

ABSTRACT

Imagining the Present: Perception, Form and Beauty in the novels of G.K. Chesterton

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This dissertation argues that encounters with the beauty of being stand at the heart of Chesterton's novels; through his characters' ability to imaginatively encounter the forms around them, Chesterton's fiction offers visions of both the splendor of being shining through phenomenal forms and the enraptured responses which attend such visions. The real literary achievement of Chesterton's novels lies in the transformation of characters through the imagination as it leads those characters to encounter both the particular forms of the world and the depths of being to which those forms are translucent.

This reading of Chesterton's novels is grounded in von Balthasar's account of theological aesthetics and form. As his characters see anew the particular forms which surround them, they encounter the depths of being present within those forms. Von Balthasar's linking of being and form requires that an account of Chesterton's fiction must address the presence of beauty, a term not readily found in the existing criticism. If Chesterton's characters are repeatedly moved by the being revealed through particular forms, this encounter and response takes place under the aegis of the beautiful.

Chapter one provides a general introduction to the project. Chapter two situates Chesterton's novels in the contexts of medieval aesthetics, *nouvelle theologie*, and modernist epiphany. Chapter three provides an account of the peculiar form of the novels especially with regard to characterization and time. Recognizing the place of beauty in the novels explains their episodic structure and fixity of character. Within these strange narrative structures, the imaginative encounter with beauty takes three distinct forms. Each of the final three chapters is dedicated to exploring one particular mode of imagination as it appears in Chesterton's novels. Thus, chapter four investigates the perceptive imagination as a tool for making the familiar strange in *Manalive*. Chapter five examines the imagination of limits in *The Flying Inn* and *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. Finally, chapter six considers the empathetic imagination of Gabriel Gale in *The Poet and the Lunatics* and Sunday in *The Man Who Was Thursday* and the charity to which it leads those characters.

Imagining the Present: Perception, Form, and Beauty in the Novels of G.K. Chesterton

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For Wendy
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In the preface to his recent, much acclaimed biography of Chesterton, Ian Ker offers a judgment of Chesterton's fiction which is as damning as it is brief: "I have passed more or less rapidly over Chesterton's fiction, apart from *The Man Who Was Thursday* and the Father Brown stories, neither of which suffers from Chesterton's admitted inability to bring alive his fictional characters as more than simply mouthpieces for ideas and points of view" (xi-xii). In answer to this commonplace critique of Chesterton's fiction, this dissertation argues that encounters with the beauty of being stand at the heart of Chesterton's novels; through his characters' ability to imaginatively encounter the forms around them, Chesterton's fiction offers visions of both the splendor of being shining through phenomenal forms and the enraptured responses which attend such visions. The real literary achievement of Chesterton's novels lies in the transformation of characters through the imagination as it leads them to encounter both the particular forms of the world and the depths of being to which those forms are translucent.

This reading of Chesterton's novels is grounded in Hans Urs von Balthasar's account of theological aesthetics and form. In the introduction to his seven volume work, *The Glory of the Lord*, von Balthasar notes that "The witness borne by Being becomes untrustworthy for the person who can longer read the language of beauty" (19). I argue that Chesterton's fiction is directly concerned with the "witness borne by Being." As his characters see anew the particular forms which surround them, they encounter the depths

of being present within those forms. Given this interplay between being and form, von Balthasar's claim requires that an account of Chesterton's fiction must address the presence of beauty, a term not readily found in the existing criticism. If Chesterton's characters are repeatedly moved by the being revealed through particular forms, this encounter and response takes place under the aegis of the beautiful.

Precise definition of beauty is notoriously difficult, yet von Balthasar offers a basic vocabulary. The figure of what is seen, the object itself, provides the first grounds for beauty, according to von Balthasar: "Those words which attempt to convey the beautiful gravitate, first of all, toward the mystery of form (*Gestalt*) or of figure (*Gebilde*). *Formosus* ('beautiful') comes from *forma* ('shape') and *speciosus* ('comely') from *species* ('likeness')" (19). Form alone, however, cannot account for the presence of the beautiful; indeed to ask the question of form is "to raise the question of the 'great radiance from within' which transforms *species* into *speciosa*: the question of *splendor* (19-20). This relationship between form and radiance gives rise to Thomas's definition of beauty as the *splendor formae*. Thus von Balthasar argues that in encountering beauty "We are confronted simultaneously with both the figure and that which shines forth from the figure, making it into a worthy, love-worthy thing" (20). David Bentley Hart's observations about beauty serve to deepen and expand this definition of beauty in ways which bear directly on this dissertation. Hart argues that beauty is (1) objective, (2) the true form of distance, (3) evocative of desire, and (4) able to cross boundaries (17-21). These four points undergird my examination of beauty in Chesterton's fiction.

Although the language of the beautiful has not often been applied to Chesterton's fiction, much that appears mysterious or puzzling in his work is clarified by

acknowledging its place in his work. Recognizing the presence of beauty in Chesterton's novels explains the energetic, indeed almost ecstatic responses, of the characters who come to renewed perception of being. Von Balthasar insists that rapture at the splendor which breaks through form, at the *splendor formae* in St. Thomas's terms, comprises a constituent element of the experience of the beautiful: "the encounter of these [*species* and *lumen*] is characterized by the two moments of beholding and of being enraptured" (10). Everywhere we find Chesterton's characters moved to this rapture through their vision of the beautiful. Innocent Smith throws himself into loving the home which God has given him and doing "all things however wild in praise of it," and Adam Wayne defends his beloved Pump Street even unto death in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (*Manalive* 109). These wild antics give Chesterton's fiction its rollicking, celebratory tones, but they also serve as moments of invitation. In the praise which their encounters with beauty elicit, Chesterton's protagonists extend their imaginative vision to their fellow characters, inviting others to witness with them the splendor of form. By the end of *Manalive*, most of the inhabitants of Beacon House have become men and women thoroughly alive, and Adam Wayne convinces not only the residents of Pump Street of the beauty of their home but also persuades all the other London boroughs of their own dignity and worth. Nor does this encounter with being end solely in praise and appreciation. Instead, through their encounter with beauty characters are drawn into participation; through the complimentary actions of defense and charity, they respond to the vision of the *splendor formae*.

Beholding these forms of being is a function of the imagination in Chesterton's novels. Von Balthasar declares that in order to read the form aright "One must possess a

spiritual eye capable of perceiving the forms of existence with awe” (24). For Chesterton, the imagination functions as this “spiritual eye”; through their imaginations his characters begin to see truly the forms around them. The imagination provides a mode of encountering the world; it is a perceptive rather than a creative enterprise. The imagination helps to right faulty vision of the world by recognizing the strangeness inherent in the forms around them.

Chesterton establishes the basic tenets of this project of restoring perception through making the familiar strange in *The Defendant*, his first published collection of essays. In his introduction to the collection Chesterton imagines a mountain valley filled with boulders as the site of some pre-historic stoning of a gigantic prophet. He then speculates about the terrible heresy for which the prophet must have been stoned:

If we weigh the matter in the faultless scales of imagination, if we see what is the real trend of humanity, we shall feel it most probable that he was stoned for saying that the grass was green and that the birds sang in the spring; for the mission of all the prophets from the beginning has not been so much the pointing out of heavens or hells as primarily the pointing out of the earth. (12)

Here the “faultless scales of imagination” are synonymous with proper vision of “real trend of humanity” and that trend is to consistently misperceive the world. “For the mind and eyes of the average man,” Chesterton claims further on in *The Defendant’s* introduction, “this world is as lost as Eden and as sunken as Atlantis” (12). The imagination, then, wakes one up to the world; by making familiar forms appear strange it shocks characters into awareness, helping characters to see the world aright. Thus, Auberon Quinn in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* after seeing the coat-tails of his friends 999 times sees them for the 1,000 time and is suddenly struck by a vision not of coat-tails but of dragons: “Two black dragons were walking backwards in front of him . . . The

eyes which he saw were, in truth, only the buttons at the back of a frock-coat . . . The slit between the tails was the nose-line of the monster: whenever the tails flapped in the winter wind the dragons licked their lips” (8). This vision provides Auberon with something of the truth of Barker’s and Lambert’s souls; afterwards he can only see these two men from behind as black dragons with blind eyes, a revealing description given their future participation in the greed-driven assault on Notting Hill. The revelation also opens Auberon’s eyes to perception of the world around him: “He had scarcely noticed the weather before, but with the four dead eyes glaring at him he looked round and realized the strange dead day” (9).

This renewed vision is always a vision of particular and quotidian things. Chesterton’s characters are struck by individual objects: coat-tails, an iron railing, a lamp post; their restored vision of the world is an awareness of and appreciation for individual forms and the being which those forms mediate. Thus Chesterton argues in a 1912 essay, “Wonder and the Wooden Post” that “All my mental doors open outwards into a world I have not made. My last door of liberty opens upon a world of sun and solid things, of objective adventures. The post in the garden; the thing I could neither create nor expect: strong plain daylight on stiff upstanding wood: it is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes” (*The Coloured Lands* 164). The “solid things” upon which Chesterton’s vision gazes not only convince him of their own existence but they point toward their own gratuity and dependent reality. Properly seen, objects in Chesterton’s fiction become transparent to the being which sustains and hold them in existence, the “Lord’s doing”. Imagination not only truly sees the form but also the splendor of being which shines through the form. Thus, Auberon Quinn not only sees with renewed eyes the

winter's day around him and the various objects of a London street, but the forms themselves communicate a strange kind of light: "The light there is on such a day seems not so much to come from the clear heavens as to be a phosphorescence clinging to the shapes themselves" (9). Here the handsome cabs and the lamps posts are illuminated from within. Now that his imagination is at work properly and perceiving the forms of the world around him, Auberon appreciates the light which pours through such forms. And he is moved to respond with wild praise by getting his hair cut: "I keep on having my hair cut, but it keeps on growing again," he says as he rushes to a nearby barber in ritual celebration of the strange but wonderful world he finds himself in (9). An encounter with the beautiful leads Auberon not only to praise but also to response and engagement in the world, even if this response takes the odd form of a haircut.

The central importance of the encounter with beauty has been ignored in Chesterton criticism which, except for a few exceptions such as *The Man Who Was Thursday*, has relegated the fiction to secondary status. Thus Ker's objective is to point out that, considered as a literary author, Chesterton is a minor and passing figure; as a social and literary critic, however, Chesterton is clearly Newman's "successor," comparable to the other great Victorian "non-fiction prose writers, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Arnold" (viii). Ker offers his dismissal of Chesterton's fiction so directly and succinctly the reader is tempted to simply take his appraisal as accepted fact and move on. That such a sweeping condemnation of Chesterton's fiction can be made so easily reflects the real lack of serious studies of his fiction. Apart from *The Man Who Was Thursday* Chesterton's fiction has not received widespread notice among literary critics generally, and although Chesterton scholars may pick and choose among the novels and short

stories for particular pieces to support their explorations of Chesterton's philosophical, theological, or social thought, sustained treatment of the novels as novels remains largely unattempted. There are few champions in the field, then, to challenge Ker's assertion. Nor is Ker alone in his condemnation of Chesterton's fiction; Hugh Kenner makes the same accusation in his otherwise excellent study *Paradox in Chesterton*.

Surprisingly enough, the one major study that does deal exclusively with Chesterton's fiction, addresses Ker and Kenner's complaint directly¹. Ian Boyd's *Art and Propoganda: The Novels of G.K. Chesterton* argues that Chesterton's fiction lies in a largely uncharted middle ground somewhere between art and propaganda:

In fact they [the novels] do not lend themselves to an easy description, for they are works which are a curious blend of literature and propaganda. Their meaning is certainly political and social, but it is usually expressed through the imaginative pattern which each of them reveals. And although they can easily be related to his social and political philosophy, very frequently they qualify it with unexpected and independent nuances of their own. Without fulfilling precisely the definition of any of the terms, they may be described as political fables, parables, and allegories, or more simply and conveniently as novels. But whatever name one gives them, they invite inquiry. For they stand in the strange and largely unexplored borderline region of Chestertonian studies which lies between art and propaganda, in which meaning is shaped and expressed by imagination and in which fiction is used as a means of accomplishing the twofold education task which Chesterton called "training the mind of men to act upon the community" and "making the mind a source of creation and critical action." (5-6)

This response begins to answer Ker's sweeping dismissal. Boyd presents the complex way in which Chesterton's political themes are refracted through the prism of fiction.

Rather than characters who are simply cardboard mouthpieces for various social

¹ Alison Milbank's *The Fantasy of the Real: Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians* (2007) and Ralph Wood's *Chesterton: The Nightmare Goodness of God* (2011) both deal extensively with Chesterton's fiction; however, neither study is focused directly on Chesterton's fiction as such.

arguments, Boyd acknowledges that Chesterton's novels resist easy definitions and reflect on the way in which art can both educate and inspire to action. However, Boyd's reading of Chesterton's novels is in the end still driven primarily by political concerns. The final value of Chesterton's work lies, for Boyd, in the political realm, however nuanced by fiction G.K.C's approach to that realm may be. This kind of socio-political analysis is certainly a fruitful and valuable way of reading Chesterton's novels. However, such politically directed readings do not account for the central radiance of beauty in the fiction, a radiance which characters first apprehend through the imagination.

Chapter two demonstrates the way in which analogical vision of the beautiful stands at the heart of Chesterton's fiction. The presence of beauty marks the very structure of Chesterton's novels; thus, in chapter three I provide an account of the peculiar form of the novels especially with regard to characterization and time. Recognizing the place of beauty in the novels explains their episodic structure and enthusiasm of character. Within these strange narrative structures, the imaginative encounter with beauty takes three distinct forms. I identify three major kinds of this perceiving imagination, each of which leads to a particular kind of enraptured response. Each of the final three chapters is dedicated to exploring one particular mode of imagination as it appears in Chesterton's novels. These three kinds of imagination and their resultant responses are linked to each other: the defamiliarized vision which calls forth praise leads to a recognition of the particular value of the limited form and the willingness to defend it; in turn, by recognizing the value of their own particular circumstances, characters are able to imagine the lives of others and act with charity toward their neighbors. Thus, chapter four investigates the perceptive imagination as a

tool for making the familiar strange in *Manalive* and the resulting praise which it draws forth. Chapter five examines the imagination of limits in *The Flying Inn* and *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and the militant defense of the local which it produces. Finally, chapter six considers the empathetic imagination of Gabriel Gale in *The Poet and the Lunatics* and Sunday in *The Man Who Was Thursday* and the charity to which it leads those characters.

This account of imagination, form, and beauty in Chesterton's novels challenges Ker's assertion that Chesterton's literary contribution is insignificant and passing and that his sole value is as a social and literary critic. Ignoring the role of beauty in Chesterton's novels has led to readings, such as Ker's, which see the novels merely as propaganda, even if propaganda for the right cause. This sort of reading bears out von Balthasar's claim that without the beautiful the good is no longer attractive and the true is no longer convincing: "If the *verum* lacks that *splendor* which for Thomas is the distinctive mark of the beautiful, then the knowledge of truth remains both pragmatic and formalistic," and "if the *bonum* lacks that *voluptas* which for Augustine is the mark of its beauty, then the relationship to the good remains both utilitarian and hedonistic" (147). This has often been the case in some critics' approaches to Chesterton's novels; failing to observe the central place of beauty in his work, they have often found dry proofs which do not convince and brilliant paradoxes that illuminate nothing. Recognizing, however, the beauty which lies at the center of Chesterton's novels renders the particular visions of the novels engaging and persuasive. The novels provide a compelling account of the imagination as it encounters form and the depths of being form reveals. This engagement with beauty invites readers into the dual moments of beholding and being enraptured. At

the heart of Chesterton's work as a novelist lies a splendor which brings his characters to encounters with the beauty of being. Such an encounter is also an invitation to participation, a participation which moves from encounter with the beautiful through praise to defense and charity.

CHAPTER TWO

Splendour Formae: Beauty in Chesterton's Novels

At the back of our brains, so to speak, there was a forgotten blaze or burst of astonishment at our own existence. The object of the artistic and spiritual life was to dig for this submerged sunrise of wonder; so that a man sitting in a chair might suddenly understand that he was actually alive, and be happy.

—G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography*

This chapter argues that encounters with the beautiful lie at the heart of Chesterton's novels. While critics have praised Chesterton's intuitive grasp of being, the role of the beautiful in disclosing that being has been ignored. However, beauty best describes the central radiance in Chesterton's novels through which characters both realize the wonder of the world around them and are drawn into participation in that world revealed by their vision. This focus on moments of revelation situates Chesterton's work within the larger literary and theological contexts of epiphany as the term is employed in both Romantic and Modernist discourses. However, Chesterton's particular brand of the epiphanic is neither clearly Romantic nor clearly Modern according to the taxonomy laid out by Charles Taylor.¹ Unlike Romantic epiphany, Chesterton clearly and consistently distinguishes between the divine and the created. Likewise, although epiphany invites formation of the self in both modern writers and Chesterton, where modernist characters discover in these manifestations of being the ground for resistance and autonomy, Chesterton's characters are invited into participation. The invitation

¹ In brief, Taylor defines Romantic epiphany as characterized by the revelation of being in Nature and modernist epiphany as the directed toward the realization of the self in order to resist reductive Enlightenment rationalism (456-493). This definition will be considered more fully later in this chapter.

which the beautiful offers is grounded in Chesterton's understanding of being, analogy, and creation and his proto-confession of the *nouvelle* theologians' insistence on the always already graced quality of the world. Through the *splendor formae*, particular objects in Chesterton's fiction both disclose their own beauty and figure forth the divine glory which irradiates them.

Chesterton occupies a contentious place within the twentieth-century canon of English literature. In death as in life, his reputation has proved controversial and varied. Damned by George Orwell as a talented writer who suppressed his "intellectual honesty in the cause of Roman Catholic propaganda" ("Great is Diana of the Ephesians" 102), and praised but relegated to a by-gone time by Evelyn Waugh ("*The Man Who Was Thursday*" 74), Chesterton was deemed irrelevant by many after World War Two. Indeed, by 1947, eleven years after Chesterton's death, Marshall McLuhan observed that Chesterton's popularity was on the wane with young readers, even Catholic ones ("Introduction" xi). In the years since these first comments, response to Chesterton has generally settled into two camps which Ralph Wood has identified as the "uncritical enthusiasts" who laud Chesterton as a cure-all for the various ills of modernity and the skeptics who find the gigantic man from Beaconsfield "thoroughly illiberal" (*Chesterton* 3). Alan Blackstock notes the same division when he divides response to Chesterton into two camps: those who attack him for "excessive optimism, slovenly scholarship, and stylistic theatricality" and those who defend him from such charges (3). Among his champions, Chesterton has enjoyed something of a renaissance in recent years, while those who find Chesterton's religious, social, and political thought repulsive—like the late Christopher Hitchens, who spent his final months completing a vitriolic article on the

English journalist for *The Atlantic*—continue to attack what they find to be the threatening substance behind Chesterton’s playful exterior of paradox and wit. Yet all of this praise and damnation centers around Chesterton’s social and political thought. His work as a novelist and poet is often passed over or examined merely as another specimen of his social commentary, brilliant rhetoric, and general *bonhomie*.

In addition to the primary attention paid to his political and social thought, the cause of Chesterton’s uncertain place in English literature lies partly in the fact that he is remarkably hard to categorize. Not only did he write fiction, poetry, and drama but also biography and criticism at a high level in addition to all his apologetic and historical work, and all of this creative and critical work occurred on top of the daily output of the journalist who wrote over 4,000 articles and essays (Ahlquist 15). Beyond the sheer variety and bulk of Chesterton’s corpus, the years of his literary life—roughly 1900 to 1936—span the Edwardian period, World War One, the advent of literary modernism, and the growing shadow of Nazism. Given the time of his emergence as a literary figure and the atmosphere of his fiction-making, he has naturally been grouped with other Edwardian writers. He does share many of the major Edwardian critiques of empire, materialism, and economic disparity, which Randall Stevenson notes are central themes of the period (13-21). Yet Chesterton’s agreement with his Edwardian contemporaries on these matters is marked by startling differences.² For instance, although Chesterton’s

² The difficulty of categorizing Chesterton and his fiction lies partly in the Edwardian cultural upheaval. John Coates traces both the general social transformation which occurred during the Edwardian period and Chesterton’s particular response in *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis*. Coates documents Chesterton’s shift in the first decade of the twentieth century from prodding a society apathetic about thinking deeply to warning against the new flood of ideologies which were sweeping over England without resistance (27).

critique of empire and the second Boer War was strident, this censure is not accompanied by suspicion of the simple stories of adventure and heroism which marked the work of other Edwardian writers such as Ford Madox Ford (Stevenson 14-15). Quite the opposite, Chesterton celebrates penny dreadfuls as productive of the right sort of patriotism and loyalty. Especially in his early years, Chesterton found himself in the awkward position of fitting nowhere in the intellectual or political landscape. Indeed that Chesterton, who grew increasingly dissatisfied with the Liberal Party in the first decade of the century, does not fit nicely into established Edwardian political camps is certainly a corollary fact to his literary peculiarities. For Chesterton's fiction too demonstrates a marked difference from many of his contemporaries. *The Ball and the Cross* and *The Flying Inn* certainly share similarities with H.G. Wells' *Tono-Bungay* as novels analyzing the condition of England, even if they come to quite different conclusions. All three novels present encounters with a wide range of social classes and problems, yet the wild adventures of Chesterton's heroes across the length and breadth of England contrast sharply with Wells' careful and detailed catalogue of English society. In Chesterton's novels the adventures are at the heart of the story, whereas even in the final flight of escape in *Tono-Bungay*, Wells' narrator suppresses excitement and romance.

Likewise, Chesterton's fiction in the first years of the twentieth century bears remarkable similarities to work in the same period by early modernist writers such as E.M. Forster and Joseph Conrad. *Manalive* takes up the same theme as E.M. Forster's *Howards End*: the importance of place, especially the home, for living fully in an increasingly alienated society. But Innocent Smith's practices of burgling his own house and repeatedly eloping with his own wife demonstrate a radical difference in method to

Margaret Schlegel's calm reflections and quiet assumption of Mrs. Wilcox's spiritual inheritance. Perhaps Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* provide the most striking instance of this simultaneous similarity and difference. Published within one year of each other, both novels consider a group of anarchist dynamiters who turn out not to be terrorists at all except for one exception: the Professor in Conrad's novel and Lucian Gregory in Chesterton's. Yet the conclusions of each novel could not be more different in either tone or form. While Ossipon slowly goes mad in light of the newspaper's final conclusion that "An impenetrable mystery seems destined to hang for ever" over Winne Verloc's suicide (224), the Pan-God-Christ figure of Sunday organizes a cosmic masquerade, hears the accusations of his celestial Council of Days, and finally reveals a glory which knocks Syme, the protagonist, unconscious. Chesterton's fiction then, much like the man himself, occupies a strange borderland. At once comparable to other major British writers of the first decade of the twentieth century, Chesterton remains significantly different.

In light of Chesterton's uneasy position among the Edwardians, I propose that Chesterton's fiction is also helpfully read against modernist writers such as Joyce and Woolf; indeed this linking is hinted at by the comparison of Chesterton with Forster and Conrad. This might at first appear a rather strained claim: if the form of Chesterton's fiction sometimes differs from his Edwardian counterparts, it is a polar opposite from the interior-focused, fragmented, stream of consciousness work of Joyce and Woolf. Moreover, Chesterton vehemently disagreed with these later contemporaries and

repeatedly bemoaned the turn toward the self and the consciousness in modern fiction.³ Yet, despite their differences in method, Chesterton's novels explore many of the same questions as the modernists regarding perception, reality, and the formation of the self. Nowhere is this similarity more evident or important than in the concept of epiphany which is central to both Joyce and Chesterton.

Epiphany in Joyce and Chesterton

In his penetrating book *Paradox in Chesterton*, Hugh Kenner makes the startling claim that Chesterton's proper place is alongside Blake and Joyce as the three greatest practitioners of the cosmic imagination in English literature (135). What leads Kenner to link these three writers is their "detached and philosophical perception" worked out primarily in the genre of myth (135). Blake, Joyce, and Chesterton, Kenner argues, offer at the center of their imaginings the form of the "gigantic man," who represents the cosmos as a whole, and thus the "magnitude" of scale establishes their work as myth (135). Given the striking differences in the style of their fiction—much less the moral, spiritual, and political content of their writing—such comparison between Chesterton and Joyce seems strange at first, and this perhaps accounts for the fact that few critics have followed Kenner's observation in linking the two writers. Yet consideration of their fiction reveals that, in addition to their shared cosmic imaginations Chesterton and Joyce demonstrate another key similarity related to the first.

³ Chesterton particularly complains against the interior focus of the modernists in his novel *The Return of Don Quixote*; chapter three will take up his complaints in detail.

They share a deep interest in the visionary moment, the sudden epiphany which discloses the being of things.⁴ Stephen Daedalus's epiphanic moment as he looks out at the woman bathing in the sea finds corollaries everywhere in Chesterton's fiction. Just as Stephen is transported to ecstatic joy in his silent encounter with the woman, so too Professor Green is transfixed by a vision of the milkmaid in *Tales of the Long Bow* which grants him an energy and determination similar to Stephen's. Their cosmic imaginations are accompanied by, or perhaps developed in response to, the epiphany, the sudden manifestation of being.

Moreover, linking Joyce and Chesterton through their common interest in epiphany not only places Chesterton's fiction in dialogue with modernist concerns, it also serves as Chesterton's point of departure from modernist aesthetics.⁵ While the epiphanic is at the heart of Chesterton's writing, those epiphanies offer an invitation to

⁴ Defining what is meant by the "being of things" will be one of the burdens of the chapter. For Joyce, as we shall see, this being is that which is present in the sudden apprehension of *quidditas* through epiphany. Chesterton offers a deeper and more nuanced understanding of being which will be explored at length; suffice it for the moment to say with Gilson that "to the Christian mind the physical world in which we live offers a face which is the reverse of physicalism itself, a face where all that was read on the one side in terms of force, energy, and law, is now read on the other in terms of participations and analogies of the divine Being" (*Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* 100).

⁵ Likewise, Chesterton's fiction shares similarities with Virginia Woolf's moments of transcendence such as Clarissa Dalloway's party and Mrs. Ramsay's dinner where moments in time suddenly blossom into expansive spaces. Indeed, James Wood argues that Woolf's concern with impressions and the conscious stems from her interest in discovering these moments of encounter; "she has a metaphysician's interest in impressions" (102). This interest, he claims, disassociates her from Pater and pure Post-Impressionism and locates behind and at the heart of all her work concern for being (even if neither she nor Wood use that term). This "metaphysician's interest in impressions" could function as a good definition of Chesterton's artistic approach, although he would use the word "perception" rather than "impression," a telling difference which reveals the similarity and difference between Chesterton and modernists such as Joyce and Woolf.

participation in being rather providing a site for the formation of an autonomous self. For both Joyce and Chesterton epiphany discloses a reality which addresses the subject, but in Joyce's case this address forms the ground from which the subject can define himself in distinction to the revelation whereas for Chesterton the epiphanic address enables characters to enter into that which they have seen.

In her recent study *Literary Epiphany in the Novel, 1850-1950: Constellations of the Soul*, Sharon Kim details the history of epiphany in Joyce studies and argues for an attention to the place of being in epiphany in addition to the usual focus on time as the governing factor in epiphanic experience. Although epiphany has become a standard term in literary criticism, Kim notes that the literary genealogy of the term—often located in Wordsworth's spots of time—is particularly chronological in focus (2, 6). In contrast, she focuses on epiphany as a “form of being,” a revelation of the *quidditas* of an object which in both its mode of non-threatening address and gratuity of presence invites questions of “spirituality” even as Joyce expressly resists Christian and supernatural contexts for the term (3).⁶

Epiphany is, thus, a contentious term for both Joyce and Joyce scholars. While epiphany is clearly the focus of Joyce's early work, particularly the fragmentary *Stephen Hero*, he distances himself from the term in later years. In his typology of literary epiphany, Wim Tigges observes that, while Joyce was certainly not the first to take an interest in epiphany, he stands as the central promulgator for critical discourse on epiphany (12). In *Stephen Hero*, Stephen overhears a conversation which “made him

⁶ Morris Beja points out that in *Stephen Hero* Joyce describes epiphany both as a “moment” and as a “manifestation” (708), a fact which makes credible both Kim's focus on being and previous critics' focus on the temporal aspect of epiphany.

think of collecting many such moments together in a book of epiphanies. By epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phrase of the mind itself” (211). In illustration of his point, Stephen points out the clock in the Ballast Office as “capable of an epiphany” if seen properly: “I will pass it time after time, allude to it, refer to it, catch a glimpse of it. It is only an item in the catalogue of Dublin’s street furniture. Then all at once I see it and I know at once what it is: epiphany” (211).⁷ In this definition epiphany concerns the “manifestation” of quotidian objects; this manifestation occasions a kind of vision which imparts knowledge regarding the being of the object.

Joyce’s concept of epiphany as presented in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Stephen Hero* derives directly from Aquinas’s consideration of beauty (Kim 31-36). This link is made directly in *Stephen Hero* where Stephen’s reflections on epiphany lead him to his aesthetic theory (Beja 708). In *Portrait*, Stephen, in his discussion with Lynch, explicitly refers to Aquinas’s definition of the beautiful as that which possesses wholeness, harmony, and clarity (212).⁸ In this discussion, Stephen focuses on *claritas* as “the scholastic *quidditas*, the *whatness* of a thing.” It is this “instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image is apprehended luminously by the mind which has arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony” (*Portrait* 213) that *Stephen Hero* defines as *claritas*, “the moment I call epiphany” (213).

⁷ Chesterton voices a nearly identical understanding the revelatory quality of apparently insignificant objects when the narrator of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* declares that a man who has seen something for the thousandth time is in danger of seeing it for the first time (8).

⁸ Aquinas’s definition of beauty will be considered at length later in this chapter.

This understanding of epiphany and beauty has direct implications for the formation of self. Objects reveal their radiance only as the mind properly perceives them; likewise, given Aquinas's understanding of the *adequatio* of the knower to the known, *claritas* forms the subject. Thus Kim notes that "what is seen in epiphany makes a subject of the one who sees it" (37). Yet for Joyce the self that is formed is one of resistance to coercion (Kim 36-37). Kim demonstrates this fact by referring to the beginning of *Portrait* and Mr. Vance's attempt to threaten young Stephen with his awful rhyme of "Apologise, / Pull out his eyes," an episode listed as number one in Joyce's book of epiphanies (36). Stephen's epiphany becomes a mode of rebellion; he turns the subjection of Mr. Vance into art, transforming the threatening bird imagery into his own symbol for artistic freedom (Kim 37). This employment of epiphanic vision for resistance underwrites Stephen's final artistic declaration and rejection of the Church: "I will not serve" (*Portrait* 239). Indeed, Kim argues that despite the differences in their understanding of epiphany, Joyce joins Heidegger, another key modern proponent of the epiphanic, in this shared this common of epiphany as the source of the formation of the resisting self; in their work aesthetics becomes a "mode of resistance" (Kim 38, 45).

In the penultimate chapter of *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor argues that this epiphanic approach to art stands at the heart of modernism (456). In building on the Romantic interest in epiphany as the revelation of being in nature, Taylor claims that "modernist" artists look into and beyond the self for the epiphanies which will provide a ground from which to resist the rationalized mechanistic understanding of both nature and the self as promulgated by the Enlightenment (456-63). In so doing, modernist art takes up a form of "indirect" epiphany where that which is revealed lies beyond the

particular form of the object or rather in between the object and the self, in the space opened up by the epiphanic frame (469, 479). Thus it stands in distinction from Romantic epiphany which “(1) show[s] some reality to be (2) an expression of something which is (3) an unambiguously good moral source. Framing or indirect epiphanies negate (2); they are not expressions of anything [. . .] [Or] in which the feature negated is (3)” (Taylor 479). On Kim’s reading, Joyce’s epiphanies clearly partake in this indirect epiphany. Joyce’s epiphany number one—“apologise / Pull out his eyes”—is not clearly an expression of any particular object or power and certainly not of an “unambiguously good moral source.” Yet somehow Stephen transmutes Mr. Vance’s eye-plucking eagles into an image of his own artistic freedom as a bird, as Daedalus, “soaring out of his captivity on osierwoven wings” (*Portrait* 225). The epiphanic frame provides the space in which Stephen can realize his freedom, a freedom conceived fundamentally as a rejection of the familial, cultural, and religious demands made upon him. Stephen’s epiphanies are essentially indirect; they look into the self to discover the grounds for resisting modernity.

Although the rest of this chapter will demonstrate that in Chesterton’s work epiphanies reveal reality as an expression of an “unambiguously good moral source,” that work is not merely a reiteration of a purely Romantic understanding of epiphany. Taylor points out that the “philosophy of nature as source” was central to all the various strands of “Romanticism” (368). If we take a commonly held view of Romanticism as a rejection of classical norms and a focus on “the rights of the individual, of the imagination, and of feeling” then, Taylor claims, “[Romanticism’s] relation to the philosophies of nature as a source can be clearly stated. This notion of an inner voice or

impulse, the idea that we find the truth within us, and in particular in our feelings—these were the crucial justifying concepts of the Romantic rebellion in its various forms” (368-69). Chesterton particularly despised all such tendencies toward inner illumination and trust in the self; “of all conceivable forms of enlightenment,” he writes in *Orthodoxy*, “the worst is [. . .] the Inner Light. Of all horrible religions the most horrible is the worship of the god within” (81). This is not to say that Chesterton didn’t accept the conscience or the affections as real and guiding internal faculties. What he could not stand was the privileging of such interior life over the external world. Chesterton recognized that without external reference elevation of private interior feeling quickly devolved into egotistical self-indulgence: “That Jones shall worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones” (*Orthodoxy* 81). Nor did Chesterton accept the Romantic view of nature as source; like the selfish bent of the inner light, when elevated as the prime site of the divine, nature quickly becomes twisted: “the only objection to Natural Religion is that it somehow always becomes unnatural” (*Orthodoxy* 82). Chesterton’s whole explanation in *St. Francis of Assisi* of the decay of the classical world and the triumph of Christianity is founded upon this conviction (11-30). In this sense, despite his other demonstrably Romantic tendencies, Chesterton is fundamentally anti-Romantic. Chesterton refuses to regard nature as source, but he also affirms that epiphany reveals an “unambiguously good moral source;” his use of epiphany then is neither clearly Romantic nor modern in Taylor’s charting of the term. Instead he offers an understanding of epiphany centered on the Christian theory of analogical participation.

Like Joyce, Chesterton is interested in the sudden revelation of being which epiphany discloses. Yet rather than providing a site for the formation of an autonomous,

resisting self, epiphany for Chesterton offers an invitation. The revelation of the beautiful is always an address to the self, an offer of identity, but an identity of participation rather than alienation. This participation, however, is not finally participation in the natural or in Nature as the Romantics understood it, even when that Nature is located as the site of the divine. Von Balthasar reflects on this Romantic conflation of Nature and God when he critiques Herder, Chateaubriand, and Gugler for failing to sufficiently distinguish between revelation and creation; Romantic theology unreflectively assumed the unity of Nature and God in such a way that, von Balthasar argues, it presented an “aesthetic and religious monism” (102). Chesterton’s work, however, preserves the distinction between the divine and the created orders while simultaneously presenting the indwelling of the grace in the midst of the quotidian and the way in which the created order draws characters up into the divine.

Chesterton’s characters find themselves caught up in and transformed by the manifestation of the beautiful, but this transformation preserves individuality while leading the characters into transcendence. According to von Balthasar’s definition, the beautiful both preserves form while transporting the person ever deeper into the divine; in David Bentley Hart’s terms, the finite participates in the infinite without destruction (von Balthasar 116, Hart 21). With this turn to von Balthasar and Hart, we have moved to the realm of theological aesthetics. Unlike Joyce, Chesterton’s theory of epiphany is grounded in a theological framework which reads even the familiar objects of the world as sites of divine presence. In his study of Joycean epiphany, Morris Beja defines an incongruity of vision as central to the epiphanic experience; epiphany in Joyce’s work is a “sudden spiritual manifestation, whether from some object, scene, event, or memorable

phase of the mind—the manifestation being out of proportion to the significance or strictly logical relevance of whatever produces it” (719). Working from the Christian doctrine of creation, however, Chesterton’s epiphanies are actually in proportion to the significance of the objects; the manifestations disclose the divine glory which irradiates every form.

Being and Analogy: Chesterton’s intuitive Nouvelle Théologie

Among the critics who are favorably disposed toward the self-titled jongleur de dieu of Beaconsfield, there is a general consensus that his most significant achievement lies in his apparently effortless understanding, appreciation, and presentation of being. Hugh Kenner provides perhaps the best introduction to this aspect of Chesterton’s thought in his marvelous and succinct 1947 study, *Paradox in Chesterton*. Kenner demonstrates that at the core of Chesterton’s vision lies his metaphysical “intuition of being,” a perception of the “is” of the world and an understanding of analogy and paradox as the proper tools for communicating such perception (1, 6). In order to explicate Chesterton’s use of these tools, Kenner relies on St. Thomas’s understanding of both being and analogy because Chesterton’s mode of perception was naturally Thomistic, since he possessed an intuitive perception of these terms according to Thomistic definitions (6). It was this natural affinity that enabled Chesterton to write without extensive study or research his biography of St. Thomas, a biography that Etienne Gilson called “without possible comparison the best book ever written on St. Thomas” (“Review” 510). Indeed, long before he was Catholic or even confessedly Christian, in the first stages of his own youthful philosophy in response to pessimism through his faith in the “mystical minimum of gratitude” for existence, Chesterton notes

that he “would have been amazed to know how near in some ways was my Anything to the *Ens* of St. Thomas Aquinas” (*Autobiography* 99, 150). This “*Ens*” is Thomas’s formulation for the existence of things, the being of which we are naturally aware. Chesterton likens Thomas’s claim to that of a child looking out a window at a green lawn. Where various modern epistemologies would deny either true vision of the lawn or the real mind of the child, Chesterton argues that Thomas “says emphatically that the child is aware of *Ens*. Long before he knows that grass is grass, or self is self, he knows that something is something. Perhaps it would be best to say very emphatically (with a blow on the table), ‘There *is* an Is” (*St. Thomas* 138). Aidan Nichols labels this conviction on the part of both Chesterton and Thomas “metaphysical realism,” a result of both a commonsense epistemology and the doctrine of creation which declares the cosmos to be properly ordered and intelligible (57).⁹ When Kenner and others laud Chesterton’s intuition of being they mean the foundational sense of the “thisness” of things. This praise of Chesterton’s treatment of being via Thomistic categories has been carried forth by other Chesterton critics, most recently Alison Milbank in *The Fantasy of the Real: Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians* (2007) and Aidan Nichols in *G.K. Chesterton: Theologian* (2009).

Moreover, this metaphysical realism recognizes that “being is intrinsically analogical” (Kenner 27). Milbank notes that this means for Chesterton that “the created nature of the world renders it both related to God as its origin yet separated from its

⁹ This metaphysical realism is not unique to Chesterton and Aquinas. Etienne Gilson observes that it is a basic feature of Christian reflection: “every Christian thinker,” he claims, is a “realist, if not by definition, [then] at least by a sort of vocation” because “in a Christian universe, the object of knowledge is of such a nature as to be capable of supporting a realist epistemology” (*Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* 229).

