more hurt by them than he had ever been by bombs. The degradation of it! – that this thing of earth and slime could stand upright and converse with *spirits before whom you, a spirit, could only cower*. Perhaps you had hoped that the awe and strangeness of it would dash his joy. . . . But when he saw them he knew that he had always known them and realised what part each one of them had played at many an hour in his life when he had supposed himself alone, so that now he could say to them, one by one, not ‘Who *are* you?’ but ‘So it was *you* all the time’. All that they were and said at this meeting woke memories. . . . Recognition made him free of their company almost before the limbs of his corpse became quiet. *Only you were left outside* (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 173-74 [2000], emphases added).

Considering that that recognition involves the Bad and the Good Powers, the reader may observe that Screwtape emphasises how ridiculous Wormwood was in his being *recognised and compared* to “Them”, the angels: “. . . spirits before whom you, a spirit, could only cower”. Ironically, as the senior devil points out, “this meeting” did not surprise nor frighten the Patient, but rather “made him free of their company” to the extent that “Only [Wormwood was] left outside”. In this sense, Screwtape adds:

He saw not only Them; he saw Him. This animal, this thing begotten in a bed, could look on Him. What is blinding, suffocating fire to you, is now cool light to him, is clarity itself, and wears the form of a Man. You would like, if you could, to interpret the patient’s prostration in the Presence, his self-aborrence and utter knowledge of his sins (yes, Wormwood, a clearer knowledge even than yours) on the analogy of your own choking and paralysing sensations when you encounter the deadly air that breathes from the heart of Heaven. But it’s all nonsense. Pains he may still have to encounter, but they *embrace* those pains. They would not barter them for any earthly pleasure. All the delights of sense, or heart, or intellect, with which you could once have tempted him, even the delights of virtue itself, now seem to him in comparison but as the half nauseous attractions of a raddled harlot would seem to a man who hears that his true beloved whom he has loved all his life and whom he had believed to be dead is alive and even now at his door. He is caught up into that world where pain and pleasure take on transfinite values and all our arithmetic is dismayed (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 174-75 [2000], emphasis by the author).

Although the Patient was, in Screwtape’s point of view, “This animal, this thing begotten in a bed”, he could also see Him. Instead of referring to God as the *Enemy*, hereinafter,

Screwtape uses subject and object pronouns and images of light as though the senior devil could not accept the truth nor deny it; in fact, it could be *felt* by Wormwood and is now *clear* to the Patient: “What is *blinding, suffocating fire* to you, is now *cool light* to him, is *clarity itself . . .*”. The reader may observe that Screwtape *does* acknowledge that truth in “the form of a Man” – which he once evaluated as “discreditable”⁴³ – whose “Presence” makes the Patient kneel, given – the reader should note an evaluative tone regarding Wormwood – “a clearer knowledge even than” Wormwood’s, who, in his turn, would choke and paralyse for its “deadly air that breathes from the heart of Heaven”. Besides, the senior devil seems to recognise the value of divine pleasures in comparison to the delights “with which [Wormwood] could once have tempted him” – an evaluative tone regarding Wormwood’s performance –, and in comparison to devilish plans over them: “He is caught up into that world where pain and pleasure take on *transfinite values* and *all our arithmetic is dismayed*” (emphases added). Thus, the reader may conclude that Screwtape cannot run away from such a defeat for an “appalling truth” (38) by blaming Wormwood; his way has led him to heresy.

The alternative for Screwtape to close his final letter is therefore, once again, denial:

Once more, the inexplicable meets us. Next to the curse of useless tempters like yourself the greatest curse upon us is the failure of our Intelligence Department. If only we could find out what he is really up to! Alas, alas, that knowledge, in itself so hateful and mawkish a thing, should yet be necessary for Power! Sometimes I am almost in despair. All that sustains me is the conviction that our realism, our rejection (in the face of all temptations) of all silly nonsense and claptrap, *must* win in the end (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 175 [2000], emphasis by the author).

Screwtape, along with the other devils, faces “the inexplicable”, whose arithmetic the Intelligence Department fails to solve with a “curse”, although, ironically, the devils are, in nature, *curled* with blindness. Screwtape denies even the undeniable, that is, failure, by pointing to a reality he cannot see, that is, their curse. In this sense, although Wormwood has proved to be a “useless tempter”, he has been defeated by something Screwtape cannot but misunderstand and, therefore, hate: “If only we could find out what he is really up to! Alas, alas, that knowledge, in itself so hateful and mawkish a thing . . .”. If devilish blindness let the devils conclude that that very knowledge which

⁴³ “There will be images derived from pictures of the enemy as he appeared during the discreditable episode known as the Incarnation . . .” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 18 [2000]).

“should yet be necessary for Power” was divine love, perhaps Screwtape would not be “*almost* in despair” (emphasis added), but in despair itself. To the reader’s amusement, the senior devil *chooses* – as though he could – to be convicted in his rejecting, “in the face of all temptations”, such a(n) (im)possibility, “all silly nonsense and claptrap”, and to believe that the devils “*must* win in the end”. The emphasis by the author should, thus, be inferred in the sense of a duty or, ironically, a probability, or both, since Screwtape should not fall into heresy again. Finally and accordingly, Screwtape goes back to Wormwood: “Meanwhile, I have you to settle with” (175). As a confirmation of the climax of this narrative in Letter 22, that is, the senior devil’s desire for the junior tempter in the form of *hunger*, the reader may ironically conclude that Wormwood will, eventually, become Screwtape’s food, and that the latter has been somewhat sincere from the beginning, in terms of devilish affection: “Most *truly* do I sign myself” (emphasis added).

