

*Bedeveled: Lewis, Tolkien and the Shadow of Evil*

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## The Inklings on War, Violence and Evil

Can we make sense of war, terror, violence and evil? How do we understand the persistence of these things that so uproot our lives? In Colin Duriez's new book *Bedeveled: Lewis, Tolkien and the Shadow of Evil* the experiences of these authors and others of Inklings fame during World War I are examined in light of their books and stories. These storytellers explore at great depth the reality of pain and suffering in light of their familiarity with total war, and Duriez applies their wisdom to modern manifestations.

"My own experience has been that Lewis's deep roots in what he called 'mere Christianity' helps in understanding both the persistence of conflict and war, with the terror it brings to the innocent, and the havoc that our own wrong choices bring upon us and upon those we love," Duriez said. "Lewis's writings are fully realistic about our spoiled world, yet always lifted up by an equally realistic hope, based upon his Christian faith."

Duriez demonstrates that C. S. Lewis, Tolkien and friends are quite relevant for today's readers, noting that they identified modern warfare as a powerful image of a deeper battle between the good and the bad going on both in society and in ordinary households. Their books and stories, from the *Chronicles of Narnia* to *The Lord of the Rings*, realistically explore the age-old question of good and evil for both children and adults, and demonstrate how Christianity can impact lives for the former.

In addition to the aforementioned series, *Bedeveled* examines classic books including:

- *The Screwtape Letters*
- *Mere Christianity*
- *Leaf by Niggle*
- *The Great Divorce*
- *Till We Have Faces*
- *A Grief Observed*

Duriez is well-equipped to speak on the topic of Lewis, Tolkien and the Inklings given his extensive writing and research on the topic. In 1994 he won the Clyde S. Kilby Award for his research, and he has also appeared as a commentator on the extended-version film DVDs of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and PBS's *The Question of God*, which compared C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud.

"Nobody knows more about the respective canons of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien or their collaborative friendship than Colin Duriez, and he puts his erudition to work in this new volume that explores and elucidates the shadow of evil in their respective literary works," said Bruce L. Edwards, editor of *C. S. Lewis: Life, Works, Legacy* and author of *Not a Tame Lion*, and professor at Bowling Green State University. "Those looking for contemporary insights into the source and problem of evil need look no further than *Bedeveled*."

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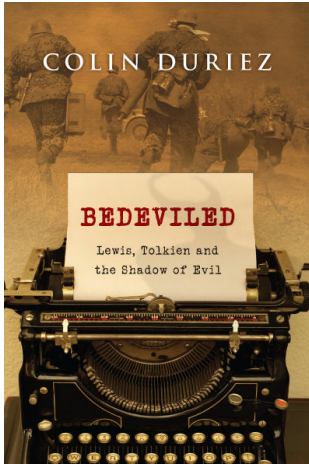
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## The Cosmic Battle

World War II had been running its course for less than a year. Wartime had brought many changes into C. S. Lewis's life, but he valued the normality of attending his local Anglican church. On the Sunday morning of July 21, 1940, he left his home, The Kilns, briskly as usual, for nearby Headington Quarry and Holy Trinity Church. As he walked, the familiar wooded slopes of Shotover Hill were behind him, and he enjoyed the rural quiet. There was the occasional sound of traffic from the main road nearby, inevitable even early on Sunday so close to Oxford.

Just the Friday evening before, Lewis's family doctor, "Humphrey" Havard, had driven up to The Kilns. It was not a medical visit to see him, Mrs. Moore, Maureen her daughter, or one of the evacuee children billeted with them. Havard was also one of his friends from the Inklings. As planned, they tuned in and listened on the radio to a speech by Hitler. The BBC provided a simultaneous translation. A possible answer to a puzzle occurred to Lewis as he listened – how was the German leader so convincing to so many? Though Lewis rarely read the daily newspapers, he of course knew Hitler's claims were grossly untrue. Making what he blatantly called his "final appeal to common sense," Hitler boasted, "It never has been my intention to wage war, but rather to build up a State with a new social order and the finest possible standard of culture."

Hitler's emotive speech may have still tugged at Lewis's mind in the quietness of his church that Sunday. England faced the very real danger of invasion by Hitler's forces, driven and maintained like a machine. The Battle of Britain, one of the deciding battles of the war, had begun – just that very day, nearly two hundred patrols were sent up into the summer skies by the Royal Air Force in response to enemy aircraft threatening Britain. During the church liturgy and bad hymns (as Lewis regarded them) he found his thoughts turning to the master of evil, Satan. Somehow, the arrogant dictator resembled him – not least in the size of his ego and self-centeredness. In the jumble of thoughts jostling with words of a great tradition, it struck Lewis that a war-orientated bureaucracy was a more appropriate image of hell for people ignorant of the past than a traditional one. Here was Hitler bent on taking over and ruling European countries, including England. There was the devil, who had designs to exert his will systematically over all parts of human life, his ultimate aim being dehumanization – the "abolition of man," as Lewis later called it.