Creator by its contingency” (12). The being of every thing stands in analogical relation to being itself. I am using analogy here in the sense of the *analogia entis* defined by Hart as a

shorthand for the tradition of Christian metaphysics that, developing from the time of the New Testament through the patristic and medieval periods, succeeded in uniting a metaphysics of participation to the biblical doctrine of creation, within the framework of trinitarian dogma, and in so doing made it possible to contemplate both the utter difference of being from beings and the nature of true transcendence. (241)

On this account, God and creation are not subsumed under the larger category of being, but being itself is made site of difference between God and creation (Hart 241-42). In her treatment of Christ, form, and the imagination, Francesca Aran Murphy defines this “realistic metaphysics” as founded upon the “analogizing of being,” the movement between God and creatures, Being and being (12). This is, Gilson observes, a direct result of the doctrine of creation in which God gives being to the world:

If then, as the idea of creation implies, the Christian universe is an effect of God, it must of necessity be an analogue of God. No more, however, than an analogue, for when we compare being *per se* with the being caused even in its very existence, we are dealing with two orders of being not to be added together nor subtracted; they are in all rigour incommensurable, and that is also why they are compossible. (*The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* 95-96)

The strict incommensurable nature of being *per se* and being of created things is central to this analogical account. Hart is very clear that this *analogia entis* offers neither univocal nor equivocal understandings of being; it does not participate in the totalizing metaphysics of either “negation” or “identity” (243). Instead, Hart argues that in order to understand the analogy “One should begin from the recognition that God is the being of all things, beyond all finite determination, negation, and dialectic not as the infinite ‘naught’ against which all things are set off (for this is still dialectical and so finite), but

as the infinite plenitude of the transcendent act in which all determinacy participates” (242). The analogy of being is possible because it is only within being *per se* that particular being is possible.

One practical result of the universe’s divine analogate is to locate the foundation for theological reflection in the sensible world. If all that is participates analogically in the divine life, then even the stuff of everyday life points towards that participation. Although the ascent of the soul may end in the beatific vision, it begins with the material data of experience. Chesterton’s intuitive perception of this fact leads him to recognize its centrality in St. Thomas’s thought: “the motto of the Mystics has always been, ‘Taste and see.’ Now St. Thomas also began by saying, ‘Taste and see’; but he said it of the first rudimentary impressions of the human animal. [. . .] It might be said that the Thomist begins with something like the solid taste of an apple, and afterwards deduces a divine life for the intellect” (*St. Thomas* 52). This method lies at the heart of Chesterton’s own preference for beginning his arguments from the most common objects: a piece of chalk, his hat, the chair in the corner.

This analogical understanding also highlights the ways in which the created order is closely connected to the divine. In his 1905 book *Heretics*, Chesterton claims that the spiritual is inextricably linked to the whole of human life: “Take away the Nicene Creed and similar things, and you do some strange wrong to the sellers of sausages. Take away the strange beauty of the saints, and what has remained to us is the far stranger ugliness of Wandsworth. Take away the supernatural, and what remains is the unnatural” (99). This is a theologically loaded statement. Chesterton recognizes that through the Creation and the Incarnation the supernatural both undergirds all of existence and provides the

natural order with an end beyond itself. This claim about the supernatural and the unnatural means that the universe is bursting at the seams with the divine; humdrum objects such as lamp posts, pillar boxes, and coat tails can sweep the unsuspecting viewer up into an ecstatic experience of transcendence in the blink of an eye. Indeed, Chesterton's heroes are constantly caught up in these bursts of illumination.

Chesterton's intuitive sense of the gratuity of being and the way in which the natural world is always already shot through with the supernatural puts Chesterton in intellectual company with the *nouvelle* theologians, a fact Ralph Wood notes in his recent study of Chesterton (*Chesterton* 9). Jurgen Mettepenningen's *Nouvelle Théologie* provides an excellent history of this movement which had such an impact on the Catholic Church in the twentieth century. Mettepenningen lists four phases of development in the *nouvelle théologie*: (1) a Thomistic *ressourcement* initiated chiefly by the French Dominicans such as Chenu and Charlier, (2) a broader patristic and historical *ressourcement* lead by French Jesuits such as Danielou and de Lubac, (3) internationalization of the *nouvelle theologie* through von Balthasar (German) and Schoonberger (Dutch), and finally (4), Vatican II's sanctioning and promulgation of *nouvelle theologie*'s concerns (32-37).¹⁰ Mettepenningen observes that the core vision of all the *nouvelle* theologians was to restore contact between theology and life and to renew contact with the sources of faith— patristic, biblical, and liturgical (141).

At the heart of these projects was a disagreement with the dominant neo-Thomism of the early twentieth century, produced partly in response to Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*,

¹⁰ Mettepenningen acknowledges that defining the term *nouvelle théologie* is fraught with problems; he provides a careful explication of the risks associated with attempting some unified definition and a justification for his use of the term (3-13).

which tended to regard the orders of grace and nature as distinctly separate spheres.¹¹ This separation, often described as layer cake theology, risked dividing the two orders so completely as to render each irrelevant to the other. This attempt led to the consideration of *natura pura*, a speculation about a hypothetical order of nature prior to the infusion of grace. The *nouvelle* theologians realized that such an approach was not only theologically problematic, but it also created a troubling distance between philosophical and theological reflection on the one hand and the lived experience of faith on the other. Indeed, Chesterton's early suspicion that a purely natural understanding of the cosmos produces unnatural results—"take away the supernatural and what remains is the unnatural"—constitutes a kind of proto-*nouvelle* confession of the problems with the *natura pura* hypothesis. Grouping Chesterton with the *nouvelle théologie* provides a theological framework for approaching his work, especially his fiction, which is so closely concerned with this interrelation between the created and the divine.

Perhaps the best way of introducing this central problem of the natural/supernatural is by way of French philosopher Maurice Blondel (1861-1949) who provided much of the foundation for the *nouvelle théologie* in his philosophical consideration of the relationship between grace and nature.

¹¹ For a fascinating insider's perspective on both the theological issues and the personalities surrounding this issue and the history of twentieth century Catholic theology, particularly in France, see *Letters of Etienne Gilson to Henri de Lubac*, especially letters 1, 2, 4, and 9.

Blondel's argument that philosophy demonstrates its own need for revelation and grace strikes at the heart of the carefully divided realms of the natural and supernatural as laid down by the manual tradition of neo-scholasticism.¹² In *The Letter on Apologetics*, Blondel attacks the idea of parallelism between nature and the supernatural. Not only is the final convergence of nature and grace problematic if they are considered parallel, but the preparation of nature for grace and the lack in the order of nature apart from revelation are both inexplicable on the dualist theory. Nature has no lack which the supernatural can fulfill, and the supernatural finds no ready or receptive ground within the natural order. Instead of this parallelism, Blondel imagines philosophy like the Pantheon in Rome which has a hole instead of a keystone in the center of the ceiling through which sunlight enters the building. Philosophy is erected around a central lack; though it must build up to supernatural, it finally remains dark unless the light of grace illuminates it. The claims of the supernatural necessitate this incomplete structure of nature and philosophy; for Christianity is not an addition to nature: men cannot simply ignore the supernatural and remain neutral. The supernatural makes particular demands on "man simply as man," Blondel argues (155). The supernatural is simultaneously "indispensable" and "inaccessible" to the natural order (161). Blondel is careful to clarify that this apparent necessity of the supernatural is not an ontological necessity but a

¹² Despite claims by his critics that he had trespassed onto the grounds of theology in his exploration of the supernatural, Blondel consistently claimed a purely philosophical approach for himself. He regarded consideration of the supernatural as proper to natural reason because such reason must finally come up against its own insufficiency. Philosophy legitimately explores all the questions which confront human experience; however, it is finally unable to comment positively on the supernatural as such. Philosophy must always be clearing the space into which revelation can enter, but philosophy, by itself, can never understand or comment on that which fills the need it has outlined other than to determine whether it does actually fill the requirements it has discovered. Thus, reason itself reveals its own incompleteness.

fact of experience, necessary in that each person simply by thought and action must encounter this problem of the supernatural.

This attack on the separation of nature and supernature forms Blondel's most significant impact on *nouvelle théologie*.¹³ Certainly for Henri de Lubac, Blondel's rejection of *monophorism* proved foundational. According to de Lubac's *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, the philosopher from Aix was the first to persuasively confront a theological and philosophical tradition which regarded grace and nature as intellectual oil and water. Even though Blondel was not a theologian and did not draw on the tradition of the Greek and Latin Fathers to refute the extrinsicist position, he still definitively challenged the Western dualism of nature/supernature (*Brief Catechesis* 37). De Lubac locates Blondel's achievement in his argument that an "intelligible

¹³ The *nouvelle* theologians drew from many facets of Blondel's work. Perhaps most obviously, they took up his claim in *L'action* that philosophy must be grounded in and account for action, the real decisions of human life. Transferring this fundamental insight to their theological contexts, *nouvelle théologie* insisted that theology was essentially lacking if did not consider the realm of human action. Jurgen Mettepenningen argues that the "core vision" of all the various *nouvelle* theologians was to "restore contact between theology and living faith" (141). De Lubac, particularly, drew on Blondel's emphasis that theology must address the person as he actually exists not as he might have existed on some hypothesis of *natura pura*. This focus on the real situation in which man must act forms a basic assumption of de Lubac's argument in *The Mystery of the Supernatural*. He notes that the question of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural and the relation of theology to life are connected. During the centuries where the idea of *natura pura* was coming to dominance, theology was consider as a science of "conclusions" which used Revelation as a starting point from which to generate its conclusions (4). However, de Lubac argues, pointing out the interconnected relationship between grace and nature has led to an increased focus on the living encounter with Revelation and its implications for action. Blondel evidences this pattern by linking his action with his reflections on the relationship between nature and grace. Blondel also laid important groundwork for the *ressourcement* project of *nouvelle théologie*, particularly in his *History and Dogma*. While Blondel advocates the importance of history, he is careful to distinguish not only the errors of the dominant extrinsicism but also the problems with an unguarded historicism which elevates history to be both jury and judge to the exclusion of any supernatural considerations.

relationship” exists between the two orders; the supernatural is not some kind of *addition* to the human nature but a *transformation* of human nature (49). Blondel claims that grace does not destroy or replace nature but comes to dwell within—*in nobis* but never *ex nobis* (49). Thus, while the natural and supernatural are two distinct orders, they are also essentially connected, and Blondel was concerned to point out the terms of their relationship were as important as their distinction (49).

This interconnected quality of the supernatural and natural orders is implicit, and many times explicit, in all of Chesterton’s work; indeed it lies at the heart of his apprehension of being. Because the natural is everywhere imbued with the supernatural, every object becomes a potential channel of grace, an opportunity for an encounter with the divine. Indeed, for one of Chesterton’s characters, Evan MacIan, the natural world is so thoroughly intertwined with the supernatural that as a child he is aware of the realm of grace before he recognizes the natural world around him:

he understood the supernatural before he understood the natural. He had looked at dim angels standing knee-deep in the grass before he had looked at the grass. He knew that Our Lady’s robes were blue before he knew the wild roses round her feet were red. The deeper his memory plunged into the dark house of childhood the nearer and nearer he came to things that cannot be named. All though his life he thought of the daylight world as a sort of divine debris, the broken remainder of his first vision. (*The Ball and the Cross* 15)

Here the natural world is thoroughly saturated with the order of grace; indeed for MacIan the world is unknowable apart from supernatural, the very grass and flowers are “divine debris,” fragments of the life of grace which irradiates the cosmos. An “intelligible relationship” between the created and the divine lies at heart of MacIan’s vision; here is no superadded grace laid over the top of the natural but an infusion of grace which both preserves difference and allows for participation.

Splendour Formae

Despite the richness of MacIain's vision of grace and the created order, the lauding of Chesterton's intuition of being is not particularly concerned with his fiction; Kenner and others find the same perception at work in Chesterton's journalism and his apologetics as they do in his fiction. At best, Chesterton's fiction becomes simply another arena for Chesterton to display his brilliant wit and paradox, and appreciation of Chesterton's treatment of being is often accompanied by criticism of his art. Many critics who have carefully attended to his work have praised Chesterton the metaphysician and censured Chesterton the artist. Thus Kenner claims that Chesterton's real contribution is to the realm of thought rather than art: "He is plainly not a great literary artist . . . His perceptions were metaphysical rather than aesthetic: they never fathered creative fusion. One might almost say that they were too comprehensive and vivid to be fused" (1-2). Marshall McLuhan goes even further in his introduction to Kenner's book: "In a word, Chesterton was not a poet . . . He was a metaphysical moralist" (xxi). Unlike McLuhan, Kenner does not discount Chesterton's art completely:

If he cannot practice art in its major sense, as creation, he practices it constantly in its broader sense, as making; and what he makes is never trivial: it is always geared to his extraordinary metaphysical perception. Here, in this less intense form of aesthetic activity, if he is not great he is sane. (2)

Kenner is certainly right to locate Chesterton's chief contribution in his perception of the world, a perception which instinctively recognized the reality and gratuity of existence. This observation accords with Milbank's claim in comparing Chesterton and Tolkien that "for Chesterton [. . .] establishing the marvelous or transcendent *realism* of objects is the central aim, for Tolkien it is their *independence*" (39). Kenner's definition of art favors

the Tolkienien approach. And perhaps such sub-creative *poesis* is a greater art than Chesterton's perceptive realism. Yet, it seems strange to claim that this perception is not aesthetic because it is too comprehensive and vivid, as both Kenner and McLuhan do. It is a strange definition of art which disqualifies the artist whose defining characteristic is to see the world with remarkable clarity.

Regardless, this approach to Chesterton which separates the metaphysician from the artist runs a grave risk of missing the corollary intuition which accompanies Chesterton's realization of being—that is, the realization that being is beautiful. Praising Chesterton's insight into being, critics have overlooked the centrality of aesthetics to Chesterton's vision of the world. I am using aesthetics here in the subordinate sense defined by Armand Maurer where, as a transcendental property of being, beauty falls within the field of ontology, and thus aesthetics “understood as the study of sensible beauty and its perception, is a part of the ontology of beauty” (34).¹⁴ Kenner and McLuhan err in separating metaphysics from aesthetics in their consideration of Chesterton's fiction; in fact it is precisely in Chesterton's fiction that metaphysics and aesthetics are supremely fused.¹⁵ The link between metaphysics and aesthetics is most

¹⁴ Maurer notes that this Thomistic appropriation of term “aesthetics” militates against the original delineation of the term by Baumgarten to include only questions of “sense perception” (33).

¹⁵ For a succinct overview of the development of the field of aesthetics since its inception by Baumgarten see the first chapter of Oleg Bychkov's *Aesthetic Revelation: Reading Ancient and Medieval Texts after Hans Urs von Balthasar*. After a broad survey of aesthetics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Bychkov concludes that the two dominant and pervasive features of the aesthetic are (1) a concern with sense experience and (2) the a “direct intuition or insight” into what is, that is “aesthetic experience [. . .] seems to ‘reveal’ something and point beyond itself, or transcends itself, and it does this immediately, without reasoning or concept, and without involving any practical interest” (46-49).

evident in his novels which best articulate the place of beauty in the apprehension of being. At the heart of Chesterton's perception of the world is a perception of beauty, an attention to aesthetics not in distinction to metaphysical insights but as a central element of metaphysical perception. The "being" of things which Chesterton so readily intuits, according to Kenner, Nichols, and others, is also a perception of the beauty of things. Chesterton's vision is quintessentially concerned with the beautiful.

This linking of beauty and being, aesthetics and metaphysics, provides the key for understanding Chesterton's fiction. However, most critics have overlooked the presence of beauty in his work and have thus misunderstood the import and importance of his fiction.¹⁶ In the introduction to *The Glory of the Lord* von Balthasar notes that "The witness borne by Being becomes untrustworthy for the person who can no longer read the language of beauty" (19). Given that Chesterton is most praised for recognizing the "witness borne by Being," disregarding the place of beauty in his fiction is a perilous error. In fact, for the characters in Chesterton's fiction, it is peculiarly the encounter with being as mediated by beauty which proves transformational.

In order to demonstrate the centrality of beauty in Chesterton's novels, some reflection on beauty and the beautiful is necessary. At the very beginning of *The Glory of the Lord* von Balthasar considers where to begin his study, what first word he can lead with, a word "broad enough to foster and include all words to follow, and clear enough to penetrate all the others with its light" (17). The word he settles on is "beauty," and he soon follows this decision by noting the two chief features of beauty which arise

¹⁶ Let me be clear that I am considering beauty *in* Chesterton's fiction rather than the beauty *of* Chesterton's fiction. A secondary effect of demonstrating the place of beauty in Chesterton's fiction may be to render his fiction more artistically compelling; such an effect, however, is not my primary aim.

immediately upon reflection: *forma* and the *splendour* which radiates from the *forma*. In choosing to begin an account of beauty in this way, von Balthasar follows St. Thomas's definition of beauty as the *splendour formae*. A brief consideration of the place of beauty in Thomas's thought, particularly of the nature of form, is necessary in order to establish the foundation from which von Balthasar works in elucidating the importance of form as it relates to beauty.

The concept of beauty occupies an elusive place within Thomas's work; he rarely reflects directly on beauty or the beautiful. Yet Armand Maurer notes that despite lack of formal attention, comments about beauty occur throughout his works (7). In his seminal study, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, Umberto Eco notes that the subject of "the beauty of being" was a common *topos* for medieval thinkers (17). He traces both the classical elements of this theme inherited from the neo-Platonists and the Christian transmutation of those elements to consider the beauty of God's actions of Creation and Redemption. Dionysius the Areopagite's *De Divinis Nominibus* stands at the heart of this tradition as the generative text for medieval commentary on beauty (Eco 18). For Dionysius it was the "flashing forth" of Divine Beauty which both created and illuminated the cosmos:

But the Superessential Beautiful is called 'Beauty' because of that quality which It imparts to all things severally according to their nature, and because It is the Cause of the harmony and splendour in all things, flashing forth upon them all, like light, the beautifying communications of Its originating ray; and because It summons all things to fare unto Itself (from whence It hath the name of 'Fairness'), and because It draws all things together in a state of mutual interpenetration. (Dionysius, qtd. in Eco 18)

Here we already find an understanding of beauty as both splendor (the "flashing forth") as well as form (the quality given to each thing according to the kind of thing it is). Nor

is it surprising that Thomas speaks most directly about beauty in his commentary on Dionysius. In response to Dionysius' reflection on Divine Beauty, Thomas observes that beauty is the "cause of harmony and splendour in all things" because "beauty is the participation of the first cause which makes all beautiful things beautiful: for the beauty of the creature is nothing other than the similitude of the divine Beauty participated in things" (qtd. in Marsh 359). This is so because "every form through which a thing has esse, is a certain participation of the divine brightness; and this is what he adds, that singulars are beautiful according to a proper notion, i.e., according to a proper form; whence it is apparent that from the divine beauty the esse of all things is derived" (qtd. in Marsh 361). Just as all being participates analogically in the divine, so too do all forms derive their proportions and harmonies from divine beauty.

Nor does divine beauty provide only the form of all things; it is also the ground of their existence. Along with truth and goodness, beauty is a transcendental mode of being, what Gilson calls the "modes of being *qua* being" (*Arts of the Beautiful* 22). Because beauty is a transcendental, it "accompan[ies] being wherever it is found, so that every being is beautiful insofar as it exists" (Maurer 34). Thus beauty participates in both the form and the being of all created things. This is why, as Maurer notes, Thomas defines the beautiful as the *formositas actualitatis*: "Beauty is the actuality of resplendent form, and also the actuality of existence, which is the supreme actuality because it is the act even of form" (Maurer 7, 40). Beauty holds a central place then in the analogical account of being as it is the visible working out of existence through form, the evidence of both particular beings and their connection to the divine.

These considerations of beauty focus on the beautiful as such; yet the beautiful is known through experience and encounter. Indeed, this moment of encounter is the subject of this dissertation. If the *formositatis actualitatis* describes the actuality of beauty, then the other chief medieval definition of the beautiful as *id quod visum placet* addresses beauty in relation to human perception. Both Gilson and Eco note that the kind of vision and pleasure referenced here describe a kind of disinterested delight in the object rather than a possessive desire (Eco 72, *Arts of the Beautiful* 24). It is this disinterested quality which distinguishes beauty from the desire to possess and retain which accompanies knowledge of the good (Maurer 35). Moreover, delight in the beautiful is a result of the intellect reflecting upon the sensible; as the intellect examines the information furnished by the senses it recognizes the integrity, harmony, and clarity of form and responds with delight. Eco downplays the role of both the senses and the sensible in this process, arguing that for Thomas knowledge of the beautiful resides only in the intellect through its ability to synthesize the particulars of sense experience and therefore recognize and delight in the form of the whole (71-73). Maurer notes, however, that as knowledge of the sensible world is connatural to the human mind, so the beauty of the sensible world is likewise connatural (32). Although the intellect may provide the crowning realization of beauty it accomplishes this through fully recognizing what is already present, even if dimly, in the senses; thus, “Beauty for St. Thomas is both intelligible and sensible” (Maurer 34-36).¹⁷ Indeed, Maurer argues that while in encountering sensible beauty the intellect relies upon the senses in a unique way:

¹⁷ Thomas observes that the appreciation of sensible beauty is unique to humans in the created order (*Summa* I, 91, 3, ad 3m).

The beautiful object, with its radiance of form, proportion, and wholeness, is presented to the intelligence, not through a concept, but through the intuition of the senses both external and internal. In the aesthetic attitude toward things the sensible intuition, especially of sight and hearing, is the formal means by which the aesthetic experience takes place; just as in the cognitive attitude the concept is the formal means whereby understanding is accomplished. In the aesthetic experience the intellectual apprehension of the beautiful remains so closely tied up with the intuition of the senses that the intellect does not form an abstract concept of the object or reason about it. (37-38)

The *visum* therefore is the result of the collaboration of both the senses and the intellect in a way which resists abstraction and privileges the immediacy of the sensible.¹⁸ The human experience of the beautiful is the recognition in the intellect of form rightly ordered and yet perceived in such a way as to retain the particularity and power of the senses.

This Thomistic account of beauty in which form and being participate analogically in divine beauty provides the foundation for von Balthasar's treatment of theological aesthetics.¹⁹ It is on this account of beauty that Balthasar makes his claim that "The witness borne by Being becomes untrustworthy for the person who can longer read the language of beauty" (19), for it is through the medium of form, through the

¹⁸ This is directly counter to Eco's claim that intuition has no place in Thomas's account of the perception of beauty (72). Moreover, Maurer notes that in addition to the external senses, the internal senses such as the imagination play an important role perceiving sensible beauty.

¹⁹ Moving directly from St. Thomas to von Balthasar requires skipping over many centuries of reflection on beauty and aesthetic experience, most notably Kant's treatment of the sublime in his *Critique of Judgment*. For a full treatment of Kant and his modern inheritors see Hart's *The Beauty of the Infinite*, especially pgs. 44-52. Francesca Aran Murphy briefly summarizes Kant's break with the broad patristic and medieval sense of being and beauty as a rejection of "the reciprocity between God and the world" (30). Von Balthasar also provides a survey of theological aesthetics from the Reformation onward; he finds in every case either an irreconcilable gap between Christ's beauty and the human experience of the beautiful or an uncritical conflation of the beauty of nature with the beauty of the divine.

integrity, harmony, and clarity of forms, that being is perceived. However, despite the importance of form for Thomistic and medieval aesthetics, von Balthasar argues the question of form has been insufficiently attended to in both Catholic and Protestant theology since the Reformation. Von Balthasar critiques modern theological aesthetics for either reducing discussion of form, particularly Christ's form, the form of revelation, to merely human standards or advocating a total disjunction between the form of Christ and the world such that there can be no proportion or understanding between them(44-114). Von Balthasar sets out to discover a theological aesthetics which can harmonize these two competing movements. He wishes to develop a theory of form and beauty which grounds itself in Revelation and yet can still engage and encounter the human experience of the beautiful. To do this, von Balthasar follows Thomas and begins with a definition of form which is necessarily both the "real presence of depth" and "a real pointing beyond itself to these depths" (116). The form presents being and that presentation leads us deeper into the infinity of being.

Central to this argument about form leading into the infinite of being lies an understanding of difference as a positive aspect, indeed a key component of beauty. David Bentley Hart observes that beauty is the "true form of distance" (18). Given the doctrine of creation "the distance of creation from God and every distance within creation belong originally to an interval of appraisal and approbation, the distance of delight" (18). Hart argues that beauty is the "true form," the "grammar" of distance (18). In the context of beauty, form both reveals itself and points beyond itself, and both the revealed form and the difference opened up in this disclosure are beautiful.

Yet, with regard to theology form is peculiar in that the new light which Christ brings both illuminates the form and “breaks forth” from within the form itself (von Balthasar 117). For this reason, von Balthasar argues, Christ’s radiance cannot simply be greater in a quantitative sense than human aesthetics; the irruption of his glory into human existence is simultaneously a new form and the light by which we see his form. However, we are not addressed in total mystery; we are still able to see the light of Christ; his radiance sustains comparison and analogy. It is only through God’s revelation of himself in history that we can begin to approach and know his beauty, a unique beauty capable of including even death and hell, and yet we must never simply equate his appearance with his beauty nor attempt to abandon his appearing and move solely to himself. In von Balthasar’s words, the journey to God must employ a “*theologia negativa*” always based on the “*theologia positiva*” of knowing God visibly (121).

For von Balthasar, the revelation of Christ’s form provides the key to any theological aesthetics. If the luminosity of form is superlative in its ability to reveal the depths of being, then the form of the Incarnation as the presence and presentation of God himself must clearly be definitive and determinative for all forms. Indeed the visible form of Christ is the locus of all theology, the central evidence from which shines the glory of God. For God must communicate himself through some form to creatures; pure communication between our “interiority” and God’s is impossible; however, we find ourselves always already in communication through the created world of forms (420). Indeed, it is the form of the world which Christ perfects according to von Balthasar, as the world becomes the temple which “harbours within and above itself” the glory of God (421). Christ then is secondarily the perfection of the form of the world. The form of

Christ is first and foremost the visible appearance of the triune God, not a limited appearing of a formless infinity but the “appearance of an infinitely determined super-form,” not an image separate from that which is imaged but a “hypostatic” union between “archetype and image” (422).

Given the unique form of Christ, worldly measures of beauty and form cannot be applied to him. Any attempt to do so founders at the foot of the cross. Christ can be “measured only by himself,” and by this von Balthasar means only by his internal harmonies (456). Yet Christ’s form does not prevent or dissolve all other human forms. Even if he first must be measured by himself, a second movement out to the world and a comparison of the Incarnation with the world remains possible for von Balthasar. However, to make such a secondary movement requires a firm grasp of the fact of Christ as the measure and the impossibility of applying any human measure to Christ.

Finally, it is form itself which provides the means of God’s revelation to man, for between the finite and the infinite there is no proportion (467). This is the case in all non-Christian mysticism, according to von Balthasar, where finally the infinite and identical destroy finitude and particularity (467). In Christianity, however, the appearance of God occurs within the form; not his form as he is in himself but as a “concealed epiphany of the thing itself in the medium of the relationship between God and creature” (468). It is this presence in form that underlies Hart’s claim that “Christian thought, uniquely, must think the beautiful and the infinite together” (21). The Incarnation makes the particular the ground for moving into the infinite. In Hart’s terms, beauty “crosses boundaries,” moving freely between otherwise impassable distances, especially that of the infinite and finite (21). Thus, for von Balthasar, form is the crux of

God's interaction with man. In the intelligibility of form lies the possibility of our journey into God, a journey in which we must both plunge into the depths of being which the form reveals while also holding onto the form as our certain guide into those depths.

The Beauty of Form in Chesterton's Novels

Von Balthasar's definition of form corresponds directly with Chesterton's depiction of the epiphanic encounter with the beauty of being in his novels. Chesterton himself loved the particularity of objects, appreciating each form's ability to be itself. In a letter to Francis during their engagement, Chesterton claimed "I do not think there is anyone who takes quite such a fierce pleasure in things being themselves as I do. The startling wetness of water excites and intoxicates me: the fieriness of fire, the steeliness of steel, the unutterable muddiness of mud" (qtd. in *Return to Chesterton* 108-09). This delight in individual things appears throughout Chesterton's fiction; through their epiphanies in response to individual forms his characters come to realize the being which undergirds existence, and these freshly realized forms of existence always communicate to Chesterton's characters both the "real presence of depth" and are also a "a real pointing beyond [themselves] to these depths." In the quotidian objects of experience, Chesterton's characters repeatedly discover the depth of being and are led upward through those depths to the divine by way of the particular forms of their first encounter. Their divine ascent always remains grounded in the "theologia positiva" of knowing God visibly through individual objects, places, and people. Thus, for Innocent Smith caring for his lamp-post and his hedge become the site of his worship and service to God.

Nor are these objects simply symbols whose content is irrelevant or to be abandoned after heaven is achieved. In response to Lois Hara's repetition of his

grandmother's faith that "we are all in exile" and "no earthly house could cure the holy homesickness that forbids us rest," Smith replies that she is right but that "God has given us the love of special places" in order that we resist worshipping eternity, the "largest of the idols—the mightiest of the rivals of God" (*Manalive* 108-09). Smith fervently denies that the exact form, even down to color, of his lamp-post and the hedge are irrelevant:

I mean [. . .] that if there be a house for me in heaven it will either have a green lamp-post and a hedge or something quite as positive and personal as a green lamp-post and a hedge. I mean that God bade me love one spot and serve it, and do all things however wild in praise of it, so that this one spot might be a witness against all the infinities and sophistries, that Paradise is somewhere and not anywhere, is something and not anything. And I would not be so very much surprised if the house in heaven had a real green lamp-post after all. (109)

These particular objects, the form of his domestic life, connect Innocent to the divine; he may always be homesick for heaven in this world, but heaven will be populated with the things he has been given to love in this world, those things lead him upward into God in a way which does not do violence to their own form. This is Chesterton's iteration in fiction of von Balthasar's theological observation that a Christian understanding of form retains particularity and individuality in the face of the infinite. All of Chesterton's wild and grotesque flights of imagination, all of his methods for startling characters into renewed perception, the *telos* of all his epiphanies is grounded upon and ordered to this vision of the depths of being presented by individual forms, the *splendor formae*.

Nor in his praise for the common forms of the world does Chesterton ignore Christological form and its radical implications for understanding beauty. His Christmas poems demonstrate the transformative effect of the Incarnation in his thought. His "Christmas Rhyme" traces Christ's life and work as a fulfillment of a natural order which left to itself grows weary of motherhood, wine, and even death. In light of Christ's

Incarnation the poem concludes “We bid a blessing down / On milk and blood and wine. All huge and humble things we bless” for “there are no things human left, / But those he made divine” (*Collected Works* 10: 129). Here the form of Christ proves definitive for all human pleasure and beauty; apart from the work of the Christ and our participation in that work lies only the “unnatural” to use Chesterton’s term from *Heretics* (99).

Chesterton also takes up the question of Christological form in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the subject of the final chapter of this dissertation.

Moreover, according to von Balthasar, such vision of the beautiful is accompanied by a responsive enthusiasm on the part of the beholder: “the encounter of these [*species* and *lumen*] is characterized by the two moments of beholding and of being enraptured” (10). The beautiful has a captivating effect; it produces a desire not for possession but for “dwelling alongside what is loved and possessed in the intimacy of dispossession” (Hart 19).²⁰ This enrapture occurs throughout Chesterton’s novels; indeed it accounts for the startling actions of so many of Chesterton’s characters who are instantly transformed and spend their lives pouring themselves out in service of the visionary moment.

This encounter with beauty is evident in all of Chesterton’s novels; it provides the core of the proto-typical Chestertonian incident whereby a character who has been engaged in either snubbing or ignoring the world is suddenly confronted with a vision of quotidian objects which shatters his self-absorption. These incidents are well known in Chesterton’s novels; however, the focus usually rests on the goodness and gratitude for

²⁰ The desire evoked by the beautiful does not conflate the beautiful with the good because it is not a desire for possession; Hart points out that the desire called forth by beauty is both eros and agape, “a desire for the other that delights in the distance of otherness” (20).

existence which this encounter produces. In *Manalive*, the undergraduate Smith forces his nihilistic professor Eames to sing just such a song of praise, albeit at gunpoint:

I thank the goodness and the grace
That on my birth have smiled,
And perched me on this curious place,
A happy English child.” (71)

But anterior to this realization of the gratuity and grace of existence is the first perception of form. Sitting astride the flying buttress outside his window, Eames is confronted with the world which he has spent the night so busily damning:

As he spoke the sun rose. It seemed to put colour into everything, with the rapidity of a lightning artist. A fleet of little clouds sailing across the sky changed from pigeon-gray to pink. All over the little academic town the tops of different buildings took on different tints; here the sun would pick out the green enamel on a pinnacle, there the scarlet tiles of a villa; here the copper ornament on some artistic shop, and there the sea-blue slates of some old and steep church roof. All these coloured crests seemed to have something oddly individual and significant about them, like crests of famous knights pointed out in a pageant or a battlefield; they arrested the eye, especially the rolling eye of Emerson Eames as he looked round on the morning and accepted it as his last . . . The sun rose, gathering glory that seemed too full for the deep skies to hold, and the shallow waters beneath them seemed golden and brimming and deep enough for the thirst of the gods. Just round the corner of the college, and visible from his crazy perch, were the brightest specks on that bright landscape, the villas with the spotted blinds, which he had made his text that night. (70-71)

Eames is struck, almost blinded by the splendor around him, a splendor radiated by particular objects: roofs, and clocks, and blinds. Overwhelmed by this assault of existence, he begs Smith to let him come in off the buttress. It is beauty that strikes Eames, the splendor of being shining through the particular forms around him. A similar realization takes place in *The Tales of the Long Bow* when Professor Green tears the blue spectacles off his face and for the first time regards the world as something more than an algorithm; he can say only: ““All is beautiful,”” and more particularly to the milkmaid

““You are beautiful”” (370). Addressed by the splendor of form, Chesterton’s characters recognize the beauty which plays throughout the whole of the created order.

These encounters with beauty generate remarkable energy in Chesterton’s characters. After standing transfixed by the beauty of the world, especially the beauty of the milk maid, Professor Green rushes to give his scientific lecture only to stun the audience with what newspaper accounts of the event describe as his raving praise in “an incoherent manner” of new life forms he has discovered: trees, cows, and a woman (373). Nor do his exploits end there; Professor Green joins the League of the Long Bow, one of only two characters to switch allegiances in the stories.²¹ Likewise, Professor Eames’ experience also provides a moment for Innocent to encounter beauty; he tells Eames that the moment of beauty was a revelation to them both: “What you [Eames] knew when you sat on that damned gargoyle was, that the world, when all is said and done, is a wonderful and beautiful place; I know it, because I knew it at the same minute” (*Manalive* 73). This vision of the beauty of the houses, clouds, puddles, and clock sends Innocent out on his wild career of walking the world “like a wonderful surprise” and holding his pistol “to the head of Modern Man” (73). Vision of the *splendor formae* transforms Innocent and generates all his spectacular adventures.

The real success of Chesterton’s fiction lies in its repeated depiction of recognition and participation in being grounded in the encounter with the beautiful.

Chapter three will consider the way in which encounters with beauty shape the structure

²¹ The other is the American millionaire Enoch Oates. Oates is convicted of his piratical capitalism and converted to the League by Pierce’s account of the damage done by the self-made Oates and his wife to other young couples struggling to make their way in the world. This move from appreciation of one’s own possessions to imagining the value of others’ possessions is dealt with in chapter five.

of Chesterton's fiction. The dual movement of beholding the forms and responding in rapture that lies at the heart of Chesterton's fiction provides a framework from which to explore the peculiar organization of the novels. The ecstatic experience of beholding the beautiful lends itself to representation in episodic narration; likewise, the enthusiasm which results from this encounter sustains characters through the rest of their lives. Chapters four, five, and six will explore in detail how the novels present the imagination, in its defamiliarizing, limited, and empathetic modes, as Chesterton's favorite method for discovering the beautiful in the familiar.

CHAPTER THREE

Strange Forms: The Peculiarities of Chesterton's Novels

Dickens was a mythologist rather than a novelist; he was the last of the mythologists, and perhaps the greatest. He did not always manage to make his characters men, but he always managed, at least, to make them gods.

—G.K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens*

“I believe about the universal cosmos, or for that matter about every weed and pebble in the cosmos, that men will never rightly realize that it is beautiful, until they realize that it is strange [. . .] Poetry is the separation of the soul from some object, whereby we can regard it with wonder.”

—G.K. Chesterton, *Christendom in Dublin*

In this chapter I examine the way in which encounters with beauty structure the form of Chesterton's novels.¹ The dual movement of beholding the forms and responding in rapture that lies at the heart of Chesterton's fiction provides a framework from which to explore the peculiar narrative arrangement of the novels. Chesterton's novels are notoriously hard to categorize; many of them are equal parts farce, dystopia, and romance. However, I argue that all of the novels share two particular qualities: episodic structure and an enthusiastic formation of character. The ecstatic experience of beholding the beautiful lends itself to representation in episodic narration; likewise, the enthusiasm which results from this encounter animates characters for the rest of their lives. Episodic narration and enthused character are both the results of the experience of and inclusion within beauty; these literary elements are a product of the aesthetic vision

¹ Sections of this chapter previously appeared in “Blood and Thunder: Penny Dreadfuls and the Novels of G.K. Chesterton,” *C.S. Lewis and the Inklings: Discovering Hidden Truth*, ed. Salwa Khoddam and Mark R. Hall, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012: 82-93. These sections are published here with the kind permission of Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

at work in the novels, a vision in which all the strange episodes and wild characters revolve around a central encounter with the splendor of form. In order to elucidate this fact, I examine the ways in which the penny dreadful genre provides a foundation from which to begin an account of episode and character in Chesterton's novels, demonstrate how the encounter with beauty further develops this approach to character and episode, and finally conclude by examining the transformative vision of Father Michael as he hangs from the cross on top of St. Paul's in *The Ball and the Cross*. The particular forms of Chesterton's fiction reflect the *splendour formae* which lies at the heart of Chesterton's novels.

Chapter two considered both Chesterton's shared interest in epiphany with Joyce and the differences in their understanding of epiphany and the being it reveals. This difference is carried over into the form of their fiction. Chesterton's artistic method directly contrasts that of modernists such as Woolf and Joyce. Where Joyce and Woolf's novels are meticulous in their attention to interior perception and psychological history, Chesterton's stories are full of actions. He repeatedly complains, even in his fiction, of the modern novel's stream of consciousness and lack of conventional plot. *The Return of Don Quixote* (1927), published the same year as Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*,² is full of narratorial asides which snipe at the modern novelists' concern for reproducing exactly in faithful psychological realism conversations and events. "Realism is dull," explains the narrator in *The Return*, "that is what is meant by saying that realism alone tells the truth

² I am not suggesting that Chesterton had Woolf's novel in mind when the narrator makes such comments. In his introduction to the *Collected Works* vol. 8, Donald Barr points out that Chesterton was working on drafts of *The Return* as early as the first years of World War One, and most of the narrative had appeared serially in 1925 -26 (16). However, the fact that both novels were published in the same year is symbolic of Chesterton's cross-purposes with the modernists.

about our intense and intelligent civilisation” (121). By contrast, Chesterton offers fictions of crisis and action. When Lord Ivywood, the Nietzschean villain of *The Flying Inn*, declares that his “adventures shall not be in the hedges and the gutters; but in the borders of the ever advancing brain,” he defines by antithesis the *modus operandi* of *The Flying Inn* and Chesterton’s other novels which are comprised of these hedge and gutter adventures (255). The form of Chesterton’s fiction stands in stark contrast to Joyce and Woolf, even if all three authors are directly concerned with epiphanic moments. This chapter argues that this difference in form stems from Chesterton’s understanding of beauty as the doorway through which his characters come to their moments of vision.