4.2 Levels of Irony and the Role of the Reader

This interpretive route I have traced from the reader’s viewpoint leads me to some considerations on *The Screwtape Letters* as an ironical and satirical fiction. Firstly, its war context may suggest, from the plot and its underlying apologetics, that twentieth-century readers should have hope, since it is the spiritual war which should matter the most. Ironical inversion confirms this in the sense that the Patient dies during an air raid and, yet, wins and lives, whilst Wormwood watches such a glorious death and is eaten by Screwtape. Secondly, this is why ironical inversion also guarantees that non-religious readers – from the time of the publication of the *Letters* or not – should laugh at the devil’s defeat. Finally, I have demonstrated that ironical inversion structures Lewis’s fiction to the extent that it is two-levelled and doubly valuable – as irony is argumentative in its essence; hence, from those or other “*inferential walks*” which the reader may have taken –, complicity between author and reader – who has been modeled by the text in his/her interpreting and performing it – enables the latter to answer the question, *Who is mocked in Lewis’s satirical fiction The Screwtape Letters?* As a reader, I would dare answer to it: at a superficial level, it is the religious Patient, the reader and even the author⁴⁴ who are mocked, but, at a deeper level of irony, it

⁴⁴ “Let the little brute wallow in it. Let him, if he has any bent that way, write a book about it . . .” (Lewis, 2000, 66).

seems that the Model Author has also included *the devil* as a target. Since the reader has inferred, from the text, that there are satirical victims, I should add that it depends on who the satirist is. Therefore, at a superficial level, Screwtape mocks the Patient, the reader and the author; and, consequently, at a deeper level, the senior devil becomes the victim of a Model Author who turns out to be the real satirist.

In this sense, I shall now propose a figure which considers the reader's interpretive cooperation in *The Screwtape Letters* as a textual strategy, that is, a Model Reader who performs a structuring ironic inversion in Lewis's satire. Given his/her *active* reading of such a *targeted* fiction, my proposal takes, then, the form of an archery target, which is divided into four different targets, as follows: the Patient, the reader, the author and the senior devil Screwtape.

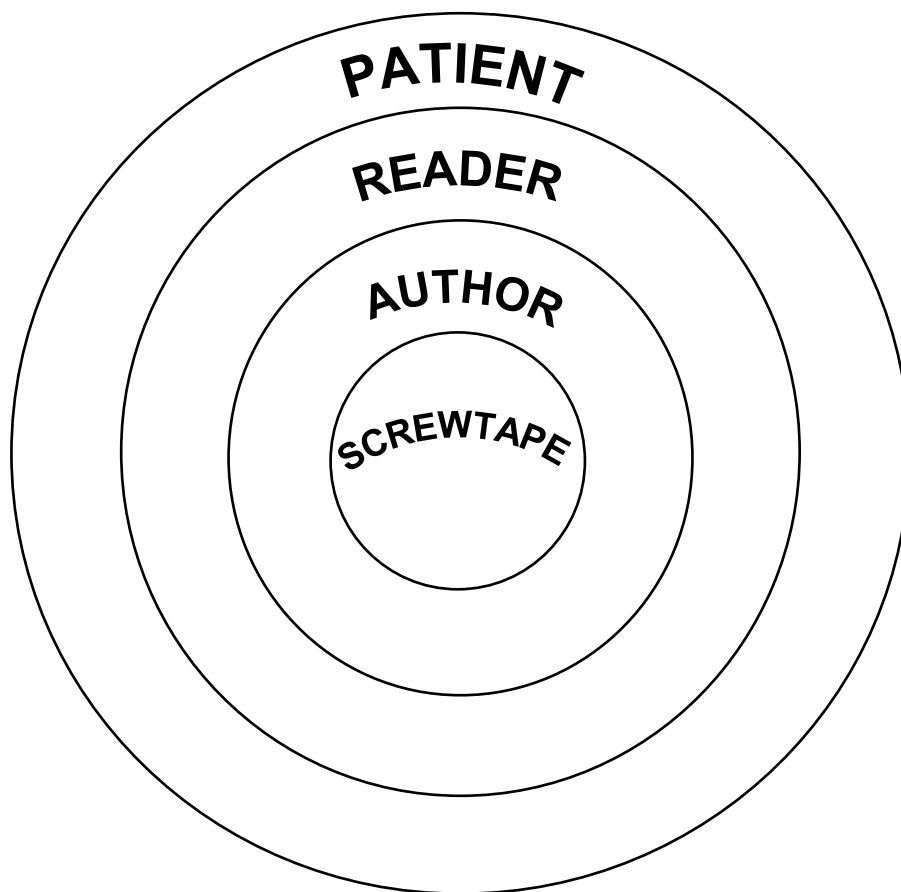


Fig. 3. Satirical victims in *The Screwtape Letters*.

