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Chesterton, Modernism, and the Representation of Reality

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PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

*Cleanse us from ire of creed or class,
The anger of the idle kings;
Sow in our hearts, like living grass,
The laughter of all lowly things.¹*

¹ GK Chesterton, 'A Hymn for the Church Militant' in *The Works of GK Chesterton*, ed Peter Faulkner (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1995), 107.

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to demonstrate and propose a resolution to modernism in the form of the thought and literature of GK Chesterton. Chesterton, whilst constantly touted as either a harmless kind of literary clown or as a Christian crypto-fascist, has largely been ignored within all serious academic discourse. Therefore, the work of this dissertation takes place in three, inter-connected and inter-weaved, stages. Firstly, the core of modernism – its problems, inconsistencies, and political ramifications – is elucidated; secondly, the central ideas of Chesterton's work are explored; and, finally, the way in which Chesterton's work presents a viable resolution to modernism's problems, is explained. In this explanation, I propose an academic return to Chesterton as a serious and coherent counter-voice to the literature of canonical high modernism.

At the heart of this thesis is the presupposition that the primal energy of modernism stems from the crisis of representation – the doubt that any reality, other than that which is subjective, can ever be known or represented. I suggest that this turn towards subjectivity exposed the modern world firstly to a kind of negative liberalism that tends to dehumanise politics, and secondly to an authoritarianism that enlarges the subjective to grand proportions in a bid to include absolutely everything into its ambit. Chesterton's thought counters such scepticism with his faith in the coherence and goodness of Being, and the organic participation of Mind and language within that Being. In his opposition to scepticism, Chesterton proposes an allegorical view of literature that has at its heart a belief in the priestly nature of writing and its ability to transfigure language into an allegory of reality. Not only is this a mere counter, but I argue that it becomes an attempt to re-position modernism itself within a scheme of Being, so as to re-configure its sceptical nature as a necessary pre-cursor to coherence and unity. Politically, this in turn suggests the possibility of a positive liberalism which offers a kind of sacred humanism as the new centre for a liberalism that is neither totalitarian nor relativist, but rather democratic in its proposal of an objective reality accessible to all people. In Chesterton's vista, the artist is reduced from modernist master to servant of reality.

My thesis works along the theoretical lines proposed by figures such as Erich Auerbach and Pericles Lewis in their analysis of mimesis and modernism in the Western canon, as well as, in particular, Lewis's theorising of the political nature of the modernist novel, in its bid to intervene upon the liberal crisis of subjectivity and thus pre-empt an organic totalitarianism. Overarching such theoretical underpinnings, however, is an analysis of Chesterton's deployment of Thomas Aquinas, and the way in which Chesterton approaches Thomism as the philosophical means by which he attempts to unite the literal graphics of writing with metaphysical reality. In so doing, this dissertation argues that Chesterton charts a way beyond both modernism and anti-modernism toward a new kind of literary sublimity that is able to incarnate objective reality.

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Introduction: The Difference Chesterton Makes to Modernism

Marshall McLuhan has stated that the ‘specific contemporary relevance of Chesterton is this, that his metaphysical intuition of being was always in the service of the search for moral and political order in the current chaos.’¹ This dissertation seeks to demonstrate this ‘metaphysical intuition of being’ as it emerges in the literature and thought of Chesterton, and as it opposes and attempts to reshape the guiding principles of high modernism – principles which will be shown to exist in a dialectical relationship with ‘the current chaos’ of modernity. McLuhan’s student, modernist scholar Hugh Kenner, has stated that Chesterton’s ‘metaphysical intuition of being’ was deployed to solve the ‘ancient problem of getting past the appearances of things.’² Before Chesterton and his solution to this ‘ancient problem’ is analysed, the problem itself, as well as its alleged connection with modernity’s chaos, must be examined. This introduction will therefore seek to establish the modernist landscape in which Chesterton may be placed, so as to then demonstrate how Chesterton sought to alter that landscape in the broadest way possible.

The ‘ancient problem of getting past the appearances of things’ appeared to the modernists as the crisis of representation – a sudden scepticism that any objective reality could ever be known or expressed. Samuel Beckett has described this crisis – in his defence of the Irish modernists against the poetry of ‘the antiquarians’ – as ‘the new thing that has happened, or the old thing that has happened again, namely the breakdown of the object...the breakdown of the subject...[the] rupture of the lines of communication.’³ Pericles Lewis infers that such a notion may perhaps define modernism itself, for ‘the modernists [had] turned

¹ Marshall McLuhan’s Introduction to Hugh Kenner’s *Paradox in Chesterton* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1947), xi to xii.

² Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 59.

³ Samuel Beckett, ‘Recent Irish Poetry’ in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 70.

away from the ideal of a language that would offer a transparent window onto reality; they favoured instead a complex language that drew attention to its own texture.⁴

Lewis, however, notes the primal contradiction at work in this turning from transparency to texture in literary language. In reference to the poetry of Ezra Pound, Lewis notes that the Pound-influenced ‘victory of free verse over traditional meters...was actually undertaken in the name of mimesis.’⁵ Whilst modernism’s turn from language as ‘a window onto reality’ had been undertaken as the result of a scepticism towards language’s ability to express reality, the new textured language of modernism was immediately imagined to be a more effective agent of mimesis – the very act which had initially been rejected. Instead of simply rejecting literature’s connection with reality, modernist art, in the words of Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, had turned ‘from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique, and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life.’⁶ This ‘deeper penetration’ necessarily involved the modernists’ attempt to cast off all conventional metaphysics – which were to be regarded as mere social artifice – in a bid to go beyond the plane of literary realism and into the depths of life. Such a movement was possible only after objective knowledge was set aside in order to allow the artist to peer into the subject. In so doing, the possibility of an objective metaphysics was equally precluded.

It was for this reason that Beckett had encouraged the ‘self-perception’ of modernism – a ‘self-perception [in which] there is no theme, but at best sufficient *vis a tergo* to land the practitioner into the correct scenery, where the self is either most happily obliterated, or else

⁴ Pericles Lewis, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶ M Bradbury and J McFarlane, ‘The Name and Nature of Modernism’ in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890 - 1930*, eds. M Bradbury and J McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1991), 25.

so improved and enlarged that it can be mistaken for the *decor*.⁷ For Beckett, the necessary self-perception in art, and the subsequent freedom from ‘theme’, either led to the self’s happy destruction, or to its improvement and enlargement such that its presence was constantly visible. Presumably, in the former, life is penetrated and the subject is transcended; in the latter, art at least makes no objective claims. Evidently, the obliteration of the self – once it has been adequately perceived – suggests some kind of successful mimesis of reality. Such a mimesis would supposedly be transcendent of any mimesis that implausibly assumes any objective kind of reality.

According to the assumptions noted above, modernism has at its core a web of tensions concerning the self and mimesis. Whilst the founding energy of modernism suggested a disavowal of the representation of any objective reality, in its lauding of subjectivity, modernism sought a higher kind of mimesis that would more fully express life. It is this paradox that leads Weldon Thornton to suggest that modernism’s archetypal author, James Joyce, is in fact an anti-modernist. Thornton asserts that, although all authors are to some extent anti-modernists in their bid to express reality, Joyce is the exemplary anti-modernist insofar as he successfully demonstrated a way beyond individualism and the limitation of the self in the fulfilment of ‘his aim of reconciling the Cartesian rift that so deeply pervades our thinking.’⁸ Whilst this thesis, in chapter one’s examination of Joyce in relation to Chesterton, will seek to demonstrate the flaws of Thornton’s argument, it is enough to note at this stage his support of the assertion of modernism’s central dialectic between the subject and mimesis.

⁷ Beckett, 'Recent Irish Poetry', 70-71.

⁸ Weldon Thornton, *The Antimodernism of Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 157.

The meaning of such a dialectic may best be approached via its political ramifications. Erich Auerbach, in his analysis of the modernism of Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, states that in Woolf's literature, and by implication in modernism, 'there actually seems to be no viewpoint at all outside the novel from which the people and events within it are observed, any more than there seems to be an objective reality apart from what is in the consciousness of the characters.'⁹ Auerbach draws utopian political conclusions from such an aesthetic: 'It is still a long way to a common life of mankind on earth, but the goal begins to be visible. And it is most concretely visible now in the unprejudiced, precise, interior and exterior representation of the random moment in the lives of different people.'¹⁰ For Auerbach, modernism held out vast political hope because of the ways in which it supposedly cast off prejudice (which presumably is the function of objective reality and its metaphysics) and allowed 'different people' to share 'the random moment' together, in some precursor to 'a common life' free from ideology.

Auerbach here reveals the original intent and energy behind modernism's dialectic of subjectivity and transcendent mimesis. Modernism must embrace subjectivity in order to destroy the ideology of metaphysics, but then it must immediately claim 'a deeper penetration of life' so as to bind such a politics with its subjective aesthetics. Modernism destroys objective reality so as to allow individuals to connect in its vision of a transcendent mimesis free from metaphysical artifice, but in that very connection it unwittingly creates a new objectivity. As it destroys universality, modernism creates a new universe.

Pericles Lewis notes that modernism's subjectivity has as one of its antecedents the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Kant, according to Lewis, had insisted that 'we can never

⁹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 534.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 552.

have direct, unmediated access to reality...[thus] the strict dualism between reality and the representation of reality therefore breaks down: the only reality that humans can perceive is appearance.’¹¹ Such a notion ensures modernism’s primacy of subjectivity – which then gives rise to a set of liberal politics that would seek to promote a maximum of individual choice in identity and ethics, as there is no certain means by which to judge whether actions are right or wrong. Such a politics is expressed in modernist literature by its intense subjectification of reality, as well as in Auerbach’s phrase that ‘there actually seems to be no viewpoint at all outside the novel.’

This politics suffers, however, from a fatal flaw, for obviously its aesthetic is very definitely the result of some actual viewpoint – namely that of the author. This undermines the supposed liberalism modernism is meant to suggest. This liberalism is not only undermined, eventually it comes to be directly opposed, by the forces already present in its own dialectic. This is because modernism’s liberalism, engendered by its subjectivity, is very much a claim to a kind of transcendent objectivity. As implied by Auerbach, the lack of an objective reality paradoxically constructs the notion of a universal – and objective – vision. The significant difference that modernism has made is that such a vision has unavoidably become the work of the individual artist. There only ‘seems to be...no viewpoint outside the novel.’ The viewpoint remains that of the author. What modernism achieves, therefore, is the near deification of the artist as a constructor of a new reality, because the artist’s position as an artist has been hidden from view by the supposed destruction of objectivity. Far from denouncing any claims to objectivity, modernism instead claims for itself an unstated, transcendent, and pointedly individualistic kind of objectivity, by virtue of the fact that it initially parades as a kind of antidote to objectivity. It unwittingly creates a monarchical space that privileges the creative powers of the artist. In modernism’s subjective objectivity,

¹¹ Lewis, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism*, 6.

there is no space for another. As Lewis says, modernist art ‘expresses...not “ourselves” but itself.’¹² As a result, it becomes ‘a site of sacred power.’¹³ In this way, modernism, from its outset, is at the same time anti-modernism.

Accordingly, over and above its connection with an apparent liberalism, modernism may also be associated with the totalitarianism of its day which sought to construct a racial or national reality that would function as the means by which political power may govern as though it were a sacred absolute. Modern totalitarianism and liberalism, insofar as they impinge upon literature, may perhaps therefore be understood as both the political offspring of modernism’s dialectic.

Thornton, in designating the arch-modernist Joyce an anti-modernist, makes the point that such a dialectic exists within the depths of canonical modernism. Another figure associated with modernism, its well-established opponent, Wyndham Lewis, demonstrates the political nature of this dialectic insofar as he, the exemplary anti-modernist, may be seen to be in fact a modernist. As the modernist becomes the anti-modernist, so too does the anti-modernist become the modernist. Equally so, liberalism is conflated with totalitarianism.

Wyndham Lewis, notorious for his Nazi sympathies (sympathies which he eventually disavowed), would, in his *Time and Western Man*, attack modernism and its proponents as ‘a mystical time cult’¹⁴ stating that ‘[the] inner meaning of the time-philosophy...is the doctrine of a mechanistic universe; periodic; timeless, or nothing but “time”, whichever you prefer; and, above all, essentially dead.’¹⁵ Lewis deplored modernism because it created a kind of hegemony that apparently threatened the stability of the individual’s reality. Hugh Kenner

¹² Ibid, 9.

¹³ Ibid, 9.

¹⁴ Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1927), 3.

¹⁵ Ibid, 110.

notes that '[Lewis]' concern was to paint like a force of Nature without handing his brush to the Zeitgeist.'¹⁶

But this concern inadvertently led Lewis to the same position as that which he so vehemently opposed – the subjectivity of modernism and the conditionality of time. He would write, 'I have allowed these contradictory things to struggle together, and the group that has proved the most powerful I have fixed upon as my most essential ME.'¹⁷ Kenner, quoting Lewis' *Tarr*, notes "[The] first creation is the Artist himself, a new sort of person; the creative man" ...in gathering his creative powers for Art, the artist discards Life.'¹⁸ Lewis' opposition to modernism finally comes to rest in his diminishing of reality into 'Art' – reality becomes a function of 'ME', and Lewis becomes an extremist modernist in his enlargement of the self into something even greater than *decor*, a dictator-creator of reality. Fredric Jameson identifies this fatal contradiction in his *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, The Modernist as Fascist*. Jameson notes that in Lewis' novel *Tarr*, 'the sentence is reinvented with all the force of origins, as sculptural gesture and fiat in the void.'¹⁹ According to Jameson, Lewis represents an expressionistic aesthetic in 'an Anglo-American modernism [that] has...traditionally been dominated by an impressionistic aesthetic' but Jameson notes that 'such wills to style have seemed in retrospect to reconfirm the very privatization and fragmentation of social life against which they meant to protest.'²⁰ In his self-defeating protest, Lewis demonstrates in reverse the dialectic posited above – his anti-modernism becomes modernism, just as modernism becomes anti-modernism.

¹⁶ Hugh Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis* (New York: New Directions, 1954), 59.

¹⁷ W Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 6.

¹⁸ Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis*, 31.

¹⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, The Modernist as Fascist* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 2.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 2.

Lewis' extremism therefore suggests the dangers of modernism's dialectic – the opportunity it presents, from its outset, for fascism. As reality comes to dwell in the flux of time, a strong artist comes to order such flux into the shape of his choosing. Such artistry is already visible in embryonic form in Auerbach's reading of Woolf, because in modernism's dialectic of subjectivity and mimesis, reality is ultimately constructed and not discovered. The impressionism of Woolf belies a burgeoning expressionism of power. Finally, it is perhaps not simply coincidental that Lewis' one-time political hero, Adolf Hitler, was not only a politician, but originally a struggling artist in Vienna.

It is precisely here that Chesterton becomes significant to the academic discourse concerning modernism. By means of an evaluation of his work and thought, Chesterton demonstrates the deficiencies of the dialectic of modernism described above, as well as the means by which a reconfiguration of modernism may be imagined. Through Chesterton, it is possible to evaluate the intensely problematic nature of modernism's subjective universality as well as the inextricable connection between such a universality and the 'current chaos' noted by McLuhan. Such an evaluation equally affords the possibility of a reconfiguration of modernism that would seek to go beyond the dialectic of subjectivity and mimesis towards a complete resolution of the crisis of representation. This resolution is predicated on the simple dictum that the scepticism that gave rise to representation's crisis is fallacious. It is against such a scepticism that Chesterton appears to us not only as a proponent of a literature that would optimistically express the goodness and accessibility of reality, but also as a kind of political theorist at odds with both modern liberalism and totalitarianism.

Such an opposition is possible for Chesterton because of his assertion that reality is not inaccessible – and thus requiring the work of construction – but rather is innately discoverable. As noted by McLuhan, Chesterton searched for moral and political order; he did not see the need to construct such an order. Whilst Kenner would describe Wyndham

Lewis as one who ‘stood for intelligence rather than intuition, for creation rather than craftsmanship,’²¹ McLuhan would describe Chesterton’s great virtue as a ‘metaphysical intuition for being.’²² Chesterton contemplated reality; he saw no need to create it.

In opposition to the dialectic of his time, Chesterton began his thought with the assertion, ‘There *is* an Is.’²³ In short, he began with a faith in the solid existence and objective coherence of Being, and in the ability of Mind to participate in that Being as a co-ordinate organic reality. Chesterton, in his monograph on Thomas Aquinas, would say, ‘If the mind is sufficient to itself, it is insufficient for itself...as an organ it has an object which is objective; this eating of the strange meat of reality.’²⁴ In this way, ‘the mind is not merely receptive...[and] the mind is not merely creative.’²⁵ He thus does not imagine language and literature to be some kind of private mirror for Being, but rather they are participants within Being. By giving reality primacy over the subject – yet allowing the subject a participation within that reality – Chesterton proposed a literature that envisioned a kind of mental democracy because reality (and its metaphysics) was accessible to all minds. In this way, he asserted a philosophical security for democracy by virtue of the fact that ‘the most terribly important things must be left to ordinary men themselves,’²⁶ not because reality could not be known, but rather because it could be known. Consequently, Chesterton proposed a kind of positive liberalism centred upon the Christian faith in a Divine Reason – as opposed to the negative liberalism predicated by Kantian scepticism towards all metaphysics. Such a

²¹ Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis*, xv.

²² Marshall McLuhan’s Introduction to Hugh Kenner’s *Paradox in Chesterton*, xi to xii.

²³ GK Chesterton, ‘St Thomas Aquinas’ in *Collected Works Volume II*, ed L Azar (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 529.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 543.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 543.

²⁶ GK Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Dover, 2004), 39.

liberalism would inspire his anti-imperialist position concerning both the Boer War and Indian independence.²⁷ Whilst this makes Chesterton an antagonist of modernism, insofar as its aesthetics were derived from the crisis of representation, it also allows him the means by which to escape its internal dialectic and avoid the trap of mere anti-modernism. The remainder of this dissertation will seek to demonstrate this movement of Chesterton as he overcomes the entire problem of modernism by means of his intuition for Being.

However, an additional preliminary question requires a response in this introduction, and that is the question of Chesterton's absence from the academic discourse concerning modernism. Why is it that Chesterton, both as a novelist and as a thinker, has been summarily ignored by the academy? There are perhaps two reasons for this.

First, Chesterton always saw his literary mission as one with a political edge. Reality and its representation had to be recovered if liberty was to survive. It is for this reason Chesterton never gave up his mantle of journalism. Instead of crafting a singular literary masterpiece, Chesterton instead leaves us with what Kenner calls 'a thousand lightning-strokes' in the place of 'the calm sunlight of a single perfect work'.²⁸ Instead of great art, Chesterton, in his career-long conversation with the pressing issues of his day, offers us what McLuhan describes as 'a high degree of moral wisdom,' focused upon 'the most confused issues of our age.'²⁹ He never really gathered together the solitary kind of discipline required for the creation of modern art. He had the gift of intuition, but not of creation. Kenner notes,

²⁷ PN Furbank has noted that an article of Chesterton's – which appeared in a 1909 edition of the *Illustrated London News* – contained the words, 'The principal weakness of Indian nationalism seems to be that it is not very Indian and not very national.' When Gandhi read the article, Furbank records that he was 'thunderstruck', and managed to organise its reprinting in India. On the basis of the article, Gandhi would later write his *Hind Swaraj*, which would state his specifically 'Indian solution' to the problems of India. See PN Furbank, 'Chesterton the Edwardian' in *GK Chesterton: A Century Appraisal*, ed John Sullivan (London: Paul Elek, 1974), 20-21.

²⁸ Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 142.

²⁹ McLuhan, Introduction to Kenner's *Paradox in Chesterton*, xxii.

‘There is a sense in which his enormous literary production is a by-product; what must be praised in Chesterton is not the writing but the seeing.’³⁰ TS Eliot summarized this point in his 1936 obituary for Chesterton, stating that Chesterton’s importance was derived from ‘the place he occupied, the position he represented...[and] to judge Chesterton on his “Contributions to Literature’, then, would be apply to the wrong standard of measurement.’³¹

In the same obituary, Eliot also suggested the second reason for Chesterton’s absence from academic criticism: ‘Even if Chesterton’s social and economic ideas appear to be totally without effect...they were the ideas for his time that were fundamentally Christian and Catholic. He did more, I think, than any man of his time...to maintain the existence of the important minority in the world.’³² Chesterton, aside from his lack of a singular masterpiece, was equally ignored because, in a secular age, he continuously asserted the minority position of Christianity and Catholicism. His solution to modernism was essentially the Christian faith. This did not gain him any popularity and he was repeatedly charged with being a mere propagandist for the Catholic Church. This dissertation will hopefully demonstrate the manner in which Chesterton was not simply a propagandist but rather a genuine thinker grappling with the depths and complexities of the burgeoning modernism of his day.

The absence of Chesterton from both the academic and popular imagination also means that a brief biographical sketch of his life is also required in this introduction, so as to position him historically as well as intellectually. Chesterton was born in 1874 in Campden Hill, London. He lived to see the imperial machinery of Britain reach its zenith in the post-Victorian age as well as to see the industrialism of his time reach a violent crescendo in the

³⁰ Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 103.

³¹ Quoted in Ian Boyd, ‘Philosophy in Fiction’ in *GK Chesterton: A Century Appraisal*, ed John Sullivan (London: Paul Elek, 1974), 41.

³² *Ibid*, 41.

First World War. He would die in 1936, having not lived long enough to see his prediction of another world conflict, based upon Prussian militarism and the rampant social Darwinism of the time, confirmed.³³

Having parted ways with a Liberal Party for which he previously campaigned (owing to his disillusionment concerning the sale of peerages)³⁴, Chesterton became known for his radical political views that blended social conservatism with a proposed redistribution of property. Distributism, as it became known, was based upon the Catholic social teachings of the nineteenth century. Chesterton had from the turn of the century described himself as an orthodox Christian, and he would at the age of 48 convert from Anglicanism to Catholicism, believing it to be '[the] one fighting form of Christianity' that could 'fight for the family and the free citizen and everything decent.'³⁵

As a writer, Chesterton would perhaps become most famous for his detective stories, in which his protagonist, the priest Father Brown, solved mysteries with the chief technique of sympathy for the criminal. The world of Father Brown may be seen as a proxy for Chesterton's deepest concerns: rising moral relativism, the decline of rural life, the replacement of an unjust aristocracy with an inhuman bureaucracy, an emerging eugenic holocaust of racial extermination, and the gathering storm of industrial imperialism, which Chesterton always associated with the floating finance of the international banker. This industrial imperialism was, for Chesterton, typified by the Marconi scandal, in which the Liberal Party's government was accused of insider trading in collusion with the Marconi Company. Chesterton would name this scandal one of the chief events of his time, for it

³³ Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1944), 426. 'He had seen the Prussian peril conquered: he saw it rising again.'

³⁴ *Ibid*, 252.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 397.

demonstrated a sinister alliance between big business and government at the highest levels of European politics.³⁶

But he also revelled in the detective story as a marker of a transcendent kind of realism – a moral realism. All the action of his short stories takes place within a decisive moral field, which forms for Chesterton the most crucial layer of reality, a layer which is the setting for all romance – as he wrote in his essay defending the validity of police detective stories: ‘The romance of the police force is thus the whole romance of man. It is based on the fact that morality is the most dark and daring of conspiracies.’³⁷ For Chesterton, morality is the romantic recovery of some precious and imperilled treasure, and the greatest treasure of all is reality itself.

Chesterton, after his highly publicised conversion to Catholicism, would ultimately come to believe that the thought of the medieval theologian, Thomas Aquinas, provided the decisive weapon against modern chaos in that it declared the primacy and integrity of the Being of reality in the face of the extreme change and subjectivity of modernism. But even prior to that conversion, Chesterton demonstrated an uncanny ‘connaturality with being’ which McLuhan suggests made him a Thomist prior to any actual study of Aquinas.³⁸ Kenner notes that throughout his life, Chesterton was a philosophical realist who depended ‘on a lifelong perception of being’ which meant that ‘Chesterton was in sympathy with St. Thomas long before he had presumably even heard of him.’³⁹ It is therefore apt that this thesis begins with a study concerning Chesterton’s deployment of the Thomist metaphysics of Being against modernism because Thomism provides the best theoretical structure with which to

³⁶ GK Chesterton, *The Autobiography of GK Chesterton* (London: Hutchinson and Co, 1938), 202–203.

³⁷ GK Chesterton, *The Defendant* (Maryland: Wildside Press, 2005), 98.

³⁸ *Ibid*, xii.

³⁹ Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 6.

make sense of Chesterton's opposition to the philosophical and social flux of the literature of his day.

Chesterton's Thomism will be examined in the light of James Joyce's secularist vision of Thomism in his *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* will be used to create a kind of rough intellectual map for such an examination, insofar as Auerbach hints at the scepticism which would come to fruition in modernism. The similar initial literary goals of Joyce (suggested in the anti-modernism described by Thornton) and Chesterton, and the sharp differences which would definitively separate their literary projects provide this thesis with an acute snapshot by which modernism's most celebrated canonical figure marks out a context in modernist space by which to understand the unexamined Chesterton.

The second chapter of the thesis will examine Chesterton's novelistic attempt at a resolution of modernism's crisis, in his work *The Man Who Was Thursday*. This novel forms Chesterton's attempt to mimetically demonstrate the essential fallacy and absurdity at the heart of the crisis of representation, and the nihilism at work in such a fallacy. In order to achieve such a thing, Chesterton evokes a literary kind of Impressionism that contains 'the metaphysical suggestion that things only exist as we perceive them, or that things do not exist at all.'⁴⁰ Such an evocation will be examined in the light of Chesterton's use of ecphrasis – the insertion into narrative of detachable description of art and scenery – which will be shown to be an inversion of what Roland Barthes has termed 'the reality effect'⁴¹ in a bid to suggest a literature capable of incarnating reality, as opposed to merely reflecting reality (as in the case of the realists) or creating reality (as in the case of the modernists).

⁴⁰ Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 91-92.

⁴¹ Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect' in *The Rustle of Language*, trans R Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986).

The politics of Chesterton's intervention upon modernism will be grappled with in the third chapter, which will deal specifically with Chesterton's novel, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. This chapter will focus on the challenge Chesterton's thought poses to modern secular liberalism, and the location of this challenge in the scheme of liberal versus organic nationhood as delineated by Pericles Lewis in his analysis of modernism. The positive liberalism of Chesterton will then be examined alongside a novel which may be said to be the exemplar of modern liberalism's fatal contradictions, *Howards End*, by EM Forster. Alongside this examination, the critical work of contemporary theologian and philosopher John Milbank will be used to demonstrate the modern pathology of secularism against which Chesterton's organic or positive liberalism was set.

Finally, in the concluding chapter of this dissertation, the roots of Chesterton's proposed resolution of modernism's crisis of representation will be probed. In his Christian apologetic, *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton lays bare the 'foundational bias' at the heart of his antagonism towards modernism – his primal belief in the ultimate goodness and joy of all Being and the subsequent optimism regarding Being's representation in art and human thought. The literary and political reverberations of such a bias will be analysed once again by utilizing the criticism of Pericles Lewis – particularly his theoretical construction of Joyce's improvisation and innovation regarding 'the novel of disillusionment' and its quest to transcend the crisis of representation by means of the collapse of objective knowledge. Against such 'disillusionment' Chesterton posits a literature of joy that ultimately attempts to re-cast modernism in a philosophical and universalised configuration of the story of Job in which modernism, like suffering, is overcome by envisioning it in the light of some higher and divine coherence.

This analysis will finally lead to the telling paradox at the very heart of Chesterton's challenge to modernism; the paradox that his opposition to modernism comes finally to be

some kind of sublime affirmation of the very possibility of modernism. It is this paradox which may lead toward an alteration of Chesterton's – and perhaps even modernism's – place and meaning in the academy.

Chapter 1: GK Chesterton and the Medieval Vision of Thomas Aquinas

The Threat to Reality

For GK Chesterton, who would come to be an orthodox Catholic, the fall of humanity did truly exist in some primeval past – the origin of sin. But Chesterton also believed in a more recent, or modern, fall that likewise required a sort of mental, or even literary, redemption. He would write in his work *St Thomas Aquinas*:

The great intellectual tradition that comes down to us from Pythagoras and Plato was never interrupted or lost through such trifles as the sack of Rome, the triumph of Attila or all the barbarian invasions of the Dark Ages. It was only lost after the introduction of printing, the discovery of America, the founding of the Royal Society, and all the enlightenment of the Renaissance and the modern world. It was there, if anywhere, that there was lost or impatiently snapped the long thin delicate thread that had descended from distant antiquity; the thread of that unusual human hobby; the habit of thinking.¹

In short, Chesterton saw the emergence of the cultural compound that is philosophical and literary modernism, as some kind of dissipation of reality, an expression of some kind of sudden epistemic loss, in which the ability to conceive the world and the individual as they really are had been lost or forsaken. To understand this Chestertonian moment of nostalgic mourning, a mourning of such intensity as to induce the heaving polemic quoted above, the perennial relationship between literature and its muse, reality, must first be discussed.

¹ GK Chesterton, „St Thomas Aquinas’, 465.

Literature has always been the hallmark of humanity's concern with the expression of some reality – be it ideal, experienced, or mythical. Typically, the western canon of literature opens with the epic poetry of Homer. Erich Auerbach, in his classic tome *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, declares that of chief concern within the Homeric oeuvre is a „delight in physical existence’, while the Homeric style has as its base impulse the representation of phenomena „in a fully externalized form.’² Ancient literature had an elemental desire to represent an experience of the world. Homer’s aim, therefore, can be said to be to shed the light of antiquity upon reality, to explain it and to revel in it; and to express a life lived in a passage of time belonging to a set of specific places. His world is undoubtedly inhabited by gods apparently no longer visible to our eyes, but Homer’s world is also inhabited by men and women, whose actions have somehow become antecedent to the reader’s current reality. The gods explain to Homer’s readers the reality of an honourable life. Yet Auerbach noted a crucial defect in this Homeric delight.

