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G.K.Chesterton: an argument for his status as a serious creative writer in the mainstream of English Romanticism, with a discussion of his possible influence on the novelist and poet Charles Williams.

by G.M. Brown.

Submitted to the Council for National Academic Awards for the degree of Master of Philosophy, under the sponsorship of the Thames Polytechnic.

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G.K.Chesterton: an argument for his status as a serious creative writer in the mainstream of English Romanticism, with a discussion of his possible influence on the novelist and poet Charles Williams.

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There are two concurrent arguments: firstly, that the Edwardians found in Chesterton the same kind of liberating imaginative experience that earlier readers found in the first Romantics (1790-1830); secondly, that, contrary to recent opinion, he was an artist of some depth.

The first chapter describes this case against Chesterton and the real problems to which a critic must address himself. Chapter 2 identifies his position among the different post-Romantic movements in Victorian society. Chapter 3 shows his special debt to William Morris's ideas; but also illustrates that the best of Chesterton's historical writing is fresh and not derivative.

The next four chapters deal with Chesterton's original achievement; in which, paradoxically, he is also most recognisably Romantic in his imagination and in his sensibility. Chapter 4 describes how his strange imagination developed from childhood to adulthood and ultimately shaped his whole career. The darker side of this imagination, his awareness of supernatural evil, is the subject of Chapter 5. Chapter 6 shows the newspaper journalist bringing all kinds of strong and tender feelings to bear on public life, and compares him to Hazlitt and his contemporaries. Chapter 7 shows how this imagination and sensibility combined to produce perceptive literary criticism.

Chapter 8 argues that the novels of Charles Williams show widespread signs of Chesterton's influence, and that this illustrates his power to permeate a younger mind. Finally Chapter 9 sums up: Chesterton is like pre-Victorian Romantic writers in his passion, his idealism, and in the imagination which perceives a miraculous universe behind the physical world. He expresses this view with the sensitivity and subtlety of the artist. Finally a rationale of Chesterton's apparent frivolity, based on his own metaphysics, is proposed as necessary to a just evaluation of his work.

Contents.

Chapter 1	The Critical Problem	p.2
2	An Edwardian Romantic	10
3	'The Legend of an Epic Hour'; Chesterton's Historical and Political Writing	32
4	'Unearthly Daylight': Chesterton's Imagination	47
5	The Haunted Imagination	65
6	'Openly and Indecently Humane': Chesterton's Sensibility.	77
7	'The Middleman in Poetry': Chesterton's criticism.	93
8	Chesterton and Charles Williams	107
9	The Problem Re-examined	124
	Bibliography: note	132
	Footnotes:	
1	p.137	
2	p.140	
3	p.149	
	Appendix A: Chesterton/Coulton correspondence	155
4	p.158	
5.	p.163	
6.	p.165	
	Appendix B: 'Romantic' Journalism of the Early 19C.	172
	Appendix C: Chesterton and the Great War.	173
7.	p.176	
	Appendix D: 'Romantic' Critics of the 19C.	184
8.	p.187	
9.	p.196.	

Chapter One. The Critical Problem.

"Even poor old Chesterton must think; he can't have actually left off thinking altogether; there must be some form of cerebral function going forward to fill the empty hours of his misdirected and wasted life..."

(Chesterton in 1928, voicing current estimates of himself.)

From 1901 to 1936, Gilbert Keith Chesterton was one of the most popular of English writers. He was also one of the most prolific of any period; and ironically, both these characteristics contributed to the fact that nearly all serious critics virtually ignored him for years before his death and have done so ever since. (1) The joking words quoted above are actually a shrewd assessment of the critics' attitudes to him. (2) He was too jolly, too simple, to be considered in the same class as, say, Shaw, Conrad or Forster: all near contemporaries. (3) So the legend went. Serious reviews of twentieth-century literature often omit him altogether. (4) Professor Bernard Bergonzi expressed a typical view when he described Chesterton and Belloc as the statues of fallen gods who deserve a long respectful stare before their features are finally eroded. (5)

Yet, curiously, though critics neglect him, his name haunts our consciousness in the 'eighties. Middle-aged media people mine for 'bon mots' to sparkle in their own articles; journalists like Katharine Whitehorn and Clive James, public persons like Cardinal Hume and ex-police chief Sir Robert Mark are recent examples. Bernard Levin refers to his ideas as well as to his witticisms. The Queen quoted him in her 1981 Christmas Day broadcast. The modern choral work, 'The White Horse' by David Bedford is based on verses from Chesterton's poem. Father Brown had a T.V. apotheosis in Kenneth More. There were a spattering of selections, biographies and critical studies in the 'seventies. (6)

Yet among younger people, Chesterton is not even known as the fat man who gave up his seat in the 'bus for three ladies; even the

myth has faded. Perhaps this is as well; now we can judge him more accurately as a writer. But it does give the problem urgency; he is in danger of slipping off the library map completely in the next decade.

Where, then, does he belong in literature? The range of his work makes him difficult to place; he wrote over thirty full-length books, and probably over a thousand articles and short stories, most but not all of which are collected into volume form. These writings include novels, verse, biographies, religious history, Christian apologetics, detective stories, politics, travel, three plays, much literary criticism, broadcast talks and an autobiography. Nobody has made up their minds about him; and certainly during his lifetime the critics differed vigorously about him. (7)

In his first decade - that is, between 1901 and 1911 - the consensus of opinion was that he was brilliant. For instance, in 1903 his Robert Browning won praise from Alfred Noyes in The Speaker which summed up what readers felt about Chesterton at his best: 'There are moments when one feels, with a sort of dazed terror, that his obscurity, his restraint, his negations, and his refusal to define or limit his conception of that behind the veil are only sure and perfect ways of asserting and making us feel its presence.' (8)

But the critics early became exasperated. They did not understand the novels - The Observer hazarded a guess that Sunday in The Man Who Was Thursday might be 'the British Sabbath'. (9) More seriously, they found his reasoning arbitrary, his method forced, the paradoxes obtrusive. F.W. Elias in The Bookman said: 'We are looking at a troupe of performing truths'. But the volume of notices testified to the impact of this new young writer. Clement Shorter in The Sphere in 1904 announced that Chesterton had 'hypnotised' both critics and public, but that he himself had neither liked nor understood what he had read. All the biographical accounts describe Chesterton's

extraordinary bounce to fame between 1901-1903, and the remarkable general interest in him. The Bookman wittily and accurately transposed Chesterton's own epigram on Dickens to 'a length cut from the flowing and mixed substance called Mr. Chesterton'. (October 1906) The same review calls him 'one of the profoundest of living mystics', and his passion and sincerity were also acknowledged widely. Evidently reading Chesterton was a vivid experience for everybody, whether they approved or not. 'His sins were scarlet but his books were read' applied to him as well as to Hilaire Belloc. They certainly sold in rapid editions. (10)

As the years went by, however, the criticisms accumulated. The Evening Standard foreshadowed future jibes when it likened Chesterton's readers to those who 'laugh at his brilliance, and assume the attitude of an indulgent crowd at a circus.' (11) After the first World War, the number of notices dwindled, although he was not publishing appreciably less; but in spite of his continued popularity with the public he was no longer an important writer for the critics. He had also labelled himself 'Roman Catholic' by his much publicised conversion in 1922, and thereby limited his appeal. In 1932, Ivor Brown wrote in his review of Chaucer: 'We all know where we are going with Mr. Chesterton at the reins. For him all roads lead to Rome. So there he sits in command, as grand and jovial as Mr. Weller senior.' (12)

A few of the later books were enthusiastically reviewed; for instance, Etienne Gilson praised Saint Thomas Aquinas in terms which, coming from a famous scholar to a journalist, were astonishing. (13) Increasingly, however, the critics paid tribute to Chesterton as a jolly personality rather than as an artist. The Autobiography appeared five months after his death, and gave them a chance to sum him up. Eric Gill (who designed Chesterton's tombstone) wrote: 'I do not think Chesterton ever grew out of certain romantic conceptions of

'the pre-war world...these things said, we may fall back on to, bask, wallow and finally rest in, the great solid four-poster of the Chestertonian mind.' (14) The Fortnightly Review expressed the embarrassment younger writers felt: the reviewer was full of praise for the early work, but: 'one who could seldom add intellectual assent to his admiration finds it impossible not to regret that so marvellous an endowment should have been devoted to a set of ideas with which the creative forces of our age can have so little to say, and to the advocacy of a way of life along which man in the Great Society that must evolve will not find it possible to travel.' (15)

Fifty years on, this confident tone is itself dated. More recent critics, in re-discovering Chesterton, have been so bemused by the unstable quality of his huge output that they are inclined to take one part of his work and study that. For instance, Mrs. Margaret Canovan, in G.K.Chesterton, Radical Populist (1977) sees him as a particularly articulate exponent of her central interest, populism, in the context of political sociology, Mr. Hugh Kenner decides he is 'a great moral philosopher.' (16) W.H.Auden thought his best work was in critical studies and comic poetry. Dr. Ian Boyd prefers to consider the novels as most representative. (17) Mr. John Sullivan's 1974 Centenary Appraisal reflects this difficulty about Chesterton: the contributors apportion praise and blame on the most varied bases. Today - as in his lifetime - most writers end up talking about Chesterton's personality rather than his art, even if they attempt to comment on his writing as a whole.

His Catholicism is still a difficulty. Chesterton loved his role as popular champion of English Catholics, and rapidly became a kind of 'house' writer for them. Current writers on Chesterton are, almost without exception, Catholics. In a major biography like Maisie Ward's, this can be a positive advantage because it ensures understanding of Chesterton's milieu; but in other cases the reader suspects special

pleading. Such partisanship as that of Mr. Graham Greene, who links the lively but totally propagandist The Thing (1929) with Orthodoxy (1908) and The Everlasting Man (1925) as 'among the great books of the age', does Chesterton nothing but harm. (18)

The continuing spatter of books suggests that there are still writers, who, even if puzzled, recognise Chesterton as a major experience it would be a pity to miss. Such a straightforward biography as Mr. Dudley Barker's presents a delightful man above categorizing. (19) Yet the danger of treating any writer as a phenomenon which defies critical placing is that ultimately he is cut off from any living context, and is less and less understood. In Professor Bergonzi's phrase, the 'features are finally eroded.'

This thesis, then, attempts something more than the 'long respectful stare' at Chesterton, yet tries to see him whole and not sub-divided. In 1983 we are perhaps in a better position to assess him. In 1932 Desmond MacCarthy wrote: '...Posterity will not think it has too much Chesterton. It will forget most of him...and in doing so forget, too, things quite as good as those it will cherish...' (20) The first part of this prophecy has come true; most of what he wrote has been forgotten, the torrent of words dried up long ago, and if in the deposits there is any solid residue which still deserves the word 'brilliant', it should be apparent now. I have proceeded on the understanding that it is proper to judge a man on his best work, and I shall try to justify my choice, over the whole of his writings, of those books which I believe deserve to be read today.

The objections to taking Chesterton seriously have been re-iterated so often that they are themselves part of the legend. Here they are:

He was an eccentric of enormous charm, who it is blasphemous to criticise.

He was a propagandist for a particular package of reactionary ideas,

who thereby disqualifies himself as a serious artist.

He was a professional funny man, playing cheap tricks with words for laughs, and with one tone of voice - fortissimo.

He totes a set of crude images (simple Catholic peasants, comic policemen, fat-nosed Jews, for instance) which operate on so simple a level that they prevent any serious exploration of any subject where they occur.

Finally: his whole performance indicates a superficial attitude to life and precludes any genuine imaginative experience.

The first of these charges has already been described as dangerous because it isolates the writer in a kind of enchanted vacuum. The next three are to do with the style Chesterton adopted as a dem^aagogue. Of course there is much truth in them- he said himself, 'All popular errors are true.' (21) He confessed cheerfully to being deliberately loud, and also to being a propagandist; and he did use language with suspicious adroitness on occasion. (22) He did employ stereotypes in his fiction, including some Edwardian bogies, such as comic Jews, which we find offensive today. The last charge is, I think, the most damning, and yet the most easily refuted; it cannot be held after one has read much Chesterton.

There is another criticism of Chesterton connected to this charge of superficiality. Any reader soon realises that, for all his bonhomie, he was a deeply reserved man. For instance, the Autobiography hardly mentions his wife, although she was the most important person in his life. Several critics have related this refusal to write about deeply-felt experience to his enthusiasm for extravert living - the heartiness, the pubs, the fighting - and they have seen it as a refusal to face his inner self. (23) This may be a moral rather than an aesthetic charge, but in either case it affects his potential as an artist; to manipulate one's own consciousness is a well-known 'romantic' strategy, but a writer who does not face himself honestly is limited.

These, then, are the charges against Chesterton. The defence has to bring evidence that he had a consistent and intelligent philosophical position; that his style elucidates rather than merely dazzles; that at his best he explores experience honestly as a sensitive and imaginative writer; that he is a more complex being than the myth allows.

But a defence of any man is not complete if it only refutes the plaintiff's accusations. It is necessary to offer a positive interpretation of Chesterton so that we can see him more clearly. The first step here is to assess him in his late-Victorian and Edwardian context. He grew up and became famous in a society where all writers were more or less 'romantic' by today's standards, in the sense of being suffused by emotion, idealistic and fascinated by dream-worlds. At worst it was crassly sentimental. In some ways Chesterton is extraordinarily representative of his period, and the idea of being 'Romantic' was of the first importance to him. Therefore the way he fed from, and the way he used, this zeitgeist, will be significant.

There will be other ways, if he is indeed a serious artist, in which he ought to be saying something original, something which does not echo the voices of his contemporaries; and so, because it was important to him to be 'romantic', I shall look to see how far he is 'romantic' as we today understand the term when we talk about English writers between 1790-1830. How far, for the Edwardians, did he provide the kind of imaginative experiences Wordsworth or Hazlitt, say, did for their contemporaries?

Finally, when we try to place a writer, we are bound to ask who are his heirs, if only because they can tell us significant things about him. In Chesterton's case there is no obvious line of succession. There are, however, some links with the Lewis-Tolkien-Williams group of fantasists, and, particularly, intriguing correspondences with Charles Williams, which suggest that, although

Williams was a very different man from Chesterton, he was influenced by him in important ways.

Anyone writing on Chesterton also has to sort out the artist from the Jolly Journalist persona, 'G.K.C.', that Chesterton himself erected so efficiently and maintained so consistently, throughout his life. That it fulfilled a real function, I shall hope to show. But I shall use the style 'G.K.C.' only to refer to the picturesque figure, 'grand and jovial', in his vast cape and broad-brimmed hat, who looms so large and yet is so much less interesting than the actual Gilbert Keith Chesterton.

Chapter Two. An Edwardian Romantic.

When in 1908 Chesterton was challenged by another journalist to declare his philosophy plainly, he wrote Orthodoxy(1); and the first thing he wanted to make clear was what we today would recognise as a 'romantic' position:

I wish to set forth my faith as particularly answering this double spiritual need, the need for that mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar which Christendom has rightly named Romance. For the very word 'romance' has in it the mystery and ancient meaning of Rome... the thing I propose to take as common ground between myself and the average reader, is this desirability of an active and imaginative life, picturesque and of a poetical curiosity, a life such as western man at anyrate always seems to have desired... nearly all people that I have met in this western society in which I live would agree to the ~~pr~~general proposition that we need this life of practical romance; the combination of something that is strange with something that is secure.(2)

Before we accept Chesterton as a 'romantic' on his own definition, however, we need to recognise that the Edwardians used the word very loosely. Popular taste was 'romantic' in the sense of being cloyingly sentimental, as in the rose-garden sickliness of Florence Barclay's The Rosary (1909). The social satire of Shaw, Wells and Forster attests this; and Wells' lower-middle class Edwardians are just as sentimental and myth-drugged as, say, the upper-middle-class Wilcoxes in Howards End. In this passage Chesterton obviously means something vigorous, not soft, but 'romantic' for him was certainly not an academic concept, as critics use it today. There has been so much discussion about the meaning of the word - and indeed, whether it has much meaning at all - that before I go further, I will try to suggest the general critical understanding of 'romantic' at present. Later I will describe what was involved in being an Edwardian 'romantic', and argue that not only was Chesterton influenced by late Victorian romanticism, but that he also had genuine affinities with the early Romantics. (3)

The underlined words of Chesterton in the passage above echo, consciously or unconsciously, the famous passage in Biographia Literaria where Coleridge describes how the poet's imagination 'reveals itself in the balance or reconcilment of opposite or discordant qualities; of sameness, with difference...the sense of novelty with old and familiar objects...judgment ever awake and steady self-possession with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement...' Coleridge's description of how he and Wordsworth deliberately made up the Lyrical Ballads from two contrasting types of poems, the homely and the supernatural, shows that they were putting these ideas into practice. Chesterton had almost certainly read the Coleridge passage, but it is unlikely that he was knowingly imitating it in order to claim succession in the Wordsworth and Coleridge tradition.(4) It is an interesting echo, all the same; and its significance lies in the fact that it suggests he had an instinctive intuition of the essentially contradictory nature of romanticism; love of the medieval past, love of the coming revolution; a desire for innocence and a fascination with corruption; a glorification of the individual which at the same time alienates him from his society. (5)

Coleridge's theoretical concern with the co-existence of 'sameness with difference' was based in his experience. Wordsworth had also felt it; the description in The Prelude of 'the huge cliff/That rose up between me and the stars', a strangeness met in a familiar landscape, is one of the key accounts of romantic experience in its primary period - that is between 1790 - 1820.

...for many days, my brain

Work'd with a dim and undetermin'd sense

Of unknown modes of being.

...huge and mighty Forms that do not live

Like living men mov'd slowly through the mind

By day and were the trouble of my dreams.

Wisdom and spirit of the universe!

Thou soul that art the eternity of thought!
 Thou giv'st to forms and images a breath
 And everlasting motion!

...purifying thus

The elements of feeling and of thought,
 And sanctifying, by such discipline,
 Both pain and fear, until we recognise
 A grandeur in the beatings of the heart. (6)

The crucial points for a definition of romanticism are epitomised here; the poet's awareness through imagination of a mysterious power behind nature, invisible yet objective; its strange numinous undertow, which yet brings joy; the sensitivity of the child to such awareness; and finally, the validating of emotion as virtue rather than weakness.

Such a powerful experience was bound to spill out beyond the merely private ecstasy. It says something about man in society; if he is thus dignified by imagination, he must resist tyranny; and so Wordsworth identified himself with revolutionary politics. So did the second generation of romantics, Keats, Shelley and Byron. (7) The liveliest journalism of the 1820s and '30s reflected these new feelings, and evoked great expectancy that man was about to realise his god-like potential. By 'Romanticism', then, I shall understand a vision of the universe mediated by images of such power, albeit based on ordinary physical phenomena, that they stimulate man's response through imagination to a point which 'brings the whole soul of man into activity.' (8) Such a welling-up of imaginative energy will result in public action; it will also make writers utter their dreams in fantasy and the recreation of legendary history.

*

The Romantic impulse dissipated itself down the Victorian decades. Chesterton himself began his Victorian Age in Literature by describing the 1820s and 1830s as 'the sunset of the great revolutionary poets'. (9)

Tennyson, for instance, was influenced by Keats, yet had not Keats' fervour of idealism. Browning, who started off influenced by Shelley, ended up speculating, fascinated by intellectual complications. Christina Rossetti drowned her sorrows in dogma. Arnold lamented his doubts, beautifully.

Journalism, too, lost its verve. The return of the Bourbons and the counsels of Metternich destroyed the political hopes of Keats' contemporaries. The middle-aged Hazlitt found his contemporaries had no sympathy for his hero-worship of Napoleon; they were frightened of reckless dreams of glory.

Mid-Victorian England presented a face of monolithic grandeur and assurance. The bright fugitive aspirations of the young Romantics had ossified; the big industrial cities built their enormous neo-classical and neo-Gothic Town Halls and Art Galleries; nothing could disturb that pax Victoriana, it seemed. The excitements of the 'fifties and 'sixties were not in visionary politics, but in the curiously prosaic Darwinian controversies.

Throughout the period, however, there are currents of imagination and feeling which obviously well up from the earlier romantic source. However, there are differences; and so from hereon we must speak of 'post-romantic mutations' in the Victorian world.

The first Romantics would have been bewildered to learn that later critics have recognised such strong currents of romanticism in the Oxford Movement - that is, in the Church of England at her most dogmatic and institutional, in a sense. Keble's Christian Year (1827) 'made men strangely aware of the glory and awfulness amid which human life is passed.' (10) Both Keble and Newman admired Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge for their imaginative idealism, and thus established romantic poetry as a valid medium for religious feeling. The speed with which Keble's ideas spread through the parishes of England shows how welcome they were. From this time on, ancient liturgical

practices, Gothic architecture, and devotional disciplines of psychological inwardness, provided imaginative inspiration for thousands of church-going Victorians, comparable to those the Romantics found in nature.

The fascination with medievalism produced the Pre-Raphaelites, themselves a considerable focus of post-Romantic feeling. The name implies their love of the Middle Ages, in which they found an honesty, an awareness of glory, and an integrity they believed the ^{later} Renaissance had lost; and the earlier painters frequently chose lines from Shakespeare, Keats, or Tennyson at his most Keatsian, for the topics of their pictures. (11) In turn, Pre-Raphaelitism fostered William Morris, (1834-1896), whose influence on Victorian society was immense, and an important post-romantic mutation in itself.

Morris hated the ugliness of industrial cities, and like Pugin (1812-1852) and Ruskin (1819-1900) before him and also during his time, dreamed of noble and inspiring environments for the citizens of the future. He wanted a society based on 'medieval' ideas of self-sufficiency and craftsmanship, and his vision of a London 'small and white and clean' was seminal in the founding of our modern garden cities. (12) Morris designs for wallpaper, furniture and fabrics, together with Rossetti's and Burne -Jones' pictures, became the chosen background for the Aesthetes of the 'eighties.

Cultured people in the last quarter of the nineteenth century often created for themselves 'Morris' environments which were genuinely romantic in so far as they drew from a deep dream of a free, happy, pre-industrial England. They lived in brick or stucco-fronted houses with small timbered rooms, leaded windows and inglenooks, set in quaint gardens - which were in refreshing contrast to the gilt salons, potted plants and French draperies of the conventional hostesses. (13) Liberty's London shop opened in 1875, and besides its famous oriental

silks and porcelain, it sold the 'props' for the Morris dream-world - the linen fabrics, the oak furniture, the blue-and-white china. It was a very English vision. Morris himself moved to a radical Socialist position, but most of the people who bought his furniture and lived in pseudo-medieval houses designed by Norman Shaw (or Baillie Scott or Voysey), professed the mildest of ideal political creeds.

William Morris, then, had created a dream-world which could actually be bought in the shops, and which combined Romantic social idealism and Romantic medievalism. But by now it had become self-conscious in a way Wordsworth or Coleridge never conceived.

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The strangest Victorian mutation of Romanticism came from that charnel strain of writing - through Chatterton to Coleridge and the Keats of 'Isabella and the Pot of Basil' - which ^{became} ~~is~~ a dark and dangerous element in Romantic writing here and on the Continent. There, writers like Baudelaire, Huysmans and Verlaine trafficked in the occult, the sexually perverse and the morbid; (14) and this development was imported to England, in the work of Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symonds, Walter Pater, Ernest Dowson, and Lionel Johnson. At first called 'Aesthetes', by the 'nineties they were pleased to term themselves 'Decadents'. Pater's famous passage which expressed their creed - 'not the fruit of experience, but experience itself' ^(14 a) - is at once like, and very unlike, the earlier English Romantics; who would certainly have recognised the importance of the individual's passionate response to beauty, but might have shown more reserve on seeking emotional frissons without any spiritual reference at all. The Decadents' influence was not ultimately as great as that of Morris, but during the 'nineties their philosophy among the literate young of Chesterton's generation was intense and pervasive.

*

These post-Romantic mutations show how the Victorians developed ~~the~~

the numinous Image of the first Romantics, full of meaning and emotion, in their own terms. The Oxford Movement had directed attention to a finer medieval past, and Morris had done something similar in secular, political terms; both protests against the modern industrial squalor of mind and body. These two strands were combined in The Christian Socialist Movement (1848), which inherited the early Romantic insistence on human dignity and its corollary of political action against all tyranny. Charles Kingsley and F.D.Maurice are the names usually associated with this Chartist-inspired organisation, but the real impetus came from J.M.Ludlow, who had been educated in France, knew French socialists, and 'shared the aspirations of the French revolution of 1848.' (15) Whatever Kingsley's shortcomings as a leader, his hymns were repeatedly reprinted; and their success shows that his vivid imagery caught the apocalyptic mood of a small but articulate group in Victorian society.

The day of the Lord is at hand, at hand;
 Its storms roll up the sky;
 The nations sleep starving on heaps of gold;
 All dreamers toss and sigh;
 The night is darkest before the morn;
 When the pain is sorest the child is born,
 And the day of the Lord is at hand. (16)

People who sing lines like these at political-religious gatherings are not far from the romantic revolutionaries of Shelley's time.

The C.S.M. came to an end in 1854, and organised Christian socialism seems to have lapsed for a generation until 1877, when the Guild of St. Matthew revived its ideals enthusiastically. Later, in 1889, came the Christian Social Union, to which the young Chesterton would eventually belong. The C.S.U. inherited the Tractarian poetic fervour, but it was larger and more practical than its predecessors; it published lists of good employers based on its own research into sweated labour, and agitated for reforming legislation. It did not last; but a residue of romantic poetic fervour remained in the Socialist movement, its inheritance from Victorian political

romanticism, until the 1930s. (17)

*

To the earlier romantics, man's political freedom was linked to his intellectual freedom, Shelley's 'thought /which is the measure of the universe'. While some Victorian romantics trod the road to Rome, others made that lonelier adventure of the imagination away from dogma, towards freer religious thinking and also towards agnosticism. Tennyson's Ulysses yearns for

...that untravelled world, whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move..

- lines which suggest quite neatly the relativism which characterised the fluidity of this attitude to life. Such questionings, set in motion by the evolutionary disputes of 1859, led to a hey-day for 'liberal Christianity' in the later years of the century. (18) In London particularly there were Theosophists, Spiritualists, Christian Scientists, Positivists, Ethical Societies, 'Free-Thought' congregations; Unitarians; and many officially Baptist, Congregational and Methodist fellowships which saw themselves as seeking fresh truths. If the seeking was sometimes humourless, many people found in this 'liberal fringe' an exhilarating opportunity to imagine, explore and discuss; and it was among these seekers that the young Gilbert Chesterton was brought up.

Free Thought was thus romantically seen as a quest; but there was, particularly in the 'nineties, a still more compelling myth of power: that of Scientific Progress. For many people it was part of their religious faith.

These things shall be! A loftier race
Than e'er the world hath known shall rise
With flame of freedom in their souls,
And light of science in their eyes. (My underlining. 19)

In the same period, H.G.Wells' early stories captured the sense of wonder that his readers found in scientific discovery. His own scientific education had opened up new imaginative worlds for him, and he had great plans for the ideal society of the future. (20) Wells

significantly indicates how romantic impulses attached themselves to science. But this was not apparent to his thousands of readers; they simply felt, when 1900 arrived, that ~~XXXX~~^{prospects} for man's progress in the twentieth century were stupendous.

*

The fizz went through the whole of society. Right at the end of the century came halfpenny and penny newspapers, so that the newly educated masses could share the exciting outlook.

The whole life of Fleet Street became effervescent as it had not been since the days of Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt; the new papers jolted the dignified but turgid Victorian press world like an electric current. In 1888 T.P.O'Connor started publishing The Star at $\frac{1}{2}$ d., the Daily Mail appeared in 1896 at the same price, and the Daily Graphic came out in 1890 for 1d. as 'the only illustrated morning paper.' Sensationalism and campaigning journalism started; W.T.Stead's exposure of child prostitution is the best known early example of this.(21) But the new papers were genuinely lively and readable, and for a few years yet the full insidious force and pressure of advertising and politics were not felt. Meanwhile the great new presses rolled with a roar like the voice of mankind. Moreover, these papers reflected a resurgence of radical Liberalism for the first time in nearly a century. Its issues may not have been as urgent as those of the 1800s, but they were grave enough in a period of great poverty, imperial expansion, scientific advances and the problems of huge new urban populations.(22) In 1900 the most fervent political idealists were the 'New Liberals' who condemned the Boer War and imperialist ambitions. A great many bright journalists were Liberals; perhaps it was the last decade in which a young idealist could become a journalist. Fleet Street was a romance in its own right, and in the loftiest sense of that term; and among the young idealists it drew to itself was Chesterton. (23)

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' We have now to see how Chesterton grew up among these romantic excitements and where, among these different, enticing imaginative worlds, he chose to belong.

He was born in 1874 and grew up in upper-middle-class comfort in 11, Warwick Gardens off Kensington High St. His parents were cultured, easy going people, and he and his younger brother Cecil looked back to happy childhoods full of amusement and enjoyment - the toy theatre, the amateur telephone rigged up in the garden, the family parties.(24) But the really seminal experiences in these years were the arguments; Gilbert and Cecil would debate with each other for hours, irrespective of company, in the fiercest but friendliest manner. On one extraordinary occasion the sparring went on for eighteen hours and thirteen minutes non-stop; the parents' reaction was simply to send in food at intervals. Gilbert was nineteen, Cecil fourteen. Predictably, such parents belonged to the 'liberal fringe' of Christianity that I have described, going to church spasmodically for the sake of the preachers, especially 'that large-hearted and poetic orator, Stopford Brooke', an ex-Anglican who commanded a large non-denominational Christian following.(25) Gilbert's later wording suggests his quick response to Brooke's speculative, imaginative Christianity; he was grateful for its wide horizons and its sensitiveness. However, back in his boyhood he had come to see an absurd side to these well-meaning people; they were, intellectually speaking, vacuous.