Penny Dreadfuls and the telos of fiction

It is appropriate to begin an account of Chesterton’s fiction near the beginning of Chesterton’s career, with *The Defendant* (1901), his first published collection of essays. In *The Defendant* Chesterton argues that, although the world is full of great goodness, humanity consistently undervalues both its own environment and history. Convinced that “progress should be something besides a continual parricide,” Chesterton commits himself to rescuing those things which are commonly derided and rejected (14). Hidden within the refuse of the world, Chesterton discovers things well worth saving: rash vows, baby worship, nonsense, and slang. “I have investigated the dust-heaps of humanity,” he claims, “and found a treasure in all of them. I have found that humanity is not incidentally engaged, but eternally and systematically engaged, in throwing gold into the gutter and diamonds into the sea” (14). In light of this fact, Chesterton argues that “the main business of a man, however humble, is defence” of the neglected and forgotten, and

the first discarded gem he attempts to recover in *The Defendant* is the penny dreadful (14).

Chesterton admittedly preferred the “ruck of hard-working people” to the “special and troublesome literary class” of which he was a part (*Orthodoxy* 53). It is no surprise then to find him defending popular penny dreadfuls as superior in many ways, especially morally, to the works of literary specialists. Yet Chesterton goes further than simple praise of the blood and thunder literature written for the working boys of London; he assigns to the whole penny dreadful genre an important place in his intellectual development. Indeed, Chesterton’s identification of particular formative theological and philosophical truths in penny dreadfuls mirrors his comments about the truths implicit in the fairy tales which shaped him as a child. And like the much discussed place of the fairy tale in his thought, Chesterton’s comments on the truths of the dreadful genre provide a set of basic premises from which to approach his own fiction. Both a combative loyalty in defense of something and a tendency toward repetitive episode and cosmic, or at least everlasting, character are primary elements of the penny dreadful according to Chesterton, and these elements play key roles in Chesterton’s own fiction. Thus, penny dreadfuls provide an expedient starting point for both these specific qualities and the form of Chesterton’s novels as a whole.

The term “penny dreadful” is something of an ambiguous term encompassing varied types of literature. John Springhall provides a useful list of the multiple meanings of the word and a history of its evolution throughout the Victorian period. The actual term “penny dreadful” began to be widely used around 1840 as a description of popular penny-novels modeled on the Gothic novel (Dunae133; Springhall 226). The term can

also be applied to the novels beginning in the 1850s that were targeted at a juvenile audience (Springhall 226). “Penny dreadful” also refers to the weekly magazines and journals catering to juvenile tastes which sprang up in the 1860s (Springhall 227). Furthermore, the term can refer to individual serials which occurred within the journals and the later collections of those serials into cheap volumes (Springhall 227). Patrick Dunae notes, however, that by the end of the century the term referred “almost exclusively to boys’ periodicals of the lowest stratum” (134). When Chesterton uses the term, he is usually using it in this last sense, referring particularly to journals and serialized stories such as *Boys of England* and its hero Jack Harkaway rather than the sensational novels of the 1840s such as *Varney the Vampire*.³

That the Victorians used the word “dreadful” to describe this particular category of fiction tells us much about their attitude toward the material produced for the working boys of London. Middle-class Victorians launched numerous crusades against the supposed corrupting influence of penny dreadful papers and stories, an influence they repeatedly connected to juvenile crime (Dunae 135). The Edwardians reacted even more strongly to penny dreadfuls and launched numerous counter journals intended to provide positive models of behavior and socialization for young boys (Olsen 163-65). The general charge leveled against the dreadful genre was that it “encouraged anti-social and criminal behaviour in the young” (Dunae 134). Not only were the dreadfuls poorly written with a lack of “sophistication and substance,” they portrayed heroes who abandoned positions of gainful employment in society to pursue wild and impossible adventures (Dunae 134). Penny dreadfuls “glorified aggression,” and, according to one

³ Chesterton’s comments in his *Autobiography* do indicate, however, that he was familiar at least with *Varney the Vampire* (29).

Victorian professor, the stories taught that “The first thing which a boy ought to acquire is physical strength for fighting purposes: and every boy who aspires to manliness ought to carry a revolver” (Dunae 134, 139). Overall, the Victorian and Edwardian middle class moral police concluded that penny dreadfuls were a pernicious influence on the young, a mode of storytelling which encouraged all the wrong sorts of values and tastes.

Chesterton, however, thought that penny dreadfuls were indeed terrible literature but good fiction, and he utterly denied the charge that they encouraged crime among working boys. The penny dreadfuls he read as a child had a lasting influence on him; on the day he was married, Chesterton thought it quite appropriate to purchase a pistol in order to defend his new wife from potential brigands in the Norfolk Broads where they were honeymooning (*Autobiography* 30). In *Orthodoxy*, he identifies in the penny dreadful another genre of story that he claims represents his second stage of development after fairy tales. In “The Flag of the World,” the chapter immediately following “The Ethics of Elfland,” Chesterton remarks,

In the last chapter it has been said that the primary feeling that this world is strange and yet attractive is best expressed in fairy tales. The reader may, if he likes, put down the next stage to that bellicose and even jingo literature which commonly comes next in the history of a boy. We all owe much sound morality to the penny dreadfuls. (72).

The penny dreadful functions, in Chesterton’s mind, in a manner analogous to that of the fairy-tale; as a genre it contains particular theological and philosophical truths which are also key elements of Chesterton’s own philosophy. This is quite a different note from the condemnations of the penny dreadfuls as corrupters of the youth. Instead, the penny dreadfuls present “sound morality” and, Chesterton later claims in *Orthodoxy*, are written in a “healthy and heroic tradition of Christianity” (90).

As a genre, Chesterton argues that the penny dreadful expresses two important and fundamental truths about the world. First, and most significant for his argument in *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton claims that penny dreadfuls present the idea of an allegiance willing to fight for and defend that to which it belongs. He identifies the analogous function of penny dreadfuls to fairy tales in *Orthodoxy* in order to make just this point: “It seemed and still seems to me that our attitude towards life can be better expressed in terms of a kind of military loyalty than in terms of criticism and approval” (72). This fact is crucial for Chesterton’s attempt in “The Flag of the World” to answer the binary of pessimism and optimism. Rather than assuming an objective position from which the world can be judged to be either good or bad, Chesterton argues that we are committed to the world in an irrevocable way which prevents some sort of exterior criticism or approval. Our first response must be loyalty, the sort of loyalty exemplified in jingoistic penny dreadfuls—a fierce loyalty which is willing to fight for that to which it belongs. Adam Wayne is a good example of this loyalty when he declares in response to King Auberon’s incredulity about Wayne’s willingness to die for his home: “‘Notting Hill,’ said the Provost [Wayne], simply, ‘is a rise or high ground of the common earth, on which men have built houses to live, in which they are born, fall in love, pray, marry, and die. Why should I think it absurd?’” (*The Napoleon of Notting Hill* 46).⁴ Wayne’s desire to defend the place of his birth causes him to throw down his sword before the king and dare the other boroughs to try and demolish his beloved Pump Street.

⁴ This fundamental allegiance to particular places is at the root of all the swords, guns, and duels in Chesterton’s fiction and will be explored more fully in chapter five.

This willingness to fight for those things that claim our primal loyalty is not totally blind. It is governed by one simple and binding principle which, Chesterton claims in his article “Boyhood and Militarism,” children uniquely appreciate:

A child’s instinct is almost perfect in the manner of fighting; a child always stands for the good militarism as against the bad. The child’s hero is always the man or boy who defends himself suddenly and splendidly against aggression. The child’s hero is never the man or boy who attempts by his mere personal force to extend his mere personal influence. In all boys’ books, in all boys’ conversation, the hero is one person and the bully the other. (307)

Thus, the loyalty penny dreadfuls present is a loyalty which fights for the defense of something rather than for the hatred or desire of something else. Chesterton reemphasizes this point when he points out in another *Illustrated London News* piece, “Christmas and Disarmament,” that “a real soldier does not fight because he has something that he hates in front of him. He fights because he has something that he loves behind his back” (22). The right sort of combat defends the places and things to which one is already attached rather than seeking to acquire new properties or goods.

In addition to this primal loyalty, Chesterton identifies another primary characteristic of the penny dreadful genre in his article “A Defence of Penny Dreadfuls” which appeared in *The Defendant*. The stories contained in penny dreadfuls are concerned solely with “adventures, rambling, disconnected and endless” (*The Defendant* 19). There is no concern for character development; the dreadfuls simply provides thousands of repetitive adventures by seemingly eternal heroes. This is not, however, in Chesterton’s mind, a negative criticism of the genre. Instead, he argues that the penny dreadfuls partake in a mode of story which creates mythologies rather than characters. This mode of story Chesterton calls fiction, in distinction to the more modern taste for

literature: “Literature and fiction are two entirely different things. Literature is a luxury; fiction is a necessity” (17). An aspect of the necessary part of fiction seems to be its creation of characters that are in some way transcendent: “The simple need for some kind of ideal world in which fictitious persons play an unhampered part is infinitely deeper and older than the rules of good art, and much more important” (17).

Chesterton develops this point further in *Charles Dickens*: “The characters [of folklore] are felt to be fixed things of which we have fleeting glimpses; that is, they are felt to be divine” (86). And a function of this divinity is unending adventures and episodes. The same observation applies to the penny dreadful as well:

Herein lies the peculiar significance, the peculiar sacredness even, of penny dreadfuls and the common printed matter made for our errand boys. Here in dim and desperate forms . . . is the old popular literature still popular; here is the unmistakable voluminousness, the thousand and one tales of Dick Deadshot, like the thousand and one tales of Robin Hood. Here is the splendid and static boy, the boy who remains boy through a thousand volumes and a thousand years. (86)

Thus, the other central feature of the penny dreadful genre for Chesterton is a particular cosmic quality of character eternally pursuing episodic adventure. Indeed, Chesterton discovers this quality not just in penny dreadfuls but at the core of Dickens’s work.

Chesterton claims that “the units of Dickens, the primary elements, are not the stories, but the characters who affect the stories—or, more often still, the characters who do not affect the stories” (42). He finds at the heart of Dickens’s method an attention not to narrative but to character:

For not only is his whole machinery directed to facilitating the self-display of certain characters, but something more deep and more unmodern still is also true of him. It is also true that all the *moving* machinery exists only to display entirely *static* character. Things in the Dickens story shift and change only in order to give us glimpses of great characters that do not change at all. (42)

Dickens works out at a higher artistic level the same basic impulse toward mythic character that penny dreadfuls present. Chesterton also finds the same element at work in Shakespeare, and it lies at the heart of his understanding of the *telos* of fiction: namely, the presentation of characters who are free to realize good and evil in an “unhampered way” in order to reveal the poetry of the world in which we actually live.⁵

“Great joy has in it the sense of immortality” Chesterton argues in *Heretics*, and the immortality of fictional characters stems from the great joy which undergirds them (43). Joy is particularly the provenance of the Christian according to Ralph Wood in *The Comedy of Redemption*, and this joy is characterized by thankfulness for both the created order and the divine scandal of the Incarnation: “Christian joyfulness means nothing less than a constant seeking of ‘opportunities for gratitude.’” (54). It is just such gratitude which Chesterton locates at the heart of fiction. The whole point of story-making for Chesterton lies in first recognizing and then praising the good of existence. The true poet, he says in *Chaucer*, is “ultimately dedicated to Beauty,” a beauty which is not synonymous with taste or theory but which partakes in the “glimpse that was given of the world when God saw that it was good” (28-29):

So long as the artist gives us glimpses of that, it matters nothing that they are fragmentary or even trivial [. . .] These things belong to the same world of wonder as the primary wonder at the very existence of the world [. . .] There is something much more mystical and absolute than any modern thing that is called optimism; for it is only rarely that we realize, like a vision of the heavens filled with a chorus of giants, the primeval duty of Praise. (29)

⁵ It is this “unhampered” quality, a relaxing of the normal requirements of life which allows these static, mythic characters the freedom to fully display and determine themselves.

This praise is the role of the fiction that is greater than literature. This praise is why fiction is older than all the rules of art and much more necessary, for it reveals and makes present that divine presence which lies everywhere about us. This claim is not surprising given Chesterton's understanding of being and analogy explored in chapter two.

For Chesterton such concern with beauty is fundamentally juxtaposed to aesthetics, a term which for him is directly tied to the decadents of the 1890s. Chesterton's own personal crisis during his time at the Slade School (1892-95) finally convinced him of the need for some order beyond the self, some goal beyond pleasure in the brief beauty which arises at the moment of destruction and decay which Dennis Denisoff identifies as key aspects of decadence and aestheticism at the end of the nineteenth century (33). Indeed it is against the backdrop of Pater, Beardsley, and Wilde that Chesterton emerges with his foundational convictions about the goodness of the world. Although Chesterton places the responsibility for his own morbid fancies and evil imaginings on his own shoulders, he admits that at least background for his dramatic struggle was provided by the "atmosphere of the Decadents, and their perpetual hints of the luxurious horrors of paganism" (*Autobiography* 98). Emerging from this nightmare, Chesterton fashions his famous conviction of the "mystical minimum of gratitude" for existence (*Autobiography* 99). With his fundamental first principles forged in the fires of aesthetic decadence, Chesterton repeatedly contrasts the kind of beauty (and fiction) with which he is concerned against the aesthetics of the 1890s. Thus when Chesterton wants to praise beauty as the goal of the poet as he does in *Chaucer*, he finds it necessary to first defend himself from any association with merely aesthetic principles, arguing they represent "very much the wrong sort of betrothal between Beauty and the Beast" (28).

Likewise, the narrator in *The Ball and the Cross* describes Father Michael as enjoying his vision of London “not aesthetically, but with a plain jolly appetite as of a boy eating buns” (11). Chesterton’s referent for aesthetics in these passages is the sybaritic atmosphere of the *fin de siècle*, and against such refined opiates he promotes the “plain jolly appetite” of penny dreadfuls, Dickens, Chaucer, and the literature of praise.

This vision of both the purpose of fiction and the contours of the contemporary literary landscape undergirds Chesterton’s dismissal of literary specialists and his promotion of simple even crude literature, especially farce. Pursuing in 1901 in *The Defendant* the same question of the literature of joy which he was to take up in *Chaucer* in 1932, Chesterton writes that while the modern taste insists on the pain of life, the literature of joy is much more difficult and rare (76). In this literature of joy, farce occupies a privileged place: “Of all the varied forms of the literature of joy, the form most truly worthy of moral reverence and artistic ambition is the form called ‘farce’—or its wilder shape in pantomime” (*The Defendant* 77). Chesterton celebrates farce and pantomime’s ability to turn the everyday into the surprising; it is along the common street among common characters that these art forms introduce imagination and wonder—“the entrance of Puck into Pimlico” (*The Defendant* 77).

The presence of Puck in Pimlico serves as an adequate description for Chesterton’s favorite trope of inverting the ordinary, of turning the world upside down so that commonplace is revealed as the wonderful. Indeed characters in Chesterton’s fiction are constantly standing on their heads. Auberon Quinn, Innocent Smith, and Gabriel Gale all enjoy the pleasures of inversion. Regarded from this topsy-turvy position, the world can be seen properly. Gale explains the reason for this to Diana when he confesses

in defense of his practice that “The world is upside down. We’re all upside down. We’re all flies crawling on a ceiling, and it’s an everlasting mercy that we don’t drop off” (*The Poet and the Lunatics* 14). Chapter four will undertake a full exploration of the principle of upside down vision in Chesterton’s work. The important point here is the close association for Chesterton between these surprising visions and the forms of farce and pantomime.

Innocent Smith—whose whole life is an attempt to fulfill the “primeval duty of praise”—is directly associated with pantomime. The blowing wind which begins the novel lifts the clouds which rise “like the curtain of some long expected pantomime” (*Manalive* 3). Indeed part one of the novel is something like an extended pantomime in fiction; Michael Moon realizes this when he reflects on the fact that Smith has said very little and done a great deal during his stay at Beacon House: “He wants to express himself, not with his tongue, but with his arms and legs [. . .] I begin to understand the old plays and pageants. I see why the mutes at a funeral were mute. I see why the mummers were mum. They *meant* something” (*Manalive* 54). Smith too means something by his actions; they are in Inglewood’s words “so many coloured picture-puzzles” (*Manalive* 54). This emphasis on pantomime in *Manalive* is but one instance of the ways in which Chesterton’s understanding of the purpose of story-telling, the kind of beauty fiction ought to present, and the modes best suited to that presentation, determine the shape and character of his own novels. Although literary forms such as farce, pantomime, and the penny dreadful may be crude, their presentation of characters who are both commonplace and everlasting partake in the literature of joy, a literature which

celebrates in and through its immortal characters the “primeval duty of Praise” for mere existence.

Character and Episode in Chesterton’s novels

Chesterton’s understanding of fiction as ordered to recognition and praise of the goodness of Creation, as it is revealed in his thoughts about the penny dreadful and popular literature, is at work in Chesterton’s own novels. His identification of the truths penny dreadfuls present is valuable for understanding Chesterton’s own fiction in the same way that his comments about the truths of fairy tales sheds light on the gratitude and wonder with which Chesterton’s protagonists view their world. Just as fairy tales provide a shorthand for identifying particular strands of Chesterton’s thought, so penny dreadfuls provide an easy marker by which to identify and talk about two specific elements in his fiction: the militant loyalty to the home and the world which marks many of Chesterton’s characters, most notably Adam Wayne in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and Innocent Smith in *Manalive*, as well as the simultaneous largeness and cosmic qualities of both Innocent Smith and Sunday in *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

No work of Chesterton’s demonstrates the peculiar sort of loyalty penny dreadfuls advocate so well as *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. The kind of loyalty which Adam Wayne displays towards his native Pump Street mirrors exactly the sort of allegiance which Chesterton claims in *Orthodoxy* that humans owe to the world. In Auberon Quinn’s absurd joke world of a London returned to medieval boroughs, Adam Wayne, the Provost of Notting Hill, is willing to defend his beloved Pump Street to the death against an attempt by the other boroughs to demolish the street in order to build a road. Now Pump Street is to a large degree the “dirty little street . . . with nothing in it but a

public house and a penny toy-shop” that proponents of the road claim (*The Napoleon of Notting Hill* 42). But Wayne’s love of Pump Street and willingness to defend it with his life are not dependent on any extrinsic qualities of Pump Street, but rather on his relationship to it. He attempts to explain himself to Quinn, the king, in this way:

I was born, like other men, in a spot of earth which I loved because I had played boys’ games there, and fallen in love, and talked with my friends through night that were nights of the gods. And I feel the riddle. These little gardens where we told our loves. These streets where we brought out our dead. Why should they be commonplace? Why should they be absurd? (47)

Wayne’s loyalty to Pump Street is a function of his belonging to it; if he had been born in North Kensington or Bayswater, he would demonstrate exactly the same feelings toward those places. His allegiance is not something which he has stood back from and evaluated at a critical distance. Instead, it partakes in the primal and elementary loyalty which Chesterton identifies with penny dreadfuls.

Likewise, Wayne’s loyalty has a particularly martial character. The first thing he does upon entering the court is to fling down his sword and declare that he has brought the King the only thing he possesses (42). Thus, Wayne’s commitment to Notting Hill is from the beginning conceived of in terms of military violence. Indeed, Wayne claims that it is fighting for Notting Hill which can give it a peculiar dignity. In reference to his sword he tells the king, “Whatever is touched with it takes a magic from outside the world. If I touch, with this fairy wand, the railways and roads of Notting Hill, men will love them, and be afraid of them for ever” (48). This violence, however, is obviously on the side of the defense. Wayne’s militarism protects the community to which he belongs; thus, it stands in distinct contrast to the greedy aggressive violence of the other Provosts in their attack on Pump Street. Wayne’s peculiar loyalty to Pump Street and Notting Hill

partakes of exactly the sort of fighting allegiance to those communities to which one first belongs that Chesterton identifies in *Orthodoxy* and associates with penny dreadfuls.

If Adam Wayne exemplifies the proper loyalty to the home, then Innocent Smith in *Manalive* presents the idea of cosmic loyalty, the defense of the world over against nothingness, of being over against non-being. Smith's confrontation with the eminent pessimistic philosopher Dr. Eames highlights both the gratuity of being and the proper reaction to such a gift. In response to Eames' claim that God is enviable in being dead, Smith attempts to put Eames out of his misery by shooting him. This experience leads Eames to reconsider his philosophical position and finally, while suspended atop a flying buttress, to sing a song of gratitude for all the things around him. Singing the words Smith has taught him, Eames recognizes not only the providential nature of existence in general, but also the providential nature of his particular existence as English and, more specifically, his peculiar present position on top of a flying buttress. For Innocent Smith the clear evidence of this guiding grace requires that Eames praise God: "You shall thank heaven for churches and chapels and villas and vulgar people and puddles and pots and pans and sticks and rags and bones and spotted blinds" (*Manalive* 72). The everyday world, vulgar people and all, deserves appreciation. Smith's experiment is successful; he convinces Eames that to be is demonstrably better than not to be, and Innocent dedicates the rest of his life to awakening others to consideration of the goodness of the world and the fact of their primal loyalty to it. He keeps the bullets in his revolver for pessimists, "pills for pale people" with which Innocent defends the fundamental goodness of being (73).

These examples of a fighting loyalty on the side of the defense inherently assume that an enemy exists against whom it is necessary to fight. Fundamental to the idea of a defense is the fact of a corresponding aggression. Like the penny dreadfuls, Chesterton's novels are filled with villains; evil is a real fact of the world.⁶ In *The Flying Inn*, Dorian Wimpole discovers this evil in the snake which appears in the little woodland he has just been comparing to Eden. After Dorian kills the snake, he is filled with a jolly cheerfulness and sets off with his donkey to have adventures. The narrator then remarks that "the finding and fighting of positive evil is the beginning of all fun—and even of all farce" (173). This is an idea to which the characters of the penny dreadfuls would agree; an opponent is always necessary for a good adventure.

Mark Knight notes that Chesterton makes a similar point in *Charles Dickens* (84). In his chapter on Dickens' supposed optimism, Chesterton argues that indiscriminate praise of everything that exists leads not to cheerfulness but to boredom and dullness. The cure is a renewed belief in the fact of evil: "This world can be made beautiful again by beholding it as a battlefield. When we have defined and isolated the evil thing, the colours come back into everything else. When evil things have become evil, good things, in a blazing apocalypse, become good" (287-88). A straightforward fight against clearly defined evil, like the sort of combat in penny dreadfuls against school bullies and sadistic pirates, highlights and encourages goodness.⁷ In all of these instances of the defense of

⁶ For a full treatment of evil in Chesterton's work see Mark Knight's *Chesterton and Evil*.

⁷ What keeps this account of evil from simplistic reduction and uncritical praise of violence is the complex Christian theology in which Chesterton grounds it, a theology where a major locus of evil is within the self. Thus, Chesterton can praise the guttersnipes who cheer as they read of the pirate's death and, in what is perhaps an

the home, the defense of the cosmos, and the fight against evil, the penny dreadful genre provides a valuable starting point for talking about this militant loyalty in Chesterton's fiction.

Chesterton's comments on the peculiar unending characters and adventures of penny dreadfuls also provide a useful avenue through which to approach two features of Chesterton's own fiction: the permanence of character and episodic structure.

Chesterton's remarks about the penny dreadful provides a starting place for examining two of the most interesting characters of Chesterton's fiction: Sunday and Innocent Smith. The glimpse which penny dreadful characters offered of something larger, something primal and something divine is fully realized in the character of Sunday in *The Man Who Was Thursday*. When Gabriel Syme meets Sunday for the first time, he describes him in larger than life terms:

His vastness did not lie only in the fact that he was abnormally tall and quite incredibly fat. This man was planned enormously in his original proportions, like a statue carved deliberately as colossal. His head, crowned with white hair, as seen from behind looked bigger than a head ought to be. The ears that stood out from it looked larger than human ears. He was enlarged terribly to scale. (94)

Sunday's terribly exaggerated features are purposefully both superhuman and statuesque; in this way, he is exactly the sort of character that Chesterton associates with penny dreadfuls, both transcendent and static. Sunday is never explained as a character—even his fellow characters in the novel never understand what he is all about; rather, both the characters in the novel and readers of the work are given glimpses of something larger, something divine. This strange and somewhat unsettling quality of a character can be

apocryphal but likely true anecdote, can write in response to the question, What's wrong with the world?: "I am."

helpfully approached through the specific type of characterization which Chesterton identifies at work in penny dreadfuls. Just as Chesterton claims that the heroes in penny dreadfuls and popular fiction are semi-divine, Sunday appears above and beyond any of the other characters in the novel. In response to his Council of Days' demand that Sunday explain exactly who he is, Sunday gives a reply that echoes God's answer to Job and then claims that he will stand as an eternal riddle (224). Sunday, like Dick Deadshot and Robin Hood, is "deliberately conceived as immortal" (*The Defendant* 17). He is eternally static in the sense that though the novel ends and Syme's adventures conclude in some fashion, there is not even the faintest suggestion that the character of Sunday has ended or concluded, but merely that the reader's vision of him has faded, like a glimpse into something higher, stranger, and stronger. Indeed, the glory which shines forth in Sunday's final revelation of himself knocks Syme unconscious and Sunday passes from view.

The same cosmic quality of character is true of Innocent Smith in *Manalive*. Smith possesses the same sort of superhuman vitality that Sunday does. When he first comes to Beaconsfield, he comes with a rush of wind, and throughout much of the novel his actions remain as mysterious and varied as the wind. Although the audience is given more insight into the nature of Smith than of Sunday, Innocent still remains a fundamentally static character. The reader gets the feeling that if she were to find Smith ten years later he would still be losing his wife in various places in order to find her again and still dealing life out of his revolver. Smith's adventures really could be endless; the boisterous energy with which he lives his life shows no signs of ceasing with the closing pages of the novel. Innocent, one feels, would remain Innocent "through a thousand

volumes and a thousand years” (*Charles Dickens* 86).⁸ These immortal characters with their episodic adventures participate in the literature of joy that Chesterton associates with penny dreadfuls, Dickens, and popular literature. Sunday and Innocent move in that “ideal world in which fictitious persons play an unhampered part” and fulfill the human need for story which is “infinitely deeper and older than the rules of good art, and much more important” through their riotous celebration of the sheer fact of being (*The Defendant* 17).

Nor is the episodic structure and sense of endless adventure limited to *The Man Who Was Thursday* and *Manalive*. Increasingly Chesterton’s late novels turn toward episodic structures which hover in an ambiguous region between novels and collections of short stories. While the feature is most evident in Chesterton’s late work, this impulse is present even from the very beginning in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and the other early novels.

The particular characteristics of the penny dreadful which Chesterton points out offer a useful starting place for understanding some peculiar elements in his own fiction. In the strange worlds where Innocent Smith and Sunday appear as good giants endlessly at play and Adam Wayne leads the shopkeepers of Notting Hill into battle, the penny dreadful proves a helpful guide by clearly outlining genre conventions which Chesterton not only follows but which he believes lie at the heart of all truly popular and comic literature.

⁸ This is not to argue that such innocence is easy or natural; chapter four will demonstrate the radical lengths to which Smith goes in order to live up to his name. His “stasis” as a character is a hard won victory always about to slip away from him.

Beauty and the Form of Chesterton's Fiction

Although the penny dreadful provides helpful terms with which to begin a study of the form of Chesterton's fiction, Chesterton adds to these popular elements an attention to being as it is revealed in the beautiful. Various explanations and arguments have been made about the strange elements of Chesterton's fiction, although Donald Barr notes that readers of Chesterton are so taken with his points that they seldom notice his style, and thus the craft of his fiction remains much in the background (15). Those who do pay attention to his fictional craft are often content to pass off Chesterton's fiction as consistently underdeveloped, the product of a man who could have been a great artist were he not much too harried by the demands of the hour. Indeed, his wife, Francis, certainly feared that this was the case (*Gilbert Keith Chesterton* 246). It is certainly true that Chesterton wrote not only his newspaper articles but also his fiction under the looming shadow of the deadline.

The publication of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* provides a good example of this fact. In a letter which Maise Ward reproduces in her second biography, Chesterton replies to a request from his publisher for the finished manuscript of the novel:

I have just got your wire and came here at once. I *could* probably finish the MS. tonight only I must go to a damned newspaper office E.C. and also a damned man in Kensington. Also I have no money. To do it I must take taxi cabs everywhere, dine anywhere, pay typewriters anyhow, but it could be done. Could you advance me £5 or so on the book for the next twelve hours [. . .] Nothing short of extreme oriental extravagance combined with extreme occidental rapidity can do the thing before dawn tomorrow. (*Return to Chesterton* 77)

Such writing conditions are not conducive to carefully studied works of art. Yet, despite Chesterton's harried writing style, careful analysis of his fiction reveals not merely the blotted pages of an overworked journalist but the thoughtful workings of a man who had

a vision for the structure of his fiction even if he was not always successful in carrying it out. For instance, Donald Barr argues that while Chesterton's writing tends toward episode even from the beginning, *The Tales of the Long Bow* represents a new literary form inherited from Stevenson's *New Arabian Nights*, namely that of a sequence of tales apparently independent and yet carefully woven together around a central theme (20).⁹ Barr finds in all of Chesterton's novels after *The Return of Don Quixote* this tendency toward episode framed and held together by thematic concerns (20). *The Poet and the Lunatics* certainly utilizes such a format. Each story is independent and quite able to stand alone; indeed, Chesterton appears to assume that the reader is reading each tale in isolation as he restates Gabriel Gale's peculiar mental abilities and method in every story. In fact, the subtitle of the novel, *Episodes in the Life of Gabriel Gale*, explicitly confesses this structure. Yet the stories do circle around similar themes of limitation, imagination, insanity, and science. Barr notes that this episodic writing was natural for Chesterton because he thought in scenes; his artistic training led him to imagine moments and visions rather than connected narratives: "when he is at his best, his ideas are embodied in glimpses—sometimes full sketches, sometimes implied by similes—of the quotidian acts of human beings" (30). In Barr's reading, Chesterton's fragmented, visionary, and unpolished narratives are a function of his artistic eye.

Yet this focus on the visionary moment also stems from Chesterton's attempt to portray the encounter with beauty, an encounter which is always striking and singular, a vision of splendor mediated by one particular scene or moment. In "The Artistic Side," an article which appeared posthumously in *The Coloured Lands*, Chesterton describes his

⁹ Barr acknowledges that Chesterton was unable to complete the form he set himself in *Tales of the Long Bow* (21).

conviction that right vision of the world begins with recognizing the individuality of things. He compares proper vision to a train ride through a tunnel with brief breaks in the darkness through which glimpses of the external world flash: “that is the way in which objects ought to be seen; separate; illuminated; and above all, contrasted against the blank night or bare walls; as indeed these livings creations do stand eternally contrasted with the colourless chaos out of which they came” (*The Coloured Lands* 112-13). These three qualities of separation, illumination, and contrast with non-being all derive from Chesterton’s understanding of being and beauty. Recognizing the basic existence, as opposed to non-existence, of an object demonstrates the essential goodness of its being, its creation *ex nihilo* and thus its analogical participation in God’s being as chapter two demonstrated. Along with this fundamental first perception, Chesterton adds the qualities of separation and illumination, that is of form and splendor. Viewing objects individually, highlighted against the backdrop of “chaos,” brings out not only their being, but their particular arrangement of being, their form. Likewise, such an isolated vision calls attention to the light which bursts forth from the form; unlike the “colourless” nothing, the form is suffused with a splendor which stems from its sheer existence. Chesterton reproduces this conviction about the right way of seeing things in his own stories; time and again, his characters are startled by a vision of one particular thing, and the richness of that vision grants them insight and wisdom. This is true both of his adventure novels and his novels of detection. Gabriel Gale is both transfixed by the bowl of goldfish and finds in their destruction the key to the Professor’s lunacy (*The Poet and the Lunatics* 29-33). Likewise, the gold paint pot of Hendry’s *Illumination Colours* recalls to Olive not only her childhood but persuades her that the social upheaval her play

has generated is grounded in something deeper than make-believe (*Return of Don Quixote* 192-93). This emphasis on the form and splendor of individual objects is at the root of both the episodic tendency in Chesterton's fiction and the dramatic enthusiasm of his characters.

Chesterton's focus on the vision of individual objects lends itself to an episodic style. For Chesterton the moment of beholding the form is luminous but also distinct, a vision of the splendor of one particular thing. Moreover, time itself is particular and distinct in the interaction with the beautiful. Encounter with the beautiful occurs through a distinct object at a certain moment. Hart observes that, through its presence in particularity, beauty resists reduction to the symbolic. Beauty, he argues, is always found in the concrete details, on the surface, not in some hidden inner reality which transcends the given form and reveals a higher, idealist realm (25). This is true not only for the formal arrangement of an object's proportions and harmonies but also for its particular place in time. The beautiful is apprehended through a particular object at a particular moment. In his project to approach the Christian imagination as a movement through the particular into the infinite, William Lynch defines time itself as a form, the quintessential limit into which poetic vision must plunge (49, 58). The centrality of time to the beautiful is especially evident in light of von Balthasar's reflections upon the form of Christ as determinative for aesthetics, for Christ's Incarnation is not only presence in a particular form, the God-man, but also in history. Attention to the beautiful then especially considers not only the "irreducibly particular" but also the "momentary" (Hart 25). The time during which encounter with beauty occurs is a constitutive element of the experience. The episodic quality of Chesterton's novels reflects this punctual encounter

with the *splendor formae*. In Chesterton's fiction, vision of the beautiful marks not only the characters, but also the time frame of the narrative itself.

Chesterton presents multiple brilliant flashes of vision so dazzling that they stand out as clear separate moments of time that may be linked to other moments but retain their independence. This fact is perhaps most evident in *Tales of the Long Bow* where each chapter is organized around one member of the League of the Long Bow literally fulfilling an expression of speech that normally indicates the improbability of something: Colonel Crane eats his hat, Hillary Pierce makes pigs fly, and Owen Hood sets the Thames on fire. Seven of the eight chapters in the novel introduce a new member of the League of the Long Bow, and thus it is not surprising that each chapter restates the overriding structure of the novel as a collection of tales about the League; yet such recapitulation serves simultaneously to connect the chapters and render them self-sufficient, like the links of a chain. The moment of vision in each chapter where the central paradox is realized stands alone; its climactic peak connects with the other climaxes in the story and yet remains individual and solitary.

The presentation of time in the novels serves to increase this sense of separate and distinct episodes. Chesterton often exaggerates the passing of time between chapters in order to emphasize the individual encounter with beauty within the chapter. *The Return of Don Quixote* is full of such elongations and contractions of time. The genesis of the novel lies in Michael Herne's forgetfulness of time as he sits all night on top of a bookshelf reading a history of the middle ages. In his encounter with the beauty of the social system of the medieval period, Herne quite literally forgets everything else around, failing even to notice the practical joke played upon him by Archer who removes the

library ladder from underneath him. Likewise, in his eagerness to describe the spreading aesthetic change of the novel where Herne's appointment as the King-at-arms over the whole West Country appears quite normal to the courtiers who surround him dressed in medieval finery and armed with swords, the narrator appears to lose track of time. He compresses Herne's social revolution into a month; in fact a mere fourteen days elapse from Lord Eden's decision to turn Herne's chivalric revival into a full blown political program and the final triumph and disaster of Herne's reign. Now it is certainly possible that having been officially promulgated by the political leaders, Herne's revived medievalism could sweep the upper echelons of society in one swift rush, but in the minds of the characters the transition has no such marks of hurriedness. In fact it seems quite the opposite, as if Herne's radical return has governed the upper crust of English society for quite some time; Herne's era is complete and total even if it lasts for only a month. When the narrator informs us that "gentlemen who had come down to shoot were often quite vexed" upon being informed by a man clad in Lincoln green that the use of the bow to send messages was "the real definition of good shooting at a little place in the country," temporal passage has faded entirely from view (175). This statement is not tied to any particular time, day, or encounter but rather appears to be simply a historical description of what life was like under Herne's vision. What the statement obscures is the fact that such a practice only occurred at the very most for four weeks. However, any sense of the brevity of the period is wholly absent. The power of the present is complete, and the current state of affairs total. When Murrell reappears after his month long quest, the whole court views his clothes as outlandish and strange, having already become so

fully accustomed to their new mode of dress that the clothes they wore only thirty short days before appear ridiculous and foreign (193).

This strange enlargement of the present also occurs in Chesterton's other novels. Innocent Smith's presence in Beacon House is so overwhelming that the first day he spends there elongates into an epoch for the characters; the narrator even realizes this and comments that Smith's day of rule-making liberation "'seemed more like a week's holiday than a day's'" (*Manalive* 22). By approaching what the other characters take to be their staid lives from a fresh perspective, Smith opens up not only their perception of the objects in the house, but their experience of time itself. Just as Smith manages to turn everyday objects into repositories of mystery and meaning, so too he transforms time until each moment is so charged with significance that a week appears stuffed into a day and the ordinary perception of chronological progression is altered.

In certain places, the exuberance of these ecstatic visions burst the chronological bonds of narrative. For instance *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, which begins with Quinn's vision of the coat-tails of his fellows, quickly develops a chronological hiccup. While they are walking to lunch at a restaurant, Auberon Quinn leaves Barker and Lambert to get his hair cut, yet although Barker and Lambert have apparently done nothing but continue walking to the restaurant, Quinn is already there, waiting for them when they arrive, and their dialogue begins without any reference to their previous encounter or Quinn's resolution to get a haircut. The time-frame of the novel is clearly broken. Similarly Donald Barr points out the problematic chronology of *Tales of the Long Bow* where Dr. Hunter is a social newcomer in the first tale and an established

Member of Parliament in the second tale whose events are chronologically prior the first (21).

This appears to be an inattention to time on Chesterton's part, nor is it surprising that Chesterton, who was chronically late to appointments and only ever arrived at all through the carefully managing of Frances and his secretaries, was not overly concerned with meticulously organizing the temporal elements of his stories. Maise Ward claims that Chesterton regarded time—in both his personal life and his novels—as a “telescope elongating and shortening at will” (*Gilbert Keith Chesterton* 279). However, this trouble with time in the novels comes not from an absence of mind but a particular presence of mind, or at least a quality of attention directed toward the present moment so fully that the surrounding events begin to bend back toward the central vision. The ordinary chronology of the narrative is blurred by the galvanic attraction of the encounter with the beautiful; the vision of the form which lies at the heart of the four examples I have given is so powerful that it overrides normal chronological progression. Auberón's vision of coattails and Innocent Smith's presence at Beacon House become the lodestones toward which the time-frames of their respective chapters point. The address of the beautiful becomes the pivot around which the events and episodes turn, not in a way which destroys chronological progression but instead subordinates it to the moment of epiphany. In Chesterton's novels time itself receives its direction and shape from the encounter with the beautiful. The particular moments during which the characters encounter the beautiful receive a privileged position within the narrative; in light of Lynch's definition of time as a form, the temporally finite experience of the beautiful itself becomes a site through which the infinite is revealed; both the “real presence of depth” and “a real

pointing beyond itself to these depths” (von Balthasar 116). It is this sense that time receives its peculiar orientation and sequence in Chesterton’s fiction. Rather than following sequential progressive chronology, time points toward the revelation of divine glory, and thus bears an eschatological quality.

