

**THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS**  
**Clock and Spiel Productions Pty Ltd**  
**Bakehouse Theatre**  
Until 22 Apr 2017

Review by [Paige Mulholland](#)

For those who associate C.S Lewis only with lions, witches and wardrobes, "The Screwtape Letters" is entirely unexpected. A brilliant mix of physical, silly comedy and intelligent, witty and thought-provoking dialogue complemented by engaging aesthetics and sound design, "The Screwtape Letters" is stimulating, enjoyable, and will have you thinking twice next time you want to do something a little 'sinful'.

Screwtape is a senior demon who, with the help of his assistant Toadpipe, is trying to guide his young nephew in his first foray into the professional world as a Junior Tempter. The stakes are high – if his nephew Wormwood cannot secure this man's soul to feed his fellow demons, he becomes food himself (and becomes an eternal embarrassment to Screwtape). The story is told entirely in the letters that Screwtape sends to Wormwood, where he advises him that sin doesn't have to be obvious – allowing his charge to slip into gluttony, lust, or even a snippy relationship with his mother could do the trick. "Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick", Screwtape advises, making the audience wonder what small evils their own personal demon would exploit.

Director, Adaptor and Producer Hailey McQueen builds on this idea of 'subtle sin' in all elements of the production – Screwtape seems haughty, Toadpipe seems mischievous, but neither of them seem outright evil, until you delve a little deeper. The dynamic set by Isabella Andronos and catchy musical interludes by Adam Jones work in harmony to create a version of hell that is very different to what we imagine, but entirely immersive. McQueen's adaptation is demanding on the actors – both are onstage, actively performing for the entirety of the 80-minute production – but interesting and varied enough that the audience remains engaged. As the source material is simply a collection of Screwtape's letters, the show could easily have felt too wordy or monotonous, but the injection of slapstick interactions between Toadpipe and Screwtape are the perfect antidote to this.

Yannick Lawry plays Screwtape with a sense of cruelty and anger tempered by refinement, rising to the challenge of a show that, for him, is full of long and challenging monologues. Lawry became tongue-tied once or twice, but was obviously well-rehearsed, and built up an excellent relationship with his foil Toadpipe, played by George Zhao. Zhao's role was equally challenging to Lawry's, but a perfect opposite – full of intricate blocking and physical stunts, but with little dialogue. Zhao's larrikin antics as Toadpipe quickly render him an audience favourite, and gains him plenty of laughs throughout the show.

A well-written adaptation of a piece that is rarely seen in Adelaide, "The Screwtape Letters" is a must-see – say no to the devil on your shoulder telling you to stay home and drink wine, and come see it (after all, you can always drink the wine another night).