In Auerbach’s account of this critical issue of ancient representation, in his comparison of Homer and the Old Testament, Auerbach notes the residual tendency of the non-biblical works of antiquity to entrench a division of style within the evocation of life lived. The sublime, the numinosity of grand events, is implicitly, and often explicitly, other to the life lived daily in the common areas of the common people. Odysseus and his friends live in a world sublimely unconcerned with the material conditions of servants, agriculture and the kitchen, things more readily associated with the life lived by the general population of the material culture of the day.³

In contrast, in the account of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac, according to Auerbach, „[the] sublime influence of God...reaches so deeply into the everyday that the two

² Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 13,6.

³ Ibid, 22.

realms of the sublime and everyday are not only actually unseparated but basically inseparable.⁴ For Auerbach, this unity of the transcendent with the low, gives rise to a kind of sublime realism which aims at an enunciation of truth – a truth he describes as tyrannical because of its objective and absolute claims.⁵ This realness, a realism which does not merely aim at verisimilitude but at the expression of sublime truth, is found in its wholeness. The whole field of existence, high and low, is accessible to the recipient of such a literature. The literature, in this formulation, becomes secondary to the vision it describes. It becomes, ideally, a pathway toward real experience, instead of a spiral back toward the subject from which it emanates.

Such a liberty, we shall see, forms the tradition from which Chesterton will draw his particular brand of liberal politics and humanism – it is a tradition in which the common and the low become in themselves the stuff of grandeur. Their reality is assured because in a sense they more than real. The common and the low are incarnations of the sublime. This sublimity allows literature to touch reality and to participate in, and express, that which is real. Chesterton would describe this process not as the mere mirroring of reality, but rather as a kind of priestly allegory, in which humanity, made in the image of God, is able to provide a vision of the mysteries of the universe, thereby, to a certain extent, sharing in the creator's power of artifice.⁶

The hard division between sublime and everyday, high and low, can surely be directly related to that other giant of ancient Greek thought – Plato – who, in *The Republic*, outlined in philosophical terms the existence of sublime forms whose shadows passed for what we assumed to be real objects and matter – reality becomes „nothing but the shadows of those

⁴ Ibid, 22.

⁵ Ibid, 43.

⁶ GK Chesterton, *The Defendant*, 31.

artificial objects,' unseen by the prisoners trapped in the cave of common existence.⁷ For Chesterton, the inherent danger within the kernel of Platonism would, at some crucial historical juncture, tend toward the intellectual energy of modernism. Ultimately, both Platonism and modernism have at their heart a kind of scepticism. Plato, within Chesterton's formulation, undoubtedly blessed the world with his pronouncement that ideas such as justice, beauty and humanity are real things in their own right, and that the abstract can be meaningful within any attempt to coherently understand the physical. However, in his hard division of forms and things, he perfectly embodies a metaphysic which is akin to the aesthetics of the division noted by Auerbach, of high versus low. Plato's forms are undoubtedly 'high' whilst in the face of such forms, Plato's things must become 'low' – mere shadows of some higher reality; a reality to which only the learned may be privy. Chesterton would assert that the chief weakness of Platonism was that it inferred that 'ideas exist as men do not exist.'⁸ Kant would later re-direct this scepticism when he positioned ideas in the mind only; in this way he would lay the foundation for a modern view of reality as nothing but inward perception, thus pre-empting the modernist crisis of representation by means of a similar kind of scepticism.⁹

The disunity of high and low, whilst being the fundamental logic behind Plato's aristocratic conception of the state's necessary guardians, is therefore implicitly the formula for a literature that is self-consciously unable or unwilling to depict reality with any kind of confidence. By presupposing a reality that is sublime yet nearly impossible to access, Plato

⁷ Plato, 'The Republic' in *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle*, trans FM Cornford, ed Reginald Allen (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 198.

⁸ GK Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (New York: Dover Publications, 2007), 121.

⁹ Kant's 'Copernican Revolution', despite being in opposition to Platonism in many ways, may be connected with Platonic scepticism insofar as they both disallow the primacy of objective and physical reality in philosophical representation. 'Thus far it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to objects... Let us, therefore, try to find out by experiment whether we shall not make better progress in the problems of metaphysics if we assume that objects must conform to our cognition.' Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans Werner S. Pluhar (Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1966), 21.

and antiquity trace a Gnostic duality toward a modernist crisis of representation, in which codification by the knowledgeable is far more likely than a recognition, or classification, of the reality of the life lived by common people of the everyday world. Reality is sure to be decided for such „low’ people – reality will not be democratically and liberally recognised according to the tenets of a recognizable goodness transcendent of power, instead it will be codified in an arbitrary fashion by those with the power to speak for ‚history’. The demise of representation on a literary level is thus matched by a real threat to liberty. Chesterton’s way out would be the transcendent or sublime realism we have already seen described by Auerbach. He would trace out such a notion in his examination of the 13th century theologian and philosopher, Thomas Aquinas.

Meanwhile, Auerbach himself would reflect the core of Thomism in associating such a wholeness with the Christian doctrine of Incarnation, as expressed in the account of St Peter’s betrayal of Christ: „What we see here is a world which on the one hand is entirely, real, average, identifiable as to place, time, and circumstances, but which on the other hand is shaken in its very foundations, is transforming and renewing itself before our eyes.’¹⁰ The world of the everyday – of servants and kitchens and fields – has become the world of sublime and tumultuous heroism. Such a conception of reality is intrinsically tied to the Incarnation of God as a man – the sublime united with everyday; the encapsulation of the real par excellence in which transcendent value, and coherence (as opposed to Platonic scepticism), as well as natural law, is given to the stuff of everyday life. Auerbach here touches the essence of Chesterton’s concern with reality and literature, and, like Chesterton,

¹⁰ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 43.

he draws on the intellectual resources of the Incarnation to explain a reverence for the common and the low.¹¹

As shall be explored further, Chesterton fought for a literature and a philosophy in which the sacred can be found within the everyday. Or to put it more accurately, Chesterton fought for a philosophy in which the everyday was seen as in itself something that was substantially and actually sacred. The Platonic division, a division Chesterton would associate with the Reformation, the Enlightenment and modernism, becomes the greatest threat to a truly liberal, or liberating, conception of reality. For in the schismatic conception of reality, the ordinary becomes less valuable than the transcendent sublime. Odysseus glows with pagan light, whilst his servant is forgotten. Guardians who see outside the cave must rule, whilst ordinary citizens are mere plebeians, perennially expendable. Eventually, this restricted reality is not even accessible to the guardians and humanity comes to be ruled irrationally and bureaucratically. Authoritarianism grows as the representation of reality dims because people come to believe in the necessity of a „strong man’ to interpret modern chaos. According to Chesterton and his Catholic faith, the schism between „high’ and „low’ defied the doctrine of the Incarnation, and its twin, the transubstantiation of the Eucharist, wherein the common carries, or rather becomes, the Divine. The property of peasants (bread) is seen as holy, and divine reality is readily accessible within a liturgy that is able to represent such a reality.

The great modifier of Platonic thought was Aristotle, and it was Aristotle to whom Aquinas turned when he attempted his synthesis of faith and reason. In modifying Plato, Aristotle would assert that Plato’s forms were real, but not inaccessible – they were not outside the cave. Reality could be known by a modified empiricism – the visibility of

¹¹ Ibid, 41.

transcendent forms within the field of matter, for „when [matter] exists actually, it is then in the form.’¹² As things came into being according to wisdom or reason, their form, the imprint of their essence, could be found within themselves. This was the energy of the movement or „becoming’ found within the entire world. Aristotle then, according to Chesterton, and unlike Plato, „took things as he found them...and men like Aquinas thought it right to correct Plato by an appeal to Aristotle.’¹³ Therefore, according to Chesterton, Aquinas best represented the kind of thought the fragmented present desperately required, an ancient wisdom prior to modernism, concerned with the wholeness and holiness of matter and reality. Such notions would lead Aquinas to assert that reality is accessible because of the divine nature of reason.¹⁴ This in turn leads Chesterton to assert that the modernist crisis of representation is in fact a dangerous and illiberal fallacy, awaiting exposure and correction.

After examining Chesterton’s deployment of Aquinas, it will be necessary to examine also the modernist thought which Chesterton opposed. To this end, the works of James Joyce and TS Eliot will be analysed in the light of Chesterton’s assertions regarding the possibility of representation. It is here where the stark contrast between the thought of Chesterton and high modernism may be brought into relief.

St Thomas Aquinas

Chesterton published *St Thomas Aquinas* in 1933, having converted to Catholicism eleven years previously. His work would earn the praise of leading Thomist scholars the world over. Etienne Gilson, the most renowned student of medieval philosophy at the time,

¹² Aristotle, „Metaphysics’ in *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle*, trans Hugh Tredennick, ed Reginald Allen (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 342.

¹³ Chesterton, „St Thomas Aquinas’, 468.

¹⁴ In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas writes, „For the intellectual light itself which is in us, is nothing else than a participated likeness of the uncreated light, in which are contained the eternal types.’ Part I, Question 84, Article 5, as quoted by Peter Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 313.

would remark, “For many years I have studied St Thomas and written on him and now a journalist writes a better book about him than I have!”¹⁵ It is not unimportant that Chesterton would always maintain his chief occupation as a journalist even when he grappled with complex philosophy. It was the Thomist exaltation of a theological yet common reason that gave him the confidence to address his literary thought to the broad audience traditionally belonging to the journalist.

The central assertion of Chesterton’s study – the fundamental goodness and coherence of reality – was no doubt a topical notion in the era between wars; the era of the Great Depression, as well as the rise of Soviet and Nazi power. Chesterton’s fleeting remarks concerning rival literary minds at the time may perhaps shed an intriguing and introductory light upon the intellectual landscape of the day. In such comments, Chesterton intentionally compares his discrepancies with the Leftist doctrine of George Bernard Shaw and HG Wells to the scholastic debate concerning Realism (which here refers to the scholastic notion that all things fit into real and mediatory categories) and Nominalism (the opposing scholastic notion that there are no natural categories):

I remember when Mr. H.G. Wells had an alarming fit of Nominalist philosophy; and poured forth book after book to argue that everything is unique and untypical; as that a man is so much an individual that he is not even a man. It is a quaint and almost comic fact, that this chaotic negation especially attracts those who are always complaining of social chaos, and who propose to replace it by the most sweeping social regulations. It is the very men who say that nothing can be classified, who say that everything must be

¹⁵ Chesterton, „St Thomas Aquinas’, 413.

codified. Thus Mr. Bernard Shaw said that the only golden rule is that there is no golden rule. He prefers an iron rule; as in Russia.¹⁶

Such comments provide us with a snapshot of the chief vision of Chesterton: the notion that a moral Realism of good faith posits a social work of classification which leads to the liberty of things as they are and as they are becoming; as opposed to a modernist and Nominalist conception of reality that posits a required social work of codification which inevitably leads to oppression and despair. Of course, Chesterton's Realism of good faith presupposes a natural law, which, when held in good faith, is supposed to discredit authoritarian claims to power. Natural law was one of the things questioned by much of modernist thought, and the means by which Chesterton argued for the existence of such a law will be demonstrated by his appeal to Aquinas's metaphysics. Chesterton believed wholeheartedly that by establishing the common as holy, natural law could defy the cruel social engineering of his day, because it was the absence of natural law that had created a social vacuum in which unnatural tyranny could emerge unchecked.

The whole sacramental scheme of the Catholic Church is here claimed as the refutation of such a notion. God as Human, changes both God and Human for both Chesterton and Aquinas. It also changes both the notion of literature and its related politics. The Eucharist Meal, as explained by Aquinas, in memorial of the Incarnation and the Crucifixion, becomes weaponry; for as the fruits of the earth are offered up to be transformed into the Body of God, so too does worth come surging into the material conditions of reality, even into the heathen thought of Aristotle, who had himself proposed a kind of incarnation for all matter when he claimed, contrary to Plato, that forms were resident in things themselves. This optimism leads humanity to explore even beyond the verisimilitude of

¹⁶ Ibid, 534-535.

realism; the Platonic impulse on the other hand draws us back into a subjectivity that removes us from our material conditions and muddies our understanding and expression of what is really there – hence the anonymity of Odysseus’s servants. According to Chesterton, this impulse achieved its high point at the historical turn towards modernity, the Renaissance –

If the morbid Renaissance intellectual is supposed to say, „To be or not to be – that is the question,’ then the massive medieval doctor does most certainly reply in a voice of thunder, „To be – that is the answer.’ The point is important; many not unnaturally talk of the Renaissance as the time when certain men began to believe in Life. The truth is that it was the time when a few men, for the first time, began to disbelieve in Life. The medieval had put many restrictions, and some excessive restrictions, upon the universal human hunger and even fury for Life...Never until modern thought began, did they really have to fight with men who desired to die.¹⁷

And so Chesterton sums up the idea of material goodness in these words: „It is the thesis that there are no bad things, but only bad uses of things...The work of heaven alone was material; the making of a material world. The work of hell is entirely spiritual.’¹⁸ Reality is always something to be celebrated and enjoyed – this is the basis for the Chestertonian possibility of representation.

There are, however, two modifiers to this notion. The first is that Chesterton will have to account for the presence not only of Being in reality, but also Becoming. In other words, he will need to account for the state of change so prevalent within the field of reality and the effect that has on our view of matter. Secondly, in opposition to this assertion of reality’s

¹⁷ Ibid, 489.

¹⁸ Ibid, 485.

goodness and coherence, is the doctrine of the Fall, which details in the Christian narrative the introduction of an evil into reality which alters humanity's approach to natural things, as well as the things in themselves. Added to change and flux of Becoming, is the related dynamic of change which is decay. If the material is to be seen as the transcendent contracted into the particular, there needs to be a rationalisation for the decay of those particulars.

It is important to note here that Chesterton's aims here are in fact similar to that of a modernist like Joyce or Eliot, both of whom will be used as analytical foils for Chesterton in this chapter. All three are intent upon analysing flux and change and coming up with some kind of an appropriate explanation for the confusion of reality. Chesterton proclaims the goodness of Being via deployment of Aquinas, yet he also asserts the threat to Being, as exemplified by the Fall. In this formulation, Being is threatened quite literally by death. One is forced to acknowledge that the world is not just sacred *Ens*. There is flux and decay prevalent throughout reality. *Ens* is not all that it could be.

Modernists like Joyce attempted to open up the machinery of literature in order to reflect this flux and get at the heart of it, while Chesterton used his literature primarily to wage war against the modernist notion that such flux was primal to reality – more central to reality than Being. Chesterton chooses to reject the neo-Platonic temptation to dispense with the material of reality, whilst he also discards the choice of Joyce to dwell in the flux, to let the flux into his aesthetics so as to represent an uncertain encounter with the real. This attempt to overcome is ultimately predicated on faith – a faith in the sacred *Ens* of reality, and a faith which Chesterton attempts to rationalise in the closing thoughts of his work *St Thomas Aquinas*.

But he does maintain intense sympathy with the position of the modernist – despair or confusion remains an ever-present live option. Chesterton writes, „St Thomas maintains that

the ordinary thing at any moment is something, but it is not everything that it could be.’¹⁹

This gap of becoming, of some loss between the potential and the actual, does invite a despair in the reality of Being. Chesterton, along with writers like Eliot and Joyce, is forced to undergo some kind of pilgrimage as a result of this loss. But Chesterton’s journey is different to that of Eliot (that is, the Eliot of *The Waste Land*) or Joyce. He traces a journey past modernist despair via the thought, and faith, of Thomas Aquinas. According to Chesterton, Aquinas provides the modernist with the resources needed to understand the flux visible in the universe, and to overcome it even as Being overcomes it, and to use it even as a bulwark in the celebration and defence of the reality that is there. Hence in Chesterton’s critique of modern philosophy, Aquinas represents an ancient hope of recovery; a way back to some kind of wholeness lost in the past; a wholeness in which the first principle of reality as being real is not discarded, but rather strengthened through the challenge of death and flux.

According to Chesterton, Aquinas’s chief philosophical triumph lies in his persistent faith in the coherence of Being. He does assert the necessity of faith in such a position; but he maintains that such a faith opens one up to a view of reality that is truly consistent with experience. He writes, „To this question “Is there anything?” St Thomas begins by answering “Yes”; if he began by answering “No”, it would not be the beginning, but the end. That is what some of us call common sense.’²⁰ Chesterton here is proclaiming that the first principle of the faith of Aquinas is in fact unavoidable for a sane life – you have to believe that stuff exists. Chesterton asserts, „Very few unbelievers start by asking us to believe so little.’²¹ Chesterton is here urging us past the classic Cartesian doubt of modern philosophy. Instead of beginning with the subject, Chesterton is asking us to begin with the universe. Chesterton

¹⁹ Ibid, 531.

²⁰ Ibid, 516.

²¹ Ibid, 529.

therefore propounds, „There is an *Is*.’²² Upon this article of faith, he proposes a reconfiguration of the entire modernist agenda. Reality can be known – Being is coherent. Faith is necessary because Being constantly changes and as a result all thought is tempted to regard change and flux as pre-eminent over Being. As stated previously, Chesterton does sometimes associate change with the Catholic doctrine of the Fall, yet it must be noted that the two concepts are not interchangeable. Chesterton, drawing upon Aquinas, who himself draws upon Aristotle, most often views the process of Becoming as something positive – the process of actualisation. The process however is dynamic and is always threatened by the disorder of the Fall, which is the corruption or desecration of the coherence of material. Change can therefore mean corruption or it can mean fruition.

But what Chesterton is implying is the fact that change is unstable and dynamic, that Becoming necessarily means confusion and the introduction of the unknown, and that „Being is often only Becoming, beginning to Be or ceasing to Be.’²³ This creates doubt in Aquinas’s first article of faith – the ontological awareness of reality as Being itself. The key difference here between Aquinas and the modern foes of Chesterton, is that Aquinas presses on with his original thesis, whilst the others retreat. Aquinas does not let go of the coherence of Being.

According to Chesterton, the modern condition is defined by this retreat. In the face of change, the modern condition is defined by its tendency to insist that change is the primordial state – that humans appear as brief waterfalls along the river of flux and that ideas are just functions of energy. From the Cartesian doubt, to Kant’s attempt to settle the relationship between mind and reality, non-ancient thinkers have found themselves consistently doubting or denying the first principle of reality. The result of the retreat – what Chesterton terms „the

²² Ibid, 529.

²³ Ibid, 533.

first break in the Thomist chain'²⁴ – has been the collapse of society's belief in the existence of moral norms, as well as in its ability to faithfully represent reality, often simply because society no longer believed in reality as something that was real. This is the heart of the modernist crisis of representation. As the goodness of reality dims, the common loses its numinosity and scepticism provides the conditions in which authoritarian power may decide reality for the weak in an irrational fashion. Ultimately this leads to the inevitable conclusion that things in their quiddity („whatness') do not matter, and that objects that exist outside the field of the subject are pliable to either chance or will.

According to Chesterton, Aquinas is the perfect philosophical counter to this retreat, because, finding reality incomplete, finding that „what we see does not satisfy or explain itself'²⁵ he does not retreat from reality and deny the Being he has already been convinced of, he goes in search of more reality, „the fullness of being'²⁶, that may possibly explain Being's sense of Becoming. This quest outside of the subject and into something that is there is Chesterton's formula for a credible objective reality as well as a positive political liberalism. It is also the meaning behind Aquinas's famous philosophical assertion: „Everything that is moving is moved by another'; or, in another formulation – „Existence exists; but it is not sufficiently self-existent, and would never become so merely by going on existing.'²⁷ A self-existent being is thus required.

It is here where we see the limits to Aristotle. If forms are found in things, and things change and die, how can we have any confidence in the coherence of things? And it is here, at this fracture of Aristotle, that Chesterton maintains that Aquinas channels Plato through

²⁴ Ibid, 531.

²⁵ Ibid, 531.

²⁶ Ibid, 530.

²⁷ Ibid, 533.

Augustine, in order to create a new Western unity in philosophical thought, to retain the first article of his faith. Thomism emerges as the completion of Augustinianism. Forms are incarnated, said Aristotle. But in the face of the inadequacy of the incarnations, the forms retain their reality in the mind of God. The incarnation retains reality because of the source of those forms which have been made carnal.

In the Divine Being, the forms of things can find their home, secure from the flux of change, and secure from the power plays of the subject. Human beings should be treated with dignity because of what the human being is in essence, because that essence is unchanging in that it finds its home in an unchanging being, namely God. Humans become positive subjects – ends and not means in any legitimate political dispensation. Forms exist both in God and in matter, just as God exists both in spirit and in flesh through the Incarnation. In this way, reality remains workable and coherent.

Chesterton is proposing that Aquinas's faith counters the subjectivity of the modernism – things do matter, and reality, though changing, is coherent and intrinsically good and should not be pliable to arbitrary will or subjectivity. Chesterton finds this assertion of reality and objective reason suddenly strengthened, despite the evident flux and gap of becoming present throughout. This is because he finds an anchor for changing Being in something that is changeless. God suddenly appears as the gigantic figure at the other end of the Thomist chain. It is worth quoting Chesterton here in full:

There is no doubt about the being of being, even if it does sometimes look like becoming; that is because what we see is not the fullness of being...St Thomas maintains that the ordinary thing at any moment is something, but it is not everything that it could be. There is a fullness of being, in which it could be everything that it can be. Thus, while most sages come at last to nothing but

naked change, he comes to the ultimate thing that is unchangeable, because it is all the other things at once. While they describe a change which is really a change in nothing, he describes a changelessness which includes the changes of everything. Things change because they are not complete; but their reality can only be explained as part of something that is complete. It is God... for God with all His power at every instant is immortally in action.²⁸

A few pertinent points arise out of this caveat of medieval faith. First, Chesterton identifies that the primacy of change above Being is ultimately the primacy of nothing over something – that is, nihilism. Whilst here opposing the materialist view, Chesterton prophesies its end – matter alone does indeed end in nothing: the randomness of quanta. We have in fact unknowingly always required forms in order to maintain Aquinas' first article of sanity – without it, we do not even possess atoms. Secondly, Chesterton argues that Aquinas's faith restores and maintains reason. In the face of change, one is threatened with death by drowning into a sea of flux. By finding the changeless, change is anchored, and Being is restored to coherence and matter can hold its shape – and value – once again, independent of the subject. As Chesterton writes in *Heretics*, „And even in the act of saying that things change, we say that there is something unchangeable.’²⁹ The bedrock of Thomism is Aquinas's assertion that God is pure actuality – there is no potentiality in God because his essence is also his existence.³⁰ In this fashion, Aquinas perceives Being and Goodness to be essentially the same.³¹ All other things, which are not ever purely actual but can cease to be and can become, derive their forms from God as well as the accompanying movement from

²⁸ Ibid, 531.

²⁹ Quoted in Hugh Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 25.

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part I, Question 3, Article 3, as quoted by Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa*, 79.

³¹ Ibid, Part I, Question 5, Article 1, as quoted by Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa*, 91 .

potential to actual. As Aquinas puts it, „All things, by desiring their own perfection, desire God Himself, inasmuch as the perfections of all things are so many similitudes of the divine being.’³² Reason can therefore be trusted because it goes outwards to meet Being which is coherent and objective.

In other words, Aquinas first counters Platonic thought by insisting that forms do not simply hover outside of physical reality. As in Aristotle’s formulation, forms are found incarnate in matter as their shape is given to them by logos. But Aristotle’s positioning of the forms is the very thing in doubt when one acknowledges the inherent instability of beings and bodies in this universe of becoming and death. What Aquinas has done subsequently, therefore, is seat the forms in the mind of God, thus restoring value to the field of Being – there are concrete forms, therefore material bodies are not just waves of change reduced to subjective perspective. Things do exist; and they do matter. For Chesterton, this means that reality can reasonably be represented because change is not all that there is, and the reality of all things is secured by their participation in the Divine Being. It is necessary here to turn to the positions of Joyce and Eliot, and examine their literary positions comparative to Chesterton’s theoretical positioning with regards to representing reality. All three may be said to derive their poetics from their engagement with the possibility of experiencing the real in the midst of modern cultural fragmentation.

Joyce, Eliot and the Prison of Subjectivity

Joyce functions as an acute parallel to Chesterton, in that both were heavily influenced by Aquinas. Yet Joyce parts with Aquinas upon the very issue described above – for Joyce things come to have their value only in themselves as things. Joyce is therefore able

³² Ibid, Part I, Question 6, Article 1, as quoted by Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa*, 95. See also 101: this idea is at the heart of what Gilson calls the “the Great Syllogism” – „Being is innermost in each thing; But God is Being (His essence is existence); Therefore God is innermost in each thing’.

to create a purely secular aesthetics of representation, in which the flux of change is not overcome, but rather embraced, for the forms of things are not held constant in the mind of God. I will argue below that this in turn draws Joyce's conception of the real into the subject, instead of allowing it to remain in the objective field.

Without the Platonic and Augustinian forms, purely Aristotelian forms become pliable to the will of the artist, and art emerges as a higher creed than any binding code of ethics or morality. The artifice does not participate in any sublime allegory. To Chesterton, such a reality then becomes unreal, because it is located within the subject, and not within an objective field open equally to everybody as a common property and heritage. Such a modernist poetics therefore – entirely unwittingly and unforeseeably – may in fact lend itself as the dialectical partner to modern political totalitarianism, wherein reality is shaped by the strong poets of government. Thomist theologians would denounce abortion upon the same grounds – matter and the workings of humanity have a sacramental quality, and so sexuality and the destiny of the unborn human come to fall under moral authority which is not merely subjective.

Whilst Joyce seems to be scattering the nets of power, he in effect is complicit in creating the conditions that allow such power to operate disconnected from any of the restraints of a moral framework. The aesthetics of James Joyce, as elucidated in his work *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, provides us with this particularly compelling parallel to Chesterton's thought. The style of the novel is in itself fragmented – that is its signal of literary commitment to the real, for Joyce, unlike Chesterton, does not posit a literature that overcomes cultural flux, but rather a new modernism that reflects, and dwells within, fragmentation. Joyce's quest is to engage with that flux in all its visceral reality. He aims to show life in its shabbiness and also in its shabby glory. Like Chesterton he seeks to exalt the

common. It is how he perceives and maintains that his literary reality that stands in stark contrast to Chesterton.

The narrative of the novel weaves its way through the psyche of its protagonist Stephen Dedalus (Joyce's alter ego) as he experiences a series of somewhat scattered events that together culminate in a focalised formulation of Joyce's literary quest to „fly by those nets' of religion, language and nationalism into some new conceptualisation of the material real.³³ In Aquinas's language, the novel may be understood as the interplay between Being and Becoming. In a world of change, flux, and Becoming, Joyce, like Chesterton, attempts a search for Being. Such a search has direct bearing upon the representation of reality, for any representation of reality is finally predicated upon the existence of Being outside of the subject. And, while the most striking trait of Joyce's narrative is its intense subjectivity, one can suggest that the narrative nevertheless be understood as the search for something beyond that subjectivity – a search somewhat akin to that of Chesterton's. This may be understood in the following focalisation of Joyce's protagonist:

Words which he did not understand he said over and over to himself till he had learnt them by heart: and through them he had glimpses of the real world about them. The hour when he too would take part in the life of that world seemed drawing near.³⁴

As Chesterton would do in his novel *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Joyce infuses this quest with the hint of romance. As Dedalus searches for the real world, he also appears to be searching for love. It is apt that by the end of the novel, that aspect of the search has been sidelined, whilst in Chesterton's novel, the romance is confirmed. Chesterton's gaze remains

³³ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1992), 157.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 46.

outwards. What is apparent here is Joyce's interest and concern for the medium of representation – words – and the experience of the real things that surround them, that is, 'the real world'. His protagonist wants to get behind the medium and into the experience in some kind of direct fashion. The net of language is being cast off.

Dedalus's quest, however, suffers two major lapses. The first is his fall from Catholic piety into a state of self-obsessive sexual experimentation with nameless prostitutes – 'By his monstrous way of life he seemed to have put himself beyond the limits of reality.'³⁵ In so doing, the protagonist becomes reclusive within the shell of his own subjectivity. His desires and thoughts are all turned in upon himself. He is caught in a net. After he confesses his actions to a priest, he immediately becomes more attuned to reality; the materials of the morning's breakfast lead to a paean of praise for the stuff of life – 'How simple and beautiful was life after all!'³⁶ At this stage, Dedalus has not yet flown by the net of religion.

The second lapse emerges soon after when, after his absolution, Dedalus sinks into the subjectivism of self-righteousness. His intense religious piety draws him to the 'secret knowledge and secret power'³⁷ of the priesthood and its sacramental duties in the transubstantiation of the Eucharist. After being asked to join the priesthood, the moment of decision shakes him from this second set of subjectivity and once again he is seemingly drawn to celebrate the common objects of his father's confused household. It is here that Joyce's protagonist shakes off the net of religion. But it is at this juncture (and not before) that Joyce seemingly parts way with Chesterton in their varying quests for the real. Dedalus is

³⁵ Ibid, 70.

³⁶ Ibid, 112.

³⁷ Ibid, 122.

said to be „destined to learn his own wisdom.’³⁸ This venture is summed up in the memorable lines:

When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.³⁹

Chesterton would argue against such an assertion by virtue of the fact that in the Thomist vision, the soul only comes to actualisation through such things as nationality, language and religion – through encountering others, as well as the ultimate Other that is God. The human subject craves connection. Nationality, language and religion are, when correctly ordered, the lines toward reality and Being, not the nets keeping reality at bay. They can exist in Chesterton's representation of the real because abstractions can be held in the mind of God. Obviously, in the secular aestheticism of Joyce, they cannot. This secular aestheticism comes to see any such abstractions as artificial barriers to a true encounter of things in themselves.