Although the most visible target is that of the Patient, the reader is advised that the main target of Lewis's satire is, supposedly, the liar Screwtape, as I argued in the

previous topic from epigraphs by Luther and Thomas More and the fictional preface by Lewis. Accordingly, the act of interpreting ironic inversion throughout the *Letters* and inferring their satirical victims would start with the reader's assuming the position of a Model Reader and with his/her looking at the central target, while a Model Author would be handing him/her a bow and a quiver containing some arrows and an arrow for the reader's first shot. He/she should get used to nocking the arrow – sharply pointed – on the bow string, drawing and securing the bow – light for some, heavy for others –, and aiming steady – despite the unreliable ground – and directly – despite the lack of light – at the target. Indeed, it would be easy to release the string, yet also to misfire in the sense that he/she might not have struck the central target; as all four targets are disposed to the reader, it should not be called his/her first *attempt*, but, rather, his/her first *shot*.

Perhaps, in Letter 1, the arrow might strike close to the target of the Patient, and, in Letter 2, the reader might even strike the Englishman with a little practise, since he is more visible than the others; as I have pointed some ironical elements in that letter, they might make the reader laugh and, hence, feel delight at the Patient's expense. However, as the reader would fire the arrows which the author handled him/her – there might not be enough in the reader's quiver – and improve his/her performance, he/she might soon notice how close he/she is to the Patient, to such an extent that they share the very human nature that Screwtape urges to mock; the reader then would be able to hit an inner target, that of himself/herself, whose harm might be relieved in his/her celebrating a more accurate shot.

The reader might follow this logic/these steps and, with a feeling of contradiction, strike the author of the fiction. He/she might wonder why this target would be there, and, later, suppose that he/she would give in otherwise: such a fellowship would be due to the fact that the author should have known how the reader would feel when the latter succeeded or was hurt or, even, felt tired, in order to encourage him/her by handing, as a Model Author, more arrows for the central target which is still intact. Although the reader could keep shooting and striking the targets already struck, it could just as well mean he/she is *stuck* in the repetition of a performance which, despite its comic effects, could be improved. The reader might, of course, follow the Model Author's instructions and perform differently. Nevertheless, with an increasingly skillful position and sight, and his/her experience of grabbing and nocking arrows, and

releasing them in the direction of the central target, he/she might eventually strike it, that is, the target of Screwtape.

Thus, the feeling of harm might cease and the reader might, then, perform the paradoxical pleasure of irony. The reader might, then, look at the archery target and see the signs of each shot, and acknowledge his/her part in that work and, besides, the Model Author's, who had handed him/her the arrows and encouraged him/her to keep shooting. Finally, the reader might come to the conclusion that, without the *edges* of irony marking the centre of the archery target, he/she would not be able to see his/her performance and, hence, Lewis's satire, as a whole structure.

4.3 Functions of Irony: The Reader's Evaluation

I shall use, in this topic, the idea of firing at an archery target as an interpretive cooperation in the sense that the reader may see each shot and, consequently, target struck, from different perspectives in *The Screwtape Letters*. As I have pointed out with regard to Hutcheon's scale, such possibilities are presented by the edges of irony which carry its transideological nature (*Irony's Edge* 45); accordingly, since irony is employed as a rhetorical strategy, its argumentative value may be varied for the reader, who may infer its levels from Screwtape's contradictory and straightforward utterances – the affective level – and, then, Lewis's performance as a Model Author – the cognitive level. Hence, for the purposes of the present study, we shall consider the archery target, from its edge to its centre, as an interpretive process which commences at the affective level and is completed at the cognitive levels of irony. Besides, I believe Lewis's religious satire offers ironical functions which may lie, from the reader's point of view, at the top of Hutcheon's scale, namely, at both the Assailing (*satirical*) and the Aggregative (*religious*) functions. Thus, the functions of irony of the *Letters* and their positive and negative charges – corrective, satiric or destructive, aggressive, *and* inclusive, amiable communities or exclusionary, in-groups – may vary according to the targets, the ironic levels, and the reader's interpretation, as may be seen in Figure 3.

The first satirical target that the reader may see with no difficulty is that of the Patient, derided by the senior devil, whose practical intentions are to "want cattle who can finally become food . . . to suck in . . ." (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 39 [2000]). The reader may notice that, although this sounds comical, the functions of irony in Screwtape's revealing the Englishman's religious experiences and personal life –

materialist and Christian friends, military service and love relationship – may but lie at the affective level of irony, with a negative charge. As I have argued, based on devilish intentions, which cannot be corrective from our moral standpoint but can be considered so from the devils’ – as, for example, in the use of the word “patient” –, the functions of irony may be *literally destructive*, by means of *aggressive* or sarcastic language: “No matter. Your patient, thanks to Our Father Below, is a *fool*. Keep everything hazy in his mind now, and you will have all eternity wherein to amuse yourself by producing in him *the peculiar kind of clarity which Hell affords*” (6-7, emphases added); “The Enemy’s determination to produce such a revolting hybrid was one of the things that determined Our Father to withdraw his support from Him” (37); “Let the little brute wallow in it. Let him, if he has any bent that way, write a book about it . . .” (66). These functions may be applied to the Patient’s mother: “Keep in close touch with our colleague Glucose who is in charge of the mother, and build up between you in that house a *good settled habit of mutual annoyance*; daily pinpricks. The following methods are useful” (11, emphasis added); “. . . a past described by her as ‘the days when you could get good servants’ but known to us as the days when her senses were more easily pleased and *she had pleasures of other kinds* which made her less dependent on those of the table” (89, emphasis added); to the Christian girl and her friends: “Not only a Christian but *such a Christian* – a vile, sneaking, simpering, demure, monosyllabic, mouse-like, watery, insignificant, virginal, bread-and-butter miss. The little brute” (117, emphasis added); “Through this girl and her disgusting family the patient is now getting to know more Christians every day, and *very intelligent Christians too*” (123, emphasis added); and twentieth-century English society, in the context of the Patient: “They are creatures of that miserable sort who loudly proclaim that torture is too good for their enemies and then *give tea and cigarettes* to the first wounded German pilot who turns up at the back door” (27, emphasis added); “[Humour] is specially promising among the English who take their ‘sense of humour’ so seriously that a deficiency in this sense is almost the only deficiency at which they feel shame. Humour is for them the *all-consoling* and (mark this) the *all-excusing, grace of life*” (55, emphases added).