I suppose I have got a dogmatic mind. Anyhow, even when I did not believe in any of the things called dogma, I assumed that people were sorted out into solid groups by the dogmas they believed or disbelieved. I supposed that the Theosophists all sat in the same hall because they all believed in Theosophy. I supposed the Atheists all combined because they believed in Theism...I have come to the conclusion that I was largely mistaken in this idea. I believe now that the congregations of these semi-secular chapels consist largely of one vague sea of wandering doubters, with their wandering doubts, who may be found one Sunday seeking a solution from the Theists and another Sunday from the Theosophists. (26)

Chesterton's later memories of these people were very funny and, one suspects, pretty accurate:

I remember a man with a long beard and a deep booming voice who proclaimed at intervals: 'What we need is Love,' or 'All we require is Love', like the detonations of a heavy gun. I remember another radiant little man who spread out his fingers and said 'Heaven is here! It is now!' which seemed a disturbing thought under the circumstances. There was an aged, aged man who seemed to live at one of these literary clubs and who would hold up a large hand at intervals and preface some fairly ordinary observation by saying, 'A Thought.' One day, Jepson, I think, goaded beyond endurance, is said to have exploded with the words, 'But, good God, man, you don't call that a thought, do you? (27)

Chesterton's laughter is goodhumoured but dismissive; during his twenties he stopped identifying with this form of Victorian romanticism. He wanted - not arid rationality; that was equally unsatisfying; but logic, clarity, intellectually solid ideas to command his allegiance. It was this early experience which led him to write later as if these suburban seekers were typical of all Protestants; however, in reacting against their vagueness - whatever its romantic possibilities of numinousness - he began to find his own clarity. (28)

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He next encountered that other romantic mutation, Decadence. He was an art student at the Slade School between 1892-1894 when it was at its most potent. (29) Although they seem distinct styles to us nowadays, the fashionable Whistler and the Impressionist painters seemed to him an integral part of Decadence because their concern was with appearances - the play of light, for instance - rather than with solid objects themselves. Like the 'liberal Christians', he felt they were avoiding truth. 'The philosophy of Impressionism is necessarily close to the philosophy of Illusion. And this atmosphere also tended to contribute, however indirectly, to a certain mood of unreality and sterile isolation that settled at this time upon me; and I think upon others.' (30)

He absorbed all the fashionable ideas on subjectivism and solipsism, but his bright mind carried them to a novel and disturbing conclusion. 'When dull atheists came and explained to me that there was nothing

but mind...the atheist told me so pompously that he did not believe there was any God; and there were moments when I did not believe there was any atheist.' (31) Nothing, it seemed, had absolute worth. More importantly, he saw that a philosophy which allows no authority to experience will cripple man mentally; his ideas can have no intrinsic value, he has nothing to justify action. Chesterton withdrew from his Art School friends and sloped off to literature lectures at University College; the Decadence worked as a poisonous nihilism in his system. For a while he had 'an overpowering impulse to record or draw horrible ideas and images', and as we shall see later, there would always be images of dark, exotic menace in his work.(32)

Oscar Wilde could hardly be claimed as an influence by a respectable young man in 1894, but neither could an artistic boy in the 'nineties escape him. (33) Chesterton may have loathed the Decadence intellectually, but he had far too much innate aestheticism in his make-up to swing to the opposite extreme and join the 'Hearties', as they were called - that is, Kipling, Hensley and their followers - as against the 'Arties'. This should be remembered when one reads criticism of the extravert jolliness of the later G.K.C. (34) For all his cheerful common-sense, Chesterton's 'fin-de-siècle' affinities are obvious today in his literary style. The paradoxes, of course, place him with Wilde - 'Do not free a camel from his hump; you may be freeing him from being a camel' could well be Wilde but is actually Chesterton- and so is the desire to shock, which they both share with Shaw. But it is his visual quality as a writer, which Shaw does not have, which betrays Chesterton's real affiliation with the Decadents. Their use of colour to create atmosphere was consummate; read the descriptions in The Portrait of Dorian Gray, for instance.(35) So was their sense of line; Aubrey Beardsley's drawings are a visual example. Chesterton constantly describes sharp, grotesque and malign shapes - the

perversely cut paper in 'The Wrong Shape' is one such - or in dramatic and menacing forms, like the great oak-tree as it crashes to the ground at the end of The Napoleon of Notting Hill; (36) or the cloaked corpse on the snow in 'The Dagger with Wings.' This colour-scheme from the same story uses jewel colours to create a fateful, dramatic mood, and also grey and white as contrast; both characteristic of the Decadents' palette. (37)

Father Brown remained seated, gazing abstractedly at the carpet, where a faint red glimmer shone from the glass in the doorway. Once it seemed to brighten like a ruby and then darkened again, as if the sun of that stormy day had passed from cloud to cloud. Nothing moved except the aquatic creatures which floated to and fro in the dim green bowl... (Father Brown goes out to make a 'phone call) Then he went and sat down again, staring at the dark carpet, which again glowed blood-red with the light from the glass door. Something in the filtered light set his mind drifting on certain borderlands of thought, with the first white daybreak before the coming of colour, and all that mystery which is alternately veiled and revealed in the symbols of window and door. (38)

'Lepanto' has gorgeously evil colour schemes to convey physical horror:

On them the sea-valves cluster and the grey sea forests curl,
Splashed with a splendid sickness, the sickness of the pearl;
They swell in sapphire smoke out of the blue cracks in the ground...
(39)

Chesterton is sufficiently deft and stylish to handle even these ambitious colour effects without deteriorating into a vulgar orgy; and the force of the poem is ultimately in its quiet and colourless ending.

Chesterton's 'decadent' colour-schemes are, of course, only part of his full palette, which includes wholesome earth and sky tones and clear heraldic blazons. The point here is that he uses colour dramatically; and often with much inward feeling, to evoke evil. It is a clue to his innate link - in spite of himself - with that odd, intense development of the earlier Romantic movement. (40)

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It was another manifestation of the romantic spirit in Victorian England which rescued the young Chesterton from his fin-de-siècle

misery.

When I had been for some time in these, the darkest depths of contemporary pessimism, I had a strong inward impulse of revolt; to dislodge this incubus or throw off this nightmare. But as I was still thinking the thing out by myself, with little help from philosophy and no real help from religion, I invented a rudimentary and makeshift mystical theory of my own. It was substantially this; that even mere existence...was extraordinary enough to be exciting. Anything was magnificent compared with nothing...I hung on to the remains of religion by this one thin thread of thanks...This way of looking at things, with a sort of mystical minimum of gratitude, was of course assisted by those few of the fashionable writers who were not pessimists; especially by Walt Whitman, by Browning and by Stevenson; Browning's 'God must be glad one loves his world so much', or Stevenson's 'belief in the ultimate decency of things'. But I do not think it is too much to say that I took it in a way of my own; even if it was a way I could not see clearly or make very clear. (41)

Chesterton had, in fact, found the point where Wordsworth started; a sense of wonder at the physical universe. For a while, this was sufficient. He took from all three writers their delight in living, and found endorsement for his own delight in a group of less contemplative men than Wordsworth. Yet he had read Wordsworth as well, and knew how he related to Stevenson at least, as his later comment shows: '...what moved Stevenson was what moved Wordsworth; the unanswerable fact of that first vividness of the vision of life. But he had it in his own quaint way; and it was hardly the vision of meadow grove and stream. It was rather the vision of coffin, gallows and gory sabre that was apparelled in celestial light, the glory and freshness of a dream.' (42)

In Chesterton's own experience Whitman probably preceded Stevenson as a guide. The unpublished notebooks of his boyhood are full of Whitmanesque 'verse' for 1894 and thereabouts, quite unlike his later rhymes. A school friend, Lucian Oldershaw, had introduced him to Whitman, and later wrote: 'I shall never forget reading to him from the Canterbury Walt Whitman in my bedroom at West Kensington. The seance lasted from two to three hours, and we were intoxicated with the excitement of the discovery.' (43) Even to the modern reader, the

sensuality of Leaves of Grass in toto is stunning; so Whitman's vision must have been profoundly liberating to those two young men in the taboo-ridden 'nineties. Chesterton outgrew Whitman, and after a number of appreciative mentions up to 1908, hardly mentions him; but his vision of life had been much more happily and hopefully romantic than that of the Decadents.

Chesterton's first full length book was Robert Browning (1903), so he had plenty of opportunity to enlarge on his enthusiasm. The study was very popular, but criticised for its unscholarliness. Later, Chesterton cheerfully admitted this:

I will not say that I wrote a book on Browning; but I wrote a book on love, liberty, poetry, my own views on God and religion (highly undeveloped)...a book in which the name of Browning was introduced from time to time, I might almost say with considerable art, or at any rate with some decent appearance of regularity. There were very few biographical facts in the book, and these were nearly all wrong. But there is something buried somewhere in the book; though I think it is rather my boyhood than Browning's biography. (44)

'Love, liberty, poetry, my own views on God and religion' sounds like the archetypal romantic manifesto. Chesterton found in Browning the same wonder at nature that he found in Whitman, but now the intense existence of natural things hints at an intense existence of spiritual things also: 'Enormous problems, and yet more enormous answers, about pain, prayer, destiny, ~~liberty~~ and conscience are suggested by cherries, by the sun, by a melon-seller, by an eagle flying in the sky...' (45) He liked Browning's appreciation of the grotesque: 'The same sense of the uproarious force in things which makes Browning dwell on the oddity of a fungus or a jellyfish...' (46) The French romantic writer, Victor Hugo, had written a famous essay on 'The Grotesque'; for Chesterton, the word was associated with Gothic cathedrals, gargoyles and fantastic animal carvings. In Browning, he saw it as a formal intensification of that which is already full of vitality, so that the reader feels the physical actuality more vividly. The grotesque includes the whimsical: Chesterton considers that had

Browning been asked, 'Is life worth living?' he might well have replied, 'Crimson toadstools in Hampshire.'

In 1903, when he was writing Browning, Chesterton was also supporting the Liberal Party enthusiastically; and in admiring Browning's larger 'liberalism' he defined his own understanding of the word in a singularly interesting way. '...A belief in growth and energy and in the ultimate utility of error...a Liberal may be defined approximately as a man who, if he could by waving his hand in a dark room, stop the mouths of all the deceivers of mankind forever, would not wave his hand...the great central Liberal doctrine, a belief in a certain destiny of the human spirit beyond, and perhaps even independent of, our sincerest convictions.' (47) Noticing the capital Ls here, one is not surprised that Chesterton soon became disillusioned with political Liberalism. He reveals his own as a metaphysical, rather than a political, position; an openness to paradox and ultimately to dualism; an adventurous and imaginative attitude, which admits disturbing possibilities. This mixture of politics and idealism is reminiscent of the early Romantics; it is also distinctively Chesterton.

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We have already noted the visionary quality which Chesterton loved in Stevenson's view of the world about him. In the 1900s, Stevenson seemed more obviously romantic in the picturesque Edwardian sense of the term than Browning or Whitman, because of his picturesque life and his swashbuckling adventure stories; but Chesterton insists that the genuinely romantic in Stevenson is most obvious in his idiosyncratic literary style. 'I find everywhere, even in his mere diction and syntax...the conception that man is born with hope and courage indeed, but born outside that he was meant to attain...that there is a quest, a test, a trial by combat or pilgrimage of discovery...the very movement of the sentence is the movement of a man going somewhere and generally fighting something.' Again, this is the distinctively

romantic image of man, heroic and alone, moving towards his destiny. (48)

Stevenson as a little boy had also had a toy theatre with gaily coloured cardboard cut-out actors, and Chesterton saw these as having influenced his taste for all that was definite, clear-cut, flamboyantly committed: 'All his images stand out in very sharp outlines; and are, as it were, all edges. It is something in him which afterwards attracted him to the abrupt and angular black and white of woodcuts. It is to be seen from the first, in the way his eighteenth-century figures stand up against the skyline, with their cutlasses and cocked hats...there was nothing of the dissolving view.' (49)

The vague, the 'dissolving view' is here again seen as unsatisfactory. Painters of the 'nineties, quite apart from Beardsley, often show this love of the exaggeratedly clear outline where they react away from Impressionism; Gauguin and the Swiss painter, Arnold Böcklin, for instance. Stevenson and Chesterton were not alone.

So Whitman, Browning and Stevenson rescued the young Chesterton from his becalmed state, so that he was able to rediscover his childhood sense of life as full of exciting possibilities. But that re-discovery was made on his own idiosyncratic terms; for instance, ~~his~~ his new fighting philosophy was accompanied by a much livelier sense of humour than any of the three older writers had. He acquired this philosophy between 1894 and 1904, and flew it like a banner for the rest of his life. 'Romantic' occurs over and over again in the Browning and Stevenson biographies where he wants to convey their adventurousness. His own understanding of the term may have been Edwardian, but in absorbing their vivid sensuousness and their idealism, he absorbed things central to the romantic tradition. (50)

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The impact of the Morris dream-world was even more important to Chesterton.

In 1896 he met Frances Bloggs, fell in love with her at first sight

and married her in 1901. Her family lived in Bedford Park, which was (and still is) a delectable little housing project near the Turnham Green tube station in Acton. It had recently been created by the architect, Mr. J. Comyns Carr, as a protest against London's growing ugliness, and as such, it was part of the Morris myth.

Artistic people lived there, unconsciously playing out their roles in that myth; including W.B. Yeats and his family, writing poetry and painting and weaving Celtic designs on handlooms. The red-brick houses in Dutch or Queen Anne style were each different from their neighbours, there was a village green and an 'inn', with art-nouveau decorations. Through Frances and her set, Chesterton became free of this delightful community. When he wrote the Autobiography in the 'thirties, he entitled a whole chapter, 'The Fantastic Suburb', and made clear how much needed such a romantic gesture was in an ugly, Philistine London.

A great deal of this chapter is about W.B. Yeats, who Chesterton came to know well. Yeats in 1900 was already well-known as a poet of faery, an adventurer in mystery. His kind of 'romance' was a kind of challenge to Chesterton, who, nine years younger, was aware of a strong pull of resemblance and an even stronger dissimilarity to the older man. (50)

Frances was part of this dream-world's charm, and she never lost this deep imaginative appeal for her husband. "She was a queer card. She wore a green velvet dress barred with grey fur, which I should have called artistic, but that she hated all the talk about art; and she had an attractive face, which I should have called elvish, but that she hated all the talk about elves." (This comment on 'all the talk about' art and elves is revealing of the nature of Edwardian romanticism!) (51) The very contradictions of Frances' character fascinated Gilbert; one of which was that in a world of chattering intellectuals, she quietly acted. The most fascinating oddity, however, was her Christianity. "...She actually practised a religion... Any number of people proclaimed religions, chiefly oriental religions, analysed or argued about them; but that anyone could regard religion as a practical thing like gardening was

something quite new to me...she had been brought up, by an accident, in the school of an Anglo-Catholic convent; and to all that agnostic or mystic world, practising a religion was much more puzzling than professing it.' (52) She may not have appreciated the precise nature of her imaginative gift to Gilbert, but it is important that through her he found the Morris dream-world of poetry and art related to a kind of Christianity with a totally different kind of imaginative appeal from that of the 'liberal fringe'. The Anglicans who Chesterton was meeting from 1900 on, had nothing vague about them; they were confident, committed and witty. Chief among these new friends was Conrad Noel, later to be famous as the colourful Socialist vicar of Thaxted, where he created a romantic medievalised enclave; and Canon Dr. Percy Dearmer, the expert on church art and music, who walked about in a cassock and biretta designed by himself as especially appropriate to Anglo-Catholics. Gilbert rapidly became known as a stimulating, off-beat speaker at C.S.U. meetings. (53) It was a real part of the happiness of his courtship and marriage that it brought him into a social milieu where the richest blend of religious culture in English romanticism, perhaps, was to be found. (54)

The Wild Knight, Chesterton's first book of serious verse, was published in 1900. It reflects the mix he had now achieved of the different strands of Victorian post-romanticism; the Morris dream-world, the High Anglicanism drawn from the Oxford movement, the Decadence, the political idealism, the liberal idealism. The flavour is of early Yeats, Aesthetic imagery, medieval carols, ballads and religious legends. Morris's own verse is recognisably one of many influences. (55)

In 1911 Frances Chesterton persuaded Gilbert to move out of London to Beaconsfield. The Old Town is still a quiet, mellow red-brick place, an original of which Bedford Park is but a pastiche - very much part of Morris's picture of Merry England. So is Top Meadow, the house they built for themselves; a quaint mixture of baronial hall (the big studio)

and Tudor cottage. And here Gilbert was utterly at home, until his death.

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Chesterton hit Fleet Street in the golden era of the new popular newspapers. Edwardian Fleet Street was racy, passionate and ramshackle, and he loved it. 'I belonged to the old Bohemian life of Fleet Street,' he wrote later, when the Press had become big business and he was disillusioned. (56) Up to 1911 he was one of its sights, sitting in public houses scribbling and drinking copiously, or standing scribbling on the pavement, oblivious to all around him.

Chesterton was swept into newspapers precisely on the crest of the new Liberal wave; his old friends Bentley and Oldershaw were able to buy 'the old Radical weekly paper The Speaker and run it with admirable spirit and courage in rather a new mood of Radicalism; what some of its enemies might have called a romantic radicalism.' This was in 1899; and they called in Chesterton to help fill their columns. Up to this year he had only published isolated art criticism for The Bookman, but in the Autobiography he describes himself as now writing 'pugnacious political articles.' Unfortunately it is impossible to confidently identify these now, as the Speaker's leaders were unsigned and Chesterton's distinctive style was still forming. (57)

In 1900 the 'new Liberals' acquired the Daily News, an important morning paper. George Cadbury owned it, and A.L.Gardiner was the Literary Editor who hired Chesterton on the strength of his brilliant debut defending eccentric causes in The Speaker (these were later issued as The Defendant), to write the prestigious Saturday evening column. His brief was to be amusing rather than instructive, and his column soon became a kind of pulpit-in-motley, and was enormously popular. Like Hazlitt in that previous period of exciting popular journalism, he was a personality his readers chuckled with, and they were warmed by

his loves and hates. Both his ideas and his style crystallised. When one turns the big crackling pages of a 1903 Daily News, say, and sees the sixteen inches of wit and colour quite obviously glowing in a broad stripe, it is easy to understand how readers turned to him as a weekly treat. The little essays thumped and bounced with high-spirited absurdities; but underlying, there was a serious message. The world is beautiful and astonishing beyond belief. Man is a strange, wonderful creature, but in danger of being ruined by the rich and powerful. Chesterton gloried in the role of scribbler who rallies the public to the defence of democratic freedoms, and he could write trenchantly, as in this 1908 passage attacking corruption in a Press run by plutocrats:

This is the whole danger of our times. There is a difference between the oppression which has been too common in the past and the oppression which seems only too probable in the future. Oppression in the past has commonly been an individual matter, The oppressors were as simple as the oppressed, and as lonely. The aristocrat sometimes hated his inferiors; he always hated his equals. The plutocrat was an individualist. But in our time even the plutocrat has become a Socialist. They have science and combination, and may easily inaugurate a much greater tyranny than the world has ever seen. (58)

This kind of writing is in the tradition of Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt or Cobbett. Chesterton was a 'trumpet' - the references to trumpets and fighting scattered over his journalism are his stage effects - producing 'soul-animating strains.' By the time he died in 1936 he had, unlike Milton, produced too many; but pre-1913, he was a loud and splendid voice announcing a world where the common man was invested with ancient dignity, and where the timeless struggle for liberty and justice had to be fought yet again.

In this chapter we have seen Chesterton as an Edwardian discarding the Decadent and the liberal Christian mutations of romanticism, as far as he could; and rooting his imagination in the Morris dream-world, in Anglo-Catholicism and in Christian Socialism, all just as ~~XXXX~~ clearly ~~XX~~ recognisable developments of the Romantic movement; and this is the context in which he must be first understood.

What is rooted, will grow; as Chesterton matured, he became more

than a talented derivative Edwardian. Through Victorian romanticism, he reached back to something which, whether he realised it or not, belonged to primary Romantic ideas, and particularly those of great and numinous images. It is this phenomenal latter-day surge of the pristine Romantic spirit in an Edwardian journalist which is the main topic of this thesis.

Chapter Three. 'The Legend of an Epic Hour'-

Chesterton's Historical and Political Writing.

'He is not of our time, but of all times. One imagines him drinking deep draughts from the horn of Skrymir, or exchanging jests with Falstaff at the Boar's Head in Eastcheap, or joining in the intellectual revels at the Mermaid Tavern, or meeting Johnson foot to foot and dealing blow for mighty blow.' It was in this historical context that many of 'G.K.C.'s readers saw him, and it was this kind of legendary Englishness that Belloc specially remembered in Chesterton after his death; (1) but these words were actually written by A.G.Gardiner, Chesterton's editor at the Daily News from 1902-1911; and he was thinking not only of his most popular contributor's literary characteristics, but his actual personal appearance as he swept in and out of the newspaper office in his picturesque cloak, broad-brimmed hat and sword-stick, Chaucerian and swashbuckling.- the 'G.K.C.' of all the cartoons, absurd but likeable. (2)

The 'G.K.C.' persona was of considerable significance to Chesterton because of its whiff of historical fancy dress, and once he had realised that his wife's inspiration to kit him out like this was apt, he enthusiastically fostered the image. He was probably ^{of the significance} unaware/that the first romantic journalists had projected personas for themselves- Lamb's 'Elia' is the best known; and equally would have scarcely identified himself with Byron's 'Childe Harold'. He knew very well, though, that in an age when most poets wore toppers, Tennyson covered his shaggy locks with a (highly becoming) broad-brimmed hat. But if this choice of clothing implies an alignment with some serious purpose, in general the fat, jolly 'G.K.C.' belonged to a merrier, older social order than Edwardian England. In a late essay Chesterton casts interesting light on his awareness of this: 'I myself...do regularly and as a matter of business, make a multitude of bad jokes. I do it for reasons connected with the duties of demagogy, and I am not

defending it here, but rather something more important...it is not altogether our fault if a chasm has opened in the community of beliefs and social traditions which can only be spanned by the far halloo of the buffoon.' (3)

So we must expect that much of Chesterton's historical and political writing will emanate, as it were, from the highly colourful and picturesque 'G.K.C.' Chesterton published a great deal of writing which could loosely be termed 'historical': twelve volumes of historical biography,, three long stories and many short ones on historical themes or topics, one long epic poem, a Short History of England, as well as hundreds of little essays and shorter poems shot through with images and references from the past;(4) so it is necessary to understand how far the demagogic 'G.K.C.' persona controlled this writing.

'G.K.C.' is a delightful but limited character; he belongs in the Olde Englishe Inne, quaffing ale in great quantities. Chesterton places him in a whole ~~world~~ context of inn and village, part of the ideal, medieval, Catholic world which permeates late nineteenth century literature. There was a definite William Morris tradition of romantic inns; and Chesterton passionately upheld them as symbols of traditional English good fellowship:

I know where men can still be found,
 Anger and clamorous accord,
 And virtues growing from the ground,
 And fellowship of beer and board,
 And song, that is a sturdy cord,
 And hope, that is a hardy shrub,
 And goodness, that is God's last word -
 Will someone take me to a pub? (5)

There are virtuous pubs all over Chesterton's books - for instance, in The Return of Don Quixote, the pub is where genuine popular opinions win over doctrinaire socialism. (6) Chesterton constantly sniped at teetotallers because they tried to close the poor man's pub and deprive him of pleasure; and irritating as his reiteration

of this theme may be, it gave his religious opinions a sturdy popular credibility they might not otherwise have had.

'G.K.C.'s real interest, however, is the traditional patron of the pub, the Common Man, who potters through all the fiction, a lovable, illogical creature, splendidly impervious to intellectuals and do-gooders. He is quite obviously the Chestertonian version of the Wordsworthian rustic or Rousseau's 'noble savage'; as Irving Babbitt says, 'the ^[Romantic] whole/movement is filled with the praise of ignorance, and of those who still enjoy its inappreciable advantages - the savage, the peasant and above all, the child'.(7)

My favourite example is the aged inhabitant of Grassley-in-the-Hole, chased by two naive moderns who believe he will prove a kind of primitive oracle - which he is, but not at a level they can take in. Turnbull the humanist speaks first:

'...What you want, my friend, is your rights. You don't want any priests or churches. A vote, a right to speak is what you-'

'Who says I ain't got a right to speak?' said the old man, facing round in an irrational frenzy. 'I got a right to speak. I'm a man, I am. I don't want no votin' nor priests. I say a man's a man, that's what I say. If a man an't a man, what is he? That's what I says...'

'Quite so,' said Turnbull, 'a citizen'.

'I say 'e's a man', said the rustic furiously, stopping and striking his stick on the ground. 'Not a city or owt else. He's a man...' And the old man went wildly singing into the night. (8)

So this was 'G.K.C.' - a delightfully whimsical piece of Old Englishry, in his pub with the Common Man, roaring out old ballads with thumping rhythms. He was also a crusader for ancient freedoms; for Chesterton, the historic past was directly related to the political present, This had been true for other romantics of certain schools; not only French painters, such as David, looked back to classical Greece for archetypes of democracy, but also some of our own poets; Shelley's Hellas sees the revolt of the Greeks in 1821 as one act in 'the great drama of the revival of liberty', and her ancient heroes 'rule the present from the past.' (9)

It was therefore entirely appropriate that when Cecil Chesterton

and their mutual friend, Hilaire Belloc, started their contentious little weekly newspaper, The Eye Witness in 1911, 'G.K.C.', the poetic chronicler of England's legends and of The Napoleon of Notting Hill, should join them in their crusading for a better England. Chesterton describes in his Autobiography, in phrases reminiscent of the revolutionary 'liberté, égalité, fraternité', how his ideas had moved away from Socialism towards the vision of an alternative peasant society (which later found expression in Distributism): ',,,my instinct about justice, about liberty and equality, was somewhat different from that current in our age; and from all the tendencies towards concentration and generalisation. It was my instinct to defend liberty in small nations and poor families; that is, to defend the rights of men as including the rights of property; especially the rights of the poor.' (10)

He articulated these ideas in What's Wrong With the World (1912); but for all its humanity and wit, this book reveals Chesterton's fundamental inadequacy as a political thinker. Although he was a brilliant platform debater, he neither translated ideas into action himself, nor into the sort of public formulations which men of action could make use of. (11) He obviously believed that as a journalist he only had to describe the vision, and someone, somewhere, would put it into practice. Indeed, the endings of his political novels imply a distrust of all politics; the inference is that happy resolutions come, rather, from mystical religion. (12) Was Chesterton bitterly disappointed by Distributism's lack of success? I think the question never arose for him; in his imagination, the vision of Merrie England did not fade. Nor can he accurately be termed a demagogue, because from beginning to end of his career, his readers were lower-middle and middle class, and he could never claim a significant working-class following. (13)

Chesterton's other incursion into politics was in his war-time

propaganda, based on the anti-German, pro-French theories of Belloc, and fully expressed in A Short History of England, (1917), dangerously partial and dangerously readable. 'The Faith is Europe and Europe is the Faith' was Belloc's aphorism; he saw Catholic Christendom, and France in particular, because of her Roman heritage, as the prime medium for Christianity. Chesterton seems to have accepted this totally, to the point where the experience of Christians in non-European traditions hardly touched his imagination. He distrusted Moslems (equally because of their monotheism and their disapproval of alcohol he said!), and it is obvious that he regarded black people as 'lesser breeds without the laws' His anti-semitism, which is glimpsed throughout his work in small references rather than formulated in any one book, cannot be wholly excused; I offer some explanation of it in Chapter Six. Unsavoury myths are the occupational hazard of the romantic historian, and rich Jews were generally unpopular in Edwardian England. (14)

Chesterton's critics distrust his interpretation of events for one chief reason, however; his Catholicism. In his apologetic writing, he consistently made a case for Catholicism on what he took to be intellectually sound historical and rational grounds; but the flaws in some of these have already been noted, and Catholicism was for him a profoundly romantic experience. In his own 1908 definition of the term, it fulfilled every requirement: the strange with the secure, the imaginative adventure, the picturesque and the poetic.

At first, Chesterton's fascination with dogmas and symbols, his love of the Middle Ages, were accepted as an attractive and appropriate part of the brilliant 'G.K.C.' package. Here, for instance, is one of the earliest of the magnificent images describing the Catholic Church which recur throughout his work. The heroes in The Man Who Was Thursday are escaping from their enemies in a car:

'Going to be a storm, I think' said Dr. Bull. 'I say, it's a pity we havn't got a light on this car, if only to see by.'

'We have' said the Colonel, and from the floor of the car he fished up a heavy, old-fashioned carved iron lantern with a light inside it. It was obviously an antique, and it would seem that its original use had been semi-religious, for there was rude moulding of a cross upon one of its sides...there was a certain allegory of their whole position in the contrast between the modern automobile, and its strange ecclesiastical lamp...they turn to face their pursuers.

'Do you see this lantern?' cried Syme in a terrible voice. 'Do you see the cross carved on it? and the flame inside? You did not make it. You did not light it. Better men than you, men who could believe and obey, twisted the entrails of iron and preserved the legend of fire. There is not a street you walk on, there is not a thread you wear, that was not made as this lantern was, by denying your philosophy of dirt and rats. You can make nothing. You can only destroy. You will destroy the world. Let that suffice you. Yet this one old Christian lantern you shall not destroy. It shall go where your empire of apes will never have the wit to find it.' (15)

This skilful but overt allegorising exemplifies the charm, and also the limitations, of much of 'G.K.C.'s writing on the Catholic Good Old Days. Gradually it became boring; by 1917, certainly, his attitude on any social or political topic was predictable. He was not actually baptised into the Roman Catholic Church until 1922, and those who knew him well were only surprised he had postponed it so long. While baptism gave him a new sense of strength and freedom, it sharply defined his public loyalties; and the sweeping anti-Protestantism of the essays in The Thing (originally published in G.K.'s Weekly in the 'twenties) must privately have embarrassed some discerning Catholics. (16) He was by temperament outside the new post-war mood of disenchantment, and refought the pre-war battles with new names. (17) Inevitably he became associated with reactionary attitudes, because as he himself argued: 'We all live in the past - because there is nothing else to live in. To live in the present is like proposing to sit on a pin. It is too minute, it is too slight a support, it is too uncomfortable a posture, and it is of necessity followed immediately by totally different experiences, analogous to those of jumping up with a yell.' (18) In 1934, when uncomfortable stances were generally considered proofs of one's honesty, such words as these help to explain why 'G.K.C.'s ideas seemed too comfortable,

too escapist to be valid. His younger contemporaries did not want to 'bask, wallow and finally rest in the great solid fourposter of the Chestertonian mind', and the fact that Eric Gill could write this in 1936 would have appalled Chesterton, had he been alive,; he had never tolerated intellectual wallowing. By so much did his original purpose appear blurred and softened by the time he died.

It is clear, then, that Chesterton ~~was~~^{is} not considered a historical or political thinker in any academic sense; his persona, and his dependence on myth, prevent this. Nor did he ever pretend to a serious reputation as a historian. We have to judge him as an artist on his imaginative qualities, not on dispassionate scholarship. Once we understand this, however, we are free to appreciate the virtues of his approach to history. In the prose, these are most apparent when he is not overly conscious of the crusading responsibilities of 'G.K.C.'

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There is a very important passage in The Everlasting Man (1925) where Chesterton describes the kind of historical writer he in fact is:

...it may be allowable to say that we need a new thing; which may be called psychological history. I mean the consideration of what things meant in the mind of a man, especially an ordinary man; as distinct from what is defined or deduced merely from official forms or documents. It is not enough to be told that a tom-cat was called a totem; especially when it was not called a totem. We want to know what it felt like. Was it like Whittington's cat or like a witch's cat? Was its real name Pasht or Puss-in-Boots?...What did soldiers feel when they saw splendid in the sky that strange totem that we call the Golden Eagle of the Legions? What did vassals feel about those other totems, the lions or the leopards upon the shield of their lord? So long as we neglect this subjective side of history, which may more simply be called the inside of history, there will always be a certain limitation on that science which can better be transcended by art. So long as the historian cannot do that, fiction will be truer than fact. There will be more reality in a novel; yes, even in a historical novel. (19)

Chesterton put all his considerable reading, his enormous intelligence, sensibility, common sense and imagination into this 'history from the inside' - which accounts for, even if it does not excuse, the shortage of dates and facts in his biographies. He

simply did not see history so splintered. However, in the middle of a leisurely explanation will come a little anecdote which flickers before the mind's eye like an early newsreel, so much more authentic than a studio re-creation twenty years later. For example, the known biographical facts on St. Thomas Aquinas are necessarily remote for the modern reader; but Chesterton makes them psychologically plausible.

'There is one casual anecdote', he promises us, and then for three pages he sets the historical context, with little visual imagery.