Joyce here shows us the paradox of Chesterton. Whilst Chesterton wants his God to sow within him the „laughter of all lowly things’, those things are not only things. Chesterton, drawing from Aquinas, asserts that, in the face of change, things must necessarily be more than themselves alone in order to maintain their substance. Whilst Joyce wants only matter, Chesterton maintains that a true encounter with matter is predicated on the existence of matter’s forms, which gives matter particularity and *Ens* – substantial quiddity as definite things. In other words, Chesterton’s „lowly things’ need the ability to laugh – they are more than just things. This point is analogous to Chesterton’s modified empiricism. It is modified

³⁸ Ibid, 124.

³⁹ Ibid, 157.

by reason's extension from the subjective utilitarianism of the Enlightenment, toward Reason's access to theologically asserted „natural law'. Joyce discards such notions. The results are poignant. Joyce/Dedalus doesn't make it clear what is precisely left over once these abstract layers have been stripped from his literary soul. The quest ends philosophically in the proclamation „Yes! Yes! Yes! He would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul.'⁴⁰

In this way, Joyce, unlike Chesterton, does not begin with the universe, but begins and ends with himself. Like Wyndham Lewis, Joyce finds no way out of the modernist dialectic. One of the critics of Joyce, Joseph Valente, has traced the roots of this self-deifying creed, and suggests that they are to be found in the sentiments of Nietzsche. „Joyce and Nietzsche's respective interpretation of interpretation come together in rejecting the Correspondence Model of Truth – the idea that there exists a reality-in-itself, theoretically accessible to conceptualisation.'⁴¹ Valente suggests that Joyce, via Dedalus, identifies himself with Nietzsche's Zarathustra, and in so doing, creates a solitary path for himself outside of any objective or received reality.⁴² In this way, both Nietzsche and Joyce „attack metaphysics'⁴³ and put forward an interpretive view of reality whereby the mind of the artist is akin to that of a creator god.

Intriguingly, theologian Phillip Blond has suggested that the roots of Nietzsche's assault on metaphysics are a lack of Thomism, and not Thomism itself. In his *Post-Secular Philosophy*, Blond suggests that it was Duns Scotus who prefigured modernism when he attempted to undo Aquinas's dictum that God is Being. Scotus instead argued that „God

⁴⁰ Ibid, 130.

⁴¹ Joseph Valente, „Beyond Truth and Freedom: The New Faith of Joyce and Nietzsche' in *James Joyce Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (1987): 88.

⁴² Ibid, 87.

⁴³ Ibid, 88.

cannot be known naturally unless being is univocal (*univocum*) to the created and the uncreated.⁴⁴ Blond suggests that this notion led to a theology in which „[the] qualitative analogical perception of God’s difference from us has been supplanted by a quantitative understanding of His differentiation from us.”⁴⁵ In other words, instead of Gilson’s “Great Syllogism” whereby God is at the heart of existence and is the necessary perfection of that existence, God emerges as the one with a greater plenitude of Being to his creatures and becomes „an object of fear and trepidation for human life.”⁴⁶ This fear becomes „the path to modernity’s demand for human self-assertion.”⁴⁷ Blond later asserts that Nietzsche’s atheism emerges from „the idea of an external governing moralising deity”⁴⁸; defiance of which takes on a kind of anti-imperial glory. Nietzsche is therefore fighting against „the nihilistic consequences of an idolatrous imposition of totality upon the world.”⁴⁹

This ontological account of modernism’s roots has an epistemological corollary. For Aquinas, Being is an absolute convertible with both Goodness and Truth.⁵⁰ Therefore, Truth, like Being, for Aquinas, has a kind of synthesised ontology to it because it is a participation in the prime reality of God. But as Being becomes a third term between creator and creatures, so too does Truth. Knowledge of Truth is first reduced to a kind of disconnected correspondence between mind and reality (which Valente alludes to above), and finally when that totalitarian reality is rejected, so too is Truth. Blond’s outline of modernism becomes even more significant when we apply it to the opposition between Chesterton and Joyce. Both

⁴⁴ Phillip Blond, Introduction to *Post-Secular Philosophy*, ed Phillip Blond (London: Routledge, 1998), 8.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 30.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ See Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa*, 91 and 145 (Part I, Question 5, Article 1 and Part 1, Question 16, Article 3 of the *Summa Theologica*).

are Thomists (of a kind). Both seek a Being outside of what, in Blond's terms, may be called „idoltrous totality.’ For Chesterton, such Being was convertible with Truth, and both were found in participation with God, whose essence is existence, in that God does not possess existence but is existence. But Joyce, unlike Chesterton, wants to reject theism.

Paradoxically, he wants Aquinas's epiphany of forms yet not the objective and transcendent Being behind those forms. This is the crucial difference between Joyce and Chesterton and the reason why, according to the argument of this dissertation, Chesterton evades the tag of mere modernist or anti-modernist, while Joyce does not.

Weldon Thornton, in *The Antimodernism of Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, writes that „[contrary] to the common assumption that James Joyce is a champion of “individualism,” his works show that while some of his characters espouse a superficial, Enlightenment-based view of the self, Joyce himself does not share their view.’⁵¹ Thornton correctly identifies here Joyce's secular aestheticism – like Chesterton, Joyce wants to know Being or reality. He wants the self to encounter something transcendent. But Thornton fails to identify the failure of Joyce's quest. Finally, Joyce ends his quest in the self because Being is not sustained by anything objective.

In substitute for such Being, Joyce, like Nietzsche, posits the mind of an artist who can re-constitute reality (and by implication his nationality) „in the smithy of [his] soul.’⁵² Joyce's soul becomes its own god and that is where he ends. His quest cannot in fact bring him to his hoped for encounter with the real. And thus the novel can be said to end in another subjective relapse – this time one not seated within sexual appetite or religious quietism, but rather within a type of introspective creativity which lauds artistry and the shaping of a new reality as the highest form of literature – a heightened plain of new epic mythology upon

⁵¹ Thornton, *The Antimodernism of Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 157.

⁵² Joyce, *Portrait*, 196.

which one can viscerally encounter true life. Such a statement would seem to provide evidence for Valente's assertion that Joyce's „aesthetics of incertitude', despite rejecting all metaphysics, becomes its own kind of creed (indeed, its own kind of metaphysics). Thus Valente finally argues that Joyce's metaphysical doubt becomes a doctrinal „yes': 'This yes, embracing the absence of absolute meaning or value, becomes its own bond, taking all meaning and value upon itself.'⁵³ While Valente suggests this is merely paradoxical, Chesterton, in his analysis of Nietzsche in his work *Orthodoxy*, would suggest the paradox is in fact a fatal contradiction to Nietzsche's whole attempt to transcend good and evil, and a demonstration of the necessity of metaphysics.⁵⁴

Here the differences between Chesterton's Thomism and Joyce's secular aesthetics become obvious. Joyce revels in the subjective mind becoming the new seat of revelation of things. That is why Dedalus ends his quest as an artist. But for Chesterton, art becomes meaningless without some objective and transcendent measure for the essence of what things are and what they are becoming. If things are not more than their decaying selves, they become pliable, and susceptible to the violent powers of modernity. For Chesterton, the solidness of a thing, independent of the artist, is the baseline for all artistry. Chesterton says:

⁵³ Joseph Valente, „Beyond Truth and Freedom „, 89.

⁵⁴ See Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 97. „Nietzsche always escaped a question by a physical metaphor, like a cheery minor poet. He said, “beyond good and evil,” because he had not the courage to say, “more good than good and evil,” or, “more evil than good and evil.” Had he faced his thought without metaphors, he would have seen that it was nonsense. So, when he describes his hero, he does not dare to say, “the purer man,” or “the happier man,” or “the sadder man,” for all these are ideas; and ideas are alarming. He says “the upper man,” or “over man,” a physical metaphor from acrobats or alpine climbers.’ Upon this point, theologian John Milbank has stated that Nietzsche's quest for ‚difference', is in fact indistinguishable from a kind of arbitrary, right-wing, positivism. See John Milbank's Preface to the Second Edition of *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), xi to xxxii. The connection between a loss of metaphysics and arbitrary positivism will be explored more fully in the third chapter of the dissertation.

The flower is a vision because it is not only a vision. Or, if you will, it is a vision because it is not a dream. This is for the poet the strangeness of stones and trees and solid things; they are strange because they are solid.⁵⁵

Whilst both authors aim to encounter things and reality, and to express that encounter honestly, they differ over where to seat the essence of things. Joyce seats it within the change of the mind of artist, while Chesterton, in a bid to preserve reality independent and transcendent of the subject, anchors changing reality in the changeless mind of God. In so doing, he equally suggests that reality is accessible to many other minds too for its accessibility does not require the work of an artist. This is the initial or foundational bias which drives Chesterton's entire literary project.

Finally, Joyce's lauding of art as a creed turns on that which he originally prizes the most, the stuff of his father's house. The seating of the subject above reality leads to a subject who when asked whether he loves his mother, can only respond, „I don't know what your words mean."⁵⁶ Paradoxically, this is the result of Joyce's fascination with Aquinas. Yet his fascination, unlike Chesterton's, is completely secular. In a certain sense, Joyce is more Thomist than Chesterton or even Aquinas. Chesterton and Aquinas differ in their synthesis of grace with nature – they ask for a conversation to take place between nature and the metaphysics of grace. The genius of Aquinas was his lauding of the part of nature in that conversation. Joyce tends to resist that conversation, by learning „his own wisdom"⁵⁷, by ignoring the dialogical nature of Aquinas. This artistic, as opposed to a communal, reality is typically modernist. Joyce thus encounters nature on her, and his, own. This becomes his particular genius – the energy of his desire to cast off all artifice. The lack of metaphysical

⁵⁵ Chesterton, „St Thomas Aquinas', 541.

⁵⁶ Joyce, *Portrait*, 186.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 124.

dialogue is evident in the assertion the „esthetic means... not more than physical.’⁵⁸ There lies nothing behind the physical appearance of things – their thingness is purely self-contained, and Dedalus’ reason restricts itself to this empirical world only, therefore he can say of the Eucharist, „I neither believe in it nor disbelieve in it.’⁵⁹ The incertitude is the certain doctrine of the ego.

But as a result, it is almost as though the whole material realm is forced, unintentionally and contrary to Dedalus’ original quest, into this subjective ego. The quiddity of things is ironically lost. There is neither framework nor anchor to keep it in its objective place. The only seat for encounter with the real is the subject. This is made abundantly clear in the form of the novel too. Joyce’s protagonist therefore concludes in his intention to create „in the smithy of [his] soul.’⁶⁰ Ultimately, despite his intentions as spelled out in the beginning (and indeed the end) of the novel, he seemingly cannot find his way outside of himself. Whilst Chesterton would write a novel in sympathy of this position, he concludes that such a literary modernism leads to a fragmentation in which the subjectivity of financial and political power runs rampant. Things are free to be anything, and so they are free to be shaped by the oppressor.

TS Eliot draws on this same sense of fragmentation to create his own set of modernist poetics. He draws his aesthetics from a constant sense that reality and meaning is always escaping our grasp. The tide washes up artefacts from the past and from some distant reality, yet the wave of meaning is always receding. In *The Waste Land*, a modern landscape brimming with classical allusions is imagined. Its coherence lies in its incoherence. It is almost as though Eliot feels the absence of the synthesis Aquinas attempted when he drew

⁵⁸ Ibid, 159.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 185.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 196.

together the universals of Christendom with the wisdom of classicism. We constantly find ourselves in what may be termed the shadow of reality – „There is shadow under this red rock/ Your shadow at morning striding behind you/ Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you.’⁶¹ The shadow is represented by the hooded figure in „What the Thunder Said’, the figure who hearkens back to Jesus walking along the Emmaus Road, deployed as a figure here from beyond some sea of modern isolation, who can never be known or recognized.⁶² This idea is taken to its zenith towards the end of the poem: „We think of the key, each in his prison/ Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison.’⁶³ In his notes on the poem, Eliot quotes FH Bradley in reference to these lines: „In brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul.’⁶⁴

Here is the essence of Chesterton’s modernist foil. Eliot’s haunting poetry lies in his tantalizing ruminations upon some key that could unlock the prison of subjectivity. Chesterton’s jolly poetry of rhyme and inane adventure lies in his assurance that the key has indeed been found. He has applied the formula of Aquinas to the modern age, and through the selfsame vision has endeavoured to declare the existence of an objective reality. His words concerning an Aquinas in defiance of the neo-Platonists are words just as easily applied to himself: „Even the doubts and difficulties about reality have driven him to believe in more reality rather than less: the deceitfulness of things which has had so sad an effect on so many sages, has almost a contrary effect on this sage.’⁶⁵

⁶¹ TS Eliot, „The Waste Land’ in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed Arthur Eastman et al (New York: WW Norton and Co, 1970), 1002.

⁶² Ibid, 1010.

⁶³ Ibid, 1011.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 1011.

⁶⁵ Chesterton, „St Thomas Aquinas’, 538.

Here it is possible to approach something of a working definition of Chesterton's oeuvre. Chesterton writes of the sacredness of the object. The movement of his gaze is always outwards. This is the logical literary extension of what he terms the Thomist chain. Literature can and should celebrate the reality that is really there. „The flower is a vision because it is not only a vision. Or, if you will, it is a vision because it is not only a dream.’ Faith in this allows for sanity, and confirms experience. The negation of such an article of faith sends one into a subjective whirlpool from which there is seemingly no recovery.

It is from such a set of poetics that Chesterton draws his own brand of what may be termed as his positive liberal politics. Because the mind is made to seek and to search („as an organ it has an object which is objective; this eating of the strange meat of reality’⁶⁶), the individual is neither „merely receptive [nor] purely creative’⁶⁷ – but rather exists in correspondence and coherence with other subjects. This in turn leads to an ideal of communitarianism that has subsidiarity as its core dynamic. This dynamic seeks to grant as much autonomy to the smallest political bodies as is possible and just. There is no strong man, nobody speaking for the march of history; but rather value surges instead into the tiny objects of reality, who dance to a tune of natural law which is always in affirmation of the actualisation of the small, because the small is truly there, and is thus truly sacred and worthy of actualisation. In analogy, reason is sent outwards too, because of the possibility that it may meet order and transcendence within the material realm, embracing a moral and metaphysical field that goes beyond Cartesian or Kantian restrictions. In Thomism, Chesterton is propounding a kind of faith that can ensure representation remains a conduit of Being, or reality, and not its substitute.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 542.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 542.

Chapter 2: The Nightmare of GK Chesterton

Chesterton's Mood

This thesis has begun at the end of Chesterton's thought – his adoption of the creed of Catholicism and, in particular, one of its inner wheels, Thomism. This chapter, therefore, will not operate on the philosophical plane of the prior chapter, but will rather trace out the literary themes of modernism found in Chesterton's most celebrated fictional work, *The Man Who Was Thursday*. This novel was written 25 years before *St. Thomas Aquinas*. As a result, this chapter serves as an analysis of a Chesterton perhaps tending toward the vision of Aquinas, rather than the Chesterton channelling Aquinas.¹ To grapple with that mood, it is necessary to view it in the context of the emergent modernism of his time. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane have attempted to exemplify modernism in Nietzsche's words: „No artist tolerates reality.”² They furthermore described the typical work of Nietzsche's ideal artist in the following terms:

[It] is the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos. It is the art consequent on Heisenberg's „Uncertainty Principle' ... of the world changed and reinterpreted by Marx, Freud and Darwin, of capitalism and constant industrial acceleration, of existential exposure to meaninglessness or absurdity. It is the literature of technology. It is the art consequent on the disestablishing of communal reality and conventional notions of causality, on the destruction of traditional notions of the wholeness of individual character, on the linguistic chaos that ensues when public notions of language have been discredited and

¹ Hugh Kenner has pointed out that Chesterton's work on Aquinas was only possible „because St. Thomas expounded in an orderly and systematic fashion what Gilbert Chesterton had been seeing and saying all his life.” Hugh Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 5-6.

² Bradbury and McFarlane, „The Name and Nature of Modernism’, 25.

when all realities have become subjective fictions. Modernism is then the art of modernization.³

For Chesterton, the notion of ‚all realities [as] subjective fictions’ is abhorrent, and is, in his understanding, complicit with the dehumanising ‚capitalism and constant industrial acceleration’ that were to occur in his lifetime – the emptying of metaphysics allowing for the rush of blind materialism. Chesterton has not left us guessing as to his attitude towards such an epoch and its art. A poetic repudiation of the ‚one art’ described by Bradbury and McFarlane is in fact found in the dedication to *The Man Who Was Thursday*:

A cloud was on the mind of men, and wailing went the weather,
Yea, a sick cloud upon the soul when we were boys together.
Science announced nonentity and art admired decay;
The world was old and ended: but you and I were gay.⁴

The novel was dedicated to Chesterton’s childhood friend, the poet and detective novelist Edmund Clerihew Bentley, and in it Chesterton specifically identifies some cultural compound of his era that has brought about a science of ‚nonentity’ (a rejoinder perhaps to the Nominalism discussed above – a Nominalism that denies any natural categories) and an art that admires ‚decay’. By metaphorically describing this compound as a cloud, Chesterton seems to suggest that the problem is akin to a seasonal bad mood or illness. This cloud on both the mind and the soul suggests an inability to know or to reason with clarity. This cloud is also associated with some senility of the world (‚The world was old and ended’), which in itself suggests some earlier time when humanity was not stricken in this fashion – in 1908 Chesterton is already reaching out for some kind of medieval or ancient intervention.

³ Ibid, 27.

⁴ GK Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday* (London: Headline Review, 2007), v .

If one is willing to use Bradbury and McFarlane's illustration of modernist art as the exemplary indicator of the period, it is clear that Chesterton is intentionally setting both himself and his novel against modernism. Nonentity and decay are taunts against an art and a science intent on both the expression of absurdity and meaninglessness and a prolific industrialisation; both being consequent upon 'the destruction of traditional notions of the wholeness of individual character.' This connection between Chesterton and the object of his defiance is also necessarily resident in the novel insofar as Chesterton also uses the novel as a form of self-examination and self-critique. The day before he died, Chesterton would draw attention to the fact that crucially the book is often named without its subtitle – *A Nightmare* – and as a result, the real nature of the story is often misunderstood. Whilst this analysis by Chesterton of his own work will have to be tested later in this chapter, it is nevertheless useful and necessary to consider the fact of his subtitle, from which Chesterton says it should be inferred that the book 'was not intended to describe the real world as it was... [but rather] the world of wild doubt and despair which the pessimists were generally describing at that date.'⁵ To return to the dedication, Chesterton would personalize this depiction of a modern nightmare, by stating that it 'is a tale of those old fears, even of those emptied hells' – a tale which 'none but you [Bentley] shall understand.'⁶ This implicitly suggests that the book may function as some kind of personal recapitulation of his, and Bentley's, recovery from a sort of modern paranoia. Together, these two statements suggest that this nightmare somehow also belongs to Chesterton, not just to the pessimists – it is a record of his own personal recovery. Such a notion is supported later in the dedication ('And I may safely write it now, and you

⁵ Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 226.

⁶ *Ibid*, vii.

may safely read'⁷), as well as by the similarities between the details of Chesterton's life and that of the protagonist, Gabriel Syme.

Because this novel functions as the nightmare of an earlier Chesterton, it is important not to view the book as containing any neat or theoretically self-enclosed arguments against modernism. Instead, the story functions as something of a burlesque of modernism; embracing an extreme kind of modern despair in order to find a way through it.

Paradoxically, therefore, the novel is, in a certain sense, a modernist text. It is Chesterton entering the 'nightmare' to see if he may find some way of waking up. It is the world of the pessimists, but it is also curiously his own world at the same time. In a way, he is confessing to his own modernism. This double effect will reverberate enigmatically throughout the entire book, particularly within the character of Sunday – the veiled nemesis of Syme's alter ego, 'Thursday'. This is a crucial point. No matter his defiance of the age, Chesterton is nevertheless a writer of that age. *The Man Who Was Thursday* perhaps embraces modernization in the same way that Joyce's *Ulysses* does – in the words of TS Eliot, *Ulysses* '[had attempted to] give a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.'⁸ However, Chesterton hopes to go one step further than that. He hopes also to empty the hells of contemporary history, so to speak, to do away with futility and anarchy and find some kind of hope and transcendence, an escape from the cloud of his day that would go beyond modernism's dialectic.

To return to Chesterton's own description of the novel, he would say it was 'a melodramatic sort of moonshine, but it had a kind of notion in it: and the point is that it described, first a band of the last champions of order fighting against what appeared to be a

⁷ Ibid, viii.

⁸ TS Eliot 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth' in *Forms of Modern Fiction*, ed W Van O'Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1948), 123.

world of anarchy, and then the discovery that the mysterious master both of the anarchy and the order was the same sort of elemental elf who had appeared to be rather too like a pantomime ogre.⁹ These champions have been operating as undercover policemen who have ingratiated themselves with the shadowy and larger-than-life figure, Sunday, the leader of the Central Anarchist Council. The Council is named for the seven days of the week – hence Syme’s title of Thursday. At first, Syme believes himself to be in terrifying isolation amongst Europe’s most dangerous men, but as the story progresses, his fellow Anarchists are revealed to be, just like Syme, undercover policeman, all recruited by a man whose face they were never allowed to see, because that man was Sunday.

In this way, Chesterton claimed he hoped to express „a gleam of hope in some double meaning of the doubt, which even the pessimists felt in some fitful fashion.’¹⁰ Here lies the reason for Chesterton’s submersion into a self-made modernist world – his fascination with the transcendent hope that may even be found in modernism itself. He is not simply anti-modern, and his approach to modernism is therefore not one without paradox. Consequently, Chesterton ends up going deeper into modernism in the book than perhaps even he realises. His „melodramatic moonshine’ explores the depths of this modern age of the „Uncertainty Principle’ to such an extent that it turns into a re-telling of the Book of Job. The suffering of Job becomes conflated with the confusion of the characters as „the last champions of order’ find themselves questioning the existence of any order or meaning to their lives. It is ultimately in their questioning that they do finally find meaning, just as it is in Chesterton’s deathly embrace of modernism that he paradoxically finds transcendence. As Job’s sufferings finally reward him, so does Chesterton suggest a greater good beyond the wild doubts of his milieu.

⁹ Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 226.

¹⁰ Ibid..

As a result, at the core of the novel is the grand paradox centred upon the character of Sunday, the personification of the peace of God who is also the ogre anarchist. Sunday is the mimesis of Chesterton's literary strategy – that is, his adoption of modernism as a means to break through modernism. In short, Chesterton is aiming to express the resolution of modernism via an examination of the paradox of the possibility of modernism. If there is an order, a communal reality and a wholeness outside of modernism, why is modernism even possible? In the terms of Job, if there is a just God, why is there even the possibility of injustice? In the novel's somewhat implausible terms, why is Sunday both anarchist and policeman?

The Rarefaction of Representation

This nightmare is best explored via a primary analysis of one of the most visually striking scenes of the book, in which the „last champions of order' are pursued by the global organisation of anarchists through a shadowy forest of the French countryside. Hitherto, the story has been set exclusively in the city, but as the plot thickens, the action moves to the countryside, where, despite a brief return to London, the doubts and confusion will be resolved. The countryside acts as a limits test case for the metaphysical anarchy threatening the protagonist – if the apparently sturdy life of peasantry and rural towns and the abiding natural landscape thereof is to be won by the anarchists and their philosophy, then all hope is lost. If the non-artificial, non-urban space is lost, then so is the universe.

As Gabriel Syme enters the forest in the chaos of this near-farcical pursuit, he wonders if the attempt to fly from his enemies is actually impossible – he wonders if anarchism is not simply found everywhere, including in an ancient French forest. The narrator, inspired by the lighting within the wood, takes the opportunity to muse upon the philosophical extrapolations of an impressionism suggested by the shadows of the forest, and

in so doing, the complexities of Chesterton's own modernism, and its ability to represent reality, are suggested. As Syme and his allies enter the forest, they are compared to „divers who plunge into a dim pool' where the light is „shattered' and the shadows „shaken.'¹¹ The effect that this has upon Syme serves as a proxy for the entire mood of his misadventures. He has seen enemies turn to allies, and will later see them apparently turned back again. In the forest, it is as though such masks impinge upon the metaphysical identity of not only those around him, but upon himself too. The shadows apparent on the policemen's faces seem to suggest that their previous masks were not only something worn externally, but were rather emblems of Syme's inability to see reality at all – he has entered a dim pool. In fact, Syme's confusion goes deeper than that – he begins to wonder if anyone is anything. He asks himself, „Was there anything that was apart from what it seemed?' Was „everything' merely „a glimpse, the glimpse always unforeseen and always forgotten?'¹²

Chesterton impresses this notion upon the text through constant allusion to the art and the mechanics of representation – the light and shadow of the forest is said to recall „the dizziness of a cinematograph.'¹³ From the technology of film, the author then induces us to regard the scene's lighting as the artificial construct of other visual art forms: „Now a man's head was lit as with a light of Rembrandt, leaving all else obliterated.'¹⁴ Chesterton keeps emphasizing the fact that his protagonist is contesting with a reality once removed by suggesting that Syme is only encountering the forest via some medium of representation – he may not really be there at all, for the forest is simply just „a chaos of chiaroscuro' or „a wood of witchery' and the narrator records the intended end of all this speculation: „For Gabriel

¹¹ Ibid, 149.

¹² Ibid, 149-150.

¹³ Ibid, 149.

¹⁴ Ibid, 149.

Syme had found at the heart of that sun-splashed wood what many modern painters had found there. He had found the thing which the modern people call Impressionism, which is another name for that scepticism which can find no floor to the universe.¹⁵

Bradbury and McFarlane's allusion to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle finds a particular poignancy here. The Uncertainty Principle states that in quantum mechanics, the more one knows about one physical quality of a particle (such as its momentum), the less one necessarily knows about that quality's associated partner (in this case, its position).¹⁶ In other words, knowledge diminishes even as it grows. The same may be said of Syme's nightmare. As Syme uncovers the truth of his situation, the less he finds he knows about the situation in general, just as one approaches an Impressionist painting, the less one sees of the general picture. The revelations have served to shake his hold on what he thought he knew. The plot has thickened; but concurrently reality seems to have been rarefied into a fleeting „glimpse.’

The effect of all these questions and doubts embedded within Syme's response to the forest is that the whole scene becomes a kind of detachable exemplar that illustrates what may be termed the author's hyper-modernism. What we have here is a paradoxical inversion of the process named by Roland Barthes as „the reality effect.’¹⁷ In his seminal essay, „The Reality Effect’ Barthes notes that the modern adaptation of the ancient rhetorical device known as the ecphrasis serves to construct „a reality effect.’¹⁸ This construction is embedded within „cultural rules of representation’¹⁹ which may be observed in the addition of „useless

¹⁵ Ibid, 149-150.

¹⁶ Werner Heisenberg and Carl Eckart, *The Physical Principles of the Quantum Theory*, trans Carl Eckart and FC Hoyt (New York: Dover, 1949), 21.

¹⁷ Barthes, „The Reality Effect’, 148.

¹⁸ Ibid, 143.

¹⁹ Ibid, 145.

details'²⁰ to modern works of literature. Barthes associates these descriptive but useless details with the 'detachable set piece' known as ecphrasis.²¹ Ecphrasis is the insertion of descriptions of works of art (though Barthes includes people, places and times in his definition) into literature.²² Although the ecphrasis appears to be detachable and therefore to have 'its end in itself'²³, Barthes argues that the hidden objective of pointless yet vivid description is the creation of the reality effect: it is these 'useless details' which, 'in the very absence of the signified...becomes the very signifier of realism.'²⁴ Through having no acknowledged objective except the intention of accurate portrayal, ecphrasis becomes the marker of a fictional realism that happens outside of the author's mere intentions.

By constantly referring to the forest as work of art, only to be glimpsed because it exists only as the play of light and shadow, as seen in the lighting of Rembrandt, Chesterton here is subverting the reality effect. The forest scene is detachable; it does break the action of the story's plot, but it is not detachable in terms of the story's *mythos*. It lays the groundwork for the whole pessimistic doubt that Chesterton is eager to render. Chesterton does not take the time to describe a scene or a work of art in order to promote a reality effect, or to suggest that his narrator is describing a real scene, rather he is drawing our attention to the fact that the scene may just be a scene – that the diegetic world of Syme may contain the loss apparently inherent in art – the real being squeezed into the thin glimpse of representation, and subsequently being lost completely as the mechanics of representation are laid bare – in the techniques of Rembrandt lighting, chiaroscuro or Impressionism. Art may just be about

²⁰ Ibid, 142.

²¹ Ibid, 143.

²² Ibid, 143.

²³ Ibid, 143.

²⁴ Ibid, 148.

art – just as Syme’s fictional experience may be but a reflection of the fictions of visual art. In this way, Chesterton threatens to extinguish reality.

By turning the ecphrasis upside down, Chesterton is embracing the extremes of modernism, but the net result is rather different to that of the work of canonical modernists such as Joyce. A double effect comes into play simply by the fact that Chesterton so eagerly questions the existence of reality at all and does so deliberately by what could be called the unreality effect. By questioning Syme’s scene, Chesterton actually ends up confirming the possibility of his own scene. Bradbury and McFarlane describe modernism in these terms: ‚a new era of high aesthetic self-consciousness and non-representationalism, in which art turns from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique, and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life.’²⁵

Chesterton has accomplished this turn of art, but comes rather to a different conclusion. He has not penetrated life, but rather penetrated nothingness. Through emphasizing the scenery of his scene, he manages to call into question the existence of the entire universe, and in so doing, has emphasized the essential absurdity of an art that comments on the mechanics of its means of representation, whilst neglecting that which it represents. The universe turns into a mere impression. By describing the forest as a painting of effects and technique, absent of any essence, Chesterton alludes to the possibility that there is no forest at all. We come not to ‚a deeper penetration of life’, but rather to the rarefied glimpse of nothing. Either we must embrace this nothingness to which a constant and singular attention to mechanics and technique must inevitably lead, or we must shake off our doubt and believe in the forest. A reckoning is forced upon us. The subverted ecphrasis thus suggests to us that art is dependent on a belief in reality. Chesterton’s repetition of the word

²⁵ M Bradbury and J McFarlane, ‚The Name and Nature of Modernism’, 25.