The reader may interpret devilish scorn, at an affective level, as the destructive and aggressive functions of irony to the extent that he/she empathises with those targets – summarised in the character of the Patient. Such an empathy reveals that the reader has struck the targets of the Reader and of the Author for their similarity to the first target, whether it be for their human nature, religion or nationality. At this point,

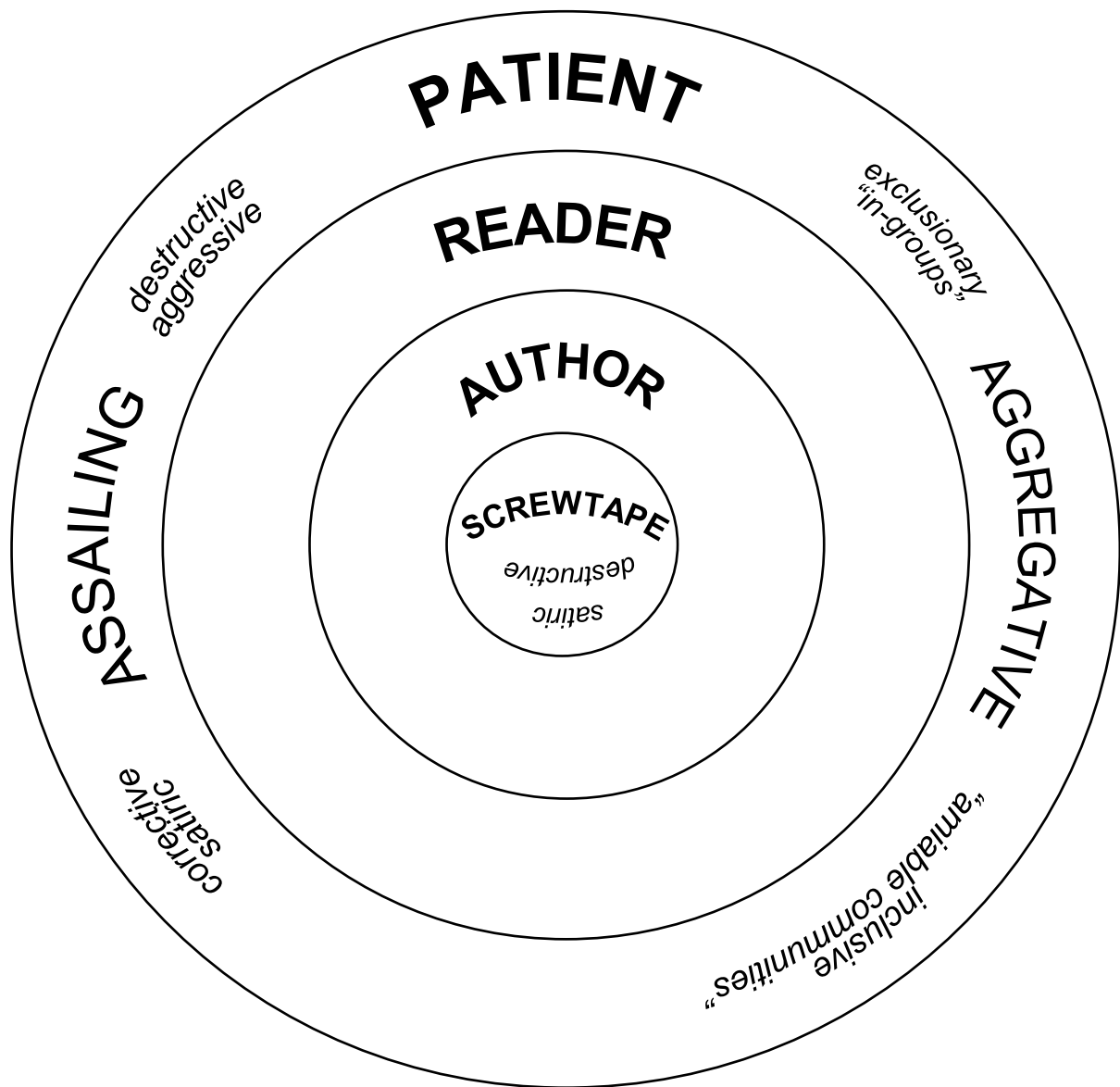


Fig. 4. Functions of irony in *The Screwtape Letters*.⁴⁵

he/she may conclude, at the cognitive level – in recognising the *Letters* as the work by a Model Author –, that a positive charge of the Assailing function of irony may be elicited from its negative. Hence, the reader may infer the corrective and satiric functions in *reversing* his/her sight, that is, by the effort of twisting his/her mind – this explains the almost upside-down positioning of these functions, which obliges the observer to spin his/her head, with some *discomfort*, in order to understand them. Nevertheless, as I pointed out in the previous topic, the paradoxical pleasure of irony

⁴⁵ In order to best comprehend the figure, I would suggest viewing it without moving the page, even though this involves some effort to read the functions of irony at the bottom of the archery target.

is this: it may hurt, but still somehow be valuable to the interpreter. Thus, “correction” and “satiric” confirm the idea that religious humour, in the *Letters*, may be performed for moral instruction by some readers, whilst for amusement by others.