Jean-Luc Marion’s reflections on time and the Eucharist in *God Without Being* offer a theological framework from which to approach this junction of the present and presence that marks Chesterton’s fiction.¹⁰ Taking up the question of presence and the Eucharist, Marion argues that critiques of transubstantiation as idolatry end up replacing the supposedly idolatrous host with the idol of the here-and-now. Grounding confidence in the present moment as the guarantor of being results in a control and mastery of presence, a result which Marion finds at the core of metaphysics (170). This control of presence was the very thing which the critique of transubstantiation set out to avoid, and Marion concludes not only that the critique has failed but that it fails precisely as it

¹⁰ In referring to *God without Being*, I recognize that I am admitting something of a foreign element into this dissertation. Marion’s critique of the application of the concept of being to God apparently rejects the theological foundations which undergird my entire project. However, in the second edition of *God Without Being* (2012), Marion rescinds his critique of St. Thomas for participating in the metaphysical subordination of God to Being. He includes a new chapter at the end of the book, “Thomas and Onto-theo-logy” in which he carefully distinguishes between St. Thomas’s analogical approach and the univocal method of onto-theo-logy. In his reflections on the distinction between God and creation, Marion begins to approach at least partially the basic theological position outlined in chapter two. For instance, Marion’s conclusion that the “*esse/ens commune* cannot, according to Thomas Aquinas, introduce anything common and, above all, nothing intelligible between entity inasmuch as it is entity and God” (212) is directly similar to Gilson’s observation, noted in the chapter one, that creation can never be more than an analogue “for when we compare being *per se* with the being caused even in its very existence, we are dealing with two orders of being not to be added together nor subtracted; they are in all rigour incommensurable, and that is also why they are compossible” (*The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* 95-96). Although Marion may focus on the apophatic dimensions of analogy, he acknowledges that St. Thomas’s use of being does not locate him with the onto-theo-logy to which Marion is responding in *God Without Being* (215).

begins its conception of time from the here-and-now. Instead Marion proposes that consideration of Eucharistic presence must be rooted in a present understood as gift. The present is not the starting point of temporality but the result of examining time as a whole. Thinking of the present as gift requires first thinking of it as memorial and then *epektasis* and finally as the present. Marion argues that the memorial and *epektasis* define the present. Rather than occupying the privileged position of the here-and-now, the present receives its form from reflection on that which God has done (memorial) in order to request that God fulfill in the *eschaton* that which He has promised and already begun (*epektasis*) (172-174). The presence of the Eucharist is received as the gift of the present, and Marion brilliantly compares presence in the present with the manna of the Israelites:

Presence must be received as the present, namely, as the gift that is governed by memorial and *epektasis*. Each instant of the present must befall us as a gift: the day, the hour, the instant are imparted by charity. This applies to the present time (gift given) as to manna: one must gather it each day, without ever being able to store it up or to amass it as far as to dispense with receiving it as gift. (175)

The linking of present, presence, and gift provides the theological underpinning for Chesterton's intuitive insistence on both the temporal as constitutive of the encounter with beauty and the necessity for gratitude.

Thinking of the present as gift is at the heart of Chesterton's presentation of time in his novels. Although the present moment of the encounter with beauty may be definitive for both the characters and the narrative, that present must always be received as gift; it is never deserved or hoarded but remains the free donation which characters can neither control nor expect. The inhabitants of Beacon House are surprised by the wind, and the volume of medieval history takes Michael Herne unawares. The gracious gift of

these encounters with beauty is perhaps best described in the short story “Homesick at Home,” which provides the narrative kernel of *Manalive*. The farmer White Wynd is roused from his unappreciative stupor to heroic struggles to love his own home in the twinkling of an eye, that fairy tale descriptor of such precision. Although the narrator searches for words that might describe the momentous change, he admits that “We might pile up colossal words, but we should never reach it” (228). The tremendous gift of the present, of presence in the present that reorients Wynd’s whole life can never be fully described, explained, or captured, or explained; the gift can only be appreciated and loved.¹¹ Perhaps Chesterton’s best description of the present moment as a grace which receives direction from beyond itself comes in his early poem “Evening:”

Here dies another day
During which I have had eyes, ears, hands
And the great world round me;
And with tomorrow begins another.
Why am I allowed two? (*Collected Works* vol. 10, 38)

The only proper response to the gift of presence in the present is gratitude, a gratitude which Chesterton’s characters demonstrate in their fierce service to the visions of beauty granted to them.

In addition to this episodic quality of Chesterton’s fiction, the ecstatic encounter with beauty explains the strange fixity of purpose with which many of Chesterton’s characters pursue their goals. Adam Wayne never swerves from his fanatical defense of Notting Hill; Innocent Smith never loses his innocence, and Michael Herne never abandons his knight-errant’s tunic. The determined quality of these characters lies at the root of Ker’s complaint that Chesterton’s characters are cardboard figures without depth

¹¹ Chapter four will consider this story and the grace of vision in detail.

or dynamism, mere mouthpieces for Chesterton's political positions (xi-xii). While it is true that many of Chesterton's characters are set in their purposes, they are not flat. Instead, these characters are simultaneously transfixed and galvanized by an encounter with beauty, and the rest of their lives are given in service to their vision. If that service takes the form of repetitive ritual, it is because these characters understand Chesterton's comment in *Orthodoxy* that God is "strong enough to exult in monotony" having "the eternal appetite of infancy" (65-66).

The previous chapter noted briefly that enthusiasm was a constitutive element in the encounter with beauty. Von Balthasar describes this transformative experience of beauty as uniting both the "ontic" and "experiential" aspects of beauty. The presence of beauty mediated through encounter draws the subject up into the beautiful itself.

Before the beautiful—no, not really *before* but *within* the beautiful—the whole person quivers. He not only 'finds' the beautiful moving; rather, he experiences himself as being moved and possessed by it. The more total this experience is, the less does a person seek and enjoy only the delight that comes through the senses or even through any act of his own; the less also does he reflect on his own acts and states. Such a person has been taken up wholesale into the reality of the beautiful and is now fully subordinate to it, determined by it, animated by it. (240-41)

This account locates the action not in response but in the beautiful itself; the subject here becomes that which is acted upon and transformed by beauty in such a way that he "loses" himself in the transformation. The movement is one of inclusion and participation rather than distanced appreciation. Nor is this possession momentary or passing; the more "total" the experience, in von Balthasar's terms, the more it directs and governs future actions, "animat[ing]" the entirety of the person.

Nowhere in Chesterton's fiction is this transformation through inclusion in the beautiful more startling and dramatic than in Father Michael's life generating near-death

experience on top of St. Paul's in *The Ball and the Cross*. As he descends from the cross atop St. Paul's, having been left there by Professor Lucifer, Michael undergoes first a realization of the truth of the cross that in order to save his life a man must be willing to lose it, second an elemental terror of dying, and finally a strange peace which is neither resignation to death nor hope of life. This peace is described as "complete and of the present," comprised of neither hope nor faith but of "satisfaction," a "vast unmeaning satisfaction" produced by a holistic vision where all the contingencies and accidents of existence are reconciled and balanced (*The Ball and the Cross* 8, 9). It is not until Michael is safely down on the street that we receive a full explanation of his experience: "in that unendurable instant when he hung, half slipping, to the ball of St. Paul's, the whole universe had been destroyed and re-created" (11). Obviously, Michael's traumatic experience quite literally gives him a new angle from which to view the world, and the centrality of this defamiliarizing perspective in Chesterton's novels will be taken up in chapter three. Here, however, we are concerned with the way in which this vision is one of beauty and generates his remarkably strange actions. For there is no other character so transformed in Chesterton's fiction.

Although he is introduced as an "exceedingly holy man," Father Michael's descent from St. Paul's radically changes him, driving him to apparent imbecility (1). In fact many of the other characters in the novel regard him as insane. The attendant who finds him in the top gallery of the cathedral certainly thinks he is an idiot, and when Turnbull sees him locked away in the bowels of Dr. Lucifer's asylum he comes to the same conclusion. Nor is this perspective limited to characters in the story; in his introduction to the novel, Martin Gardner finds the figure of Father Michael "obscure and

unsatisfactory” (xii). What are we to make of the holy and learned monk who becomes an idiot, Gardner asks? He supposes that perhaps Chesterton was painting a picture of how the church might look in secular society, and yet he concludes “it is hard to believe that any of Chesterton’s readers, or G.K. himself when he was older, could consider his monk a good symbol of the Church” (xii). Father Michael’s transformation is so radical and baffling that many—characters and readers alike—can only render the judgment: insane through extreme exposure. However, there is another way of reading Michael’s transformation, and at least one character in the book suspects that there might be more to the priest. MacIan is not sure that Michael’s simplicity is not a divine simplicity, the foolishness of God. The heart of this simplicity is found in the beauty which he encounters while hanging from the cross atop St. Paul’s.

Beauty seems a strange word to apply to Michael’s vision hanging from the cross in his “last agony” (*The Ball and the Cross* 9). Yet what else can it be called; it is after all a vision of not only the destruction but the recreation of the universe, and the prime feature of this new universe is its beauty, a beauty found in particulars. Michael is awed by the gallery attendant, the “image of God in nickel buttons” who discovers him, and once he descends to the street “everything his eye fell on it feasted on, not aesthetically, but with a plain, jolly appetite as of a boy eating buns” (10, 11). Moreover the wholeness of the vision, its ability to provide proportion and harmony to the chaotic movement of death argues for its beauty. Although splendor is not immediately listed as a feature of Michael’s vision, it is clearly applied to not only his vision on top of St. Paul’s but to his vision of the rest of the world. He has in von Balthasar’s terms been “taken up wholesale into the reality of the beautiful.” It is this possession by the beautiful which animates all

of Michael's consequent actions. The "cold splendor of space," the "infinite" of the cosmos gives way to the beauty of the gallery attendant and the smallness and particularity of the London street (10, 11). And it is this sense of the beauty and wonder of existence which moves Michael to convert the people around him who remain oblivious:

Michael felt he knew not how. The whole peace of the world was pent up painfully in his heart. The new and childlike world which he had seen so suddenly, men had not seen at all. There they were still at their old bewildering, pardonable, useless quarrels [. . .] A fierce inspiration fell on him suddenly; he would strike them where they stood with the love of God. They should not move till they saw their own sweet and startling existence. They should not go from that place till they went home embracing like brothers and shouting like men delivered. From the Cross from which he had fallen fell the shadow of its fantastic mercy; and the first three words he spoke in a voice like a silver trumpet, held men as still as stones. (11-12)

This passage highlights what has been implicit in all of Michael's praise of the world he finds in and around St. Paul's: that such appreciation is made possible by the strange light of wonder cast by cross. Michael's whole personal drama of the destruction and recreation of the world takes place under the cross on top of St. Paul's. Upon first sight of St. Paul's, Professor Lucifer claims to have discovered a new world, but it is actually Michael who "climb[s] up into a star," and the first fact of the new world is the cross sticking up through the clouds (3-5). It is Michael's coming down from the cross which gives him the eyes to see and the ears to hear the terrestrial paradise of the London street. Having first observed and the experienced the primacy, grace and death of the cross, Michael can see fully the beauty of the world. The beautiful "within which" Michael's whole self is taken up and transformed is his divinely granted vision of the cosmos in the midst of his own experience of death and new life, and this death and resurrection are

linked directly to the Passion of Christ. In the hour of his last agony, hanging from the cross upon which he has been put by the design of Professor Lucifer, Michael's vision of the completion and perfection of the universe is simultaneously a fulfillment and transformation of his life.¹² From that moment on he is indelibly marked; before he was a holy monk engaged in refuting ancient heresies, now he is a saint who the world can view only as a lunatic. In response to his three word sermon on Ludgate Hill, the police "took the happiest man in the world away to an asylum" (12).

When he reappears at the end of the novel, Father Michael is still animated by his experience on top of St. Paul's. In fact, he is perfectly happy and content in his cell as he delights in its various formal aspects: the shape of the room, the number of squares on the wall, the iron spike which sticks out of the wall. Despite his solitary confinement, he tells Turnbull that he is "very happy" (153). The happiest man in the world remains so even in total solitary confinement. This happiness does not stem from lunacy, as Turnbull first suspects. Father Michael is indeed capable of quite direct and piercing questions, and he somehow controls the machinery of the prison. And in the end, it is Father Michael who is unharmed and even singing in the final inferno, like the three Hebrew youths in the furnace, and it is his miraculous passage through the flames that occasions Turnbull's conversion. This divine contentment and power is a result of his experience on St. Paul's. When Professor Lucifer first lifts him out of his garden in Bulgaria into his airship, Michael is holy even as he possesses a piercing commonsense.

¹² The cross here provides what Chesterton early on recognized was one of the prime functions of religion, not the pointing out of heaven or even hell but of the earth: "Religion has had to provide that longest and strangest of telescopes—the telescope through which we could see the star upon which we dwelt" (*The Defendant* 12). Yet as the cross provides the lens through which Michael sees the earth it also determines the form of his vision.

But his inclusion in the strange beauty of the cross as he hangs dying atop St. Paul's indelibly marks him, driving his transformation from a holy monk into a saint. He is, in von Balthasar's terms, "fully subordinate to [the beautiful], determined by it, animated by it" (240).

In this subordination within the beautiful, Father Michael is the clearest example among Chesterton's pantheon of heroes who experience the possessive and animating effects of being caught up into the beautiful. Father Michael's vision fulfills Chesterton's criterion that the true poet provides a "glimpse that was given of the world when God saw that it was good" (*Chaucer* 29). Like the mythic characters and myth-making genres of popular literature, in their response to the beautiful, Chesterton's characters participate in the function of fiction, which is to fulfill the "the primeval duty of Praise" (*Chaucer* 29).

This account of the way in which the *splendour formae* shapes the form of Chesterton's fiction complements Chesterton's claims about the priority of fiction over literature and his privileging of popular genres over the work of literary specialists, particularly those influenced by the pessimism and aesthetic decadence of the 1890s. Chesterton's novels are simultaneously "hedge and gutter adventures" and paeans of praise to the *doxa* which streams forth from the Father through the Son and is reflected everywhere in the forms of the world. It is in and through the gutters and hedges that Chesterton's novels offer their praise of being, and the forms of the novels with their repetitive episodic quality and irregular chronologies likewise bear witness to the encounters with beauty. Chesterton's fantastic episodes and startlingly energetic characters all dance around a central vision of beauty. This is quite literally true of the

cosmic festival at the end of *The Man Who Was Thursday*, and it accounts for the formal qualities of all the novels.

CHAPTER FOUR

Imagination and Perception: The Grace of Vision in *Manalive*

To find no contradiction in the union of old and new; to contemplate the ANCIENT of days and all his works with feelings as fresh, as if all had then sprang forth at the first creative fiat; characterizes the mind that feels the riddle of the world, and may help unravel it.

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 80

We must invoke the most wild and soaring sort of imagination; the imagination that can see what is there.

—G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*

The enthusiasm which is inherent to the Christian faith is not merely idealistic; it is, rather, an enthusiasm which derives from and is appropriate to actual, realistic Being

—Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*

In chapter three I examine the place of imagination and perception in *Manalive*.¹ Renewed perception of familiar forms occurs everywhere in Chesterton's fiction. Characters are constantly arrested by seeing something for the 1,000th time and therefore seeing it for the first time, to use the language of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. Gabriel Gale claims that "the main object of a man's life was to see a thing as if he had never seen it before" (*The Poet and the Lunatics* 29). These fresh visions are a function of the characters' imaginations. It is their ability to see the habituated forms of perception from strange and startling angles that allows Chesterton's characters to see the world in Coleridge's phrase "as if all had then sprang forth at the first creative fiat" (*Biographia Literaria* I: 80). The imagination lies at the center of Chesterton's account in fiction of encounter with the beautiful. The revelatory quality of form which discloses both its own

¹ Sections of this chapter previously appeared in "The Failures of Innocent Smith," *The St. Austin Review* 13.3 (2013): 14-17. These sections are published here with the kind permission of *The St. Austin Review*.

distinctive composition and the glory of the divine depends upon perception and particularly imaginative perception in Chesterton's work.

In 1911, Chesterton published his fourth novel, *Manalive*. The plot of the novel is shortly summarized and is quintessential Chesterton; Maise Ward calls it the "acid test of a Chestertonian" (*Gilbert Keith Chesterton* 370). The novel is divided into two parts: "The Engimas of Innocent Smith" and "The Explanations of Innocent Smith." Innocent Smith is the mysterious, literally larger than life character who shows up at Beacon House, a dull boarding house in London. The inhabitants of the house are equally perplexed by Smith's furious and fantastic antics and by his refusal to clearly identify who he is and where he has come from. When Smith attempts to elope with a member of the house, the police are called in, and the boarders discover that according to an American criminologist Smith is a dangerous fugitive. In light of the principle of home-rule at home which Smith has early propounded to them, the boarders decide to set up a tribunal and judge Smith for themselves. As the trial progresses, they discover that beneath every charge of murder, theft, desertion, and polygamy Smith has broken the "conventions" but kept "the commandments" (*Manalive* 122). His method, they discover, has been to "remind himself by every electric shock to the intellect that he is still a man alive, walking on two legs about the world" (121). Smith's ability to retain awareness of his life and the goodness of the world, evident in his having two legs, is directly tied to his imagination, his ability to "perceive the forms of existence with awe" in von Balthasar's terms. The electric shocks with which he keeps himself awake in the world are provided by imaginative defamiliarization of familiar objects. Thus he enters his house like a burglar from the roof in order to feel the strangeness of his own

possessions, and he repeatedly proposes to, marries, and elopes with his wife so that he can continually remain aware of the wild romance of marriage.

Making the familiar strange is not only Innocent's method but the method of the novel as well. The novel begins with a wind, a "wave of unreasonable happiness" blowing across England (1). Yet it is a peculiar kind of happiness the wind brings as it bears "drama into undramatic lives" and carries the "trump of crisis across the world" (1). To the professor the wind scatters his pages until they seem "precious," to the poor mother for whom the five shirts on the clothesline look like five dead children the wind transforms them in to kicking goblins, to the melancholy girl in the hammock the wind disperses the gloom of the garden and shows her "pictures of bright villages far below, as if she rode in heaven in a fairy boat," and to the weary curate plodding down the lane to whom the trees appear funereal the wind shakes the trees until they crash round him like a "salutation of seraphic wings" (1). In each case the wind transforms the apparently ordinary into something else. Or, to be precise, what the wind really transforms is the perception of the various people; in blowing about and stirring into motion the objects around them what had seemed quotidian now appears quite startling.

This is explicitly stated when the wind finally strikes Beacon House, the boarding house where the action of the novel takes place. To the characters standing in the garden as the wind blows away the clouds and reveals the sunset,

there was something oddly romantic about this inrush of air and light after a long, leaden, and unlifting day. Grass and garden trees seemed glittering with something at once good and unnatural like a fire from fairyland. It seemed like a strange sunrise at the wrong end of the day. (2).

Although this fairy fire seems otherworldly, it has the effect of drawing attention to this world. Indeed, Chesterton argues in *Orthodoxy* that this is the function of fairy tales which “say that apples were golden only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green” (59).² By literally shaking and displacing familiar objects, the wind produces new perception in characters: the girl’s oppressive garden becomes a parapet from which she looks down on the world as if from heaven, and the curate’s monotonous landscape is suddenly charged with divine presence. The first page thus not only sets up Innocent Smith’s entrance but his whole method and the method of the novel, which is to startle characters into awareness of the beauty around them. The wind certainly reveals this beauty:

The colossal clearance which the wind had made of the cloudy sky grew clearer and clearer chamber within chamber seemed to open in heaven. One felt one might at last find something lighter than light. In the fullness of this silent effulgence all things collected their colours again; the gray trunks turned silver and the drab gravel gold. (*Manalive* 5).

The blowing wind discloses a fullness of light, almost a divine light which opens ever deeper in heaven, where all created things reveal their beauty.

Innocent Smith is fundamentally identified with this wind. The most fantastic of the objects which the wind blows into the garden of Beacon House—including a hat, an

² In this focus on the way in which the imagination sharpens our attention to the actual world, Chesterton demonstrates his agreement with Tolkien and Lewis who both highlight this value of the imagination. In “On Fairy Stories” Tolkien argues that “we should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses—and wolves” (*Tolkien Reader* 74). We return from our travels in Fairyland with renewed wonder and interest in the primary things of the world around us: stones, fields, and streams. So too Lewis observes in “On Stories” that *The Wind in the Willows*, far from hindering our interaction with the real world, actually enables the simple pleasures of eating and companionship; “this excursion into the preposterous sends us back with renewed pleasure to the actual” (68).

umbrella, and a yellow luggage bag—is Innocent himself, and he takes up the bustling energy of the wind by shaking the boarders free from the “lethargy of custom” in Coleridge’s phrase (*Biographia* II: 7).³ Innocent continues the work of the wind, carrying its energy into Beacon House. This wind which is linked with Innocent thus connects to the imagination, for Smith is particularly the prophet of the imagination: “it looks as if,” observes Michael Moon, “he could turn into a sort of wonderland any minute by taking one step out of the plain road” (*Manalive* 18). And Smith does this, quite literally, throughout the novel; he physically dislocates himself and his companions through picnics on the roof and entering his own house from every opening but the front door. He is able to transform any minute, place, or occupation, however mundane, into a marvel. Yet Smith is no illusionist, creating some deceptive alluring quality in familiar things. Moon later describes Smith as “a man of business . . . A plain practical man; a man of affairs; a man of facts and daylight” (30). Smith manages to combine the fantastic and the prosaic; indeed Smith argues that the prosaic *is* the fantastic, and as the novel develops the other characters realize that such a conflation is at the heart of Smith’s project. Indeed his very name demonstrates this linking of apparent opposites: Innocent, a miraculous name if really true, and Smith, the most common of commonplace names. The junction of the marvelous and the commonplace defines both Smith as a character and the peculiar function of the imagination in Chesterton’s novels. For Chesterton the

³Except for the reference to St. Francis’s thinness, Chesterton’s description of the holy man of Assisi seems particularly applicable to Innocent Smith, especially in the identification with the wind: [He] was a lean and lively little man; thin as a thread and vibrant as a bowstring; [. . .] In appearance he must have been like a thin brown skeleton autumn leaf dancing eternally before the wind; but in truth it was he that was the wind (*St. Francis* 37).

imagination may create a wonderland, but that wonderland is nothing other than the world of “facts and daylight,” which is to say that for Chesterton the imagination is directed toward perception.

The Failures of Innocent Smith

The best way to understand Chesterton’s connection of imagination and perception is through the failures of Innocent Smith. Highlighting Smith’s failures is intentionally provocative; after all, half of the point of the novel is that Smith really is innocent. And Smith himself is one of the most beloved of all Chesterton’s characters; his great principle of breaking the conventions and keeping the commandments is something of a rallying cry for Chesterton enthusiasts. Moreover, chapter three considered Smith as one of the great cosmic characters in Chesterton’s fiction. In light of these facts, discussion of Smith’s failures seems a strange reversal of the position he has already been accorded by both readers and my own argument. However, I elucidate Smith’s failings only in order to better point out his triumphs. For Smith’s failures generate his wonderful antics; to reverse his famous dictum, Smith breaks the conventions because he is in danger of breaking the commandments. Breaking conventions constitutes his desperate attempt to keep the commandments. Smith’s struggles are instructive, for the particular nature of his failings provide the grounds for his strange methods and actions. The root of Innocent’s struggle lies in faults in his memory and his perception, so he develops peculiar strategies to keep himself awake and alert in the world. Moreover, understanding his own trials allows Smith to see clearly and respond effectively to the lethargy of his fellow characters.

Beyond the particular case of *Manalive*, Innocent Smith's method provides a window onto the larger question of the place of memory, perception, and imagination in Chesterton's work. Innocent's struggles are not unique; his violent attempts to retain proper appreciation of his family and his home are caused by problems common to everyone, especially the disenchanted of late modernity. The residents at Beacon House suffer from a decayed perception of the world in which the most wondrous of things appear ordinary and mundane. This is most clearly evident in the aborted romances of Michael and Rosamund and Arthur and Diana; although these couples may once have been enamored, they have lost all faith in their ability to love and to be loved.

In order to combat this faulty perception, Smith turns to defamiliarization, that is making ordinary things appear strange and unfamiliar, in order to see the world anew. Chesterton argued repeatedly that a large part of our failure to appreciate the world lies in our failure to truly see the world; thus, the question of right perception, of how to restore vision stands at the heart of his work. Innocent Smith the character and Chesterton the author both rely on the technique of defamiliarization in order to startle their audiences into wonder. Understanding the ways in which they make settled things strange not only reveals much about Innocent Smith as a character but also sheds light on the method of Chesterton's fiction.

Let me begin with the common perception of Innocent Smith as a larger-than-life figure full of vigor and energy. Dorothy Sayers called Chesterton the "beneficent bomb" of her generation, and that description fits Innocent Smith equally well (123); he bursts in upon the inhabitants of Beacon House, revolutionizing their apparently dreary lives through his demonstration of the wonder of existence and the specific merits of their

particular situation. Nobody had thought to climb the tree in the yard before Innocent came; no one had noticed the back garden. Under his spell, however, the other characters are galvanized with a peculiar energy. Arthur turns his hobby into an exhibition titled “Moral Photography,” Rosamund’s occasional songs coalesce into an opera, and Michael’s ramblings become a magazine (*Manalive* 21). Smith’s proposal of marriage to Mary Gray leads Michael and Arthur to make similar declarations of love to Rosamund and Dianna; throughout his whole tenure at Beacon House, Smith is a presiding genius of hilarity, adventure, and fun.

His fellow characters realize that something separates him from themselves. Arthur likens him to the eternal schoolboy, and Michael thinks that perhaps he simply the lost youth of the boarders returned: “Haven’t you noticed,” he says, “that we never saw him since we found ourselves? He was an astral baby born of all four of us; he was only our own youth returned. Long before poor old Warner had clambered out of his cab, the thing we called Smith had dissolved into dew and light on this lawn” (36). While Michael’s hypothesis is immediately disproved by a real Smith shooting very real bullets at Dr. Warner, something of this interpretation obtains through the rest of the novel. Innocent may turn out to be human, but he certainly seems something more as well; he may be a man fully alive, but *manalive* seems to be something higher than ourselves. Raymond Percy, the curate, thinks Smith a messenger from Heaven (94), and many readers of *Manalive* are likely to agree. To both characters in the novel and to readers, Innocent often appears as a saint or a creature from a fairy-tale; he is fantastic in the literal sense. At times he seems much like Sunday, another gigantic character who is quite literally larger than life. Just as Syme thinks that Sunday is some kind of elemental

ogre or elf, so too Arthur Inglewood sees Innocent, silhouetted by the rising moon, as a “huge half-human figure sitting on the garden wall” (54).

This reading of Smith is quite valid; Smith is fantastic and gigantic. His apparently boundless energy, his appetite for enjoying life, and his ability to and remain a manalive are inspirational. His attempt to “remind himself by every electric shock to the intellect that he is still a man alive, walking on two legs about the world” startles both the boarders of Beacon House and often readers of the novel itself into admiration and praise (121). Indeed, Ian Boyd argues that Smith’s inspiration and education of the other characters is directly linked to Chesterton’s inspiration and education of the reader; as Smith revolutionizes the world-weary boarders, so too Chesterton wants to renew appreciation for life amid Edwardian England (52, 56). On both a fictional and a meta-fictional level Smith is a wonder who surprises his audience into appreciation and praise.

This admiration for Smith, however, sometimes clouds another aspect of his character, that of his failures. After all, if he is such a figure of life and vitality, why does Innocent leave his home and walk around the world? The answer is obvious but often forgotten in wonderment at Smith’s successes. Smith is so startling, his methods so brilliant and dazzling, that they obscure his motivations. Why, does he leave his family? Why does he break into his own house and elope with his own wife? Why, in short, does he “seek to remind himself by every electric shock to the imagination that he is a manalive walking on two legs about the world” except that Innocent Smith is constantly forgetting that he really is a manalive. This fact becomes quite evident in part two of the novel, titled “the Explanations of Innocent Smith;” these explanations not only establish

Smith's strange methods and clear him of all criminal charges, they also reveal the struggles that lie at the heart of his actions.

The first clear evidence of Smith's problems comes during the Burglary Charge of the trial, the first episode after Smith's smashing success with Professor Eames. At the end of Part Two, Chapter One, we leave Smith victorious at Cambridge, promising to "walk the world like a wonderful surprise" with his pistol held to the head of Modern Man (*Manalive* 73). Yet when we find him again in the next chapter burgling his own house with Raymond Percy there is a new element to Smith's antics: "You know the house, then?" [Percy said]? 'Too well,' [Smith] answered, with a sadness so strange as to have something eerie about it. 'I am always trying to forget what I know—and to find what I don't know'" (90). This sadness about his home marks a difference from Innocent, the undergraduate who made Eames praise God for ducks and drakes and spotted blinds. Smith has tried to live out his creed of wonder and has found it quite difficult. This difficulty comes through no particular fault of Innocent's; instead it is simply a fact of experience that as humans we become inured to our environments and accept the miraculous as mundane. Innocent Smith's difficulties then are everyman's; he suffers from the same terrible bent toward boredom that we all do. Moreover, the "eerie" quality of Smith's melancholy is a foretaste of the novel's reflections on the "holy homesickness that forbids us rest" (108). Smith's sadness is a reflection of his exile, of humanity's exile which "no earthly house can cure" (108). Although Smith recognizes this fact and tells Louis Hara that he has become a "pilgrim to cure myself of being an exile," he often forgets his status as peregrinator and reverts to mere dissatisfaction and dullness (108).

Innocent tells Percy as much in the course of their conversation. Percy reflects that “His creed of wonder was Christian by this absolute test; that he felt it continually slipping from himself as much as from others. He had the same pistol for himself, as Brutus said of the dagger” (92). Innocent Smith holds the gun to his own head; it is a pill for his pale soul as well as for the souls of other “pale people” (73). He repeatedly puts himself into bodily danger in order to remember that he really is alive. Yet, after a while even this roulette loses its force. Smith confesses that his home, his children, and his wife appear gray and dull. This failing, he tells the Russian station attendant, is solely his own: “It was not the house that grew dull, but I that grew dull in it. My wife was better than all women, and yet I could not feel it” (102). Thus, Innocent Smith, the celebrated champion of hilarity, adventure, and child-like wonder is himself prone to dullness and blindness. He knows that he lives in a world of wonders, but he cannot see or feel it.

Indeed, it is knowledge of his failings, his realization that he does not properly appreciate his family that generates his wonderful adventures. It is this sense that Smith breaks the conventions in order to keep from breaking the commandments. Chesterton argues in *Orthodoxy* that “A man may lie still and be cured of a malady. But he must not lie still if he wants to be cured of a sin; on the contrary, he must get up and jump about violently” (144). Smith’s life consists in just this penitential jumping.

To draw out this point, it is helpful to look an early version of the *Manalive* narrative, a short story by Chesterton written in 1896 and titled “Homesick at Home.” In that story the contrast between deadened stasis and violent movement is even more stark. In “Homesick at Home” the farmer White Wynd, Innocent’s predecessor, suffers from the same problem as Smith: the home and farm which are all that he has known and loved

have become stale: “In his later years he hardly ever went outside the door. And as he grew lazy he grew restless: angry with himself and everyone. He found himself in some strange way weary of every moment and hungry for the next” (227). Like Smith, White Wynd cannot see the nearest, dearest things properly: “Now he seemed to be able to see other homes, but not his own. That was merely a house. Prose had got hold of him: the sealing of the eyes and the closing of the ears” (228). He can remember when he properly recognized the beauty of his own house, when “the thatch of his home burned with gold as though angels were standing there,” but he can remember it only as a dream (228). The life which Wynd once appreciated has apparently grown stale, or rather Wynd has grown stale. His home and his farm are as wonderful as ever, but Wynd has lost eyes to see and ears to hear the good news of his own life.

White Wynd’s cure lies in a powerful movement of the heart which shocks him into action. One morning as he sits at breakfast as he has done countless times, something changes: “At last something occurred in his heart: a volcano; an earthquake; an eclipse; a daybreak; a deluge; an apocalypse. We might pile up colossal words, but we should never reach it” (228). This unnamable event, greater even than the apocalypse, is the movement of grace: a violent upsetting of Wynd’s quiet stagnation rousing him to action. In the end, Wynd cannot restore himself; he cannot rouse himself from his own bitter lethargy. It is only through the unaccountable and unexpected jolt of grace that he suddenly becomes aware that he has fallen out of poetry and into prose. This grace is associated with the wind as Wynd steps out of his farmhouse to begin his journey, the same wind which reappears at the beginning of *Manalive*. The wind is certainly an appropriate symbol for grace and the Holy Spirit; it comes as a surprise, something

outside of human expectation and control. The particular action of grace is to renew Wynd's perception. He terrifies his wife and children by pointing out all the familiar things which remind him of his true home and family. He starts up from the breakfast table, grabs his hat, and sets off around the world to find the real White Farmhouse by the river.

Grace lies at the heart of perception in Chesterton's fiction. For Chesterton grace must undergird vision because that which is seen is itself graced. There is no such thing as ungraced nature in the language of the *nouvelle* theologians, a point given beautiful expression in fiction by George Bernanos's young priest who when informed that he will die without receiving final unction declares with his dying breath "Does it matter? Grace is everywhere . . ." (298). The existence of anything, much less the ability to perceive that existence, is a gift which can never be deserved nor repaid; "It is the highest and holiest of paradoxes," writes Chesterton in *St. Francis*, "that the man who really knows he cannot pay his debt will be forever paying it back [. . .] He will be always throwing things away into a bottomless pit of unfathomable thanks" (77). The movement to thanks and the vision of beauty are enabled by that "unnameable event" of divine action.

Like White Wynd, Innocent's problem lies in what Chesterton labels "prose," a malady of the mind and the eyes which makes our truly fantastic lives appear boring and dull. The value in diagnosing this problem is two-fold. First, recognizing Smith's continual struggle against the ever-encroaching boredom which besets him reminds us of Smith's humanity. The giant joker of Beacon House who appears like someone out of a fairy tale is actually mired in the prose of life. He is in fact quite ordinary—remaining wide awake to the wonder of being is hard, even for Smith to whom it appears to come so

naturally. This fact explains Smith's seriousness throughout the novel; he is serious about his play because it matters; something very real is at stake for him. More importantly, understanding the nature of Smith's disease enables a better understanding of the particular cure Chesterton proposes.

At the heart of Innocent's struggle to remain manalive lies the problem of perception and memory. Nearly all the various descriptions of Innocent's method involve the problem of forgetfulness and memory. Smith tells Percy that he "treasured up trivial and yet insane details that had once reminded him of the awful subconscious reality" (*Manalive* 92). Smith admits that priests ought to tell men they will die, but "at certain strange epochs it is necessary to have another kind of priests, called poets, actually to remind men that they are not dead yet" (92). Moon's summation of Innocent's aim which we have already visited uses the same language: "He seeks to remind himself by every electric shock to the intellect that he is still a man alive" (121). In each case, Smith's method is to attempt to remember that which he is constantly forgetting.

Indeed, the whole novel takes place under the sign of forgetfulness. Arthur Inglewood realizes that all the inhabitants of Beacon House are "too busy to wake up" (28), and Michael Moon completes this line of reasoning when he tells Rosamund that "We went to sleep a little while ago on this very lawn, in this very sunlight" (30). For five years, the company of characters has forgotten themselves in one long afternoon nap; they have forgotten their dreams and their desires; they have forgotten their names. Consequently they have abandoned their romances and their passions; Michael confesses that underneath all his apparent sordid drinking and carousing is mere surrender: "you see

before you a person whom civilization has thoroughly tamed,” he declares to Arthur as they picnic on the roof (17). Likewise, Arthur can regard himself as nothing more than a weak man who knows only that he is weak (19). Forgetting who they really are, Michael and Arthur can only sink into inaction and lethargy.

For Chesterton, this loss of memory is at the heart of the modern condition. He writes in *Orthodoxy* that

Every man has forgotten who he is. One may understand the cosmos, but never the ego; the self is more distant than any star. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God; but thou shalt not know thyself. We are all under the same mental calamity; we have all forgotten our names. We have all forgotten what we really are. All that we call common sense and rationality and practicality and positivism only means that for certain dead levels of our life we forget that we have forgotten. All that we call spirit and art and ecstasy only means that for one awful instant we remember that we forget. (59)

Innocent remembers who he really is, but such remembrance is a struggle, a tenuous victory which he constantly battles to maintain. Michael Moon remembers his name when he proposes to Rosamund: “Is my name Moon? Is your name Hunt? On my honour, they sound to me as quaint and distant as Red Indian names. It’s as if your name was ‘Swim’ and my name was ‘Sunrise.’ But our real names are Husband and Wife, as they were when we fell asleep” (*Manalive* 30). And yet he also acknowledges that he will perhaps never remember so clearly again in his life: “Disappointed! [he tells Rosamund] Of course we’ll be disappointed! I, for one, don’t expect till I die to be so good a man as I am at this minute, for just now I’m fifty thousand feet high, a tower with all the trumpets shouting” (31). Smith’s genius consists in stringing together the “awful instants” these trumpeting minutes where he remembers that he has forgotten his name and then inviting others to remember their names as well.

Chesterton links this tendency toward amnesia with our perception of the world. Chesterton lays out his basic argument regarding the human inclination to misperceive the world in his introduction to *The Defendant*, his first collection of essays, published in 1901. For the average fallen “mind” and “eyes,” this world is “as lost as Eden and as sunken as Atlantis,” he argues (12).⁴ Chesterton’s emphasis here on the eyes themselves as deceiving instruments is worthy of note. The problem lies not solely in the fact that our minds misconstrue what we see; our very vision itself is flawed, and this provides the occasion of our forgetting ourselves:

This is the great fall, the fall by which the fish forgets the sea, the ox forgets the meadow, the clerk forgets the city, every man forgets his environment and, in the fullest and most literal sense, forgets himself. This is the real fall of Adam, and it is a spiritual fall. [...] Most probably we are in Eden still. It is only our eyes that have changed. (12).

Innocent Smith repeats this emphasis on optical salvation when he tells Rosamund:

“Open your eyes; and you’ll wake up in the New Jerusalem” (*Manalive* 25).

Chesterton’s project in *The Defendant* consists in attempting to rectify the deficiency in human perception, for flawed vision leads to flawed conclusions and actions. Part of our ocular fault lies in seeing the world worse than it is; our fallen eyes see everything not in a better but a worse light. Thus, we dispraise all the things Chesterton attempts to defend in his first collection of essays: penny dreadfuls, rash vows, slang, and baby worship. If we were but able to see properly, Chesterton claims, we would see that we live in an elfland more fantastic than the wildest fairy tale.

⁴ Chesterton continues this theme later in *The Defendant* in his essay “In Defence of Planets” where he argues that humans are blind to the place in which they actually live: “If we once realize all this earth as it is, we should find ourselves in a land of miracles: we shall discover a new planet at the moment that we discover our own. Among all the strange things that men have forgotten, the most universal and catastrophic lapse of memory is that by which they have forgotten that they are living on a star” (50).

Yet, we do not often view the world in this way; instead, our homes and our things appear merely normal and thus boring. Chesterton claims in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* that “we can look at a thing 999 times but if we look at it for the 1,000th time we are in danger of seeing it for the first time.” Nor is this a purely passive occurrence where one simply waits for the magical 1,000th time. Chesterton observed in the passage from *Orthodoxy* that art aids in the endeavor to break out of the perceptual rut and begin to remember. Art can help restore proper perception of the world through the reawakening of the imagination. If we tend to forget—to fall asleep in the world—then art wakes us up and it does so by stimulating our imaginations to proper wonder and appreciation. The rest of this chapter will be concerned with illuminating the role of the imagination in restoring perception for Innocent Smith and the readers of *Manalive*.