Gradually pictures start to emerge, dimly first and then brightly; until finally: 'And then suddenly the goblets leapt and rattled on the board and the great table shook, for the friar had brought down his huge fist like a club of stone, with a crash that startled everyone like an explosion; and had cried out in a strong voice, but like a man in the grip of a dream, 'And that will settle the Manichees!'" (20)

Often it is a small, subtle immediacy; as in the account of the discovery of the cave-drawings of Lascaux. 'A man and a boy entered some time ago a hollow in the hills', the story starts like a fairy-tale, and then in Chesterton's rambling conversation are dropped various words suggesting depths, as if we were climbing down with him: 'such sealed and secret corridors of rock': 'burying themselves alive seven times over': 'the first intruders into that sunken world'. It is all dark and eerie, and then - 'they recognised, across that vast and void of ages, the movement and gesture of a man's hand'. (21) The cave-man is in the cave now, or a split second ago. These vivid glimpses are all over the historical writing. (22) Chesterton also knows when to leave a detail unclear; so that an incident of St. Thomas' deathbed suggests something frightening in its restraint:

In the world of that mind there was a wheel of angels, and a wheel of plants, or of animals; but there was also a just and intelligible order of all earthly things, a sane authority and a self-respecting liberty, and a hundred answers to a hundred questions in the complexity of ethics or economics. But there

must have been a moment, when men knew that the thunderous mill of thought had stopped suddenly; and that after the shock of stillness the wheel would shake the world no more; that there was nothing now within that hollow house but a great hill of clay; and the confessor who had been within him in the inner chamber, ran forth as if in fear, and whispered that his confession had been that of a child of five. (23)

The imaginative power which here concentrates on one tiny point of time, can also evoke the great syntheses of history, the flux of ideas and movements rising and falling in vast orchestrations: 'What was that persistent trend or spirit which all through the eighteenth century lifted itself like a very slow and very smooth wave to the deafening breaker of the French Revolution?' (24) Chesterton is deeply conscious of the Revolution as a source of inspiration for early nineteenth century thinkers; for instance, in Robert Browning there is a long passage describing the dissemination of Revolutionary ideals through the lower strata of society in the 1800s - 'It was the age of inspired office-boys'.(25) And he can make the reader see quickly for himself something which a less impressionistic writer might expend many learned words over with less success. Here he is explaining why Aztec gods are ugly:

We may note also in the mythology of this American civilization that element of reversal or violence against instinct of which Dante wrote; which runs backwards everywhere through the unnatural religion of the demons. It is notable not only in ethics but in aesthetics. A South American idol was made as ugly as possible, as a Greek idol was made as beautiful as possible. They were seeking the secret of power, by working backwards against their own nature and the nature of things. There was always a sort of yearning to carve at last, in gold or granite or the dark red timber of the forests, a face at which the sky itself would break like a cracked mirror. (26)

The reader can endorse this out of his own imaginings, as well as from his knowledge of primitive art as magic. But often Chesterton ~~gains~~ wins respect by his sheer good judgment of the mind's workings. For instance, The Everlasting Man was written to counter H.G.Wells' arguments in his Outline of History that man was explicable in deterministic and agnostic terms. Wells had stated that religion developed from primitive man's awe in face of the harvest cycle, of

dreams, and of the tribal elders. Chesterton argues that these would never have acquired religious significance had not the religious sentiment existed already. The reader assents out of his instinctive consciousness, his 'common sense'; Chesterton's presentation has a plausibility which invites respect. (27)

Although The Everlasting Man is too discursive for the modern reader, as a demonstration of the delicacy and acuteness of Chesterton's arguments it is unique. The man who chose to describe his contemporary culture as 'full of curiosity; and the one thing it cannot endure is the agony of agnosticism' obviously knows what he is talking about; yet it is precisely this 'agony' which critics deny to Chesterton. (28) He is at his best in the chapter about the difference between a mythology and a religion:

...mythology is a search; it is something that combines a recurrent desire with a recurrent doubt, mixing a most hungry sincerity ~~with a recurrent~~ in the idea of seeking for a place with a most dark and deep and mysterious levity about all the places found. So far could the lonely imagination lead, and we must turn later to the lonely reason. Nowhere along this road did the two ever travel together...The pagans had dreamt about realities; the dreams do indeed tend to be very vivid dreams when they touch on those tender and tragic things, which can really make a sleeper awaken with the sense that his heart has been broken in his sleep. They tend continually to hover over certain passionate themes of meeting and parting, of a life that ends in death or a death that is the beginning of life. Demeter wanders over a stricken world looking for a stolen child; Isis stretches out her arms over the earth in vain to gather the limbs of Osiris; and there is lamentation upon the hills for Atys and through the woods for Adonis... [But] nobody really thought of Isis as a human being; nobody thought of Demeter as a historical character; nobody thought of Atys as the founder of a church. There was no idea that any one of them had changed the world; but rather that their recurrent death and life bore the sad and beautiful burden of the changelessness of the world. (29)

Of course this is not anthropology. Nevertheless, it makes a real point (the words I have underlined), and once Chesterton has made us see it, another small area of the historical darkness is spotlighted.

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Chesterton is chiefly famous for his biographical studies, and as I deal with the literary ones in Chapter 7, I shall deal mostly with

the non-literary people here. Twelve Types (1902), the earliest collection of such sketches, first showed this flair for probing the minds of men long dead. Some of the choices seem odd for a Victorian romantic - Charles ^{II}~~II~~ and Alexander Pope, for instance - but Chesterton has illuminating things to say about them. The sympathy he shows for Savonarola indicates his imaginative ability to see the opposing point of view, because already he had little love for iconoclasts; here he describes how Savonarola sensed something evil in the Florentines' passion for beauty: '...this is a thing constantly forgotten in judging of ascetics and puritans of old time. A denunciation of harmless sports did not always mean an ignorant hatred of what no-one but a narrow moralist would call harmful. Sometimes it meant an exceedingly enlightened hatred of what no-one but a narrow moralist would call harmless. Ascetics are sometimes more advanced than the average man, as well as less.' (30) Thirty years later he might have considered such sympathy with the puritan spirit inconsistent in a popular Catholic champion; but where his mind can range freely, he is always humane and generous. (31)

The subjective biographer is, of course, always in danger of creating characters in his own image. Chesterton frankly admitted this in Browning's case, as we have seen. Yet each of his 'lives' evokes a strongly felt individual: St. Thomas, St. Francis, Savonarola, Charles II, Cobbett are clearly differentiated. He is too aware of other men's minds to do otherwise. Moreover, he invariably sets his people in the context of the ideas of their period, a highly plausible dimension. The French Revolution is shown as ~~tremendously~~ important for Browning and Dickens. St. Thomas Aquinas is seen against the huge philosophical controversies of the early Middle Ages. (32)

Of course, as we have seen, Chesterton's view of the Middle Ages is 'romantic' and therefore slanted. But it may be argued that he did read his primary sources, the literature of the time, for his biographical studies; in the case of St. Thomas, the Summa. He may

have done his reading rapidly and forgotten the details; but he has read intelligently and he places writers with astonishing shrewdness. He is aware of, but not bemused by, critical exegesis. Of course only a trained historian can do justice to a medieval text; but I would argue that, in spite of his shortcomings, Chesterton's enormous intelligence and intuition provide valid insights when he is engaged on his particular job of 'psychological history.' The criticism of Chaucer is not so much that he misunderstood Chaucer's philosophical background as that he romanticised the social context in which those ideas were worked out.

The novels, also, remind us not to condemn Chesterton's romantic medievalism too sweepingly. He did not have an uncritical vision of the romanticising of the Middle Ages. The Napoleon of Notting Hill, The Ball and the Cross and The Return of Don Quixote all deal in different ways with the romantic who tries to revive medieval ideals and who is opposed by a typically 'modern' thinker. (33) The neo-medievalists do not win outright in any of these novels; Adam Wayne's Notting Hill is a splendid dream, no more. Evan MacIan the Royalist sees his dream of the 'good old days' distorted into a cruel nightmare of tyranny, just as the socialist Turnbull's new society becomes a horror of violence. This is altogether sadder and wiser than Morris's bland picture of a neo-medieval England in News From Nowhere. It is not true, though I have seen it written, that Chesterton 'loved the Middle Ages and hated modern times;' he was not so simple. In the last resort, Chesterton was under no illusions that twentieth-century England could return to medieval social patterns. (34)

Such ironies of perception provide the imaginative strength of the best of the historical poems. In 'Lepanto' the Christian champions are inept in contrast to the whirlwind energy of the Saracens. 'Outline of History', one of the pieces which show Chesterton's interest in archeology, modern man is embarrassingly like primitive man: 'Us with

the troglodytes'.(35) The Ballad of the White Horse is deeply romantic in its evocation of 'battles long ago', but it is not noisy or jingoistic, and it is poised on its ironies. There is the spiritual sickness which seizes the conquering Danes, which Chesterton could describe out of his own experience; the fathomless despair out of which Alfred wrests victory; the triumph which is eternally precarious. For instance, at the end, the aging Alfred wins a battle in far-off London, but in his own Wessex nature itself dismantles his glory:

And all the while on White Horse Hill
 The horse lay long and wan,
 The turf crawled and the fungus crept
 And the little sorrel, while all men slept,
 Unwrought the work of man.

With velvet finger, velvet foot
 The fierce soft mosses then
 Crept on the large white commonweal
 All folk had striven to strip and peel,
 And the grass, like a great green witch's wheel,
 Unwound the toils of men.

And clever and silent thistle strove,
 And buds burst silently,
 With little care for the Thames valley
 Or what things there might be -

That away on the widening river,
 In the eastern plains for crown
 Stood up in the pale purple sky
 One turret of smoke like ivory;
 And the smoke changed and the wind went by,
 And the king took London town. (36)

The form itself, unfashionable as it may be, is part of the poem's ironic strength; it resembles ballad, and is therefore suited to a tale of epic fighting; but Chesterton's variations suggest other and very different things. The movement of the verse shifts by small alterations in verse form and rhyme scheme, until it seems

capable of conveying every fluctuation of mood. This quiet ending

seems to me imaginative writing of a high order; and though

Chesterton imperturbably agreed with his critics that he was

frequently a noisy writer, no one who reads much of his poetry or

his prose can miss his hushed effects. (37) Apart from the battle

scenes, The Ballad of the White Horse has the quietness of an ancient countryside.

So Chesterton uses picturesque myths of history with love; but he

is too intelligent, too aware, not to perceive the weaknesses of the dreams. To say this is not to lessen his essential romanticism; it only intensified the poignancy of his longing for the lost.

We look before and after;
We pine for what is not... (38)

Statistics and dates were not enough; colourful legends were not enough; the true romantic desires the truth which is always beyond these.

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The Common Man, whom we have seen as a comic character in the novels, also appears as a far deeper concept in the non-fiction. Chesterton believed with Wordsworth and Coleridge that simple people retain in their instincts and traditions more wisdom than intellectuals in their acquired knowledge, and he said so as often and as powerfully as he could. (39) It forms the basis for the argument of Orthodoxy; only Christianity meets the deepest common human needs. Chesterton nevertheless realised that the Common Man is often a stupid or craven victim; for instance, in one essay the pathetic little serf ignorantly applauds the rich men who enslave him because he is brain-washed by the newspapers they control. (40)

It follows from this that Chesterton writes well on primitive people. What the artist constantly seeks, he says, is the 'primitive revelation.' By this he means a pristine world of vision - 'as long as the artist gives us glimpses of that, it matters nothing that they are fragmentary or even trivial.' (41) This idea, as we saw above, runs through all Romantic awareness. Chesterton found this pristine vision in man's simplest, most basic experiences:

Ordinary things are more valuable than extraordinary things; nay, they are more extraordinary. Man is something more awful than men; something more strange. The sense of the miracle of humanity itself should be always more vivid to us than any marvels of power, intellect, art or civilization. The mere man on two legs, as such, should be felt as something more heart-breaking than any music and more startling than caricature.

Fairy tales express this primitive sense of reality, the marvel of

common life and its inexorable moral laws:

...even nursery tales only echo an almost pre-natal leap of interest and amazement. These tales say that apples are golden only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found they were green. They make rivers run with wine only to make us remember, for one wild moment, that they run with water...' (42)

The experience of childhood is therefore, for Chesterton as for most Romantics, of the first importance. Man is childlike in his mystical, instinctive apprehension of the truth rooted in ancient sanctities, 'the teeming vitality of the dead', and like the child, he is a profoundly moving figure: 'And I for one believe that the mind of man is at its largest, and especially its broadest, when it feels the brotherhood of humanity linking it up with remote and primitive and even barbaric things'. (53)

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I have tried to show that beyond the picturesque myth-making of 'G.K.C.', Chesterton is a romantic historical writer of real imaginative power. He could suggest the strange vitality of ideas moving in men's minds, and the development of moods which are the dynamic of history. It is always worth reading Chesterton as an adjunct to one's more up-to-date and scholarly reading on a topic; the thing comes alive, he challenges one to think, if nothing else.

Secondly, Chesterton constantly shows us that the Common Man is an experience of history within ourselves which we need to be reminded of and taught to value; our own primitiveness, our own childlikeness, our own irrational depths of love, tenderness, loyalty, fierceness. Whether he appears as a folksey image out of the Morris dream-world, or at the core of a famous man's personality, or as one of the 'Secret People' in the poem, or as that odd creature to which Chesterton appeals in his readers, the Common Man is central to his meaning. And nowadays, when we realise as keenly as did the Edwardians how the specialists of our technocracy manipulate us, and more than they did how much our health depends on the primitive within us, that meaning is significant.

Chapter Four. 'Unearthly Daylight': Chesterton's Imagination.

World is suddener than we fancy it...
 World is crazier and more of it than we think,
 Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
 A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
 The drunkenness of things being various. (Louis MacNeice, 'Snow'.)

The two previous chapters have shown Chesterton as imaginative in a very Edwardian - or Victorian-way. But his peculiar imaginative gift has not yet been mentioned; and this is the odd way he saw the world around him. It makes him almost unique among English writers; and yet it links him to the first romantic poets.

Wordsworth and Coleridge thought a great deal on what 'Imagination' might be, and their ideas influenced not only the second-generation Romantics, but also Victorian thinkers such as Keble, Maurice and Newman. (1) Essentially, they represent an advance on previous views that imagination is a passive thing, a mechanical reflection in the mind of sense-impressions..(2) Wordsworth, more influenced by eighteenth-century tradition, sees 'man and nature as essentially adapted to each other', and that, in fact, man picks up through his imagination an awareness of 'the goings-on of the Universe' which correspond with his own feelings and intuitions.(3) But Wordsworth is not clear or consistent on the details.

Coleridge analysed his imaginative life far more searchingly. Imagination is an activity involving the total personality. The images we make in our minds act as a focus whereby the realities of an unseen spiritual world reach us. Thus, Bible miracles are images, or symbols, of spiritual realities. (4) But these images are not simple; awareness of oneself, plus awareness of the thing seen, set up a tension which makes our imaginings peculiarly personal, existential insights. The object itself exists in tension between its own physical and its spiritual existence. This means that imagination becomes a rich medium for our knowledge of a vast cosmic reality, which nineteenth and twentieth century writers have/developed^{consciously} in different ways; fer

Coleridge himself it was a medium for the holy. (5)

Chesterton describes his own curious childhood vision so vividly and consistently that one begins to wonder seriously whether there was not something abnormal about his eyesight. The abnormality, however, was in his imagination, not his optic nerves. Wordsworth's 'light that never was on sea or land' was literally part of his earliest consciousness:

To me my whole childhood has a certain quality...a sort of white light on everything, cutting things out very clearly, and rather emphasising their solidity. The point is that the white light had a sort of wonder in it, as if the world were as new as myself; but not that the world was anything but a real world. I am much more disposed now to fancy that an apple-tree in the moonlight is some sort of ghost or grey nymph; or to see the furniture fantastically changing or crawling at twilight, as in some story of Poe or Hawthorne. But when I was a child I had a sort of confident astonishment in contemplating the apple-tree as an apple-tree. I was quite sure of it, and also sure of the surprise of it; as sure, to quote the perfect popular proverb, as sure as God made little apples. (6)

In the same way, the small boy enjoyed the cardboard smell and feel of his toy-theatre cut-out figures. Their bright outlines had the same surprising clarity. There was also a hobby-horse's head, painted white - 'almost archaic in its simplification', and satisfying in precisely the same way. Sixty years later Chesterton saw these first experiences of shapes and colours as very important in his adult character:

...if psychologists are still saying that early impressions count considerably in life, I recognise a sort of symbol of all that I happen to like in imagery and ideas. All my life I have loved edges; and the boundary line that brings one thing sharply against another. All my life I have loved frames and limits, and I will maintain that the largest wilderness looks larger seen through a window...I have also a pretty taste in abysses and bottomless chasms and everything else that emphasises a fine shade of distinction between one thing and another...And I believe that in feeling these things from the first, I was feeling the fragmentary suggestions of a philosophy I have since found to be the truth. (7)

This passage is of the first importance in understanding Chesterton's mind. All his later characteristics as a writer begin here.

The child, however, was not bothered by philosophical inferences; he was simply deeply interested in whatever he saw, and very happy. When, as we have seen, the art student rejected Impressionism because of its emphasis on the appearances rather than the essentials of physical objects, he was passionately re-asserting this childhood vision.

Although the Autobiography suggests that Chesterton was the only young man in London to dislike Impressionism, this, as we have seen, was inaccurate; many other artists preferred to see the world in terms of clearly defined outlines and solid colours. We are less familiar with the Symbolist painters than the Impressionists today, but Chesterton would have known, for instance, the work of the French Puvis de Chavannes and that of the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch.(8) The Decadent Beardsley is a master of significant form - he can set a black line on white paper that it teems with meaning. So, for all their Post-Impressionist associations, are Gauguin and Van Gogh. Even Whistler himself - represented in the Autobiography as the arch-Impressionist - is a master of 'frames and limits'. Chesterton's love of the strong line is in itself something which he shares with many of his contemporaries.

As the adult Chesterton re-discovered and articulated his childhood experience, it exploded in his imagination as a vision of energy; of clarity and intensity far beyond a mere taste for sharp outlines. It excited and dazzled him. Everyday life was miraculous - going to bed and waking up in the morning - as these much later verses show:

Men grow too old for love, my love,
Men grow too old for wine,
But I shall not grow too old to see
Unearthly daylight shine,
Changing my chamber's dust to snow
Till I doubt if it be mine.

Men grow too old for love, my love,
Men grow too old for lies;
But I shall not grow too old to see
Enormous night arise,
A cloud that is larger than the world
And a monster made of eyes...

A thrill of thunder in my hair;
Though blackening clouds be plain,

A thrill of thunder in my hair;
 Though blackening clouds be plain,
 Still I am stung and startled
 By the first drop of rain:
 Romance and pride and passion pass
 But these are what remain.

Strange crawling carpets of the grass,
 Wide windows of the sky:
 So in this perilous grace of God
 With all my sins go I:
 And things grow new though I grow old,
 Though I grow old and die. (9)

Only bizarre images can express the shock of objects felt like this.

One of his first poems is on the novelty of sun and grass imagined from the viewpoint of an unborn baby:

If a fixed fire hung in the air
 To warm me one day through,
 If deep green hair grew on great hills,
 I know what I would do. (10)

Further to this, he points out over and over again that physical objects have a curious life of their own:

That strangeness of things, which is the light in all poetry, and indeed in all art, is really connected with their otherness, or what is called their objectivity. What is subjective must be stale; it is exactly what is objective that is in this imaginative manner strange...the energy of the mind forces the imagination outwards, because the images it seeks are real things. All their romance and glamour, so to speak, lies in the fact that they are real things; things not to be found by staring inwards at the mind. The flower is a vision because it is not 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. (11)

This passage from St. Thomas Aquinas demonstrates how Chesterton could understand Thomist thought so well; here he is recognisably recreating his own childhood experience, and it authentically corresponds with the 'Ens' of the Summa - 'thisness'; the same, solid, marvellous goodness instinct in every thing.

This abnormal intensity of vision also resembles that of Gerard Manley Hopkins, although Hopkins, who was a Scotist, had another explanation for it. 'Inscape' and 'Instress' in his poems describe the special holy quality of things:

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same;
 Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
 Selves - goes itself; myself it speaks and spells;
 Crying What I do is me - for that I came. (12)

Chesterton is not, of course, in the same class as Hopkins as a poet; but it is worth underlining the rareness of a gift which has such far-reaching effects in the recipients' lives. I headed the chapter with lines from MacNeice which have always seemed to me to express an awareness - probably momentary - remarkably like Hopkins' and Chesterton's; but he did not build his life around it.

Once Chesterton the journalist realised he could make his readers laugh at the sheer novelty of his viewpoint, he exploited his gift to make comic or serious points on any topic he chose. For instance, in a collection of Daily News pieces from 1910, he tells us in three different essays how eccentric the whole concept of stairs is, how glorious a colour grey can be, what an abnormal experience car-riding is. Each proposition is absurd; but - just for a second - Chesterton startles us into seeing his point. (13)

However, Chesterton did not only want to amuse; his vision inspired his most serious purposes. In one of his best poems he 'sees' the human body metaphysically:

Sunder me from my bones, O sword of God,
 Till they stand stark and strange as do the trees;
 Till I whose heart goes up with the soaring woods
 May marvel as much at these.

Sunder me from my blood that in the dark
 I hear that red ancestral river run,
 Like branching buried floods that find the sea
 But never see the sun.

Give me miraculous eyes to see my eyes,
 Those rolling mirrors made alive in me,
 Terrible crystal more incredible
 Than all the things they see.

Sunder me from my soul, that I may see
 The sins like streaming wounds, the life's brave beat;
 Till I shall save myself, as I might save
 A stranger in the street. (14)

After the violent images of the first two verses, attention is adroitly slanted away from the body to the soul; and all the

'accumulated emotion falls on the short line, 'a stranger in the street' in a way which releases a charge of ironic meanings: do we take the claims of public courtesy more seriously than those of religion? Do we hold ourselves too cheap? But, is a stranger in the street also a marvel, and not to be assisted casually?

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Chesterton's vision of the physical world is ultimately the most important thing about him. This is because he developed its implications, rather in the way Coleridge had done. He deduced ultimate realities from the things he stared at. This philosophy had ramifications in all his activities, and is therefore the starting point, and the key, to all his thinking. These

We have seen that he related the haziness he disliked in Impressionist art with the vague relativism of liberal Christianity in the 'nineties. He also made the corollary; that, as once you accept the formal in art you also accept clear outlines, so if you think in clearly defined terms you must accept certain limitations.

If you go to Rome, you sacrifice a rich suggestive life in Wimbledon...it is impossible to be an artist and not care for laws and limits. Art is limitation; the essence of every picture is the frame. If you draw a giraffe, you must draw him with a long neck. If, in your bold creative way, you hold yourself free to draw a giraffe with a short neck, you will find that you are not free to draw a giraffe. The moment you step into the world of facts, you step into a world of limits. (15)

Much of Orthodoxy is on the further inference from this point; without absolute premises, vigorous thinking is impossible. Moreover, if we have no absolute confidence in our premises, we cannot act with confidence; so both thought and action are inhibited. Chesterton instanced Bernard Shaw as a rationalist whose beliefs were unlikely to be put into practice for precisely this reason: 'Some might think that [Shaw's] anarchism would make a man tread down mighty cities in his madness. I think it would make a man walk down the street as if he were walking on eggshells.' (16) Many years later he was still

insisting on the necessity of 'edges and boundaries' in good thinking: '...a fine distinction is like a fine painting or a fine poem, or anything else; a triumph of the human mind.' (17) It enabled him to draw his giraffe, so to speak.

This love of the formal comes out in his biographies; it is the solidity of Aquinas' thought, the springy confidence of Blake's line, the dash of Stevenson's style, the pristine quality of St. Francis, which he picks out unerringly; all characteristics of incisiveness, definition; but individual, 'myself it speaks and spells', in each man. He does in literary portraiture, in fact, what symbolist portrait-painters were also doing in paint. (18)

Not only thought and action, but also our ability to relate to each other depend on fixed terms: 'A fixed creed is absolutely indispensable to freedom...And an intellectual formula is the only thing that can create a communication that does not depend on mere blood, class or capricious sympathy.' (19) In the same way, Chesterton also found the language of dogmatic theology stimulating. This is from one of his post-conversion essays: '...to talk as if it were possible for any science to attack any problem, without developing a technical language, and a method always methodical and often minute, merely means that you are a fool and have never really attacked a problem at all.' (20)

We can say, then, that Chesterton's vision suffused his religious thinking, and also his idea of what is most valuable and god-like in human personality. He loved the bold, the incisive; the people in his stories, for all their sketchiness, are flamboyant. They shout, they argue passionately, they tear through the countryside in fast cars. They are ecstatic in their loyalties. This violence and exaltation comes to a head in the closing pages of The Man Who Was Thursday, in a fantastic transformation scene; the same is true of The Ball and the Cross, but there it is more lightly sketched. (21) In his first collection of essays Chesterton had written 'A Defence of Rash Vows', in

which he described the intellectual thrill of committing oneself to something formal, limited, arbitrary, like a vow. It was in this spirit that twenty years later he was - quite simply - faithful to his vision, and became a Catholic.

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The clear-cut vision also had practical implications.

Small things fascinated him; he liked writing about the contents of his pockets, or about toys; and his long love-letters to Frances are written on absurdly small writing-paper. Presumably from his point of view, small things had a higher proportion of significant form to mass than large things. 'Plato, who liked definite ideas, would like my cardboard dragon; for though the creature has few other artistic merits he is at least dragonish.' (22) He was also fond of small organisations - small shops, small towns. The whole thesis of The Napoleon of Notting Hill is that a little community is better than a big one; and the plot begins with a President of Nicaragua, a very small and heroic nation at that time (1904) in the news. Similarly, Chesterton sided with the Boers against the British in the Boer War, like many other young Liberals; but part of his reason was that they were a small nation challenging a huge imperial power. He disliked big stores (Selfridge's opened in 1909) and the superior efficiency of the little shop is one of the themes of The Return of Don Quixote. Conversely, he distrusted monopolies, trusts and multi-million business enterprises because they lacked the human vitality of the small concern - and because they could swindle the individual with more impunity. He had already withdrawn from Socialism when he realised that little people would have less rather than more independence in a fully Socialist state; and when Distributism came into being, in 1925, his weekly essays in G.K.'s Weekly outlined its 'Small is beautiful' philosophy. That famous phrase comes from E.F.Schumacher's 1973 book, of course, but to use it here reminds us that our current interest in 'alternative' societies and

de-centralising schemes infers that Chesterton's political ideas have a relevance today. Nevertheless, the political application of his vision does not seem to me, as I have already indicated, as important as Mrs. Canovan's book, G.K.Chesterton: Radical Populist would suggest. If we try to assess him as a specifically political thinker, we are bound to think he saw life in over-simplified terms. And - curiously - his awareness of clear solid reality is anything but simple.

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The first clue to the complexity of Chesterton's imaginings is in the surprising analogies, the topsy-turvy statements, all jumbled together in a brilliant rag-bag. For instance, 'On Running After One's Hat'(23) is on the familiar theme of the poetry of everyday life. But Chesterton leaps from image to image; flooded Battersea as a new Venice; toothache; burnings at Smithfield; railway signals in red and green; the butcher in a gondola, a man running after silk hat; anglers sitting by dark pools; gentleman struggling with jammed drawer. In such little essays he flicks from mood to mood and topic to topic, extraordinarily aware of the bizarre nature of life. 'Belles-lettres' essays may be characterised by lightness of touch, but Chesterton's gusto and dazzling vitality are exceptional by any standard.

In the novels, these bewildering conjunctions were too much for some readers. To judge from the reviewers' remarks collected in Professor D.J.Conlon's G.K.Chesterton: The Critical Judgments,(24) few critics could understand what The Napoleon of Notting Hill was supposed to be about, and as we have seen, there was similar difficulty with The Man Who Was Thursday. It still remains a story in which numbers of distinct but related points flash by, and the reader is aware of a play of ideas so rapid that he is probably missing a good deal of Chesterton's intellectual fun. (25)

I am not suggesting, of course, that mere fecundity and swiftness

guarantees seriousness in a writer. The kaleidoscopic quality is so strong in all Chesterton's work, however, that it does imply that prerequisite for seriousness: an awareness of the co-existence of disparate forces in the universe. And an honest mind which is aware of this must eventually engage with them at a deeper level.

One complex idea in the novels is that the dynamic of life is provided by the conflict of irreconcilable forces. In The Napoleon of Notting Hill, Auberon Quin and Adam Wayne personify detachment and commitment respectively, and at the end they accept each other as 'two lobes of the same brain', and achieve a wary balance. In The Man Who Was Thursday, Chaos and Law co-exist in the person of Sunday, and the whole book is a fugue on their relationship. Scepticism and Romanticism are the dialectical forces in The Ball and the Cross.

This awareness that it is intellectually necessary for incompatibles
the whole of
to co-exist is an important element in Chesterton's work. In one of his poems, he describes a dream-experience of such a duality, and ends:

'But since I woke
This single world is double till I die.' (26)

We have seen it in his definition of Liberalism in Robert Browning. (27) He praises Chaucer for 'that note of balance, or the power of keeping two different considerations in the mind...he was duplex; that is, he could think of two things at once.' (28) This attitude is dualistic in that it presupposes that equally valid opposing forces exist, and that the truth on any one issue is, as Wilde said, 'rarely pure and never simple.' This unsettling awareness of the dichotomy of life seems to me one of Chesterton's most exciting perceptions.

Any contradiction between the vision of things as solidly existing and also as perpetually duplex, is more apparent than real. This is made clear in Orthodoxy; a really good idea is a triumph of equipoise, and Christianity is precisely this: 'the great and daring experiment of the irregular equilibrium'. (29) The real solidity of anything, paradoxically, is due to the balance attained by its intrinsic tensions.

Orthodoxy itself, as a book, provides a good example of this; its picturesque chapter-titles, amusing absurdities and colourful spontaneity suggests at first reading a wilful and frivolous quality. Only when one comes to analyse the thinking does one realise how solid an argument Chesterton is building up as he swings from one point of view to another. (30)

The fascination of human character, too, lies in its ambivalence; part of his success as a detective-story writer lies in the mysterious, enigmatic quality of people. Sunday in The Man Who Was Thursday is the most obvious example; but the question of Innocent Smith's moral nature is the whole theme of Manalive, and to name only three equivocal characters out of dozens in the Father Brown stories, there are Flambeau the reformed criminal; the fratricidal clergyman Wilfred Bohun, and Israel Gow the strange gardener. (31)

In Chesterton's later writing, the idea of the 'irregular equilibrium' lacks the early resilience; we feel the clever old journalist is at his tricks again. Yet he continued to see the world in dualistic terms; and in this he is a little like Coleridge, who saw intelligence and imagination as two-way energies, and who in Table Talk (30.4.30) quoted Plato's idea of paradoxical truth which 'can come forth out of the moulds of the understanding only in the disguise of two contradictory conceptions'. This awareness of polarity, of the stereoscopic vision which sees everything in tension, is a constant in Chesterton's thought as it is in Coleridge's.

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It was Chesterton's 'double-sight' which produced his famous paradoxes. Paradox was, of course, a typically 'nineties form of wit, and Wilde, Shaw and Chesterton on occasion all sound like each other. But whereas Wilde and Shaw usually want to shock - 'really, if the lower orders den't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them?' - Chesterton's paradoxes are more often attempts to express a more

complex truth.(32) For instance, 'If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly'. (34) We are familiar with 'If a thing's worth doing, it's worth doing well'; so we examine the new proposition in the light of the first. We discover the key word is now 'worth'; if a thing is so important that we ought to attempt it, it is preferable to have tried and bungled the attempt than not to have tried at all. Two truths have been exhibited, one old and one new, and we re-assess our ideas. A process analogous to that of a stereoscope takes place in the minds of those readers whose imaginations work visually. (I believe that those who find the paradoxes devices of limited worth rather than genuinely imaginative strategies, probably have conceptual rather than visual imaginations; so there will always be argument about their value.) The picture-making imagination can take even so abstract a paradox as this, slot the two truths together and apprehend them in some sort as images; identify the new word to be re-assessed; so a new perspective of refreshing clarity is achieved.

He also believed that in all good ideas there is an 'x' factor,
 (35)
 something unknown./ Although, as we have seen, he reacted with distaste to shapes he felt to be perverse, he equally distrusted the over-regular. He believed that mechanistic truth is simplistic; and that something deeper than the merely rational, such as the poetic image, is the only adequate medium to convey truth. Words themselves are clumsy to convey the delicacy of meaning; therefore he loved and trusted fairy-tales, myths and legends for their truth-telling powers. This has always been a characteristic of Romantic writers in every language; the folklore collecting of the Brothers Grimm in the early nineteenth century was part of German Romanticism. Fantasy goes with fairy-tales; and was just as widespread. a reaction against classical logic and formal structure. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1832); Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798), Shelley's Revolt of Islam (1816) Keats' Fall of Hyperion(1819) are all different forms of fantasy from

the early English Romantics; but as the century wore on, fantasy proliferated. Mario Praz's The Romantic Agony charts its darker waters; and Romantic painters such as Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), and Anne Louis Girodet (1767-1824) brought to landscape and mythological subjects, respectively, such imaginative fervour that the 'fantastic' element in their paintings predominates.