„modern’ (‘modern painters’/‘modern people’) demonstrates once again his charge that this scepticism is the ‚sick cloud’ of a world that has already ended. And as we choose to leave the forest (if we do), Chesterton’s ability to say something about reality is confirmed, precisely because representation has once again been confirmed as not the sum total of reality.

But the forest scene is not quite as simple as that, because in Chesterton’s subversion of the ecphrasis, we do not only have his *reductio ad absurdum* argument against modernism, but we also have his subversion of the reality effect that achieved for him this argument. He throws off realism in order to buttress the real, but, having questioned realism and the integrity of the reality effect, there remains the question of what kind of fiction and what manner of representation Chesterton will propose in the face of both his subversion of realism and his rebuttal of modernism. For like the modernists, Chesterton has subverted realism; but in his reduction of modernism to the absurd (that is, if we accept the metaphysical claims of his hyper-modernism), we are forced to ask what kind of representation is actually possible – we cannot simply go back to the attempts at verisimilitude of the nineteenth century because in Chesterton’s forest set-piece, such a literary realism has already been discarded. Everything has been called in to doubt, and even once this doubt is dispelled, there remains the work of examining what kind of representation is justified.

Even if it is agreed that art is not simply about art, but is rather a medium for reality, the manner of that medium is highly debatable. In enclosing nothingness within the world of the novel, one is forced to question the substance of the remains of that novel. For in many senses, Chesterton, whilst dispelling modernism, becomes the modernist *par excellence*. For by subverting realism to the point of the absurd, he goes further than any modernist (by the definition of Bradbury and McFarlane) to the point of demonstrating the absurdity of modernism. What emerges in this new dispensation is a new kind of realism that goes beyond

realism insofar as it allegorizes the sublimity incarnate within the real. This new kind of realism is already present within the forest scene.

One of the startling features of Syme's forest is what may be described as its universality. As Syme enters the forest it at first seems we are being drawn into a particular, albeit fictional, place within the French countryside. The reverse is true. The forest is rather Chesterton's concession to the pessimists of his day. The absurd doubts of his protagonist have been given one reified trysting place. In that sense, the forest is a mimetic participation in a new universe consisting of representation and no reality. As the novel climaxes, and the existence of this universe is resolved and collapsed, we remain aware of this totality of vision in the novel. We are not being drawn into Syme's experience, as it were, but together with him and his author we are being asked to believe in the passing of a 'sick cloud' so as to allow a participation in the reality of the real universe. The forest is not this universality, but rather the labyrinthine universe of the anarchic-modernists – the pessimists who doubt the coherence and meaning of anything in the world. Nevertheless, the forest is still an allegory of a universe, and therefore it functions as a participation in some kind of universe. By being only in one place, Chesterton is suggesting that it is in fact nowhere. By giving the atmosphere of the forest an artificial universality, he is attempting to collapse its existence even as he suggests the resolved universality of the book's climax.

John G. Peters has written of the literary Impressionism found within the work of Joseph Conrad – an Impressionism that is not merely based on the visual arts but rather on the philosophy of Impressionism. Whilst it is clear that Chesterton (the former art student) is deploying Impressionism in his novel as a function of visual arts, nevertheless Peters' observation regarding the usage of Impressionism *per se* is apt here: „[Conrad's] impressionism saw all phenomena filtering through the medium of consciousness at a particular time and place, thereby representing knowledge as an individual rather than a

universal experience.²⁶ Chesterton is inverting this kind of literary Impressionism by attempting to discard the individual basis of knowledge traditionally suggested by Impressionism (knowledge reduced to impressions gleaned from the glance and thus reduced to individual experience) and therefore hint at a universal basis of knowledge, which he would later predicate on Thomist *Ens*.

The difficulties and essence of such a universal participation may be analysed in a literary fashion via its contrasts with the technique of subjective rendering known as the „objective correlative.²⁷ Flaubert has loomed as a figure on the periphery of these questions – his work *Madame Bovary* having been the example used in Barthes’ „The Reality Effect’ – and the same work is deployed by Allen Tate in his essay „Techniques of Fiction’, in which he discusses the utility of the object in correlating the subjective into a novel. Such a technique, he writes, has allowed the novel to catch up finally with poetry. Tate observes that Flaubert, in describing Emma Bovary’s desire to jump off a building to her death, is able to put the reader into her head by correlating the sound of a nearby lathe with the „humming vertigo’ in her head. In that way, we do not have to imagine for Flaubert – he has managed to put everything in to the novel itself.²⁸ Through an object, we have greater access to the subject, and in this way, the novel becomes the character; the movement of our gaze being consistently inwards. In other words, Flaubert has come close to his desired achievement of anti-universality, which he speaks of in the following terms: „What strikes me as beautiful,

²⁶ Cited by Richard M. Berrong, „Modes of Literary Impressionism’ in *Genre* 39, no. 2 (2006): 204.

²⁷ The term being borrowed from Eliot. See TS Eliot, „Hamlet and his Problems’ in *The Sacred Wood: Essays in Poetry and Criticism*, (London: Methuen, 1920).

²⁸ Allen Tate „Techniques of Fiction’ in *Forms of Modern Fiction*, ed W Van O’Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1948), 44-45.

what I should like to do, is a book about nothing, a book without external attachments, which would hold itself together by itself through the internal force of its style.’²⁹

Such a sentiment is the artistic energy behind a modernism which, according to Bradbury and McFarlane, turns from realism and representation towards ‘style, technique, and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life.’³⁰ Flaubert is not expressing nothingness here as a metaphysical concept but rather posits it as a counter to any pretence of metaphysical extrapolation or artifice. Chesterton attempts to plumb the fissure of this penetration in order to demonstrate that what one finds there is not life, but rather what Flaubert unwittingly suggests: nothing, a universe with no floor; a life without metaphysical ‘artifice.’ Chesterton’s fissure, the alternate universe which is his forest, is here operating in an inverse fashion to Flaubert’s ‘objective correlative.’ His forest, by grappling with modernism as universality, attempts to demonstrate its ultimate despair. The forest here serves as the allegory of an absurdist – an exposition of a particular island universe in which the protagonist experiences representation only and is cut off from the real. Consequently, therefore, Chesterton is urging participation with the universal universe, with Being itself, as the real incarnate within representation – thus forming the floor of the universe that is beyond the glance of Impressionism. In so doing, Chesterton is hoping to express the necessity of universalism – the inescapability as well as the organic nature of what both Flaubert and Joyce suppose to be metaphysical artifice – so as to transcend modernism, as well as to justify the possibility of his own universalism, which he implicitly expresses even as he suggests the impossibility of the forest of Syme’s despair. This universalism has at its heart the notion that reality exists as the first principle. Flaubert would assert the contrary and thus delineate the guiding principles of his literature: ‘For want of the real, one tries to console

²⁹ Quoted in M Bradbury and J McFarlane, ‘The Name and Nature of Modernism’, 25.

³⁰ Ibid..

oneself by way of fiction...The one way of tolerating existence is to lose oneself in literature as in a perpetual orgy.³¹

Chesterton, by virtue of Syme's forest, is expressing the opposite. There is no 'want of the real', and one need not indulge in the orgy of literature, or in the orgy of anarchism. Instead, words on a page, graphic text, are expressed as incarnations of ideas beyond yet including themselves. Words are able to allegorize reality in a way that is beyond literary realism – the way of scholastic Realism. As Hugh Kenner notes, 'Chesterton treats language as a bridge between the human microcosm and the world; language has a consistency of its own – ultimately, an autonomy – derived from its function of mediating between the mind and the universe.'³²

Because of language's reality, and its connection to organic mind, it can allegorize the rest of reality. Such an allegory renders for the reader an approximate representation through which the reader can participate in the real, even though reality itself may not be exhaustively expressed or contained by textual signifiers. Inside the reader's intellect, the signifier incarnates the real presence of ideas. This is the epistemology of Aquinas.³³ The forest is therefore not an 'objective correlative' designed to keep one within the confines of the subject, but can rather be described as a 'universal participation', designed to allow one to enter into a literary allegory of the universe. In opposition to Flaubert's aesthetics of

³¹ Efrain Kristul, *Temptation of the Word: The Novels of Mario Vargas Llosa* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), 83.

³² Hugh Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 42. Later, Kenner writes, 'One who saw the world as a vast inter-reflecting organism saw language implicated in that reality along with every other ingredient.' (115)

³³ Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa*, 115 and 275 (Part I, Question 12, Article 4 and Part I, Question 79, Article 4 of the *Summa Theologica*). Aquinas holds that the human intellect reaches truth because of its participation in the superior intellect of God. This participation also means that the human soul is not wholly intellectual, therefore, 'it reaches to the understanding of truth by arguing, with a certain amount of reasoning and movement. Again it has an imperfect understanding; both because it does not understand everything, and because, in those things which it does understand, it passes from potentiality to act. Therefore there must needs be some higher intellect, by which the soul is helped to understand' (275). When the intellect knows truth, there is a real presence of the thing known in the mind of the owner, via the abstraction of real forms from sensible objects (115). The presence of the form cannot be a falsity, but the judgement thereof can.

consolation in the face of nothingness, Chesterton proposes an art consequent on knowledge of the real. Such an art does not contain reality, in the fashion that Flaubert's art contains diegetic reality through the force of artistry; but rather explores reality through the force of perception. Art is a continuously outward movement.

In this way, after nullifying the verisimilitude of realism, and then reducing modernism to the absurd, Chesterton proposes an allegorical encounter with the real that goes beyond realism into the sublime. In *The Defendant* he writes:

Nothing sublimely artistic has ever arisen out of mere art, any more than anything essentially reasonable has ever arisen out of the pure reason. There must always be a rich moral soil for any great aesthetic growth. The principle of *art for art's sake* is a very good principle if it means that there is a vital distinction between the earth and the tree that has its roots in the earth; but it is a very bad principle if it means that the tree could grow just as well with its roots in the air. Every great literature has always been allegorical – allegorical of some view of the whole universe. The „Iliad’ is only great because all life is a battle, the „Odyssey’ because all life is a journey, the Book of Job because all life is a riddle.³⁴

Whilst navigating beyond modernism and realism, Chesterton is also attempting to go beyond both the schools of formalism and cultural materialism – art is not simply part of the universe's material, nor does art occupy some non-universal ethereality. Rather, it draws its life from a semi-transcendent humanism that is able to allegorise the universe. This is not simply realism – for the universe cannot be contained – nor is it modernism – for the real is accessible through the allegorical point of contact that is art and literature. Literature ventures

³⁴ GK Chesterton, *The Defendant*, 31.

outward with the reader in order to touch the universe and its metaphysical being. The forest thus becomes an absurd portal, which, whilst constructing a subjective universe, forces us to confront an objective universe outside of the forest, a universe which is purposefully infinitely larger than the island-universe of the forest.

This notion, as expressed in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, finds its zenith in the climax of the book. When the detectives finally catch up with Sunday, they attend a banquet given in their honour. In the forest, Syme wondered if there was anything beyond the masks (both literal and metaphorical) that he and his fellow detectives had been wearing – „Was there anything apart from what it had seemed?’³⁵ – but at the banquet the detectives wear costumes that have the opposite effect. Their costumes, depicting the events of each of the days of creation as expressed by the Genesis story, represent each of the characters’ personalities. Syme, as Thursday, wears the images of the sun and moon because as a poet „the great moment [for him] is not the creation of light’ but the division of the primal light into „special shapes.’³⁶ At that juncture, Chesterton writes, „If Syme had been able to see himself, he would have realized that he, too, seemed to be for the first time himself and no one else.’³⁷ Chesterton’s answer to the doubts of Syme in the forest is not the abolition of artifice, the mere removal of masks, but rather a kind of priestly artifice that allegorizes the real. This is the opposite of Flaubert’s nothingness, and it depends on a kind of metaphysical faith.

Corollaries to this feature of Chesterton’s writing are found throughout the novel. Such corollaries, unlike the forest, do not negatively express this universalism, but rather, like the costumes, suggest it positively, in ways that subtly interplay with the language found in

³⁵ Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 149.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 149.

³⁷ *Ibid*.

the forest. In the forest, the real is constantly reduced to the glance of Impressionist art – in other places, Chesterton suggests that objects found within the universe are not reduced objects of art, but are rather expressions of the transcendent real. Such objects are knowable beyond mere shadow and light, but there is too much within and behind them to be fully known. They are more than themselves. They are participants in Being. The narrative of the plot is hemmed in by Syme's encounter with Rosamond Gregory, who only briefly appears at the outset of Syme's adventures (and functions as some kind of resolution of the real at the book's denouement):

And yet, in some indescribable way, she kept recurring like a motive in music through all his mad adventures afterwards, and the glory of her strange hair ran like a red thread through those dark and ill-drawn tapestries of the night.³⁸

In this case, her red hair is celebrated as glorious, yet it is also strange because it is more than hair. Her return at the end of the story confirms Syme's confirmation and celebration of the real; and her hair becomes 'a red thread' that guides Syme through the labyrinth of his adventures that are summed up by his experience in the forest. In this way, Rosamond, and her hair, are knowable, but both are more than themselves – Rosamond is a musical motive because she is a person that can be touched and expressed. This idea, as well as the motif of red hair, re-occur in all Chesterton's work; and may be theoretically understood by his ultimate Thomism. In his sketch of Thomas Aquinas, Chesterton accounts for the combination of his celebration of the real, as well as his rebuttal and inversion of realism:

If things deceive us, it is by being more real than they seem...If they seem to have a relative unreality (so to speak) it is because they are potential and not

³⁸ Ibid, 10.

actual; they are unfulfilled, like packets of seeds or boxes of fireworks. They have it in them to be more real than they are.³⁹

This is the meaning of Chesterton's exaltation of the everyday and the mundane – nothing is truly mundane. Everything is more than itself, and because of this luminosity, literature can explore the beginnings of that reality. This concept is visible again upon Syme's first meeting with the Council, where he is consumed by terror of the strange Sunday. Syme finds himself filled with a 'supernatural courage' as he hears a barrel-organ in the street below. The barrel-organ assumes the character of a bugle, insofar as it is filled with 'the vivacity, vulgarity, and the irrational valour of the poor.'⁴⁰ Once again, we have the 'low' (both the poor and the barrel-organ), imbued with what Homer previously reserved only to Odysseus and his class alone. As the autumn leaves became golden, and humanity wears the masks of God, so a barrel-organ becomes a bugle, the street-busker a herald of the oncoming universe.

Syme has a similar experience when he fights the Tsar's would-be assassin, a fellow Council-member who turns out to be, like Syme, an undercover policeman. As Syme begins the duels, he simultaneously imbibes the existence of the natural world around him: 'He felt a strange and vivid value in all the earth around him, in the grass under his feet; he felt the love of life in all living things.'⁴¹ These renderings contrast with the forest because in the forest the reality of objects is being reduced to a thin plane of sight only; in these examples, the content of the object is extended infinitely beyond their physical representation, whilst still including the physical. Such a physical representation is expressed as an incarnation of the object's immense potentiality – an incarnation which is not just a hazy cinematograph of the

³⁹ Chesterton, 'St Thomas Aquinas', 538.

⁴⁰ GK Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 73.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 136.

real as in Plato's cave, but rather an incarnation of the potential, as in Aristotle's concept of forms present in matter. The love of life is truly present in living things.

Chesterton therefore believes language to be a kind of sacrament. The graphics of language are able to explore reality as they are contained within physical pages. They are seeds of some greater actuality. This aesthetic of Chesterton finds its dialectical opposite in the description of the landscape of Syme's forest. „Was not everything, after all, like this bewildering woodland, this dance of dark and light?’⁴² Here the physical is reduced to mere consciousness. Chesterton explicitly contrasts this view of landscape as the story rushes to its new universality as Sunday, the chief anarchist, reveals himself to be ultimately benevolent. Professor Gogol, one of Syme's compatriots, describes the face of Sunday as a landscape – „Walking up a road at night, I have seen a lamp and a lighted window and a cloud make together a most complete and unmistakable face.’⁴³ But this reverse of the rarefaction of the forest is unstable for Gogol. He says to Bull, another of the detectives, shortly afterwards, „My poor dear Bull, I do not believe that you really have a face. I have not faith enough to believe in matter.’⁴⁴

Syme attempts to account for this space between the forest and this face of nature. „Shall I tell you the secret of the whole world? It is 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 –’⁴⁵ This seeing nothing but the back of things is, like red hair, a constant motif in Chesterton's work. In *The Napoleon of Notting*

⁴² Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 150.

⁴³ Ibid, 202.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 202.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 205.

Hill, this second sight of things as being back-to-front will function as the catalyst for re-invigorating medieval heraldry and chivalry, as the bureaucrat-king gives wings to his vision of the startling absurdity of all things. But in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, seeing only the back of things provides Syme with two contrary ways of dealing with reality. One can dismiss it as a dream that is constantly receding through the act of representation; or one can try „get round in front’ even as one grapples with the back of things. The force of effort is the key thing for Chesterton because the shared belief in „the face of nature’ allows literature to communicate some kind of truth about the universe. Because he believes in a benevolent God, this truth can only ever be a liberating force that sets humanity free.

Sunday finally emerges as the core of the book’s concerns. In a crude and sketchy metonym, Sunday’s identity as an anarchist is the back of things; and Sunday as the personification of the peace of God, the Sabbath, is the face. Sunday is thus the emblem of Nature itself. Syme notes to his fellow detectives that each of them „can find only one thing to compare him to – the universe itself’ whilst Gogol would explicitly refer to Sunday as Pan – which, as he himself points out, means everything.⁴⁶ Chesterton himself would assert that the book records an ascent out of despair and toward pantheism, although even that pantheism would remain doubtful by the end of the book, when the voice of Christ is heard, and Sunday asserts his identity not as God, but as his peace.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, this contested pantheism serves to imbue, as shown above, every object described with a sense of divinity. Everything is more than itself, because in a sense everything is divine. The susceptibility of all things to be doubted is because we have not seen nature’s face. The journey to this face gathers the energy of the epic, especially as barrel-organs become bugles and the dirty city gives way to the strange backdrop provided by

⁴⁶ Ibid, 203-204.

⁴⁷ GK Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 102-103.

the French countryside. This movement towards the divine out of the non-real is therefore not only suggested by the ontology of the forest and the universe external to that forest, but also by the language of the forest as it collaborates with the rest of the book.

Even as Syme enters the forest where the real is forsaken, Chesterton maintains the rhythm of this emerging epic tone, chiefly by means of alliteration. „Shock of shadow’; „wood of witchery’; ‘dance of dark and light’; ‘final scepticism which can find no floor to the universe,’ are all terms used to suggest a kind of dance present even within with the chaos of the forest.⁴⁸ This is of a kind with the reverse corollaries to the forest experience. The music of the barrel-organ is filled with „vivacity’, ‘valour’ and „vulgarity.’⁴⁹ While when he fights the Marquis, Chesterton’s words immediately take on this poetical stampede – there is „grass growing’, „vivid value’, „love of life’, and „fresh flowers.’⁵⁰ In the midst of the moonshine of the detective tale, a pastoral epic akin to Virgil’s re-calibration of Greek bucolic poetry is emerging. Simultaneous to this is the unfolding realisation of the divinity behind the back of nature.

All of this suggests Chesterton’s desire to narrow the problems of representation down to two alternatives, one of which he clearly favours and constantly suggests through his language choices. Both attempt to deal with the fixed notion that reality cannot merely be represented. Chesterton’s work presupposes that language is able to explore reality because of its vivid and vast potential – potential which crucially applies to language itself too. The second choice is that suggested by the words of Flaubert – one can forget the real and pursue the orgy of nothing found in the force of singular artistry. In *The Man Who Was Thursday*, this position is portrayed by the story’s original anarchist-poet, Lucian Gregory, the brother of

⁴⁸ GK Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 148-150.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 73.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 136.

Rosamond, who introduces Syme to the world of Sunday. „An anarchist is an artist,’ says Gregory. „The man who throws a bomb is an artist because he prefers one great moment to everything.’⁵¹

As Syme concludes his rampage through the French countryside, the book logically turns its sights upon the master of events, Sunday. In so doing, Lucian Gregory emerges as the figure of „Lucifer’, that is, the figure of Satan found at the prologue to Job’s suffering. By channelling the story of Job as a precursor to modernism’s confusion, Chesterton seeks to set his questions of modernist representation within the context of Job’s riddle.

The Modernist Job

In a sense, both Gabriel Syme and GK Chesterton need the likes of Lucian Gregory. They require the test of non-reality in order to affirm reality. This need is the catalyst for the whole atmosphere of modernism that pervades *The Man Who Was Thursday*, and it also represents the culmination of the questions asked by Chesterton by means of his deployment of the themes found in his forest. Modernism becomes the riddle of the universe; in the same way that suffering was for Job. The riddle is chiefly a result of the book’s structure – a structure which never quite comes to a genuine resolution.

The book contains a multi-layered narrative structure that is almost designed to baffle the reader. The conflict at the outset is created through the antipathy between Syme and Gregory. Gregory is the resident poet in the fictional London suburb, Saffron Park. Upon the strange evening that forms the backdrop of the opening sequence, there enters into the suburb a second poet to counter Gregory: that is, Gabriel Syme. They parry regarding their respective philosophies of poetry. Gregory’s aesthetics derive from a principle of chaos – art is explosive and anarchic in its very first principle. It is the disruption and demolition of both

⁵¹ Ibid, 5.

the societal and the natural order – „The poet delights in disorder only.’⁵² Syme is his antithesis. For Syme, the Underground Railway is the most poetical thing in the world.⁵³ „Chaos is dull’ and poetry is found in the magic of hitting the mark.’⁵⁴ In short, Syme’s poetry is founded upon the presumption of some kind of order wherein ‚a mark’ may be found; a universe where there is a way, or an order, which can be found or which can be missed. Hence his statement: ‚Revolt in the abstract is – revolting. It’s mere vomiting.’⁵⁵

This dialectic forms the first and primary layer of the narratorial conflict, which is escalated when Gregory reveals to Syme that he is not a mere entertainer, but is in fact an anarchist of a more serious sort. In this way, Syme is pulled into the lower levels of the Anarchist Council. It is here where Chesterton reveals a secondary layer which is to provide the impetus for the majority of the plot. Crucially, this new energy is an internal force found within Syme himself. This inward movement, reified by the forest, is continuously at war with the universal effect already discussed. The movement is derived from Syme’s identity as a philosopher-detective who has intentionally walked into the world of Gregory. Whether he knew of Gregory’s true identity is a problem somewhat clumsily neglected by the author; nevertheless we come to the presumption that Syme has always known more about Gregory’s world than he lets on. The conflict of this second layer derives from the fact that Chesterton reveals more to us about Syme than even Syme knows. This knowledge is not gleaned through a kind of objectification of Syme’s consciousness by means of a movement of representation inward into his psyche; rather it comes to us from a universal voice overarching the anarchy of Syme’s whole predicament. This voice is akin to the order of Syme’s

⁵² GK Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 5.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 5.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 7.

poetry, and its authority is assumed just as that order is assumed – as a necessity for sanity and coherence.

This voice tells us that Syme is not a complete character and that he is rather too similar to the fanaticism of Gregory for his own comfort. He too is a rebel – „His respectability was spontaneous and sudden, a rebellion against rebellion.’⁵⁶ His sense of order does not permeate his inner being; but is rather held in revolt. His movement in relation to the narrative voice of order is therefore one of development and learning – this second layer is a *bildungsroman*. And it is here where Sunday looms as the character most associated with the narrative voice of the book.

Sunday serves as the connector between these two layers, because he is revealed as the instigator of both. Sunday is not only the grand architect behind Gregory’s anarchism – he is also the grand architect of Syme’s mission. He is the mysterious unseen man who has recruited all the detectives. When the detectives are cornered at the French coast by the Council’s secretary and the entire region’s citizenry, the detectives do not realise that they are being persecuted as the anarchists they have disguised themselves to be, rather than the policemen they think they truly are. Yet in their predicament, one of them records „one silly little hope’ – „a man I never saw.’⁵⁷ After they realise that Sunday and his South African and American millionaires have not overthrown all order, and that they have been merely fighting themselves they are left with the awful question of what their lives have truly meant.

Syme’s intellectual duel with Gregory has been collapsed into a duel with himself and the whole universe. His sense of order has been questioned by the whole metaphysical problem of doubt. How does he know there is a sense of order from which he derives his

⁵⁶ Ibid, 41.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 175

poetics? If this order exists, why does chaos and anarchy seem to surround his life – why is there even a possibility of doubt? No more can Syme simply chase anarchists and challenge the Pessimists and Decadents. He must find something deeper than mere rebuttal. Chesterton has personified this missing ingredient – it is Sunday and the missing ingredient is the peace of God. Syme then joins his fellow detectives in a chase through the English city and into the countryside. This time they are not fleeing Sunday; they are trying to catch him. As they do so, they begin to reveal to each other that they have not simply hated Sunday as a nemesis. There has always been something in Sunday that inspired their sympathy. Sunday is a colossus. He is like an animal mass. Yet the detectives all begin to muse on his paradoxical levity and spirit of jolliness until finally Syme sums up the sentiment by stating that he was „only like a father playing hide-and-seek with his children.’⁵⁸

This aspect of Sunday’s character is the hidden face of nature of which Syme has already seen glimpses throughout his adventures. This face is the embodiment of Chesterton’s literary theory – that everything is itself because it is simultaneously more than just itself. The forest is the limits of philosophical and artistic anarchy, but everywhere else there seems to be some immanent personality that shines through landscapes like ‚the gleam of hope’ Chesterton says the book is meant to represent. It is in this face that Chesterton provides some kind of resolution of the layers of *The Man Who Was Thursday*. The detectives, once they catch up with Sunday, and are ushered into his royal seat, no longer merely have gaps in their knowledge that they want addressed but they also have grievances that they want to present to the man who has been behind not only their adventures, but also behind their suffering and despair. Once he has revealed himself as some kind of mysterious incarnation of God’s peace, the secretary immediately rebuffs him, exclaiming, ‚Oh, I can forgive God

⁵⁸ Ibid, 205.

His anger, though it destroyed nations; but I cannot forgive him His peace.’⁵⁹ Gogol puts his suit in simpler terms: ‚I wish I knew why I was hurt so much.’⁶⁰

With these words, Sunday collapses the layers into one. For at this moment, Sunday seems to allow for the return of Gregory so as to hear his complaint against him too. This time Gregory is explicitly the figure of Lucian – Lucifer, or Satan, the Hebraic accuser of Job. The world of Gregory has become Sunday’s world and Syme’s character is forced to develop. Gregory fits into Sunday’s world as Satan, and in his complaints, the connections between Job’s condition and the modernism of Syme and Chesterton will be laid bare.

The etymology of Lucifer is derived from Satan’s description by the Hebraic prophet, Isaiah, as a ‚morning star’, a ‚son of the dawn’, that is, one who bears light. Satan’s desire to ascend to the throne of God and become the source of his own glory leads to his fall from grace.⁶¹ Lucian Gregory vivifies this desire in his relation to government, law and anarchy. He wants to break the law in order to create his own independent sense of agency, in order to feel as though he has lived an individual life that has raged against the safety and conformity of the order, even at the cost of his own suffering and pain. As a result, he sums up his case against Sunday and the detectives in this fashion – ‚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 –’⁶²

It is in the satanic figure that Syme uncovers for himself the answer to his confusion and suffering. It is the mystery of particularity. ‚I see everything,’ he cries.⁶³ Everything is at

⁵⁹ Ibid, 218.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 219.

⁶¹ Isaiah 14:12-13, The Holy Bible, New International Version, International Bible Society, Third Edition, 2002.

⁶² GK Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 221.

⁶³ Ibid, 221.

war in the universe, fighting a seemingly pointless war in order that it may be itself and exist as itself. The susceptibility to confusion and suffering, as well as to the historicised and objectified condition of knowing that may be entitled modernism, is the necessary result of such an existence. It is this fact that allows him to rebut Gregory again, this time not as a mere dialectical opposite, but as one who has broken through to some new kind of depth. According to Syme, everything is alone and at war „[so] that each thing that obeys law may have the glory and isolation of the anarchist. So that each man fighting for order may be as brave and good a man as the dynamiter. So that the real lie of Satan may be flung back in the face of this blasphemer, so that by tears and torture we may earn the right to say to this man, “You lie!””⁶⁴

It is here that Chesterton reduces modernism to the necessary cause of Syme’s development, and in this fashion embraces modernism. Syme needs to pass through the state reified by the forest so that he may be able to pass through to a belief in order and goodness that is not merely reactionary but transcendent. Consequently, Chesterton introduces a third layer to his narrative that acts as a kind of synthesis of the prior narratorial arcs. It also induces a new kind of mystery and indeed confusion into the substance of the plot. He achieves this by reminding us that Syme has in fact been in a nightmare. Syme awakens walking the streets of Saffron Park again with Gregory. If the subjectified romantic interest of Dedalus seems to disappear from *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Rosamond Gregory emphatically abides in *The Man Who Was Thursday*. Syme returns to her and her red hair, and the book closes with Rosamond „cutting lilac before breakfast, with the great unconscious gravity of a girl.”⁶⁵ This is Syme’s final vision.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 222.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 223.