Accordingly, with regard to religious allusions and references, the reader may interpret the Assailing function of irony from Screwtape’s and/or the Model Author’s level(s). Yet, some of these do not seem to imply any sort of correction, but, rather, devilish scorn, such as in these allusions to, respectively, the parable of the Prodigal Son: “Remember the elder brother in the Enemy’s story?”⁴⁶ (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 14 [2000]); the Lord’s Prayer: “It is about *this* that he is to say ‘Thy will be done’, and for the daily task of bearing *this* that the daily bread will be provided”⁴⁷ (Lewis, 2000, 25, emphasis by the author); and to the Book of Common Prayer: “The Christians describe the Enemy as one ‘without whom Nothing is strong’. And Nothing is very strong: strong enough to steal away a man’s best years not in sweet sins but in a dreary flickering of the mind over it knows not what and knows not why . . .”⁴⁸ (60). On the other hand, the corrective function of irony may be inferred from ironical references – in the sense that “the more ‘religious’ (on those terms) the more securely ours” (35) – to historical personalities such as the apostle Paul, and to Anglican parties in the Church of England: “. . . subordinate factions within [the Church] have often produced admirable results, from the parties of Paul and of Apollos at Corinth down to the High and Low parties in the Church of England” (33). The power of such an ironical utterance may be felt as destructive or offensive and, at the same time, corrective and/or satiric in the treating of Christian parties as *factions*; the reader may, however, notice some actuality in Screwtape’s depiction:

We have quite removed from men’s minds what that pestilent fellow Paul used to teach about food and other unessentials – namely, that the human without scruples should always give in to the human with scruples. You would think they could not fail to see the application. You would expect to find the ‘low’ churchman genuflecting and crossing himself lest the weak conscience of his ‘high’ brother should be moved to irreverence, and the ‘high’ one refraining

⁴⁶ From Luke 15:25, it can be observed that the elder brother is the one who did not rejoice at the younger brother’s return. In Letter 3, Screwtape suggests that the Patient’s mother should act likewise, given his recent conversion to Christianity.

⁴⁷ In Matthew 6:10-11, Jesus Christ prays: “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread”. As depicted in Matthew 26:39, Jesus’s prayer before his arrest for Judas’s betrayal is this: “. . . ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will’”. See also Mark 14: 32-42 and Luke 22: 39-46.

⁴⁸ “O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy . . .” (Fourth Sunday After Trinity, The Collect).

from these exercises lest he should betray his 'low' brother into idolatry. And so it would have been but for our ceaseless labour. Without that the variety of usage within the Church of England might have become a positive hotbed of charity and humility . . . (84-85)

Besides, as Screwtape suggests the corruption of *virtues*, the reader may infer an undesirable Christian *practise* from positives – in a destructive sense – by the senior devil, in such a way that he/she may elicit the corrective function of irony while performing a satirical side of these positives, given the exaggerated form they take:

What we want, if men become Christians at all, is to keep them in the state of mind I call 'Christianity And'. You know – Christianity and the Crisis, Christianity and the New Psychology, Christianity and the New Order, Christianity and Faith Healing, Christianity and Psychical Research, Christianity and Vegetarianism, Christianity and Spelling Reform. If they must be Christians let them at least be Christians with a difference. Substitute for the faith itself some fashion with a Christian colouring (135).

Finally, the reader may interpret Screwtape's contempt in his alluding to the Christian God by the term "Enemy" throughout the *Letters* as *destructive*. If, on Screwtape's affective level, this irony tries to *deconstruct* the idea of a godly father who endures an unpretentious love towards his sons and daughters by means of *aggressive* language, on the cognitive, it reinforces and recommends that idea, and even *corrects* it – if seen in reverse – or, at least, entertains the reader by means of straightforward depiction of the Enemy from the point of view the human being:

If you examine the object to which he is attending, you will find that it is a composite object containing many quite ridiculous ingredients. There will be images derived from pictures of the Enemy as He appeared during the discreditable episode known as the Incarnation: there will be vaguer – perhaps quite savage and puerile – images associated with the other two Persons. There will even be some of his own reverence (and of bodily sensations accompanying it) objectified and attributed to the object revered. I have known cases where what the patient called his 'god' was actually *located* – up and to the left at the corner of the bedroom ceiling, or inside his own head, or in a crucifix on the wall (18, emphasis by the author).