In Victorian England, fantasy was comparatively domestic. Coleridge had spoken of the image as the medium whereby truth was apprehended, and George Macdonald (1824-1905) used fantasy in this way, in his children's fairy stories and in Phantastes, which is a fairy story for adults. Chesterton saw Macdonald as a writer of great importance, because coming from a Dissenting background not unlike that of Coleridge (or indeed of Chesterton himself) which gave him a spiritual awareness of a particular innocence and translucency, he was also aware of the living power of image and symbol. Chesterton wrote the preface to Greville Macdonald's biography of his father, in which he described The Princess and the Goblin as 'a book that has made a difference to my whole existence, which helped me to see things in a different way from the start.'

Macdonald creates two co-existent visionary worlds; one is our world seen from a conventional point of view, the other the same world from a visionary point of view. In his book Romanticism and Religion, (36) Dr. Stephen Prickett quotes Macdonald's description of a Victorian bedroom which gives us 'the shock of seeing the familiar for the first time', just as Chesterton does; and this indicates what Chesterton's rather vague quoted remark refers to, that Macdonald showed him the power of the poetic image. It was all-important in poetry; ^{to Chesterton} 'The metaphor, the symbol, the picture...is actually the keystone of the arch. Take away the particular image employed and the whole fabric of thought falls with a crash...The metaphors of the passage, the stars, the web, the murmurs of the syn, are not mere

illustrations, they are the original thought.' This is a passing remark from an essay on Tennyson; Chesterton distrusted critics' talk, and while there are various scattered references which make it clear that he was aware of contemporary critics' discussion of 'The Image', he himself did not want to 'cut all its connections and leave it in the air', as he put it. (37) He himself would have preferred to offer an example rather than a critical statement - perhaps this early poem, so typically Chestertonian in juxtaposing the tiny and the enormous to say something about God:

'Speller of the stones and weeds,
 Skilled in Nature's crafts and creeds,
 Tell me what is in the heart
 Of the smallest of the seeds.'
 'God Almighty, and with Him,
 Cherubim and Seraphim,
 Filling all eternity,
 Adonai Elohim.'

(38)

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Chesterton's move towards Catholicism can be seen, then, as typical of that of many 'nineties artists and writers who felt the ^{romantic} fascination of symbolic theology. (39) When he began seriously to explore Catholic doctrine, he was delighted to find it apparently permitted a degree of paradox - for instance, in the Incarnation dogmas, especially as expressed in the Athanasian creed. He found this sophistication exciting. For him, Catholicism was 'a magnificent world of metaphysical ideas...it is not true that mythology ever rose to the heights of theology. It is not true that a thought as bold as this one [the dual nature of Christ] ever crossed the mind that created the Centaurs or the Fauns... no conception so colossal as the being who is both Zeus and Prometheus...a mind filled with this Duality has plenty to think about along these lines and has no need to dig up dead gods to discredit the Everlasting Man.' (39)

The Catholic Church and Conversion (1927) is an account by Chesterton of his inner experience as a convert; and although it has not been much noticed, I find it as honest and endearing as all Chesterton's

writing about himself. In it he makes clear that his baptism did not simplify life for him. But Catholicism asked the right questions; and the deviousness of some of its answers did not repel him; they only assured him of its intellectual hospitality. (40)

The Everlasting Man shows how easily Chesterton could fit his idiosyncratic ideas into Catholic doctrine. In the second half of the book he argues the unique, supernatural nature of Christ; central Catholic doctrine. But he resists the temptation to score cheap debating points. When he has to write about God or Jesus he is less rhetorical, more gently exploratory than in Orthodoxy. Its relevance to this chapter is in showing that where we might expect Chesterton to be most dogmatic and less than truly imaginative, in fact his curious sensitive visualising power probes in its own way. For instance, here he is evoking the mysterious psychological appeal of the Incarnation:

It is...as if a man had found an inner room in the very heart of his own house which he had never suspected; and seen a light from within. It is as if he had found something at the back of his own heart which betrayed him into good...It is all that is in us but a brief tenderness that is there made eternal; all that means no more than a momentary softening that is in some strange fashion become a strengthening and a repose; it is the broken speech and the lost word that are made positive and suspended unbroken; as the strange kings fade into a far country and the mountains resound no more with the feet of the shepherds; and only the night and the cavern lie in fold upon fold over something more human than humanity. (41)

If this passage were only a tissue of hushed poetic prose woven by a journalist for emotional effect - and as such indeed it may appear to a modern reader at first - it would be meretricious. He is making however, a point, by the means of the reader's imagination. He has compared the Bethlehem story with the popular myths of pagan religions, and he is arguing that its elements add up to an experience more intimately moving, more likely to reach the depths of a human being's consciousness, than these myths. Chesterton knows precisely the fine shade of response he is aiming for, calculated to awaken a memory of

imaginative experience which will - for a split second - make the reader feel for himself the poignancy and the poetry inherent in the doctrine of the Incarnation. This is what Chesterton is constantly doing - communicating a subtle vision with subtlety; not a simple nor a crude achievement.

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It is worth adding another illustration of Chesterton's fastidiousness in small details.

There can be no apologia for Christianity with fewer references to 'God' or 'Jesus' than Orthodoxy. 'Christianity' and 'The Church' are used constantly, but 'god' and 'Christ' more rarely, and the emotive 'Jesus' hardly at all. The reader senses that Chesterton's instinctive taste prevents him from using words which he feels might make facile or direct emotional demands. In the section of The Everlasting Man, 'The Man Called Jesus', he could hardly avoid the word, but whenever he can, Chesterton chooses the indirect reference which gives the reader a novel perspective on an all-too-familiar figure - 'the figure in the Gospels': 'the voice that says': 'a strolling carpenter's apprentice'. (This last seems grossly inaccurate, but the writer's motive is appreciated.)

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We are bound to ask, was Chesterton in childhood really aware a 'white light', a 'strangeness' in nature; or did he merely recognise later on, when he had read his Wordsworth and his Macdonald, that his childhood vision had resembled theirs? The evidence for answering that does not exist. What we do know is that while it was the amusing novelty of his imaginings in The Defendent^o which first attracted the public, what maintained for many years his reputation as one of the leading minds of the day was the inference he drew from those imaginings - that the universe is suffused with one enormous meaning hidden behind, but perceptible through, physical phenomena. His gusto and brilliance

excited people into seeing the solid and beautiful world he saw; and it is this power to move from the fanciful to the deeply creative, which is 'imaginative' in the sense Wordsworth and Coleridge used the word. (And it should also be pointed out that Chesterton's sturdy common-sense and sharp brain corresponds to that 'Good Sense' which Coleridge insisted on as a necessary adjunct to imagination.) 'The grass seemed signalling to me with all its fingers at once; the crowded stars seemed bent upon being understood. The sun would make me see him if he rose a thousand times. The recurrences of the universe rose to the maddening rhythm of an incantation, and I began to see an idea.' (42) Reading George Macdonald, his instinct that the poetic image is the only way of expressing complex meanings was endorsed. He was aware that the good miracle is always in the balance, in tension between irreconcilables; nothing can be taken for granted. Where he is most sensitive to this disturbing idea, his imagination rouses, and he does his best work.

And how good is Chesterton's imagination? In the last chapter I described him as a good historical writer but not a historian; in this chapter, I have argued that he ~~was~~ a remarkably imaginative writer; yet there is no one great imaginative work to show for it, no Prometheus Unbound, no Passage to India, no major poetry.

Part of the answer to this is that Chesterton scattered his good things. In my last chapter I shall discuss in more detail the existential concern which made him so apparently feckless. Was he too lazy to discipline his imagination? In addition to these questions, there is the - perhaps unfortunate- fact that his mind always moved towards controversy, and therefore towards rhetoric as ever-riding intellectual duty, because he passionately believed that people are more important than art. (43) Under these circumstances, a writer will not heap his talents on one great imaginative tour-de-force.

Chesterton can hardly be regarded, however, as a fine imagination gone to waste. When Coleridge wanted to praise Wordsworth's

imagination, he said that he had 'above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents and situations, of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dewdrops.' (44) This is precisely what Chesterton did for his Edwardian public. In amusing and dazzling them with his journalism, day by day he evoked for them 'the tone, the atmosphere' of his own vision of a universe poised, fearfully and wonderfully, on the edge of miracle.

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The bright miraculous world we have just been considering was not all Chesterton perceived. He was also aware of its darker obverse side; a region of supernatural evil. If we praise him for his 'childlike' quality, we have to acknowledge that that included, on occasion, a singularly nasty imagination, and that he had a disturbing sense of evil within himself. When he was considering becoming a Catholic in 1922, he wrote a long letter to Ronald Knox which includes the revealing phrase, 'all the morbid life of the lonely mind of a living person with whom I have lived.' Evelyn Waugh, Knox's biographer, comments that in Catholicism Chesterton sought not primarily Authority 'but, surprisingly in a man of such transparent innocence, Absolution'; and there is in Chesterton's writing the persistent suggestion of some very private and unspeakable nightmare. (1)

Nightmare has always been one of the characteristics of the Romantic imagination. Mario Praz in The Romantic Agony shows how this was intertwined with sexual guilt and perversion, and illustrates it from a wide variety of European sources. English Romanticism produced nothing so sensational as the Marquis de Sade (one cannot describe 'Monk' Lewis' influence as pervasive here); we may perhaps distinguish three strands, among others. Firstly, there was the charnel strain of feeling developed from Young's Night Thoughts (1742-5) and Chatterton's poems, examples of which are Keats' 'Isabella and the Pot of Basil', the animated corpses in the Ancient Mariner or Scott's 'Proud Maisie.' Christina Rossetti's sonnet on the dead Lizzie Siddal, 'O Earth, lie heavily upon her eyes', is a Victorian mutation of this genre. Secondly, there was a fascination with the occult and the demonic which appears intermittently in Coleridge, and in such stories as Hogg's Confessions of a Justified Sinner, in Poe's 'The Black Cat'. Thirdly, Keats significantly shows the peculiar mixture of beauty, lust, death and cruelty which fermented so potently in later European literature, and which Praz' book is about: 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', Lamia; later on she reappears in England in

Swinburne's 'Dolores, Our Lady of Pain'. In the visual arts, the wide influence of Fuseli's painting is reflected in Jane Eyre's portfolio of schoolgirl drawings, spectral and menacing.

As we have seen, the 'nineties Decadence inherited the mid-nineteenth century European fascination with diabolism and evil. Aubrey Beardsley may almost be said to have personified it in his effete appearance, his strange passionate Catholicism, and the energy with which he drew evil, sensual forms. Wilde expressed it in the image of Dorian Gray. Some of the best English fiction of the occult and the supernatural dates from this period: Arthur Machen's 'The Great God Pan', (1894); R.L. Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, (1886), Henry James' The Turn of the Screw (1898) Montagu James' Ghost Stories of an Antiquary (1905)

Chesterton was aware of all this; and there was another source for his interest in the occult. The liberal questioning of Christianity which he was familiar with in his boyhood led many serious and intelligent Victorians into heterodox ideas; Spiritualism and Theosophy, for instance, seemed to ~~many people to~~ support valid lines of enquiry; and good folk who would not have dreamed of reading Baudelaire or Huysmans, went to seances and earnestly discussed 'ectoplasm' and 'astral planes'. Poetry reflected such interests; the later pages of The Oxford Book of Victorian Verse are full of poems about the shadowy borderlands of religion.

The air is full of music none knows what
Or half forgot
The living echo of dead voices fills
The Unseen Hills.

(2)

- a kind of blurred, faery mutation from Wordsworth, who had been a major influence in Victorian Christianity. When Chesterton got to know W.B. Yeats in Bedford Park, he himself was interested and partly sympathetic to Yeats' ideas; and these, as befitted one of the 'last romantics', were directly related to occult experiments. The disproportionately long account in the Autobiography of his own youthful experiments with Spiritualism suggests that, years later in his sixties,

Chesterton recognised their significance in his life story.

He came to believe that in experimenting with the occult, he had gone beyond the mild excitements of 'liberal' religion, and had actually made contact with Evil in some objective form.

...my brother and I used to play with planchette, or what Americans call the ouija board...I saw quite enough of the thing to be able to testify, with complete certainty, that something happens which is not in the ordinary sense natural, or produced by the normal or conscious will. Whether it is produced by some subconscious but still human force, or by some powers good, bad or indifferent, which are external to humanity, I would not myself attempt to decide. The only thing I will say with complete confidence about that mystic and invisible power, is that it tells lies. The lies may be larks or they may be lures to the imperilled soul or they may be a thousand other things; but whatever they are, they are not truths about the other world; or for that matter about this world. (3)

These convictions were still powerfully in Chesterton's mind when he wrote William Blake in 1910. He believed Blake's art positively suffered from his contact with supernatural powers: '...it was exactly because he was unnaturally exposed to a hail of forces that were more than natural that some breaches were made in his mental continuity, some damage was done to his mind.' (4) Contrary to the occultists' beliefs, such forces destroy, they do not enhance perception. Reviewing a book of morbid poetry at the same period, Chesterton insists vehemently that our waking nightmares must be kept in perspective. 'That is the stern condition laid upon all artists touching this luxury of fear. The terror must be fundamentally frivolous. Sanity may play with insanity; but insanity must not be allowed to play with sanity.' (5) These ideas found dramatic expression soon afterwards in Magic, the play which ran in London for about a fortnight in 1913, and is about an Edwardian occultist who eventually gives up necromancy because it releases evil forces on human beings.

For all this brisk overt rejection of the occult interests of his contemporaries, and for all his robust common-sense, no-one can read much Chesterton without realising that his imagination was perpetually

haunted. 'Decadence' mingled in his imagination with religious quest, and produced that mixture of physical horror and supernatural evil which is characteristic of so much decadent writing - 'the triple spell/Of moth and snake and white witch terrible'.(6) The capacity to imagine horrors is something Chesterton associated with his Art School days: 'As Bunyan in his morbid period, described himself as prompted to utter blasphemies, I had an overpowering impulse to record or draw horrible ideas and images; plunging deeper and deeper as in a blind spiritual suicide...there is something truly menacing in the thought of how quickly I could imagine the maddest, when I had never committed the mildest crime.'(7) None of these horrible drawings exist, though the curiously grotesque nature of all Chesterton's extant artwork gives a certain credibility to his claims, and in itself suggests a violence and a perversion far below the consciousness of this most gentle and pure of Edwardian gentlemen. The nearest thing in his writing is that remarkably repulsive poem, 'The Modern Manichee', sexually suggestive to a greater degree than anything else he wrote; so perhaps his 'horrible ideas and images' at Art School were similar.

...The green things thrust like horrible huge snails,
 Horns green and gross, each lifting a leering eye
 He scarce can call a flower; it lolls obscene,
 Its organs gaping to the sneering sky. (8)

Throughout his life, however, Chesterton portrayed physical horror with verve, and this crudest manifestation of his nightmare is most obvious in the 'Father Brown' stories. There is the corpse with two heads in 'The Secret Garden'; the human head buried among the potatoes in 'The Honour of Israel Gow'; the man smashed to smithereens in 'The Hammer of God'; the body dragged from window to window in 'The Man with Two Heads'. (9) In the 'Invisible Man', there is an eerie roomful of humanoid robots (the romantic's protest against Wellsian science?) - and bloodstains, but no corpse. "Eaten him?" said the nightmare at his ear; and he sickened for a moment at the idea of rent, human remains absorbed and crushed into all that acepholous clockwork.'

Afterwards, the explanation is more matter-of-fact; we breathe a sigh of relief, we have been spared that particular grisliness.

However, physical horror is a comparatively small element in the uncanny atmosphere of the 'Father Brown' stories. Chesterton suggests spiritual evil in different ways: in an eerie setting, an enigmatic personality, or an apparently ghostly phenomenon. The mystery exists within this atmosphere, and Father Brown, in solving the mystery, also banishes the occult fear. For instance, in 'The Doom of the Darnaways', the dark house, sunk below ground level and inhabited by gloomy people, dominates the plot. Mystery spawns in this dank atmosphere. Father Brown refuses to be intimidated, discovers the doom is an ordinary piece of criminal trickery, and the Darnaways cheer up. (11)

Chesterton wrote enough 'Father Brown' stories to fill five books between 1911 and 1935. They vary in quality, but the formula is unvarying - a Catholic priest dispels illusions of evil and darkness. Chesterton knew their obvious allegorical meaning very well, but the unflinching nastiness of the central images suggests something more personal. I believe the stories correspond to some deeply and continuously felt process going on in Chesterton's own mind: Christianity exorcising his own darker imaginings. In fact, these stories are a safety-valve releasing him from himself, a device of the subconscious mind; and much of their success depends on the imaginative power generated by this inner compulsion. This would help to explain the fact that, even when Chesterton was dictating the later ones under the most flagrant 'pot-boiler' necessity, the formula could always produce a tale with at least some core of authenticity. (12)

This said, the delicacy and variety of eerie effects is remarkable; the silence and the musical sounds in 'The Song of the Flying Fish'; the strange watery acoustics of the river-house in 'The Sins of Prince Saradine'; the looking-glass in the shadowy hall in 'The Mirror of the Magistrate'. These mirrors and other objets d'art, elaborate

theatricals and exotic garments, are characteristically 'fin-de-siecle'; and fantastic: small details indicating romantic sources. (13)

It is worth looking at the way Chesterton develops one of his sustained effects - the extreme cold in 'The Sign of the Broken Sword'. (14)

Father Brown and the detective Flambeau are walking on a bitterly cold night, and the story of the heroic General Arthur St.Clare - itself a rather clumsy plot - unfolds in their conversation. The point of the tale, ultimately, will be that the General is exposed as a criminal of the meanest kind. The story starts like this:

The thousand arms of the forest were grey, and its million fingers silver. In a sky of dark green-blue like slate the stars were bleak and brilliant like splintered ice. All that thickly wooded and sparsely tenanted countryside was stiff with a bitter and brittle frost. The black hollows between the trunks of the trees looked bottomless, black caverns of the heartless Scandinavian hell, a hell of incalculable cold. Even the square stone tower of the church looked northern to the point of heathenry, as if it were some barbaric tower among the sea rocks of Iceland. It was a queer night for anyone to explore a churchyard. But on the other hand, perhaps it was worth exploring.

The cold is felt in terms of an exquisite backdrop of icy colour, of mass: - the church tower, the woods, the Icelandic rocks; of fine detail: - the silver fingers, the brittle frost. The humanoid forest has 'arms' and 'fingers', but 'stiff' suggests a corpse. The two men then inspect the grandiose metal statue of the General, which sustains the image of hardness, as it 'glitters in the starlight'. A reference to hot summer afternoons and coachloads of visitors intensifies by contrast the impact of cold and silence. Now the conversation echoes in a waste: 'In the stillness of those stiff woods a wooden gate creaked.' As the plot proper unfolds in its Brazilian setting, we are constantly reminded of the cold emptiness around the two speakers. We see malign shapes - 'one black tree-bough curved across it exactly like a devil's horn' - and as Father Brown approaches the shameful crux of the story, the setting can indicate a dramatic crescendo in a way the matter-of-fact speaker cannot: '∴ the woodland path grew smaller, steeper and more twisted, till they felt as if they were ascending a winding

staircase. The priest's voice came from above out of the darkness.' Later on, the allusion to Dante's circle of ice in the worst part of Hell for the traitors, sets the crime in a perspective of ancient legendary treacheries. The setting has been more than a literary decoration; by orchestrating a number of tiny effects, the image of cold has conveyed a sense of cruel sterility which gives the story a meaning - about the nature of evil - which the mechanical plot could not itself convey. Many of these 'Father Brown' plots are saved by this sense of muminous enigmatic powers moving in society. On the literal level, they are wielded by the remarkable numbers of Very Important People in Father Brown's world - the stories are full of distinguished scientists, millionaires, titled ladies, experts in exotic and unusual skills.(15) But they have a certain brooding poetic force; 'huge and mighty Forms that...were the trouble of my dreams'. These evocations are often sketchy; but there are a good many which are deeply and sensitively felt, such as the 'cold' image described above; and then the reader recognises that Chesterton is both writing closely from his own imagination, and producing something which is in the mainstream of Romantic eeriness.

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Some critics are disappointed because all Chesterton's supernatural effects turn out to have natural explanations. For instance, in the 'Invisible Man' it is the postman, not the robots, who have committed the murder. Dr. Stephen Medcalf sees this as a major weakness in Chesterton; he is putting up 'a defence against the shadowland of (his) mind.' (16) Dr. Medcalf criticises him, not only for dismissing his nightmare, but for 'adopting an arbitrary set of explanations to avoid going too deep into it.' Secondly, Dr. Medcalf considers each example of the paranormal in Chesterton as an artistic failure - 'letting in the nightmare which he thought it his vocation to dispel.' This seems to me to be over-simplifying the point. Modern writers believe integrity

obliges them to explore their darker consciousness, and in so far as Chesterton declined to do this, he is, of course, not a modern writer. But as we have seen, he believed there was an objective power of Evil which distorts the ideas of occult explorers, actually destroying rather than clarifying meaning; so it is only consistent if he is wavier than a writer to whom the occult is merely subjective. If an artist refuses to explore on the grounds that perception of truth depends on not exploring, we may regret his convictions, but we can hardly call him 'arbitrary'. He is not being dishonest, as Dr. Medcalf suggests in the point from his essay which I quoted first; he has seen, understood, and, like the magician in Magic, rejected on what he thinks are valid grounds. Fear may be operative here; Chesterton would have admitted that promptly; but I do not detect dishonesty either with himself or with the reader.

Nor, pace Dr. Medcalf, was Chesterton so naive as to believe it his 'vocation' to 'dispel' nightmare permanently. The repeated evocations of the uncanny are not slips of the pen. They are part of his experience, therefore cannot be denied, and he is not denying them. Horror is a real thing in the mind of man and always comes back; religion simply helps us to cope with it temporarily. Father Brown may dispel one patch of darkness, but in the nature of the universe another will gather to need exorcising.

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These examples of the eerie in the 'Father Brown' stories start with ordinary physical phenomena: a cold night, a hall mirror, a river landscape. Suddenly, the whole world becomes charged with the preternatural; Chesterton is particularly good at suggesting this moment when the scalp begins to crawl. The previous chapter dealt with that perception of numinous existences which are subsequently defined as 'ggod'; but before the mind reaches that definition, comes a moment which is purely existential, when it merely registers the alien, the unknown - literally, the 'uncanny', like the Ancient Mariner's tranced

uncomprehending terror. The following passage exemplifies Chesterton's typical progress from normal perception (which is healthy, grotesque and comical) to uncanny perception: 'As long as a tree is a tree, it is a top-heavy monster with a hundred arms, a thousand tongues, and only one leg. But so long as a tree is a tree, it does not frighten us at all. It begins to be alien, to be something strange, only when it looks like ourselves. When a tree really looks like a man our knees knock under us.' (17) This is the recurrent dread that haunts Chesterton's imagination - that the solid miraculous world of things will slip away, leaving a nothingness; or, worse still, a mere reflection of oneself, the solipsist's nightmare. (18) The Devil himself is the denial of healthy materialism:

...Those refined thinkers who worship the Devil, whether in the swamps of Jamaica or the salons of Paris, always insist upon the shapelessness, the wordlessness, the unutterable character of the abomination. They call him 'horror of emptiness', as did the black witch in Stevenson's Dynamiter; they worship him as the unspeakable name, as the unbearable silence. They think of him as the void in the heart of the whirlwind; the cloud on the brain of the maniac; the toppling turrets of vertigo or the endless corridors of nightmare. It was the Christians who gave the Devil a grotesque and energetic outline, with sharp horns and spiked tail. It was the saints who drew Satan as comic and even lively. The Satanists never drew him at all.' (19)

The novels are full of disturbing illusions, things that refuse to be reassuringly solid. In The Man Who Was Thursday - which is subtitled 'A Nightmare' - everything shifts and changes; the dingy café sinks below ground to reveal a subterranean anarchists' den; the good stolid Frenchmen appear for a horrific split second as bloodthirsty madmen; in a sunlit wood, the hero is confused by the glinting shadows (is Chesterton remembering Impressionist paintings?) so that he cannot recognise other people. (20) The relevance of these examples to the allegory of relativist versus dogmatic thought on which the whole story is built up, is obvious; but this is more than mechanistic analogy. Dr. Prickett calls it 'allegory plus' because it is analogy when it occurs in George Macdonald's work perceived not only intellectually, but also imaginatively; we are ourselves disturbed as we read. (21) The Ball and the Cross has a

similar succession of shifting images; the beautiful country house becomes a prison; St. Paul's dome is strangely and significantly altered; among the lunatics there is a false Edward VII and a false God. (22) Even the comic dressing-up, the false beards and wigs Chesterton is so fond of, contribute to the alarming loss of security which we, as readers, feel almost as much as the characters as the plot whirls on. The modern reader, who can see Chesterton's whole oeuvre, understands the relief, the sheer delight, he eventually found in strong clear images which did not shift; heraldry, the shadowless shapes of illuminated manuscripts, brightly coloured toy theatre figures. (23)

If Chesterton had only used the supernatural in his fiction, we might regard it as merely a sensational money-spinning device. Its recurrences in the non-fiction, when he is writing in his own person, show how genuinely it is part of his own sensibility. That much-cheapened word 'thrill' was used by him to convey the mystery one half-senses in something. I do not know another popular writer who can make abstract ideas so simply exciting; and often it is because he captures the alien, the other, moving in the spiritual world. This kind of imaginative power makes William Blake (1910) intriguing; whatever its faults of emphasis, there is an answering awareness of Blake's strange thoughts which makes this a luminous piece of criticism. Here he is describing Blake's Platonism: 'He meant that there really is behind the universe an eternal image called the Lamb, of which all living lambs are merely the copies or approximations. He would not have seen anything comic...in talking about the Wrath of the Lamb...if there is an immortal lamb, a being whose simplicity and freshness are for ever renewed, then it is truly and really a more creepy idea to horrify that being into hostility than to defy the flaming dragon or challenge darkness or the sea...' (24)

Not that Chesterton thought Blake morbid; he saw him as a Christian

'mystic, a man of 'solid and joyful occultism', when he was not possessed by spirits. This passage is another example of that existential moment of perception; en route to a critical or moral point, we get a sudden glimpse down an eerie perspective. 'Turnip ghosts mean nothing if there are no real ghosts' he suddenly drops in to the middle of an essay on myths(a propos of the fact that an idea may depend for its force on its opposite), a chilling reminder that children's games are based/were once real fears. (25)

There is a mask image which recurs throughout all the books, and is always frightening. Sunday in The Man Who Was Thursday has it, an abnormally large face; Gabriel Syme 'remembered that as a child he would not look at the mask of Memnon in the British Museum, because it was a face, and so large'. (26) It appears, bizarre but unforgettable, as the last paragraph of Robert Browning: instead of the sober critical summing-up we would expect, there is a profoundly Romantic image: 'And suddenly the face begins to change and harden, the eyes glare like the eyes of a mask, the whole face of clay becomes a common mouthpiece, and the voice that comes forth is the voice of God, uttering his everlasting soliloquy.' (27) It is an evocation of that moment of terror when a great writer's words take on power beyond the artist's rational control.

All these are examples of what, as we saw in Chapter Three, Chesterton called the 'primitive revelation', which he believed to be the artist's primary task to record. This may be related to fantasy, which was important to the Romantic imagination, but it also has the authority of pristine perception, which was essential. As both artist and journalist, Chesterton himself was bound to struggle for the right words to catch those fading, devastating moments; what many romantic Edwardians were doing mawkishly, he had the power to do strongly. Like Wordsworth, he responded first to his physical environment; from that, to his marvellous, invisible but objective universe; and then, on the

edges of the vision - out of the corners of his eyes, as it were - he also caught a quality of that strangeness which instead of being good, is terrifyingly alien. The nightmare was always controlled, and only sometimes allowed to spurt out in fearful shapes; ; but it links Chesterton with the earlier masters in horror; and it makes, behind the hearty bulk of 'G.K.C.', a shadow which throws that figure into sharper perspective.

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Chapter Six. 'Openly and Indecently Humane'.

Chesterton leapt to fame in 1901 as a clever funny man, but straightway there were perceptive critics who recognised that he was also a man of deep and delicate sensibility. Noyes' comment in Chapter One shows how enthusiastic such readers could be. In 1912 a New York reviewer described him as 'one of the great pregnant, primal, wilful temperaments', in the same category, though not necessarily so distinguished, as 'the Richters, the Heines, the Sternes, the Lambs, the Burnses, the Carlyles'; that is, firmly among the more idiosyncratic Romantics of the early nineteenth century. (1)

How far is this true? In this chapter we shall look at the way in which Chesterton as a journalist resembles those of the earlier period; and how sensibility characterises his work as a whole.

Other critics agreed with the New York man, though they worded it less oddly. In 1911 The Academy pointed out that Chesterton was not merely a 'pregnant temperament', but a deliberate artist in feeling:

...(he) possesses in a high degree the excellent quality of suggestion...as with true poetry, so with prose - if it beings the peculiar, indescribable thrill, that sense of elation and spiritual recognition of its essential truth, it is often due to something hardly expressed, but strongly felt, which by a mysterious power communicates itself sublimely and potently to the soul of the reader...this has happened to us more than once in Mr. Chesterton's company, and it argues, not verbosity, but restraint in the writer...' (2)

Restraint was an admirable quality in an age of so much unexamined emotionalism and sentimentality. Chesterton himself believed far too intelligently in 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' not to know where that differed from sweet sloppiness; but, characteristically, he was defending the latter in Dickens when he wrote the 1905 essay which effectively is his own manifesto on 'the holiness of the heart's affections.' A writer of great moral stature, he says, must of necessity have a tenderness which on occasion will betray him into maudlin writing. Dickens could not have created Micawber so brilliantly had he not also had the capacity to perpetrate the saccharine Little

Nell. It is necessary' to have friendship and honour and an abysmal tenderness. Above all, it is necessary to be openly and indecently humane, to confess with fulness all the primary pities and fears of Adam.' (3)

The big new popular press needed writers of this kind. Indeed, only colourful and spontaneous characters could make much impact on the huge new public in the short articles these papers needed; (a Daily News column was 1500 words.) Shaw, for instance, was writing music criticism in The World in the early 'nineties, and his flamboyant style developed in this and other dailies. (4) Chesterton, however, had begun by writing art-criticism in the gentler world of the cultured magazines. (5) For all their faults, 'belles-lettres' may have preserved sensitivity of feeling alongside the heaviness of most Victorian periodical journalism; one is grateful for the perceptible lightening and quickening of tone which begins to be felt in the serious magazines of the 'nineties. (6) This had been Chesterton's first training-ground, then, before his short time with The Speaker led A.G. Gardiner to recruit him for the Daily News in 1901.

Within months he had become the outstanding 'personality' journalist of the decade, writing the Daily News Saturday column from 1901-1913, and a weekly piece in the Illustrated London News from 1905-1936. Such a column is the only place where a writer speaks directly to the reader in his own person, baring himself in any mood he fancies on almost any topic he fancies, day in day out. These columnists have always been one of a newspaper's strongest selling points; (when The Times advertised its re-appearance after a year's stoppage in 1979, its sole caption was 'Bernard Levin is back in The Times on Tuesday.') Chesterton must have enjoyed the curious illusory intimacy of his columns, because, once his name was known, he would probably have done better in terms of both money and reputation to have concentrated on full-length books.