When Syme awakes, he has a new appreciation of everything that is around him. This appreciation has been burgeoning throughout the book, but at the book's ending, this love for things has enveloped not just the narrator, but has penetrated the consciousness of Syme too. He has found a metaphysical plane that allows him to hold to his philosophy not out of a negative defiance, but rather out of a positive embrace. Chesterton employs his universal effect to demonstrate this – „A breeze blew so clean and sweet that one could not think that it blew from the sky; it blew rather through some hole in the sky.”⁶⁶ Something has entered in to reality to secure it. (Chesterton hints here at the Incarnation, when another voice is heard, as he leaves the nightmare. The voice says, „Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?”)⁶⁷ This transcendental security gives Syme a sense of peace with Gregory, and a delight in Rosamond and her fantastical milieu. He has needed to go through doubt in order to find this peace. He has to be alone in a forest of nothingness before he can be at home in the universe. Nature has needed to become unintelligible before he can see that it is not just nature. It has a kind of face bursting through it. This surrealism acts as the guarantor for the real whilst, along with modernism, making folly the confidence of realism.

But what of the nightmare? How can something definitively unreal confirm for Syme the goodness of the real? Chesterton seems to attempt a circumvention of this question by suggesting the nightmare is a vision – a vision at the discretion of the voice taken from the Gospel. In other words, it is literature. The vision works upon Syme just as Chesterton works upon the reader. The story is not true but is an allegory of the universe. Because Chesterton is

⁶⁶ Ibid, 223.

⁶⁷ This „cup’ to which Jesus refers to in Matthew 20:22 is ultimately a reference to the crucifixion. Slavoj Žižek has pointed out that *The Man Who Was Thursday*, up to this moment, is basically a pre-Christian book in that it expresses the pagan idea of a god of both „peaceful harmony and destructive rage’ – „the claim that, in fighting Evil, the good God is fighting himself (an internal struggle), is still the (highest) pagan insight. It is only the third feature, the suffering God, whose sudden emergence resolves this tension of God's two faces, that brings us to Christianity proper: what paganism cannot imagine is such a suffering God’ –see Slavoj Žižek, „Hegel – Chesterton: German Idealism and Christianity’, *The Symptom – The Online Journal for lacan.com*, 2006, <http://www.lacan.com/zizhegche.htm> (16 June 2011).

encouraging us to hold a faith in the semi-transcendence of language to emerge from material conditions and yet speak and judge truth, he also encourages us to believe in literature's ability to participate in universal truth. But to teach Syme, he deploys an author of a different order to himself. In a vague fashion, heaven writes Syme's story. Such a notion is predicated once again on a belief that literature can be more than a cloud upon the mind, but can rather shed light upon the soul.

Chesterton, in a somewhat careless fashion, only leaves us guessing as to whether Syme is still a detective and whether Gregory was simply always merely a poet. The retention of both suggested facts seems to be the most logical. In any case, Chesterton is not quite sure enough – at this stage – about modernism or modernism's resolution to present to us the finer nuances of Syme's nightmare. He instead is simply hanging on to the twin sentiments of immanent divinity and the „whatness' of things as a rugged counter-force against the artistic energy of his day. Whilst it is important to note this deficiency of nuance and subtlety, the sense of celebration of the low and metaphysical transcendence that Chesterton is able to engender from a rough tale begun in a London suburb remains a powerful yet rough counter-voice to both Chesterton's and the current literary era. Despite inherent weaknesses, what Chesterton achieves is a coherently proposed overthrow of modern paralysis and despair – a window through the literary fashions of his day – by means of a dissident literary theory. This window is not only literary or philosophical – it would also be defiantly political. Such a set of politics may be explored in the even stranger novel, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*.

Chapter 3: Chesterton and Political Representation

The Idea of the State

Chesterton's literature presses the claim that reality can be represented, and that the modernist crisis of representation is in fact fallacious. That this notion of universal representation is applicable to political representation is expressed in Chesterton's other notable novel, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. Here, Chesterton suggests the political ramifications of his opposition to modernism. The novel records the insane local patriotism of a future England (the novel is set eighty years after its time of writing in 1904) in which a bureaucrat-king, the child-like Auberon Quin, absurdly re-organises London into its ancient villages and gives them each heraldic armies and borders. One man, Adam Wayne, takes the joke seriously and emerges as the Napoleon of Notting Hill. When the oligarchs of the despotic England plan a highway through Notting Hill, Wayne takes up arms, and becomes the harbinger of some other political dispensation that threatens the hegemony of the modern state, as well as of the mass cosmopolitan bureaucracy that has colonized the world. The object of the oligarchs' desire is Notting Hill's Pump Street, a seemingly insignificant road of which Wayne declares, „That which is large enough for the rich to covet, is large enough for the poor to defend.’¹

But Chesterton is suggesting here something more than a kind of buffoonery against the progressive and efficient forces of modernity. The main idea of the novel is that together Wayne and his impish King do not re-cast England into something artificial and merely fantastical against the grey backdrop of modernity; rather, they are revealing something natural and true about politics: the transcendent nature of human space, and humanity's

¹ GK Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (Chennai: Tutis, 2007), 109.

ability and fundamental right to organise and govern within that space. Wayne defends his militancy to the king with the apologetic:

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 nights 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?²

In this lofty prose, Wayne suggests that it is the life of a neighbourhood that lends to it a political reality. The life of a society ensures that space becomes sacramental – a source of grace and meaning to its inhabitants. It is this notion that Chesterton deploys against the mass culture of modern times, in which nothing but the material is considered real. The reality, and sacredness, of the town or the village is asserted against the expediency of a cosmopolitan civilization that takes into account only material economics and a hegemonic mass culture. In the vacuum of metaphysical reality, the largest power simply carries the day on its own, and becomes its own rationality, its own absolute. In Chesterton's proposed metaphysical field, a plurality of decentralised bodies of governance emerges to secure a positive liberty for citizens that has as its ultimate aim a kind of monarchical virtue which secures the grounds of liberty for the citizenry.

In other words, just as Chesterton contends that literature can participate in reality, and can allegorize „the way things really are,‘ so too can politics become an adequate representative of the real. Chesterton asserts that the state exists in accordance with natural law, within a shared sense of place. The state is not only a subjective agreement, but a real thing. For this reason, in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, Nicaragua's president (whose country

² Ibid, 121.

has been swallowed up by the new modern civilization) can say, „The Yankee and the German and the brute powers of modernity have trampled [Nicaragua] with the hoofs of oxen. But Nicaragua is not dead. Nicaragua is an idea.’³

Implicit within such a contention is the epistemological assertion that the mind deals in the currency of ideas, which are real and substantial things abstracted from material objects (in this case, groups of people and the space in which they live). Once again, Aristotle’s modification of Plato’s theory of forms comes to bear on the work of Chesterton. The stuff of the world is more than stuff. All things carry their own potential ideal within them. In this way, communal space is seen as the potentiality of the just state. It is not simply neutral space, standing empty, awaiting social contract. Fundamentally, therefore, Chesterton’s worldview is one wherein matter is constantly perceived to be overarched by metaphysical superstructures.

This is ultimately a profoundly optimistic contention – that the state can exist substantially and lies, in one sense, waiting to be discovered rather than built – and its innocence, as well as its specific content, must be critically examined after the trauma of World War II and its nationalist pathologies. Before Chesterton’s optimism of a political representation of the real is analysed, it is worthwhile placing such optimism within the context of what Pericles Lewis has described as modernism’s intervention in the liberal crisis of the early twentieth century.

Lewis has analysed the national project of the literary modernists in his work, *Modernism, Nationalism, and the Novel*. One of the chief anxieties of the modernist novel, argues Lewis, is the modern preclusion that one can never arrive at some agreed external

³ Ibid,30.

reality outside of subjective consciousness.⁴ After Descartes and Kant, the notion of an objective natural law had disappeared, leaving Europe with the possibility of embracing the Nietzschean response to the problem of subjectivism – „a turn to an organic conception of the nation as the source of all values.’⁵

Lewis neatly sums the turn towards organic nationalism by quoting Hannah Arendt: „the state was transformed “from an instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation.” Instead of representing justice in the abstract, the state was to represent the interests of the nation understood as a homogenous ethnic group.’⁶ According to Lewis, this transformation was due to the fact that abstract justice had lost any sense of objective reality. In the subsequent vacuum, the nation emerges as the locus of reality. For proponents of the liberal state, this induces a grave crisis. Lewis recognizes that when the ideal nature of justice is questioned (as it was by the Copernican revolution of Kant), any defence of the liberal state becomes highly complex. This is what he terms the crisis of liberal nationalism; and he argues that the modernist experiment can largely be understood as a response to this crisis. Lewis suggests that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries faced

the problem of whether the nation should be understood as a legal and political unit, defined by the voluntary membership in it of individual citizens, or as an ethnic and social unit, defined by the shared culture, history, and (perhaps) biological inheritance that was thrust upon individuals, not chosen by them.⁷

Lewis contends that some modernists, such as Gabriel D’Annunzio, embraced this emergent collectivisation of race as the organic state, while others (among whom James

⁴ Pericles Lewis, *Modernism, Nationalism, and the Novel* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Lewis, *Modernism*, 7.

⁷ Ibid, 6.

Joyce was pre-eminent) „treated the influence of “national character” on the individual as a fundamental existential fact and developed a heightened sense of irony that allowed them to investigate the shaping effects of nationality.’⁸ Lewis asserts that Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in his diary entry for April 26 (‘Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race’), is expressing a greater plan ‘to become a Christ-figure, redeeming his “Godforsaken” race by symbolically standing for the Irish nation as a whole.’⁹

But rather than such a desire becoming the instrument by which Joyce embraces national character, instead this personal enactment and redemption of an Irish ‘uncreated conscience’ becomes the means by which to re-order the perceiving subject’s relationship with national ties. The irony of the embrace is encapsulated by Dedalus’s subsequent move to Paris – a suggested nexus of secular cosmopolitanism. Lewis suggests that the embrace ultimately leads to some kind of affirmation of the sovereign nation-state – the liberal conception thereof – which becomes the social unit capable of granting individuals of common culture the ability to ‘shape their own destinies.’¹⁰

Racial identity is not, however, to be discarded, but radically altered so as to be redeemed into some kind of new modernist experience, which is conscious of the failures of nation, language and religion. In this way, a new agency is to be achieved, and the terror of the age of relativism is to be assuaged by this new consciousness of one’s national identity, which Joyce embeds into his novel by means of his transcription of his protagonist’s consciousness. This consciousness becomes a replacement for any kind of objective account

⁸ Ibid, 7.

⁹ Ibid, 1-2.

¹⁰ Ibid, 2-3.

of reality – „a sort of phenomenological representation of consciousness according to which individual experience can be transformed into an inter-subjective reality.’¹¹

In a certain sense, then, Lewis is suggesting that Joyce is redeeming not only national conscience, but also attempting to recover and redeem the nation as a broad social unit, out of the simplistic grasp of organic nationhood, by allowing a kind of shared yet ever shifting and negotiable sense of consciousness, located within the subject. This negotiation is to undergird the simplistic liberalism threatened by the reverberating effects of the Kantian revolution. Kant had confined reality to the subject, and as reality became inaccessible to the nation-state, the tide seemed to turn toward the organic nation. In this crisis of liberalism, the modernists accessed the spaces between the individual and the national conscience so as to espouse a new kind of experience emerging from the collective. In particular, Lewis puts forward Joyce as the agent of a redemptive intervention.

This intervention has as its goal the proposal of a new kind of reality which would emerge in the act of their writing. Lewis concludes that in the notion expressed in Proust’s famous words – „it seemed to me that they would not be “my” readers, but the readers of their own selves’ – the liberal nation finds its way out of the Kantian problem, whilst still necessarily avoiding any kind of absolute reality.¹² Instead, an „inter-subjective reality’ becomes fertile ground for further liberal experiments. In this way, race is decisively discarded as the new absolute, while the liberal state owes its very survival to the fact that it claims no absolute. Instead, the modernists propose a new way of being in the nation that has as its focal point the infinite task of differentiating the individual from the nation. The lauding of individual experience is, somewhat paradoxically, the answer to the problem of the lack of objective reality.

¹¹ Ibid, 214.

¹² Ibid, 216.

It is this near deification of the individual experience which forms the chief object of Chesterton's opposition to modernism, as seen in the preceding chapters of this dissertation. Chesterton asserts, throughout his corpus, that the individual exists, and comes to fruition, only by relating to reality and the natural law of reason. Part of this reality, as expressed in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, is the metaphysical field of city and state, which for Chesterton are not merely Platonic ideas, but incarnate and organic realities.¹³ In Lewis's scheme, this assertion places Chesterton squarely in the camp of the organic nationalists. Yet there are some qualifications that must be made.

The difference between Chesterton's thought and organic nationalism may best be summarised by stating that while Chesterton believed the state to be a real thing, an organic reality, he did not believe it to be an absolute in itself. Because the subject is open to the possibility of an objective metaphysics, there is no need for the state to become the totalitarian and absolute embodiment of the transcendent nation or race.¹⁴ Such an organic state was not needed as a substitute for knowledge of truth or goodness; instead it was to act as a vehicle for truth and goodness, a relative partner for the transcendent absolute, subservient to the natural law from which it sprung. Further, this same field of natural law also gave rise to a number of subsidiary bodies such as the town and the family (among others) which decentralised the nation's hegemony. For this reason, despite his belief in an organic state, it is still appropriate and possible to identify Chesterton as a liberal.

¹³ Denoted here again is Chesterton's Aristotelianism. Aristotle provided for three natural associations – the family, the village, and the polis, which is fulfilment of the first two. „Because it is the completion of associations existing by nature, every polis exists by nature, having itself the same quality as the earlier associations from which it grew.’ Aristotle, „Politics’ in *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle*, trans Ernest Barker, ed Reginald E. Allen (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 377-378.

¹⁴ Chesterton explicitly satirizes this ideology in his Father Brown story, „The Absence of Mr Glass’. In the story, the great criminologist, Dr Orion Hood, declares, „Now the root fact in all history is Race. Race produces religion; race produces legal and ethical wars.’ Needless to say, Dr Hood is proved a fool in the story, and Chesterton makes known his contempt for the eugenic and scientific racial theories of his time. GK Chesterton, „The Absence of Mr Glass’ in *The Wisdom of Father Brown* (London: Penguin, 1974), 13.

In this way, Chesterton attempts, like the modernists who appear in Lewis's analysis, to go beyond Lewis's suggested dialectic of liberalism and organicism. Yet Chesterton differs sharply from figures like Joyce and Proust (who both deployed a kind of inter-subjectivity between nation, individual and state) because of his approach to the crisis of representation. Chesterton firmly believed that the objective real could be attained. This difference suggests a new kind of liberal politics beyond the liberalism of Joyce and Proust; a liberalism which may best be called positive liberalism, because of its openness to objective reality and positive metaphysical doctrine. Because of this openness, Chesterton's intervention upon the liberal crisis is far more decisive than that of Joyce's or Proust's, who both retain the central tenet behind the liberal crisis – that objective reality is ultimately unknowable. This positive liberalism is made evident in an analysis of Chesterton's novel, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*.

Chesterton's Positive Liberalism - The Poetry of Localism

In *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, Chesterton begins his sketch of a future Britain by bringing the issue of the absolute into the foreground. The whole of Europe, in 1984, is being quietly oppressed, according to Chesterton, because nobody believes in anything anymore. There is no encounter with something beyond the relative present. Therefore, any kind of revolution has been impossible, and a quiet, bureaucratic despotism has created a monolithic global mass – „For it stands to common sense that you cannot upset all existing things, customs, and compromises, unless you believe in something outside them, something positive and divine.’¹⁵ Consequently, England is governed by a ruling bureaucracy, which, in turn, is governed by a despot chosen by lottery. Because of the entrenched political philosophy, there is no chance of the despot upsetting the status quo – until Auberon Quin assumes the throne.

¹⁵ Chesterton, *Napoleon*, 11.

Whilst issue could be taken with the details of his vision (namely, the return of a non-constitutional monarchy), much accuracy does have to be admitted. For instance, Europe (an entity increasingly similar to the ‚great cosmopolitan civilisation’¹⁶ of *Napoleon*) currently has a largely unknown President – who was named at a private dinner in Brussels in 2009. As Chesterton put in the opening pages of the book – ‚Democracy was dead; for no one minded the governing class governing.’¹⁷ The world of Notting Hill’s *Napoleon* does, in many respects, bear a strong similarity to the contemporary world of 2011, in which governments, along with massive multi-national corporations, form entrenched ruling classes that are too complex, large and distant for any kind of large-scale intervention by the people themselves.

Tellingly, this lack of liberty is not pinned by Chesterton upon a lack of individualism, nor does he propose the work of inter-subjective differentiation as a means to combat despotism. Rather, Chesterton suggests that political illiberalism comes as a result of a lack of any authority or organisation outside of the state. There is no organisation outside of the state because there is no metaphysical belief beyond the state. The future dispensation, bearing similarities to our present, therefore has no rivals to its claims of ultimate power and sole rationality because metaphysics has ceased to exist as a discourse. This lack of metaphysics, which, whilst being the source of liberalism’s crisis, is also paradoxically the foundation of modern liberalism, tends finally to an illiberal state. This seems to be Chesterton’s point – the novel is implicitly a criticism of modern liberalism, a dispensation Chesterton believed to be devoid of poetry and real liberty.

The failure of modern liberalism to deliver liberty has been explored by the theologian John Milbank. Milbank’s significance to this thesis is his academic project entitled

¹⁶ Ibid, 35.

¹⁷ Ibid, 12.

„Radical Orthodoxy.’¹⁸ Along with the already mentioned Phillip Blond, Milbank is deploying Chestertonian ideals and Catholic Christianity (albeit from an Anglo-Catholic perspective) in a critique of modern secular liberalism. Blond, in particular, is touting Chesterton’s distributism as a game-breaker in the current impasse in modern state capitalism.¹⁹ Milbank’s critique of secular liberalism provides a kind of theological and theoretical construct in which to analyse the politics of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. Milbank suggests that secularism’s antagonism to metaphysics has at its roots a certain kind of theology. This theology is the same theology Blond suggests is the root cause of Nietzsche’s, and modernism’s, disavowal of religion. Such a theology has at its heart the philosophy of Duns Scotus, the great rival to Aquinas in scholastic thought. Milbank writes,

[The] invention of an autonomous secular realm is perhaps mainly the paradoxical work of a certain kind of theology. This theology tends to lose sight of the fact that created being is only a gift; only exists as *sharing* in divine existence and as perpetually *borrowing* this existence. Instead, God is now idolatrously regarded as a kind of very big literal fact, who established other facts alongside himself and grants to these facts certain autonomies, certain areas of purely free decision – like a government decreeing that „nomally’ police cannot enter a private house or say what should go on there...The same norms of non-interference now pertain between individuals:

¹⁸ See John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, Graham Ward (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999).

¹⁹ See Michael Black, „The Sources and Uses of Distributism: A Roman Catholic’s View of Anglo-Catholic Genius’ *The Economy Project at Second Spring*, <http://www.secondspring.co.uk/economy/Black%20on%20Distributism.pdf> (17 June 2011).

This is of particular interest to the present moment because Blond, since his scholarship alongside Milbank, has become one of the policy architects at work behind David Cameron’s British government, bringing a Chestertonian critique of Right and Left politics to bear upon the market and social crises of the present day. See Phillip Blond’s „Rise of the Red Tories’, *Prospect Magazine*, <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2009/02/riseoftheredtories/>, 28 February 2009. Accessed 18 July 2011.

already Duns Scotus substituted for the „common good’ contractually-agreed upon conventions as sufficiently guaranteeing the civil peace.²⁰

The problem with this secularism, according to Milbank, is that in the vacuum created by the removal of the concepts of „common good’ and „virtue’ and „justice’, liberalism emerges from the same root of as absolutism, namely „the primacy of the will.’²¹ Milbank outlines the results of this:

Beneath all of these woes of liberalism lurks one fundamental point: it lacks any extra-human or any extra-natural norm, and this ensures that it revolves in an empty circle...The State legislates, the market exchanges on behalf of human nature which it represents, yet without the State or market this human nature is not really *entitled* to be represented. Therefore representing and represented compose an empty hall of mirrors: in the middle, the soul of humanity is no longer there where we suppose it to be...Under liberalism we no longer really meet each other; establish connections yes, truly make friends, almost never. There is no longer anyone to be friends with, as a hundred novelists have told us.²²

²⁰ John Milbank, „The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority’ in *New Blackfriars* 85, no 996, (2004) 221.

²¹ Ibid, 220.

²² Ibid, 222-223. Such a novelist is EM Forster, whose *Howards End* will be compared to *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* later in this chapter. Later in his essay, Milbank recapitulates Pericles Lewis’s dialectic of liberal versus organic (and totalitarian) nationalism in this metaphor of „an empty hall of mirrors’. According to Milbank, the years 1800 to 1865 saw efforts to „infuse psychic and bodily content into liberalism’s hall of mirrors’ – here we have Lewis’s organic nationalism. This effort, says Milbank, was „discredited by totalitarianism’. Milbank’s analysis moves beyond Lewis’s in history by claiming that „neo-capitalism’ currently „exults in the liberal hall of mirrors’, and this has been reflected by an accompanying religious fundamentalism that has its roots in theological voluntarism. At this juncture, Milbank seemingly returns once again to Duns Scotus. Fundamentalism invokes voluntarism insofar as both believe God’s rule not to be determined by a participation in his Being, but rather by arbitrary will. „Gift’ is replaced by „contract’ and in this way the market as governor is sustained. „Hence today the world is increasingly governed and fought over by a fearful combination of literal readers of the Hebrew scriptures together with out-and-out postmodern liberal scientific nihilists who shamelessly rejoice in the ceaseless destruction of every rooted and ancient tradition and

Chesterton attempts to sketch a similar critique of the liberalism of his day in a fictional form in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. Both Chesterton and Milbank are of the opinion that secularism, far from being the guarantor of liberalism, is in fact liberalism's greatest threat. This is because a purely secular liberalism operates in a kind of negative flux that invites authoritarianism and excludes any sense of a sacred humanism. Chesterton would always identify himself as a liberal, albeit one who felt a sense of betrayal by the parliamentary politics of his day – „As much as I ever did, I believe in Liberalism. But there was a rosy time of innocence when I believed in Liberals.’²³ But in his description of the modern world in the novel's introduction, Chesterton hints at the illiberal, long-term political results of the secular liberalism as criticised by Milbank.

The implicit politics of Chesterton's 1984 world is that as subjects have unhinged themselves from national ties (which, according to the character Barker, the spokesman of the new order, are mere superstitions), so has a singular power emerged to capture such subjects under a monolithic authority structure. In the terms of Lewis, Chesterton suggests that the liberal state has defiled its own liberalism via the dialectic of the blank and isolated liberal individual and that individual's need for control by a blank and all-powerful despotic state. Because of the lack of any encounter with any kind of absolute, objective reality, the citizenry cannot envision any other political dispensation because there is no transcendent humanity in which individuals can connect with one another. Nothing that hints at another order can be formed because there is no faith to form it. It does not matter which one of the citizenry assumes the chair – or throne – of the reigning despot. The state does not even require a large police force.

even the roots and long habits of *nature* herself.’ See Milbank, „The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority’, 229-233.

²³ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 38.

Therefore, in the subtext of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*'s milieu, Chesterton is providing us with a critique of the modernist experiment's attempts to attenuate the liberal state's failure through the individualisation of national consciousness. When Joyce flies by the nets of language, religion and nation, Lewis contends that he is making an intervention upon liberalism's slide into an organic totalitarianism. In Chesterton's novel, we find the reverse to be true; the removal of the bonds of language, religion and nation has led to the authoritarian state. Precisely because the citizenry has lost the connecting lines of language, religion and nation, is the implicit global order (hinted at by Del Fuego, the Nicaraguan president, in the term „The Yankee and the German and the brute powers of modernity',²⁴) able to create a cosmopolitan mass that governs by blank and impersonal despotism. The state has become its own absolute, and is therefore totalitarian. This is not the organic totalitarianism of the fascist nation, but the blank totalitarianism of present-day liberalism.

In such a world, the subjective consciousness of a character like Stephen Dedalus is powerless, even if given the powers of a king, to affect any kind of revolution, because such a revolution can only come about by some kind of encounter with an absolute. Without it, a mass of nameless power is formed in the vacuum that lies between consciousnesses. So although Chesterton, along with Joyce and the other modernists of Lewis's thesis, faces the same liberal crisis of the age, his response is far more dramatic and decisive than experimentation in attenuated individualism. Chesterton posits a real response to both the coupled threats of individualism and autocracy, via the recognition of some other kind of natural social order.

What Chesterton is proposing here is a revision of „the small circle' suggested by Georg Simmel in his critique of urban life – the circle „in which the inevitable knowledge of

²⁴ Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, 31.

individuality as inevitably produces a warmer tone of behaviour, a behaviour which is beyond a mere objective balancing of service and return.’²⁵ For Chesterton, however, the behaviour beyond ‘mere objective’ balance is in itself objective and is a function of the goodness of Being, which, Milbank asserts, can alone rescue modern politics by means of the transcendence provided by a return to ‘the common good.’ The goodness of Being secures both the objective reality of the ‘small circle’, as well as ‘the common good’ which it engenders. Chesterton primarily builds his case for such an order through the poetry of localism – an objectified ‘small circle.’ In a certain sense, Chesterton proposes a politics that is in itself a kind of literature – a literature that allegorizes prime reality in a kind of sacred artifice. In this way, Chesterton’s politics perfectly reflects his literature. To analyse the politics, it is only necessary to know the achievements and deficiencies, as well as the underlying theory, of the literature.

Hugh Kenner has noted the prime contradiction of Chesterton’s literature; that while Chesterton ‘is plainly not a great literary artist’ – for he ‘scarcely left a page that is not (as he would have cheerfully admitted) in some way botched or disfigured’ – his ‘especial gift was his metaphysical intuition of being.’²⁶ It is this discrepancy which lies at the heart of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. The book, to put it bluntly, seems silly. Its tone carries a sort of apocalyptic revelry as a result of a discord between absurd satire and serious political commentary. That the government requires no force to oppress its citizens becomes a strange counter to the bloodletting of the eventual resistance – which, like the original state of affairs, hardly seems real. That a chosen king, Auberon Quin, whilst ruling a bureaucratic super-state, divides London up into ancient boroughs, replete with inane heraldry, seems like a ridiculous

²⁵ Georg Simmel, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’ trans HH Gerthund and C Wright Mills, in *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities* ed Richard Sennett (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), 49.

²⁶ Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 1-2.

kind of satire of modern politics. The book is devoid of any haunting, dark, Orwellian humour. The whole plot carries a lightness which makes satire, or any of Kenner's „metaphysical intuition of being', seem impossible.

Further to this, (and more to Kenner's point) the story's narrative contains incongruent passages of time, as well as a relentless hunting of aphorisms and puns that distract both the author and the reader from the story. The prime example of this is the novel's prologue, in which Chesterton spends a multitude of pages detailing crude caricatures of all the free thought of his day so as to build up to one single point – that despite all the social prophecies, „[when] the curtain goes up on this story, eighty years after the present date, London is almost exactly like what it is now.'²⁷ In that example is a demonstration of yet another of the critical failings of Chesterton's literature, namely, his inability to create an artistic world – hence his referral, in the novel, to „this story.' As Kenner puts it, Chesterton „cannot practice art in its major sense, as creation, [but] he practices it constantly in its broader sense, as making.'²⁸ It is perhaps for this reason that Chesterton not only parodies a contemporary figure, Max Beerbohm, in his description of Quin, but also quotes him in the course of the narrative, regarding modern fashion.²⁹ He need not have done this, for it unnecessarily unravels the suspension of disbelief in the novel's fiction, but he does it unconsciously because Chesterton was not in the habit of creating singular works of art, but preferred rather to make stories that existed in conversation with the controversies of his time.

But both the playful tone of the novel and Chesterton's desire to make instead of create are more than just weaknesses. They suggest something deeper than mere errors. They are, in fact, at the very heart of the book's metaphysics. These weaknesses have a reason

²⁷ Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, 10.

²⁸ Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 2.

²⁹ Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, 17.

behind them which goes to the depths of everything Chesterton means in modern literature. Chesterton's playful tone and silly satire (akin to his love of journalism) suggest, at their bottom, not only his positive liberalism, but also his mystical love of reality. These two strands of thought may be found together in Chesterton's fixation with the poetry of commonplace things. The iconic example of such poetry in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* is Adam Wayne's speech to Notting Hill's grocer, in which Wayne, in his madness and even lust for the transcendent nature of his city, seeks to share his vision with the rest of Notting Hill:

"I know the temptations which a grocer has to a too cosmopolitan philosophy. I can imagine what it must be to sit all day as you do surrounded with wares from all the ends of the earth, from strange seas that we have never sailed and strange forests that we could not even picture. No Eastern king ever had such argosies or such cargoes coming from the sunrise and the sunset, and Solomon in all his glory was not enriched like one of you. India is at your elbow," he cried, lifting his voice and pointing his stick at a drawer of rice, the grocer making a movement of some alarm...

The grocer sat for some little while, with dim eyes and his mouth open, looking rather like a fish. Then he scratched the back of his head, and said nothing. Then he said –

"Anything out of the shop, sir?"³⁰

After Notting Hill revolts against England's oligarchs, and twenty years pass, Mead the grocer has been transformed by Wayne's poetic vision:

³⁰ Ibid, 145-147

He was dressed in a long and richly embroidered robe of blue, brown, and crimson, interwoven with an Eastern complexity of pattern, and covered with obscure symbols and pictures, representing his wares passing from hand to hand and from nation to nation. Round his neck was the chain with the Blue Argosy cut in turquoise, which he wore as Grand Master of the Grocers. The whole shop had the sombre and sumptuous look of its owner.³¹

Mead describes this transformation himself:

"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 wonderful ways that they are made...My mind was a blank on the thing. I was as mad as a hatter."³²

Kenner notes that such an example exemplifies Chesterton's own assertion: „I deny most energetically that anything is or can be uninteresting.’³³ As in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Chesterton is at pains to demonstrate that everything, and in particular the ordinary or small things, is more than it appears to be. Grocers are not simply blank agents of commerce, but rather their trade is indicative of the mystery of creation and human activity. This accords with Chesterton's belief as expressed in *St Thomas Aquinas*, that everything within the universe is a gift of goodness and joy that may not necessarily have been given, and should therefore be celebrated as participants in the mystery of Being. A grocer is cause for celebration in such a scheme because by definition his trade brings together the diverse mysteries of food and agriculture.