Imagination and Perception

For Chesterton, the end of the imagination is perception; all the wild flights of fancy in his fiction are finally directed toward renewed vision of the world that is, a world that chapter two has argued is “charged with the grandeur of God.” Chesterton establishes this basic function of the imagination in *The Defendant*. Whereas the imagination is usually thought of as ordered to contemplating fresh new utopias, Chesterton argues that it is primarily the tool of the historian:

By the cheap revolutionary it is commonly supposed that imagination is a merely rebellious thing, that it has its chief function in devising new and fantastic republics. But imagination has its highest use in a retrospective realization. The trumpet of imagination, like the trumpet of the Resurrection, calls the dead out of their graves. Imagination sees Delphi with the eyes of a Greek, Jerusalem with the eyes of a Crusader, Paris with the eyes of a Jacobin, and Arcadia with the eyes of a Euphuist. The prime function of the imagination is to see our whole orderly system of life as a pile of stratified revolutions. In spite of all revolutionaries it must be said

that the function of the imagination is not to make strange things settled, so much as to make settled things strange; not so much to make wonders facts as to make facts wonders. (52-53)

Turning facts into wonders is the whole goal of *The Defendant*, discovering precious gems in all the “dust-heaps of humanity” (14). In separate essays in the collection Chesterton defends rash vows, nonsense, ugly things, slang, and baby worship all in an attempt to make these supposedly dull and pedestrian things appear as marvels. Nor is this an attempt to escape reality and create a Neverland of the mind. It is just such escapism in Lewis Carroll which causes Chesterton to judge Edward Lear the better nonsense poet.⁵ For the imagination does not provide another world in antithesis to this one. Fairyland, Chesterton claims, is “nothing but the sunny country of common sense” (*Orthodoxy* 54). By this he means that fairyland is directly concerned with logical relations even if they are cloaked in fantastic forms.

In *Orthodoxy* Chesterton argues that the most important idea fairytales teach is the contingent gratuity of the world; reality could be quite other than it is, but as it is, it is good and beautiful, and the proper response to such goodness is humility (70). These are exactly the values John Milibank discovers in fairy tales. He claims that one of the functions of fairy tales is to make us “see the contingent absurdity of our own world which might have been otherwise, and at the same time the specific value of this elective

⁵ Chesterton argues that Carroll sits suspended between his Wonderland and his actual life in Oxford; readers suspect the realities of the Oxford don behind Humpty Dumpty and the March Hare, and thus his nonsense world has a strong sense of escape. Moreover Carroll’s world is one of reason even if it is reason gone mad. Lear’s nonsense on the other hand is “poetical” and “emotional” rather than “intellectual.” Whereas “Jabberwocky” is a precise web of nonsense words, Lear’s ““Far and few, far and few, / Are the lands where the Jumbles live”” simply includes “scraps of [Lear’s] own elvish dialect into the middle of simple and rational statements” (*The Defendant* 44).

set of circumstances” (146). The imagination thus highlights the fairy-tale nature of the world.

If the imagination points out the fairy-tale quality of the world, then, the marvelous lies not in some imaginative addition which the mind supplies to objects but in the very objects themselves. When the wind blows into the garden of Beacon House, color infuses the landscape, and this is at once a “good and unnatural” fire from fairyland and also simply the natural state of the world: “all things collected their colours again” (*Manalive* 5). The supernatural and the natural are tightly woven together within the objects themselves; the imagination discovers the inherent wonder of these objects; it does not create their significance or meaning.

Chesterton reflects at length on this peculiar conviction which distinguished him so definitively from the other mystics with whom he was grouped as a young man. In an essay titled “Wonder and the Wooden Post,” which appears in the posthumously collected *The Coloured Lands*, Chesterton recounts knocking his head against a post in the dark and the startling realization that this experience produced. Using this accident, he explains his “power of seeing plain things and landscapes in a kind of sunlight of surprise” as the “power of poetically running one’s head against a post” (161). When as a young poet he was introduced to all his fellow mystics who were likewise concerned with the wonder of the wooden post, he discovered a fundamental difference. When the modern mystic “said that a wooden post was wonderful [. . .] they mean that they could make something wonderful out of it by thinking about it. ‘Dream; there is no truth,’ said Mr. Yeats, ‘but in your own heart.’ The modern mystic looked for the post, not outside in

the garden, but inside, in the mirror of his mind” (163-64). Chesterton, on the other hand, argues that, although he may be a mystic, his mysticism is externally focused:

My last door of liberty open upon a world of sun and solid things, of objective adventures. . . . When the modern mystics said they like to see a post; they mean they liked to imagine it. They were better poets than I; and they imagined it as soon as they saw it. Now I might see a post long before I had imagined it [. . .] to me the post is wonderful because it is *there*; there whether I like it or not. (164)

The function of the imagination is to demonstrate the reality of objects, to point out that the facts of the world are really wonders, that the wooden post’s mere existence is the “substance of things not seen” (164). The imagination is thus directed toward perception.

In this focus on the perceptive function of the imagination, Chesterton situates himself within a long tradition of understanding the imagination as intimately tied up with perception. However, this linking of vision and imagination might appear at first a confusion of terms, a comparison of intellectual apples and oranges. After all, vision, especially the vision of being which chapter one dealt with, is the seeing of what is, and imagination is most easily defined as an interior activity involving the creation of images. In the introduction to her massive and multi-faceted *The World of the Imagination*, Eva Brann lists a few basic definitions of the imagination, the central feature of which is their location internally within in the mind. Whether imagination is considered as the philosophical power for representing “perceptual objects without their presence,” the psychological category of representations which occur “in the absence of the usual external stimuli,” or according to the common sense definition as the “mind’s eye,” it is first and foremost an interior process (24). In light of this, linking the imagination with perception of the beauty of being appears a conflation of terms, an uncritical mixing of the medieval *visum placet* with the creative, Romantic imagination. How is clear vision

of that which is related to the mental activity of interior sight of that which is not? For Chesterton, however, the imagination is the mental activity which allows characters to see clearly the forms of existence. Often this occurs through defamiliarization of either perspective, or objects, or both. This definition partakes in both medieval and Romantic understandings of the imagination as both a perceptive and a creative mental act.

The imagination is given a variety of explanations, definitions, and functions in classical and medieval thought, yet its basic position is one of mediation, a middle term linking sense and intellect. Brann argues that by locating the imagination in between “visual sensation” and “intuitive mind,” Augustine explicitly gives imagination the “mediating middle position that it had always implicitly held” (53). In Book XI of *The Trinity*, Augustine describes an imaginative triad where the will directs the internal sight (*acies animi*) to both think about and refashion memory. This action produces “in thought something like sight” and yet is capable of creating its own images from the building blocks of memory (Augustine 308). This understanding is taken up by Aquinas for whom the imagination provides a “storehouse” of images for the contemplation of the intellect; it is the function of the imagination to supply the intellect with forms from which the intellect can abstract the intelligible species (Brann 63-64). Indeed, Aquinas argues that given the human composition of both body and soul, the knowledge proper to us is that of intelligible species derived from the sensible species and thus imagination is a necessary link between the sensible and the intelligible: “In the present state of life in which the soul is united to a passible body, it is impossible for our intellect to understand anything actually, except by turning to phantasms” (I, 84, 7). Thomas gives a number of reasons for why this is so and all of them center on the difference between the corporeal

and the intellectual and the need for some middle term which can bridge the distance between them.

In Thomas's account the imagination forms a necessary part of perception itself, moreover, particularly the perception of beauty. In light of the mediating role of the imagination, Gilson argues that in Thomas's thought in addition to sensibility and intellect, imagination is a necessary ingredient in perception: "the latter [imagination] plays a decisive role, not only because it makes possible the free representation of possible objects not yet given in nature, but primarily in the very apprehension of the objects actually given" (*Arts of the Beautiful* 28). The perceptive rather than the creative role of imagination is accorded primacy here. The imagination provides the key function of holding the disparate elements of sensation together and presenting them as a whole, a complete form, to the intellect (28-29). This is so because the imagination recognizes form. In the perception of sensible beauty where the intellect does not focus on drawing concepts from the sensible but rests in the unified form presented to it by the interior senses, the imagination has an especially important role as it provides the place in which the "aesthetic experience" occurs (Maurer 37-38). For Thomas then, the imagination plays a direct role in perception and especially in perception of sensible beauty.

Nor is this focus on the imagination as a means for seeing what is restricted to classical and medieval thought; the Romantics articulate a similar understanding of the imagination, although they also bring a strong sense of the creative powers of the imagination, especially as a link to the divine. For Coleridge, the imagination is also directly involved in perception. His famous definition of the imagination in the

Biographia Literaria posits a primary and secondary imagination, the first of which is concerned with perception and the second with artistic creation.

The IMAGINATION then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation.” (I: 304)

J. Robert Barth, S.J. in *The Symbolic Imagination: Coleridge & the Romantic*

Tradition points out that the primary imagination is clearly a feature of common perception; the primary imagination unifies the chaos of experience into “meaningful wholes: landscapes, groups, relationships of shapes, sounds, and colors,” that is, of form (18). Here, as it unifies and unites, the imagination performs the same work as in classical and medieval thought. Coleridge describes the imagination as “that reconciling and mediatory power” (*Lay Sermons* 29). Moreover, the imagination is directed toward the creation of symbols, symbols which for Coleridge are based upon a theory of the “consubstantiality of being” a “oneness of things,” a theory is quite similar to the traditional Christian analogy of being (Barth 33-34). Coleridge defines symbol as

characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal in and through the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative. (*Lay Sermons* 30)

This definition with its vision of difference and participation mediated by symbol bears direct correlations with von Balthasar and Hart’s reflections on form and beauty in chapter one. Furthermore, Barth argues, perception of this consubstantiality occurs in the primary imagination which is able to recognize the unity undergirding existence and its

symbolic nature (37-38). What marks Coleridge's work as different from the scholastic vision as elucidated by Gilson and Maurer is the linking of this form-reading activity with the creative work of God. For Coleridge the kind of ordering by which the imagination bestows form bears direct analogy to God's own creation in which the formless void receives shape. Perception of form is itself a "repetition" on a human level of the Divine act.

The secondary imagination is linked to this primary imagination in that it likewise provides order and is also directed toward perception. For Coleridge the work of secondary imagination, the work of the poet, in dissolving the forms of the primary imagination in order to reconstitute them anew is centrally concerned with renewing perception of familiar things. "It is," he claims in *Biographia Literaria* "the prime merit of genius and its most unequivocal mode of manifestation, so to represent familiar objects as to awaken in the minds of others a kindred feeling concerning them and that freshness of sensation which is the constant accompaniment of mental, no less than of bodily, convalescence" (I: 81). Who, Coleridge asks, having read Burns' lines "To snow that fall upon a river / A moment white—then gone for ever" has not, although they have seen it "a thousand times," has not had their usual perception of falling snow refreshed and reinvigorated? (I: 81). Coleridge returns to this theme in volume two of the *Biographia* when he reflects on Wordsworth's goal in *The Lyrical Ballads* of

awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which in consequence of the film of familiarity, and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand. (II: 7)

The theological resonances of this passage are magnified by James Cutsinger's observation that Coleridge saw "a world translucent to deity" (93). The loveliness of the world is not merely natural but a window onto the divine, and the secondary imagination consists in revivifying perception in order that we might see clearly both the created order and the transcendent which shines through that order.

This long emphasis on the imagination in both its medieval and Romantic strains undergirds Chesterton's presentation of the imagination as a tool for surprising characters into perception. The wealth of Chesterton's statements on the imagination which this chapter has so far amassed all describe an action which enables vision of that which is. Nowhere in his fiction is this fact more evident than in *Manalive*. The pointing out of what is constitutes Smith's whole project during his stay at Beacon House. The imagination repeatedly leads characters towards this kind of renewed perception of familiar phenomena in *Manalive*. When Innocent Smith first arrives in the garden with his wild hat chasing antics, Inglewood, Moon and even the smug Warner begin to see things differently. They all realize that, although they have resided at Beacon House for five years, they never once thought to climb the tree (8). For Inglewood this realization is accompanied by a sense of the color of the garden; the colors that have returned to everything in the light and the wind (8). Smith's own imaginative play causes the other characters to perceive familiar things anew.

Smith continues his quest for giving his fellow lodgers eyes to see in his wild approach to their various hobbies. Strictly speaking, during his stay at Beacon House Smith creates no new institutions, he merely exaggerates what is already present by turning Arthurs's photographs into an art exhibition, Dianna's sewing into Smith's

Lighting Dressmaking Company in which plain dresses are decorated with chalks in order to combine elegance and economy, and Michael Moon's parodic High Court of Beacon into the Sovereign State of Beacon House. This exaggeration is not only Smith's particular method, it is according to Chesterton the definition of art itself (*Charles Dickens* 10, 26). For exaggeration is at its core nothing but realism in Chesterton's thought, governed as it is by the "principle that the most fantastic thing of all is often the precise fact" (*Charles Dickens* 25).

This growing sense of and appreciation for the objects around them leads characters to an experience of beauty. As Michael Moon and company perceive more clearly the forms around them, they are struck by the splendor radiating from those objects. The forms reveal both their own depth and point beyond themselves to the divine presence which irradiates them. When Innocent first catches the hat with his feet in the garden, a blast of wind splits the hat and "the eyes of all the men were blinded by the invisible blast, as by a strange, clear cataract of transparency rushing between them and all the objects around them" (*Manalive* 7). Here what blinds is invisible yet present, an overwhelming presence, a "translucence to deity." This initial blinded glimpse grows throughout the novel as the inhabitants of Beacon House begin to follow Smith's advice: "Open your eyes; and you'll wake up in the New Jerusalem" (25). By the time Dr. Warner answers Diana's plea for help in dissuading Mary Gray from eloping with Innocent, he finds Diana and Arthur as well as Michael and Rosamund dancing in the garden around an imaginary mulberry bush in celebration of their engagements and declaring that health and sanity are infectious and spreading rapidly throughout the house.

Although these nuptial festivities are interrupted by the trial, health and merriment eventually prevail, and the great wind returns in the final scene of the novel as the lovers celebrate Smith's acquittal by the High Court of Beacon and Smith himself whirls a firebrand on the roof sending sparks and smoke out over the whole neighborhood. His jolly roar of "acquitted" celebrates more than simply the result of the trial or even the return of health and cheer to Beacon House (127). The sparks from Smith's firebrand which the wind blows across three counties are a direct reference to the bluster of light and wind at the beginning of the novel which gave the garden an appearance "at once good and unnatural like a fire from fairyland" (2). At the end of the novel this second fairy fire goes out from Beacon House to the neighboring homes and counties. This is on one level a political fulfillment of Smith's political vision of Home Rule at Home in which the "bonfire of independence" lit at Beacon House spreads out to local community (23). Yet it is also an imaginative fulfillment of the gratuitous and unsettling wind. For now the fire comes not only from fairyland but also from the log which Smith brandishes. Beacon House itself has become caught up in and now participates in the glory which the wind disclosed at the beginning of the novel. As the flames illuminate the surrounding neighborhoods, the house and everyone in it fulfill the name of the place. Beacon House has remembered its name just as Smith remembers his own. The boarding establishment quite literally is a beacon, a revelation of light which is both illumined and points beyond itself toward the goodness and beauty which underlies all that is.

The Man Upside Down: The Defamiliarizing Method

If the imagination is directed toward this perception of what is, it achieves that goal through its own creative refashioning. By taking common elements of experience

and recasting them in unusual forms the imagination jolts us into awareness. Shelley describes this basic action in “A Defence of Poetry”: “Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar” (487). Chesterton agrees with Shelley about the method by which the imagination works, but he locates the problem not in the hiddenness of the world but in human blindness. The beauty of the world is obvious, for Chesterton, so obvious that it is often overlooked. It is in this sense that Chesterton frequently maintains that the order of the world is the truly remarkable thing: “We should wonder less at the earthquake, and wonder more at the earth” (*Collected Works* 27: 41). The imagination shakes the scales from our eyes by making the familiar strange.

Chesterton explains this concept when defending his historical method in *The Everlasting Man*:

But when its [the Church’s] fundamentals are doubted, as at present, we must try to recover the candour and wonder of the child; the unspoilt realism and objectivity of innocence. Or if we cannot do that, we must try at least to shake off the cloud of mere custom and see the thing as new, if only by seeing it as unnatural. Things that may well be familiar so long as familiarity breeds affection had much better become unfamiliar when familiarity breeds contempt. [. . .] We must invoke the most wild and soaring sort of imagination; the imagination that can see what is there. (148)

The defamiliarizing method of the imagination is directed toward appreciation of what is, toward seeing the beauty disclosed everywhere in the forms of the world.

For Chesterton, making the familiar strange is the work of poetry, but it is not the exclusive occupation of poets. Careful attention to Innocent Smith’s peculiar actions and confessions throughout *Manalive* demonstrate that Chesterton is centrally concerned with the imagination not of the poet but of the common man; Innocent Smith may be

manalive, but he is man for all that, and the solution he adopts provides a model not just for artists but for everyone. Innocent Smith's struggles to remain manalive demonstrate the widespread necessity of the imagination for perception.

If dulled perception of the world leads to forgetfulness and sleep, then the imagination must be reinvigorated by seeing the familiar as strange. This is Chesterton's point about the danger of seeing something for the 1,000th time; perhaps something will break through and jolt the deadened senses into awareness of the peculiarity of the world. This sense of the strangeness of things is a prerequisite, Chesterton claims, for wonder:

A thing cannot be completely wonderful so long as it remains sensible. So long as we regard a tree as an obvious thing, naturally and reasonably created for a giraffe to eat, we cannot properly wonder at it. It is when we consider it as a prodigious wave of living soil sprawling up to the skies for no reason in particular that we take off our hats, to the astonishment of the park-keeper. (*Defendant* 45-46)

It is the faculty of the imagination particularly which accomplishes this unsettled sort of vision. Chesterton writes in *The Defendant* that

The prime function of the imagination is to see our whole orderly system of life as a pile of stratified revolutions. In spite of all revolutionaries it must be said that the function of the imagination is not to make strange things settled, so much as to make settled things strange; not so much to make wonders facts as to make facts wonders. (53)

By recasting familiar objects in peculiar and strange ways, imagination opens us up to see anew what appeared settled and pedestrian.

The man standing on his head is the central image for this imaginative unsettling of perception in Chesterton fiction. Chesterton's novels are full of these inverted observers who take particular pleasure in viewing the world upside down.⁶ Auberon

⁶ Chesterton suggests at least one source for this image in his *Autobiography*. In recounting his experience at St. Paul's School and his friendship with E.C. Bentley,

Quinn receives the news of his kingship as he moos like a cow with his head between his legs; Innocent Smith catches Dr. Warner's hat by doing a handstand; and Gabriel Gale stands on his head to get a proper view of the landscapes he wishes to paint. The image recurs throughout Chesterton's work as a model of right vision because such a topsy-turvy position reminds its practitioners that all perspectives are arbitrary and consequently gratuitous. Upside down or right side up, the world is gift.

The value of this unsettling is rooted in the analogical understanding of the world which chapter two explored. Seeing objects analogically, that is as uniquely individual and yet possessing being from God, means seeing them from a radically unusual perspective; objects become repositories for meaning and significance far beyond what we usually attach to them. This is what Chesterton means in *Orthodoxy* when he reflects on his discovery that "Christian pleasure was poetic, for it dwelt on the unnaturalness of everything in the light of the supernatural" (86). The key here is that "everything" is unnatural; there are no ordinary things no matter how accustomed to grass, and trees, and stones we may become. Bathed in the rays of grace, the entire created order becomes a window which opens onto the divine.

The further implication of the analogical imagination is that it goes ever deeper. Because this imagination both recognizes and crosses the distance between the form of things and the depths of being, analogical vision grows ever richer but is never finished or exhausted. Von Balthasar describes this procession of analogical form as "the real

Chesterton recalls their creation of the Junior Debating Club as both an institution and a regular publication. Chesterton remembers the High Master of the school reading one of Bentley's comical pieces for the JDC and declaring "That boy looks at the world standing on his head" (70).

presence of the depths, of the whole of reality, *and . . . a real pointing beyond itself to these depths*” (116). This twofold quality accounts for both the ever deeper depth and the perdurance of the form which discloses those depths; we may be “transported” to the depth revealed in the beautiful but this “never happens in such a way that we leave the (horizontal) form behind us in order to plunge (vertically) into the naked depths” (116).⁷

The assumption behind von Balthasar’s observation is that seeing things rightly requires participation; as we perceive the particular qualities of an object, we are invited to respond not only to the form but to the depths of being which that form reveals. The beautiful itself is an invitation, an offer by which we are addressed and asked to respond. This idea is at the heart of Marion’s definition of the icon as that which “opens in a face that gazes at our gazes in order to summon them to its depth” (19). The moment of epiphany offers an invitation to participation in the divine beauty disclosed by form. The created order both demonstrates the glory of God and leads us through itself even deeper into that glory. Thus, for Chesterton, our imagination ought always to be disrupting our habitual perception of things in order to remind us anew of the “unnaturalness of everything,” not only so that we can wonder at it but so that we can begin to participate ever more deeply. He details this conviction in *Orthodoxy* when he links recognition to the strangeness of the world with gratitude; “the wonder,” he argues, “has a positive element of praise” (59).

If the imagination is directed toward making the ordinary strange in order that we might properly see and respond to the beautiful, then Chesterton’s primary tool for

⁷ Von Balthasar’s most important application of the principle comes when he recognizes that this priority of form holds true for God’s revelation: “we ought never to speak of God’s beauty without reference to the form and manner of appearing which he exhibits in salvation history” (121).

accomplishing this surprised perception is the practice of making unfamiliar the quotidian and habitual. This focus on making strange the familiar links Chesterton with the Russian Formalists who also took what they called “defamiliarization” to be at the center of the artistic effort and experience. A comparison between Chesterton and the Formalists might at first appear far-fetched or even farcical. Chesterton, the vociferous defender of commonsense and the Church, seems a polar opposite to the Formalists with their concern for grounding the study of literature in firm scientific principles. I certainly do not want to oversimplify things and claim a level of shared understanding between Chesterton and these Russian thinkers which does not exist; there are many important elements on which they would disagree vigorously. And yet, they both share a common interest in the idea of defamiliarization. Victor Shklovsky, one of the most prominent of the Formalists, declares in “Art as Technique” that “art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*,” a sentiment parallel to Smith’s statement about poets reminding men that they are not dead yet (12). Although they do not share Chesterton’s analogical vision of the world, the Formalists do begin with the problem of human perception and its relation to experience and art. The Formalist’s careful analysis of defamiliarization as a technique thus provides helpful critical terminology for understanding Chesterton’s practice as a writer.

Like Chesterton, the Formalist emphasis on defamiliarization is predicated upon an assertion about the nature of human perception. According to the Formalists, humans necessarily become inured to their environment; repetitive action leads to abstraction in perception of the world. Victor Shklovsky clearly articulates this point: “If we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual, it

become automatic” (“Art as Technique” 11). The Formalists’ favorite image for this process is algebra; algebraic symbols stand as a shorthand which can function without reference to the actual objects which the symbols represent. In the same way, repeated perception reduces objects to vague forms devoid of content: “we apprehend objects only as shapes with imprecise extensions; we do not see them in their entirety but rather recognize them by their main characteristics” (“Art as Technique” 11). Perception naturally tends to encounter phenomena not as they actually are but as certain distinguishing features link them to abstractions in the mind.

This abstracting tendency is important to Formalism because of the relationship between perception and art. According to Eijzenbaum, perception forms a necessary component of art: “It should be evident that *perception* figures...not as a simple psychological concept (the perception of individual human beings) but as an element of art in itself, since it is impossible for art to exist without being perceived” (12). The habituated perception of objects according to their general forms rather than particular substance prevents art altogether; true perception is a necessary pre-requisite for art.

Thus the work of the artist includes the project of defamiliarization, of making familiar things seem strange. It is the artist’s task to present his object in such a startling manner that the audience is jarred out of their normal perceptual rut and forced to perceive the object truly. Many of the Formalist writers describe particular facets of this method of defamiliarization. Boris Tomashevsky outlines perhaps the simplest element of defamiliarization: “The old and habitual must be spoken of as if it were new and unusual. One must speak of the ordinary as if it were unfamiliar” (85). This “as if,” speaking of the ordinary *as if* it were unfamiliar,” highlights a key difference between

Chesterton and the Formalists. For Chesterton the ordinary *really is* and *ought to be* unfamiliar; the wooden post is “wonderful because it is *there*” (*The Coloured Lands* 164). The Formalists on the other hand are interested in their artistic experience of the post rather than the post itself, in how the post appears to them rather than in its real existence. In this sense they are linked to the mystics Chesterton distinguishes himself from in “Wonder and the Wooden Post.”

Both Chesterton and the Formalists, however, are interested in how we make common things strange, and their conclusions about method are strikingly similar. Roman Jakobson, another of the Formalists, notes that defamiliarization may require breaking traditional artistic rules: “The artist-innovator must impose a new form upon our perception, if we are to detect in a given thing those traits which went unnoticed the day before. He may present the object in an unusual perspective; he may violate the rules of composition canonized by his predecessors” (“On Realism” 40). Translated into Smith’s terms, one must be willing to “break the conventions.” Shklovsky observes that Tolstoy repeatedly “makes the familiar seem strange by not naming the familiar object. He describes an object as if he were seeing it for the first time, an event as if it were happening for the first time” (“Art as Technique” 13). For the Formalists defamiliarization means disrupting the normal modes of perception so that objects can be experienced in a new and fresh manner.

However, while the Formalists appear to agree on the importance of defamiliarization, the end toward which the technique is directed is a bit less clear. Shklovsky is a good example of this as he is responsible for developing the crucial terms of Formalism and seems to present competing understandings of the *telos* of

defamiliarization (Denner 372). In the quote given earlier about art reawakening one to the stoniness of the stone, Shklovsky seems to present defamiliarization as a means of making the world more present, a method for encountering the world as it really is. Yet, right after that quote, he claims that “Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important” (“Art as Technique” 12). The purpose of art, he later expounds in good Formalist fashion, is artfulness; the goal is not knowledge but an aesthetic experience: “it [an image] creates a ‘vision’ of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it” (“Art as Technique” 18). Thus, defamiliarization is not concerned with the world as it is but solely with aesthetic experience.

Yet, the renewed encounter with objects through a special vision would seem to provide some sort of knowledge of objects even if the purpose of the encounter was simply the vision. In his 2002 introduction to *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, Gerald Bruns certainly does not think that Shklovsky’s divorce of knowledge of the object and aesthetic experience of the object represents his [Shklovsky’s] final thought on the matter. Instead, Bruns claims that “aesthetic experience for Sklovskij [sic] aims to restore an intimacy with the world of things rather than to produce the otherworldliness that, since Plato, the experience of beauty has been said to achieve” (vii). Likewise Lee Lemon and Marion Reis’s introduction to Shklovsky’s essay on *Tristram Shandy* notes that Shklovsky could have quite consistently argued that, because the forms are exposed in the novel, we must pay attention to them and consequently to the world which the novel depicts (27). Michael Denner treats this question of the relationship between life and art at length in his article on the use of Tolstoy in Shklovsky’s “Art as Technique.” Denner argues that

Shklovsky's repeated reference to Tolstoy in the article demonstrates his indebtedness to Tolstoyan aesthetics: an aesthetics in which good art engages with "practical life" (373). All three of these critics argue that defamiliarized perception does indeed lead to knowledge of and engagement with the object of perception.

Are we to credit Shklovsky or his interpreters about the relationship between art and life? Perhaps there is a third way suggested by Peter Steiner's observation that Shklovsky changed his mind and his terms. According to Steiner, Shklovsky modified his early claim that art changes our perception of the world to later argue that art is concerned solely with perception without reference to the object perceived (55-56). This change in definition accounts for the contradiction between Shklovsky's statements in "Art as Technique" and his critical reception, and it proves key factor analyzing the utility of the term for Chesterton studies.

Whatever its ultimate aim, this process of defamiliarization is continuous. Art must maintain a constant struggle against the automatizing nature of perception. Roman Jakobson, in his essay "On Realism in Art," notes this endless conflict; what shocks and seems revolutionary in one age proves to be boring and prosaic for the next (40-41). Thus, within art, techniques and words must constantly be reviewed and revised.

Manalive presents a textbook case of the defamiliarizing principle as outlined by the Formalists. The novel demonstrates many of the key components of defamiliarization. As we have seen, Smith's life goal is one of defamiliarization; his method of shocking himself into awareness through breaking convention is predicated upon the necessity of making the familiar strange in order to properly perceive it. Moreover, Chesterton's construction of the novel itself reveals a similar project of

making strange. Chesterton utilizes a number of the structural devices which the Formalists identify as components of defamiliarization.

First, the manner of Innocent Smith's introduction accords with Shklovsky's commentary on the defamiliarizing method of introducing a character: "Exposition, preparation for a new character, always occurs after we have paused in perplexity over a strange word or an exclamation from that character" ("*Tristram*" 30). Innocent Smith is presented in exactly this way. Michael Moon and Arthur Inglewood are standing in the garden of Beacon House when a hat suddenly comes over the wall.

Another object came over the garden wall, flying after the fluttering panama. It was a big green umbrella. After that came hurtling a huge yellow Gladstone bag, and after that came a figure like a flying wheel of legs, as in the shield of the Isle of Man. But though for a flash it seemed to have five or six legs, it alighted upon two, like the man in the queer telegram. It took the form of a large light-haired man in gay green holiday clothes. (*Manalive* 22)

Moon is quite confused about the nature of the newcomer, as is the audience. Indeed, it is unclear whether the thing is even human at first. Rather than presenting Innocent himself at the outset and then describing his accoutrements, Chesterton lists a number of increasingly strange objects that culminate in the strangest object of all, Innocent himself.

Moreover his first words continue this theme of defamiliarization. Inglewood steps forward to return the stranger his hat, but the stranger rebukes him, "Unsportsmanlike!" bellowed the big man. "Give it fair play, give it fair play!" (23). What exactly the stranger Smith means neither the character nor the audience is quite sure, and his breathless commentary as he chases his hat is equally obscure: "Fair play, fair play...sport of kings...chase their crowns...quite humane...cardinals chase red hats...[and so on]." (24). This commentary certainly has its own strange logic, but the

meaning eludes Moon and Inglewood. Before any explanation or exposition of Smith is given, he has already given a number of strange “exclamations,” to use Shklovsky’s phrase, which startle not only the other characters but also the reader.

These strange actions and words on Innocent’s part produce in Michael and Arthur a new aesthetic experience of the garden. Both of them consider in a new light the tree which Smith climbs. Inglewood’s perception is affected on an even deeper level: “[he] felt first the mere fact of colour” (27). Smith’s defamiliarizing acts and words bring about new perception of familiar objects.

Moreover, the question of Smith’s true identity is always raised yet never solved in the first half of the novel. Various propositions about who Smith really is are considered, but no definitive answer is ever established. Thus, the characters (and the audience) are continually reminded of the problem of Smith’s identity yet are never given a full answer. Never knowing his real identity, the characters are unable to predict or contain his actions. He unsettles all expectations until Inglewood can no longer stand it: “‘But you must have some real names,’ shrieked Inglewood in despair. ‘You must call yourself something’” (160). Delaying revelation of Smith’s true identity defamiliarizes all of his actions; because one does not know what sort of thing he is, he cannot be reduced to an abstraction. Perception and experience of him must remain fresh.

Presentation of objects from an unusual perspective, particularly an unusual physical perspective, also plays a key role in Smith’s project of defamiliarization. Moon notes that Smith can “turn into a sort of wonderland any minute by taking one step out of the plain road” (53). While Moon means this in a metaphorical way, the literal meaning describes Innocent’s method quite well: he chooses unusual places in order to

defamiliarize normal things. Innocent decides to have a picnic on the rooftop, and although the fare is common, even cheap, his fellow picnickers are startled by the wonder of their own repast; Moon appreciates the cheap claret he is drinking in a way he has never has before. Smith enters his own house through the chimney like a burglar in order to make his own possessions seem strange and wondrous. Perhaps the clearest example of physical dislocation producing renewed aesthetic experience is that of Professor Eames. Not until Smith forces Eames at gunpoint to sit on the flying buttress outside his window does the Professor truly begin to consider his surroundings (212). In each case familiar things like wine, chairs, and sunrises are made strange by simply looking at them from an unfamiliar place.

Beyond the particular ways in which Innocent defamiliarizes what Michael Moon calls the “melancholy, but at least rational, suburbs” of London, the very structure of *Manalive* causes events to appear strange (31). The action begins *in medias res* but does not provide any following explication or history of events until part two. Smith’s actions are without any sort of explanation or defense until the trial which begins almost half way through the novel. For example, Smith shoots at Dr. Warner early in the novel, but the cause of this attack, Smith’s particular philosophy of life, is not revealed until nearly the end of the novel. As we have noticed, the novel is broken into two halves, the first of which is called “The Enigmas of Innocent Smith” and the second “The Explanations of Innocent Smith.” Thus, to use Shklovsky’s terms, the “causes” of the action follow the “consequences” in the most basic construction of the work, its division into two parts (“*Tristram*” 29).

Moreover, as Smith's accusers always present their side of the story first during the various charges, the reader is always presented with one plausible but false interpretation of the event before the true story is revealed. This slows down the narrative as each event is described twice. Likewise, the first interpretation always appears to make the most sense according to cultural and social norms. Innocent eloping with a number of different women at a number of different places would normally indicate that he is a polygamist. The second interpretation always defamiliarizes what appeared to be a common thing: the different women are really one woman, Smith's wife, disguised under different names in different places with whom he repeatedly elopes.

Defamiliarization thus provides a useful term for understanding both Innocent Smith's method of awakening himself and his companions to the world around them and Chesterton's own construction of the novel. Through the imaginative act of making settled things strange, Innocent strives to remind himself of his true name, Manalive. Chesterton too works throughout the novel to unsettle readers into perception and praise, to help them see facts as wonders. And the chief object of his defamiliarizing project is Innocent Smith. Chesterton makes Smith so strange and shocking because he wants his readers to see man from another perspective. He wants them perhaps to begin to remember their own names.

This leads the argument back full circle to where it began, with Innocent Smith's struggles to remain wide-awake in a world full of wonder. For Chesterton is so adept at making Innocent strange that audiences tend to gloss over his struggles in their praise of his successes. It is easy to forget that Smith has to work very hard at being Innocent; like everyone else, he sometimes sees his life as dull and boring, full of things he knows that

he should appreciate but cannot. Smith does not rest there, however, waiting for lightning to jolt him back into appreciation; instead he makes strange those very things which he does not appreciate in order to see them anew. Wielding his imagination, what Chesterton elsewhere calls the “sword of surprise,” Smith makes the familiar strange in order that he might fully perceive it and appreciate it (*Collected Works* 10: 173). The goal of proving that Smith’s struggles underlie his whole project is not to debunk Innocent and strip away his aura of mystery and magic. The point is not that as readers we should see Innocent Smith as common and mundane like the rest of us but that we should see ourselves made strange and wonderful in Innocent.

CHAPTER FIVE

Fairyland in the Suburbs: The Imagination of Limits in *The Flying Inn* and *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*

I am just old enough to remember in infancy the world before telephones. And I remember that my father and my uncle fitted up the first telephone I ever saw with their own metal and chemicals, a miniature telephone reaching from the top bedroom under the roof to the remote end of the garden. I was really impressed imaginatively by this; and I do not think I have ever been so much impressed since by any extension of it. The point is rather important in the whole theory of imagination. It did startle me that a voice should sound in the room when it was really as distant as the next street. It would hardly have startled me more if it had been as distant as the next town. It does not startle me any more if it is as distant as the next continent. The miracle is over. Thus I admired even the large scientific things most on a small scale. So I always found that I was much more attracted by the microscope than the telescope. I was not overwhelmed in childhood, by being told of remote stars which the sun never reached, any more than in manhood by being told of an empire on which the sun never set. I had no use for an empire that had no sunsets. But I was inspired and thrilled by looking through a little hole at a crystal like a pin's head; and seeing it change pattern and colour like a pigmy sunset.

—G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography*

In this chapter I consider the way in which Chesterton's novels celebrate the local and the limited. Once the defamiliarizing imagination startles characters into perception and praise, they begin to imagine the value of the limits of their own homes. Limits here are related to the characteristics of form which chapter two considered. Limits constitute the edges of form, the outline which separates one form from another. Thus the term is centrally concerned with questions of particularity, of the distinct materials, influences, composition and history of a thing which provide it with its irreducible uniqueness. The term also has a distinctly spatial context as boundary, the marker of division between places. Finally in this context the word retains its sense of smallness and particularity but

for Chesterton those qualities are virtues rather than vices.¹ The home provides the central locus of the distinct, bounded, and small in Chesterton's fiction. Chesterton claims in his *Autobiography* that the whole of his thought grew out of people's failure to recognize the value, indeed the splendor, of the particular places in which they live: "everything I have thought and done grew originally out of that problem . . . It was the problem of how men could be made to realize the wonder and splendor of being alive, in environments which their own daily criticism treated as dead-alive, and which their imagination had left for dead" (134). The previous chapter examined Chesterton's solution for reawakening characters to the wonder of being alive; this chapter considers the way in which such realization leads characters to love and defend their own particular homes and locales.

Imaginative vision of the value of limits allows characters to respond appropriately to particular places. *The Flying Inn* and *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* are the main texts in which I trace this imagination of limits. Both of these novels consider the evils of the imagination which ignores limits and can neither recognize nor respect boundaries. Indeed, this rejection of limits is a recurring feature among Chesterton's villains. In response, Chesterton's heroes offer a vision of the beauty of boundaries. In *The Flying Inn*, this celebration of limitation largely occurs through the various songs which permeate the novel and through Humphrey Pump's knowledge of the local history,

¹ Chesterton argues in *Orthodoxy* that regarding the cosmos as small and cozy is not only just as logical as imagining it as vast and empty but is also better theology: "I did feel that these dim dogmas of vitality were better expressed by calling the world small than by calling it large. For about infinity there was a sort of carelessness which was the reverse of the fierce and pious care which I felt touching the pricelessness and peril of life. They showed only a dreary waste; but I felt a sort of sacred thrift. For economy is far more romantic than extravagance" (69).

both natural and social, of England. Likewise *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* celebrates limits through its presentation of one place, Pump Street. The novel demonstrates the revolutionary effect of an imagination that sees the glory of the home, even if that home is a dirty London side-street. Moreover, true appreciation of the limited and local leads characters to defend their homes against the plutocrats and egoists who refuse to acknowledge limits. This militant aspect of Chesterton's fiction cannot be understood except from within the limited imagination which recognizes the beauty of the small and the particular. Unlike the antagonists who disregard limits, Chesterton's protagonists are able to see the particular circumstances and compositions of their homes imaginatively. Their imaginative valuing of their homes leads them to both boisterous celebration through poems, songs, symbols and to clashes with the reductive readings of the economic and political elite.