The dashing style which won him popularity points first to the

influence of R.L.Stevenson. As we have seen, Chesterton loved the optimism, the adventurous fighting quality which he felt in the very sentence-structure of Stevenson's prose, and he believed that style reveals the essence of a writer's character. Stevenson himself had been a magazine journalist before he became famous for his adventure stories; and he also was a conscious stylist. He provides an interesting link with the great era of 'romantic' journalism, through his life-long regard for William Hazlitt. (1778-1830) (Appendix A)

In his account of the authors he admired and imitated as a youngster, Stevenson mentions Hazlitt first. (7) He caught not only the light, springy suppleness of Hazlitt's style, but wrote on some of his topics, too. (8) Later in life he considered writing a biography of Hazlitt - 'it must be good to live with another man from birth to death' - which suggests that Stevenson was considerably drawn to him. Ill-health prevented the project; but Hazlitt's directness, his vigorous yet light imaginative texture, his openness to all experience, is recognisable throughout Stevenson's writing.

To suggest a Chesterton-Stevenson-Hazlitt link may seem arbitrary at first sight; temperamentally they were very different; Chesterton shows no special interest in Hazlitt. But once we see them in relation to each other, their very differences point up the similarity of their views on the journalist's function, and there are surprising similarities in what they wrote and how they wrote it, which show how much Chesterton's kind of writing was related to the 'romantic' journalism of Keats' contemporaries. (9)

The epitaph Hazlitt's ^{old friend wrote for him} ~~wrote for himself~~ sums up his career as he saw it:

He was
The first (unanswered) Metaphysician of the age.
A despiser of the merely rich and great.
A lover of the people, Poor or Oppressed;
A hater of the Pride and Power of the Few
as opposed to the happiness of the many;
A man of true moral courage...
Who was a burning wound to the Aristocracy. (10)

The point here is that not only Hazlitt's radical colleagues, but also Chesterton's, would have liked to describe themselves in these terms. The proud bravado of the lines suits Chesterton well. Whether he was as successful as a 'burning wound to the Aristocracy' as he hoped, is a different matter; he certainly wrote with that intention all his life. He was 'a lover of the people', he constantly satirized the 'merely rich and great', and while they were 'metaphysicians' in different senses, both related social problems to greater human themes.

Hazlitt had been among the first 'personality' columnists. In The London Magazine during its first bright period (1820-1829) the contributors not only assumed pen-names but idiosyncratic personalities as well. Lamb first became 'Elia' here, and Hazlitt himself was 'Mr. Drama'.

Like Chesterton, Hazlitt trained as an artist, and is a very visual writer. Besides his vivid little descriptions, he is the first 'impressionistic' critic. He conveys his critical points through metaphor - Coleridge as a 'mouldering tower' for instance (11)-which convince the reader he has just seen something flashingly accurate. Whatever topic he writes on - prize-fighting, Indian jugglers, Beau Brummell, ladies' fashions a la 1807, children's kites- he is lively William Hazlitt being himself. His tone is just as versatile. He is by turns ironic, rhetorical, slangy, abusive, comical, or a connoisseur of delicate passionate feeling. (12) Throughout his long career he explored how best to communicate informally with his reader, avoiding Johnsonian 'pomp and uniformity' because 'it reduces all things to the same unmeaning level.' (13)

'Gusto' in a man is important to Hazlitt; that is, a fruity vivacity which brings a 'double relish' for what we experience. He could enjoy life, and he could also hate with gusto - 'without something to hate, we should lose the very spring of thought and action' (authentic tone of Fleet Street!) Hazlitt's hatred, however, is generally that of the

ravaged idealist, who has seen the injustice he abhors. (14) Thus, he attacks The Times for moral timidity: 'It takes up no failing cause; fights no uphill battles; advocates no great principle; holds out a helping hand to no obscure or oppressed individual.' (15)

Hazlitt is the most important of the romantic journalists because he is in many ways typical of Romantic consciousness - idealistic, passionate, vulnerable - and he poured this out on to the society of his day through the popular media of newspapers, magazines and lectures for many years and in a professional way. He was intensely part of the London scene, stimulating other men and being stimulated by them. Chesterton has not Hazlitt's violence, but he shares the capacity for private and public loves and hates, the gusto, the visual sense; and as a late Victorian, he inherited the sort of criticism called 'impressionistic'. Like Hazlitt, he offers himself to the reader as a common man commenting on the current scene, but most uncommon in his ability to touch the nerve of human feeling. (16)

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It was Chesterton's glory that because he saw himself as this sort of journalist, he was able to rise above the elegant emptiness of the typical belles-lettrist (such an one, for instance, as Le Gallienne), and to talk passionately about important things not in spite of, but by means of, the chatter. A writer who has to fill his column will often be trivial, but Chesterton extended and deepened the role of 'personality' journalist. Like Hazlitt, he had tremendous convictions, but he mediated these through a light, glittering style; and the suggestive power of feeling poised in such tension can be considerable. Within a couple of years of his first appearance in The Speaker (1899) Chesterton had achieved a sureness and versatility of tone whereby he could reach the reader's feelings precisely where he wanted. This explains his remarkable spurt to fame. He had not been to university, at school he was something of a failure, his first paid job was as a

nonentity in a publisher's office. Yet by the end of 1901, he was the most popular columnist on the great Daily News, lunching with Max Beerbohm, dining with Sidney Colvin, exchanging letters with Edmund Gosse. (18) Everybody seems to have felt fond of him, while being infuriated by many of his stances. They thought he was clever and funny; but they also sensed his tenderness. He evoked a response at a more vulnerable level than wits generally do. He remembered about childhood, about our private fears and horrors, a thousand subliminal perceptions, the tiny flickers of love, heroism and viciousness which make up daily consciousness. With this imaginative grasp on his readers' lives, he could go on to demand more of them; he could be angry on public issues, fantastic, dogmatic, aesthetic and hearty by turns. All this was rapturously received. If proof is needed further to the enormous amount of work solicited from him by publishers and editors at this time, surely the number of 'introductions' they soon started asking him to write to other people's book, indicates that, to the public, he was more than an entertainer. (19) The Edwardians welcomed him because, in a showy age, he represented that counter-movement of taste away from the exquisite, the 'dainty', towards homely and even blunt feeling, on which Wells and Shaw had already capitalised. (20) He was capable of deep common emotions. He generated a current of recognition between himself and his readers in which they saw the world magically clear, and themselves in it. This mutual recognition can be intensely pleasurable, and also liberating. Of course all extremely popular writers - Dickens, for instance - do this for their readers. No journalist in this century has won so much affection so quickly as Chesterton, and this, in my judgment, is because he brought to work-a-day readers this authentic excitement of romantic writing.

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First of all, when he invokes his Common Man, Chesterton is often calling his reader's bluff. He is reminding him that he, the reader, is

really a very vulnerable chap at heart, and that naïveté is not to be despised. On Byron, for instance: 'He heard suddenly the call of that buried and subconscious happiness which is in all of us, and which may emerge suddenly at the sight of the grass of a meadow or the spears of the enemy.' (21) He constantly challenges the reader to admit that he is still capable of childlike happiness. On the Brontës: '...and the truth the Brontës came to tell us is the truth that many waters cannot quench love, and that suburban respectability cannot touch or dampen a secret enthusiasm.' (22) The force of this is in the two words I have underlined; since the Brontës were not in themselves in the least suburban, the writer is evidently talking not of them but of us, the readers. He is implying: 'If you are honest you know that underneath your conventional veneer, you care deeply about things you would be horribly embarrassed to own to.'

Such glimpses of innocence occur throughout Chesterton's work, as they do in all the early Romantics' work. The pristine vision, whether it comes through childhood's eyes, through those of peasants, or savages, is the great theme of the Lyrical Ballads, of the Songs of Innocence; the young single-mindedness of Laos and Cythna, Porphyro and Madeline; Keats' wide-eyed young gods and goddesses, Psyche and Apollo. Burns' 'Cotter's Saturday Night' is nearer to Chesterton's picture of the Common Man, ^a and still part of the Romantics' celebration of untainted feelings.

In an essay written just before the first World War, Chesterton describes young French conscripts in a church service. They understand the ethical problems of war as little as the English onlooker understands their mumbled French. Their feelings are irrational, fumbling, perhaps even manipulated, for whatever good purpose. Yet he conveys that these common lads are full of truth and innocence; a 1913 version of those earlier peasants on the fells of the Lake District.

The priest made a short speech; he did not utter any priestly

dogmas (whatever they are), he uttered platitudes. In such circumstances are the only possible things to say; because they are true. He began by saying that he supposed a large number of them would be uncommonly glad not to go. They seemed to assent to this particular priestly dogma with even more than their alleged superstitious credulity...He spoke about Joan of Arc, and how she had managed to be a bold and successful soldier while still preserving her virtue and practising her religion; then he gave them each a little paper book. To which they replied (after a brief interval for reflection):

Pongprongperesklang pour la patrie

Tambraugtararrone pour la patrie,

which I feel sure was the best and most pointed reply. (23)

Chesterton himself has been touched by authentic emotion, and as a journalist he wants to record just that. But he does not want to be accused of prejudice; so he slides under our defences with a tone of high detached amusement, scripting the boys' pious mutterings as gibberish. However, the plainness of the priest's vocabulary precludes an easy sneer at his expense. Throughout the essay Chesterton suspends the reader's reaction so neatly between amusement and sympathy, that we are more moved than such a clichéd situation would seem to warrant. There is emotionalism; but Chesterton tempers it with irony, avoids mawkishness, and makes his point.

Yet simplicity and homeliness are not confined to children and peasants. They can exist as a core of pleasure when we overcome a metaphysical danger by intellectual means: 'Suffice it to say that this triple enigma [the Trinity] is as comforting as wine and open as the English fireside; that this thing that bewilders the intellect utterly quiets the heart...' (24)

In reminding us of our naïveté, he also reminds us of our childish griefs - homesickness and loss, the first of all our sorrows. One of his chief propositions is that man has wandered away from God, and forever seeks his lost happiness. This is the theme of Manalive, whose hero regularly quits his comfortable home so that when he returns after travelling round the world, he can appreciate its joys afresh. The bliss of homecoming, literally and metaphorically, is all over Chesterton's verse and prose. (25)

. Again, he not only tells us about loss; he makes us experience it. A sudden shaft of feeling opens in the argument; once again we are taken off our guard; and rediscover something disturbingly wistful in ourselves: '...that sublime sense of loss that is in the very sound of all poetry, and nowhere more than in the poetry of pagans and sceptics: 'we look before and after, and pine[sic] for what is not'; which cries against all prigs and progressives of the broken heart of man, that happiness is not only a hope, but also in some strange manner a memory; and that we are all kings in exile.' (26) However, the reader is only ready to acknowledge his unguarded moments because Chesterton's tone is so light and deft; he is tactful. 'All prigs and progressives' is the tiny familiar side-swipe which (though we may deplore it) here provides the necessary astringency to bring out by contrast the force of the emotive words and rhythms.

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Chesterton's most obvious infectious quality - which he shares with Hazlitt and the other Romantic journalists - was his love of a fight. This was not just crude pleasure in a scrap (though it can include that) but a more subtle courage against all odds. His first Daily News, a piece on Stevenson, shows this: "'Whatever we are intended to do', he said, 'we are not intended to succeed.' That the stars in their courses fight against virtue, that humanity is in its nature a forlorn hope, this was the very spirit that through Stevenson's work sounded a trumpet to the brave.' (27) All Chesterton's real heroes show this kind of courage: Don John in 'Lepanto' is only 'on a nameless throne a crownless prince', yet he routs the Saracen. (28) The Ballad of the White Horse is about a band of desperate men against a great army; and the utter despair and weakness of the English in defeat comes, after the noisy description of the battle, in the image of a child playing a quiet, mindless game.

The novels, likewise, are full of duels and fighting; and

understandably, Chesterton has been criticised for glamourising war just before the carnage of the Somme and Passchendaele. (XX 29) But these battles are all transparently picturesque fiction; the warfare is curiously unreal (and of course this must be a weakness, even in allegory.) Even in The Napoleon of Notting Hill, where the battle in N.3. is ingeniously plotted, there is no convincing description of wounding or killing. What did Chesterton mean by all this aggression?

He did indeed hate some people vigorously, as Hazlitt did; rich men and faceless politicians. But he would have considered death in battle too good for them; the fictional equivalents of the people he hated in real life do not perish in battle - they go quietly mad, like Lord Ivywood in The Flying Inn, or 'enjoy a quiet funeral in a crematorium shed' like Mr. Mandragon the Millionaire. (30) It seems to me that battle, for Chesterton, is a metaphor for exhilarating challenge, a rare experience to be sought eagerly by brave men; not an expression of hate. As we have already seen, he uses battle as an image of exaltation when no actual fighting is in progress: 'the message of Robert Browning is a single trumpet calling to the charge.' (31) When Gabriel Syme in The Man Who Was Thursday is in danger there is no physical battle, but 'there clanged in his mind that unanswerable and terrible truism in the song of Roland,

'Paiens ont tort et Chretiens ont droit',

which in the old nasal French has the clang and groan of great iron.'

(32) This kind of courage is described so frequently and so sharply that one is bound to accept that Chesterton had had experiences of it himself; yet he never went to war or wielded as much as a fencing foil in sport. He led a very comfortable, protected life, in physical terms. Yet, as some of the passages I have quoted, show, he had suffered from grief, shame, remorse, and had in some sense 'overcome' them. And in a sense Chesterton did spend the whole of his life fighting: Blake's 'mental fight' of ideas. These were his real, and most exciting adventures.

There is even a shadowy physical dimension in the picture of the two Chesterton brothers pacing up and down ceaselessly in the course of their marathon arguments, and these must have been even more challenging at the time than the later famous public debates with Shaw and Wells. If we take the battles in the books as images of mental conflict, a reading justified by the Autobiography(33), we still cannot acquit him of naïveté about real war; but we get closer to realising that his brain was so alert to ideas that it experienced them as physical forces.

What the first reading gives us, however, is the sheer excitement of anticipating danger. For instance, when Syme faces the Marquis de Sainte Eustache, a formidable enemy, in a duel, Chesterton puts some of his best writing into a description of the weaker man's exalted consciousness:

...But he saw that these fears were fancies, for he found himself in the presence of the great fact of the fear of death, with its coarse and pitiless common-sense. He felt like a man who had dreamed all night of falling over precipices, and had woken up on the morning when he was to be hanged. For as soon as he had seen the sunlight run down the channel of his foe's foreshortened blade, and as soon as he had felt the two tongues of steel touch, vibrating like two living things, he knew that his enemy was a terrible fighter, and that probably his last hour had come.

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. He could almost fancy that he heard the grass growing; he could almost fancy that even as he stood fresh flowers were springing up and breaking into blossom in the meadow - flowers blood red and burning gold and blue, fulfilling the whole pageant of spring. And whenever his eyes strayed for a flash from the calm, staring, hypnotic eyes of the Marquis, they saw the little tuft of almond-tree against the sky-line. He had the feeling that if by some miracle he escaped, he would be ready to sit for ever before that almond tree, desiring nothing else in the world. (34)

Trench warfare and shell-shock soon made this sort of writing impossible; but anyone who has felt the fearful exhilaration of any sort of physical challenge, with its surge of adrenalin, can respond to this. On such occasions, Chesterton stirs such scraps of courageous memories as even an armchair reader may have. And if we suspect that in our cocooned and standardised 1980s, such memories

are dimming fast, the stimulus is all the more valuable.

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These puny men are dwarfed before the immense forces they encounter, and yet they are all exhilarated by the grandeur of the challenge. This consciousness of the individual pitted against an enormous unknown universe is, again, a recognisable Romantic theme, from the Ancient Mariner's 'Alone on a wide, wide sea!' to Emily Brontë's 'No coward soul is mine.' It is part of that 'pristine revelation' which Chesterton believed to be the artist's first task to record; awe before the great energy felt in nature. Wordsworth had spoken of the 'wisdom and spirit of the universe' which he associated with the 'absolute power' of imagination. Chesterton saw it, I think, ^{as 'energy'} rather than 'power'; there is a difference in our usage of the two words.

This energy reverberates in Chesterton's best writing - and there is a good deal of it. When his first reviewers spoke of him as a 'new voice', they had heard this rumbling bass diapason in his style. It is an important part of the experience of reading Chesterton, and as such, belongs in this chapter; but as the strength can be felt in all the quotations, here I will merely deal with the characters in whom this great dynamism is personified.

Sunday is the most developed of them.

"I? What am I?" roared the President, and he rose slowly to an incredible height, like some enormous wave about to arch over them and break. "You want to know who I am, do you? Bull, you are a man of science. Grub in the roots of the trees and find out the truth about them. Syme, you are a poet. Stare at those morning clouds. But I tell you this, that you will have found out the truth about the last tree and the topmost cloud before the truth about me. You will understand the sea, and I shall be still a riddle; you shall know what the stars are, and not know what I am. Since the beginning of the world all men have hunted me like a wolf-kings and sages, and poets and law-givers, all the churches, and all the philosophers. But I have never been caught yet, and the skies will fall in the time I turn to bay." (35)

This baffling figure, reminiscent of God in the Book of Job, is 'the nature of the universe' as it appeared to Chesterton when he was struggling out of pantheism in the early 1900s. It is the virtue of

the novel that Sunday remains mysterious to the end, revealing himself in arbitrary flashes, yet solid and tremendous. Innocent Smith in Manalive is another image of energy, this time on a more human level; he is also, of all the heroes, the most physically like the huge, comical Gilbert Chesterton himself; and thus in a sense he is also a portrait of the romantic artist mediating mysterious forces beyond his conscious understanding. (36)

Chesterton's stories are full of 'power' figures in the worldly sense, who represent one aspect of these forces of the universe. Apart from the characters in the 'Father Brown' stories, who we have already noted, the novels are similarly cast. The Return of Don Quixote, for instance, has a Lord, a Prime Minister, a medieval King-at-Arms with a court and powers of judiciary, and a Commissioner in Lunacy. (37) Of course, these people are often too sketchy to be convincing; but the sense of mysterious forces at work in society is as great as, say, in The Everlasting Man or Charles Dickens, where historical ideas have power. Chesterton's dual perception of the world is ultimately a vision of cosmic energies, beneficent and malevolent. (38)

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What part does Chesterton's humour play in his sensibility? It seems to me to be a kind of depth charge, which causes a vibration, an effervescence, in the emotional quality of his work as a whole. He has passion, courage, tenderness, idealism, noble scorn; but these virtues do not save a writer from being boring, nor, alas, repulsive.

His humour establishes a sympathy with the reader; once we admit we are amused, our defences are down. All sorts of delicate perceptions are involved over a shared joke. We can see how this works if we examine one of the more extravagant essays in detail, 'A Piece of Chalk'; (39) a really far-fetched proposition is the best test of humour's power to suspend disbelief.

Chesterton is propounding one of his major ideas - that there is a marvellous element in ordinary things. He is limited to 1500 words,

'so the argument must be presented flamboyantly if it is to make any impact at all. 'So I drew the soul of the cow; which I saw there plainly walking before me in the sunlight; and the soul was all purple and silver, and had seven horns and the mystery which belongs to all the beasts.' This sort of thing is not going to be acceptable to his Daily News reader without some manoeuvring; so he begins by establishing himself as a harmless comic character asking his landlady for brown paper in the kitchen. This is homely and recognisable, so we accept him with a smile; whereupon he proposes his first absurd thesis: '...brown paper represents the primal twilight of the first toil of creation.' By this time he has us firmly by the hand, linked in a child's conspiracy to outwit the grownups. So the essay proceeds; the fantasy alternates with the comedy. There is a Chagall-like vision of Symbolic Nature, then a bathetic collapse - 'I always get wrong in the hind legs' - on drawing cows. Thus tacking, he reaches the point at which we will accept his most far-fetched idea yet: that as cows and brown paper are more exciting than we thought, so too are moral qualities: 'Virtue is not the absence of vices or the avoidance of moral dangers; virtue is a vivid and separate thing, like pain or a particular smell. Mercy does not mean not being cruel or sparing people revenge or punishment; it means a plain and positive thing like the sun, which one has either seen or not seen. Chastity... means something flaming, like Joan of Arc.' Having achieved this, he collapses again - 'meanwhile, I could not find my chalk.' He laughs out loud, so that 'the cows stared at me and called a committee', which reminds us of the characteristic committee-like appearance of cows, and sets us firmly on his side for the last page; in which he realises that the whole of the South Downs are, in fact, chalk; and that a bit broken off can be used as a substitute for the shop variety.- a last surprise which clinches the argument wittily, because he is 'proving' his fantastic thesis with a fact which is both startling

and indisputable.

The humour takes any number of forms. In the chalk essay, it is mock-heroic versus bathos; but sometimes Chesterton uses a straight bit of farce, like the gentleman with the jammed drawer 'uttering encouraging shouts to himself'; or deadpan irony: '...gazing reverently at the profound Protestantism of Mr. Michael Arlen or Mr. Noel Coward...' (40) The irony can be both funny and deadly:

I look reverently at the portrait of Lord Rothschild; I read reverently about the exploits of Mr. Vanderbilt. I know that I cannot turn everything I touch into gold; but then I know I have never tried...I know that these people have certainly succeeded in something; that they have certainly overcome somebody; I know that they are kings in a sense that no men were ever kings before; that they create markets and bestride continents. Yet it always seems to me that there is some small domestic fact that they are hiding, and I have sometimes thought I heard upon the wind the laughter and whisper of the reeds. (41)

Irony presumes an intelligent reader who very well understands the underlying reality; it is intellectually pleasurable and flattering to have seen the point. Perhaps this is why masters of irony like Jane Austen win devoted readers. Thus, Chesterton's send-up of somebody's claim that a capitalist society invariably encourages rugged individualism, depends for its effect on the reader using his own judgment:

The reader refolds the Daily Mail and rises from his intensely individualistic breakfast table, where he has just dispatched his bold and adventurous breakfast; the bacon cut in rashers from the wild boar which but lately turned to bay in his back garden; the eggs perilously snatched from swaying nest and flapping bird at the top of those toppling trees which give the house its appropriate name of Pine Crest. He puts on his own curious and creative hat, built on some bold plan entirely out of his own curious and creative head...He strides down the street, making his own way over hill and dale towards the place of his own chosen and favourite labour, the workshop of his imaginative craft. He lingers on his way, now to pluck a flower, now to compose a poem, for his time is his own... Such is the life of a clerk in the world of private enterprise and practical individualism. (42)

After that, there is no need of preaching. In all these examples of Chesterton as humorist, his instinct for how a word plays on the reader's responses is impeccable. (And, conversely, it is this which makes him so exasperating when we do not agree with him.)

The Academy reviewer quoted at the beginning of this chapter, who praised Chesterton's 'mysterious power', went on to point out that as a matter of fact, for most of the time Chesterton was simply jolly and not particularly soul-stirring. Such critics would have liked him to sustain a more exalted emotional tone and not write piffling comedy three times a week. Yet, had Chesterton not disarmed his readers by being so funny, they would probably not have stayed around in such numbers to benefit from the 'indescribable thrills' when these did occur.

I hope that the passages quoted in this chapter show, if nothing else, the inaccuracy of the belief that Chesterton's jollity precluded real sensibility. Chesterton's whole existential view of life made this criticism possible; he deliberately presented himself as an imperfect human being, in whom exalted feeling occurred spasmodically, as it does in most people. Modesty, as well as humour, tempered his emotions. The cheerfulness which attracted the Edwardians has, ironically, repelled many later readers. Perhaps the word 'gusto' has done him harm; he deserves it in the more demanding Hazlitt sense, 'a double relish of all its objects'. Chesterton did indeed doubly relish, and though his feelings were common, they were never vulgar.

Nowadays we are suspicious of cheerful artists. Even our 'personality' columnists have to adopt a permanent tone of exacerbation to prove their mental integrity. However, anyone who takes Chesterton at his face value encounters a person who, however quirky or wrong-headed he may be, opens himself to his reader as a man of sensitive and wide-ranging feeling.

Chapter Seven. ('The Middleman in Poetry': Chesterton's Criticism.

In our time, the splendid jungle of Chesterton's criticism - six full-length studies of writers, The Victorian Age in Literature, and hundreds of short essays (1) - has been suspect; students who find Chaucer or Robert Browning are warned that their function on the library shelves is not so much to teach, as to illustrate the faults of impressionist criticism. He may be fun to read, but he is not to be trusted. Serious histories of criticism ignore him; and, indeed, he is hardly recognisable as a critic in today's terms - that is, an academic writing for 'Eng. Lit.' students. He belongs to that hopeful period at the turn of the century when there were thousands of new readers wanting to read Macaulay or Ruskin for sheer private pleasure. One of those readers was Leonard Bast. (2)

Between 1900 and 1920, however, it seemed no-one could have enough of 'G.K.C.' talking about books. It was his 1901 article defending Stevenson which shot him to the notice of the literary world, and which led to the commission for Robert Browning, which in its turn established him as shockingly unscholarly and irresistably readable. (3) The Victorian Age in Literature was reprinted seventeen times between 1913 and 1947. (4) As late as the 1930s, the B.B.C. considered his book talks remarkably successful.

Academics of courage still occasionally recommend him on their undergraduate^a reading lists; and in 1970, W.H.Auden, persuaded to re-read him for a selection of the non-fiction, expressed a judgment of surprising warmth, ranking him 'very high' among literary critics (5) So, he gets studied neglect and eccentric attentions; which does he deserve? Does he really lead us in to the text and a fresh experience of the author? Or is his criticism so much colourful Edwardian waste paper?

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By today's standards, Chesterton was writing in a bad period. 'Impressionistic' meant a whole package of bad writing to Leavis and his

contemporaries, and it also does, by definition, to the latest school of 'scientific' critics. It started with the spirited and descriptive reviewing of Hazlitt and his 'romantic' contemporaries, for whom a capacity to make Olympian judgments seemed less important than the sensitive response.(5).

All the early Romantics had theorised about poetry and poetry's function; for instance, Shelley in his 1821 Defense of Poetry argued that poetry 'awakens and enlarges the mind' and does not need to preach. 'A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively.' The Victorians eagerly developed this idea of poetry as ennobling; Matthew Arnold is the great exponent of this strand of romantic critical thinking (though he considered the early Romantics lacking in the serious critical effort essential if Englishmen were to think excellently on their ideals.)(6) Most of the critical writing in the mid-Victorian journals reflected Arnold's moral and cultural preoccupations, and Chesterton had certainly read him - read him well enough, indeed, to make his reservations about the older critic apparent in the preface he was asked to write for the 1906 'Everyman' edition of Arnold's Essays in Criticism. He praises him for his intellectual humility and his courage; but the essay as a whole must have dismayed Arnold's admirers. He was too cool, too aristocratic, too fastidious for Chesterton by temperament; the young man saw Arnold's virtues accurately and disliked them.

There was ^{however} another development of the earlier criticism of Hazlitt and his contemporaries. Keble re-stated Hazlitt's theory that poetry represented 'ungratified desire'; and so, naturally, the author's personality becomes the reader's most interesting experience. Abrams sees Keble as a radical critic who anticipated Freud in seeing poetry as the indirect 'overflow of powerful feelings' which could not otherwise be expressed. Keble's criticism was principally in Latin and therefore his ideas had less immediate impact than Arnold's; but ideas sympathetic to Hazlitt's and Keble's developed, not in this country, but among French writers like Baudelaire and Hugo. Swinburne (1837-1909)

was the first English critic to assert their importance, and to develop them towards 'Aesthetic' criticism. He was immensely influential in Chesterton's youth, and, indeed, Chesterton shared many of his passionately held loves and hates. (7)

Swinburne's successor was Walter Pater (1834-1894) He also sees the good critic as possessing an especially sympathetic temperament, to search behind the written words to the psychology and hidden motives of the writer. He is thus, in the first sense of the word, 'impressionable' to his author. Secondly, Pater says life is 'a tremulous wisp constantly reforming itself on the stream'; (like Shelley's 'fading coal') nothing is fixed or absolute, so the artist must capture truth as it passes in rapid 'impressions' rather than finished masterpieces. ('Do you ask 200 guineas for two hours' work, Mr. Whistler?'- 'No, my Lord, I ask it for the knowledge of a lifetime'.) Pater's elegant prose could not itself be called sketchy, but he re-states the possibility of sketchiness as a virtue; that primary demand of the earlier Romantics for spontaneity. Thirdly, the artist positively lives for 'impressions'; the famous passage in The Renaissance describing his desire to be 'present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy', is a plea for those intense moments of experience which Shelley and Keats describe. Pater, however, writes as if those halcyon seconds are ends in themselves - an important difference. (8)

Pater's successors, the impressionistic critics of the 'nineties and the Edwardian period, earned their title by insisting on the catching of quickly-fading impressions as the artist's - and therefore the critic's - primary concern. Modern critics point out that in cultivating spontaneity (the solecism demonstrates the difficulty) the impressionists deteriorated into rhetoric. They are more interested in their own intriguing reactions than in the work under review. Their pretty 'pen-pictures' obscure rather than reveal. Much of this

indictment is demonstrably true; a Hazlitt can use the method profitably, but it is risky. This is not to say that much impressionistic criticism is not fun to read; Virginia Woolf, for instance; but one tends to enjoy the critic rather than the original text. (9)

By the 'nineties, the whole concept of the critic's job was emasculated. Richard Le Gallienne (1866- 1947) described 'the greatest critic' as 'he who can appreciate the greatest number of beautiful things' - and nothing suggests he intended 'appreciates' in any very active sense. (10) The result was a vogue for picturesque little essays; and magazine reviewers found it easy to adapt such light-weight work for the big new popular newspapers. Le Gallienne himself wrote for Fleet Street; so did Bernard Shaw and Andrew Lang, of whom Henry James wrote in a letter to Stevenson: '...Lang in the 'Daily News' every morning, and I believe in a hundred other places, uses his beautiful thin facility to write everything down to the lowest level of Philistine twaddle...' (11)

To mention Shaw here is to demonstrate what a shock his vigour administered to such charming but bloodless company. (12) As a reviewer on the Star he was already outlining vociferously his philosophy of life, and creating a taste for an aggressive popular criticism of moral and social values which would place him beyond the charge of dilettantism; and meanwhile, the young Chesterton was trying out his own fledgling style in the columns of The Speaker.

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One might have expected Chesterton to have gravitated towards the critics who opposed Aestheticism, the 'Hearties', whose leader was W.E. Henley. (1849-1903) (13) However, he dissociated himself from Henley explicitly and early on. (14) He disliked Decadents and Aesthetes, he loved a fight, but the burliness of his personality was counter-balanced by his innate sensibility to the aesthetic movement of

of his time. Swinburne and Pater were an important part of his inheritance. (15)

Like his contemporaries, Chesterton was shy of critical theories. He once called them 'the awful obstetrics of art'. In this essay he explained that he saw the critic as 'The Middleman in Poetry' who came between the artist and his public, and encouraged, by his superior sympathy and intelligence, a lower standard of articulacy; he would mediate, he would explain, the artist could remain in his ivory tower.

(16) Most of his ideas about art (which of course he had in plenty) occur in his text in odd phrases and sentences. One such passing comment is 'All real good taste is gusto...the power of appreciating the presence of - or the absence of - a particular and positive pleasure.' (17) This is a more vigorous version of Le Gallienne's aphorism, and Hazlitt's 'gusto' is significant here. Generally, though, Chesterton's insistence on the reader's untutored, immediate response to books - itself a form of romantic theory - precludes him making long statements such as Wordsworth's Preface or Shelley's Defense of Poetry.

Style is of the essence. This places him firmly with the Aesthetic critics. Continually he reminds us: 'It is one of the curses of the criticism of poetry that it tends to detach the ideas of a poet from the forms by which he expresses them, which is like detaching the abstract idea of vegetation from all conceivable forms of vegetables.' (18) He distrusts overt moralising: 'An artist teaches far more by his mere background and properties, his landscape, his costumes, his idiom and technique - all the parts of his work, in short, of which he is probably unconscious, than by the elaborate and pompous moral dicta which he fondly imagines to be his opinions.' (19) This is recognisably related to Swinburne's 'Save the shape, and Art will take care of the soul for you.' (20) Like Pater, Chesterton believes passionately in moments of intense experience, while rejecting equally passionately the Aesthete's slogan, 'Art for Art's sake.'