³¹ Ibid, 285.

³² Ibid, 288.

³³ Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 72-73.

The protagonist Adam Wayne attempts another such celebration, when, as a teenager he publishes a book of poetry entitled „Hymns on the Hill’ in which urban features of London are given the treatment usually bestowed on nature by the Romantics. This peculiarity of Wayne’s is explained by the narrator:

An accident in his seventh year prevented his being taken away to the seaside, and thus his whole life had been passed in his own Pump Street, and in its neighbourhood. And the consequence was, that he saw the street-lamps as things quite as eternal as the stars; the two fires were mingled. He saw the houses as things enduring, like the mountains, and so he wrote about them as one would write about mountains. Nature puts on a disguise when she speaks to every man; to this man she put on the disguise of Notting Hill.³⁴

But after Wayne fails as a poet, he finds a new way to express his poetry – the real life of politics:

But he was born under the lucky star of a single coincidence. He happened to be at the head of his dingy municipality at the time of the King's jest, at the time when all municipalities were suddenly commanded to break out into banners and flowers. Out of the long procession of the silent poets, who have been passing since the beginning of the world, this one man found himself in the midst of an heraldic vision, in which he could act and speak and live lyrically. While the author and the victims alike treated the whole matter as a silly public charade, this one man, by taking it seriously, sprang suddenly into a throne of artistic omnipotence. Armour, music, standards, watch-fires, the noise of drums, all the theatrical properties were thrown before him. This one

³⁴ Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, 134.

poor rhymster, 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.³⁵

The politics of Wayne is the extension of his poetry. And the supreme energy of his politics is a kind of joy in the little thing he has known his whole life – Notting Hill. For Chesterton, politics is a kind of democratic poetry („for which the Iliad is a cheap substitute’), in that in his ideal politics all people are able to participate in the expression of Being – the organisation of space and people according to natural law. Democracy is a deeper kind of poetry than even poetry because „[ordinary] things are more valuable than extraordinary things; nay, they are more extraordinary.”³⁶

It is here where the roots of Chesterton’s manufactured literature and silly satire may be found – his belief in the sacredness of all things. And it is his love for small things (as demonstrated by Wayne’s love for Notting Hill) that most clearly expresses such a belief. As discussed above, this sacredness is imbued in all things because of their participation in the existence of Being. In Thomist terms, Chesterton passes from the wonder of the thing, to the Being that connects all existing things and in which all things find their form or their place in natural law. Ultimately, this idea takes root in the Incarnation, in which God takes on flesh and the infinite descends to the particular. As Kenner notes, „The baby in the cave... is the type of that love of all small things which is so prominent a part of Chesterton’s philosophy: the love of small nations, of toy theatres, of pocket-knives and cottages and lumps of clay... The small things are intrinsically divine, as that baby was divine: because that baby

³⁵ Ibid, 136-137

³⁶ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 38-39.

was divine.³⁷ And this is Chesterton's source for the romance of Wayne's struggle against an entire cosmopolitan civilization.

The idea of the Incarnation also accounts for Chesterton's brand of satire, as well as the weaknesses of the book as an artistic work of literature. In fact, the Incarnation accounts for Chesterton's whole obsession with paradox; not only because the Incarnation is a paradox in itself, but for Chesterton it was the root of all existence, thereby affirming the paradoxical nature of the whole world. The Incarnation answers the central question any critic must ask of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*: why does Chesterton write such a ridiculous story to illustrate such a heartfelt point? The answer comes from the paradox of the Incarnation of God as Man. Chesterton paints a picture of a ridiculous England because he wants to remind his readers of the inherent dignity of the English and of humanity in general. As he writes in *All Things Considered*: „Why is it funny that a man should sit down suddenly in the street? There is only one possible or intelligent reason: that man is the image of God... Only a man can be absurd, for only man can be dignified.³⁸ Quin and Wayne, and even the oligarchs of the story, are ridiculous because Chesterton has associated the whole plot with a love for the smallest things. They are ridiculous and so, paradoxically, we are reminded of their inherent dignity.

The manufactured nature of the novel is equally derived from this same paradox of the God and humanity. „All my mental doors open outwards into a world I have not made,' wrote Chesterton.³⁹ Chesterton's prime concern, says Marshall McLuhan, was not ‚making a world', but ‚contemplating a world.'⁴⁰ This was due to the fact that Chesterton preferred to focus on the problems of his day rather than create lasting literary masterpieces. It may also

³⁷ Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 89-90.

³⁸ GK Chesterton, *All Things Considered*, (London: Methuen, 1923) 101.

³⁹ Quoted in Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 122.

⁴⁰ See McLuhan's Introduction to Kenner's *Paradox in Chesterton*, xxii.

be that he simply lacked the personality required to undergo the exacting and isolating work that literary art requires. As Kenner notes, this led his work to be devoid of „intense dramatic life’⁴¹ because none of his work existed outside of a direct conversation with the metaphysical battle he was waging with his journalism and criticism. He was perhaps over-compensating for the desires of artists like Flaubert, who said,

What strikes me as beautiful, what I should like to do, is a book about nothing, a book without external attachments, which would hold itself together by itself through the internal force of its style.⁴²

Chesterton, on the other hand, definitely wanted to write about something – his passion was the object, and its meaning in the scheme of Being – in the world of the Incarnate God. This passion meant that Chesterton would never put his journalistic work aside to focus on his creative writing. In Kenner’s terms, he was „a practical mystic’, and not an artist.⁴³ He was too busy with the particulars of his own age to write a masterpiece that could function in isolation from his literary mission. But it is this selfsame energy that allows him to envision a figure like Adam Wayne as a grotesque and ridiculous counter to a modern culture in flux and which pays no attention to the particular in its rush for the advancement of its civilization.

Chesterton ultimately derives the poetics of Wayne’s politics from the paradox of the local God of the stable in Bethlehem, and its exemplification of the marriage of the infinite with the particular. In this way, objective reality takes on an organic form within the shared space of dignified human beings. Notting Hill, as a geographical space, becomes a

⁴¹ Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 134.

⁴² Quoted in M Bradbury and J McFarlane, „The Name and Nature of Modernism’, 25.

⁴³ Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 141-142.

synecdoche for its entire history, culture and humanity. Having undergone this transformation, its occupants are energised to resist the sacrifice of Pump Street to the state's merely economic expedience. In the process, like Mead the grocer, they are transformed into a kind of political priesthood that mediates the sublime and poetic within the currency of everyday, but not ordinary, things. It is here that Chesterton's fiction provides the starkest contrast possible as compared to the modernist intervention described by Pericles Lewis.

Lewis has demonstrated that the modernists had attempted an intervention upon the crisis of liberalism that had emerged as a result of the lack of an agreed objective reality. No longer did the modern state seem to be a capable arbiter of abstract justice. Instead a new kind of reality came to be located merely in the biological success of a race or nation, of which the state was their vehicle. The modernists attempted to create an inter-subjective reality that could act as a kind of potential-but-never-actual source of objective reality, thus establishing a workable kind of relativism to sustain the state, without resorting to race as an absolute.

However, Chesterton's point in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* is that in order to sustain liberty, one requires a positive doctrine that will sustain points of authority outside of the state – namely, the towns. The negative grounds of modernism's mediated liberalism cannot hold. But if the smaller things are sacred, then they are more easily protected. For Chesterton, one must believe in authority if one is to believe in liberalism, because authority is required to define the entities whose freedom is sought. The alternative is simply to maintain a negative liberalism suspicious of all authority. This then creates a vacuum of power which is subsequently filled by the hegemonic state – in which democracy becomes something of a charade. Modernism, therefore, provides no real antidote to the liberal crisis, but instead entrenches the conditions whereby the citizenry are increasingly alienated from their own authority. In short, Chesterton is a liberal not because he is suspicious of authority, but rather

because he believes the universe to be in its essence a liberal place. In this way, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* acts as a marker for the politics of his literary project – politics which require a brief précis.

Chesterton was inspired by Catholic social teaching in his politics, particularly by the concept known as subsidiarity, later explicated by Pope Pius XI as the principle whereby „a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to co- ordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good.’⁴⁴ This respect for the rights and the reality of other bodies is based upon an implicit belief in an ideal human nature, as well as upon the Greek teleology embraced by Thomas Aquinas. For Chesterton, this would lead to the politics of distributism, by which he meant the proliferation of property ownership amongst the poor, so as to secure points of authority outside, or prior to, the state. As he writes in the book *What’s Wrong With The World*, „The idea of private property universal but private, the idea of families free but still families, of domesticity democratic but still domestic, of one man one house – this remains the real vision and magnet of mankind.’⁴⁵

Smaller political bodies, real but prior to the state, make up together an organic state based not upon race, but the ontological realities of human association. In this way, organic fascism (whereby the state, organised along ethnicity, is all) is excluded, whilst liberal authoritarianism (whereby a nation of individuals becomes subject to a bureaucratic state) is equally repudiated. Edmund Burke wrote in his *Reflections on the French Revolution* that „[to] love the little platoon we belong to in society is the first principle of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to

⁴⁴ The Catechism of the Catholic Church (Nairobi: Paulines, 2007), 412.

⁴⁵ GK Chesterton, *What’s Wrong With The World* (Radford, Virginia: Wilder, 2007) 42.

mankind.⁴⁶ Adam Wayne concurs. For it is by his love for his little town that he attempts (although ultimately fails) to create a nation of towns.

Such centres of allegiance and authority are thus grounded upon the belief that the human subject – in the activities becoming of humanity – imbues a kind of sacredness upon natural space. In this way, space itself, intimately connected to humanity in a shared materiality, is presented to us as something bound up in the sacredness of the Thomist Being of humanity (sacredness which had been finally expressed by the Incarnation). The fact that such space should not be defiled is the essence of a political code. This is the final meaning of Wayne's words –

Notting Hill 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.⁴⁷

At this juncture it is useful to return to Milbank, who has traced the very same idea in theological terms. He concludes „The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority’ with the following statement:

Today then, we need to surpass liberal democracy and search again for the common good in ceaseless circulation and creative development, a search that may involve laws, but more fundamentally involves charity beyond the law. Our poles of reference should not be the fantasised pure individual nor the pure sovereign state (natural or globalised) nor the pure free market. Instead we should both locate and form real groups pursuing real goods and exchanging real gifts amongst themselves and with each other according to measures judged to be intrinsically fair. We need to acknowledge the place

⁴⁶ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution* (London: JM Dent and Sons, 1955), 44.

⁴⁷ Chesterton, *Napoleon*, 119.

and point of families, schools, localities, towns, associations for genuine production and trade (not the mere pursuit of profit), and transnational bodies. However, if we conceive this within immanence or theological voluntarism...then these groups will themselves be reduced to quasi-individual mutually contracting entities and we will be back in the empty liberal echo-chamber.

Instead, all these groups can communicate and exchange with each other only if all are conceived as operating under grace. Only if we can come to regard corporate bodies as receiving the objective and subjective gifts of created realities that are already imbued with pre-human meaning. Only if we can conceive the work of these bodies as further realising the natural order in order to offer the gift of Creation back to a God who is no arbitrary sovereign but a giver who can order what he gives because it is intrinsically, true, good and beautiful.

Only a global liturgical polity can save us now from literal violence.⁴⁸

Via very different modes of writing, both Chesterton and Milbank are in effect replying to Lewis's analysis of modernism – individual attenuation is not the solution to any liberal crisis. Only a sacredness, in which power can be decentralised to real public bodies, can oppose the violence of the forces of modernity – be they Lewis's organic nation-states, or Chesterton's liberal bureaucracies. The hallmark of both Milbank and Chesterton's political vision is their refusal to deny an objective and sacred humanity as the benchmark of political

⁴⁸ John Milbank, „The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority’, 234-236.

interaction.⁴⁹ For them, polity is a kind of liturgy within a sacred space – and like any liturgy it is also heraldic and poetic. Their great fear is the blank, liberal individual, pliable to a liberal economics, the power of which is capable of overtaking any kind of parliamentary democracy. In this regard, a useful comparison may be made between *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and EM Forster's *Howards End*, a work that is a profound expression of secular liberalism, and which, as a work of literature concerned with liberty, echoes many of the issues brought up by Chesterton.

EM Forster and Negative Liberalism

The epigraph of *Howards End* is crucial to any understanding of its underlying philosophy – „Only connect...⁵⁰ represents the core of the book – Forster's attempt not only to connect the philosophical liberalism of the Schlegels with the materialism of the Wilcoxes (the unseen and the seen) but also to connect the classes of England in some kind of social intertwinement symbolized by the house, Howards End. As he builds this vision, Forster, like Chesterton, is at pains to demonstrate the poetry of everyday things. When Margaret Schlegel arrives at London's King's Cross station, the station suggests „infinity', and its termini

⁴⁹ For this concept of a sacred and shared humanity, see in particular Chesterton's *What's Wrong With The World*, 133. „Now (to reiterate my title) this is what is wrong. This is the huge modern heresy of altering the human soul to fit its conditions, instead of altering human conditions to fit the human soul.' (55) And, finally, he concludes the book by commenting on a proposed law to keep the hair of little girls of the lower classes short for hygiene purposes: „Now the whole parable and purpose of these last pages, and indeed of all these pages, is this: to assert that we must instantly begin all over again, and begin at the other end. I begin with a little girl's hair. That I know is a good thing at any rate. Whatever else is evil, the pride of a good mother in the beauty of her daughter is good. It is one of those adamant tendernesses which are the touchstones of every age and race. If other things are against it, other things must go down. If landlords and laws and sciences are against it, landlords and laws and sciences must go down. With the red hair of one she-urchin in the gutter I will set fire to all modern civilization. Because a girl should have long hair, she should have clean hair; because she should have clean hair, she should not have an unclean home: because she should not have an unclean home, she should have a free and leisured mother; because she should have a free mother, she should not have an usurious landlord; because there should not be an usurious landlord, there should be a redistribution of property; because there should be a redistribution of property, there shall be a revolution. That little urchin with the gold-red hair, whom I have just watched toddling past my house, she shall not be lopped and lamed and altered; her hair shall not be cut short like a convict's; no, all the kingdoms of the earth shall be hacked about and mutilated to suit her. She is the human and sacred image; all around her the social fabric shall sway and split and fall; the pillars of society shall be shaken, and the roofs of ages come rushing down, and not one hair of her head shall be harmed.'

⁵⁰ EM Forster, *Howards End: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed Paul B. Armstrong (New York: Norton, 1998), 3.

become „gates to the glorious and unknown.’⁵¹ This notion, of the poetry of everyday things, finds its zenith in the symbol of Howards End, which will be for the plot a final respite from modern flux. As the narrator notes, „Under cosmopolitanism, if it comes, we shall receive no help from the earth. Trees and meadows and mountains will only be a spectacle, and the binding force that they once exercised on character must be entrusted to Love alone.’⁵²

Howards End is an intervention upon this cosmopolitanism – a place of connection away from the city. Along these same lines, we read of the deceased father of the Schlegels and his past complaints of Germany’s obsession with size – „It is the vice of a vulgar mind to be thrilled by bigness.’⁵³ As demonstrated by the analysis of Chesterton’s novel, such notions are crucial to liberty and Forster feels this in the same way that Chesterton does, yet crucially Forster is unable to secure such notions. Contradictions tear them apart. This is already subtly evident in Forster’s introductory characterisation of the Schlegels.

Concomitant to his lauding of the countryside and of the home, just as Forster deploys Mr Schlegel against German imperialism, Forster also grants that Ernst Schlegel’s liberalism is in itself an Imperialism – „the Imperialism of the air’ that classes him as a compatriot of the likes of Kant and Hegel.⁵⁴ The otherwise silent patriarch of the Schlegels, while denouncing the material imperialism, here exemplified by Prussian aggression, later to be exemplified by Wilcox’s Imperial Rubber Company, is said to have possessed a kind of spiritual Imperialism. This is the precedent to the liberalism of the Schlegel daughters; a liberalism that suggests that the unseen, or intellectual life, is superior to the material, or the physical. As will be shown later, this kind of Platonism, despite its good intentions, can only

⁵¹ Ibid, 11.

⁵² Ibid, 186.

⁵³ Ibid, 23.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 22-23.

lead away from democracy and liberty. It is important to note that both the seen and the unseen life are here associated with the Imperial.

Forster begins to note the irony of the Schlegel belief in spiritual superiority as he demonstrates the kind of aristocratic divide this sort of belief tends to create between their own leisure class and the lower classes as represented by Leonard Bast. While the Schlegels stimulate their minds through an array of interesting people, ideas and the latest art, Forster introduces us to Bast at a Beethoven recital where he makes his fateful acquaintance with the Schlegels. We later see him in his dingy rented flat, reading Ruskin for „[he] felt that he was being done good to, and that if he kept on with Ruskin, and the Queen’s Hall Concerts, and some pictures by Watts, he would one day push his head out of the grey waters and see the universe.’⁵⁵ For Bast, if the universe is only glimpsed through spiritual effort divorced from daily life, he is at a near unsurpassable disadvantage to the Schlegels. Even if they assist him, as Helen Schlegel attempts to do, the class difference, despite the best efforts of Forster’s narrative, cannot resolve because Bast will always be catching up. Reality is not as accessible to him as it is to those classes closer to the ‚infinity’ of the unseen. Forster’s problem here is that a figure like Bast cannot find a dignity outside of the definition of the higher classes.

Unlike Chesterton’s sense of the sacred in the poor and lowest elements of society, Forster seems to suggest that it is only in ‚private life’, and seemingly the private life of the educated, that one can hold ‚a mirror to infinity.’⁵⁶ Infinity is emphatically not within the particular.⁵⁷ This sentiment is expressed best by Forster’s narrator when he describes Bast as ‚one of the thousands who have lost the life of the body and failed to reach the life of the

⁵⁵ Ibid, 38.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 61.

spirit.⁵⁸ Forster is conscious of this problem within Schlegel liberalism, and so he attempts to reconcile the body and the mind, the seen and the unseen. This leads him to construct the novel's grand narrative of connection which will come to be centred in the house, Howards End, which acts almost as a kind of secular sacrament in that it is to contain within itself the sublimity of both the life of the body and the mind.

In order to connect the two, Forster first separates them clearly, and acknowledges their apparent irreconcilability. After establishing this separation and irreconcilability by means of the character of Leonard Bast, he continues to assault the Schlegels' disconnection between the life of the world and their life of the spirit in the form of the businessman Henry Wilcox. Wilcox attacks the Schlegels for presuming that they should be the means of uplifting Leonard Bast – „What right have you to conclude it is an unsuccessful life, or, as you call it, “grey”?’⁵⁹ When Wilcox proposes to Margaret Schlegel this leads her to a final realisation of the central contradiction of her position, both philosophically and materially. She benefits from the industry and materialism of those like Wilcox, yet she deems such activities inferior to the life of her mind. What is more, she also suspects that her mind would not have had such a life, were she not of independent, material means.

Wilcox, meanwhile, is the subject of his own, unconscious hypocrisy, in that he chides the Schlegels for their maternal attitude towards the lower classes, yet because of his lack of concern for the lower classes, he is able to build a vast business empire on their backs, without any stricture of conscience. Margaret's decision to marry him is formulated in the desire to connect their two positions in a kind of coherent unity – she would rid him of his ascetic attitude toward passion, and from him she would gain a life of necessary prose to settle her hypocrisies. She cries, „Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be

⁵⁸ Ibid, 84.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 106.

exalted, and human love will be seen at its height.’⁶⁰ They cannot merely be balanced, they must be united.⁶¹

But there is a deeper contradiction in Forster’s attempt at unity, one which cripples his entire vision. Forster assumes the Schlegel position to be antithetical to the kind of material imperialism espoused by Wilcox; and he assumes the industry and organisation of Wilcox to be antithetical to the idealism of the Schlegels. He wants to connect them because he thinks them both to be wrong in one way, but both necessary in another. To his mind, both positions are wrong if left disconnected, but connected they may provide a way forward for English liberalism. What Forster fails to see is that both positions are wrong because they are in fact features of entirely the same position. As he hints in his early description of Ernst Schlegel, both positions are imperial.

This contention is supported by some of the strange parallels between the beliefs of Helen Schlegel and Henry Wilcox. Helen’s actions in the story are almost entirely motivated by her sense of outrage at Wilcox’s callous mistreatment of both Jacky and Leonard Bast. She lambasts his crude social Darwinism, saying, ‘I’ll show up the wretchedness that lies under this luxury, this talk of impersonal forces, this cant about God doing what we’re too slack to do ourselves.’⁶² Wilcox had defended his actions by stating that, ‘The poor are poor, and one’s sorry for them, but there it is. As civilization moves forward, the shoe is bound to pinch in places, and it’s absurd to pretend that anyone is responsible personally.’⁶³ Yet Helen mimics this belief in her own ideas, albeit they are applied to psychology as opposed to economics, for ‘[she] exaggerated the Punch and Judy aspect of life, and spoke of mankind as

⁶⁰ Ibid, 134.

⁶¹ Ibid, 140. ‘No; truth, being alive, was not halfway between anything.’

⁶² Ibid, 161.

⁶³ Ibid, 138.

puppets, whom an invisible showman twitches into love and war.⁶⁴ Although Margaret notes this contradiction, Forster does not explore it further.

Instead of identifying this underlying similarity between the Wilcox progressivism and the Schlegel altruism, Forster proposes a kind of allegorical resolution to the apparent problem of connecting these two sides of life. Finally, after Helen bears her and Leonard's son, Helen lives with Margaret and Henry at Howards End. The seen and the unseen have been connected by the sanctity of a place, whilst the mistreatment of Bast is resolved by virtue of his child's presence in this English „Holy of Holies'.⁶⁵ In the physical space that is Howards End, spirit comes to dwell with matter, and Henry's materialism finally connects with a spiritual sense of guilt for his own failings.

It is the deeper contradiction of Forster as a thinker which makes his work fruitful as a comparative line of thought to be placed against Chesterton's politics. This is because Forster, in both *Howards End* and his non-fiction, has perfectly expressed the negative liberalism against which Chesterton's *Napoleon* rages. In his essay „What I Believe', Forster declares that he does not believe in Belief.⁶⁶ In Chesterton's, and Milbank's, critique of modern liberalism, this negative liberalism creates the pliable and isolated individual, who waits to become prey for the imperial forces of modernity. In their vision, negative liberalism is the dialectical partner of oppression. Forster, in the same essay, goes on to describe himself as a naked individual, saying, „I am naked under my shirt, whatever its colour.'⁶⁷ He is here attempting the same political intervention Flaubert attempted upon a literary level (a novel about nothing) in that he aims to free people from all metaphysics so as to guarantee their

⁶⁴ Ibid, 139.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 64.

⁶⁶ EM Forster, „What I Believe' in *Howards End: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed Paul B. Armstrong (New York: Norton, 1998), 310.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 318.

liberty (as Flaubert was aiming for bare reality in his literature). Forster describes his creed as „negative’ because he believes such a creed to be „necessary for the salvation of this crowded and jostling world.’⁶⁸ As Chesterton predicted, however, in a metaphysical vacuum, it is the opposite that really happens.

Forster seems to realise this, yet he simply takes it on the chin. In „The Challenge of Our Time,’ he writes that what is needed, in the material world, is „planning and ration books and controls.’⁶⁹ He argues for government interference in family life and parenthood.⁷⁰ Yet at the same time, he asks for a doctrine of *laissez-faire* „in the world of the spirit’ to ensure that this planning does not lead to fascism.⁷¹ This government interference would apparently be a counter to the indefatigable and mystical (yet oppressive) progress proclaimed by the likes of Henry Wilcox. Yet it comes to the same thing – the decay of life as represented by *Howards End*, in favour of some kind of ruling oligarchy, who hopefully keep the poor and hungry in mind when they conduct their planning. Milbank’s argument is that there is absolutely no reason for such government planners to do so, for, like the mystical market forces of Wilcox, such planning is taking place in a vacuum of humanity (in a „hall of mirrors’), because humanity *per se* has been separated into a multitude of naked individuals. In fact, as Chesterton notes, „Hudge’ and „Gudge’ (his terms for Big Government/Socialism, the political manifestation of Schlegel idealism; and Big Business, the kind espoused by Wilcox) ultimately loom as the same thing – the enemy of Jones, the common man:

⁶⁸ EM Forster, „Tolerance’ in *Howards End: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed Paul B. Armstrong (New York: Norton, 1998), 321.

⁶⁹ EM Forster, „The Challenge of Our Time’ in *Howards End: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed Paul B. Armstrong (New York: Norton, 1998), 323.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Gudge, the plutocrat, wants an anarchic industrialism; Hudge, the idealist, provides him with lyric praises of anarchy...Gudge wants a tame and timid population who will never take arms against tyranny; Hudge proves from Tolstoi that nobody must take arms against anything. I do not know whether the partnership of Hudge and Gudge is conscious or unconscious. I only know that between them they still keep the common man homeless.⁷²

It is here where Forster's grand weakness is located. His genius knows that a place like Howards End, a family home, is sacred, and is the antidote to modern flux, yet because he is intent on a total *laissez-faire* of the spirit, such sacredness must bow to some kind of regime of centralised planning. His solution cannot exist within his politics. If Henry Wilcox, alongside his capitalist materialism, represents a kind of mercantile imperialism, insofar as his trade is connected with British colonialism, then it is clear that his marriage with the German idealism of Margaret Schlegel is a marriage of sameness. In Milbank's terms, both hold to a kind of theological „immanence“; a belief that the social system itself carries its own standards and solutions, and that there is no transcendent good for which to aim or by which to measure. For both of them, the good emerges from a kind of Hegelian synthesis – it is immanent within the contradictory forces of society. In such a polity, Howards End is expendable, and cosmopolitanism inevitable. There can therefore be no trysting place for the classes. As a secular sacrament, Howards End is an illusion. Forster seems to suggest this despair himself, in the novel's recurring motif of love as a jewel buried under the ocean.⁷³ In the midst of the hopelessness of politics, love allows one to transcend the hopelessness of society and form something imperishable that survives the death of personality. Against the secular liberalism of Forster, Chesterton posits a liturgy of local patriotism that suggests the

⁷² Chesterton, *What's Wrong With The World*, 130.

⁷³ Forster, *Howards End*, 127.

everlasting nature of personality itself. Such a liturgy must further be examined in the interplay between the two chief characters that together formulate this vision, Adam Wayne and Auberon Quin.

Democracy and the Ideal Character

In defiance of the flux of cosmopolitanism, Chesterton pairs together two unlikely allies: the satirist Auberon Quin, and the fanatic Adam Wayne. Together they help to create the sanctity of the free city – a sanctity equally symbolised by Forster’s *Howards End*. As a natural artist, in the atmosphere of the nonsensical artistry of the king, Adam Wayne finds the reality of localism. Here, in the bosom of local ownership and freedom, Wayne emerges as a kind of defender of all things small, because it is only within the king’s scheme that somebody like Wayne can defy the confiscation of a small neighbourhood (like that of Pump Street) by the ruling oligarchy. Consequently, a civil war is launched in England, which sees Notting Hill, with its army of grocers and toy-shop owners, and its cavalry of hansom cabs, defeat their rulers.

But as a result, Wayne changes the political landscape of the entire nation. In a collision with his localism, his enemies, who originally hold nothing but contempt for the king’s ridiculous charter, become infected with his romance of the village. Their own colours given to them by Quin begin to mean something more than the king’s absurdity. Consequently, Wayne’s dominant Notting Hill, ignorant of Wayne’s romantic vision, attempts to stamp down the growing signs of patriotism in the other cities, by which a new war is eventually caused. At this juncture, Wayne returns from retirement to rebuke his followers:

Notting Hill is a nation. Why should it condescend to be a mere empire? Do you not see that it is the glory of our achievement that we have infected the other cities with the idealism of Notting Hill?⁷⁴

But his supporters do not listen to his pleas of subsidiarity – his patriotism that glorifies in the smallness of its object. Wayne then predicts that Notting Hill will lose its impending battle; but he will die in the fight. Subsequently, the king enlists in his army. Notting Hill is defeated, but Wayne is not killed. Instead, Quin and Wayne find themselves in an intriguing epilogue, whose backdrop has been made obscure by Chesterton. We are not told how the political situation resolves. Instead, Chesterton's denouement seeks to resolve the subtler conflict of the novel – not that between Wayne and England, but that between Wayne and Quin.