The Flying Inn and the Denial of Limits

The Flying Inn (1914) marks the end of Chesterton's early novel writing; he would not publish another novel until *Tales of the Long Bow* in 1925.² *The Flying Inn* is the tale of an Irish ex-naval captain, Patrick Dalroy, and an English innkeeper, Humphrey Pump, who save England by traveling round the countryside with a keg of rum and a wheel of cheese. Under the influence of his Turkish allies, the Prime Minister Lord Ivywood effectively bans alcohol by first passing a bill which forbids the sale of alcohol without a proper pub sign and then destroying all the pub signs—all the pub signs, that is,

² Donald Barr has pointed out that Chesterton was working on *The Return of Don Quixote* in 1915, although he shelved the project during the later years of World War I (16). This long hiatus from novel writing is due in part to Chesterton's strenuous war efforts and his serious illness in the winter of 1914-15

except one. Dalroy and Pump manage to save the sign of “The Old Ship,” Pump’s pub, and they tour the countryside covertly, displaying the pub sign wherever they stop to dispense their wares. Dissatisfaction with the new legislation grows among the common people of England. When Dalroy discovers for the working classes that all the rich and privileged people are still drinking their spirits though they deny the poor man his beer, a revolution breaks forth which ends with a climactic battle and the defeat of Lord Ivywood and his allies.

The story is a tale against Prohibition and various other social ills. In Dalroy and Pump’s wanderings, Chesterton tackles post-Impressionism, deliberate journalistic obscurity, the cult of health, and a range of other issues. This wide range of topics gives the novel an unwieldy feel on first impression. The torrent of songs and poems that Dalroy and Pump compose on their grand English tour heightens this sense of jumbled confusion; among Chesterton’s fiction, the novel is remarkable for its proliferation of verse. The novel appears then as a loose collection of episodes in which Chesterton waxes eloquent as he rides various hobby horses.

Repeated emphases undergird this hodge-podge of topics, however. Ian Boyd has pointed out that the political and social themes of prohibition, polygamy, and cultural conquest which unify the various episodes are presented at the very beginning of the novel in the terms of the peace treaty that marks the surrender of Ithaca (68).³ These

³ Chesterton’s choice of Odysseus’s home for the scene of resistance against the Turkish Empire and Dalroy’s title as “King of Ithaca” have obvious Homeric references. These overtones are strengthened by the circuitous journey across England which Pump and Dalroy take and by the song of revolution which Dalroy sings whose refrain consists of the question “Who goes home?” (289). These echoes shed some light on the events of the end of the novel where Ivywood must be killed in order for the restoration of England just as the suitors must be slaughtered in order to reestablish the polity of Ithaca.

social and political questions certainly do weave together the various strands of the story, but they are merely the effects of a deeper more insidious philosophy which drives all the considerations of the novel.

At the heart of the novel lies a debate about the importance of limits—social, artistic, and theological. The villain of the novel, Lord Ivywood, is driven by his Nietzschean quest to push beyond all boundaries and definitions, recognizing nothing sacred or binding in the world as it has been constituted. In a debate with his cousin, the poet Dorian Wimpole, about the value of a Post-Futurist art exhibit, Ivywood presents in an aesthetic context the principle which drives all of his actions: “I deny that any limit is set upon living things” (*The Flying Inn* 254). The fact that his artistic principles mean a fundamental change in the nature of Art does not bother Ivywood at all. In fact, it is just this fact of change and breaking with the past that draws Ivywood to embrace the Post-Futurist school. Ivywood himself confesses that he can see nothing in the pictures except “the breaking of the barriers” (256). The particular political causes he espouses, such as Prohibition and his embracing of the Muslim prophet Misyra Ammon, are simply surfaces upon which he exercises his radical rejection of all limitation (Boyd 71). The heroes of the novel on the other hand are able to imagine the value of boundaries and borders whether they are historical, social, or artistic. Unlike Ivywood, Dalroy and Pump acknowledge the givenness of both the natural order and of cultural history. Although they may critique facets of English identity, they do not deny the validity and importance

of that identity.⁴ Quite the opposite, as we shall see, they justify their revolution against Ivywood in light of the historical tradition.

At its core, Ivywood's rejection of definition, identity, and limitation demonstrates a modern understanding of power. Romano Guardini, the twentieth century German philosopher and social critic, offers helpful definitions of this modern conception of power. Guardini lived and worked through the First and Second World Wars, and his reflections about modernity, power, and culture in his seminal work *The End of the Modern World* (1950) provide a full explication of the understanding of power which Chesterton recognizes at work in the first decades of the twentieth century. Guardini offers an academic diagnosis of the problem Chesterton is considering in *The Flying Inn* generally and the character of Lord Ivywood particularly.

In *The End of the Modern World*, Guardini argues that power is at the root of the dissolution of the modern world. Modern man saw a radical growth in his ability to

⁴ Dalroy, who has been dismissed from the British Navy because of "Fenian sympathies" provides a critique of the English character which is simultaneously a generous interpretation of national qualities and a scathing critique of British treatment of the Irish (22). His main conclusion is that the English are a supremely associative people who "won't have one thing without the other thing that goes with it. And as you can't imagine a village without a squire and parson, or a college without port and old oak, you get the reputation of a Conservative people" (186). This system, Dalroy concludes, is based on English sensitivity, but it has two problems. This first occurs when a non-Englishman, or an Englishman who "hasn't got an English mind" such as Lord Ivywood, takes political control. The second problem arises when the English try to apply their model of "not this without that" to a foreign people. "If ever, in blundering about the planet, you come on an island in the Atlantic—Atlantis, let us say—which won't accept *all* your pretty picture—to which you can't give everything—*why* you will probably decide to give nothing. You will say in your hearts: 'Perhaps they will starve soon'; and you will become, for that island, the deafest and the most evil of all the princes of the earth" (187). Although Dalroy casts this as a hypothetical example, the "island in the Atlantic" he has in mind is surely Ireland. In fact, Chesterton elsewhere posits the advantages of calling Ireland Atlantis without revealing the fact in order to clear the discussion of false foreknowledge and stereotypes (*Irish Impressions* 32).

manipulate both himself and the world, according to Guardini. This increase in power has led to radical redefinitions of man, nature, and culture. The modern world valued power as an indicator of “progress”; man’s increasing control over himself and his environment signaled clear gains towards “security, usefulness, welfare and vigor” (82). Yet, Guardini claims, power itself proved too strong for the goods towards which it was supposedly directed. Thus, the twentieth century has seen an incredible development in “man’s power over being,” but this increase has not been accompanied by “the strong character needed for exercising this power” (82). We do not yet have “power over [our own] power” (90). Even more frightening, power, as it is currently understood, justifies itself as an impersonal necessity. We have agreed to a conception of power, defined as increasing technical control of ourselves and our world, as an unstoppable force independent of human will, and consequently outside the realm of human responsibility. In Guardini’s words “the conviction grows that power simply demands its own actualization” (83). For Guardini, this conception of power is finally demonic. If humans no longer take responsibility for the power they have unleashed, then that power does not simply return to nature but falls into the realm of the demonic.⁵

Particularly, Guardini argues that in response to the kind of power wielded by the modern world, culture itself has become “non-cultural” (88). Under the grip of objectified power, culture will cease to provide security and instead will be marked primarily by “danger” (89). The threats to safety which previously arose from the natural world now arise from within culture itself through the unrestrained expansion of power:

⁵ Guardini means the demonic here in “the precise sense given it by Revelation” rather than as a symbolic term (84).

Nature now, however, has emerged once again into history from within the very depths of culture itself. Nature is rising up in that very form which subdued the wilderness—in the form of power itself. All the abysses of primeval ages yawn before man, all the wild choking growth of the long-dead forests press forward from this second wilderness, all the monsters of the desert wastes, all the horrors of the darkness are once more upon man. He stands again before chaos, a chaos more dreadful than the first because most men go their own complacent ways without seeing, because scientifically-educated gentlemen everywhere deliver their speeches as always, because the machines are running on schedule and because the authorities function as usual. (92)

Guardini's vision here seems at first to resonate more with Cormac McCarthy's dark visions of the world than with Chesterton's jovial "beer and skittles" personality. However, despite Chesterton's renowned good cheer, his presentation of the unrestricted exercise of power mirrors Guardini's awful diagnosis. Society presents a serious, sometimes infernal threat in much of Chesterton's fiction. In *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* the whole of London turns out against the defenders of one small street because the inhabitants of the city can imagine only the economic value of the place. In *The Flying Inn*, Dalroy and Humphrey Pump are constantly on the run with their illegal pub sign as a result of Ivywood's systematic dismantling of English culture and tradition. And in *The Ball and the Cross*, English society forces MacIan and Turnbull to flee to various wild places in order to conduct their duel while Professor Lucifer develops an insane asylum to silence anyone who has met the dueling pair. In each case, culture itself proves dangerous because it wields an understanding of power as ordered to the increase of power rather than to the flourishing of the human person. The protagonists of each story struggle against a supposedly civilized order which is deadly to the human spirit. This gives many of Chesterton's novels something of a dystopian atmosphere.

A rejection of limitation forms the key component of the modern understanding and exercise of power, according to Guardini. The vast ability to refashion both the given structure of nature and humanity has not been accompanied by corresponding developments in control and moral guidance; thus, humans now have vast power without a sense of determinative boundaries. Guardini claims that, based on these non-human definitions of man and non-natural definitions of nature,

Man will [. . .] face an existence in which he will be free to further his lordship of creation, carrying it even to its last consequences. This mastery will be open to him because he has permitted himself utter freedom: the freedom to determine his own goals, to dissolve the immediate reality of things, to employ its elements for the execution of his own ends. These things he will do without any consideration for what has been thought inviolate or untouchable in nature. (73-74)

Guardini recognizes that the modern understanding of power is predicated upon a denial of boundaries and a program of limitless control, mastery, and expansion.

Despite the apparently unlimited quality of power in the modern age, behind every instance of power lies a responsible party. Power always entails a responsible agent, he argues, even if the complex systems of modernity tend to obscure responsibility and promote power as autonomous and necessary. “There is no being without a master” according to Guardini; when man takes being out of the natural order and incorporates it into the realm of human freedom, he assumes responsibility for it (83). Thus despite its incredible abuses and expansions, power remains linked to the choices of human persons even if it often appears to be inevitably outside of human control.⁶

⁶ Guardini notes that humans can abandon responsibility for the power they have unleashed either through intention or through the increasing complexity of systems which obscure responsibility. However, he believes that once taken out of its natural context power cannot simply return to its original state. Thus, he argues, that if humans

With their emphasis on culpability, Chesterton's novels provide an artistic confession of Guardini's insistence that this new presence of danger within culture is not without authorship. Despite the apparently autonomous and self-justifying character of modern power, there is always a responsible party for the abuses of power in Chesterton's fiction. In the midst of his dystopian societies, central figures stand as parents of the perverted orders. Thus while the President of Nicaragua might admit at the beginning of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* that the whole modern world is against his small country, in the action of the novel itself, it is Buck, Barker, and Wilson who are against Pump Street. Likewise, although there is a sense of international political movements and forces in *The Flying Inn*, Lord Ivywood sits at the center of these machinations, and it is his home and his person that the revolutionaries attack, even as his defeat restores normal social order to England. Rather than agree to an understanding of power as impersonal necessity, Chesterton provides villains who are clearly responsible for their abusive pursuit of power and the current state of their societies.

Among all of Chesterton's antagonists, Lord Ivywood demonstrates most clearly the modern definition of power as both necessarily progressive and unbounded by any limitations. Throughout the action of the novel, Ivywood grows increasingly fanatical in his quest for power and progress without restriction. His vision is ever more abstract and separate from the everyday world that his constituents live in. The narrator tells us that his is a "fanatical pleasure" which gains enjoyment from neither food, wine, nor women (51). Indeed Ivywood regards the physical world itself as largely unimportant, preferring instead to focus most of his energies on his own projects. Midway through the novel, he

relinquish or fail to take charge of the power they have untethered from its moorings in nature, then responsibility for that power falls into the possession of the demonic (83).

brags that his “adventures shall not be in the hedges and the gutters; but in the borders of the ever advancing brain” (255). Ivywood’s failure to pay attention to what is happening in the hedges and gutters of England leads to his final defeat in the novel, but not even the destruction of all his schemes can break Ivywood out of his abstraction and mental isolation. He becomes a madman, unable to acknowledge the reality of the physical world because such recognition entails admitting his own limitation and failure.

This privileging of abstraction over concrete experience is typical of many of Chesterton’s villains. Indeed a basic typology of the abstract, sophisticated villain opposed to the fleshy, active hero is evident in much of Chesterton’s fiction. In *Manalive*, Innocent Smith wears green and wants merely to love the hedge and the lamppost that God has given him to guard, while Dr. Warner is “bland and bored,” writes on “The Probable Existence of Pain in the Lowest Organisms,” and possesses “the kind of brain that most men desire to analyze with a poker” (4). In *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, Adam Wayne’s red-headed, sword carrying figure with “bold blue eyes,” contrasts violently with the “blank handsome face and bleak blue eyes” of James Barker—the blandly composed face of the man who dies “loaded with honors without having either amused or enlightened the mind of a single man” (10, 41). In both of these examples and in most of Chesterton’s writing, the potential for corruption, abuse, and evil resides not primarily in the physical but in the mental and spiritual.

This careful suspicion of the internal world has its roots in Chesterton’s crisis at the Slade School. In his *Autobiography* Chesterton confesses that during the personal watershed of his doubt of everything, the world itself seemed merely a product of his own projection, and thus “while dull atheists came and explained to me that there was nothing

but matter, I listened with a sort of calm horror of detachment suspecting that there was nothing but mind” (97). Chesterton recovered from this great temptation toward solipsism, but he recognized its danger and carried over into his fiction the conviction that the really dangerous man, in fact the real madman, is not the vulgar criminal but the polished man who believes in himself, in the literal sense of the term.

Ivywood offers the most extreme example of this self-belief in Chesterton’s fiction. Obsessed by his vision of the future and by his desire for progress, Ivywood denies all limitation of any kind. Although this fact is implicit in all of Ivywood’s actions and policies, it becomes explicit during the Post-Futurist art exhibit. In a debate with his cousin, a poet, about the value of exaggeration, Ivywood argues that “everything lives by turning into something else. Exaggeration is growth.” The poet replies:

But exaggeration of what? [. . .] You can combine up to a certain point; you can distort up to a certain point; after that you lose the identity; and with that you lose everything. A Centaur is so much of a man with so much of a horse. The Centaur must not be hastily identified with the Horsey Man. And the Mermaid must be maidenly; even if there is something fishy about her social conduct. [. . .] Don’t you see this prime fact of identity is the limit set on all living things? (*The Flying Inn* 253-54).

“No,” says Ivywood, “I deny that any limit is set upon living things” (254). Denial of any limit or given identity leads Ivywood to all his political, cultural, and economic changes. This chilling assertion places Ivywood squarely within Guardini’s definition of modern man’s exercise of power which rejects all limitation. Ivywood exhibits exactly this kind of disregard for the concrete and natural in favor of his abstract vision of progress—a progress in which even the fundamental understanding of the human being is open to change and development. He dissolves whatever stands in his way in order to further “the execution of his own ends” (*The End of the Modern World* 73).

Yet exaggeration in itself is not problematic. As chapter four noted, Chesterton argues in his study of Charles Dickens that exaggeration is almost the definition of art. Ivywood, however, produces no art; Wimple notes that, because he disavows all “human limitations” and thus lacks any sense of pathos, the Prime Minister has never written and never will write any poetry (*The Flying Inn* 255). This is not merely because Ivywood cannot abide by the requirements of meter and rhyme but because artistic creation itself requires an appreciation of the forms of the world as they are. Ivywood, however, exaggerates not in order to celebrate existence but to destroy and remake it. His dismantling of the English pubs, his championing of Islam in England, and his subtle attempt at polygamy are all directed toward breaking down established forms in order to refashion the world according to his own will.

Such denial of created limits is at its root a rejection of the supernatural. In refusing to acknowledge the givenness of the world, Ivywood denies God. His disavowal of createdness is necessarily a rejection of Divine authorship. Ivywood is quite explicit about this fact. When asked who Ivywood thinks he is that he can fundamentally alter the world so easily, he declares “The world was made badly, [. . .] and *I will make it over again*” (288). This terrible declaration reveals Ivywood’s Luciferian conception of power which is predicated upon superiority to God.

Lord Ivywood’s denial of the supernatural, however, leads not to the natural order but to perversion and distortion. Denying the spiritual ends in unnatural suppressions of human freedom. Not only does Lord Ivywood deny men drinks, he agrees to the enslavement of captured prisoners, even as he also seeks to establish polygamy in England. Moreover, his denial of the supernatural leads to his own distortion. Midway

through the novel, Ivywood's quest for political control leads him to break his word, the one honorable thing left to him. When Wimpole opposes Ivywood's attempt to revise his prohibition law in order to prevent the escapades of Pump and Dalroy, the Prime Minister promises that he will wake the sleepy poet when the appropriate time comes for Wimpole's speech. Ivywood leaves Wimpole asleep, however, in order to pursue his plans unopposed. He emerges from this experience "the naked fanatic; [who] could feed on nothing but the future" (220). Once Ivywood sacrifices his honor as a gentlemen, he severs the last tie that holds him to any kind of recognizable humanity.

His power-hungry fanaticism finally drives Ivywood to imbecility. Unable to cope with his defeat at the end of the novel, Ivywood relapses into a solipsistic second childhood, unaware of the circumambient world. While his troops perish around him Ivywood enters fully into the internal world of his own making: "Where I walk in the Heavens, no man has walked before me; and I am alone in a garden. All this passing about me is like the lonely plucking of garden flowers. I will have this blossom, I will have that" (320). This madness serves as an example of Chesterton's argument in *Orthodoxy* that "thinking in isolation and with pride ends in being an idiot" (48). Our final vision of the superman consists of his playing with scraps of weed, oblivious to anyone and anything but himself. Ivywood's denial of all limits leads to a breaking of his own mind. Thus, Lord Ivywood provides a good model of the basic characteristics of Chesterton's villains. Their modern conception of power as control of being without moral or ontological limits entails a denial of the supernatural. This denial always results in unnatural suppressions of human freedom and dignity.

The political and economic corollary to this theological assertion of human power and rejection of limits is imperialism. Although Chesterton's distributist economics have been much commented on, his corollary anti-Imperialist politics has not received similar attention. This is surprising given that some of the greatest critics of empire found in Chesterton a significant source of inspiration. Michael Collins was greatly influenced by *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (Mackay). After reading Chesterton's article regarding the importance of a particularly Indian rather than European nationalism for India, Ghandi was inspired to write *Hind Swaraj* (Furbank 21). Chesterton himself was a fierce critic of the Boer War; his brother, Cecil, in his 1908 book, *G.K. Chesterton: A Criticism*, listed Chesterton's anti-imperialism first in the reasons why his brother was worth studying although Chesterton was still so early in his career (25).

The Flying Inn, as well as *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, is explicitly concerned with imperialism because it ignores not only international boundaries, traditions, and limits but intra-national ones as well. Both novels open with the recapitulation of a heroic resistance of a small nation against an overwhelmingly superior imperial aggressor and the subsequent defeat and surrender of the small nation. These first experiences of resistance to empire influence the rest of each novel; as Ian Boyd observes, "the initial defeat of a tiny nation by a world empire is eventually followed by the equivocal victory in England of a popular force against the same enemy" (67). After an opening chapter which introduces the fantastical prophet Misysra Ammon proselytizing on the beach at Pebbleswick, the action of *The Flying Inn* moves to a small island in the Mediterranean and one of the novel's main protagonists, Patrick Dalroy. Having left the British Navy after a fellow officer slighted Ireland, Dalroy found employment as the sole member of

the Ithacan navy. In that position he has carried on a solitary and heroic struggle against the advances of the Turkish Empire, but it is a struggle that is doomed to fail. The people of Ithaca finally ask Dalroy to offer their surrender, so he meets his enemy, the Turkish commander Oman Pasha, and the representatives of Europe, Lord Ivywood of England and Dr. Gluck the German minister. With empty rhetoric and Orwellian doublespeak, Ivywood negotiates the treaty which includes the Turkish retention of the captured women from Pylos, the importation of Chinese workers for the Greek quarries, and the destruction of all the vineyards. To all of this Dalroy is powerless to respond, realizing that in the face of such international machinations his own physical strength can do no lasting good. Financial opportunity underwrites colonial subjugation in the conquest of Ithaca by Turkey, and these economic considerations play a key role in the rest of *The Flying Inn*, where the main action of the novel is caused by the disruption of local economy in the form of The Old Ship.⁷

As economic conquest and domination formed a key part of the surrender of Ithaca, so economic disruption provides the impetus for the main action of *The Flying Inn*. Pump and Dalroy take to the road with their pub sign, cask of rum, and wheel of cheese because the new English laws outlaw Pump's pub and destroy his means of livelihood. Economic displacement and restructuring is the background upon which events of the novel take place. This breaking up of established economy is incredibly

⁷ The economic dimension of the treaty is the only item on the agenda which explicitly references Europe's concern in the matter: "Both Coote and the Bernsteins insist there must be Chinese for the marble" (27). This financial opportunity, disguised by Ivywood as the peaceful presence of Asia in Europe, leads him to "consent to a scheme of colonization" (28). In addition to this explicit economic demand, Pasha also insists that the Greek vineyards must be destroyed, an event which will have serious consequences for agricultural communities.

disastrous for Pump because he has lived all of his life as the proprietor of his pub; to sever him from his pub is to ostracize him from the countryside which he knows so much about. Pump notes this fact in his complaint to Lord Ivywood about the wrongs he has suffered, just before he shoots Ivywood in the leg:

I want you to look at what you've done to me. You've stolen a house that was mine as that one's yours. You've made me a dirty tramp, that was a man respected in church and market. Now you send me where I might have cells or the Cat. If I might make so bold, what do you suppose I think of you? Do you think because you go up to London and settle it with lords in Parliament and bring back a lot of papers and long words, that makes any difference to the man you do it to? (*The Flying Inn* 165)

Pump's usually sanguine nature is overcome by the force of what Ivywood's economic rearrangements have done to him. These rearrangements stem from a denial of limits and boundaries, in this case economic limits.

In response to these limit-denying understandings of political, economic, and technological power, Chesterton's protagonists argue for the beauty of boundaries and defend the importance of established forms. In *The Flying Inn*, both the songs and Humphrey Pump's knowledge of local geography, botany, and social history provide the means for resistance to Ivywood's rejection of definition, tradition, and limitation. Dalroy and Pump's adventures are a defense of English culture and English ways of life against the modern progressivism of Ivywood. Most obviously, Dalroy and Pump distribute rum and preserve the public inn, represented by the pub sign of the Old Ship which they carry with them, an institution which Chesterton regarded as central to English character and identity. The narrator of *The Flying Inn* declaims regarding the imminent destruction of Pump's pub: "England might be sunk under the sea; which would be better for England than never again having such places as 'the Old Ship'" (43).

The pub presents the kind of local and historical culture and economy to which Ivywood is fundamentally opposed. Ralph Wood notes that for Chesterton the public house was a modern iteration of the ancient public square, the necessary corollary to the domestic which he also championed (*Chesterton* 117).

However, Pump and Dalroy's defense is more than simply handing out rum; in their travels around England, they recount and preserve English history, traditions, and folk-songs. Humphrey Pump knows all the local history and recounts the stories associated with the places he and Dalroy pass in the travels. He knows where "old Mother Grouch shot the Methodist" and rebukes Dalroy's behavior toward the Society of Simple Souls as the silliest action in the district since "Bishop's Folly" (64, 91). He remembers a whole list of local characters who discovered new things which had to be kept hidden: Dr. Boone, whose treatments saved lives but caused his female patients to grow mustaches, and Dean Arthur, who got his idea about balloons from watching the village idiot blow bubbles (92). Pump's most impressive display of local knowledge comes during the poetic competition organized by Dalroy around the question of why the road they are on twists and winds about as it does. Pump's poem consists of a turn-by-turn description of exactly why the road makes the turns it does:

The road turned first toward the left
Where Pinker's quarry made the cleft;
The path turned next toward the right
Because the mastiff used to bite;
Then left, because of Slippery Height,
And then again toward the right. (271)

These first few lines are enough to give a sense of Pump's poem which continues on for another page. From this position of detailed historical knowledge, Pump is in a position to fully appreciate the outrage of Ivywood's actions; his anger at Ivywood's policy rests

partly upon his recognition of Ivywood's dramatic rearrangements of a local cultural order. Nor does Pump know only local history; he is well versed in the flora and fauna of the area as well. He knows instinctively through tradition and experience which mushrooms are edible and which are not. Indeed, he is an "old-fashioned English naturalist like Gilbert White or even Isaac Walton" (136). Pump's knowledge of the particulars of the countryside around him provides an antidote to Ivywood's indifferent abstraction from the material world.

All of this knowledge appears at first glance to be extraneous to the real action of the story; Pump's comments seem merely humorous. Considered in the context of preservation of a national culture, however, Pump's knowledge takes on new significance. John Coates observes that Pump's local lore provides the beginning of a cure for Ivywood's expansive individualism, which denies human boundaries (93-94). Pump's knowledge is likewise vitally important for resisting Ivywood's social changes. This can be seen especially clearly when Pump is contrasted with Misysra Ammon. Ammon's project throughout the novel is to demonstrate that Muslim influence lies at the root of all English culture. Thus, Ammon argues that the pub called The Bull is simply a mispronunciation of its original name The Bul-bul and that all the crescents in London—St. George's Crescent, Royal Crescent—are all explicitly in honor of the crescent of Islam. Although his arguments are ridiculous, they still manage to convince a great number of people. Lady Brett reflects on this fact and realizes that Ammon does indeed know English history very well, better than most of his audience, yet he misses something: "In every case what he did not know was the truth behind the fact. What he did not know was the atmosphere. What he did not know was the tradition" (*The Flying*

Inn 127). His arguments are convincing only to those who like him do not really know the history of the place in which they live. Ammon is a foil for Pump, who knows the tradition and the atmosphere quite well. Though Pump may never have had any formal schooling and may not know the mere facts of history as Ammon does, his knowledge is of a deeper sort; it is rooted knowledge of a place gained after dwelling there for a long time. Thus, Pump's various stories and bits of knowledge become an antidote in the novel for Ammon's learned lies. Local history, tradition, and culture provide a defense against foreign rewritings of England and Englishness.

Beyond Pump's ingrained local and natural knowledge, *The Flying Inn* is full of songs and poems that reinforce national identity and legitimate resistance. Dalroy, Wimpole, and to a lesser extent Pump, repeatedly break out in verse, and many of these verses have to do with English history and traditions. Dalroy composes a song about the pub called The Saracens' Head detailing its destruction in accordance with Ivywood's policies. Dalroy and Wimpole each compose a song in addition to Pump's about the winding English road. An old man recites the beginning of a long drinking song which begins in praise of King George. Pump sings a song against grocers and in favor of inns. This is just a brief list; all of the chapters except one which focus on Dalroy and Pump's adventures contain some sort of song or poem. The point of all this is more than Chesterton simply having fun making up songs, a practice he was quite fond of. The songs, especially the songs about English places and people, serve to preserve and advance the national identity. The changes occurring in England are measured against this historical unity and found wanting. The songs recall to the characters' minds the particular histories and qualities of England and serve to highlight the way in which

Ivywood's rule is fundamentally opposed to the entire body of those particulars. Thus, the songs provide a place from which to judge the economic and social restructuring occurring throughout England.

The marching song Dalroy sings as his spontaneous militia marches toward Ivywood house provides an excellent example of the way in which this historic consciousness demonstrates Ivywood's fundamentally destructive intentions. The song's central metaphor compares the English body politic to a tree which has suffered the oppressions of various people. Each verse lists an interaction by an historical figure with the genealogical tree of the English people. In each case, although the historical character may possess flaws, he has not destroyed the tree. An excerpt from the verse on Charles II provides a good example of the song's method:

In convent schools no man of tact
Would trace and praise his every act
Or argue that he was in fact
A strict and sainted bloke;
But not by him the sacred woods
Have lost their fancies free,
And though he was extremely big,
He did not break the tree. (298)

At the end of every verse, the song contrasts Ivywood with the historical example under consideration because unlike everyone else, his is an attempt to destroy the tree. He "rots the tree as ivy would," and he "breaks the tree as ivy would," and finally he "hates the tree as ivy would" (298-99). Ivy is a destructive plant eventually killing the tree that it climbs, so too the song argues, Ivywood is attempting to eradicate England and the English people in a manner different from previous rulers. Dalroy's song locates Ivywood within a continuous tradition and then uses that tradition to judge him not simply much worse but quite different from previous bad examples. Other awful rulers

may have made poor laws or have been quite unjust, but they did not attempt to destroy the English spirit like Ivywood. Ivywood's rejection of all limitation and eagerness to break and rend in the present for the sake of an ideal future fundamentally entails destruction of all that England and the English both have been and are.

In contrast to Ivywood's destructive motives, the violent resistance led by Pump and Dalroy is essentially creative. The protagonists of the novel take seriously the given form and limits at hand whether they are economic, geographical, political or historical. They recognize that these limits not only enable human flourishing but that such boundaries provide the basis from which their patriotism springs. Joseph McCleary argues in *The Historical Imagination of G.K. Chesterton: Locality, Patriotism, and Nationalism* that, for Chesterton and the characters in his novels, the prime fact of locality produces patriotism and nationalism (1). For Chesterton proper political community derived from the complex matrix of local practices, beliefs, customs, and faiths (McCleary 4). Thus the antagonists in his novels who attempt social engineering which dismantles these *loci* of meaning and coherence rouse the fury of the common people. Pump and Dalroy's revolution actively affirms life and protects the local communities of England from Ivywood's destruction.⁸ The limits which the revolution seeks to reestablish are essential to human well-being. Nowhere is this defense of locality more evident than in Chesterton's celebration of the home and the neighborhood in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*.

⁸ This basic affirmation which underwrites their entire position is evident in Dalroy's tribute to the dying Oman Pasha, the great Turkish general, whom Dalroy kills in the final battle of the novel. Dalroy is able to recognize Pasha's skill and to salute him for his valor and courage.

The Napoleon of Notting Hill and Imagining the Home

For Chesterton the home is the central limit and boundary which must be recognized and respected. This is clearly true of his political and social thought, much of which centered on elevating and protecting the home. Chesterton was also centrally concerned with defending the home imaginatively. Reflecting back on his first novel *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, Chesterton observes that “I still hold that it is the main earthly business of a human being to make his home, and the immediate surroundings of his home, as symbolic and significant to his own imagination as he can; whether the home be in Notting Hill or Nicaragua, in Palestine or in Pittsburgh” (*The Coloured Lands* 112). Chesterton lamented that the modern home was deadened to the influence of the imagination. He recounts in his *Autobiography* an interaction with his editor at the *Daily News* who, living at Clapham, could not believe that Chesterton really viewed Clapham imaginatively and romantically and not ironically when he wrote “Clapham is built upon a volcano”(133). Despite Chesterton’s repeated insistence that Clapham really was a place of wonder, “there was utterly veiled from [the editor’s] sight the visionary Clapham, the volcanic Clapham, what I may be allowed to put upon the cosmic map as Thunderclapham” (133). The resident of Clapham, Chesterton realized, remained obtuse to any application of imaginative possibility to his home. Chesterton observes that this problem was the genesis of all his work: “It was the problem of how men could be made to realize the wonder and splendour of being alive, in environments which their own daily criticism treated as dead-alive, and which their imagination had left for dead” (134). The key here is that the problem lies in the imagination which is unable to regard the modern home with any kind of interest. The problem is deeper than mere disinterest;

Chesterton presents this despising of the home as an active phenomenon, a habitual occurrence so ingrained that many people, like his editor, cannot recognize the fact of their consistent denigration of the places in which they live.

The solution that Chesterton offers to this problem is the limited imagination, that is, the imagination which is able to regard the smallness of the home as stimulating rather than stifling. Chesterton argues that this attention to limits is at the heart of the imagination since “the imagination deals with an image. And an image is in its nature a thing that has an outline and therefore a limit” (*Autobiography* 111).⁹ This fact is most evident in children who are “positively in love with limits” using their imagination to “invent imaginary limits” (111).¹⁰ The imagination is thus centrally concerned with limits, laws, and boundaries. McCleary argues that localism, his term for Chesterton’s privileging of the home and the surrounding environs, is naturally affiliated with the imagination, since the imagination is concerned with the particulars which comprise the local (3). The imagination, for Chesterton, finds its most natural employment in taking up the limits and particulars of the home and the local. Chesterton employs this imagination of boundaries in order to make the homes of his protagonists “symbolic” and “significant.” Often, this reimagining takes place in the city in Chesterton’s fiction. Rather than view the modern city as anathema to the kind of fairytale sensibility that

⁹ Chesterton quips memorably in *Orthodoxy* that “Art is limitation; the essence of every picture is the frame” (45).

¹⁰ To Chesterton’s mind, the chief virtue of *Robinhood Crusoe* is its celebration of limits through the catalogue of salvaged items that Crusoe recovers from the sea; the novel, he argues, “owes its eternal vivacity to the fact that it celebrates the poetry of limits, nay, even the wild romance of prudence” (*Orthodoxy* 69).

Chesterton's outlines as his most basic education in *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton finds the forms of the modern city enchanted and enchanting.¹¹

His poem "Modern Elfland" clearly articulates this reading of the industrial city. The poem argues that fairyland survives in the midst of the smog-filled streets of the Industrial Revolution. Where the speaker of the poem expects to find fairyland, he discovers instead that

lo, within that ancient place
Science had reared her iron crown
And the great cloud of steam went up,
That telleth where she takes a town. (*Collected Works X*: 233)

Yet the speaker is still able to discover the strange magic of fairyland in this new, monstrous environment:

But cowed with smoke and starred with lamps
That strange land's light was still its own;
The word that witched the wood and hills
Spoke in the iron and the stone. (233)

Far from banishing fairy land, the modern city becomes the site of an enchantment analogous to that of the natural world. It is clear that whatever enchantment there is comes from outside the walls of the world. The speaker of the poem recognizes that it is "not Nature's hand" which twists the "mute unearthly porter's spine" of the railroad tracks (234). Rather it is the "word" that "witches" both the natural and artificial materials (234). The theological resonances of "the word" fit with the focus on the goodness of Creation in chapter two. The same presence which makes the natural world

¹¹ Chesterton's important reflections on the city in general and London in particular are beginning to draw the comment they deserve; the recent collection of essays *G.K. Chesterton, London, and Modernity* published by Bloomsbury provides a good example of the ways in which critics are beginning to take account of Chesterton's thoughts on the city.

marvelous is also at work in the bricks and mortar of the city. The poem catalogs the marvelous in the city; train signals become dragons' eyes and chimneys are seen "signaling to the sky" (234). Even the dog seems "four legged by monstrosity." The speaker has achieved the proper point of defamiliarization at which even the given created order—a dog with four legs—appears strange and fantastic.

This is not simple optimism and praise of modernity. Even as he discovers fairy land in the city, the speaker laments many features of modern industrial life. He addresses the city directly and argues that "though you too touch the new time's desecrating hand, / through all the noises of a town / I hear the heart of fairyland" (234). The focus on noise here together with the "cloud of steam" that first alerts the speaker that "Science" has overtaken fairyland presents a good portrait of the mills and factories which formed the core of the new industrial world—a world which Chesterton repeatedly attacked for its treatment of the poor and alienation of workers. Yet, despite these atrocious qualities, the speaker of the poem can still recognize the supernatural presence at work.

The poem concludes with a typical Chestertonian turn. The speaker has set out for fairyland, discovered the industrial town, and recognized the heart of fairyland amid the smog and steam. Finally, he reads the inscription above a door and is shocked to discover his own name: "Then through my spirit pealed and passed: / This is the town of thine own home / and thou hast looked on it at last" (134). The speaker has been examining his own home all along, but it is not until he can see it as fairyland even in its

modern iteration that he truly sees his home.¹² Clapham is really elfland, and only when it is seen imaginatively as elfland that it is really seen properly. Such vision requires renewed recognition of the imagination as the proper tool with which to approach the home.

Likewise, Chesterton praises detective stories in *The Defendant* because they are the first literary form to celebrate the poetry of the modern city. Detective fiction, Chesterton argues, is the "earliest and only form of popular literature in which is expressed some sense of the poetry of modern life" (96). This project is worthwhile in Chesterton's eyes because every stone in a city is a deliberate symbol; "while Nature is a chaos of unconscious forces, a city is a chaos of conscious ones" (96). Detective stories highlight this inherent symbolism of the city by focusing on the importance of the commonplace; they celebrate the "romance of detail in civilization" (96). These visions of the poetry of the modern city provide the kind of re-imagining which Guardini claims is necessary in order to respond to the incredible increase in power which the modern world has unleashed.

The creation of new forms more suitable to the romantic possibility of cities and the needs of the human heart lies at the center of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. The story is centrally concerned with the relationship between limits, form, and the home. This is true even on the elementary level of the plot of the novel, which concerns the form and

¹² This progression out from the home in order to return to the home and truly know it anticipates T.S. Eliot's famous lines from "Little Gidding": "We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time" (59). Chesterton's return is more rooted in the actual physical place of the home than Eliot's journey of the soul, but both poems articulate a remembering of that which is nearest and closest as the key to this full participation in place.

boundaries of Pump Street and whether that street will retain its small limited form or be bulldozed in order to make way for a cross-city thoroughfare. The novel is set in 1984, a fact directly responsible for Orwell's setting of his dystopia in the same year (Hollis 229). However, unlike Orwell's dark prophecy, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* occurs in a London largely the same as its 1904 counterpart (the year the novel was published). The people have played the game of "Cheat the Prophet" and have ignored all the various dire social forecasts of the Georgian period, contenting themselves with doing just what they have been accustomed to in the past. This consistency is not due to vitality but rather to a loss of belief. The people of the novel have "lost faith in revolutions" because they have ceased to believe in any doctrine or dogma which might justify action (7). Instead Londoners have given themselves over to an evolutionary theory of development in which all growth must be slow and natural. This produces a world devoid of any imaginative possibility or romance; people go about their daily business because no reason exists to do anything different (7). "Everything in that age had become mechanical," the narrator observes (8).

In this imaginatively stifling London, Auberon Quinn enters as the one man who recognizes the absurdity of their existence and who refuses to surrender his humor.¹³ The one man in England who is still capable of revolt does so through his mockery of James Barker and his world of political and economic interests and intrigues. His humor however constitutes his desperate defense to ward off the ennui of nihilism. The

¹³ Chesterton's Auberon is certainly linked to the traditional king of the fairies. The narrator claims that the king of the fairies must have been Auberon's godfather (41). I am indebted to Nathan Kilpatrick for pointing out that just as Shakespeare's Oberon orchestrates the elaborate fooling of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, so Chesterton's Auberon deliberately arranges the fooling of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*.

President of Nicaragua recognizes this and calls him a "dangerous man" who "cares for nothing but a joke" (22), and Auberon himself confirms this description just before his election as King of England when he tells Barker that his "soul has been emptied of all pleasures but folly" and that he possesses the "madness of an utterly idle man" (24).

Once chosen as king, Auberon exercises his creative powers to their fullest in the creation of the Charter of Cities, a proclamation which attempts to return London to its medieval boroughs replete with halberdiers and heraldry. While this attempt may be a joke, it is an attempt to respond to the inhuman deadness of the modern industrial-political leviathan. Auberon may not believe a word of the rich history and symbolism he weaves around North Kensington and Bayswater, but he thinks it an excellent exercise in flummoxing the beauracrats and plutocrats who control the city. The imaginary boundaries and limits he devises even though they begin as mere moonshine are better than the insidious moonshine of Buck and Barker with their concern for "the interests of the public" (18).