In this sense, although I have not included the devils but only Screwtape in my figure – in order to maintain some coherence in my analogy of an archery target in relation to an interpretive cooperation process –, the reader may also feel the *destructive* charge at the senior devil's affective level, that is, his *aggressive* or scornful approaches to Wormwood and references to other devils, such as Slubgob, as regards their inefficiency: ". . . if you know your job he will not notice the immense improbability of the assumption" (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 13 [2000], emphasis added); "In my

present form I feel even more anxious to see you, to unite you to myself in an indissoluble embrace . . .” (121); “If you have often seen men led by it into anger, malice and impatience, that is because those men have had *efficient tempters*” (166, emphasis added); “I always thought the Training College had gone to pieces since they put old Slubgob at the head of it, and now I am sure” (37); “*Even under Slubgob* you must have learned at college . . .” (93, emphasis added). As the reader gets the dynamics of the *Letters*, he/she may conclude that, even in a sort of *corrective* task to be played, Screwtape often employs *corrosive* irony towards Wormwood: “From the way some of you young fiends talk, anyone would suppose it was our job to *teach!*” (4, emphasis by the author); “Meanwhile I enclose a little booklet, just issued, on the new *House of Correction for Incompetent Tempters*. It is profusely illustrated and *you will not find a dull page in it*” (117, emphases added). Furthermore, at a cognitive level, the reader may find a *satirical* side of *it*, in the sense that he/she does not share the destructive effects of irony with the devils, but its *comic* effects with the Model Author; the reader may confirm this in Letter 22 and at the end of the fiction, in which Wormwood’s inefficiency *comically* concurs with his literal destruction: “I think they will give you to me now; or a bit of you. Love you? Why, yes. As dainty a morsel as ever I grew fat on” (171). Thus, if there are any *corrective* functions left for the reader to infer, it may be that of his/her idea of a devilish efficiency, although pointed in negatives, since Screwtape cannot conceal it.

By this stage, the reader is about to strike the target of Screwtape – the central target in my figure – and, then, feel the edges of the Assailing function of irony at a deeper cognitive level; in other words, positive and negative charges of such a function can only be felt in analysing Screwtape’s utterances *in reverse* – and, here, the observer may spin his/her head to read the ironical functions which strike the target. I have pointed out that Screwtape cannot conceal Wormwood’s inefficiency and that that is presented to the reader by means of ironical language whose function is only to mock. However, at this level, the reader may notice that it is in Screwtape’s *concealing*, *ignoring* or believing in what the reader has proved inefficient that lie the functions of irony. Hence, when the senior devil *praises* the devils, the reader may infer, from all events of the narrative, *scorn* by the Model Author; although it is early hinted in epigraphs by Luther and Thomas More, the reader may come up with the conclusion that it is not through direct *jokes* or *aggressiveness* that he/she may interpret the *satiric* or *destructive* functions of irony *towards* Screwtape’s own voice – since this would be

impossible –, but, rather, *from* it, that is, through the senior devil's positives towards Our Father Below, devilish efforts and himself: “. . . I am suggesting he has been shown for centuries to be greatly the inferior of Our Father Below” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 2 [2000]); “Your patient, *thanks to Our Father Below*, is a fool” (6, emphasis added); “Ever since Our Father's first great victory . . .” (93); “Our Father hopes in the end to say ‘Mine’ of all things on the more realistic and dynamic ground of conquest” (115); “The real value of the quiet, unobtrusive work which Glubose has been doing for years on this old woman . . .” (88); “. . . more and more complicated theories, fuller and fuller collections of data, richer rewards for researchers who make progress, more and more terrible punishments for those who fail – all this, pursued and accelerated to the very end of time, cannot, surely, fail to succeed” (101); “A very unsatisfactory arrangement, but, I trust, we shall one day learn to do better” (159); “That is not the sort of thing that a nephew should write to his uncle – nor a junior tempter to the under-secretary of a department” (15); “Now that the transformation is complete I recognise it as a periodical phenomenon. . . . Transformation proceeds from within and is a glorious manifestation of that Life Force . . .” (120-21); “The difference is that I am the stronger” (171).

From the signs of the edges of irony in the central target – as well as from the other targets –, the reader may infer that Screwtape's weapon, that is, pretentious scorn, is his mortal sin. As the senior devil believes “the *words* are not offensive”, his satirical tone, in the *Letters*, sounds inviting, yet also cutting (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 13 [2000], emphasis by the author). If the reader accepts such a destructive invitation, he/she may find out that Screwtape's laudatory expressions reveal his double-edged “sword”. In other words: when the reader *reverses* ironic *inversion*, he/she may have ironic functions *destroy* Screwtape himself; and when the reader realises that this is possible because of the senior devil's *twisted* viewpoint, he/she may have Our Father Below, the other devils, and Screwtape appear to be *comical* figures in a *satiric* sense – which the devilish kingdom could not bear. Indeed, the words *are* offensive, even, unintentionally – from Screwtape's viewpoint –, by means of intended praise, and, hence, the words are also comical to the reader in the sense that he/she has recognised the inferior position in which Screwtape is placed. So the reader has finally been able to hit the central target and elicit its ironical functions with the Model Author's arrows, intended to be aimed at the devilish target, which was not intended by Screwtape to be struck.

My final proposal, on the right side of the Figure, is that the ironic inversion of the *Letters* is Aggregative. I have demonstrated that this function lies at the top of Hutcheon's "temperature scale", so its positive and negative charges imply a degree of affection between the author of an ironic work and his/her interpreter. I have also demonstrated that geographic, linguistic and ideological matters contribute to such a proximity – or distance – in an interpretive cooperation, and, when it involves irony, these can be intensified. In this sense, I have located negative charges of the Aggregative function of irony, that is, exclusionary and "in-groups", in an easy place to read; besides, I have not included that of "elitist", given the satiric and religious nature of the *Letters*. Accordingly, positive charges are situated in an almost upside-down position so that some logic is maintained in my analogy in relation to the Assailing function.