Quin gave Wayne a vision for a poetic life, while Wayne has given Quin a reason to doubt his absurdity. When Wayne presents himself as the son of „The Charter of the Cities’, Quin is thrilled that he has another absurdist to share in his fun. He is shocked when Wayne is in earnest; and his extreme doubt in the importance of anything is shaken to the core:

[Suddenly], he knew not how, [he] found his mind was a total blank. After all, why was it absurd? He felt as if the floor of his mind had given way. He felt as all men feel when their first principles are hit hard with a question. Barker always felt so when the King said, “Why trouble about politics?”⁷⁵

The King suddenly finds himself with an objection to his rootless harlequining. Something suddenly seems to matter. But this complement of parallel characters is given a twist in the epilogue, when Quin admits finally to Wayne that his whole reign has been

⁷⁴ Chesterton, *Napoleon*, 300-302.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 119.

nothing but a joke, and that the basis for the glory of Notting Hill has been nothing but nonsense. (It is an error on the part of Chesterton that Wayne has not already drawn this conclusion himself.) Finally, Chesterton suggests that these two characters have been two halves of one complete and sane person. One has been the satirist, and the other the fanatic. Wayne says that their separate identities are only needed in times of crisis, and together they have achieved something great – they „have lifted the modern cities into that poetry which every one who knows mankind knows to be immeasurably more common than commonplace.’⁷⁶ But nevertheless they have been mad, and have borne a burden as a result. Quin has been a humorist without „the joy of gravity,’ whilst Wayne has had to „grope without humour.’⁷⁷ In the sane man, the humorist and the fanatic are connected. It is interesting that, just as in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Chesterton over-arches his narrative with the subtle development of the psyche of his protagonist. In both cases, the development is the same, and it seems to reflect an anxiety of Chesterton’s – namely, that his faith runs the risk of leading him into a position defined not by joy, but by disagreement and battle. Gabriel Syme has to learn that rebelling against rebellion is no substitute for a positive orthodoxy, while Wayne has to learn that faith requires humour, if it is to avoid a fanaticism that finds no pleasure in common life.

Quin’s brand of humour, in particular, and at its best, emphasises the astounding nature of reality – things are remarkable and always to a certain extent are shrouded in some kind of incomprehensibility. That is why he takes pleasure in the company of the eccentric Del Fuego, and enjoys mocking the steady and unexamined political expediency of Barker. It is such a humour that Wayne requires in himself if he is to find any meaning beyond Notting Hill – a city that ultimately both falls, and fails, in its moral purpose. Quin’s humour steps in

⁷⁶ Ibid, 332.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 330.

at this point to suggest that there is some kind of detachment between things and any kind of absolute. This detachment allows Wayne to walk freely into a new unknown world. It allows Wayne sanity in a world in which he is defeated.

This detachment in turn assures his character of the positive liberalism of Chesterton, because it emphasises the artifice of the earthly world and the politics of humanity. Wayne knows that such artifice means something, that such artifice has a metaphysical reality, but he still needs to learn that it is not the sum total of reality. In this way, the humour of detachment ensures the necessary relativism of democracy – because the state is not the measure of reality, the state need not be safeguarded by a tyranny of state religion. Humour reminds Wayne of the artificial nature of his politics; that politics is a mediation of absolutes and not the absolutes themselves. If the state falls, there is another life to live.

This is not the relativism of modernism, although there is some connection between the two. Rather, the relativism suggested by the detachment of things as their own things is a necessary corollary to such things being participants in an absolute. This is the paradox that unity requires diversity and vice versa. The relativism of a positive liberalism requires the other life of a more primal reality, if it is to avoid decaying into the illiberal cosmopolitanism of Chesterton's future London. In dealing with Wayne's character last, in the elevated and apocalyptic space created by his final defeat in battle, Chesterton is asserting that the measure of character is the final end of democracy. The vision of ideal character and virtue is democracy's indispensable guiding star, the sacred humanity which must govern politics. By being transcendent of the state, its monarch, the concept of a sacred humanity ensures that the state can never subjugate the individual irrationally. This is the very grounds for debate within a democracy, for without this positive doctrine, no honest political ordering is possible. Without it, Barker's politics („the interests of the public') emerge in bad faith as a

pathology of relativism, and the politics of ‚money and sophistry’⁷⁸ become an unconscious absolute within a totalitarian relativism that destroys democracy.

Quin’s humour of incomprehensibility is therefore a necessary partner to the absolute vision of Wayne. Together, they admit the possibility of meaningful political co-existence between real, independent things in a pursuit of the good. Quin laughs at Notting Hill because it is a ridiculous and detached thing, while Wayne envisions Notting Hill as a participant in a universal scheme of sacred space. And each character sustains the other. For if relativism is to remain a fruitful concept, it must be tied to a mediation of the absolute. Without this mediation, relativism becomes a homogeneity which becomes the pliable matter exploited by the mass state. But if there is only a unifying absolute that is the source of this Being, and no things which exist in their own right, then the absolute becomes its own homogeneity, a meaningless unity of an anonymous mass.

This is the meaning of Chesterton’s transcendence of the modernist dialectic. He admits the possibility of detached realities, because such realities beg the question of a greater unifying reality. As this dynamic partnership is true in politics, so it is true in the human subject, and in Wayne. Chesterton uses the human relationships to express this – ‚The mother laughs continually at the child, the lover laughs continually the lover, the wife at the husband, the friend at the friend.’⁷⁹ In each case, laughter is the effect of a realisation of the person’s unique and solitary existence. Yet that laughter is impossible if not surrounded by transcendent metaphysical realities. Singular people are participating in the realities of love and its manifestations in the forms of childhood, sexuality, marriage and friendship. Without those realities, realities originated from a transcendent love, there could not be the free

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Chesterton, *Napoleon*, 332.

movement of laughter, because the relationships would be merely capricious and have no anchor in loyalties or duty.

It is poignant to remember that this is exactly Stephen Dedalus's position at the conclusion of *A Portrait of the Young Artist as a Young Man*. He no longer knows what it means to love his mother, because he given up hope in there being any mediation of any kind of absolute within the relative world. For Joyce resolves the crisis of the liberal nation in a completely different way to Chesterton – via an individualist attenuation of inter-subjectivity. Chesterton's resolution, however, is pursued via a faith in the liberal nature of the universe itself.

Chesterton's Wayne, as a result of this faith, faces the existential crisis of Notting Hill in a manner almost of release. Its death almost frees him from a temptation to be only a warrior, and not a lover. The collapse of his city, both morally and militarily, compels a climax in his character that allows him, aided by Quin, to seek solace in the other life of extra-democracy that is beyond the artifice of his politics. In this way, despite its failure, Wayne's democracy realises its promise as the mediator of a good outside of itself. Their continued alliance into „the unknown world'⁸⁰ suggests that this has been the political goal all along – the development of character. Political collapse is therefore not a final end. Like Nicaragua, Notting Hill cannot really die, because it is an idea transcendent of material conditions. When Notting Hill falls, Wayne's solace is not in Forster's despairing metaphor of the survival of the jewel of love, but in the other life in which Wayne and Quin can continue their moral journey.

This other life is the unassailable space that resources and secures a positive theory of democracy. It achieves this by means of its provision of the positive theoretical content of

⁸⁰ Ibid, 333.

sacred humanity. This divine space, as suggested in previous chapters of this dissertation, is equally the guarantor of the possibility of the representation of reality in that it allows for the priestly transcendence of a humanity able to participate in a divine reason. Chesterton would argue that such a space is defined by the term „orthodoxy’, which is the eponymous subject of his book of natural theology, the book which comes closest to encapsulating the totality of his opposition to modernism. An analysis of that book forms the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

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Chapter 4: The Paradox of Orthodoxy

Chesterton and Job

Throughout Chesterton's corpus, there is reference to the biblical story of Job. Job's dilemma, of whether to curse God for his inexplicable sufferings, or to hold faith in his goodness, carries a resonance with Chesterton because in a certain way it reflects the dilemma of modernity. For Job, his sufferings begged the question of whether goodness really did rule the universe. For Chesterton, the confusion of modernity posed the question of whether there was in fact any objective coherence outside of modern flux – as a corollary, this in turn posed the relevant question of whether objective reality could be represented.

In 1908, Chesterton wrote both *The Man Who Was Thursday* and *Orthodoxy*. It appears that by this time of his life he had arrived at a settled resolution to this dilemma. He had chosen the path of Job – the path of faith. Such a choice meant Chesterton, like Job, would have to wrestle with a paradox for the remainder of his life. This is the paradox of the existence of suffering within a world created by an omnipotent and benevolent God. The paradox extends into the conceptual world of literary theory albeit in different terms. It is the paradox of the existence of confusion within a world apparently created by divine reason. Most thinkers of Chesterton's age had refused the paradox and instead insisted that there was in fact no such thing as God or divine reason, that coherence would have to be garnered via some kind of mythic subjectivity. Chesterton's rejection of such a refusal is at the core of his opposition to modernism. It is also the reason he was so interested in the Book of Job.

Chesterton's abiding interest in Job is made most evident by the essay he would write to be included as an introduction to a 1916 edition of the Book of Job. His cursory thoughts revealed in this essay provide evidence of the ultimate energy lying behind his opposition to modernism – his belief in the ultimate goodness of Being. These thoughts together expose the

kernel of theory at the heart of his *Orthodoxy*. As a result, it is useful to begin an examination of *Orthodoxy* with an examination of what may be termed Chesterton's foundational bias.

This bias is at the centre of his opposition to modernism. Chesterton's primary interest in Job was its concern with knowing the reason behind confusion and despair. For Chesterton, this concern made the ancient and enigmatic story of Job unique amongst all the literature of the ancient world; and even unique amongst the Old Testament. Chesterton wrote in his introduction,

Everywhere else, then, the Old Testament positively rejoices in the obliteration of man in comparison with the divine purpose. The book of Job stands definitely alone because the book of Job definitely asks, "But what is the purpose of God? Is it worth the sacrifice even of our miserable humanity? Of course, it is easy enough to wipe out our own paltry wills for the sake of a will that is grander and kinder. But is it grander and kinder? Let God use His tools; let God break His tools. But what is He doing, and what are they being broken for?" It is because of this question that we have to attack as a philosophical riddle the riddle of the book of Job.¹

For Chesterton, this uniqueness of the book is particularly pertinent to his age because in it Job is asking what is not only the ultimate question of the modernist but is also the ultimate question for all people. This is the question of what is, as opposed to what seems; the question of whether one may truly go beyond representation into a knowledge of reality. As Chesterton puts it, „The first of the intellectual beauties of the book of Job is that it is all concerned with this desire to know the actuality; the desire to know what is, and not merely

¹ GK Chesterton, Introduction to *The Book of Job* (London: Palmer and Hayward, 1916), xv-xvi.

what seems.² Job asks if there is anything beyond the seemingly random pain of life, and at the same time he rejects the comfort of his friends that pain is merely part of the self-contained cycle of punishment found in most religion. The story itself, therefore, for Chesterton, is a kind of parable of the whole mystery of existence, with Job and his comforters representing the two possible philosophies of the ancient world.

Chesterton gives these two camps the qualified labels of optimist versus pessimists. Strangely, Chesterton regards Job as the optimist of the story and his comforters as the pessimists. Job, despite cursing the day upon which he was born, and pleading rather for non-existence as opposed to his unspeakable suffering, is an optimist because, in Chesterton's words, he wants the universe to justify itself.³ He wants goodness and coherence. „He shakes the pillars of the world and strikes insanely at the heavens; he lashes the stars, but it is not to silence them; it is to make them speak.⁴ In this regard, he is unwilling to accept the counsel of his friends who, despite their attempts to cheer Job, are considered by Chesterton to be ultimate pessimists:

² Ibid, xvii.

³ Chesterton regarded Charles Dickens in the same way, insofar as Dickens suggested a kind of joy and merriness overarching the troubles of life. When Chesterton uses the term „optimism' he uses it as a critique of the optimism of his time which suggested that the world was not only essentially good, but good in actuality too. This optimism suggested that sin and evil was an illusion. Dickens was a superior kind of optimist who believed in the existence of evil within the greater structure of a good universe - „The optimist is a better reformer than the pessimist; and the man who believes life to be excellent is the man who alters it most. It seems a paradox, yet the reason of it is very plain. The pessimist can be enraged at evil. But only the optimist can be surprised at it. From the reformer is required a simplicity of surprise. He must have the faculty of a violent and virgin astonishment. It is not enough that he should think injustice distressing; he must think injustice absurd, an anomaly in existence, a matter less for tears than for shattering laughter. On the other hand, the pessimists at the end of the century could hardly curse even the blackest thing, for they could hardly see it against its black and eternal background. Nothing was bad because everything was bad...But we have a long way to travel before we get back to what Dickens meant: and the passage is along a rambling English road, a twisting road such as Mr. Pickwick travelled. But this at least is part of what he meant; that comradeship and serious joy are not interludes in our travel; but that rather our travels are interludes in comradeship and joy, which through God shall endure for ever. The inn does not point to the road; the road points to the inn. And all roads point at last to an ultimate inn, where we shall meet Dickens and all his characters: and when we drink again it shall be from the great flagons in the tavern at the end of the world.' GK Chesterton, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, (London: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1913) 6 and 115.

⁴ GK Chesterton, „Introduction to the Book of Job', xviii.

All that they really believe is not that God is good but that God is so strong that it is much more judicious to call Him good...They will keep on saying that everything in the universe fits into everything else; as if there were anything comforting about a number of nasty things all fitting into each other.⁵

What Chesterton had perceived in Job's story is its central paradox. Job questions God's goodness to the point of blasphemy; his friends defend God's justice in the face of Job's questions; yet it is Job who is finally vindicated and his friends who are censured by God at the story's conclusion. Yahweh declares himself to be a God of paradox. This is not to say that Job's argument against God is not rebuked too; but the central point is that Job as a character (as an optimist, in Chesterton's formulation) is divinely validated, while the role of his comforters is divinely invalidated. His suffering is never explained, but the logical explanation given by the pessimists is definitely discredited. Instead, when God appears in a storm at the end of the epic, he rather suggests that beyond both Job's questions and the pessimists' logic is a mystery and a goodness that dare not be uttered. Job has come closest to this mystery in his refusal to accept the religion of his friends.

God resolves the web of conflict between himself, Job, and the pessimists, not by suggesting that the world is explicable after all, but rather by suggesting that it is even more inexplicable than Job dared imagine. The pessimists are censured because they dared assume that the world was explicable (as though God were an imperial force simply to be placated)⁶, while Job is credited for insisting upon its inexplicability. Yet at the same time, Job's doubts about goodness and justice are answered when God, „willing to regard [Job's dispute] as if it

⁵ Ibid, xviii-xix.

⁶ This is a mirror of the theological problem posited by Duns Scotus as noted by Phillip Blond above – „[the] qualitative analogical perception of God's difference from us has been supplanted by a quantitative understanding of His differentiation from us.' Phillip Blond, Introduction to *Post-Secular Philosophy*, 8.

were a fair intellectual duel'⁷ counters Job not by explaining any kind of hidden wisdom, but by suggesting that „that it is a much stranger world than Job ever thought it was.’⁸

God says, in effect, that if there is one fine thing about the world, as far as men are concerned, it is that it cannot be explained. He insists on the inexplicableness of everything. “Hath the rain a father? . . . Out of whose womb came the ice?” (38:28f). He goes farther, and insists on the positive and palpable unreason of things; “Hast thou sent the rain upon the desert where no man is, and upon the wilderness wherein there is no man?” (38:26). God will make man see things, if it is only against the black background of nonentity. God will make Job see a startling universe if He can only do it by making Job see an idiotic universe. To startle man, God becomes for an instant a blasphemer; one might almost say that God becomes for an instant an atheist. He unrolls before Job a long panorama of created things, the horse, the eagle, the raven, the wild ass, the peacock, the ostrich, the crocodile. He so describes each of them that it sounds like a monster walking in the sun. The whole is a sort of psalm or rhapsody of the sense of wonder. The maker of all things is astonished at the things he has Himself made.⁹

Strangely, this comforts Job. For, although „[he] has been told nothing...he feels the terrible and tingling atmosphere of something which is too good to be told. The refusal of God to explain His design is itself a burning hint of His design. The riddles of God are more

⁷ GK Chesterton, „Introduction to the Book of Job’, xix-xx.

⁸ Ibid, xxiii.

⁹ Ibid, xxii-xxiii.

satisfying than the solutions of man.’¹⁰ The insinuation of a greater goodness, suggests Chesterton, is let drop at various moments.

For instance, there is that famous passage where Jehovah, with devastating sarcasm, asks Job where he was when the foundations of the world were laid, and then (as if merely fixing a date) mentions the time when the sons of God shouted for joy (38:4-7). One cannot help feeling, even upon this meagre information, that they must have had something to shout about. Or again, when God is speaking of snow and hail in the mere catalogue of the physical cosmos, he speaks of them as a treasury that He has laid up against the day of battle – a hint of some huge Armageddon in which evil shall be at last overthrown.¹¹

For Chesterton, and for Job, goodness is finally retained in the midst of inexplicable suffering and evil because goodness is a militant kind of thing. It exists in the conflict of free will and liberty, in the particularity of things that may or may not choose goodness.¹² This is Gabriel Syme’s epiphany in *The Man Who Was Thursday* when he rebuts Lucian Gregory, a figure of the Satan found in Job’s story. Gregory has cursed Sunday’s Council, ‘the sons of God’, because they are ‘safe’, because they dare not seize an independent agency and embrace the agony of the rebel. Syme, fresh from the experience of being ‘alone’ as an insurgent agent of the law in Sunday’s council, rebuts Gregory, saying, ‘It is not true that we have never been broken. We have been broken upon the wheel. It is not true that we have

¹⁰ Ibid, xxii.

¹¹ Ibid, xxiv.

¹² This assertion is a variation on the Augustinian theme: ‘Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil.’ Cited in Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Question 2, Article 3, in Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa*, 69.

never descended from these thrones. We have descended into hell.’¹³ This sentiment is at the bottom of the grand epiphany:

„I see everything,’ he cried, „everything that there is. Why does each thing on the earth war against each other thing? Why does each small thing in the world have to fight against the world itself? Why does a fly have to fight the whole universe? Why does a dandelion have to fight the whole universe? For the same reason that I had to be alone in the dreadful Council of the Days. So that each thing that obeys law may have the glory and isolation of the anarchist. So that each man fighting for order may be as brave and good a man as the dynamiter. So that the real lie of Satan may be flung back in the face of this blasphemer, so that by tears and torture we may earn the right to say to this man, “You lie!” No agonies can be too great to buy the right to say to this accuser, “We also have suffered.”¹⁴

Chesterton concludes the problem of Job by suggesting that suffering is necessary in order to allow particular things the loneliness and glory of choosing order for themselves. For Chesterton, this kind of glorious suffering is anchored in the paradox of the Incarnation – even God suffers so as to achieve the glory of the particular. This is the paradox which ultimately answers for him the problem of modernism as well as the problem of Job – and which leads him to Christian orthodoxy. Chesterton suggests that in Job we find an ancient figure of the suffering Christ:

I need not suggest what high and strange history awaited this paradox of the best man in the worst fortune. I need not say that in the freest and most

¹³ Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 222.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 221-222.

philosophical sense there is one Old Testament figure who is truly a type; or say what is prefigured in the wounds of Job.¹⁵

Chesterton makes this same link in *The Man Who Was Thursday*. When Syme asks Sunday if he has suffered as Syme has, he wakes up from his nightmare, and hears a distant voice asking, „Can ye drink the cup that I drink of?‘¹⁶ This paradox of the Incarnation, and its completion in the Crucifixion, is the chief resource by which Chesterton not only answers the problem of suffering, as in Job’s case, but also by which he attempts a resolution of modernism’s crisis of representation – as suggested by Syme’s adventures in the world of anarchism.

For just as suffering is necessary in a scheme in which particulars must actively choose goodness, so incoherence is equally necessary in a scheme in which particulars have an ontological reality independent of the Being of God. Paradoxically, disunity, or rather particularity, is necessary in order to establish any kind of unity. A particular agent can only be united to the good if it is at first separate from the good. Otherwise, there would only be the good, and that goodness would be diminished by virtue of the fact that it has not been achieved or earned. In the same way, incoherence, the impossibility of representation, must be a live option for there to be any kind of meaningful coherence, because coherence requires that particular things cohere – things which may opt out of coherence. This problem of coherence is therefore the necessary and subsequent corollary to the fabric of cosmos which places goodness as a function of free will. Particularity ensures the greater good of a militant goodness, and at the same time creates the paradox of incoherence within a greater system of divine coherence.

¹⁵ Chesterton, „Introduction to the Book of Job’, xxvi.

¹⁶ Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 222.

Chesterton identifies the root of these necessities in the Trinity of God. He writes in *Orthodoxy*:

When the world shook and the sun was wiped out of heaven, it was not at the crucifixion, but at the cry from the cross: the cry which confessed that God was forsaken of God. And now let the revolutionists choose a creed from all the creeds and a god from all the gods of the world...They will not find another god who has himself been in revolt. Nay (the matter grows too difficult for human speech), but let the atheists choose a god. They will find only one divinity who ever uttered their isolation; only one religion in which God seemed for an instant to be an atheist.¹⁷

In the Trinity of God there is a kind of particularity in the separate persons of the Father and the Son which is made most evident by the Crucifixion. At the Crucifixion, this particularity reaches the zenith of its own paradox – for an instant it appears incoherent. This divine particularity, and its culmination in suffering, is the prime reality in which Job participates both as a figure of Christ and as a poetical-historical personage. His eventual vindication, because of his pursuit of a God who is not merely very powerful, but is at the heart of all Being and its goodness, prefigures the Resurrection, and it also prefigures Chesterton's attempt to resolve modernism.

In Chesterton's literary resolution, literature is able to express confusion and incoherence because it must begin any expression of an objective reality from the perspective of particularity before it can gain any kind of unity with this reality. Precisely because it is meant to express reality and coherence, can the representation of reality tend towards crisis. Because God has created separate things, things that possess a degree of autonomy and

¹⁷ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 131.

independence, these things must work to participate in the prime reality that is God. The crisis of representation rests finally on the paradox of the Trinity. But to remain in the crisis, as though it were the end of literature to express subjectivity, is, in Chesterton's view, folly, because God is not only Three but is also One – and people and created things are not only independent but are also participants in Being. Crucifixion – the pain of incoherence and disconnection – must be connected to Resurrection if it is to have any kind of meaning.

This does, however, force an inevitable confrontation with yet another paradox, the paradox at the heart of Chesterton's apparent resolution – namely, the paradox of the Trinity. For Chesterton, this paradox was true because it was metaphysically true, but the obvious rejoinder to the paradox as it is propounded theoretically is the rejoinder one can attach to any paradox – that is, the impossibility of contradiction. How is it possible for something that does not resolve to be at the heart of all coherence? Hugh Kenner's observation of Chesterton's use of paradox suggests an answer to such a challenge. Kenner writes:

Paradoxical stuff, then, is for Chesterton the raw material of thought; and the paradoxes arises either out of our own confusion, which thinking can more and more nearly resolve, or from the nature of Being which is unresolvable. When you have dissipated all the mists of the mind, there remains the fundamental paradox that cannot be resolved and can only be contemplated. Contemplation in this sense Chesterton called „love', and the key to his claim to be called a contemplative is contained in the statement that „we admire things with reasons, but love them without reasons.'¹⁸

Kenner has here obliquely suggested the bias at the heart of Chesterton's literary project. Paradox remains Chesterton's „raw material' because of the primacy he gives to love.

¹⁸ Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 23.

He does not need, or want, to resolve the paradox of the Trinity, because he is content to contemplate it, as a lover contemplates a beloved. And such an attitude mirrors the very workings within the Trinity – the interplay between Lover, Beloved, and Love – Father, Son, and Spirit. The paradox of the Trinity does not only invite Chesterton's contemplative love, but, according to his Christian faith, is also the source of such love. Not only is the Trinity the source of the mysteries of the Incarnation, the plenitude of Being, and the possibilities of both suffering and incoherence, but it also provides the rationale for the Christian emphasis on love. „God is love' is a rational statement because of the paradox of there being a kind of community within the most complete unity. Its irresolvable nature, its eternal paradox, is the wellspring of Chesterton's foundational love, because the existence of such a community at the heart of unity means that love and contemplation are possible at the deepest part of reality.

And so when Chesterton, like Job, begins with a kind of optimism that has a basic love for existence at its root, and arrives at the foundational paradox of the Trinity, he is satisfied by that paradox because it guarantees the legitimacy of love and contemplation that initiated his optimism in the first place. Like Job, Chesterton wants the universe to justify itself. There is an innate desire for happiness before that process of justification even begins – a love for the cosmos and a belief in its ultimate goodness.¹⁹ The process of justification is

¹⁹ The rationalisation of such a faith in the goodness of the universe is outlined by Aquinas. „But there cannot be a supreme evil; because...although evil always lessens good, yet it never wholly consumes it; and thus, while good ever remains, nothing can be wholly and perfectly bad. Therefore, the Philosopher (Ethic. iv. 5) says that if the wholly evil could be, it would destroy itself; because all good being destroyed (which it need be for something to be wholly evil), evil itself would be taken away, since its subject is good.' Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa*, 217 (Part I, Question 49, Article 3 of the *Summa Theologica*).

Such a statement is predicated upon Aquinas's belief in the convertibility of the terms goodness and being – 'Goodness and being are really the same, and differ only in idea; which is clear from the following argument. The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable. Hence the Philosopher says (Ethic. 1): Goodness is what all desire. Now it is clear that a thing is desirable only in so far as it is perfect; for all things desire their own perfection. But everything is perfect so far as it is actual. Therefore it is clear that a thing is perfect so far as it exists; for it is existence that makes all things actual...Hence it is clear that goodness and

only able to be completed because it is begun in that fashion. Love is *a priori* to the logic of that justification. As a result, Chesterton comes to the Incarnation, and by implication, to the Trinity, and is satisfied by paradox because it is the fulfilment of that original love that begun the search for coherence and goodness. Love comes to be the reason behind the paradoxes. As Chesterton notes, „Romance is the deepest thing. It is deeper even than reality.’²⁰ It is because of this foundation of love, and its consequent joy, that Chesterton is able to assert that God’s riddles are more satisfying than the solutions of man. Without those riddles – one of which is the necessity of particularity within unity – love is lost. Without this initial cosmic loyalty, Chesterton’s thought is irrational. It is from this bias, the bias of a faith in the goodness of things – and the subsequent desirability and love engendered by that goodness – that Chesterton constructs his *Orthodoxy*. If we disagree with his initial bias, then we will surely discount his final argument. But if we grant him the validity of that bias, then his final thought becomes a compelling and rational counter to the philosophy of scepticism inherent within modernism. This conflict is best illuminated via an analysis both of Chesterton’s *Orthodoxy* as well as the thought which it opposed.

Orthodoxy and ‘The Novel of Disillusionment’

Orthodoxy was written as a companion piece to Chesterton’s *Heretics* of 1905.

Chesterton wrote in its introduction, „Many critics complained of the book called *Heretics* because it merely criticised current philosophies without offering any alternative

being are the same really.’ Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa*, 91 (Part I, Question 5, Article 1 of the *Summa Theologica*).

²⁰ The passage from which this quotation is taken demonstrates Chesterton’s foundational bias as it was developed in *Heretics*. „Romance is the deepest thing in life; romance is deeper even than reality. For even if reality could be proved to be misleading, it still could not be proved to be unimportant or unimpressive. Even if the facts are false, they are still very strange. And this strangeness of life, this unexpected and even perverse element of things as they fall out, remains incurably interesting. The circumstances we can regulate may become tame or pessimistic; but the "circumstances over which we have no control" remain god-like to those who, like Mr. Micawber, can call on them and renew their strength.’ GK Chesterton, *Heretics* (Maryland: LLC, 2009), 98.

philosophy.’²¹ In *Heretics*, Chesterton had criticised the thought of literary luminaries such as Wells, Shaw, Kipling, and Swinburne; in *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton aimed to show the measure of such criticism. This measure runs contrary to the pattern of high modernist thought, as vivified by Pericles Lewis.

Lewis has figured in this dissertation as a key theorist regarding the politics of modernists such as Joyce. Lewis has argued that Joyce was attempting to recalibrate the relationship between the human subject and the liberal state via the redemption of the nation through a kind of inter-subjective differentiation of the individual. Beneath such a politics, according to Lewis, is a philosophy of literature that made Joyce unique and boldly innovative in the novelistic tradition of Western Europe. *Orthodoxy* exists in stark contrast to such innovation, both upon a literary level and the politics consequent to that literature. Lewis believed that Joyce’s primal innovation lay in his reworking of ‘the novel of disillusionment’. Georg Lukács has noted the roots of this disillusionment in the nineteenth century novel – ‘the necessarily inadequate relation between soul and reality...the inadequacy that is due to the soul’s being wider and larger than the destinies which life has to offer it.’²²

In comparing Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* with Balzac’s *Lost Illusions*, Lewis infers the logical consequences of this inadequacy –

For Balzac, the encounter with the disagreeable realities of life begins when the young provincial leaves for Paris and ends in defeat and return to provinces; for Joyce, the encounter starts soon after birth, and the projected

²¹ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, iv.

²² Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans Anna Boston (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 112.

trip to Paris is only the millionth manifestation of a process which will continue unto death.²³

Joyce develops the trope of disillusionment by seating it in the very perception of his protagonist. Stephen Dedalus's disillusionment is not simply a reaction to the reality of his society; instead it is a kind of metaphysical stance of disappointment towards his entire perception of life. For this reason, Lewis writes that, for Joyce, disillusionment passes „from a single, momentous event in the life of the protagonist into an indefinite process coextensive with life itself.²⁴ By furthering the field of his disillusionment, Joyce is hoping to create the means by which Dedalus/Joyce may alter his reality, or re-write it, by becoming a kind of redemption for his nation. Joyce's chief technique in doing so is his collapsing of the novel's objective knowledge into the perception of his protagonist. As Lewis points out, this allows for „Stephen's longed-for synthesis with the conscience of his race.²⁵ Whilst Balzac had criticised social conventions in the disillusionment of his protagonist, Joyce is able to suggest a re-creation of an entire nation through an extended, metaphysical disillusionment. Joyce's attack on convention seems to pierce deeper than society and into the very fabric of reality. This what Bradbury and McFarlane have described as modernism's attempt at a „deeper penetration of life.²⁶ Such a penetration – a penetration into the realms of „uncreated conscience²⁷ – allows the artist to become a kind of god, as Lewis infers:

In Balzac, there exists an „objective' external reality, albeit one ruled by social conventions. Through his encounters with these conventions, the hero learns to

²³ Lewis, *Modernism, Nationalism, and the Novel*, 15

²⁴ *Ibid*, 30.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 13.