Quinn creates the form, but Adam Wayne brings the vision which can properly see the form. Having grown up in Notting Hill and never having been anywhere in the world but London, Wayne has the proper limited vision which allows him to see his home for what it is, a sacred wonderland of lamps, and bricks, and living persons. The term "limited vision" is used quite intentionally here; Adam Wayne has literally never been outside of London. He missed a holiday at the sea due to illness as a young boy and so spent his entire childhood and early manhood in London. This narrowness of experience enables him to see truly the mysteries of London. For Wayne, no distinction exists between the natural light of the sun and the artificial illumination of the gas-lights;

"he saw the street-lamps as things quite as eternal as the stars; the two fires were mingled" (53). He was a "natural mystic," we are told, "perhaps the first to realize how often the boundary of fairyland runs through a crowded city" (54). Auberon's Charter of Cities provides Wayne the structure in which to fully realize his vision of the poetry and pageantry of the city. With the King's proclamation of the individuality of each borough, Wayne can make his whole life the poem that he does not have the skill to write: "this one poor rhymester, having burnt his own rhymes, began to live that life of open air and acted poetry of which all the poets of the earth have dreamed in vain; the life for which the *Iliad* is only a cheap substitute" (54). Wayne pursues with single-minded determination the fulfillment of the supposedly comic Charter of Cities.

This is not confusion on Wayne's part; he does not fail to distinguish between nature and culture as much as he realizes the mysterious wonder which undergirds them both; as one who lives "on the border of fairyland" he recognizes the existence is enchanting in all its variations, natural and artificial: "Twenty feet from him (for he was very short-sighted) the red and white and yellow suns of the gas-lights thronged and melted into each other like an orchard of fiery trees, the beginning of the woods of elf-land" (54). Wayne achieves the same proper vision of the city as wonderful that Chesterton argues for in "Modern Elfland" and in his comments on detective stories.

At the heart of Wayne's limited vision is a recognition of the value of limits and particularity. The first confession of this limited imagination comes from the President of Nicaragua. The President cherishes his country, but that he expresses that love concrete ways: he lets his own blood in order that he might have some bit of red to go with the yellow poster he has torn off the wall and so make the colors of the Nicaraguan flag. He

agrees that Nicaragua is an “idea brilliant, a burning thought,” but this idea is incarnated in the world around him: “Wherever there is a field of marigolds and the red cloak of an old woman, there is Nicaragua. Wherever there is a field of poppies and a yellow patch of sand, there is Nicaragua. Wherever there is a lemon and a red sunset, there is my country” (14-15). Nicaragua is incarnated in the particulars of the physical world; it finds expression everywhere, bursting out of even the most ordinary of things.

Likewise, Wayne's small neighborhood bears incredible significance because it is the place where the most monumental and important events happen: birth, marriage, love, death. With his limited field of vision, Wayne can see that his own Pump Street is not a thing for mockery or disdain but a place to be celebrated and praised:

‘These little gardens where we told our loves. These streets where we brought out our dead. Why should they be commonplace? Why should they be absurd? Why should it be grotesque to say that a pillar-box is poetic when for a year I could not see a red pillar-box against the yellow in a certain street without being wracked with something of which God keeps the secret, but which is stronger than joy or sorrow? Why should any be able to raise a laugh by saying “the Cause of Notting Hill”?—Notting Hill where thousands of immortal spirits blaze with alternate hope and fear.’ (47)

Smallness of scale does not entail unimportance; quite the opposite, the most important and eternal questions, the questions of the soul, can be found in any alley or side street.

If the climax of human drama can be decided in alleyways, so too the whole of human drama can be found in miniature in every home and neighborhood. This is true on a political and economic level as well as a spiritual one. Just as Innocent Smith argued to the inhabitants of Beacon House that if they were cut off from civilization they would discover all the materials necessary for survival, so Wayne finds in Pump Street all that is needed for a city under siege: a grocery for garrison and supply, an antique store stocked

with weapons, a chemist to deal with diseases, and a toy and paper shop able to fulfill the need for a "free press" (56). His recognition of the importance of limits allows him to see the possibilities inherent in the neighborhood.

With his imagination as a lens, Wayne can see the true value of the street, its irreducible uniqueness, whereas the financiers of the road cannot imagine any value other than money. Buck and Barker can only assume that, when Wayne rejects an offer of fifteen hundred pounds for a property worth no more than one hundred, he must be mad. After all accepting such a proposition is merely commonsense, the principle upon which the whole government rests, according to Buck. His definition of commonsense demonstrates the degree to which the profit margin is the guiding doctrine of the supposedly undogmatic society of the novel. Barker makes this principle explicit when he declares to Auberon that, if the king attempts to stop the plans to force the road through, "revolution" will happen (173). This word is particularly charged in a world in which, the narrator tells us at the beginning of the novel, "the people had absolutely lost faith in revolutions. All revolutions are doctrinal" (7). With all other faiths and doctrines abandoned, Mammon remains in sole possession of the society, quietly driving the eradication of small nations like Nicaragua and small communities like Pump Street.

In this sense, just as *The Flying Inn* offers a critique of imperialism, so *The Napoleon of Hill* presents a defense of the home against the plutocrats of the modern industrial system. Indeed, Chesterton directly locates the second Boer War (1899-1902) as the inciting factor for his writing of the novel. In his pro-Boer position, Chesterton found himself as a kind of odd man out, for although he disliked the arrogant optimism with which the jingoists were sure the British would smash the Boers, he disliked just as

much the pacifists who simply opposed the war because it was a war. Thus, Chesterton was almost alone in his support for the Boers in their defense of their homes; he explains his sympathy with the beleaguered Dutchmen in his *Autobiography*. “I thought that their farmers were perfectly entitled to take to horse and rifle in defence of their farms, and their little farming commonwealth, when it was invaded by a more cosmopolitan empire at the command of very cosmopolitan financiers” (117). Imperialism is, in this description, simply the political face of modern capitalism; Chesterton claimed later that modern politics was simply the machinations of corporate monopolies (*As I was Saying* 104).

With the substitution of “shop keepers” for “farmers,” Chesterton’s defense of the Boers serves as a fine definition of most of the action of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. Against the “very cosmopolitan” Buck and Co. who wish to knock down Pump Street and build a road through it, Adam Wayne rallies the shopkeepers of Notting Hill to the defense of their little borough from economic aggression.¹⁴ *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, then, is written in response to the imperial aggression of the Boer War, and although it concerns the defense of Notting Hill, that defense is inspired by the defense of the Boers against imperial conquest.

¹⁴ In describing his friendship with Hilaré Belloc which came about due to their common position on the Boer War, Chesterton reveals some of the motivations behind the novel: “Though his [Belloc’s] military imagination flung its battle-line far across history from the Roman Legions to the last details of the guns of Gravelotte, and mine was a parochial fancy of an impossible skirmish in Notting Hill, we knew that the moral of the fable and the facts was the same; and when I finished my Cockney fantasy, I dedicated it to him” (*Autobiography* 120). The moral which produces both Belloc’s historical work and *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* is the moral of the Boer War, the rightness of the defense of the home against imperial aggression.

The primary conflict in the novel is generated by the clash between industrial economy and local economy. Mr. Buck and the other industrial magnates have long been at work on their plans for a road. This plan has involved, according to Buck, ten years labor of “buying property and getting compulsory powers and fixing compensation and squaring vested interests” (37). Buck’s language here betrays the close relationship between modern economy and force; compulsory evacuation and forced sale of property have comprised the bulk of the capitalists’ labor. Against this economic expansion and destruction, Adam Wayne rallies the shopkeepers of Pump Street: a grocer, a chemist, a barber, an antique shop owner, and the proprietor of a toy and paper shop. Opposed to the large-scale economies of Buck and Barker, these shops, which Wayne views as the very center of Pump Street, are all small and sit side by side (56). Their owners are also the proprietors and primary employees. The shops’ economic livelihood and their physical premises will certainly be destroyed by the proposed road. Thus, the shopkeepers and the citizens of Notting Hill follow Wayne into battle against the destruction of their businesses, neighborhoods, and homes.

Wayne’s ability to imagine the value of limits, particularly the limits of the home, leads him to defend Notting Hill. His patriotism stems from his love of the particulars of his neighborhood. Indeed, the narrator tells us, Wayne knew the most important fact of patriotism, that “the patriot never under any circumstances boasts of the largeness of his country, but always, and of necessity, boasts of the smallness of it” (55). Just as the President of Nicaragua’s love of his country lay behind his defense of it, so too Wayne’s love of Pump Street occasions his valiant defense.

In fact Wayne's ability to defend Notting Hill is directly tied to his knowledge of its particulars. The success of his military campaign lies in his ability to pay attention to the actual details of the neighborhood: horses, street lights, and water tower. Turnbull's commandeering of the cabs in the city gives rebels a cavalry, and Wayne's disabling of the power station during the Battle of the Lamps reduces his opponents to chaotic slaughter of their allies due to the disorientation which the sudden darkness brings. Because he knows the limits, boundaries, and characteristics of the particular place in which the battles occur, Wayne is able to conquer the superior forces of the financiers. Ultimately Wayne is able to force his enemies to surrender because he captures the water tower on Campden Hill. His desperate struggle to control the water tower perplexes his opponents until the peace negotiations in which they realize that all of their forces are in the valley directly below the tower and Wayne can flood the entire valley and drown them all if they refuse his terms.

Moreover, Wayne's love of Notting Hill enables him to recognize the value of other places and the heroism of other patriots. He celebrates his enemies' burgeoning pride in their own neighborhoods. When in the midst of the battle around the water tower, a man cries out "Bayswater forever," Wayne takes up the cry: "Bayswater forever! We have taught our enemies patriotism" (104). Indeed Wayne's whole argument about the sanctity of Notting Hill is predicated on the fact that all of his enemies could—and to his mind should—make the same claims about their own neighborhoods. Because he regards his own home as sacred, Wayne can imagine the similar feelings which others have toward their homes, and he rejoices when his enemies shed their reductive money-driven visions and begin to imagine the significance of their own homes.

In fact it is the pride of other boroughs in their own histories and victories that provides the impetus for the final third of the novel, which takes place twenty years after Wayne's defense of Pump Street. Notting Hill remains triumphant, and its atmosphere has penetrated all of London; everyone observes the Charter of Cities with great feeling and reverence. But Notting Hill has become imperialist, seeking to limit the other boroughs' celebrations of their own heroes and glories. In his attempt to talk his people out of war, Wayne argues that Notting Hill ought not to be threatened by the patriotism of Bayswater for Notting Hill created that patriotism. Just as Athens and Nazareth created new worlds and were content that their ideas should spread, so "the soul of Notting Hill has gone forth and made men realize what it is to live in a city" (118). But like Athens and Jerusalem, Notting Hill is a real place whose particularity lies at the heart of the ideal it spreads. This is the fact which underlies the strange conclusion of the novel.

The novel ends with a conversation between Wayne and Quinn, who have died in Wayne's final and furious uprooting of the tree and smashing of himself and his enemies. Through the conversation, Quinn confesses that the whole Charter of Cities was only a joke and Wayne defends his patriotism even in the face of this fact. They conclude in the end that they represent laughter and love respectively; they are two halves of a whole joined in most people. Between them, they have succeed in raising modern cities to the poetry which they deserve, but in healthy people there is no conflict between the principles they represent.

The value in the whole story, however, is not in the final conclusion stripped of its rootedness. The novel is in the end not about a universal principle or theory; the final good of the tale is Notting Hill itself. This is certainly Wayne's conclusion: "Notting Hill

has fallen; Notting Hill has died. But that is not the tremendous issue. Notting Hill has lived" (126). From Notting Hill all manner of truths may be revealed but never at the cost of abandoning the place. Wayne's final defense of his actions to Auberon rests upon the fact of Notting Hill. It is through his loyalty and devotion to the particular form of Notting Hill that Wayne is able to transform London. The particular generates the form through which move into the universal and transcendent.

The universality of Notting Hill begins in its particularity. This is the paradox of limits that Chesterton celebrates: when a man declares one spot to be everything to him, then the whole world is really given to him. Wayne declares this fact in his last breath as he clings to a tree and fights off the hordes around him. The moment, he says, that a child in a garden declares "'this tree [to] be all I have' that moment its roots take hold on hell and its branches on the stars" (124). Chesterton makes the same point in *Heretics* when he argues that Kipling's emphasis on seeing the world in order to know it—"what can they know of England who only England know"—results not in love or wonder but in boredom (17). Kipling, Chesterton argues, is proof of this fact because he thinks of England as a place from which one can come and go. The true patriot knows, however, that "the moment we are rooted in a place, the place vanishes. We live like a tree with the whole strength of the universe" (19). Thus it is that limits enable wonder and imagination. Chesterton concludes his article on Kipling by reflecting on the importance of limits for the imagination: "The man standing in his own kitchen garden, with fairyland at the gate, is the man with large ideas" (19). From this "splendid parochialism" such a man can watch "motor car civilization going its triumphant way, outstripping time, consuming space, seeing all and seeing nothing, roaring on at last to

the capture of the solar system, only to find the sun cockney and the stars suburban” (19). Without limits imaginative vision of the home proves impossible and the wonders of the world become bland and boring.

The Napoleon of Notting Hill celebrates the boundaries of the home and the paradox of limits. Through loving devotion to one small street, Wayne transforms the world. His celebration of the poetic qualities of the modern city is the kind of re-imagining of the world that Guardini calls for in response to the new wilderness of power in which we live. Reading the modern/post-modern, technological-industrial landscape as fantastic and wonderful begins to re-appropriate the chaos of this new world by giving it a human measure. The Charter, even in its ridiculous pomp, is ordered to the human person; Auberon takes seriously the ugly and mechanical quality of modern life and attempts to redress the balance, albeit comically, by festooning industrialists in sumptuous colors and surrounding them with ceremony. When the inhabitants of London are forced by Wayne’s defense to take the Charter seriously they rapidly discover that it provides a more humane way of life. Mr. Mead, the Notting Hill grocer, sums up the ennobling quality of the change when he reflects after twenty years on his pre-war opinion of his work:

‘I thought nothing of being a grocer then,’ he said. ‘Isn’t that odd enough for anybody. I thought nothing of all the wonderful places that my goods come from, and the wonderful ways that they are made. I did not know that I was for all practical purposes a king with slaves spearing fishes near the secret-pool, and gathering fruits in the islands under the world. My mind was a blank on the thing. I was as mad as a hatter.’ (113)

This change takes place through the farcical form of Quinn’s Charter of Cities, but the humorous Charter is founded upon the solid fact of the good of local neighborhoods and

the inherent pageantry of life.¹⁵ After all, Auberon's farce is inspired in the first place by Wayne's very real patriotism and pugnacity as a young boy.

Through recognition of the value of limits, Wayne learns to celebrate the gratuitous character of his own home and leads others to view their own places in similar ways. Wayne realizes the paradoxical truth that the dedicatory poem at the beginning of the novel presents: "For every tiny town or place / God made the stars especially." When rightly seen the particular places in which we live when encountered in their particularity open up onto the universal and the infinite, for as the dedicatory poem notes "Heaven is everywhere at home." Set against villains who deny limits, Chesterton's heroes model an imaginative reading of the world in which limits provide the lens by which they can see grace at work even in the heart of suburbia and everywhere the world of created things drawing humans up in to the divine.

¹⁵ Chesterton complained that modern democracy failed to extend to everyone the symbolism, heraldry, and pomp of the aristocracy: "When the great trump of equality was blown, almost immediately afterwards was made one of the greatest blunders in the history of mankind. For all this pride and vivacity, all these towering symbols and flamboyant colours, should have been extended to mankind. The tobacconist should have had a crest, and the cheesemonger a war-cry . . . Instead of doing this, the democrats made an appalling mistake—a mistake at the root of the whole modern malady—of decreasing the human magnificence of the past instead of increasing it. They did not say, as they should have done, to the common citizen, 'You are as good as the Duke of Norfolk,' but used that meaner democratic formula, 'The Duke of Norfolk is no better than you are'" (*The Defendant* 65-66).

CHAPTER SIX

Imagining Others in *The Poet and the Lunatics* and *The Man Who Was Thursday*

Beauty crosses every boundary, traverses every series, and so manifests the God who transcends every division.

—David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*

If defamiliarization (Ch. 4) leads Chesterton's characters to recognize the strangeness of all things and the imagination of limits (Ch. 5) enables them to love and defend the particular strangeness of their own homes, then the imagination of others provides characters the ability to see the eternal wonder and the real pain of the other souls around them and to love them accordingly. This chapter demonstrates the process by which imagining the suffering of other leads to charity in Chesterton's work. I first examine *The Poet and the Lunatics* because it offers many examples of the way in which the imagination enables the care of others. Through Gabriel Gale's imaginative identification with the criminals he meets, he practices a strange but beautiful charity. Using the basic principles of imagining the suffering of others demonstrated by Gale, I consider Chesterton's strangest novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday* in which the nightmare world of anarchists, bombs, and double identities mysteriously transforms into a cosmic masquerade. To draw out the importance of the imagination as a means of charity in *The Man Who Was Thursday* I compare that novel with Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. Both Chesterton's and Conrad's novels consider the interaction between the imagination and charity in the context of suffering. Stevie Verloc's empathetic art offers an imaginative vision which finds its fulfilment not in Conrad's novel, where Stevie is blown to bits and his charity obliterated, but in the cosmic harmony orchestrated by

Sunday at the end of *The Man Who Was Thursday*. While Stevie's charity ends with his death and while Gabriel Gale's care of the madman Hurrell, although gracious, cannot heal the broken man, Sunday's identification with Christ as the end of the novel offers a kind of beauty which acknowledges and transposes suffering into "that divine art for which there is no human analogue" (von Balthasar 121). As the full form of beauty, Christ undergirds the theological vision of the end of the novel and indeed all of Chesterton's artistic vision.

Imagining Madness in The Poet and the Lunatics

Many of Chesterton's characters demonstrate an ability to envision the minds of others and discover their thoughts, motives, and past actions through imaginative identification with them. Of all of Chesterton's characters, Father Brown is perhaps best known for this close identification with others, especially criminals; however, Gabriel Gale, the protagonist in *The Poet and the Lunatics*, provides a clearer and more consistent picture of the empathetic imagination at work. While Father Brown relies on his theological training to help him uncover evil, Gale has no other faculty or power to help him other than his ability to enter imaginatively into the crimes and lunacies of others, a skill which often places him in some danger. Midway through the novel, Dr. Garth provides a summary of Gale's peculiar practice:

He thought he could cure cracked people by what he called sympathy. But it didn't mean what you would mean by sympathy; he meant following their thoughts and going half-way with them, or all the way with them if he could. I used to joke with him, poor fellow, and say that if a lunatic thought he was made of glass, Gale would try hard to feel a little transparent. Anyhow, that was his notion, that he could really look at things to some extent from the lunatic's point of view; and talk to him in his own language. (60)

Gale uses his imagination not only to comprehend but also to share in, as far as he is able, the inner lives of the desperate people he meets. This ability to empathize with the criminals and lunatics he meets leads him to charity; because he understands their crimes and torments by imaginatively undergoing the same temptations, Gale responds with care and love to the tortured souls he encounters. This care is efficacious for many of the madmen because it is offered in their “own language.” Unlike the rest of the world which can merely regard their insanity from the outside, through his entering into the specific form of their lunacies, Gale responds from within their madness. Gale’s imagination forms the basis of his charity.

Gabriel Gale possesses many of the same qualities as Chesterton’s other protagonists. Like Gabriel Syme, Auberon Quinn, and Adam Wayne, so is Gabriel Gale a poet. Also like Father Brown, Gale is also a detective, although not a formal detective and much more unorthodox in method than even Father Brown. Unlike most of his fellow protagonists, however, Gale is moderately wealthy. Gale’s history is not provided until the final chapter where we learn that the erstwhile poet and landscape painter whose primary occupation appears at first to be taking holidays actually inherited a small estate as a young man. Gale’s revolutionary political sympathies, however, which lead him to advocate on behalf of the gypsies and poachers do not win him any friends among his rich peers. When Gale turns the walls of his farm buildings into billboards covered with political satire, he rouses the ire of the gentlemen in the district. The offended politicians

and patricians hire two “doctors” who lure Gale to an asylum and attempt to certify him as a madman.¹

Gale escapes through the help of a fugitive from the asylum, James Hurrell, who really is mad. In gratitude Gale dedicates the rest of his life to helping Hurrell avoid capture. After Hurrell nearly murders a young squire in the first chapter, Gale retires to a small house in Cornwall where he can keep Hurrell under close observation. With his “talent” for a “sort of psychological imagination,” Gale is able to prevent Hurrell from murdering anyone in his lunacy (18).² Indeed, Gale claims that he is the only one who can so manage Hurrell, and he takes care of the lunatic to “save him from the “infernal brutality of officials” (18). Chapters two through seven ostensibly occur while Gale is taking brief breaks from his duty as protector and keeper, and chapter eight begins with Hurrell’s death and ends with Gale’s marriage to the woman he met in chapter one.

This basic outline of the plot establishes two of Chesterton’s favorite themes: madness and the perversity of the rich. However, the real genius of the story and the most fascinating aspect of Gabriel Gale is his strange imagination which allows him to identify with the madmen he meets so closely that he is able to solve their crimes and sometimes prevent their lunacies. Gale first explains his strange power in chapter one; after Hurrell attempts to murder the squire, her brother, Diana realizes that it is really

¹ This continues Chesterton’s repeated complaint of the abuse of the insane asylum as a place for the modern state to lock away without trial or any term anyone who questions the motives and assumptions of the state, the powerful, and the wealthy. This horro figures most prominently in *The Ball and the Cross* where citizens are required to wear a badge proving their sanity, and half of England ends up interred along with MacIan and Turnbull. However, the same general threat occurs in *The Return of Don Quixote* and here in *The Poet and the Lunatics*.

² Hurrell’s attempted murder of the squire occurs only because Gale is distracted by Diana Westermaine from his care of the madman.

Hurrell who is mad, not Gale as she feared. In defense of his actions, Gale tells Diana that he sometimes seems mad because he has “a streak of sympathy with lunatics—and that’s why I can manage them [. . .] You see, the truth is they say I have a talent for it—a sort of psychological imagination. I generally know what they’re going to do or fancy next” (18-19). This faculty has nothing in common with the usual ratiocinative deduction of detective stories, as Gale explains to a woman who demands evidence for his conclusion that her mentor is deranged: “Oh, proofs!” [Gale] cried,

I know the sort of proofs you want. The foot-prints of the remarkable boots. The bloody finger-print carefully compared with the one at Scotland Yard. The conveniently mislaid match-box, and the ashes of the unique tobacco. Do you suppose I’ve never read any detective stories? Well, I haven’t got any proofs—of that sort. I haven’t got any proofs at all, in that sense. (34)

The facts of the traditional detective do not enter into Gale’s method because the men whom he helps require something beyond the merely factual.

Invoking a quintessentially Chestertonian paradox Gale argues that a thoroughly impractical method is required in order to achieve really practical results with a lunatic. In the case of a suicidal innkeeper, Gale convinces the witnesses to allow him ten minutes alone with the man rather than calling for the police:

‘What you want is an unpractical man. That is what people always want in the last resort and the worst conditions. What can practical men do here? Waste their practical time in running after the poor fellow and cutting him down from one pub sign after another? Waste their practical lives watching him day and night, to see that he doesn’t get hold of a rope or a razor? Do you call that practical? You can only forbid him to die. Can you persuade him to live? Believe me, that is where we come in. A man must have his head in the clouds and his wits woolgathering in fairyland, before he can do anything so practical as that.’ (9)

Sanity, health, and the desire to live are all matters much too mysterious for a purely empirical solution; indeed, the problem often lies in an exaggerated rationality: “the

madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason” (*Orthodoxy* 24).

Redressing the balance of the imbalanced mind requires not the logician but the poet and the mystic. With his impractical method, Gale does convince the innkeeper to live.

Instead of the scientific proofs of the Scotland Yard detective, Gale possesses an imaginative power to follow the implications behind seemingly irrelevant details and harmless actions.

This imaginative power is first expressed in Gale’s contemplation of objects, a contemplation that often seems unwarranted by the objects themselves. He is often so caught up in thinking about a passing object—be it a canary, statue, or peacock—that he loses track of time, companions, and even himself. The narrator is careful to explain that this attention is not the detective’s close “attention to everything and promptest presence of mind” but rather that it is “the absence of mind”: “Some solitary object he was staring at would become fixed in his mind like a talisman, and he stared at it till it began to speak to him like an oracle” (*The Poet and the Lunatics* 98). This focus on the revelatory power of individual objects echoes the observations of chapter three of this dissertation about the perception which sees objects isolated against the backdrop of non-being.

Chapter two of *The Poet and the Lunatics* demonstrates the value of Gale’s focus on seemingly insignificant objects. Gale’s study of the freed canary and the dead goldfish provides him the clues to the suicidal insanity of Ivanhov, the Russian professor. Looking at the released canary being attacked by the wild birds in the forest, Gale begins to think about the nature of liberty and limitation. He realizes that the canary is certainly less at liberty for having been freed from its cage and reflects that “being oneself, which is liberty, is itself limitation” (35). This realization provides Gale with the insight into

Ivanhov's driving desire for escape from all limits. When Gale comes across the broken fish bowl, he knows that Ivanhov has crossed over into insanity: "The man who opened the bird-cage loved freedom; possibly too much; certainly very much. But the man who broke the bowl merely because he thought it a prison for the fish was already outside the world of reason, raging with a desire to be outside of everything" (36). Contemplation of these quotidian facts leads him into understanding of Ivanhov himself. The narrator's description of the objects as "oracles" is particularly appropriate as they disclose meanings greater than what they appear to bear. Gale's reading of the canary and fishbowl demonstrates in brief the movements of the imagination which I explored in chapters two and three. His focus on the individual forms of the bird and the bowl leads to discovery of their meaning, a meaning which is inseparable from the limits which give them their particular form. Imaginative perception of the present enables Gale to recognize the constitutive limits of a thing or person and thus to care properly for them.

For revelatory as objects are for Gale, it is his empathetic imagination that allows Gale to move from attention to objects to knowledge of character. Although the canary and the fishbowl may be necessary keys which unlock Ivanhov's mad reasonings, Gale's access to the inner workings of Ivanov's mind is predicated upon the fact that the maddened mind is a familiar place to him:³

'Perhaps you think I am as mad as he,' Gale tells his companions, 'and I have told you that I am at once like and unlike him. I am like him because I also can go on the wild journeys of such wild minds [. . .] I am unlike him because, thank God, I can generally find my way home again. The lunatic is he who loses his way and cannot return.' (36)

³ Almost all of Gale's companions suspect at one time or another that he really is mad; however, once the reasons behind Gale's actions are explained, his friends are totally convinced by his sanity. It is the poet among the lunatics, not the lunatic among the lunatics.

Gale is able to imaginatively accompany Ivanhov on his terrible journeys of the mind but can return to the world of daylight and wonder. This is perhaps his clearest explication of the method of his empathetic imagination. Moreover, Gale's statement reveals that the madness he encounters is primarily a malady of the mind not of the emotions. Gale's imaginative identification allows him to empathize not only with the pain of the madmen he meets, the normal implication of empathy, but also with their lunacy itself. In *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton describes the lunatic as one who lives "in the clean and well-lit prison of one idea" (27). This image provides a helpful construct for explaining Gale's strange method. If the men he meets are locked within the confines of a deranged reason, Gale enters into the cells with the inmates and is able to regard them from the inside; it is this fact which gives Gale his power to solve the crimes of madmen and his ability to care for them.

Although Gale's empathetic imagination often enables him to solve crimes, it also leads him toward charity to many of the madmen whose insanity he can understand. This is the case in chapter four, "The Crime of Gabriel Gale," where Gale lassoes the young divinity student Herbert Saunders and pins him to a tree with a pitchfork. This strange form of charity is interpreted by Gale's friends as madness, and they attempt to have him certified as insane in order for him to avoid charges of attempted murder. Upon talking to Saunders, however, they discover that the young man is quite grateful to Gale.

A quiet and shy student, Saunders becomes the center of attention when his arrival at a social party is accompanied by sudden thunderstorm. This concurrence of student and rain happens a second time and a third. Although the rest of the party laughs at this repeated accident, Gale realizes that the weird repetition has worked strangely on

the brain of the divinity student who has begun to suspect that he might be God. Gale becomes aware of this while watching two raindrops slide down a window pane, and it is his attention to this small detail which reveals Saunders' condition to him. "Haven't I told you a thousand times," he tells his companions, "that I always find myself looking at some little thing, a stone or a starfish or what not, and that's the only way I can ever learn anything?" (*The Poet and the Lunatics* 69). Noticing that Saunders is staring at the same raindrops he is with an "unobtrusive smile," Gale realizes that Saunders is beginning to believe that he can control the speed at which the drops fall: "I knew that Saunders was just at the delicate crisis, where he was half trying to believe he was [God]. He was half trying to think he had really changed the weather and might change everything" (70). Gale's solution is drastic but effective; as Saunders runs out of the building into the downpour, Gale takes up a spare rope, lassoes Saunders, ties him up, and finally pins him to a tree with a two-tined pitchfork. "I was certain," says Gale, "that unless he learnt his human limitations sharply and instantly, something illimitable and inhuman would take hold of him in that very hour" (71). The cure for this suspected omnipotence is limitation.

Gale's solution is effective, and his method demonstrates in brief the argument of the previous two chapters of this dissertation. His careful attention to the window pane itself, because "glass is a very beautiful thing, like diamonds; and transparency is a sort of transcendent colour" (69), and to the drops of rain on it show him the truth of the rain, the glass, and Saunders. This vision leads him to champion quite forcefully the value of limits and boundaries but it also provides Gale with cure for Saunders' disease.

Impressive as his methods of perception are, Gale is able to diagnose Saunder's condition and prescribe the remedy because he himself has been in a similar state. "I have been through it myself," he tells Garth, "as I have been through nearly every form of infernal idiocy. That is the only use I am in the world; having been every kind of idiot" (72). Like Saunders, Gale has dreamed of his own creative divinity, that without him "nothing was made that was made" (73). Thus Gale knows that the only solution for the mind convinced it is the center of the world is pain; only pain can cure the "nightmare of omnipotence" in which Saunders finds himself because pain "is the thing a man *knows* he would not tolerate if he could really control it" (73). Gale's dramatic solution forces Saunders to confront his own limitations: "God forgive me for blasphemy, but I nailed him to a tree" (73). Gale's empathetic imagination allows him to care for Saunders, even if at first it appears a strange sort of charity.

Saunders as a type for Christ is certainly not the main focus of the episode, yet the resonances of the crucifixion introduce an important point about the efficacy of suffering and the imagination which can recognize such efficacy. Gale's reference to the crucifixion is at first puzzling since what Saunders must be forced to endure in order to acknowledge that he is not God is exactly what Christ *willingly* endured as God. But despite his initial resistance, Saunders' experience of his symbolic crucifixion provides the cure for his madness. Through entering into the suffering of Christ, Saunders is healed and declares that Gale's method has "more than saved my life" (66). Saunders' suffering proves salutary, and it is through the lens of his imagination that Gale first realizes this fact. The episode links the charity to which Gale's imagination leads him with the crucifixion and the good of human participation in the sufferings of Christ and

so offers a brief vision of the stunning conclusion of *The Man Who Was Thursday*, where these questions of imagination, suffering, and beauty are answered in the form of the crucified Christ. In fact, the connection with *Thursday* is made even more explicit in Gale's mini-parable explaining Saunders' condition: "There was a man who saw himself sitting in the sky; and his servants the angels went to and fro in coloured garments of cloud and flame and the pageant of the seasons; but he was over all and his face seemed to fill the heavens" (73). Although this is a depiction of Saunders' inappropriate vision of himself, it describes exactly actions at the end of *The Man Who Was Thursday* where a great masquerade takes place before the elaborately dressed Council of Days, the "seven angels of heaven" and the face of Sunday grows ever larger until fills the cosmos (*The Man Who Was Thursday* 142). Thus Gale's description of Saunders' madness in *The Poet and the Lunatics* is transformed into the redemptive suffering of Christ in *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

The Poet and the Lunatics lays out the basic relations of imagination, suffering, and charity which *The Man Who Was Thursday* employs. In each episode of the novel, Gale confronts some form of madness based on a rejection of limits of some kind and through his imaginative ability to identify with others solves the mystery.⁴ Gale's method provides the clearest demonstration of the connection between imagination and charity in all of Chesterton's fiction. His ability to imagine the lives of others is

⁴ Consideration of the total meaning of *The Poet and the Lunatics* is perplexing. Ian Boyd argues that it is perhaps the most difficult to judge of all Chesterton's novels, particularly with regard to its political rather than personal meanings; after all, there is no large scale political solution unlike most of Chesterton's other novels (139). However, the personal meaning or rather the personal method of Gabriel Gale is clear in its consistent emphasis on the imagination as a powerful tool with which to practice charity toward the "least of these."

predicated upon his own defamiliarizing and limited imagination; recognition of the strangeness of existence and the fundamental importance of boundaries and limits enables him to imaginatively understand the minds of the criminals and madmen he meets and so to care for them. This imaginative journey into the sufferings of others in order to love them provides the interpretive key with which to unlock Chesterton's most puzzling novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

The Man Who Was Thursday and The Secret Agent

These reflections on imaginatively driven charity prove a helpful lens through which to evaluate Chesterton's best known yet most bewildering novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday*. The connection made in *The Poet and the Lunatics* between imagination, suffering, and charity finds full application in *The Man Who Was Thursday*. In order to draw out this theme of imaginative empathy motivating charitable action, I provide a reading of Conrad's *The Secret Agent* which compares Stevie's empathy and art with Sunday's actions in *The Man Who Was Thursday*. Published within one year of each other, these two novels about anarchist plots and the actual absence of such plots share similar concerns about the role of art in restoration and healing. In *The Secret Agent*, Stevie's empathetic imagination, expressed by his care for the beaten and broken animals and people around him, is complemented by his art, the endless circles which constitute his vision of health and unity. However despite its pathos, Stevie's desire to comfort the afflicted and restore justice is finally impotent. The possibility of healing which Stevie's art opens is foreclosed by the bomb which takes his life, and the novel can offer its readers nothing more than the awful conclusion that "An impenetrable mystery seems destined to hang for ever over this act of madness or despair" (224). It is this final

despair which marks most significant difference between Chesterton and Conrad's novels of dynamiters and demonstrates the theological depth of *The Man Who Was Thursday*. Like Stevie's art, Sunday's cosmic dance celebrates the wholeness of creation and foregrounds the imagination and the suffering of others. Yet unlike the final failure of Stevie's art, Sunday's dance is linked to the crucifixion, and the vision of wholeness and reconciliation that it offers is made possible through the sufferings of Christ. It is in this context that the final vision of the novel provides the universal restoration and healing of which Gabriel Gale's strange charity offers a glimpse. *The Man Who Was Thursday* fulfills the promise which is obliterated in the Greenwich explosion in *The Secret Agent* and which is hoped for in Gale's care of James Hurrell in *The Poet and the Lunatics*.

In *To Hell with Culture: Anarchism and Twentieth Century British Literature*, H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight claim that Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* is the only novel about anarchy which most students of English Literature are ever likely to read (xi). If such students were ever to read a second novel about anarchy, it would surely be G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*. In this brilliant and baffling novel, which Ian Ker claims is the most likely of all Chesterton's fictional works to endure, Chesterton, like Conrad, addresses questions of justice, art, suffering, and anarchy (125, 186). Indeed the number of similarities between the two novels is startling. Published within one year of each other, both authors admit that the impetus for their respective novels stems from their experiences of anarchy and nihilism during the 1890s. Likewise, the feared league of anarchists in both novels turns out to be a sham. The International Red Committee wants nothing more than to maintain the status quo in *The Secret Agent*, and the General Council of the Anarchists of Europe is populated solely by

police detectives in *The Man Who Was Thursday*. Over against these false organizations, each novel also presents one true anarchist, the Professor and Lucian Gregory respectively. Thus in terms of basic character types, the two novels hold much in common.

Alfred Nobel's invention of dynamite in 1866 revolutionized not only anarchists but also popular perception of these subversive groups. In her essay on dynamite, literature, and culture in England, Sarah Cole argues that not only did dynamite present a new form of violence, it mesmerized both anarchists and the larger public with its extravagant excess; never before had so few been capable of such widespread destruction (302-303). Indeed, a flurry of violent attacks by radical, usually anarchist, individuals and groups marked the end of the nineteenth century (Cole 304). Both Conrad and Chesterton locate the impetus for their novels in events of the 1890s.⁵ Each author takes up the challenge presented by the new dynamite threat and attempts to represent it in fiction. Yet to speak of *The Secret Agent* and *The Man Who Was Thursday* as anarchist novels or novels of anarchy is misleading, for while the novels deal with anarchist groups, both Conrad and Chesterton are finally dismissive of anarchy. Conrad acknowledges in his note on *The Secret Agent* that the irony in the novel allowed him to express his "scorn," presumably of anarchists, as well as his "pity" (232). While both *The Secret Agent* and *The Man Who Was Thursday* may start as novels about anarchist plots, they quickly expand beyond this initial concern. Conrad and Chesterton critique the anarchists not for their condemnation of injustice but for their proposed remedy.

⁵ Conrad's novel is based on the attempted bombing of Greenwich Observatory in 1894. The anarchist nihilism which Lucian Gregory represents has its roots in Chesterton's own experiences of nihilism and pessimism at the Slade Art school in the 1890s.

Both Chesterton and Conrad, although they are finally critical of the anarchists in their works, do highlight the value of anarchist concerns. Thus, Stevie recognizes the injustices which lie at the origin of the anarchists' radical critique of society, and Gabriel Syme realizes the positive good which can be found in taking a stand against the universe. In the end, Conrad and Chesterton use the premise of dynamite outrages as a catalyst; each author takes up the questions of art, solidarity, and suffering which dynamite and anarchists raise but proposes answers which are perhaps antithetical to the revolutionary thinkers of the late nineteenth century.

The real connection between the novels lies in their treatment of the nature of art and the proper response to suffering. Against the figure of the anarchist as the destroying artist creating society anew, Chesterton and Conrad hold up a conception of art as essentially ordered to wholeness and charity. The key to this reading lies in Stevie and Sunday, who appear to be as radically different as any two characters could possibly be. Stevie's stuttering and apparent imbecility are pitiful enough when placed alongside his fellow characters in *The Secret Agent*. Compared to the near omniscient and omnipresent Sunday of *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Stevie seems limited indeed. He cannot command attention and loyalty like Sunday; he strikes fear and love into no one, except perhaps his mother and sister. He constructs no elaborate schemes and organizes no grand games where the same men are simultaneously the police and the criminals. He is the polar opposite of Sunday.