A careless reader who does not share the religious values mentioned by Screwtape might infer that this work is *exclusionary*, since it would be exclusive to the religious community of the Church of England. Here, I use the word "careless" because I have pointed out that humour drew non-religious readers' attention to the *Letters* at the time of its publication in *The Guardian*. Indeed, those readers were familiar to religious topics such as the High and Low parties in Anglicanism and expressions from specific books of its liturgy, given the geographic factor – they were from or, at least, lived in the United Kingdom –, yet the *Letters* regarded religion as well as *war*, which seems to involve more than a specific group. That reader might, then, suggest that the English language and contextual knowledge pre-suppose the achievement of some ironical effects by using and referring to specific terms and events. On the religious matter, this careless reader may change his/her mind during his/her interpretive cooperation, since the text offers him/her the means for performing most of the comic effects of irony or, at least, its overall effect, without sharing the values approached. On the matter of historical context, much of this can be inferred from personal knowledge, yet the fictional feature of the narrative guarantees a general comprehension of the events depicted. On the geographic and linguistic matters, I should say that the mere fact that Lewis's work has been translated into various languages – and more than once⁴⁹ –, means that its ironical meanings and effects are

⁴⁹ In Brazil, for example, *The Screwtape Letters* has been translated five times: *Cartas do Inferno* (1964) by Roque Monteiro de Andrade; *As Cartas do Coisa-Ruim* (1982) by Yolanda Steidel Toledo; *Cartas de um Diabo a Seu Aprendiz* (1996) by Mateus Sampaio Soares de Azevedo; *Cartas de um Diabo a Seu*

open to different languages and cultures, even though it might also have (required) the translator to include explanatory footnotes. Thus, negative charges of the Aggregative function of irony – exclusionary and “in-groups – may be possible from a careless or judicious reading – like someone who shoots at the archery target, yet refuses to be instructed by his/her instructor.

Otherwise, the reader who has performed the *Letters* by following the textual – and, optionally, contextual – clues, and who has performed its comic effects may infer that ironic inversion *includes* him/her in its interpretive process to the extent that the work expects him/her to cooperate in order for it – along with irony – to occur. Although a religious or English reader might expect to enjoy a sort of complicity since he/she belongs to a religious community or English nation, these do not prevent him/her from misreading the *Letters* – let us remember that it was an *English priest* who believed them to be erroneous and diabolical. In fact, I have demonstrated the interpretive value in textual clues in its book-formatted edition – epigraphs and fictional preface – and throughout Screwtape’s *Letters*. Hence, religious, English, non-religious and/or foreign readers may infer that such a structuring, ironic inversion *also* functions in order to create “amiable communities” in the performing of the work and its irony. When this is inferred, the reader has already become a Model Reader: which is why he/she can now read these positive charges of the Aggregative function in the archery target, and can therefore enjoy actual complicity, in the sense of a *shared* work of irony.

Finally, I should point out what I believe to be the argumentative values of ironic inversion, which structures *The Screwtape Letters*. As I have located the Assailing and Aggregative functions of irony in such a way that they mirror each other in my archery target, it will be noticed that the satirical and apologetical values in Lewis’s work are dosed by its central target, which is to say, Screwtape. In this sense, the senior devil’s comic figure counterbalances the weight of direct scorn towards the human being as well as the weight of Christian recommendation. So, the reader may laugh at Screwtape and be included for his/her interpretive cooperation, yet he/she may also find a corrective approach in the *Letters*, and, optionally, accept those religious values – elicited through inversion – as true. Thus, the Model Reader of *The Screwtape Letters* cannot be summarised as the *one* reader idealised by C. S. Lewis: it is a diverse

community of readers, mediated by humour, “the all-consoling and . . . the all-excusing, grace of life” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 55 [2000]).

5 CONCLUSION

My aim in the present study has not been to present an exclusive interpretation of irony in *The Screwtape Letters*, but rather to demonstrate a way in which it can be read. That is why I have supported the openness of a literary text which, since it is ironic, becomes doubly inviting and challenging to the reader: because irony describes and evaluates its object through the unsaid; it entertains and corrects while it hurts; it includes as well as excludes; it is complete, yet demands to be complemented in order to exist. Lewis's *Letters* seems to capture these features through a reversed irony, and continues to be effective – in the interpretive sense – despite the contextual elements which were aimed at twentieth-century readers in the midst of war. I have argued that the contemporary reader should follow textual and contextual clues – included in the form of prefaces and notes in book-formatted editions – which provide a *path* for his/her interpretive *movements*. Thus, the reader's destination is that of performing and evaluating the meanings which he/she has raised, and this may imply comical pleasure in engaging with such an affective and cognitive work.

The creative, rational and Christian world of C. S. Lewis allowed him to empathise with his fellow believers and the British people during a time of fear and uncertainty, occasioned by World War II in the 1940s. Whereas Lewis shared his faith on his *Broadcast Talks*, from 1941 to 1944, as a layman and by means of accessible language, in *The Screwtape Letters*, he translated Christian thought into an ironical, devilish worldview, as a creative and articulated fictionist. Indeed, that has drawn the attention of readers – religious and secular, and British and international – and critics ever since 1942. His reversed irony has enabled twentieth-century readers to laugh, hope, and learn about the Christian faith and practise of the Christian community and about their own humanity – from a critical angle.