Chesterton's metaphysical stance, which we considered in Chapter Four,

in fact achieved a neat compromise between the Aesthetic and the more Arnoldian view of literature as ennobling morally. Art must not preach; but a good writer inescapably refers his reader to a transcendent meaning, and by inference to a 'Meaner'. Orthodoxy outlines both a theology and an aesthetic.(21)

There are other important critical ideas which are not traceable to Aesthetic sources. One of these is his interest in the writer's psychology, which goes a good deal further than Pater's: 'The function of criticism, if it has a legitimate function at all, can only be one function - that of dealing with the subconscious part of the author's mind, which only the critic can express, and not with the conscious part of the author's mind, which the author himself can express.'(22) This is like Keble; and is a psychological version of Shelley's description of poetic inspiration whose 'footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea.' (23) It also partly explains Chesterton's reluctance to analyse.

He also believed that the critic must see the writer historically. The Aesthetic tendency had been to isolate the writer behind his work, (Joyce's artist 'paring his nails') so that historicism, while characteristic of much Victorian criticism, was not important to them. (24) But in the preface of The Victorian Age in Literature Chesterton is insistent on this: 'the chief peril of the process, however, will be an inevitable tendency to make the spiritual landscape too large for the figures. I must ask for indulgence if such criticism traces too far back into politics or ethics the roots of which great books were the blossoms; makes Utilitarianism more important than Liberty or talks more of the Oxford Movement than of The Christian Year... I can only answer, I shall not make religion more important than it was to Keble, or politics more sacred than they were to Mill.' (25)

I think Chesterton may well have been brought up on the French critic, Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893), whose 'History of English Literature' was

exceedingly popular and accessible in his boyhood. (26) Published in French in 1864, it was translated into English in 1871 and reprinted frequently, sometimes with pictures, up to the First World War; so it is highly probable that the moneyed and cultured Edward Chesterton bought a copy for 11, Warwick Gardens. Taine is a vivacious, highly pictorial writer, though without humour. His real interest as a critic lies in his emphasis that 'the psychological state is the cause of the social state'. That is, not only do events in society influence writers, but ideas moving powerfully through a society eventually produce historical events. Taine encouraged a psychological and sociological approach to literature, and his awareness of history as a constant flux of 'moments', 'the incessant becoming of things', is more like Hegel's than Pater's. Chesterton's concept of ideas in history as invisible forces, which we saw in Chapter Three, and his understanding of the interplay of the writer's subconscious and the ideological movements round him, can be seen as growing naturally from a reading of Taine. (27) Taine is a rationalist, however, and there is no transcendent dimension in his views either of society or literature. On a different level, Taine's sparse and arbitrary use of biographical facts may have been responsible for Chesterton's notorious neglect of them.

The reader only has to peruse these earlier critics, however, to realise that, wherever he derived his understanding of criticism, Chesterton was genuinely original in important ways. (28) He was funny, he was fresh, everything he wrote about sprang to life. His acute, detached intelligence steadied itself on his metaphysics, and thus he achieved a lucid critical poise which served him well for over thirty years.

As we might expect, Chesterton sees the subjects of his six full-length biographies as visionaries in their different ways. (This is the 'subconscious part of the author's mind'- Dickens and Shaw might have been surprised to be termed visionaries) They are influenced by past

events which have shaped their society (for instance, the French Revolution), and are able to articulate the new feelings which they and their contemporaries are experiencing in the wake of these events. But because they are men of outstanding imaginative power, they relate this experience to their own perception of absolute reality, which indirectly asserts a moral authority. (This is like Chesterton's own position as I outlined it at the bottom of p.5.) (29)

Thus, Chesterton sees Robert Browning, the subject of his first literary biography, as a product of the post-Revolutionary society, influenced as a young man by 'the first beginning of the aesthetic stir in the middle classes'. But he is also a great individual, not a mere product of external forces, 'a priest of the higher passions'; a complex man, through whom God speaks. (James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, who originates from Joyce's memories of the 'nineties, is described in the same intensely romantic-aesthetic way.) In Browning, this sacerdotal role enables him to speak in his maturity for all liberal Victorian thinkers, a significant prophet as well as priest for his time. (30)

Chesterton cheerfully denigrated his handling of Browning in later years; as we have seen. (31) In spite of this, the reader gets a vivid sense of Browning's character; this is due to Chesterton's quick, humble appreciation of the things he admires. For instance, he argues that although Browning has been accused of formlessness he is always experimenting with new verse forms, and that his very love of the grotesque shows an acute and original sense of form. Chesterton would no doubt have read Victor Hugo's famous essay on 'The Grotesque', and his own delight in gargoyles and fantastic animals, all the extravagances of the Gothic cathedrals, shows his sympathy with this strand of the Romantic imagination. If there is traditional form, there are delightful possibilities of formal deviation arising from it. Similarly, Browning's 'ruggedness' denotes not insensitivity but its opposite: 'Ruggedness being an essential quality in the universe, there

is that in man which responds to it as to the striking of any other chord of the eternal harmonies⁽³¹⁾ Chesterton assumes here that in his style, a great writer reflects what Wordsworth called 'the goings on of the universe', and his readers respond out of their own instinctive sympathies with nature - a primary Romantic assumption.

Chesterton's approach to Dickens is also consistent with Taine's standpoint, plus his own belief in visionary power. Again, he has taken for subject a man saturated in the post revolutionary idealism of the 1820s and 1830s. Only in such an exhilarating atmosphere can the individual achieve 'greatness', Chesterton claims. His Dickens is a less heroic figure than his Browning, a moody, vulnerable and compassionate man: '...the voice in England of this humane intoxication and expansion, this encouraging of anybody to be anything...' But because he is possessed by a vision, he writes about that contemporary experience that it becomes, not a passing historical mood, but an aspect of greater truth: '...exhilaration is not a physical accident, but a mystical fact...this braver world of his will certainly return; for I believe that it is bound up with realities, like morning and the spring.' (32)

Again, he selects only those biographical facts which help to explain Dickens' subconscious daemons. For instance: 'Dickens had all his life the faults of the little boy who is kept up too late at night. The boy in such a case exhibits a psychological paradox; he is a little too irritable because he is a little too happy...In all practical relations of his life he was what the child is in the last hours of the evening party, genuinely delighted, genuinely delightful, genuinely affectionate and happy, and yet in some strange way fundamentally exasperated and dangerously close to tears.' (33) Chesterton reminds us of our own memories of childhood and shows us how this hectic mood informs Dickens; so that henceforth we understand one facet of him on this intensely felt level.

As the nineteenth century advances, and society's mood changes, so does Dickens' response: 'But the illimitable white light of human hopefulness, of which I spoke at the beginning, is ebbing away, the work of the revolution is growing weaker everywhere; and the night of necessitarianism cometh when no man can work. For the first time in a book by Dickens perhaps we really do feel that the hero is forty-five.'

(34) This is revealing, because it was Dickens himself who was forty-five in 1857 when Little Dorrit was published - who was, to Chesterton, the real hero of the novel. Another small revealing detail is that the image of the 'white light', associated here with the Revolution, is the same as the 'white light on everything' in his earliest childhood memories (Ch.4,p.48), and also as that associated with Wordsworth's 'glory and ^{the} freshness of a dream' (in Ch.2,p.23).

William Blake (1910) has been criticised or ignored by Blake scholars, but I find it a helpful approach to Blake for the general reader, and a reverberating piece of criticism. Strictly speaking, this is art-rather than literary-criticism - which perhaps accounts for the writing being even more pictorial than usual - but Chesterton relates poetry, theology and engravings in one total utterance. 'Blake was a fanatic on the subject of the firm line...the thing he hated most in art was the thing we call Impressionism...the substitution of atmosphere for shape, the sacrifice of form to tint...like every true Romantic, he loved the irrevocable'. (35) The reference to Impressionism suggests Chesterton is about to preach; but Blake's gigantic stature prevents him from doing so. He goes cautiously; his good taste precludes cosiness with the author of the Prophetic books. He regards Blake with interest, sympathy, respect - and wariness; he senses him as a living presence. But he also keeps the sense of the eighteenth century context, 'the strict and undecorated frame from which look at us the blazing eyes of William Blake.' (36) He deals with the period's preoccupations at length; for instance, when he is explaining Blake's peculiarly

eighteenth-century brand of occultism, he takes the reader through his argument methodically and with disarming clarity. (37)

William Blake exposes Chesterton's limitations; for instance, he is for instance quite comically bewildered at Blake's hatred of war. But he can convey the tremendous realities which weighed on Blake's imagination: 'God for him was not more and more vague and diaphanous as one came near to Him. God was more and more solid as one came near. When one was far off one might fancy Him to be impersonal. When one came into personal relation one knew that He was a person.' (38) It seems to me that here, and in hundreds of other critical essays, Chesterton boosts the reader's imaginative capacity, so that for a second we see God as Blake saw Him. If, as I understand, there is no significant distortion of Blake's meaning, then surely such writing is valuable criticism. The imaginative tour-de-force is achieved so coherently that one is made as 'free' of Blake as a normal person can be.

Robert Louis Stevenson (1927) begins with Chesterton announcing that he will not be distracted by Stevenson's picturesque life-story; his concern is with his imaginative life. He presents him as a conscious stylist, whose moral vision is implicit in the style: 'there is nothing of the dissolving view,' he comments with approval. Intrinsically present in the clear-cut, swinging prose is Stevenson's desire to 'make the human soul come to a conclusion in some fashion and announce its conclusion in some way.' (39) Chesterton's Stevenson obviously has points in common with Chesterton's Browning, but the two personalities are different - Stevenson is the slighter, more romantic and flamboyant character, an adventurer possessed by his vision of life's possibilities.

Chaucer (1932) is pleasurable, but now the reader suspects the method; surely not even Chesterton can feel himself back into a mind moving in so remote a period? Nor do we now believe in Chesterton's

medieval Christendom undivided and secure. (40) But Chesterton enjoys writing about the Middle Ages so much that there are moments of great poetic beauty, including one which - if one may digress in a chapter on critics and criticism - suggests Eliot may have remembered it when

ERRATUM It has been pointed out to me that Chaucer (1932) appeared after Ash Wednesday (1930), so that Eliot could not have been indebted to Chesterton's book for his 'medieval' images there.

voices speak from behind the golden masks of the gods.' (41)

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The best of the short ~~pieces~~ are the early ones, before Chesterton was tired or propaganda-driven; but certain writers who interest him stir his imagination to throw off fresh responses time and time again. (42) Tennyson is a case in point. Chesterton did not much approve of his doubts and his melodious weariness, but he feels the poet's mind to a point which makes him careful, makes him choose his words slowly as if he were groping for the right ones. His 1902 essay for The Bookman illustrates this.⁽⁴³⁾ He starts off bemused by a sense of Tennyson's detachment; casts around, and comes up with the inaccurate statement, 'He was at his very best in describing buildings'. He is not satisfied, and continues musing, getting nearer the truth: 'In reading Tennyson's natural descriptions we never seem to be in physical contact with the earth...we see the whole scene accurately, but we see it under glass. In Tennyson's works we see Nature indeed, and hear Nature, but we do not smell it.' Now his imagination is moving, and he sees the enormity of the poet's task in a Darwinian world where faith was challenged.⁽⁴⁴⁾ It is surely more to his honour, since he was the idle lover of beauty who has been portrayed. He felt the time called him to be an interpreter. Perhaps he might even have been something more of a poet if he had not sought to be something more than a poet. He might have written a more perfect Arthurian epic if his heart had been as much buried in

medieval Christendom undivided and secure. (40) But Chesterton enjoys writing about the Middle Ages so much that there are moments of great poetic beauty, including one which - if one may digress in a chapter on critics and criticism - suggests Eliot may have remembered it when writing 'Ash Wednesday' and 'Burnt Norton': 'like a figure emerging from that chequered and glimmering forest of dreams in which such medieval figures so often walk; in which a half-human figure will carry two faces under a hood of allegory, and haunting half-recognisable voices speak from behind the golden masks of the gods.' (41)

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prehistoric sepulchres as the heart of Mr. W.B. Yeats.' (45)

I have quoted this essay because, even in its clumsy and inaccurate parts, it illustrates the slow amiable probing which Chesterton often used in his literary criticism, which encourages the reader to probe along with him. This is a valid development of the 'romantic' approach to criticism, in its spontaneity and its appeal to instinct and sensibility. It is this open thinking process which he himself admired most in other writers - 'Mr. Chesson prefers to think his way through the book' was his high praise of a writer in 1908. (46) His praise of H.G. Wells was that 'you can lie awake at night and hear him grow' - that is, develop ideas; and it is the existential nature of his best criticism which makes him readable even when his conclusions are controversial.

The similes in the preface to The Victorian Age in Literature carry this suggestion of a living, organic process, reminiscent of Coleridge's theories of art: 'The critic who wishes to move onwards with the life of an epoch must be always running backwards and forwards among its mere dates; just as the branch bends back and forth continually; yet the grain in the branch runs true like an unbroken river.' (47) This organic view of criticism was particularly apt for the rapid, panoramic view of a whole literary landscape in The Victorian Age in Literature. Although it slides off into irrelevancies towards the end, it also has scores of vivid little thumb-nail sketches and bon-mots which have ensured its popularity.

One might argue that these only prove that Chesterton was merely a journalist showing off. We can judge the accuracy of the charge only by reading the authors concerned: is Chesterton accurate? I myself consider a few more witty than true, but usually the reader is refreshed by the view. '...Rogers, with his phosphorescent and corpse-like brilliancy...' '...There was about Mill even a sort of embarrassment; he exhibited all the wheels of his iron universe rather

reluctantly, like a gentleman in trade showing ladies over his factory..' (On Carlyle writing on Goethe)'...it is like watching a shaggy Scandinavian decorating a Greek statue washed up by chance on his shores.' 'Pater cannot let go for the excellent reason that he wants to stay; to stay at the point where all the keenest emotions meet, as he explains in the splendid peroration of The Renaissance;' Of William Morris: 'He was the first of the Aesthetes to smell medievalism as a smell of the morning; and not as a mere scent of decay.' (48)

Perhaps this is the point to mention Chesterton's parodies of Swinburne, Whitman, Tennyson and Yeats- among others, both accurate and funny; small critical achievements in their own right. (49)

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The properly suspicious reader, realising the warmth and generosity of Chesterton's sympathies, may well wonder whether there were any writers in whom he could not find qualities he admired. His limitations are interesting. He did not, it seems to me, pay more than lip-service to Shakespeare; he did not appreciate Milton. A certain distrust of the Renaissance was the obverse of his enthusiasm for the Middle Ages. He has nothing valuable to say on Lawrence, Joyce, Forster or Conrad. He is generally ill-at-ease writing about women authors. By the time he was editing G.K.'s Weekly, he believed Protestantism to be inimical to poetry; Bunyan was really a Catholic at heart; so was Milton.(50) Put like this, the case sounds comic; but Chesterton's ideas of Protestantism were conditioned by the extreme liberal vapourings of his youth, and he never understood that Puritanism may be not so much iconoclasm as an elegant severity of the imagination. Where sectarian loyalties were not involved, however, Chesterton remained a choice critic. As we have seen, he picked out qualities of incisiveness and definition in authors, where he possibly could (Ch.4,p.53); both in their imaginative qualities - Dickens' flair for the vividly caricatured - or in their morals: Stevenson's desire to 'make the human soul come to a conclusion'.

Yet, surprisingly, he is not a dogmatic critic. As a polemical writer, he could be heavily prejudiced; and in controversy, as for instance with ^{G.} G. Coulton in The Listener in 1935, he could be irritatingly dismissive; but when he is dealing with artistic creation, he is generous. Tennyson and Thackeray are both writers who he might have charged with a 'dissolving view', Tennyson because of his religious doubts and Thackeray by reason of his worldliness; yet he feels himself unauthorised to dismiss any artist who bears the responsibility of a vision to proclaim to the world, alien though that vision may be to his own. (51) It may be relevant to point out that although Chesterton has often been likened to Dr. Johnson, both for his aggressiveness in debate and in his personal appearance (and indeed there are several accounts of his having dressed up as Johnson for fancy-dress parades), he wrote very little about him, and nothing of quality. Yet it was Chesterton's life-long contention that 'a fine distinction is like a fine painting or a fine poem or anything else; a triumph of the human mind.' (52)

Nor did Chesterton (or any critic of his period) feel the writer's importance in creating a modern society's values; his laments over Tennyson's involvement in Victorian ideals, quoted above, demonstrate that; and this shows how far Chesterton's contemporaries had moved from the High Romantic view that 'poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.' (53) Reading, for them, was a private pleasure, an intimate joy. However, the very fact that Chesterton thought art less important than citizenship meant that he could encourage his readers to respond to the artist spontaneously, irrationally if they wanted to, to their hearts' content. There was no moral compulsion. Ultimately, the great writers are visionaries whose morals are implicit in the vision; and this is basically the position of the Romantics; first, they were filled with vision.

If Chesterton made the risky impressionistic approach work for him

instead of against him, this was because he was humble and sensitive enough to be more interested in the people he was writing about than in himself. He was too acute to be sentimental; perhaps he was temperamentally lucky to achieve so nice a blend of detachment and sympathy. He gets close to the nerves and pulses of his author, and at the same time he maintains a long view. In this way he deserves to be considered an authentic literary critic showing strong characteristics of romantic criticism.

Chapter Eight.. Chesterton and Charles Williams.

If Chesterton ever thought about his influence on younger writers, it was only in the 'twenties and 'thirties, when he had become a popular Catholic champion, that he looked for successors in what he called the 'anti-modern reaction'. (1) Here he confessed himself puzzled; he had always presumed that this reaction would be among warm-hearted commoners, not 'fastidious and over-refined persons' such as the Sitwells, Aldous Huxley and T.S.Eliot. He found in the latter - in 1935 - 'an almost cloistered refinement, full of the virginal traditions of old religion', and added wryly: 'We must not be ashamed of finding ourselves, if necessary, on the side of the cultivated and the clever.'

(2)

The public, however, had already recognised that in spite of his Anglo-Catholicism, Eliot inhabited a far more modern world than Chesterton's. A year later, many of Chesterton's obituarists wrote as if they had buried a kind of lovable prehistoric monster that had lumbered into a climate where it did not belong. (3) Successors seemed unlikely. Certainly Chesterton himself had not expected to influence other writers except by pointing them to the political and religious causes he advertised.

Yet his influence on young Edwardians had been immense, and it is difficult to believe that at this earlier period no young writer took an impress from his personality. Frank Swinnerton makes clear his own personal fervour, and the fervour of large audiences, for Chesterton as a public speaker. (4) In 1908 the schoolgirl Dorothy Sayers read Orthodoxy and was thereby prevented from abandoning Christianity completely. (5) A third young Edwardian recorded later that 'for a long time his Saturday column in the Daily News was - to many young readers - the most exciting event of the week.' (6)

This small tribute, with its suggestion of personal testimony, comes from that strangely powerful writer Charles Williams (1886-1945), and

I want to offer evidence that his work indicates Chesterton's influence at a deep imaginative level.

*

In 1901 Chesterton made an early statement of his great theme, the strangeness he sensed behind the facade of common life. It comes in the essay 'In Defence of Detective Stories':

The first essential value of the Detective story lies in this, that it is the earliest and only form of popular literature in which is expressed some sense of the poetry of modern life...of this realisation of a great city as something wild and obvious, the detective story is certainly the Iliad...the lights of the city begin to glow like innumerable goblin eyes, since they are the guardian of some secret, however crude, which the writer knows and the reader does not. Every twist of the road is like a finger pointing to it; every fantastic skyline of chimney pots seems wildly and derisively signalling the meaning of the mystery.

The realisation of the poetry of London is not a small thing... We may dream perhaps that it might be possible to have another and higher romance of London, that men's souls have stranger adventures than their bodies, and it would be harder and more exciting to hunt their virtues than to hunt their crimes. But since our great authors (with the admirable exception of Stevenson) decline to write of that thrilling moment when the eyes of a great city, like the eyes of a cat, begin to flame in the dark, we must give fair credit to the popular literature which...declines to regard the present as prosaic or the common as commonplace. (7)

Although Chesterton went on to write a good deal about London imaginatively and fantastically (The Napoleon of Notting Hill is an apotheosis of W.11), this passage suggests something more serious, than he himself ever attempted. However, between 1930 and 1945 seven novels appeared from Charles Williams' pen which correspond with a peculiar precision to Chesterton's idea here. They all happen in London or in the commuter-land of St. Alban's, and in each the sense of place is pervasive. (8) They have been described as 'supernatural thrillers', and the phrase is serviceable enough; action-packed plots in modern settings. The real interest, however, is in the struggle of good and evil spiritual powers: 'men's souls have stranger adventures than their bodies.' Altogether they are as occult, romantic and religious as Chesterton could have desired. (8)

I am not suggesting, of course, that Williams read Chesterton's paragraph and was thereupon consciously inspired to write his novels;

there is no evidence that he ever saw these lines at all. But there is plenty of external proof that he was always keenly aware of Chesterton's work.(9) Once attention is alerted by this apparently chance connection between the two men, a series of clues forming a trail of circumstantial evidence appears; from which I shall argue, not that Williams deliberately imitated Chesterton, but that as a young man his imagination was deeply influenced by Chesterton's; and that there is a sub-stratum throughout Williams' work where this influence is consistently traceable.

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Before we deal with this internal evidence, it is worth looking at both men in their social context. Chesterton was a middle-class journalist, a professional wit, committed to communicating loudly with the man in the street. Williams came from a harder, humbler background, but yearned for the scholarly, the rarefied, the arcane. (10) Chesterton had a tremendous popular readership; Williams won a few devotees(wholly among graduates in the present writer's experience)

If it seems surprising to realise that in fact Williams was only twelve years younger than Chesterton, this is because the chasm of the Great War and its aftermath lay between the decades in which each was best known. Actually both men had their literary nursery in the rather precious Catholic aesthetic coterie of the turn of the century; the poet and essayist Alice Meynell and her husband, who had befriended Francis Thompson in the 1890s, were also patrons to the young poet Chesterton in 1901 and the young poet Williams in 1912 .(11)

Like Chesterton, Williams was a busy, highly productive 'bookman' all his life; his work as an editorial assistant in the London office of the Oxford University Press gave him great experience of books and writers, but it also meant that he was more tied than Chesterton to the rigours of a nine-to-five job. Apart from the novels, which he said he wrote 'to pay my son's school fees', he poured out historical

biographies, plays, literary criticism, poetry, and theological essays. He was brought up as, and remained, a devout Anglo-Catholic, and his creative writing occupies that borderland, much explored by Romantic writers, where legend, history and religion meet; and is all in an elegantly mannered, yet passionate style - a style which extended from his writings to his speech and mannerisms.(12) No humour and no politics; otherwise the similarities to Chesterton's output are obvious.

Chesterton never read Williams, apparently; but Williams not only read Chesterton, he wrote an essay on him in Poetry at Present (1930) and lectured about him in his evening classes during the 'twenties. (13) Poetry at Present expresses enthusiasm for a remarkable variety of contemporary versifiers, so perhaps too much should not be read into Williams' praise; but he shows shrewd insights. He recognises the knowledge of inner treachery, the pain and self-doubt in Chesterton's work, at a time when many critics saw him as unvaryingly jolly as a garden gnome; and these are important qualities for Williams. (14) Though Chesterton is often noisy, Williams is also aware of the hush at the centre of the verse, the desolating moment 'which is beyond warfare, and which opens beyond the soul, when, and whether, the last battle has been won or lost...' In a private letter, the older Williams appraised 'my admired G.K.C.' more coolly as 'adult by inspiration at great moments; hardly wholly so.' (15)

Since Williams' death, critics such as T.S.Eliot, Anne Ridler, and most recently, Glyn Cavaliero have briefly noted similarities to Chesterton.(16), and Mr. Humphrey Carpenter's The Inklings (1978) shows C.S.Lewis's debt to Chesterton, and the respect in which he was held by this little group of dons who wrote fantasy-stories for fun. (17) In 1980 a review called 'VII' appeared linking these four - Lewis, Williams, Tolkien, ^e ~~Own~~ Barfield - with Dorothy Sayers, George Macdonald, and Chesterton; an interesting and suggestive grouping. (18)

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Our first vague feeling that a Williams novel is like a Chesterton

novel traces back to the sensational plots.(19) A farrago of events leaps out at the reader in the same arbitrary way, as if the author is deliberately insisting on the extraordinary drama for some hidden purpose. For instance, War in Heaven opens with a corpse very coolly planted as in a detective story, in the naturalistically-drawn office of a London publisher. The elderly publisher tells his son he is himself the murderer (largely for the pleasure of tormenting him), but the son is too frightened to hand his father over to the police. The publisher's motive was necromantic power, and for his further purposes he needs a holy object to practise Black Magic with. So when the Holy Grail turns up in an English village, he and his accomplices steal it with violence for their witchcraft. There is a blackmail attempt, a car chase, and a sensational struggle in an underworld den in N.6. The murderer gives himself up to the waiting police, and the novel ends with a happy but no less spectacular miracle-scene.

War in Heaven is more like a detective-story than any of the others, but all the subsequent novels can be described in similar terms, with the exception of Descent into Hell. There is also much excitement generated by the supernatural, but here I am merely illustrating the 'thriller' mechanism of the novels.(20) They may not carry the metaphysical weight of Chesterton's allegories, so that Williams may seem to be exploiting a popular form simply to keep his readers happy; but the total effect of his surprises is as momentous as Chesterton's. They both deliberately concoct whirlwind sequences of events which, however equivocal they may seem (some good characters die, and at the end there is pain as well as joy), promise ultimate deliverance and even blessedness. Apparently, they both want to say something about the universe being both unexpected and, in the end, good. (21)

Next, Williams' stories are acted out by the same bizarre clusters of Very Important People as are Chesterton's; quite blatantly and glitteringly symbolic. Many Dimensions, for instance, has the Lord

Chief Justice, the Home Secretary, the Persian Ambassador, the Prime Minister, a millionaire, a titled archeologist, and the Mayor of Rich. Like Chesterton, Williams' chief interest in his characters is as 'ideas dressed up' rather than as individuals in their own right, and although he is good on voices (Sir Giles Tumulty is a small infernal triumph of the novelist's art), many characters remain flat and unvisualised; for instance, although we are told she is young, we never learn what Chloe Burnett, Many Dimension's heroine, actually looks like. The total effect, in both men's books, is of a stirring metropolitan society and its power forces. Chesterton is much more shrewdly observant of the political scene because he habitually moved among journalists and politicians; but it is significant that the rarefied Williams also felt compelled to set his actions among his 'thirties contemporaries, rather than escape wholly into fantasy. If nothing else, their own convictions about the Incarnation made both Chesterton and Williams present their revelation of the Unseen Reality in the London they knew.

One Williams character has been generally recognised as straight borrowing from Chesterton; the Archdeacon of Fardles in War in Heaven - a 'round dapper little cleric in gaiters' - not only looks like Father Brown but also has his comic possibilities combined with saintly poise and percipience.

These modern people, like Chesterton's, cope with modern problems; Lester and Richard, for instance, view their marriage relationship with post-war pragmatism. Lionel Rackstraw in War in Heaven is angst-ridden in a peculiarly 'modern' way. Yet these twentieth-century people act against a background of past myths, and of history: in Many Dimensions it is Solomon's legendary stone which disturbs the tranquillity of Whitehall; Pauline in Descent into Hell takes on herself the agony of the Marian martyr, John Struther. As we have seen, (Ch.3,p.43) Chesterton related the present to the past in a similar way.

Even minor characters easily develop into great mythopoeic creatures from remote times. Here is a policeman on point duty from The Greater Trumps, who Williams turns into a symbol of Law like an elemental force:

...for a moment she saw in that heavy official barring their way the Emperor of the Trumps, helmed, in a white cloak, stretching out one sceptred arm, as if Charlemagne, or one like him, stretched out his controlling sword over the tribes of Europe pouring out from the forests and bade them pause and march as he would...The noise of all the pausing street came to her as the roar of many peoples; the white cloak held them by a gesture; order and law were there. It moved, it fell aside, the torrent of obedient movement moved on, and they with it. They flashed past the helmed face, and she found that she had dropped her eyes lest she should see it.' (22)

This romantically vivid and sometimes painful sense of the European past is very Chestertonian. One of the moments when Chesterton sounds most like Williams is in The New Jerusalem (1920); he looks down at modern Jerusalem, imagining its history: 'And I myself was still walking that long evening of the earth; and Caesar my Lord was at Byzantium'.(23) This cadence suggests that Williams learned something of his management of tones from Chesterton's velvet rhetoric; and it is also interesting because he made Byzantium so rich a theme for his poetry.

Although Williams does not share Chesterton's distrust of Jews or disapproval of Moslems, he portrays essentially the same picture of Christian Europe infiltrated by the dangerous East. (24) 'The Faith is Europe and Europe is the Faith' is as true of his thinking as it was of Chesterton's. Not only are his characters constantly quoting Dante, old ballads, Marvell, or the adventures of Odysseus, but he uses one or more European historical themes in each of the novels: the Grail story, Prester John, the Tarot cards, Byzantine angelic theory, the Marian persecutions; and whenever he dips into history like this, his writing takes on its richest imaginative texture. Here are two young men in War in Heaven, keeping vigil in front of the Grail, to guard it from attack. The piling up of evocative, tiny images of Catholic history is like Chesterton, but, I would suggest, more intensely sustained and therefore more successful than comparable passages in Chesterton.(25)

Under the concentrated attention the vessel itself seemed to shine and expand. In each of them differently the spirit was moved and exalted - most perhaps in the Duke. He was aware of a sense of the adoration of kings:- the great traditions of his house stirred within him. The memories of proscribed and martyred priests awoke; masses said swiftly and in the midst of the fearful breathing of a small group of the faithful; the ninth Duke who had served the Pontiff at his private Mass; the Roman order he himself wore; the fidelity of his family to the faith under the anger of Henry and the cold suspicion of Elizabeth; the duels fought in Richmond Park by the thirteenth Duke in defence of the honour of Our Lady... 'Jhesu, Rex et Sacerdos', he prayed...

Kenneth trembled in a more fantastic vision. This, then, was the thing from which the awful romances sprang, and the symbolism of a thousand tales. He saw the chivalry of England riding on the quest - but not a historical chivalry... Liturgical and romantic names melted in one cycle - Lancelot, Peter, Joseph, Percivale, Judas, Mordred, Arthur, John BarZebedee, Galahad - and into these were caught the names of their makers - Hawker and Tennyson, John, Malory, and the medievals. They rose, they gleamed and flamed about the Divine Hero, and their readers too - he also, least of all these. He was caught in the dream of Tennyson - together they rose on the throbbing verse.

And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail

Rose-red with beatings on it.

He heard Malory's words - 'the history of the Sangreal, the which is a story cronyclod for one of the truest and holiest that is in thys world' - 'the deadly flesh began to behold the spiritual things' - 'fair lord, commend me to Sir Lancelot my father.' The single tidings came to him across romantic hills; he answered with the devotion of a romantic and abandoned heart. (26)

Williams' distrust of the East becomes a major image in his work.

Geographically, his imagination moves further and deeper into the Orient than Chesterton's, for whom the centre of 'the Empire' was Rome; William's centre was Byzantium. Hell itself - or rather, Abomination itself, 'an empire of paganry', has a Chinese name, P'o-L'u. (27)

Williams goes further south, too: in Shadows of Ecstasy, Roger Ingrams, the university lecturer who is the chief protagonist, shows a fascinated response to African primitivism which indicates Williams' sense of its heady enchantments.