This difference, however, serves as a connection between them, for just as most characters in *The Secret Agent* regard Stevie as sub-human, so Sunday appears super-human in Chesterton's novel. Yet, both characters, despite their positions on the very

edges of society model a charitable humanity through their willingness to participate in the pain of others. Stevie, the babbling idiot brother of Winnie Verloc, demonstrates an empathy for other beings, both human and animal, which is unmatched anywhere in the novel. *The Secret Agent* may be the story of Winnie Verloc, as Conrad claimed, yet the moral center of the novel is clearly Stevie (Conrad 231). Likewise, Chesterton concludes *The Man Who Was Thursday* with a dizzying scene in which Sunday, who throughout the novel has clearly been portrayed as more than human, takes on divine characteristics. Yet this great enigma refers at last to the passion of Christ as the ultimate evidence of his solidarity in suffering with the Council of Days. Thus, Stevie and Sunday both acknowledge the injustices that shape anarchist responses, but they choose to respond with participation in that suffering rather than violent explosions.⁶

Cole convincingly makes the case that stories about dynamiters are necessarily melodramatic; the kind of “excess” which dynamite represents naturally lends itself to exaggerations in style and content (303). *The Secret Agent* and *The Man Who Was Thursday* clearly contain melodramatic elements; Winnie’s murder of Mr. Verloc and the revelation of Gogol as a traitor are two scenes which demonstrate great emotional and atmospheric excess. Yet while both novels do partake in the melodramatic, they move beyond the constraints of that genre through their respective stylistic modes: satiric irony in Conrad’s case and surreal nightmare in Chesterton’s. Moreover, despite their humorous characterizations of particular anarchists, each author takes seriously a facet of the anarchist critique of culture. The novels balance laughter with terror, moving back

⁶ Where *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and *The Flying Inn* considered the good of defending the home, *The Man Who Was Thursday* offers the martyr as a response to injustice and suffering. Chesterton certainly upholds both models as proper responses; the difference lies in the vocation of the respective characters.

and forth between the humorous descriptions of Michaelis and the grisly shovelful of Stevie's remains, between the hilarious scene of Syme's election to the post of Thursday and the diabolical smile of the Secretary.

Yet at the heart of each author's sophisticated treatment of anarchy lies an alternative vision of revolution. Rather than throwing bombs, both Chesterton and Conrad hold up solidarity in pain as the first response to injustice and suffering. The characters who demonstrate this solidarity in each novel are unlikely candidates for encountering the struggles at the core of human existence. Stevie and Sunday exist on two opposite peripheries of human society, yet they both connect directly with the agony at the center of human experience. In conjunction with their empathy and participation in the pain of others, both characters also practice an art ordered to wholeness. Stevie's endless circles which are physical manifestations of his wonderful desire to enclose the whole world in his bed are given flesh and fulfilled in the Sunday's strange and wonderful masque where the whole of the natural order dances in harmony for the Council of Days and for Sunday himself, who is the "peace of God" (*The Man Who Was Thursday* 140). The possibility of connection and communion which Stevie offers but which is finally obliterated in *The Secret Agent* is realized and fulfilled in the final triumphant dance of creation in *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

Stevie's Art and Imagining the Suffering of Others

As the most well-known novel about anarchy in English, *The Secret Agent* has received a significant amount of critical attention. Conrad's deft weaving together of terror and the domestic, action and indolence, and irony and grotesquerie creates a complicated web of meanings. Within this rich network of significations, Stevie's

character has certainly attracted scholarly notice; the idiot boy who draws circles, loves animals, and is blown to pieces stands out in a novel full of interesting characters.

However, the connections between Stevie's art and his empathy have not been fully explored. Likewise, Stevie's similarity to the Professor, perhaps the most repulsive of the anarchists in the novel, deserves further elucidation. Although Stevie is finally dismembered in the novel, prior to his death he provides a model for re-membering the fragmented world of London: his empathetic imagination allows him not only to enter into the suffering of others but to create a vision of human wholeness and integrity.⁷

Although seemingly alien to kind Stevie's temperament, the Professor forms a direct foil for him in the novel. Much like Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway, the two characters share important similarities that serve to link them to each other although they never meet. But these commonalities serve to highlight the difference between their methods. Outlined against the backdrop of the Professor's terrible creed and actions, Stevie's own response to injustice stands out clearly.

While the Professor may be an anarchist, he is quite different from the other revolutionaries in the book, specifically the organized anarchists who meet in Verloc's sitting room. The members of the International Red Committee are clearly derided in the novel. Michaelis, Yunt, and Ossipon want nothing to do with real anarchy; they are quite content doing their part to maintain the balance of power. Ossipon worries that Verloc's plan to commit an outrage will upset the "even tenor of his revolutionary life" (58).

These members of organized anarchy really are the "gallery of grotesque, pathetic or

⁷ It is perhaps the greatest tragedy in a novel full of tragedy that Stevie's vision is ultimately barren; the model which he offers, although compelling, lacks the real grounding in the transcendent which would enable it to fully answer the suffering to which it is addressed.

absurd creatures” which John Rignall claims (11). Reception of these figures has varied. Some critics justify Conrad’s ironic treatment of anarchists in light of the true domestic nature of the novel, while others blame Conrad for caricature that evades real analysis and dialogue (Mulry 2). Mulry persuasively argues that while his anarchists may be caricatures, each represents a stage in the development of anarchist thought in the late nineteenth century (6). However, as individuals in the novel, they remain laughable, removed from any real threat of violence.

The Professor, on the other hand, is quite a different story. Although he is sometimes grouped with Michaelis, Yunt, and Ossipon as an overly exaggerated character, he is quite distinct from the other anarchists. Unlike, his complacent counterparts, the Professor brings an element of terror to the novel; he demonstrates the potential of dynamite for the revolutionary: the ability of a single man to strike at any moment. Of all the anarchists he espouses most fully the anarchist call for a politics of action rather than words, the famed “propaganda by deed” (Cole 306). Indeed the Professor is given a privileged position as the central figure of the final paragraph of the novel as he moves menacingly among the crowds of London “like a pest in a street full of men” (Conrad 227). In explaining his motive and methods to Ossipon, the Professor argues that society must not be revolutionized but completely destroyed: “what’s wanted is a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life. That sort of future will take care of itself if you will only make room for it. Therefore I would shovel my stuff in heaps at the corners of the streets if I had enough for that” (55). Cole has pointed out how the shovel stands for Stevie’s shattered flesh after the bombing. She argues that the shovel metonymically represents Stevie; it is the sound of the shovel scraping up the bits

of bones and flesh which makes the park keeper vomit, and Winnie fastens on the image of the shovel in her imagining of Stevie's death (316). In light of Cole's reading, the Professor's reference to shoveling his "stuff" on street corners becomes particularly grisly. It is Stevie's charred remains which are piled on a street corner, the product of the Professor's commitment to action.

Yet, the Professor's terrible creed stems from his sense of injustice. If he wants to destroy culture, it is because he thinks it deeply flawed. In a novel full of tragedies, the Professor's own pitiful history is easy to overlook; however, it sheds important light upon his character especially as he functions as an alternative to Stevie. The Professor, we are told, transferred the religious fervor of his early upbringing to a faith in merit, a "frenzied puritanism of ambition" which he held as "something secularly holy" (Conrad 60). Faced with a society which ignores worth and value, the Professor concludes that everyone must be forced to see the injustice of the legal system and turns to violent acts as his mode of argument (60). Thus, he seeks some "blow fit to open the first crack in the imposing front of the great edifice of legal conceptions sheltering the atrocious injustice of society" (60). While the Professor is clearly deluded in his assessment of society, it is important for his connection with Stevie that he feels with a religious fervor the overwhelming nature of injustice.

The Professor adopts two basic responses to the perceived injustice of the world: solitude and destruction. Considering himself to be much better than society has judged him, the Professor remains aloof from all human connection. He lives alone, walks alone, and usually eats alone. When he meets Chief Inspector Heat, the Professor congratulates himself on his own "superiority over all the multitude of mankind" (62).

Indeed, the only moment of human community he will allow are the twenty awful seconds after he has activated his detonator but before the bomb explodes when the community of death will join his fellow victims to himself. In this solitude, the Professor fantasizes about destruction. The closing paragraph of the novel highlights both the Professor's loneliness and his mad creed.

And the incorruptible Professor walked too averting his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind. He had no future. He disdained it. He was a force. His thoughts caressed the images of ruin and destruction. He walked frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable—and terrible in the simplicity of his idea calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world (227).

This final description clearly locates both the Professor's solipsism and desire for annihilation and a new world. Twisted though his vision may be, he finally seeks a new political, cultural, and perhaps, in light of the language of "regeneration," even a new spiritual space.

Significantly, the Professor is not as alone as he thinks; he has a twin in Stevie Verloc, Winnie's supposedly half-witted brother. To claim that the Professor and Stevie are at all alike seems preposterous at first. What does kind-hearted Stevie with his desires to comfort the whole world in his bed have to do with the pestiferous Professor seeking wholesale destruction? But while their ultimate goals may differ, they bear a remarkable resemblance to one another. In a novel full of big bodies— Verloc's corpulence, Ossipon's muscles, and Winnie's "broad hips"— the Stevie and the Professor are linked by their weak, frail frames (4). The Professor is repeatedly described as "little" and of a "stunted stature" (46, 60). Likewise, Stevie is "delicate" and good looking in a "frail way" (7).

Beyond their physical resemblance, Stevie and the Professor share the same code of action. If the anarchist challenge in an age of dynamite is to deeds rather than words, Stevie is clearly the most successful “anarchist” in the novel. Lacking ready control of language, Stevie communicates primarily through deeds; indeed, his language is usually employed in justifying or explaining his activities after the fact. Many of his acts ignore societal convention and undermine the established stratification of society. Thus, Stevie pays attention to the cabby’s emaciated horse and decides to walk to lighten its load, a decision which his sister condemns because it upsets social equilibrium. In his most dramatic act, Stevie actually creates his own small dynamite outrage. When the other office boys play upon Stevie’s credulity with “tales of injustice and oppression,” Stevie sets off fireworks in the building in an attempt to burn it down (7). Significantly, this is the most damaging act of anarchy in the whole novel in terms of material effect. While Verloc’s awful attempt at an outrage disturbs the public but does not even mar the Greenwich Observatory, Stevie’s fireworks create a potentially “serious” situation and provoke an “awful panic” which visibly disrupts societal order as smoke roils down the corridors of the building and gentlemen flee the premises (7). At one level then, Stevie and the Professor demonstrate the same code of action and a willingness to participate in destruction.

David Mulry certainly reads Stevie as an anarchist character. Both Stevie and Winnie, he claims, model the anarchist principle of “propaganda through deeds” (11). Indeed, he argues that Winnie is the most exemplary anarchist character in the novel according to the definition of a “classical anarchist as person who discovers himself or herself free to act” (11). Yet if Winnie discovers her freedom to act, Stevie has possessed

such freedom from the beginning. Our first introduction to his character is a catalogue of his various actions taken against the grain of society: caring for stray cats, mourning fallen horses, and setting off fireworks. This detailed attention to injustice on Stevie's part certainly mirrors the Professor's own almost religious conviction of the oppression of society. In fact, Stevie's perception of injustice is certainly more trustworthy. The Professor's personal failure drives his condemnation of society. Stevie, however, has no vested interest in the poor victims which bring him to such rage. On one level then, Stevie is the most complete anarchist in the novel, a fit companion for the Professor. Indeed, Cole argues that, in his empathy for the suffering of others, Stevie accurately portrays the true "message" of anarchism, unlike Yundt, Michaelis, Ossipon, and even the Professor (314).

Yet, Stevie the apparent anarchist turns out to be no anarchist at all, at least not the sort the Professor would recognize. In a subtle move, Conrad links Stevie to the Professor in order to show how Stevie's moral actions radically transcend the Professor's awful creed; Stevie is the Professor's "obverse counterpart," as Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan terms it (219). If the Professor calls "madness and despair to the regeneration of the world," Stevie too attempts regeneration but through solidarity and compassion. Rather than the solitary Nietzschean figure of the Professor, Stevie identifies himself with those who suffer; his ability to empathize even extends to his actual body. When he hears of injustice, Stevie is worked up into a physical frenzy; Winnie has to talk him down from his agitation over the story of the German soldier whose ear was partially torn off by his officer (Conrad 45). While this physical violence apparently connects Stevie to both the Professor and Winnie who respond to injustice with violence, Stevie's physical acts differ

fundamentally from both his sister and the deadly anarchist. Whereas the Professor and Winnie both take up violence to right personal wrongs, or supposed wrongs in the case of the Professor, Stevie's empathy leads his "immoderate compassion" which in turn produces his violent impulses, impulses which the narrator points out are fundamentally "innocent" (124). These two linked impulses lie at the core of what the narrator describes as Stevie's "universal charity" (124). This charity towards others both humans and animals stands out so startlingly in a novel full of selfish actions; his rage is never directed against the injustices which he has suffered.

Stevie's powerful imagination lies at the heart of his charity. Almost all the evils which drive Stevie to frenzy are narrated to him, yet he is able to enter into these stories almost bodily. The office boys tell him tales of suffering, he reads the account of the German soldier in one of Ossipon's pamphlets, and Mrs. Neale relates her children's hardships to him. His capacity for imagination is demonstrated fully during the meeting of the International Red Committee at Verloc's house. Only Stevie who overhears Yundt's prescription for branding and Ossipon's description of capitalist cannibalism truly imagines the terrible reality of those scenes. The other men remain totally unaffected; Ossipon yawns and Michaelis heads for the door, but Stevie sinks to the ground overcome by the awful images which their words have called up.

Stevie's empathetic imagination works most powerfully in his interactions with the cabby and his horse. In the most luminous passage of the novel, Stevie empathizes not only with the poor horse whose welfare he was previously concerned with, but also with the cab driver himself who passes onto the horse the injustices he himself suffers. This chain of suffering culminates in the cabby's statement that he must feed his four

children and wife: “The monstrous nature of that declaration of paternity seemed to strike the world dumb. A silence reigned, during which the flanks of the old horse, the steed of apocalyptic misery, smoked upwards in the light of the charitable gas lamp” (123).

Although this is the narrator’s description, the dumbness here is certainly Stevie’s, and the charity present in the scene is his as well. It is Stevie’s willingness to empathize with the suffering of others which illuminates the steam rising off the worn-out horse. He is willing to recognize in others the same sort of suffering he endures and to enter again into that suffering; thus, he feels the event deeply even if all he can say is “Shame:”

That little word contained all his sense of indignation and horror at one sort of wretchedness having to feed upon the anguish of the other—at the poor cabman beating the poor horse in the name, as it were, of his poor kids at home. And Stevie knew what it was to be beaten. He knew it from experience. It was a bad world. Bad! Bad! (126)

While the Professor’s sense of injustice shields him from the world, Stevie’s own experience of suffering leads him into the pain of others.

Some critics attempt to deconstruct Stevie’s empathy. Ludwig Schnauder argues that Stevie’s moral sense is merely the result of conditioning, an outworking of the Darwinian perspective of the novel (6). Likewise, John Lyon notes that Stevie’s compassion is directly linked to his own fear of pain and thus not simply “altruistic” (xii). While Stevie is certainly morally conditioned by his sister and mother and does fear pain even for others, these things surely do not mean that he loses his moral force. Many of his sympathies lie in directions which his sister and mother have tried to steer him away from— concern for dying animals in the street, for instance. Likewise, Stevie’s fear of pain for others is not remarkable. What is truly admirable is the degree to which he participates in their suffering by linking it with his own.

This imaginative presence calls into question Cole's contention that Conrad's ironical treatment in the novel extends to Stevie's work as an artist (315).⁸ Read in the light of his empathetic imagination, Stevie's dedication to drawing his endless circles takes on important signification, for what Stevie really wants is wholeness, a complete and perfect unity. His imagined solution to the problem of the cabman and his horse is to bring them all into his own bed. From his experience he knows that to be enfolded in Winnie's arms and enclosed in her bed is to be comforted. And although he knows that he cannot take the cabman and horse into his bed, Stevie knows that it would help because "To be taken into a bed of compassion was the supreme remedy, with the only one disadvantage of being difficult of application on a large scale" (*The Secret Agent* 123). Winnie's bed is a haven because it is an expansive enclosure, a space both inclusive and yet complete. Stevie is perceptive enough, however, to note the problem with his solution which can accommodate only a few persons. This limited quality stands in direct contrast to the increasing size of Sunday at the end of *The Man Who Was Thursday* whose face grows to fill the whole sky before Syme passes out.

Stevie's circles are the application of this idea on a larger scale, although they lack the practical application which Winnie's bed offers. When Mr. Verloc comes upon him in the kitchen, he finds Stevie "drawing circles, circles, circles; innumerable circles, concentric, eccentric; a coruscating whirl of circles that by their tangled multitude of repeated curves, uniformity of form, and confusion of intersecting lines suggested a rendering of cosmic chaos, the symbolism of a mad art attempting the inconceivable"

⁸ Other critics too have failed to note the importance of Stevie's art. Thus Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan in an article about "the relationship between ethics and aesthetics" in *The Secret Agent* completely ignores Stevie's artistic work.

(34). Just like his experience in Winnie's bed, the circles intertwine and are yet complete; they are total and yet welcoming. With his art, however, Stevie can try to bring the whole world into harmony and peace; indeed, this is exactly what the narrator suggests he is trying to do. Stevie's "rendering of cosmic chaos," his attempt to make meaning and harmony in a broken world full of pain rests upon interlocking circles, symbols of wholeness which interpenetrate each other without losing their own integrity. In this way, Stevie's art flows from his empathy.⁹ Avrom Fleishmen points out that Stevie's circles are "his plan of a utopia" (197). If Stevie's imagination enables his to participate somatically in the pain of others, it also provides him with a vision of the potential transformation of this painful sharing into reconciliation and wholeness.

This identification of Stevie's role as artist in the novel through his exercise of the empathetic imagination highlights his strange place in *The Secret Agent*. He is first introduced as Winnie's idiot brother, regarded by everyone but his mother and sister as almost sub-human. Yet, the narrator goes to great lengths in the scene with the cabman to demonstrate that Stevie is not mad but "reasonable" (123). Indeed through his empathetic imagination, Stevie provides a model of charitable humanity in the novel. In a story of failed identities, of the injustice woven into the very fabric of society, and of mistaken responses to that injustice, Stevie stands out, like the "charitable" light of the gas lamps, illuminating the suffering of others through his participation in their pain.

However, the empathy and humanity which Stevie offers is finally reduced to a pile of bones and flesh. No means exists for the continuance of his vision after his death, and the novel offers no structure or interpretive scheme in light of which his death might

⁹ It is significant in this regard that once Verloc begins to corrupt Stevie's empathy for his own purposes Stevie stops drawing his circles.

have some kind of transcendent significance. This is the great limitation of Conrad's novel; although the character of Stevie argues persuasively for sharing in the suffering of others, no real answer to that suffering is offered. Quite the opposite, Stevie is obliterated, Winnie drowns herself rather than hang for murdering Verloc, and Ossipon is driven nearly to insanity by the inexplicable, because ultimately meaningless, nature of their deaths. It is in this context of art, the imagination, and the need for a convincing response to suffering and death that we turn to *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

The Character of Sunday

Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* takes up the same questions of anarchy, art, justice, and suffering which Conrad addresses in *The Secret Agent*. In a bizarre novel, Chesterton leads his protagonist on a dizzying journey into the depths of the General Council of the Anarchists of Europe which turns out to be populated solely by philosophical policemen seeking to undermine anarchist activities. What starts as a good detective story slowly morphs into a kind of metaphysical thriller centered around the godlike character of Sunday, simultaneously the President of the Anarchist Council and the Chief of the Philosophical Policemen. The political and artistic questions with which the novel begins become theological questions regarding Sunday's nature; in the end, the six members of the Council of Days care only about discovering whether Sunday is God or the devil. Chesterton does not ever clearly elucidate Sunday's exact nature and motivations, yet the giant's final words highlight the Crucifixion as an example of the divine response to pain. Sunday, a character apparently on the border of humanity like Stevie, although in a very different sense, proves to be a model of charity through his solidarity with the suffering.

The Man Who Was Thursday has received the most critical attention of any of Chesterton's novels. This fact stems partly from the puzzling nature of the book. Just what kind of universe is Chesterton really proposing, critics have wondered. Published in 1908, the same year as *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton's great apology for Christianity, the novel is not obviously orthodox. But Chesterton's comment that those who try to find evidence of his heterodoxy in the novel clearly misread the subtitle of the work, *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare*, has resolved many of the questions the work raises. In an article written the day before he died, Chesterton claims that the story was addressed to a peculiar strain of thought prevalent when the novel was written:

It was not intended to describe the real world as it was, or as I thought it was, even when my thoughts were considerably less settled than they are now. It was intended to describe the world of wild doubt and despair which the pessimists were generally describing at that date; with just a gleam of hope in some double meaning of doubt, which even the pessimists felt in some fitful fashion. (*The Man Who Was Thursday* 145)

This defense seems to explain much of the mystery surrounding the theological vision of the novel, although some critics have remained unconvinced.¹⁰ Yet while Chesterton makes clear the distance between the world of the novel and his own belief, the character of Sunday still remains something of a mystery. Who or what exactly is Sunday supposed to be even within the confines of the story?

Unlike Stevie who is ignored by many of his fellow characters, Sunday is treated with worshipful reverence, awe, and terror by the other characters in the novel. When he is first introduced as the chief of the New Detective Corps, Syme talks with him in a pitch

¹⁰ Robert Caserio argues for instance that Chesterton's final claim about a double meaning of doubt deconstructs his whole statement about the novel. Such a reading, however, fails to take seriously Chesterton's theological commitments which render doubt good, not in and of itself, but only with regard to particular statements which ought to be doubted.

black room where he can make out only that the man is huge and that he has his back to Syme. This sense of great size carries over into the first vision of Sunday that the novel offers; indeed, he is described as something almost beyond human when Syme first sees him:

This man was planned enormously in his original proportions, like a statue carved deliberately as colossal. His head, crowned with white hair, as seen from behind looked bigger than a head ought to be. The ears that stood out from it looked larger than human ears. He was enlarged terribly to scale; and this sense of size was so staggering, that when Syme saw him all the other figures seemed quite suddenly to dwindle and become dwarfish (37-38).

This description locates Sunday on the borderland of humanity; he exists just on the edge of human possibility. This fact is made explicit when Syme actually meets Sunday and the President's face grows larger and larger until Syme fears that it will become "too big to be possible" (38). In the end Sunday's face is "still possible to humanity," but his size, particularly the size of his face, clearly partakes in something more than human (38). In fact, this description anticipates the end of the novel in which Sunday's face really does cover the sky and discloses his divine humanity.

Indeed, Sunday looms increasingly large in the novel until he overtakes the narrative completely. Questions of dynamite outrages and assassinations fade into the background as the various members of the Council of Days realize that not only are they all policemen but that the man who hired each of them was Sunday. All that matters by the end of the novel is to discover who Sunday really is and what he means. Answering this question requires consideration of Sunday's art.

The Art of Sunday

Like Conrad, Chesterton takes up art as a critical term in exploring the nature of anarchy. Indeed, it is a debate about art which brings Gabriel Syme and Lucian Gregory together, a meeting which precipitates the action of the rest of the novel. Heather Worthington argues correctly that their argument is “mapped” onto the wider social scale of the entire novel in its polarity between detectives and anarchists (23). In a conversation which makes explicit the differences between Stevie’s circles and the Professor’s bombs, Gregory argues that all art consists in destruction while Syme holds that order forms the constitutive element of imaginative creation. In response to Syme’s snide remark that if order were poetical then the London Underground would be the peak of poetry, Syme replies that so it is:

The rare, strange thing is to hit the mark; the gross, obvious thing is to miss it. We feel it is epic when man with one wild arrow strikes a distant bird. It is not also epic when man with one wild engine strikes a distant station? Chaos is dull; because in chaos the train might indeed go anywhere, to Baker Street, or to Bagdad. But man is a magician, and his whole magic is in this, that he does say Victoria, and lo! It is Victoria. No, take your books of mere poetry and prose, let me read a time-table with tears of pride. (*The Man Who Was Thursday* 4)

Although Chesterton critiques the circle as a philosophical symbol in *Orthodoxy*, he would certainly approve of Stevie Verloc’s circles as proper to the work of the artist insofar as they embody this delight in order. This is not to argue that art must be boring or uninteresting for Chesterton. Quite the opposite, he argues that order is exciting, invigorating, and inspiring. Thus, he claims in *Orthodoxy* that “people have fallen into the foolish habit of speaking of orthodoxy as something heavy, humdrum, and safe. There never was anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy” (107). Order is

essential to art, a wild living order. This concept of order is at work in the fantastical masque at the end of *The Man Who Was Thursday*, as we shall see.

But unlike Stevie whose art is an active demonstration of his empathy, we cannot immediately look to Sunday's actions for an example of his empathy; after all, his main role in the narrative has been to make his followers doubt even himself. As the philosophical policemen gradually discover that all of their fellows on Council of Days are also policemen, they realize that as awful as Sunday seemed when he was only the President, the reality is something much more strange and terrible. The Professor admits that he is afraid of asking Sunday who he is for fear that the gigantic man might actually tell him (*The Man Who Was Thursday* 117). Sunday directly plays upon this sense of mystery by telling the detectives that he is also the chief of the New Detective Corps who hired them in the dark room. In the course of the novel, Sunday, who at first appears mysteriously evil, becomes simply mysterious and finally nearly incomprehensible.

But Sunday's art does clearly share similarities with Stevie's in its concern for inclusive wholeness. Jacques Maritain argues in *Art and Scholasticism* that properly speaking the saints are the art of God (18). If Sunday functions as a deity in at least some respects, the Council of Days is clearly his art. This is evident on the very material level of dress. Sunday in his role as chief detective directs each of his employees regarding their disguises. Likewise, during the climactic scene at the garden masque, Sunday provides his supposed anarchists with particular clothes which they must wear. Each man is given an outfit which directly relates to his position in the week of creation. Thus, as Monday, the Secretary wears a black robe split down the middle by a pure white stripe, a representation of the creation of light on the first day. Dr. Bull, Saturday, has a coat

covered in the shapes of animals. Resplendent as each man is individually, when they sit together upon their raised seats they symbolically represent the whole of the created order. Sunday completes his own artistic picture when he joins the six days bringing their number to seven, the number of completion and perfection.

The revelers who dance before the Council of Days are the art of Sunday too in his role as a sort of Pan, bringing the natural order to life. All the dancers are costumed as things from the world. Some of them are dressed as objects from the previous adventures of the novel: a windmill, an elephant, a hornbill. Others have no clear connection to the events of the story such as the dancing apple tree or the dancing ship. Indeed there are hundreds even thousands of dancers, and thus it seems to Syme perhaps the world itself has been bespelled: “One would have thought that the untamable tune of some mad musician had set all the common objects of field and street dancing an eternal jig” (*The Man Who Was Thursday* 138). While the dance does end and the revelers go home, it remains present in Syme’s mind for the rest of his life such that “he could never see one of those particular objects—a lamp-post, or an apple-tree, or a windmill—without thinking that it was a strayed reveller from that revel of masquerade” (138). This language of music and the eternal dance of nature calls to mind the celestial music of the spheres. Sunday has clearly reproduced a terrestrial imitation of that heavenly music. And like Stevie’s circles, Sunday’s art is an art of total harmony and unity, a physical representation of and participation in the eternal. Sunday’s vision also addresses suffering, but unlike Stevie’s ultimately ineffective response, through its connection with the suffering of Christ, Sunday’s art offers the possibility of full reconciliation and healing which Stevie longs for but is unable to effect.

Beauty, Crucifixion, and Christ

Beauty structures the conclusion of *The Man Who Was Thursday* in two ways. First and most obviously the beautiful is present in the cosmic dance which celebrates the various forms of the world and their harmonious interrelation. This beauty of form is linked to Sunday. Sunday orchestrates the entire ceremony; it occurs at his estate, and he is the presiding genius of the feast. But beauty, in the beauty of Christ's passion, also dominates the end of the novel in Sunday's response to the problem of suffering which lies at the heart of the complaints of both the Council of Days and the real anarchist Lucian Gregory. In Sunday's identification with the passion of Christ, the full beauty and glory of divine presence is disclosed. It is this beauty which undergirds the beauty of the dance of forms; in light of the form of Christ the forms of the world take their significance and meaning. In *Christ the Form of Beauty*, Francesca Murphy summarizes William Lynch and von Balthasar on the imagination, the world, and Christ and claims that these theologians find Christ simultaneously at work from outside the form of the world and from within it in the imaginative drive to encounter reality. These two movements are in fact related since "faith in the person of Christ—the simple, literal fact,—gives the imagination its concrete ground" (19). The end of *The Man Who Was Thursday* fulfills this definition of the imagination as Sunday's connection with Christ also underwrites the dancing revel which celebrates the various forms of existence. In this way the conclusion of the novel demonstrates von Balthasar's observation that Christ

is both the measure of beauty, the “form of all forms” and also the perfection of the “form of the world” (421, 422).¹¹

In the context of this cosmic harmony, this feast of forms, Sunday’s reference to Christ’s words offers the Passion as the response to the sufferings of the Council of Days. After the dance has ended and the revelers have departed, Sunday finally speaks directly to the Council of Days. Sunday reveals to them that he was the man in the dark who hired them as philosophical policemen and whose voice they followed though the whole world was against them. Although his explanations remain mysterious to the Council, what is clear is that Sunday wished to test their honor and virtue by turning the whole world, even himself, against them. In response to their demand to know who and what he is, Sunday replies “I am the Sabbath [. . .] I am the peace of God” (*The Man Who Was Thursday* 140). In the context of the dance of the created order which precedes this conversation, Sunday’s declaration carries a particular kind of weight. With the six days of creation present and the whole of the created order moving in unison together, the feast at the conclusion of *The Man Who Was Thursday* is a species of hexameron, a work both praising and explicating God’s act of creation as given in *Genesis*. Syme is even provided a Bible with the appropriate passage in Genesis marked out to justify his strange dress, which symbolizes the creation of the sun and moon (136). If Sunday is the Sabbath, then he is the repose of God after the work of creation. This confession makes

¹¹ “Beyond all creaturely hopes and expectations, moreover, the revelation in Christ was to bring together in one divine and human Head everything heavenly and earthly, which is thus endowed by grace with a crown the radiance of whose glory, belonging to the *Kyrios* of the world, was to shed its rays over the whole of creation. In this way the form of the world itself, which as such already was the revelation of the divine *δόξα*, in Christ and in the Holy Spirit poured out through him becomes a temple which, like the tabernacle and Solomon’s edifice, harbours within and above itself the *kâbôd* of God” (von Balthasar 422).

sense of Sunday's position as the author of the dance and organizer of the feast; he is presence of the divine recognizing the work of his hands as good and very good.¹² Thus it is that, when Sunday enters the feast, Syme sees on the faces before him "a frightful and beautiful alteration, as if heaven had opened behind his head" (139). The dancers recognize Sunday as more than simply another form; he is a manifestation of divine presence. Yet although Sunday is the Sabbath, he is not Saturday. He is not the Jewish day of rest but the Christian day of resurrection. This fact becomes evident in the final conversation of the novel which addresses the place of suffering in the wild adventures of the philosophical policemen.

Although Sunday's explanations are mysterious, the agony that each of the philosophical policemen has endured becomes quite clear. Indeed, the overriding problem at the end of the novel becomes the problem of pain. The Professor makes perhaps the most chilling statement in this regard when he tells Sunday, "'You let me stray a little too near hell'" (141). And Gogol sums up best the problem which the others articulate when he says quite simply "'I wish I knew why I hurt so much'" (141). As the six detectives question Sunday about his motives and reproach him for their pain, Lucian Gregory enters as the satanic accuser and the true anarchist. When he enters, Bull actually recites Job 1:6 "Now there was a day [. . .] when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them" (143).¹³ Gregory

¹² This linking of the seventh day of creation to Christ is not unique to Chesterton. In his *Hexameron* Ambrose finds in God's rest on the seventh day a symbol of Christ. For Ambrose, God's rest is a particularly a rest in man; after all, Ambrose claims, we do not find God resting after the creation of the stars or of the birds. Thus, he links God's rest in man and Christ's taking human flesh and suffering death (282).

¹³ Indeed, Sunday's first response to the Council's accusations earlier that morning also echoes God's response to Job's complaints as Sunday declares that they

brings the final charge against Sunday and the other Council members, the charge of divine apathy: ““You are the seven angels of heaven, and you have had no troubles. Oh, I could forgive you everything, you that rule mankind, if I could feel for once that you had suffered for one hour a real agony such as I-”” (142). In the biblical story, Satan questions Job’s righteousness because he has not suffered. Gregory recasts this accusation so that it is the suffering one who accuses the divine angels because they have not suffered. Just as in Job, we are given no full defense against this accusation but rather a vision. Syme begins to answer Gregory but finally it is the face of Sunday which the novel offers in response to the problem of suffering.

Syme responds to Gregory’s complaint with a declaration of the value of isolation. ““I see everything,’ he cried, ‘everything that there is”” (142). In a novel where the basic facts of identity are often mysterious, this claim is particularly resonant. Vision of the world is repeatedly described in terms of faces and backs in the novel. Syme claims that ““we have only known the back of the world. We see everything from behind, and it looks brutal. That is not a tree, but the back of a tree. That is not a cloud, but the back of a cloud. Cannot you see that everything is stooping and hiding a face? If we could only get round in front—”” (132). When Syme declares he can see all that is, he finally gets round in front of the world and finds the face of Sunday.

What Syme sees is that everything must stand in isolation in order to experience the thrill of defending orthodoxy even in the face of a hostile world. Syme claims that his fellow Days have suffered and that in their suffering he has discovered the positive value of being a rebel against the world like the anarchist. In fighting alone and beleaguered,

even the Council of Days possessed all the knowledge in the world, they would not be able to contain or control him.

they have had “the glory and isolation of the anarchist” (142). Sunday has separated them, Syme realizes, so that “each man fighting for order may be as brave and good a man as the dynamiter,” and so that the defenders of order and virtue may say also “We have suffered” (142).¹⁴ This imaginative vision of the value of isolation and suffering leads Syme to question Sunday—“have you ever suffered?” (143).

Sunday answers Syme’s query by growing larger and larger until, in true keeping with the nightmarish quality of the novel, Syme faints. But as he faints, he hears a voice recite Matthew 20:22: “Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?” (143). Jesus makes this comment about his forthcoming Passion to James and John who have asked to sit at his right hand in glory. Thus Sunday, who before provided the Old Testament defense of God in the presence of suffering by referencing Job, now presents the answer of the New Testament through identifying himself with Christ, the crucified God who suffers for the sake of his people. Sunday’s response to the suffering in the novel is to claim his solidarity with the sufferers; indeed, the context of Christ’s words indicate that Sunday has suffered more than Syme, Gregory, or anyone else in the novel could bear.

This is not to argue that Sunday has consistently been portrayed as Christ or even God in the story. He is perhaps most definitively identified as Nature throughout the book. Yet the story is a nightmare after all, and faces often change in nightmares. Chesterton writes of *The Man Who Was Thursday* that Sunday’s quotation of Scripture “seems to mean that Sunday is God. That is the only serious note in the book, the face of

¹⁴ Although each detective has experienced the thrill of isolation, the novel does not posit an essentially individualistic vision of faith. Wood points out that the participation of all six members of the Council of Days in the final peace of the novel indicates that “for Chesterton, redemption is not primarily an inward and solitary but an outward and communal affair” (*Chesterton* 221).

Sunday changes, you tear off the mask of Nature and you find God” (qtd. in Ker 192). This language of the mask resonates with the narrator’s observation that the robes with which Sunday clothes the Council of Days disclose rather than obscure: “For these disguises did not disguise but reveal” (*The Man Who Was Thursday* 136). So Sunday moves from his role as Pan to the God who suffers. Indeed, playing the part of Pan, a purely immanent god, reveals both the importance of the forms of the world and also the need for a transcendent response to suffering. For it is in response to the question of suffering that Sunday finally reveals the face not of Pan but of Christ.

Sunday’s response is more than simply a confession of solidarity in suffering with the Council of Days, it is also a confession of the beauty of Christ to which the whole conclusion of the novel has been pointing. Wood has demonstrated that Sunday’s confession of the words of Christ establishes the real theological depth of the novel in holding up the “nightmare goodness of God,” which offers the Cross of the Son of God as the means of redemption (*Chesterton* 220-221). The corollary to this point is that Sunday also offers the terrible beauty of God, a beauty which is able to encompass death, hell, and suffering (von Balthasar 121). For, although it may be foolishness to Gentiles, if Christianity is the aesthetic religion par excellence, as von Balthasar claims, then it is the person of Christ, in the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection that determines the beautiful (210).¹⁵ In fact the beauty of Christ determines all speech about the beauty of God as well as the beauty of the world (von Balthasar 121, 422).¹⁶ This is the point

¹⁵ For a succinct but penetrating analysis of the beauty of the Cross in von Balthasar’s work see Stephen Fields’ “The Beauty of the Ugly: Balthasar, the Crucifixion, Analogy and God.”

which von Balthasar is at pains to establish in the introduction to *The Glory of the Lord*; the two directions which theological aesthetics have pursued since the middle ages—focusing on the divine beauty to the exclusion of all worldly beauty and subsuming the beauty of Christ within natural measures of beauty—both fail to take seriously the form of Christ in all of its particularity (44-114). Francesca Murphy sums up with admirable succinctness von Balthasar’s basic contention: “the crucified Christ is the expression of transcendental beauty. The beautiful is to be perceived. The historical form of Christ makes it perceptible” (131). It is this beauty of Christ, “a beauty crowned with thorns and crucified,” which the face of Sunday discloses as it grows ever larger until Syme passes out (von Balthasar 33).

Thus the peace and revel of Sunday which preside over the conclusion of the novel are given their cohesion and persuasive power in the suffering of Christ. The wonderful dance of Sunday’s feast offers the richest confession of the beauty of form in Chesterton’s fiction. All that has been said about the good of being, of particularity, and of limits in the previous chapters is artistically present in the grand carnival of existence. It seems to Syme that whole of the created order is present, “every shape of Nature imitated in some crazy costume,” (*The Man Who Was Thursday* 138) yet despite the “individual romance” of each dancing couple, the whole company constitutes the “huge masquerade of mankind” (139). This crowning instance of beauty in Chesterton’s novels is directed to, measured by, and fulfilled in the beauty of Christ. Von Balthasar argues

¹⁶ Fields notes that although Christ is determinative for all aesthetics, He is so in such a way that does not destroy or render meaningless natural measures of beauty: “however much the cross of Christ sets the standard for beauty, it cannot be understood to destroy the integrity of worldly aesthetics. It must somehow give this integrity its center” (176).

that all questions of form are uniquely decided in Christ: “What perfection and infinity really are for man, what emanation and encapsulation, self-surrender and being caught up really are, what ‘transfiguration’, ‘deification’, ‘immortality’, really are and what all the great words of aesthetics signify; it is in the Christ-form that all of it has measure and its true context” (465). It is not surprising then that, for Chesterton, the encounter with the beautiful forms of the world leads ultimately to Christ. Although the form of Christ may have analogues in human experience of the beautiful, that form is one which transcends all human measures and expectations; thus, the “inclusion in Christian beauty of even the Cross and everything else which a worldly aesthetics (even of a realistic kind) discards as no longer bearable” (von Balthasar 121). The empathetic imagination and the charity toward which it draws characters finds its fulfillment in the form of Christ, a “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” (*KJV* Isaiah 53:3). At the heart of *The Man Who Was Thursday* and Chesterton’s art stands the beauty of the crucified Christ. Thus Chesterton’s grasp of the “language of beauty” renders his presentation of the “witness borne by Being” trustworthy (von Balthasar 19). This presentation of beauty marks the definitive contribution of his novels; in the central light of form and splendor which irradiates the novels, Chesterton’s characters are both transformed by their encounters with the beautiful through the invitation to participation in the divine life which beauty offers. This inclusion within the beautiful generates the fantastic energy with which they live out their lives in service to their revelatory encounters and visions. The light of the beautiful illuminates Chesterton’s novels and renders the truths they offer persuasive and the goods they present desirable.

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