Critics who have traced and demonstrated other “reading routes” have contributed to my understanding of the *Letters* as a whole, and, hence, to the development and conclusion of the present study. In fact, they confirm the hypothesis that there is more than one way of interpreting and performing Lewis's work. I must highlight Schakel's approach to the *Letters* as an effective satire in the moral and comical sense; the interdisciplinarity between literature and theology, discerned by Chou, in order to elicit the multiple interpretation of irony; the importance of the epistolary form of the work, as stressed by Huttar; and the philosophical means of

learning about humanity through the devilish world, as proposed by Cunningham. These readings have undoubtedly influenced my own, but I have also borne in mind the role of the Model Reader and how he/she is constructed through his/her interpretive walk, which occurs precisely through the interpretation of irony.

The somewhat nebulous Patient can be identified as the representative *human victim* of Screwtape's satire and Wormwood's devilish schemes. As empathy is initiated with the author's placing the Patient in an *inferior position* compared to the supposed superiority of the senior devil, it is expected that the reader will do the same, so that the edges of irony and their possible meanings are effective in terms of affection and (re)cognition; it is in this sense that Lewis's work relates to the tradition of religious satire. On the other hand, since I have pointed out that the value in the *Letters* lies in its being accessible to secular readers, reversed irony and the *devilish essence* of Screwtape offer an unintentional – from the senior devil's perspective –, humorous presentation of humankind and *himself*. I have demonstrated that Screwtape's inability to acknowledge the truth in ignoring or distorting it while satirising the Patient and blaming Wormwood turns irony against him. Hence, Lewis becomes the actual satirist of the *Letters* in a work of double-edged irony which guarantees corrective, apologetical as well as powerful comic effects: although such a "diabolical ventriloquism" seems to have been easily put into words, it could not have been done "with less enjoyment" (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* 180, 183 [2000]).

The reader's interpretive walk through *The Screwtape Letters* as a double satire has been illustrated through an extended toxophilite metaphor in Figure 3. I sought an image which could demonstrate the levels of irony in Lewis's satire, but I came to the obvious conclusion that a series of concentric circles could not illustrate my idea *pragmatically*, since the reader's cooperation would be missing. For this reason, Figure 4 presents an archery *target to be hit*, from its outer ring to its centre – each ring respectively representing the satirical victims, that is, the Patient, the Reader, the Author and Screwtape, to be hit by the reader as he/she follows the instructor's commands. In this interpretive process, the reader becomes Eco's Model Reader while Lewis becomes the Model Author, and Screwtape the central victim of the satire. The reader can thus perform the paradoxical pleasure of irony, which first involves cooperation and harm, and results in laughter.

I have also proposed that the argumentative value in these ironical *Letters* can be evaluated by the reader from the degree of affection between him/her and the

functions of irony – as represented by Hutcheon in Figure 2. The *satirical* and *religious* features in Lewis's work place its irony at the top of Hutcheon's scale, namely, the Assailing and Aggregative functions; since I have applied the analogy of an archery target to these evaluations in the interpretation process, the *edges* of irony enable the reader to evaluate the work's ironical functions in a positive and/or negative sense(s), depending on what he/she hits and from what perspective he/she is aiming. Accordingly, Screwtape's superficial and affective level makes the reader evaluate the ironical functions as *aggressive* and *destructive*, with regard to the Patient, the Reader and the Author; yet, in reversing reversed irony and reaching the cognitive level, the *satirical* and *corrective* functions can be elicited for humorous effects and/or moral purposes. Furthermore, the affective level of irony may suggest, at first, an *exclusionary* approach in *The Letters*, or, in other words, suggest that it may have functioned "*in-groups*" for dealing with Christian themes during World War II Great Britain. However, I have argued that the reader can evaluate the Aggregative function of irony in reverse – on a cognitive level: ironic inversion *includes* non-religious, contemporary and foreign readers in its interpretive cooperation, and creates an "*amiable community*" of readers – foreseen as C. S. Lewis's Model Reader.

In view of this, twentieth-century community of readers of the *Letters* were not more responsive at the time of its initial, weekly publication. Although there were no prefatory clues, Lewis's popularity as a result of his talk show on the BBC, along with his earlier academic and fictional publications, assured his reliability as a committed apologist and should have signalled that his devilish fiction was meant to be ironic. Interpretive cooperation by contemporary readers confirms the enduring power of Lewis's work as a meaningful satire: once empathy during wartime is put aside, *ironic inversion* remains for the reader's interpretation and accomplishment through the unsaid, which underlies the whole *text* and supports satirical, interpretive and/or religious fellowship between Model Author and Reader.

The present research has led me to conclude that irony – particularly ironic inversion – functions as a structuring whole which supports and conveys the satirical and apologetical meanings in *The Screwtape Letters*. Indeed, it becomes a work of literature *when* the reader makes cooperative movements and performs its ironical functions and effects. The continuing enjoyment and use the text provides are some of the consequences of the reader's interpretive response, which may well have been

Lewis's primary concern as a Model Author – in other words, the interplay between irony and the reader.

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