²⁶ M Bradbury and J McFarlane, „The Name and Nature of Modernism', 25.

²⁷ Lewis, *Modernism, Nationalism, and the Novel*, 1-2.

interpret „reality’ correctly (that is, in the same way as everybody else). For Joyce, the shaping effects of conscience itself are so important that the hero, by virtue of his perceptions, effectively transforms the outside world.²⁸

Chesterton’s philosophy, meanwhile, is in conflict with the disillusionment evoked by both Balzac and Joyce. His *Orthodoxy* indicates a love for reality as something inestimably larger than the soul. Disillusionment becomes discovery. Whilst Chesterton shared in common with Joyce a desire to rework the liberal state (as expressed by the violence of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*), he did not attempt to do so by means of a challenge to reality. Rather, he appealed to reality as both the reason and resource behind political revolution. It is his desire to get behind the social conventions criticised by Balzac and find their antecedent reality which had been forgotten that sets him apart from modernists and anti-modernists alike. Unlike Joyce, Chesterton did not want to undo the artifice of convention, and unhinge the powers of the artist, but rather he sought to demonstrate why such conventions – religion, family, nation, and marriage – were not conventional at all, but rather incarnations of Being. It was because their reality had been forgotten that they had become oppressive and decrepit. Upon this point, Chesterton agreed with the popular thinkers of his time. But against the disillusionment of modernism, Chesterton proposed a literature rather of re-discovery – the re-discovery of the lost knowledge of the goodness of reality. The term he used to describe such knowledge was „orthodoxy’.

Such a re-discovery is only possible for Chesterton because of his foundational bias – his pre-rational love for existence. He fleshes out this bias in *Orthodoxy*’s pivotal chapter, „The Ethics of Elfland’. In this chapter, Chesterton argues that the purpose of all fairy tales has been to remind us of the fact that reality is itself a fairy tale, filled with wonder and

²⁸ Ibid, 42.

magic. For Chesterton, this wonder has moral implications. As God does in Job's story, Chesterton suggests that the inexplicability of the world should induce in us a kind of joy and gratitude. He writes,

When we are asked why eggs turn to birds or fruits fall in autumn, we must answer exactly as the fairy godmother would answer if Cinderella asked her why mice turned to horses or her clothes fell from her at twelve o'clock. We must answer that it is *magic*.²⁹

Chesterton is here demonstrating that there is an impenetrable inexplicability to the universe to which an appropriate response is wonder. Even when science describes the workings of the natural world as law – such as gravity – it is assuming 'an inner synthesis which we do not possess' of incomprehensible events, such as the cutting of a stalk, and the falling of an apple. A law of gravity is only formed by the two events happening together – not by the same synthesis that allows us to see 'two and one trees make three.'³⁰ Fairy tales challenge the hubristic assumptions of modernity, because they tell us 'apples are golden only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green. They make rivers run with wine only to make us remember, for one wild moment, that they run with water.'³¹ Fairy tales thus serve us by reminding us of the inexplicability of the universe – the sheer wonder of its existence. This is the core of Chesterton's aesthetics of re-discovery; a belief in the shocking and magical nature of Being. For Chesterton, because it is a posture of a desire for happiness which has allowed him such a shock, the wonder of Being leads onward to an appreciation and a gratitude for all existence. This admiration is so powerful, it is able to overcome the existence of danger and suffering:

²⁹ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 44.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 43-45.

³¹ *Ibid*, 46.

And the strongest emotion was that life was as precious as it was puzzling. It was an ecstasy because it was an adventure; it was an adventure because it was an opportunity. The goodness of the fairy tale was not affected by the fact that there might be more dragons than princesses; it was good to be in a fairy tale. The test of all happiness is gratitude; and I felt grateful, though I hardly knew to whom.³²

This gratitude, thankfulness for the bare fact and opportunity of existence, should, according to Chesterton, lead us to a kind of loyalty toward the magic of our existence in the same way that Cinderella has to be loyal to the inexplicable conditions of the magic of her fairy godmother. The magic may be questioned, but then it can no longer be appreciated or enjoyed. Cinderella's command to be home by midnight, as a condition to her attendance of the ball, is akin, according to Chesterton, to the mystical command of monogamy – „Keeping to one woman is a small price for so much as seeing one woman.’³³ Traditional morality, for Chesterton, is extensive with the magic of existence, and not some kind of artifice placed against existence. Instead it is based upon an outward movement of gratitude that leads outside the universe to the One behind the universe. This affirmation is based upon his conclusions regarding both the goodness, and the source, of existence. Gratitude is therefore the foundation of all ethics, and the means by which to re-discover the universality within Christian virtue. This re-discovery is poignantly opposed to aesthetics of disillusionment which would throw off all metaphysical ‚artifice’ in a celebration of the naked artist. Instead, re-discovery celebrates the whole of the cosmos, and the morality which forms its liturgy.

³² Ibid, 46-47.

³³ Ibid, 49.

Chesterton would express this notion in his 1912 novel, *Manalive*, in which his protagonist, Innocent Smith, is considered a criminal by his fellow boarders at Beacon Lodge owing to his insane love for his home, his wife, and life itself.³⁴ The boarders mistake his entrance into his own house via a chimney for an act of burglary; his travels around the world to re-discover the startling nature of his home for family desertion; and his repeated elopements with his wife for polygamy. The secret behind Smith's strange behaviour is his desire to re-discover the life behind what is normally viewed as ordinary, or as blandly moral to the point of being mundane. Smith's adventures are designed to wake him up from the „weak spirits'³⁵ of humanity that would see the stuff of ordinary life as merely commonplace, and to view them afresh as gifts. On his travels, while in Russia, he muses why an absolute freedom from convention – such as that discovered by Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* – is in fact „wicked and dangerous.'³⁶ It is „wicked and dangerous' because it negates the fundamental necessity of human beings „to be found.'³⁷

Eventually, the capers of Smith, and the exuberant and joyful manner in which he undertakes them, shake his fellow lodger, the hard-bitten Irish journalist, Michael Moon, to the extent that he believes that in Smith he may have found a way out of „the trap of old age and doubt' – namely, the bold adventure of being good.³⁸ Moon suggests that it is perhaps innocence that sets humanity free, that makes humanity happy, for perhaps the source of much of modern malaise is an unwillingness to enter into the goodness of existence by means of the conventions of morality. Smith himself declares that when „the clouds turned pink',

³⁴ GK Chesterton, *Manalive* (New York: Penguin, 1947).

³⁵ Ibid, 115.

³⁶ Ibid, 157.

³⁷ Ibid, 157

³⁸ Ibid, 187.

and he knew for sure that „the world, when all is said and done, is a wonderful and beautiful place’, he also knew for the first time that „murder is really wrong.’³⁹ In this way, the foundation for Smith’s innocence is his sense of wonder and gratitude for existence itself; his belief that life in its essence is always good. Through such a discovery, he comes to a wild kind of morality that is not merely conventional but liturgical in the sense that it connotes a communion between humanity and existence that allows for a transfiguration of reality. It is within such a space that Chesterton envisions a literature that constantly discovers and incarnates reality’s sublimity. Such a philosophy of literature exists in stark opposition to the trope of disillusionment identified by Lewis.

As opposed to the disillusionment that is „coextensive with life’, Chesterton’s motif of re-discovery pre-supposes the chief function of the artist not as seer of hidden knowledge, capable of shaping reality, but rather as one who expresses the reality of the Being of existence, alongside an audience with equal access to such reality. Audience and artist become fellow participants in a sublimity that is constantly being re-discovered. This vision is the consequent to Chesterton’s core belief that the universe appears to us primarily as the work of a magician, whose magic awaits constant investigation and appreciation. Such a re-discovery allows one to participate in the magic. In this way, the universe is a kind of pedagogy that begs a response from human beings. Like its politics, the ethics of existence are not irrational conventions, structured according to the tastes of power, but rather like liturgy, they are conventional in appearance but in actuality participative in a transfigurative reality suggested by the inexplicable „recurrences of the universe’ which rise „to the maddening rhythm of an incantation.’⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid, 113-115.

⁴⁰ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 51.

The crucial point for Chesterton is that the magic of the universe suggests a will transcendent of the closed system proposed by the materialists of his day. The existence of the magical universe, as a sign of God's love within the field of particularity and as a harbinger of the Incarnation, constantly suggests something beyond itself. Its inexplicability presupposes a supernatural or transcendent order and law. According to *Orthodoxy*, the repetition of gravity, reproduction, or any of the natural processes of the universe has been misunderstood as evidence of the universe being ‚a piece of clockwork’; when in fact the repetition is evidence of an untiring and boundless joy that does not enact mere repetition but rather ‚theatrical encore.’⁴¹ In support of such a proposition, Chesterton cites the example of children:

Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, ‚Do it again’; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, ‚Do it again’ to the sun; and every evening, ‚Do it again’ to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.⁴²

The magic of the universe leads Chesterton to the possibility of a magician, namely God. The will of God as the source of the magic opens up for Chesterton a kind of liberty – a

⁴¹ Ibid, 52.

⁴² Ibid, 52.

window of outside air that guarantees the possibility of miracles, free will, morality, and the representation of reality. All of those are predicated on a kind of transcendence for humanity in that they provide the possibility of not only obeying law, or knowing truth, but also of disobeying law and misrepresenting truth. Humanity has a kind of innate freedom given by God that means the universe is not clockwork, but more like a story, a story involving decisions and consequences. Chesterton suggests that such a universe is a more liberal place than the ‚modern universe,‘ in which ‚[one] went into larger and larger windowless rooms, rooms big with Babylonian perspective; but one never found the smallest window or a whisper of outer air.‘⁴³ In such a universe, humanity is a kind of priesthood – mediating between the natural world and a magician God.⁴⁴ In being given access to the nature of the universe, its ultimate form, humanity possesses both free will and the ability to represent reality through communication and art.

It is here where Chesterton theoretically confirms the connection between his Thomism and his positive liberalism. Chesterton’s vista of a semi-transcendent humanity participating in divine reason, grants for humanity the possibility of a kind of natural or positive politics that transcends the negativity of modern liberalism that has its roots in scepticism, or disillusionment. This positive liberalism is not bound up in the granting of arbitrary choice to highly-individualized political subjects, but rather in the liberal nature of Being. Freedom is humanity’s natural state because it grants an opportunity to choose to participate in the intent of Being – its natural law – or to choose to rebel. This choice does not suggest the validity of lawlessness – as supposed by Lucian Gregory in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, but rather a higher reality of love, in which order is freely chosen by the intellect,

⁴³ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 54.

⁴⁴ Chesterton writes that human clothes testify to this fact of priesthood – ‚For clothes are very literally vestments and man wears them because he is a priest.‘ GK Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, 46.

so as to achieve a union not of homogeneity, but of love between particulars. Such particulars ultimately find a higher freedom by participating in their own nature – „God made the frog jump; but the frog prefers jumping.’⁴⁵ Or, to state it negatively – „If a triangle breaks out of its three sides, its life comes to a lamentable end.’⁴⁶ In other words, law is the predicate of liberty – not its enemy, because it provides for freedom an ideal content or form.

These results of Chesterton’s foundational bias, his re-discovery of orthodoxy, are undoubtedly at odds with the tenets of modernism as explicated by Pericles Lewis. Whilst for modernists like Joyce literature is an infinite process of disillusionment as the subject transcends social and metaphysical artifice, for Chesterton, literature is an outward-bound romance with the magic of reality, because he allows for an open door between reality and a „magician’ God. And so the universe comes to be a kind of teacher, or even a kind of sacrament. It is finally the arena for the transaction of divine Being. Literature’s place in this scheme is primarily one of illumination, not of disillusionment. The communication of literature is a continuous foreshadowing and memorial of the communication of Being. This is because literature, along with politics, has an organic reality that is able to represent the nature of Being and thus work towards freedom. Politically, liberty is not to be gained via a subjective and individualistic attenuation of the nation. Rather, Chesterton asserts that by rejecting the possibilities of knowing an objective reality in its natural state of law, liberty is paradoxically lost, because without such limits and laws, one simply sinks into the flux of an anarchic universe –

Mental and emotional liberty are not so simple as they look. Really they require almost as careful a balance of laws and conditions as do social and

⁴⁵ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 47.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 32.

political liberty. The ordinary aesthetic who sets out to feel everything freely gets knotted at last in a paradox that prevents him feeling at all. He breaks away from home limits to feel poetry. But in ceasing to feel home limits he has ceased to feel the „Odyssey’. He is free from national prejudices and outside patriotism. But being outside patriotism he is outside „Henry V’. Such a literary man is simply outside all literature: he is more of a prisoner than any bigot. For if there is a wall between you and the world, it makes little difference whether you describe yourself as locked in or as locked out. What we want is not the universality that is outside all normal sentiments; we want the universality that is inside all normal sentiments.⁴⁷

In this formulation, liberty, and in particular, literary liberty, is gained by allowing for laws and limits. These laws and limits are natural because they are secured by an appreciation for the „universality’ within them. Finding the „universality’ within the sentiments of social convention is the consequent to the grounds of Chesterton’s universe of open windows. Being is able to reveal itself. These open windows equally allow one the opportunity to keep and break laws, and they also secure both democracy and the representation of reality because humanity is granted a semi-transcendence of free will and reason – a semi-transcendence proper to its role as priesthood of the universe.

It is for this reason that Chesterton asserts the validity of the old Christian orthodoxy of the West. The problem with western civilisation, contends Chesterton, is not that its sentiments are in themselves oppressive and artificial, but rather that the reality, or universality, of those sentiments (of home, and patriotism, to use the examples from the passage above) has been forgotten and such sentiments have subsequently decayed.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 89.

Orthodoxy allows for the romance of such sentiments to be re-discovered. Chesterton's argument in *Orthodoxy* is that the liberation of humanity from such sentiments will only lead to a paradoxical illiberality because they in fact lead nowhere. One is forced to worship either the will, or the negation thereof. Nietzsche and Buddha sit down together at a crossroads „and one hates all the roads and the other likes all the roads. The result is...They stand at the crossroads.’⁴⁸

Chesterton seats all these assertions upon the foundation of his explicitly Christian orthodoxy. His contention that the Trinity, and subsequently the Incarnation, satisfies the paradoxes of Being and particularity, and suffering and evil, secures for him also the possibility of the representation of reality. Humanity, created in the image of God, is granted a participation in the divine reason.⁴⁹ This in turn secures for him a sanction for democracy, because as the whole field of reality is defined as sacred, by virtue of its Creator and the Incarnation, so is an ability to govern spread widely.⁵⁰ Upon these same grounds would Chesterton assert the economics of distributism, whereby each family is due an ownership of its means of production.

Chesterton suggests that this sanction for democracy is primarily garnered by Christian orthodoxy in two definite ways. First, because orthodoxy suggests the world is good but disordered due to sin, citizens can love the world, and by implication their country, or their families, with a free and intense love that does not blind them to their country or family's shortcomings but rather empowers them to hate such shortcomings with zeal equal

⁴⁸ Ibid, 35.

⁴⁹ „Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert – himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt – the Divine Reason.’ Ibid, 23.

⁵⁰ „In short, the democratic faith is this: that the most terribly important things must be left to ordinary men themselves – the mating of the sexes, the rearing of the young, the laws of the state.’ Ibid, 39.

to their love. In so doing, one could avoid the pessimism of a figure like Marcus Aurelius who had given up on the idea of social virtue and instead „looked only to the god within’ whilst the world was wrecked; and one could also avoid the optimism of Natural Religion which had led to an imitation of nature where „[because] the earth is kind, we can imitate all her cruelties.’⁵¹ Instead, one could be transcendently loyal to existence via an acknowledgement of the original goodness from which the universe had fallen.

Secondly, democracy was also secured by Christian orthodoxy because such orthodoxy lent an unchanging ideal to society which could lead to progress as opposed to mere change. Here we find the sacred human figure, the figure absent according to Milbank’s vision of modern liberalism as a hall of mirrors consisting of market forces and secular philosophy. Chesterton suggested that we could not learn this merely by looking at nature, but rather we require a theory of form for society – dependent upon our view of humanity – that leads to reform – „it means we see a certain thing out of shape and we mean to put it into shape. And we know what shape.’⁵² It is Chesterton’s contention that the shape given to humanity by the Christian doctrines of Original Sin, Good and Evil, and the Incarnation, assures society of a humane sanity and a liberal politics. The pursuit of a transcendent vision ensures humanity of „wonder, curiosity, moral and political adventure, righteous indignation.’⁵³ Reality’s representation comes to mean not oppression by imperial and metaphysical artifice, but an ability to perceive and participate in the goodness of Being.

The Challenge of Secularism

⁵¹ Ibid, 69.

⁵² Ibid, 98.

⁵³ Ibid, 127.

The primary challenge, however, to all of these assertions is the modern notion that the only fair way in which to manage the public square is to assure its secular nature. The challenge of secularism would topple Chesterton's proposal of orthodoxy at its foundation. In its place, it would assert that it is only the doubt and scepticism of a secular body politic that allows humanity to be free of oppression. Secularism makes this claim not only in the political sphere, but primarily in the intellectual sphere. It asserts that intellectualism must be a pursuit primarily of doubt and criticism if thought is to remain free from totalitarian constraints. Edward Said has written a canonical essay upon this very point, 'Secular Criticism', in which he puts forward the case that criticism can, by its very nature, only ever be secular. He suggests, 'It is not practising criticism either to validate the status quo or to join up with a priestly caste of acolytes and dogmatic metaphysicians.'⁵⁴ Instead of adopting any kind of metaphysics, Said asserts that

In its suspicion of totalizing concepts, in its discontent with reified objects, in its impatience with guilds, special interests, imperialized fiefdoms, and orthodox habits of mind, criticism is most itself, and if the paradox can be tolerated, most unlike itself at the moment it starts turning into organized dogma. 'Ironic' is not a bad word to use along with 'oppositional'.⁵⁵

Said contends that criticism must always retain an ethos of 'alternative acts and alternative intentions.'⁵⁶ In Said's formulation of criticism, therefore, Chesterton fails as a social critic insofar as he propounds the highly organized dogma of specifically Catholic Christianity. But Said's arguments are logically problematic. Criticism is in fact only ever

⁵⁴ Edward Said, 'Secular Criticism' in *The Edward Said Reader*, eds Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin (New York: Vintage Press, 2000), 223.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 242.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 242.

valid when it assumes some kind of metaphysical standpoint from which to criticise. The request for an elusive critical posture of ‚alternative acts and alternative intentions’ must ultimately be recognised as a misdirection by which to conceal one’s own inevitable metaphysical, and political, standpoint from any kind of subsequent criticism. To divorce criticism from the confession of metaphysics is to hide the privileged position by which one is able to create a new platform of ‚secularism’ beyond the reach of any metaphysics or theology. A secularism of oppositional irony finally becomes its own superior and invisible metaphysics, albeit an unacknowledged metaphysics, hidden from scrutiny. In this way, Said’s position can be said to be a hindrance to criticism because it becomes possible to criticise his own position, for the very reason that he claims to have no position. He has secured for himself a solitary transcendence. This also comes to be the fatal flaw of the postmodern criticism. Jean-Francois Lyotard’s ‚incredulity toward all metanarrative’⁵⁷ becomes in itself a self-denying metanarrative. Chesterton, as a fellow critic of modern centres of power, does sympathise with Said’s position (‚It is rational to attack the police; nay, it is glorious’⁵⁸) – but ultimately he discards it as destructive because ‚modern critics...are like men who should attack the police without ever having heard of burglars.’⁵⁹

It is upon this weakness of modern critical theory that Chesterton’s *Orthodoxy* poses a crucial challenge to today’s academy. Chesterton notes that ‚human intellect is free to destroy itself’ because scepticism is able to turn firstly on metaphysics, and then finally on its own thought.⁶⁰ Said hovers between these two positions and does not realise the end of his

⁵⁷Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 24.

⁵⁸ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 25.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 25.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 25.

definition of criticism. It ends in nothing but paralysed doubt about everything, including itself. According to Chesterton, where a thinker like Said goes wrong is in his assumption of the opposition between reason and faith. By discounting the faith inherent in dogma or metaphysics, and by insisting on the sole validity of the eternal reason of criticism, Said undercuts the faith necessary to sustain reason. Chesterton notes, „It is an act of faith to assert that our thoughts have any relation to reality at all.’⁶¹

This insistence on faith, and its object of dogma, is, along with Chesterton’s foundational bias of primal joy and happiness, the prime argument that Chesterton employs in his insistence of the rationality firstly of metaphysics, and secondly of Christian orthodoxy. Chesterton asserts that such a position is both pragmatic and absolute, for humanity pragmatically requires a belief in the absolute.⁶² Chesterton cites the example of revolution in support of this assertion, stating that any rebel must not only know what he is rebelling against, but also „what he would *not* rebel against’, for by ‚rebellling against everything’, one loses the right ‚to rebel against anything.’⁶³ Without a belief in anything, there is no measure for criticism, as well as no hope. It becomes a mundane task of despair, constantly shuffling yet never settling.

And so Chesterton pragmatically comes to an assertion that life requires faith in reason, and that only a kind of faith in the goodness of Being leads one out of the crisis of representation, and to a recovery of the validity of thought itself. What Chesterton demonstrates, according to Kenner, is the necessity of Being preceding thought – Chesterton

⁶¹ Ibid, 25.

⁶² Ibid, 28.

⁶³ Ibid, 33-34.

is writing against „the rationalist who lacks the instinct for being.’⁶⁴ Kenner correctly notes that Chesterton, writing *Orthodoxy* in 1908, before he knew the terminology of Thomism, incorrectly names Being „mysticism’.⁶⁵ Chesterton asserts that if one maintains mysticism (or, in Thomist terms, a faith in Being), reason is equally maintained and illuminated. Faith in Being becomes like the sun – „The one created thing which we cannot look at is the one thing in the light of which we look at everything.’⁶⁶ As described in chapter one, this faith in Being leads Chesterton, as it did Thomas Aquinas, to a belief in God, and in Christian orthodoxy. From such a perspective, Chesterton asserts the futility of the inherent scepticism of secularism because it can only lead to a kind of subjective despair unable to connect with reality. In an attempt to embrace reason alone, reason falls, and humanity becomes „too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table.’⁶⁷

The concomitant effect in the political sphere – paradoxical to the intentions of Said – is the retention of the conditions of oppression. The effect of pure intellectual secularism is humanity’s loss of a taste for freedom. For if there is no transcendent vision of human freedom, if the vision of heaven is in constant flux, „the vision of earth will be exactly the same.’⁶⁸ Philosophical scepticism leads to political paralysis and a permanent status quo of illiberal political relations. If one cannot make judgements of politics according to some kind of binding standard, there can be no definitive or transformative criticism of politics. Chesterton’s attack on the purely secular position may perhaps be best understood as an intervention upon the scepticism carried through history via the philosophies of Descartes and

⁶⁴ Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 62.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 61.

⁶⁶ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 21.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 24.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 100.

Nietzsche. Descartes had doubted that Being could truly be trusted, and had thus begun a defence of reality's coherence from his own thought –

I now admit nothing which is not necessarily true: I am therefore, precisely speaking, only a thing which thinks, that is to say, a mind, understanding, or reason, terms whose significance was hitherto unknown to me. I am however, a real thing, and really existing; but what thing? I have already said it: a thing which thinks.⁶⁹

Instead of the mind being occupied with reality – what Chesterton proposed as its „meat”⁷⁰ – in Descartes' formulation mind must find its initial sustenance within itself. Nietzsche would bring to completion this scepticism when he cast doubt on the mind which had previously confirmed reality for Descartes. Nietzsche wrote,

For, formerly, one believed in “the soul” as one believed in grammar, and the grammatical subject: one said, “I” is the condition, “think” is the predicate and conditioned-thinking is an activity to which thought must supply a subject as cause. Then one tried with admirable perseverance and cunning to get out of this net – and asked whether the opposite might not be the case: “think” the condition; “I” the conditioned; “I” in that case [am] only a synthesis which is made by thinking.⁷¹

Chesterton, perhaps reacting to the influx of Nietzschean thought into England at the turn of the century, demonstrates a break from this passage of scepticism by returning to the

⁶⁹Rene Descartes, „Meditation II’ in *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, trans FE Sutcliffe (London: Penguin, 1968), 105.

⁷⁰ Chesterton, „St Thomas Aquinas’, 542.

⁷¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, „Beyond Good and Evil’ in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed Walter Kauffman (New York: Modern Library, 1969), 257.

original doubt of Descartes and refuting it by insisting on humanity's ability to know reality. He insists that humanity's sanity rests on a faith in the coherence of reality – which he would come to associate with the Thomist notion of *Ens*. The crisis of *Ens* – in literary terms the crisis of representation – comes to be resolved by the Incarnate God, who secures the reality of Being at that initial moment of doubt. This is the core idea of *Orthodoxy* – reason and Being must be trusted if anything is to mean anything. This is the leap of faith undertaken by Chesterton in the book, and in his entire life's work. This is the meaning of his reconfiguration of modernism, and the philosophy by which he posits a literature of re-discovery and joy against the disillusionment of his day.

The Paradox of Chesterton's Orthodoxy

Chesterton anchored this literature of joy in his Christian faith, but he was ready to recognize and celebrate that literature anywhere it was found – be it in the work of the likes of Stevenson, Browning and Dickens. Chesterton would become the great apologist in his time for all three of those writers, just as he would become the modern apologist and biographer for the political radicalism of a figure like William Cobbett.⁷² Chesterton's orthodoxy did not lead him to a narrow and bigoted vision which would insist on a regimented theocracy in life and letters, but rather, via his belief in the goodness of Being, it led him to a generous view of the world around him that could appreciate the good in a variety of sources and traditions. It was his resolution of the crisis of representation that gave

⁷² Joseph McCleary notes that „Chesterton saw Cobbett as a prophet who warned of the loss of the average Englishman's power of self-support through the centralization of capital and resources... Cobbett advocated the exercise of political and economic authority at the most local level possible in order to be effective. In his championing of the small landholder and the local exercise of authority, Cobbett was an early proponent of the idea that mediating institutions allowed for a more humane exercise of power.’ Joseph R. McCleary, *The Historical Imagination of G.K. Chesterton: Locality, Patriotism, and Nationalism* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2009), 136. „In 1927 TS Eliot was to write, “there is no better critic of Dickens living than Mr Chesterton.’ Ian Ker, *GK Chesterton: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 184.

him this confidence that truth and goodness lay in a variety of sources, rather than simply in those that were explicitly Christian.

This was akin to Aquinas's defence of Aristotle in the Middle Ages, and is perhaps the final reply to the calls for secularism posited by Said. While Said's secularism leads to the exclusion of most of the world's critical thought, Chesterton's orthodoxy leads to a widespread and liberal affirmation of all the human thought that asserts faith in ultimate goodness, reason, and moral realism. If such things were forsaken – as they are by Said's attack on metaphysics – then the entirety of human thought must be undercut, including that thought which propounds secularism. His insistence on orthodoxy does not seek to delegitimize all other human thought, but rather it paradoxically seeks the survival of such legitimacy. There is only „one thought that ought to be stopped’, and that is the thought which terminates all thought.⁷³

It is this generosity of Chesterton's orthodoxy which leads to the final paradox in his thought – the paradox which unsettles and destabilizes his very opposition to modernism. For in identifying the paradox of the Trinity as the source of his resolution of modernism's crisis of representation, Chesterton's place in literature comes to be a paradox in itself. Modernism's apparent and shocking root in the sacredness of the paradox of the Trinity means that there is a kind of ambivalence between Chesterton and modernism. His opposition to modernism becomes a kind of joyful and necessary conflict. As the wounds of Job are connected with the dilemma of modernism, and as both are connected with the Crucifixion and its end in Resurrection, modernism itself is re-capitulated into a new universal and Christian scheme. It is therefore too simplistic to call Chesterton an anti-modernist, for he was not simply contrary to the modernism of his day. Rather, he suggested its despair was an

⁷³ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 25.

indicator of a grand scheme in which suffering and incoherence lead to a greater and secret joy. Modernism and the crisis of representation finally suggest the joy of particularity and the possibility of overcoming loneliness and confusion. Modernism in its very terminology suggests this particularity via its particularization of time itself. What Chesterton attempted to do was connect this particularization with the unity of universal time. It is in such a connection that he transcends the dialectic of modernism and anti-modernism.

This re-capitulation is visible in the re-casting of Lucian Gregory's character in the final scene of *The Man Who Was Thursday*. After the nightmare, Gregory is no longer an anarchist Satan but rather Syme and Gregory find themselves walking together like „old friends', their previous arguments turned into „triviality'.⁷⁴ Their warfare has been forgotten because Syme has come to an understanding of the hidden face of the universe. The universe is more than itself – it possesses „some hole in the sky' through which a clean breeze can blow.⁷⁵ Because Chesterton's work suggests that modernism could be transcended by means of its re-capitulation into a scheme of joy, Chesterton's connection with modernism, as with Gregory, is not simply as a foe, but rather modernism becomes for his thought a kind of joyful opportunity. Its incoherence and crisis of representation form a part of life's fairy tale. In its crisis, there is not simply despair, but a happy fight in which the likes of Gabriel Syme could revel.

This is evident in the conclusion of his *Orthodoxy* – modernism's core emotion of loneliness is perhaps a prologue to some great and imminent reunion – „So we sit perhaps in a starry chamber of silence, while the laughter of the heavens is too loud for us to hear.'⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 133.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 133.

⁷⁶ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 152.

Finally, in the seemingly inexplicable wounds of Job, and in the confusion and pain expressed by modernism, we find, in Chesterton's contribution to modern letters, the expression of a hope for the future restoration of the entire cosmos – the resolution of Being. Chesterton is therefore not simply against modernism; rather, he is beyond modernism. He proposes a way beyond the simple ‚now’ implicit in modernism, by making the particularity of modernism – and indeed all things – the function of an eternal unity.

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