Part of Chesterton's love of clearly defined shapes was his delight in historical emblems and in heraldry, costumes, boldly painted insigns. This also included archaic symbolic artefacts: the iron lantern in The Man Who Was Thursday (Ch.3 p.36). the bright red pigment in The Return of Don Quixote, (28), the weapons his characters rejoice to wield; (29) intensely solid things full of meaning. Williams'

nevels also conspicuously feature similar solid shapes; true emblems rather than 'images' in the Wordsworthian sense. In four of his novels, however, they assume crucial importance as power objects, generating mysterious spiritual energy more literally than Chesterton's swords and lanterns. There are the Grail, the Stone of Solomon, the Tarot cards and their golden figures, the hieratic and formalised Angelic Beasts. Shadows of Ecstasy, All Hallows' Eve and Descent into Hell do not have these power symbols; in the first two, the secrets of the African jungle and those of the reversed Tetragrammaton, respectively, are felt as concentrated centres of power. The Arthurian poems seem to me to be complete emblems in themselves - pictures harder than images, capable of specific meanings; for instance, the 'figure of the Empire', head in Logres, breasts in Gaul, buttocks in Caucasia. (30) Reading all the seven novels, it seems as if Williams began by being interested in the mysterious powers inherent in matter - that is, he was interested in the sacramental possibilities of matter - but developed beyond this in his later stories. He was fascinated by power (as distinct from the 'energy' Chesterton perceived in nature) and this is shown by his references to poetic power in Wordsworth in The English Poetic Mind. 'Power' in Williams' novels is a fascinating and infinitely desirable quality before which it is pleasurable to submit - for instance, to Nigel Considine in Shadows of Ecstasy or to Simon Leclerc in All Hallows' Eve. It is thrilling as well as dangerous for Nancy Coningsby to bend the power of the tarot cards to her will in The Greater Trumps. Gregory Persimmons greedily desires power through Black Magic, in War in Heaven. It is no crude greed; Taliessin in the Arthurian poems exerts subtle but most satisfying power through his poetry, and in The Descent of the Dove, the Holy Spirit is seen as a mysterious force working through the Church in history. (31) The reader becomes as fascinated as Williams, as ready to submit. Yet one remembers that in his own life, Williams had little power at the Oxford University Press, and it was perhaps not

surprising that his novels are fantasies of power. This is where he differs from Chesterton. They were both possessed by a visionary awareness of a mysterious dynamism in the universe, which Williams - but not Chesterton - consciously associated with Wordsworth. But Chesterton (who could never have been described as a 'wage-slave') was always suspicious of power and its fascinations. In political terms, this meant that he was as suspicious of a monolithic Socialist state as he was of oligarchic power under Capitalism; his solution, Distributism, breaks down power into tiny units. Both men, in fact, had the same distinctively romantic imaginative experience which influenced them strongly; but Williams developed this into dreams of controlling other people in a way Chesterton did not. (32)

The most striking oddity that Chesterton and Williams share is that ^{in their novels} they both see two worlds - the same two worlds - one superimposed on the other. The first one is of ~~the~~ ^{the} reassuring sensory world, clear and solid; the second is a dissolving world, where things have a disturbing tendency to turn into something else. (33) Williams is more sophisticated about it, so his dissolutions are more frightening. Is Lester really in central London, and if so, why is London so quiet? (34) Is Anthony Durrant really standing on a landing, or is he down a pit? (35) This shifting world jolts, confuses and intrigues the reader. The ambivalent characters Chesterton had crudely suggested with masks and wigs, Williams evokes psychologically. Is Nigel Considine a good or a bad man? Shadows of Ecstasy hinges on this, and some readers have been uneasy about Williams' equivocal attitude to this disturbing character. In All Hallows' Eve Simon LeClerc is clearly evil, but he has healed the sick and given them peace, and the author seems to be so far inside this powerful and mysterious mind when he describes its processes, as can only suggest the word 'sympathetic'. (36)

The great Power objects likewise have a certain moral ambivalence.

The Stones in Many Dimensions remain eerily passive in the hands of greedy and corrupt people until the end of the novel, when their innate predisposition towards good is revealed. The magnificent creatures in The Place of the Lion both give life and destroy. (37) I have described this in Chesterton as a 'dualistic' attitude: (Ch.4,p.56) it is a deliberate metaphysical stance he takes and plays with; and it is one of the things which makes every movement of his mind interesting. In Williams, it seems to have come from a personal 'crisis of utter overthrow and desolation' which gave him a poignant interest in similar crises in other writers, and which made him vividly aware of the evil which exists in good, and vice versa. (38) Chesterton never suffered from his perception as Williams did; and Williams' personal suffering enabled him to use it more imaginatively in his work than Chesterton. Nevertheless, this duplex vision gives both writers an ambiguity which can be exciting.

Williams was fascinated by occult evil as Chesterton had refused to be. All Williams' protagonists meet some kind of forbidden arcane wisdom, and Williams himself once belonged to the hermetic 'Order of the Golden Dawn' associated with Aleister Crowley and W.B.Yeats. (39) Such wisdom bestows power, but it is dangerous; for instance, in The Place of the Lion Mr. Berringer's discussion group members ignorantly become victims of the dangerous forces his occult studies have unleashed. Nigel Considine has secret knowledge; so have Simon LeClerc and Gregory Persimmons, and it excites them greatly. Really wise people like Lord Argley refuse to tamper with it; one surmises Williams himself could not have been so strongminded had he been confronted with the Stone. (40)

When he is not thinking in terms of the occult, he can make the reader feel the power of cosmic evil with a force which is Miltonic.

By no broomstick flight over the lanes of England did Gregory Persimmons attend the Witches' Sabbath, nor did he dance with other corcerers upon some blasted heath before a goat-headed

manifestation of the Accursed. But scattered far over the face of the earth, though not so far in the swiftness of interior passage, those abandoned spirits answered one another that night; and That beyond them (which some have held to be but the precipitation and tendency of their own natures, and others for the equal and perpetual co-inheritor of power and immortality with Good) - That beyond them felt them and shook and replied, sustained and nourished and controlled. (41)

Generally, the occult has a stench (sometimes literally) of physical horror. (42) It both fascinates and is loathsome; in the early poems, in the marshes of P'o L'u, in the diseased imaginations of Giles Tumulty, in the dwarf woman in All Hallows' Eve; in the vulture nightmare in The Place of the Lion. Some critics have objected to this element in Williams as a kind of perverted sexuality not honestly acknowledged, and Chesterton had, I think, been aware of this in his own occult imaginings (as Ch.5 suggests); but it seems justifiable to describe a sexual frisson in the minds of Williams' half-crazed, loveless necromancers. (43)

However, Williams is almost as good at portraying a natural and blessed happiness as he is at evil. (Not quite, of course; the shudder at forbidden delight is necessarily absent.) He was himself a positively good man in an interesting and imaginative way, so the evil is controlled by a mind which delights also in goodness. (44) Most masters in horror portray that alone, but Williams is rare among religious novelists in that he can describe holy joy without mawkishness. Though some readers recoil at this (and of course sometimes he fails, and the result is embarrassing), these evocations of finely-poised sanctity are possibly the reason others become addicts. (45) The most elaborately orchestrated is the Mass at the end of War in Heaven. The best are conveyed in sustained images of natural beauty, like that of Lester towards the end of All Hallows' Eve, when she is finally loosed from the last physical bonds in 'the exquisite and pure joy of death' expressed in the image of rain and river water, gently but inexorably bearing her away. (46)

These numinous experiences, good and evil, convey a powerful sense of

an Unseen Reality which is like Chesterton's Unseen Reality in some important particulars. Chesterton had described it seriously in Orthodoxy, The Everlasting Man and the Autobiography, and light-heartedly symbolised in the duels, hair-breadth escapes, car chases and romantic episodes of his stories. This was the basis of Chesterton's Christianity, and it was certainly a similar awareness which impelled Williams' imagination far beyond the pieties of the Anglican pew.

But there are differences. Chesterton as a young agnostic struggled for a minimum of Christian belief. He observed individual phenomena - dandelions, for instance - and perceived that each dandelion had inherent miraculous quality. From many such observations he deduced God.(47) Williams works the opposite way; he starts off as a believing Christian in the Catholic tradition, who accepts a miraculous universe more easily than Chesterton. He shares Francis Thompson's vision of

...Jacob's ladder
Pitched between heaven and Charing Cross.-

-that is, a spiritual world co-existing with, and glimmering through, the physical. Chesterton was geared to see Charing Cross itself pulsing with glory. (48)

There is a passage in The Place of the Lion which demonstrates a Chesterton-type vision actually developing into a Williams-type vision. It is the account of Anthony Durrant looking out of the windows of his flat, musing. First he sees the surrounding buildings intense with an inner energy of their own, as Chesterton might have done. Then the forms his imagination shapes, take on an independent reality of their own, which gradually becomes more and more vivid until a 'supernatural' vision flickers before us.

It presented itself to him as an apparition of strength. How firmly the houses were set within the ground! with what decision each row of bricks lay level with the row beneath! Spires and towers and chimneys thrust into the sky, and slender as they were, it was an energetic ~~blend~~blenderness. The trees were drawing up strength and displaying it, and the sunlight communicated strength. The noises that came to him through the streets resolved themselves into a liturgy of energy. Matter was directed by and inspired with this first and necessary virtue, and through the vast spaces of the

sky potential energy expanded in an azure wonder.

He stood there, looking out, and as if from some point high in space he beheld the world turning on its axis and at the same time rushing forward...Within the sunlight he could almost have believed that a herd of wild horses came charging towards him across the 'savannahs of the blue', only they were not a herd and not coming towards him; they were single and going from him, or would have been had he not been following at a similar speed...such was the inmost life of the universe, breaking from its continual death into continual life, instinct with strength and subtlety and beauty and speed. But the blazing Phoenix lived and swept again to its nest of fire, and as it sank all those other Virtues went with it, themselves still, yet changed. The outer was with the inner; the inner with the outer. (49)

The close texture of this description suggests that the writer is describing from his own experience; although this quotation is considerably cut from the original passage in the book, it fairly represents Anthony's awareness of the normal moving into the paranormal, and I believe it shows that Williams did develop his own vision of his unseen world through processes which grew out of an awareness similar to Chesterton's. Williams, then, comes ultimately to what is Chesterton's primary proposition; that the Universe is miraculous, transcendent, tremendous and good. All matter is good, because physical and supernatural are part of the same Creation; he is a Thomist in this if not in other things. Here are Damaris Tighe and her father having lunch together in The Place of the Lion; Damaris is an intellectual snob who despises her father's hobby of butterflies.

'There was a great one on the oak at the top of the hill,' he said, 'and it vanished - really vanished - just as I moved. I couldn't recognise it; brown and gold it seemed. A lovely, lovely thing!'

He sighed and went on eating. Damaris frowned. 'Really, father,' she said, 'if it was as beautiful as all that I don't see how you can bear to go on eating mutton and potatoes so ordinarily.'

Her father opened his eyes at her. 'But what else can I do?' he said. 'It was a lovely thing; it was glinting and glowing there. This is very good mutton,' he said placidly. 'I'm glad I didn't miss this too- not without catching the other.'...

'Plato says-'she began.

'O~~h~~, Plato!' answered Mr. Tighe, taking, as if rhythmically, more vegetables.

'-that', Damaris went on, ignoring the answer, 'one should rise from the phenomenal to the abstract beauty, and thence to the absolute.'

Mr. Tighe said he had no doubt that Plato was a very great

man and could do it. 'But personally', he added, 'I find that mutton helps butterflies and butterflies mutton. That's why I like lunching out in the open...It's a pity', he added irrelevantly, 'that you don't like butterflies.' (50)

Yet in neither Chesterton or Williams was this trust in a good reality a simple stance; Chesterton's position was metaphysically complex, and all Williams' writing makes clear that he was a more torn and tormented creature than the resilient G.K.C. (51)

Williams shows Chesterton's odd unwillingness to use the name of God conventionally. (52) The most startling example is in the opening pages of The Descent of the Dove, where he refers to Jesus as 'it' for a page, which is eccentric but effective in the context. However, where Chesterton is uncovering a hidden freshness, Williams is adding mystery. For all this, both men are imaginative Christians who through their surprises and their eccentricities force the reader to be more aware of the strangeness of the idea of God. No-one who remembers university life in the 'forties and 'fifties can doubt that, like Chesterton in his time, Williams made Christianity seem exciting and intellectually feasible for many young people.

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Finally, London. All Hallows' Eve is the novel which most fully corresponds to Chesterton's 'realisation of the poetry of London'. In this story, the other and greater London first appears in Jonathan Drayton's painting of a devastated area near St. Paul's the morning after an air-raid. There is a mysterious light in the picture which seems to emanate from the houses and the rubble itself. 'It would everywhere have burst through, had it not chosen to be shaped into forms, and to restrain and change its greatness in the colours of those lesser limits...It was universal, and it lived.' (53)

When he wrote this, Williams had already in his poetry and theology developed his vision of London into a concept of the City as a spiritual community held by its own immutable laws, a noble variant of Chesterton's idea. (54) This spiritual community is hinted at in

All Hallows' Eve as the story unfolds; Lester has been walking along such shadowy edges of that City as are available to the newly dead and the pagan, and the whole action moves on this perimeter. Finally, the essential goodness of the City plays a part in confounding Simon's witchcraft.

...as the Acts of the City took charge and the nearness of all the Hallows grew everywhere within the outer air, it became dank and even more oppressive with a graveyard chill. The round hall itself, and its spare furnishings, and the air in it were of earth, and nothing could alter that nature. The blessedness of earth was in them, and now began to spread out of them. There too were the Hallows, and their life began to awake, though the City itself seemed not awake. Invisible motions stirred, and crept or stepped or flew, as if a whole creation existed there unseen. The Acts of the City were at hand. (55)

I have described a number of features in Williams' novels, some apparently superficial and others of deeper importance, which remind the reader of Chesterton. Resemblances in themselves do not, of course, prove that one writer has influenced another; but the very unlikeliness of such similarities cropping up in the 'thirties between an esoteric sophisticate and a popular elderly journalist itself suggests that a case exists for looking at those resemblances enquiringly.

Williams wrote his novels as a hurried amateur. In these circumstances, a writer will take from his reading any familiar structure that seems serviceable, and I would hazard a guess on the evidence of his plots, characters and images that Williams as a boy read Chesterton's fiction (he was fifteen in 1901 when Chesterton became famous) and later, found its devices apt for his purpose.

Secondly: the fact that so many of these small likenesses appear, makes it reasonable to infer that the deeper resemblances of ideas are not coincidences, but that they indicate that Chesterton influenced the young Williams at imaginative and conceptual levels.

Chesterton's critics regretted his failure to seriously develop the fascinating suggestions in his work; but he performed different functions, one of which was to spark off other men's imaginations. I suggest that Williams was one of these 'other men', and that in his work we see the

kind of stimulus Chesterton's random brilliance could be.

Williams had in his own right a luminous imagination, grounded in romantic that/Anglo-Catholic tradition which had focussed and released Chesterton's deepest imaginative powers. Further to this, he shows characteristic Chestertonian preoccupations: an engulfing awareness of both good and evil powers moving behind the universe; a fascination with the duality thus perceived; and all this related to a belief in the ultimate goodness of life, and the daily sacramental presence of the Unseen Reality. This is like Wordsworth, and Williams' own literary criticism shows how important Wordsworth was to him, in particular the experience of 'Absolute power/and clearest insight.' His capacity to recreate the Arthurian myth is romantic in its imaginative sweep, and it is also 'romantic' in the medieval sense in which Chesterton loved to use the word. - though he would no doubt have deplored the difficulty of the 'Taliessin' poems. Perhaps he would have described Williams, had he read him, in the words he used of Blake - 'solid and joyful occultism'. (56) Finally, like Chesterton, Williams presented orthodox Christianity to his readers in a new and intriguing light.

The distance between the two men should not be ignored; it shows in their characteristic tones - Chesterton's, briskly cheerful; Williams', incantatory. The mature Williams adventured deeper into poetry and theology than the man who, I believe, was his first master.

Nonetheless, in his strange arcane achievement it is possible to trace the seminal influence of the equally haunted, imaginative and doubting spirit who underlay 'G.K.C.'

Chapter Nine. The Problem re-examined: a new assessment of Chesterton.
'...a startling absence of cant, a startling sense of humanity as it is,
and the eternal weakness.' (Description of Dickens, Charles Dickens, ch.6)

A few years ago I saw a paperback of The Man Who Was Thursday with a front cover- a modern surrealist landscape with a falcon bleakly surveying itself in a mirror - which suggested that the publisher himself had no idea what the story was about, and that anyone buying it on the strength of the picture would be considerably puzzled when he or she began to read. (1) This seems to me to symbolise neatly today's ignorance about Chesterton. He was himself partly to blame, of course, for projecting a buffoon image to attract attention to his serious ideas. This offends today's taste; we expect good art to judge rather than amuse us. (2) The deathly critical silence suggests that his motley has been taken at its embarrassing face value.

But have we missed something? Or is it all 'lumbering ephemerality' as Evelyn Waugh put it, which ought to be dismissed by now? I have tried to show in these chapters that the Edwardians were not mistaken in welcoming Chesterton so rapturously; that he had truths to tell; that in a particularly civilised and creative era, they heard in his voice the life-enhancing quality which identifies the artist.

Before I sum up this evidence, it is worth pointing out that Chesterton was unlucky in his timing. His creative crisis was between 1895-1905, and he was strenuously involved in working this out philosophically for the next six or seven years. By the time the Great War broke out, he was simply not available for a further spiritual odyssey. Would those creators of the post-war consciousness, Owen, Graves or Eliot, all much younger men than Chesterton, have been open to a new spiritual challenge in , say, 1930? Very few writers were. Perhaps the only major pre-war writer who developed a 'post-war' voice was Yeats. (3)

This does not imply that all Chesterton wrote after 1918 is inferior. St. Thomas Aquinas, The Everlasting Man and the Autobiography show his

mind and imagination as keen as ever. But the essays are less imaginative, the fiction is even more patchily written, and while he had always been a gleeful propagandist, in later years this became less fun and more of a burden. G.K.'s Weekly was, increasingly, the organ of specifically Distributist opinion; but quite apart from this fact, Chesterton's sharp loyalties to the Catholic Church, to Cecil's memory, to clear thinking and honest feeling, meant he was daily churning out ideas which had all been said before. They had lost their novelty; and he had become a bore. In the 1900s, however, his contemporaries had been fascinated by watching a colossal intelligence groping its way towards the sources of its power. So if the artist exists at all, we are likely to find him most visible in the pre-war work. (4)

What Chesterton's first readers recognised was his truth of feeling; the disarming intuition which lays a finger on the most sensitive spot. He told them that man is soft-hearted, irrational, and also at his most potent when he is directed by homely impulses. If the sentimental Edwardian public enjoyed this, Chesterton himself was far too acute, too ironic, to be merely sentimental. (5)

He was aware of the primitive motives which underly actions, the vast dark underworld of human life. He understood intuitively how the mind works. This is a great strength, particularly in the biographical studies when he is explaining, say, Aquinas' theology or Blake's occultism. His openness to original minds enables him to explain their ideas in a peculiarly clear-headed way. He never pretends to be scholarly, but he illuminates. His chief authority is this common insight, which is in fact rare among literary critics; he only wants to evoke lucid response and quicken a just appreciation. His own sympathies are so broad that he can cope with an imagination as strange as Blake's, while staying in touch with his most conventional reader. This also means that when he describes his own inner life - as in Orthodoxy - he is convincing; not as easy as one might expect. (6)

Chesterton combined two different strands of Victorian romanticism. First, he inherited the William Morris dream of a good and beautiful society for common people. Secondly, he was steeped in Aesthetic sensibility. In this way, he achieved something quite new; he was at once common and choice. Apparently effortlessly, he brings his readers into his world of unusually fresh responses. This is a liberating experience; we are aware of his quick cogent mind controlling the ideas, but we feel a new quickness and cogency in ourselves while we are within its force-field. The first Romantic writers gave their readers this sense of joyful liberating energy, and it was the comparable delight that Chesterton's readers felt which swept him to his enormous popularity.

The humour is very much part of this experience. 'I should regard any mind which had not got the habit in one form or another of uproarious thinking as being, from the full human point of view, a defective mind...unless a man is in part a humorist, he is only in part a man...frivolity is part of the nature of man.' (7) There are earnest books on Chesterton which hardly convey he is funny at all; but the difficulties of analysing comedy are notorious. Perhaps people still find him funny because he touches off the incongruity of man's eternal pretensions with his actual lovable silliness. He thought highly of the banana-skin joke. 'The human race, to which so many of my readers belong'...one of his more quoted openings, catches a whole spectrum of delicate pretensions in its airy elegance.

The phenomenon of his readership deserves investigating. The reprinting of The Victorian Age in Literature is an example of this; in spite of its faults, it was re-issued as late as 1966 by the Oxford University Press in their Oxford Paperback series, over fifty years after its first publication, its first spate of reprints, and a good deal later than the steady reprintings of the 'twenties and 'thirties when it was already considered dated by the critics. Of course, large

sales do not indicate quality; bad writers have also their tens of thousands. But people seem to have wanted to read Chesterton's non-fiction in spite of his dowdiness. The reprinting of his religious books has to be judged rather differently, because it probably reflects conservative Catholic taste in America; for instance, Burns Oates republished The Everlasting Man in 1974. But generally, his sales were uncommonly solid for a very long period, as the lists of reprints in the front of the books show. (8) Yet his politics had always seemed whimsical; his Catholicism had shunted him among the reactionaries; his poetic reputation did not survive the Great War; his books were unscholarly; his own magazine was, professionally speaking, a poor job. (9) His sales, then, can only suggest that readers returned to him loyally because they found something deeply satisfying about his writing, even when they admitted his shortcomings. This 'something', I would suggest, was a 'feeling intellect' and a profound understanding of the human predicament.

Chesterton's special characteristic as an artist, his metaphysical stance, was not fully apparent at first. In his early articles he outlined a topsy-turvy attitude to life; Byron was a cheerful poet, medieval monks were 'spendthrifts of happiness', Original Sin is a comforting doctrine. (10) But it was not until the publication of Heretics in 1905 that he overtly assumed the role of preacher; whereupon G.S. Street demanded that he publicly define the grounds on which he had consigned numerous respected contemporaries to the outer darkness of 'heresy'. Orthodoxy was Chesterton's reply, which gathered up into consistent argument the ideas scattered tantalisingly through the earlier books.

Orthodoxy demonstrates that Chesterton saw, not only the physical world, but also the world of ideas, in an unusual range of perspectives. (11) One instance is his insistence that things can only be fully understood by knowledge of their antitheses - 'modern critics

of religious authority are like men who should attack the police without ever having heard of burglars' (11) He explained how he had come to appreciate Christianity from the negative image projected by its opponents. (12) He was congenitally aware of alternative possibilities - 'If you go to Rome, you sacrifice a rich suggestive life in Wimbledon' - and this duplex view of life underlay his paradoxes, which identify the truth that is poised between two opposites. Christianity satisfied him because it offered this fascinating dialectic.

So dynamic a philosophy gives a buoyancy, a springiness to everything Chesterton wrote when he was on his best form. He posited a universe perpetually poised, delicately, dangerously, between possibilities: '...about the whole cosmos there is a tense and secret festivity - like preparations for Guy Fawkes day. Eternity is the eve of something. I never look up at the stars without feeling that they are the fires of a schoolboy's rocket, fixed in their everlasting fall.' (13) There have always been readers who regard this sort of writing as typical Chestertonian silliness; but he expresses his odd outlook so consistently, and in metaphors of such variety and power, that he ultimately convinces us, if not of the philosophical implications, at least of the dizzy thrill of the view.

The imaginative possibilities of a perpetually poised, perpetually antithetical universe are limitless. First of all, the physical world becomes miraculous and strange because it cannot be taken for granted. This prompts Chesterton to a passionate response to its rare and passing beauty which is recognisably like Pater's. 'Precious' was a word associated with Aestheticism, and it is not a coincidence that it is important also in discussing Chesterton, in a slightly different sense; but unlike the Aesthetes, he was not satisfied with the 'precious' experience for its own sake, but, like the earlier Romantics, found it precious because it shadowed a greater Reality behind.

This glittering, vulnerable world was complex, and Chesterton



gloried in its complexity. Christianity, and in particular Catholicism, had a theology tough and sophisticated enough to satisfy his sense of cosmic intricacy. So underneath 'G.K.C.'s geniality, a fine, fastidious mind is operating, and apparently simple statements carry fine-drawn meaning. It is always a mistake to take the amiable tone as an invitation to complacency. (14)

There is a further inference in this existential position, which I consider shaped Chesterton's life-style. He often speaks of a careless, unpremeditated quality in the universe; Sunday, in the later chapters of The Man Who Was Thursday, scattering bits of paper scrawled with flippant messages to his pursuers, is an image of this.

Chesterton distrusted the rigidly logical because he detected an 'x' factor, a 'silent swerving from accuracy' in all processes. (15) A kaleidoscopic cosmos, then, demands in a Romantic an appropriate response; if life is thus tossed prodigally towards us, the artist must live with corresponding careless confidence. Here again the Aesthetes' influence shows; truth must be briefly glimpsed as it fades between life's cross-lights.

A solemn concentration on one's goals, then, distorts the truth; the light and careless glance is more likely to apprehend it. For instance, Chesterton says, the best way to be healthy is not to bother too much: 'The one supreme way of making all these processes go right, the processes of health, and strength, and grace, and beauty, the one and only way of making sure of their accuracy, is to think about something else.' (16) For obvious reasons he did not solemnly concentrate on this thesis, but it is implicit in all his work, and (to a certain extent) it explains the scattering of his talents. He may well be accused of reconstructing the universe, in this point at least, in his own image; he had started off as an unusually lazy and disorganised boy. The philosophy of the glancing view excused his casual attitude to money which secretaries found so irritating; it rationalised the

years of light journalism his critics deplore, and explains why he did not write the important books they would have preferred - Auden strangely suggested a life of Freud, for instance. (17) Chesterton never made any serious effort to reform his ways, and some people felt his helplessness was a pose, however amusingly apologetic he might be for his unpunctuality or his untidy appearance. (18) The charming unworldliness undoubtedly left him free to project his own visionary world, which sparkled from moment to moment with new possibilities, and which was expressed in such profusions of wit, paradox, aphorisms, analogies and images that their kaleidoscopic nature itself proclaimed what the vision was all about; the carelessness was itself a statement. In the modern phrase, 'the media is the message'.(19) Reality, the fascination with which is the hallmark of serious thinkers, can only be perceived in the interaction of a thousand random impressions. I believe this was Chesterton's deliberate intention; it is unlikely that the tremendous stylist who recognised the innate form in Browning's apparent formlessness was not fully aware of the advantages, for his own purposes, of being fat and disorganised. And if as a result he sacrificed a serious reputation, he was romantic enough to know that a moment's imagination can influence a pupil more than hours of solid teaching.

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There is no Collected Chesterton, and we need a bigger Selection, drawn largely from the period 1901-1913, which would convey his range in a gallimaufrey of prose and verse. There would be an account of the legend - the fat man who got lost on trains - but it would not obscure the harder, indestructible quality of the writing.

It could also show that Chesterton's miraculous universe was his version of the earlier Romantics' vision. Although he viewed them from the further side of the great Victorian divide, he was steeped in their idealism and wonder. His aesthetics remind us of Shelley's 'fading

coal' of inspiration, and his insistence on the significance of feeling, of Keats' 'holiness of the heart's affections'. It is this latter element in Romantic writing in which I think Chesterton's lasting worth as an artist consists - as the quotation heading this chapter implies. His own poetic imagination would be as well illustrated in such a Selection by some of the haunting prose passages, as by his best verse.

It would be a mistake, I think, to reprint more than a small amount of the Distributist journalism, in spite of its bulk in Chesterton's output as a whole. There is undoubtedly a good deal of interest today in ideas which resemble his - our slogans, 'alternative society' and 'small is beautiful' indicate that - but he is not an original thinker, and he is more justly considered as one among many Romantic writers who have hated mechanistic social structures and who have worked for alternatives at once more humane and more ideal. His 'relevance' to society is elsewhere. For him, values previously called 'aristocratic' - honour, passion and poetry - are inborn and available to the common man: every reader of the Edwardian Daily News; every 1983 supermarket shopper. His ultimate message, that man reaches out to a transcendent God, means that some readers will always regard him as frivolous. But 'God' for Chesterton was mysterious, and enlarged rather than inhibited imagination, a source of profound vitality, the poet's 'deep but dazzling darkness.'

We need to dispel the error that Chesterton's exuberance and eccentricity overlaid any genuine artistic power he might have had. His work shows that awareness of tension and ambiguity which we look for today, and his huge humane intelligence continually deflates pretension and irrelevance. The Autobiography shows that the imaginative tide never ceased to flow: 'Existence is still a stranger to me; and as a stranger I give it welcome', he wrote at the end of his life. (20) He had written his first Romantic manifesto in 1908; and the strangeness had not departed.

Bibliography.

In spite of John Sullivan's excellent bibliography (University of London Press, 1958) and its 1968 Supplement, tracing the different editions of Chesterton's writings is exceedingly complicated. The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Lit. lists 115 books and pamphlets, quite apart from separate essays contributed to other publications. There are at least 26 different publishers in this country alone. Most of what Chesterton wrote appeared in newspapers and magazines before being quickly and casually picked out for publication in book form. Sullivan lists first editions, but it is impossible to chart the relationship between these and subsequent editions. The British Library catalogue is not helpful here; I would have liked to compile a list of all editions and reprints for the different books, but I have had to rely on the reprints list at the front of the most recent edition I could get. Nor has it proved possible to consult Daily News archive to verify A.L. Maycock's assertion that the popularity of Chesterton's column caused the Saturday night sales almost to double. (The Man Who Was Orthodox, a selection from the uncollected writings, A.L. Maycock ed., 1963)

Even attempts to get first editions from the British library were unsuccessful. I have therefore used the earliest editions available to me, and I list below those titles used most frequently, the date and publisher, and the abbreviation used in the notes.

I am most grateful for the discussion I was able to have with John Sullivan, Esq., and to R.S. Eagle, Esq., the librarian at the Thames Polytechnic, for his expert advice.