Lewis's brother Warren ("Warnie") had been evacuated just a few weeks previously. This was just before many thousands of retreating British soldiers were snatched from the beaches and jetties of the nearest French port of Dunkirk by ships and by boats large and small. Warnie, a retired army major, had been called back the previous year into military service and dispatched to France, which had been partly occupied by German forces. That quiet Sunday afternoon Lewis told Warnie in a letter an idea that would germinate and

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Colin Duriez has taught, written and spoken worldwide on C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien and the Inklings for nearly thirty years. In addition to winning the Clyde S. Kilby Award in 1994 for his research, he has also appeared as a commentator on the extended-version film DVDs of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Peter Jackson, director), PBS's *The Question of God*, which compared C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud, and the Sony DVD *Rings* about Tolkien fandom and the impact of Tolkien on popular culture.

Duriez studied at the University of Istanbul, the University of Ulster (where he was a founding member of the Irish Christian Study Centre) and under Francis Schaeffer at

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grow, and eventually become *The Screwtape Letters*. The idea was for a book containing the correspondence between a senior and a junior devil. It resulted in an important figure in hell's "Lowerarchy" (Screwtape, the senior devil) writing convincingly to Wormwood (the junior devil, Screwtape's nephew) about devilish ways of winning over human beings or keeping them safe in the clutches of his "Father Below." Screwtape in fact would expertly model himself upon his master, the "father of lies," also known as "Our Father Below."

As the book idea developed, C. S. Lewis made the connection between the traditional conflict of good and evil and the imagery of modern warfare, with its terror, apocalyptic weapons and global reach. Lewis had lived through World War I and experienced trench warfare on its front line in France. Some of Lewis's most popular writings on the forces of evil and goodness came into existence in the second global war, with its even more advanced modern weapons of terror.

As Hitler's broadcast made clear, his story of the racial superiority and heroic destiny of his particular nation was compelling to millions of ordinary, contemporary people, despite being a vicious cocktail of lies. While he was listening to it, Lewis felt himself being drawn into its devilish spell. He confessed to Warnie in that letter, which he started writing on the day after the broadcast, "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 a waver just a little. I should be useless as a schoolmaster or a policeman."

Lewis evidently pondered how Hitler's deceptive story, with its carefully crafted plausibility, revealed new things about the ancient nature of evil. The egotistical and self-absorbed leader of Germany fitted well into his own theory of "chronological snobbery." Lewis had been disillusioned with this attitude in the 1920s through the influence of his friend Owen Barfield. Chronological snobbery was his name given to the all-pervasive belief that the modern view of *x* is inevitably superior to past ways of seeing *x*. Older views, to the modern, simply had been left behind by progress.

Then there was the larger vista of war itself, made even more ghastly in its modern forms, such as that present war. World War I had been renamed from "The Great War" because of its total reach. The new war (at that time Lewis called it "the European war") had already dramatically reached in its destruction and desolation more deeply into cities. The new scale of the bombing of civilians made the attacks by zeppelins in World War I tiny in comparison. Lewis's thoughts at this time are not recorded, but their outcome in *The Screwtape Letters* suggest ruminations along these lines in his imagery of hell as a mix of bureaucracy and techniques that might be found in a ruthlessly pragmatic modern business. Tolkien's own similar thoughts, recorded in letters, reveal concerns about the triumph of machinery as a devilish power ("the weapons of Sauron") in World War II. As the Screwtape idea increasingly took flight, Lewis shows evidence of thinking about what modern warfare revealed about the age-old battle for the human soul. In Lewis's humble church in

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# BOOK EXCERPT

L'Abri in Huemoz, Switzerland. His best-known books include *The C. S. Lewis Encyclopedia*, *The Inklings Handbook* (with the late David Porter), *J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis: The Gift of Friendship*, *Tolkien and The Lord of the Rings* and *A Field Guide to Narnia*. Duriez also compiled *The Poetic Bible*, an anthology of English verse from over one thousand years based on the biblical text.

Headington Quarry, in a tranquil Oxford suburb, the talk often was, as it had been for centuries, of a cosmic battle against the world, the flesh and the devil. This tradition of such talk had a powerful reality for Lewis as he responded by standing, sitting and kneeling during the liturgy of that July lunchtime service of Holy Communion, a service as familiar to him as his old slippers waiting for him at home.

The years when Lewis lived through World War I and then World War II provided startling insight into his preoccupation with devilry – the powers of evil – and goodness. His differing experience of the global wars, both unprecedented in history before the twentieth century, represent a quest and a growth in Lewis as thinker, writer and storyteller – and as a person. It now seems natural to us for a book like *The Screwtape Letters* to be begotten during a war that is to us a typically modern, all-out conflict. Many wars now seem to be, in words now common to brave journalists at the scene, “of biblical proportions” or “apocalyptic.” What remains surprising, indeed remarkable, is that Lewis, seemingly without effort, could approach his subject with humor and biting satire, without alienating his readers even today, by diminishing the horror of evil and human suffering.

– Taken from chapter one, “C. S. Lewis in Wartime”