Chesterton texts referred to most frequently:

<u>Title</u>	<u>Date of First Publ.</u>	<u>Edition used.</u>	<u>Abbrev'n.</u>
The Defendant	1901	1st ed. revised, 1901, J.M.Dent.	D
Twelve Types	1902	5th ed. 1910 Arthur L.Humphreys.	TT
Robert Browning	1903	1925, Macmillan & Co., Ltd.	RB
The Napoleon Of Notting Hill	1904	1947, <u>A G.K.Chesterton Omnibus</u> , 3rd edition. Methuen.	NNH
Heretics	1905	1910, 6th edition. John Lane, The Bodley Head.	H
Charles Dickens	1906	1919, 12th ed., Methuen.	CD
The Man Who Was Thursday	1908	1937 Penguin 3rd Imp.	MWWT
All Things Considered	1908	1915 9th Edition, Methuen	ATC
Orthodoxy	1909	1909 3rd Edition, John Lane The Bodley Head.	O
The Ball and The Cross	1909	1925 4th Impression, Wells Gardner	BAC
George Bernard Shaw	1910	The Bodley Head, 1910	
William Blake	1910	1st ed., The Popular Library of Art	WB
Alarms and Discursions	1910	Methuen.	AD
Father Brown stories:			
Innocence of Father Brown	1911	Penguin 1974	IFB
Incredulity of Father Brown	1926	Penguin 1974	Inc.FB
Secret of Father Brown	1927	Penguin 1974	SFB
A Miscellany of Men	1912		AMM
Manalive	1912	1947 Penguin	M
The Victorian Age in Literature	1913	1913 1st ed., Williams & Norgate	VAL
The Everlasting Man	1925	1947, Hodder & Stoughton	EM
The Return of Don Quixote	1927		RDQ
Robert Louis Stevenson	1927	1st ed., Hodder & Stoughton	RLS
The Thing	1929	1939, Sheed and Ward.	T
Collected Poems	1927	1933, Methuen	CP
St. Thomas Aquinas	1933	1947, Hodder and Stoughton.	STA
Autobiography	1936	1952, Hutchinson.	A
A handful of Authors	1953	Post., 1953. Sheed and Ward.	AHA
Daily News (articles)			DN
Illustrated London News (articles)			ILN

The following books on Chesterton have been particularly useful:

Author	Title	Date	Abb'n.
Maisie Ward	<u>Gilbert Keith Chesterton</u>	1944	Ward
Christopher Hollis	<u>The Mind of G.K.Chesterton</u>	1970	Hollis
Dudley Barker	<u>G.K.Chesterton: a Biography.</u>	1973	Barker
Sullivan ed.	<u>G.K.Chesterton:a Centenary Appraisal</u>	1974	CA
D.K.Conlon,ed.	<u>The Critical Judgments,Part 1.</u> (1900-1937).There is no Part 2.)	1976	Conlon
Jay Corrin	<u>G.K.Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc:</u> <u>The Battle Against Modernity</u> Ohio U.P. Distributist studies.	1981	Corrin
Hugh Kenner	<u>Paradox in Chesterton</u>	1948	

General background reading I have found most useful:

Swinnerton, Frank	<u>The Georgian Literary Scene</u>	1935	Hutchinson 1969
Thompson, E.P.	<u>William Morris, Romantic to Revolutionary</u>	1955	
Vidler, Alec R.	<u>The Church in an Age of Revolution</u>	1961	
	(Vol.5 of Pelican History of the Church)		
Armytage, W.H.G.	<u>Heavens Below: Utopian Experiments in England 1560-1960</u>	1961	
Gross, John	<u>The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters;</u> <u>English Literary life since 1800</u>	1969	
Nelson, James G.	<u>The Early Nineties: A View from the Bodley Head.</u>	1971	
Smith, Warren S.	<u>The London Heretics 1870-1914</u> ('Fringe' religious movements.)	1967	
Read, Donald	<u>Edwardian England, 1901-1915: Society and Politics.</u>	1972	
Garner, Philippe	<u>The World of Edwardiana</u> (Applied arts and decoration)	1974	
Cooper, Nicholas	<u>The Opulent Eye: Late Victorian and Edwardian Taste in Interior Design</u>	1976	
Camplin, Jamie.	<u>The Rise of the Plutocrats: Wealth and Power in Edwardian England</u>	1978	

For Romanticism:

M.H.Abrams:	<u>The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition.</u>	1953	
M.H.Abrams and others:	<u>Romanticism Reconsidered</u>	1963	
Frank Kermode	<u>The Romantic Image</u>	1957	

René Wellek	<u>Concepts of Criticism</u>	1963
W.K.Wimsatt and C.Brooks	<u>Literary Criticism:a Short History:</u>	1957
René Wellek	<u>A History of Modern Criticism</u>	1965
Praz, Mario	<u>The Romantic Agony</u>	1933
Prickett, Stephen	<u>Romanticism and Religion:the tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church</u>	1976
Lilian R.Furst	<u>Romanticism</u>	1969
Richards, I.A.	<u>Coleridge on Imagination</u>	1934

Miss Dorothy Collins, Chesterton's private secretary from 1926-to his death in 1936 and the executor of his estate, was kind enough to talk to me at her house next door to 'Top Meadow' in Beaconsfield. She answered specific questions and allowed me to handle the early Notebooks and the love-letters to Frances. I also visited 'Top Meadow' and was shown round by the Warden. It is now a holiday home for Catholic clergy.

*

<u>Title</u>	<u>Williams' texts referred to most frequently: Date of first Publ.</u>	<u>Edition used</u>	<u>Abbrev'n</u>
War in Heaven	1930	Faber & Faber 1942	WIH
Many Dimensions	1931	"	MD
Shadows of Ecstasy	1931	" 1965	SE
The Greater Trumps	1932	" 1944	TGT
Descent into Hell	1937	" 1949	DIH
All Hallows' Eve	1945	" 1947	AHE
The Place of the Lion	1931	" 1952	POL

Books on Williams: those principally used:

Ridler, Anne, ed. The Image of the City: Essays by Charles Williams with Introductory essay by Anne Ridler. O.U.P. 1958.

The introductory essay is a useful source of biographical material.

Carpenter, Humphrey. The Inklings George Allen and Unwin, 1978.

Cavaliero, Glen. Charles Williams Poet of Theology. MacMillan 1983.

Hadfield, Alice Mary. An Introduction to Charles Williams Robert Hale 1959.

Hillegas, M.R. Shadows of Imagination. Essays by divers hands. Carbondale 1969.

Also consulted: letters to Thelma Shuttleworth in the Bodleian.

Chapter One. The Critical Problem.

1. See for instance Swinnerton, p.75: 'at the hour of his death he was regarded as prehistoric'.
2. Tp.205
3. Shaw, Conrad and Forster were all at their most creative between 1900-1914, Chesterton's best period. The Vedreane/Barker seasons at the Court Theatre, 1904-1906, made Shaw's name; Forster's early bunch of novels appeared between 1905-1910; Conrad's most famous books came out between 1900-1914.
4. For instance, David Daiches' Critical Approaches to English Literature (1956) and the Pelican
5. Bernard Bergonzi, 'Chesterton and/or Belloc', The Critical Quarterly, 1.1959. pp.64-71.
6. 27.1.83, Norman St. John Stevas on BBC Radio 2, 8.50.
 10.4.83 Katharine Whitehorn, 'The Observer'
 9.2.83. Lord Anglesey, letter to the Times on the current strike of water-workers.

15.8.82. Alistair Cooke, Radio 4, 'Letter from America'.

25.12.81. The Queen's speech.

5.3.81. ITV thriller serial, 'Who Goes Home?'

7.12.80. Katharine Whitehorn, The Observer.

3.1.80. Cardinal Basil Hume, The Times

29.4.80. Clive James, The Times.

Sir Robert Mark quotes a Chesterton aphorism in his Autobiography.

(1979) These are just a few random examples, not an exhaustive list.

For recent studies of Chesterton:

Christopher Hollis, The Mind of Chesterton (1970) Hollis and Carter.

W.H.Auden: G.K.Chesterton: a selection from his non-fictional Prose (1970) Faber and Faber.

Dudley Barker, G.K.Chesterton, A Biography. (1973), Constable.

John Sullivan ed. G.K.Chesterton: A Centenary Appraisal (1974)

Elek.

Ian Boyd, The Novels of G.K.Chesterton, a study in Art and Propaganda, (1975) Elek.

7. See Conlon, The Critical Judgments, 1900-1937. Antwerp Literary Studies. (1976)
8. The Speaker, 13.6.03. Conlon.
9. The Observer, 1.3.08. Conlon.
10. Charles Dickens, published in 1906, reached its twelfth edition in 1919. All Things Considered, a very typical little volume of Daily News essays, had five editions within twelve months of its publication in 1908. Orthodoxy had three editions in its first year, 1908-09.
11. The Evening Standard, 30.6.1910, reviewing What's Wrong With The World. Conlon.
12. The Observer, 11.4.32. Conlon.
13. Cyril Clemens, Chesterton, quotes Etienne Gilson, pp.150-151:

I consider it as being without possible comparison the best book ever written on St. Thomas. Nothing short of genius can account for such an achievement. Everybody will no doubt admit that it is a 'clever' book, but the few readers who have spent twenty or thirty years in studying St. Thomas Aquinas, and who, perhaps, have themselves published two or three volumes on the subject, cannot fail to perceive that the so-called 'wit' of Chesterton has put their scholarship to shame. He had guessed all that which they had tried to demonstrate, and he has said all that which they were more or less clumsily trying to express in academic formulas. Chesterton was one of the deepest thinkers who has ever existed; he was deep because he was right; and he could not help being right; but he could not either help being modest and charitable, so he left it to those who could understand him to know that he was right, and deep; to the others, he apologised for being right, and he made up for being deep by being witty. That is all they can see of him.'
14. Eric Gill, The Dublin Review, November 1936. (Conlon)
15. S.K.Ratcliffe, The Fortnightly Review, July 1936.
16. Hugh Kenner, Paradox in G.K.Chesterton, 1948. Sheed and Ward.
17. See above, 6. Dr. Boyd sees the novels as combining all Chesterton's important elements, humour, social purpose, parable and allegory.
18. In G.K.C.: Collected Essays, The Bodley Head, 1969.
19. See 6, above.
20. Desmond MacCarthy, Sunday Times, 18.4.32. Conlon.

21.

22. Orthodoxy, p.48 'The circle returns upon itself and is bound. The cross opens its arms to the four winds; it is a signpost for free travellers'. I quote this as an example of one of Chesterton's more irritating ^{devices} mannerisms; to score a point on the accident of a thing's physical appearance. In this chapter he has been arguing the superiority of Christianity (cross) to Buddhism (circle). His interpretation of the shape of the Cross is quite arbitrary and whimsical.
23. Such a criticism is made by Dr. Stephen Medcalf in A Centenary Appraisal. I discuss this in Chapter 5.

Chapter Two. An Edwardian Romantic.

1. A, p.177. 'It was about this time that I had published some studies on contemporary writers...I gave the book the title of Heretics. It was reviewed by Mr. G.S.Street, the very delightful essayist, who casually used the expression that he was not going to bother about his theology until I had really stated mine.' H.G.Wells also seems to have been driven by similar sentiments in his review of Charles Dickens in The New Age, 11.1.08. Conlon.
2. O, p. 13 'In Defence of Everything else'.
3. Abrams and Wellek, for instance, have discussed at length what is signified by the term 'romantic' in literature. Lilian Furst's little book, Romanticism, lists 27 different definitions of the term without claiming to be in any way comprehensive. A.O.Lovejoy in the Journal of the History of Ideas 2, p.261,1941, claimed that the word is so vaguely used as to be valueless. Wellek's Concepts of Criticism was written to refute this. For Chesterton's own distinction between 'Romance' and 'Romanticism', and his treatment of early 19C. Romantic writers, see Appendix A.
4. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria Ch.14, Vol.2 pp.12-13.
" " pp.5-6
5. This is the whole thesis of O.
6. The Prelude, l.11.418 et seq.
7. Byron and Shelley both collaborated with Leigh Hunt on his radical paper, The Liberal, and Keats hoped to 'contribute to the Liberal side of the question' as a journalist. Wordsworth's appalled rejection of the Terror does not invalidate his memory of the Revolution's ideals ~~IN~~ 'When Reason seemed the most to assert her Rights/When most intent on making of herself/A prime Enchantress'.
8. Biographia Literaria, Ch.14, p.12
9. VAL, p.27.
10. Alec Vidler, The Church in an Age of Revolution, p.51.

11. Pre-Raphaelite pictures on 'romantic' themes include:

The Eve of St. Agnes - Holman Hunt
 Madeline in her Chamber - Daniel Maclise
 Isabella and the Pot of Basil - Millais
 The Lady of Shalott - Holman Hunt
 Ophelia - Holman Hunt.

Both Rossetti and Burne-Jones frequently used topics from Malory; for instance, Burne-Jones' Holy Grail tapestries in the City of Birmingham Art Gallery; Rossetti also used Dante and medieval topics generally. Burne-Jones and Morris collaborated on stained glass of Sir Galahad and the Holy Grail, and the ill-fated frescoes they painted for the Oxford Union were of medieval figures. There were a good many pictures on topics directly and indirectly medieval: Hunt's 'Rienzi vowing to obtain justice for the death of his young brother', Burne-Jones' 'Clerk Saunders', Ford Madox Brown's 'Chaucer at the Court of Edward III', and also, with rather different medieval-macabre associations, Henry Wallis's 'The Death of Chatterton'.

12. The description of London in News from Nowhere tallies with this, but the actual line comes from the Prologue to The Wanderers, l.1. Ebenezer Howard was the man who started the 'Garden City' movement, but the impetus came from Morris's ideas.

13. The Opulent Eye: Late Victorian and Edwardian Taste in Interior Design by Nicholas Cooper, 1976, has photographs of both conventional and Morris-type interiors, and makes the difference between the two very clear.

14. See Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony.

~~14~~^{14a} Walter Pater, conclusion of revised version of The Renaissance,

1873:

The service of philosophy, of speculative culture, towards the human spirit is to rouse, to startle it into sharp and eager observation. Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistably real and attractive for us - for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience only, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given us of a variegated, dramatic life...How shall we pass most

swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy? To burn always with the hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy is success in life...While all else melts under our feet, we may well catch at any exquisite passion, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours and curious odours or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend. Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, in this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening...The theory or idea or system which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience...has no real claims upon us.

15. Vidler, p.100
16. Songs of Praise 310. SP. is itself a collection born out of the Anglo-Catholic revival of church music associated with Martin Shaw, and also with Percy Dearmer. (1867-1936) Canon Dearmer was a personal friend of Chesterton's, and there is an amusing account of him in the A.
17. Edward Upward's trilogy, The Thirties, evokes this in fiction.
18. See W.S.Smith, The London Heretics.
19. By J.A.Symonds. Published in 1880 in a book of verse, this was set to music in the U.S.A. and appeared in Garrett Horder's Congregational Hymns, 1884. Songs of Praise 312.
20. From Wells' Experiment in Autobiography: New forces are working 'to promote industrial co-ordination, necessitate new and better informed classes, evoke a new type of education and make it universal, break down political boundaries everywhere and bring all men into a planetary community.' This was published in 1934, but it echoes the same hopes that inspired Wells back in the 'nineties. Note how the phrases move from a description of the industrial scene to evocations of a super-society; one will develop from the other.
21. In The Pall Mall Gazette
22. For instance, the findings of the Seebohm Rowntree report on working-class housing in 1901 profoundly shocked middle-class readers -and that was only in York; the problem in London was much greater. The Sidney Webbs amassed facts on Trades Unions

and Local Government, and the Fabians produced statistics on city life tirelessly. The fiction of the period often gives unintentional glimpses of the way in which these revelations of poverty disturbed upper-class people with social consciences: an example of this is Mrs. Ramsay in Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse, a character closely based on Julia Stephen, her mother, who died in 1895;...'the things she saw with her own eyes, weekly, daily, here or in London, when she visited this widow, or that struggling wife in person with a bag on her arm, and a note-book and pencil with which she wrote down in columns carefully ruled for the purpose waging and spending, employment and unemployment, in the hope that thus she would cease to be a private woman...and become, what with her untrained mind she greatly admired, an investigator elucidating the social problem.'

The relevance of this long note is to point the fact that at the turn of the century 'investigators' 'elucidated' the 'social problem' with a thoroughness which was offensive to Chesterton and his friends who disliked working-class people treated as statistics; and such books as What's Wrong with the World cannot be understood outside this context.

23. Grose describes a 'swarm' of eminent Liberal editors and leader writers, including C.P.Scott, A.G.Gardiner, J.A.Spender, H.J.Massingham. But these were established men; Chesterton's contemporaries were such 'new' Liberals as Charles Masterman, who lived among the London poor for some years to learn about their conditions; and Hilaire Belloc, who combined poetry, journalism and fierce political campaigning. Belloc was an M.P. in the 1906 Liberal Parliament, but quickly became disillusioned with Parliamentary Liberalism.

24. A, Chs. 1 and 2.

25. A, p.172.

26. A, p.173.

27. A, p.158.

28. Q shows how widely acquainted Chesterton was with the different fashionable religion-substitutes of the 'nineties. In A. he recounts his dalliance with Spiritualism. In fact, both children of this most undogmatic of Victorian households became Catholics; Cecil in 1913, Gilbert in 1922.
29. 1891 The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde
 1893 The Decadent Movement in Literature by Arthur Symons
Under the Hill by Aubrey Beardsley
 1894 First number of The Yellow Book.
The Green Carnation by Robert Hichens - a skit on the Decadence by intention, its style was so close to that of Decadent writers that it functioned rather as a pastiche.
30. A, p.92.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid,p.93.
33. Chesterton writes with both dislike and praise of Wilde in VAL, and speaks of his 'very powerful and very desolate philosophy' in H,p.107. The verses 'The Earth's Shame' (CP p.349) would seem to refer to Wilde with sympathy.
34. The essay on Kipling ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ in H is shrewd but critical, and suggests Chesterton would have had little in common with the older man. Nor, as various references indicate, had he any great love for Henley as a man. Henley had quarrelled with Stevenson, and Chesterton was aware of his bullying side. See TT, 'Pope and the Art of Satire', for Chesterton's shaft on this.
35. The Decadent writers and painters use a splendid palette of colour, very self-consciously applied. The poets often affect rich jewel colours, or an isolated patch of red, shadowed by dark shades, and contrasted with whites and greys. Some examples from the Oxford Book of Victorian Verse are:

'La Jeune Homme caressent Sa Chimère' - J.A.Symonds p.623

- 'Epithalamium' - Edmund Gosse p.731
 'Rose of the World' - W.B.Yeats. p.863
 'Cynara' - Ernest Dowson p.886.
 'By the statue of King Charles at Charing Cross' -Lionel Johnson p.894
 'Impression de Nuit' - Lord Alfred Douglas,p.926.

Compare these colour-schemes with prose examples in Dorian Gray.

There is also a predilection for effects of wind, rain, moving water, and 'dim' and 'wan' lighting, which all suggest the influence of Impressionist painting techniques.

This dramatic use of colour is usually associated with Keats' influence. Edgar Allan Poe's effects are similar, and nearer in time to the 'nineties.

36. NNH, Bk.5 Chapter 2, last lines.p.192
 37. One of Chesterton's more 'Decadent' poems is 'Nightmare',CP p.80, which starts 'The Silver and violet leopard of the night', erupts into violent colour in the later verses,and then ends with a contrasting image of wholesomeness,'Down the grey garden paths a bird called twice', an image he uses again in the introductory verses to MWWT (see below, n.50), and which resembles one of Peter's images.
 38. InFB p.135.
 39 'Lepanto',CP, p.117.
 40 Mr. Sullivan has a rejection slip from The Yellow Book to Chesterton, dated, which shows that Chesterton would have been happy to appear in print under its aegis; and, of course, as he himself says elsewhere, the magazine was never ~~XXX~~ as perverted as later accounts suggest.

early

There is an interesting little/poem called 'Art Colours' (CPp.366)- presumably these are the rather dirty hues associated with home-dying and craft needlework.

On must we go; we search dead leaves
 We chase the sunset's saddest flames,
 The nameless hues that o'er and o'er
 In lawless weddings lost their names.

God of the daybreak! Better be
 Black savages; and grin to gird
 Our limbs in gaudy rags of red,
 The laughing-stock of brute and bird.

And feel again the fierce old feast,
 Blue for seven heavens that had sufficed,
 A gold like shining hoards, a red
 Like roses from the blood of Christ.

41. A, p.94.
42. RLS p.106.Ch.4.
43. Quoted by Ward, p.49. She also cites a list of his possessions in 1898, in which a volume of Whitman is the only adult book he mentions. See n.50, below, for Whitman references in 'To E.C.Bentley'.
44. Robert Browning was written for the English Men of Letters series, under the editorship of John Morley. The quotation is from A, p.99.
45. RB, Ch.5,p. 127.
46. RB , Ch.6.p.150
47. RB, Ch.4 p.86.
48. RLS, Ch.6, p.155 Chesterton's first writing on Stevenson was actually the 1901 book-review which first attracted the attention of the literary world. The 1927 biography is a consistent expansion of the same view.
49. RLS, Ch.2, p.51.
50. The verses, 'To Edmund Clerihew Bentley', with which Chesterton prefaced MWWT, are full of biographical interest. Bentley had shared Chesterton's fin-de-siècle depression, and the poem implies, had been helped by the same authors to recover.

Not all unhelped we held the fort, our tiny flags unfurled;
 Some giants laboured in that cloud to lift it from the world.
 I find again the book we found, I feel the hour that flings
 Far out of fish-shaped Paumōnok some cry of cleaner things;
 And the Green Carnation withered, as in forest fires that pass,
 Roared in the wind of all the world ten million leaves of grass;
 Or sane and sweet and sudden as a bird sings in the rain -
 Truth out of Tusitala spoke and pleasure out of pain.
 Yea, cool and clear and sudden as a bird sings in the grey,
 Dunedin to Samoa spoke, and darkness unto day.

(11.19-28)

51. A, 'The Fantastic Suburb',p.153
52. Ibid.
53. For an amusing account of Chesterton's Anglo-Catholic beginnings,

and his debut as a C.S.U. speaker, see A, 'The Crime of Orthodoxy!', p.158 et seq.

54. Represented for instance by Christina Rossetti in an earlier generation. The Guild of St. Matthew and the later Christian Social Union were the social conscience of this Anglo-Catholic revival; Dr. Vaughan Williams and Canon Percy Dearmer the musical conscience, and Ninian Comper⁽¹⁸⁶¹⁻¹⁹⁶¹⁾ the architectural. Comper designed fantastic Gothic interiors for churches; many are still in place, including St. Mary's, Wellingborough and Blisland, Cornwall.
55. A friend sent a volume of The Wild Knight to Kipling, who in acknowledging it, added this: 'Merely as a matter of loathsome detail, Chesterton has a bad attack of 'aureoles'. They are spotted all over the book. I think everyone is bound in each book to employ some pet word unconsciously but that was Rossetti's.' (Quoted by Ward, p.126)

Other poets of the genre at the same period were Katharine Tynan Hinkson, (1861-1931), May Probyn, 'A.E.'

In an article in the Chesterton Review, Autumn 1979, Miss Isobel Murray compares The Ballad of the White Horse with Morris's Pilgrims of Hope. Both, she points out, are "poems of near hopelessness, with grim central messages and at best only transitory solutions." She quotes Marshall McLuhan on Chesterton: '...That large and unassimilated heritage he got from William Morris - the big, epic, dramaturgic gestures, riotous colour, medieval trappings, ballad themes, and banal rhymes.' rather McLuhan derogates Morris's verse and thereby Chesterton's/more, in my opinion, than either deserve; but he is right about Chesterton's debt.

Chesterton's own comments on Morris in the essay in TT are interesting. He criticises Morris for loving the past and not the industrial present, and for designing timeless artefacts

like chairs and beds rather than applying his principles to machinery - gas fittings or bicycles. But he recognises Morris as a great reformer - 'it requires a fine effort of the imagination to see an evil which surrounds us on every side' -and his otherwise scattered references always imply the gratitude accorded to a man who is a real benefactor to one's own generation.

56. A, 'Figures in Fleet Street',p.185.
57. A,p.119.'Nationalism and Notting Hill'.
58. ATC, 'Anonymity and Further Counsels',p.129

Chapter 3. 'The Legend of an Epic Hour'.

Chesterton's Historical and Political Writing.

1. Hilaire Belloc, *The Place of Chesterton in English Literature*. 1940.
2. Quotation in Stephen Koss, Fleet St. Radical: A.G. Gardiner and the 'Daily News', 1973.
3. 'An Apology for Buffoons' in The Well and the Shallows, 1935.
1922 just before his 'conversion',
Chesterton's/letter to Ronald Knox/, given in full in Evelyn Waugh's
The Life of Ronald Knox, 1959, also shows how clearly divided 'G.K.C.'

was from Chesterton's own private consciousness at sadder times:

I am in a state now when I feel a monstrous charlatan, as if I wore a mask and were stuffed with cushions, whenever I see anything about the public G.K.C: it hurts me; for though the views I express are real, the image is horribly unreal compared with the real person who needs help just now. I have as much vanity as anybody else about any of these superficial successes while they are going on; but I never feel for a moment that they affect the reality of whether I am utterly rotten or not; so that any public comments on my religious position seem like a wind on the other side of the world; as if they were about somebody else - as indeed they are. I am not troubled about a great fat man who appears on platforms and in caricatures, even when he enjoys controversies on what I believe to be the right side. I am concerned about what has become of a little boy whose father showed him a toy theatre, and a schoolboy whom nobody had heard of, with his brooding on doubts and dirt and day-dreams of crude conscientiousness so inconsistent as to (be) near to hypocrisy; and all the morbid life of the lonely mind of a living person with whom I have lived. It is that story, that so often came near to ending badly, that I want to end well. Forgive this scrawl; I think you will understand me.

Yours very sincerely,
G.K.Chesterton.

4. For the frequency of historical references, take as example AD(1910)
Of 38 essays, 13 have historical topics or sustained historical ideas, ranging from King Alfred, archeological digs in Glastonbury, Gothic art, Babylonian deities, Dr. Faustus, Robespierre, medieval Italian gentlemen, prehistoric cairns, White Horses cut in chalk, a Franciscan friar in the Middle Ages. There are also scores of incidental historical images and allusions.
5. 'A Ballade of an Anti-Puritan', CP p.191. Compare Morris's The Message of the March Wind, Oxford Book of Victorian Verse p.546, for another 'pub' of healthy virtue contrasted with London commercialism:

Come back to the inn, love, and the lights and the fire,
 And the fiddlers old tune and the shuffling of feet;
 For there in a while shall be rest and desire,
 And there shall the morrow's uprising be sweet.

The fact that the inn at Bedford Park was - and is - one of its most lovingly decorated buildings inside, has relevance here.

6. RDQ, Chapter 5, 'The Second Trial of John Braintree'.
7. Cited by Lilian Furst in Romanticism, p.3.
8. BAC, Chapter 7, 'The Village of Grassley-in-the-Hole.'p.140
9. Hellas, Preface and 1.701.
10. A,p.342. In fact, defending the rights of the poor, for Chesterton, meant resisting current philanthropic schemes. Lloyd George's national insurance scheme was bitterly and ceaselessly attacked by Cecil Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc in The Eye Witness and its successor The New Witness (1911-1914) Belloc's The Servile State (1912) explained his suspicion of totalitarian control disguised as benevolent legislation, and outlined what was to be known in the 'twenties as Distributism.

Throughout the 19C., reformers had experimented with land reform schemes involving private co-operative or 'guild' organisations, similar to those of Distributism. Ruskin was associated with the Guild of St. George, and Morris found Ruskin's ideas 'a kind of revelation'. Edward Carpenter wrote a long account of Ruskin's 'industrial villages' for Morris's magazine, The Commonweal.

During the later nineteenth century, Tolstoyans, Anarchists and Evangelicals all sent out villagers to make shoes or run market-gardens, and for one reason or another nearly all these 'ideal' communities failed. By the time Chesterton was editing 'G.K.'s Weekly in 1926, it was one of three periodicals linked with such schemes: A.R.Orage of The New Age had associated his paper with the Guild Socialist movement, which thrived in the early 'twenties. Professor J.W.Scott of Cardiff founded the National Homecraft Association with the help of the Spectator,

funding a commune of ten families on smallholdings in Chesltenham. Distributism could be called a Catholic version of a recurring theme of 'alternative' societies. See Heavens Below by W.H.G.Armytage (1961) for a full account of Utopian experiments in England between 1560-1960.

11. Jay Corrin's G.K.Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc: the Battle against Modernity ,1981, gives a very clear account of Chesterton's relationship to the Distributists. He undoubtedly inspired them, and kept the peace when there were differences of opinion, but he could not do more.
12. BAC -the novel ends with the miraculous appearance of the saintly monk Michael out of a burning building, as a kind of saviour.
RDQ - Seawood Abbey has become a convent, and its description at the end of the book implies that solutions may be found there, not in Socialism or neo-medievalism.
13. Distributism, for instance, was a small movement whereby the middle-class could help the working class. I believe Chesterton himself was completely innocent of class-consciousness; he would have talked to anyone on the train between London and Beaconsfield with interest and respect. Nevertheless, his readers were lower-middle-class rather than working-class, and a book like What's Wrong With The World had few readers of the class it was most intended to affect.
14. See Read, Edwardian England,1972.
15. MWWT, 'The Earth in Anarchy', Ch.12,p.191.
16. John Sullivan has ^{privately} shown me a letter to himself from the playwright Sean O'Casey expressing precisely this embarrassment with Chesterton.

Views which, I suggest, would hardly have been propounded by Catholic scholars in the 'twenties but which appear in The Thing include the following: (i) 20C Protestantism has no positive

theology; it is simply a feud. ('Why I am a Catholic') (ii) Bunyan, Milton and Shakespeare were really disguised Catholics ('If they had believed')(iii) Catholics, unlike Protestants, are not duped by the vulgarities of the mass-media ('On Courage and Independence') (iv) Catholic theology 'the only real attempt to govern the world by ideas' ('The Revolt against Ideas'.)

17. Example: 'The New Luther' in The Well and the Shallows, 1935.

The (currently fashionable) Oxford Group Movement is one more sect thinking in large, loose and therefore dangerous terms.

Chesterton relates it, as such, to Fascism and 'Hitlerism' - also in the news in 1935. His point of view is reasonable and wittily expressed, but his attack on all sects as 'the very essence of formlessness' is precisely the same as in Orthodoxy, 27 years previously.

Similarly, 'Austria', in the same volume, repeats the Belloc-inspired view of Europe; Hitler represents German barbarism, Dollfuss is 'the representative of all that remains of the Holy Roman Empire'. This may be a shrewd comment, but it was not new to Chesterton readers; simply an old thesis inteminably re-applied.

18. Avowals and Denials, 1934: 'On Facing Facts',

19. EM, Ch.7. 'The War of the Gods and Demons', p.161.

20. STA, Ch.4. 'A Meditation on the Manichees'.

21. EM, Pt. 1, Ch.1, 'The Man in the Cave'. p.31.

22. Two other examples in EM are the simile of the prehistoric horse in the Introduction, p.17; or the surmise on the effect of the first hieroglyphics in 'The Antiquity of Civilisation', p.76.

23. STA, Ch.5, 'The Real Life of St. Thomas', p.114.

24. WB, p.105.

25. RB, Ch.1. 'Browning in Early Life'. p.15.

26. EM, 'The Demons and the Philosophers', p.139.

27. EM, 'Professors and Prehistoric Men', p.52.
28. EM, Ibid., p.49
29. EM, 'Man and Mythologies', p.131.
30. TT, 'Savenarola'.
31. This is obvious, but none the less striking, in all Chesterton writes about Shaw and Wells. He really disliked their beliefs; but he says perceptive and appreciative things about their work. In VAL he praises Swinburne with discernment, although he finds the decadent element in his work distasteful. Similarly he abhors the sensuality of Wilde's style, but he also appreciates a trait not generally associated with Wilde: 'ALL his lapses were proper to the one good thing he really was, an Irish swashbuckler - a fighter.' From Chesterton, this is praise.
32. For instance, the position of Aristotle in the early medieval world is charted thoroughly in STA; it is obvious that what really fascinates Chesterton's detective instincts is the way thoughts move, alter, and permeate history: 'the long thin delicate thread that had descended from distant antiquity; the thread of that unusual human hobby, the habit of thinking.'
(STA, 'The Aristotelian Revolution', p.63)
33. In NNH, Adam Wayne the romantic v. Auberon Quin the humorist; in BAC, Evan MacIan the Royalist v. Turnbull the Socialist; in RDQ, Michael Herne the medievalist v. John Braintree the Trade Unionist.
34. "Medievalism", CP p.83, indicates in its quotation marks that its topic is the conscious relationship to the Middle Ages; and seems to be saying that it is the ideological principle of the Middle Ages rather than the picturesque trappings thereof, which attract Chesterton himself.
35. CP, 'Outline of History', v.6, p.19,

We clothe the dead in their theatric raiment
To hide their nakedness of normality;

Disguise by gilded mask or horned mitre
 The accusing faces of such men as we;
 Till the last brotherhood of men brings down
 Us with the troglodytes in their twilight town.

36. CP, 'Ballad of the White Horse', p.315.
37. For instance, the endings of MWWT, O and A. 'Lepanto' ends with similar quiet after triumph. Chesterton gives the impression that he is now writing exhausted, beyond rhetoric; which means that it becomes his best rhetorical effect. In the essays, the endings sometimes are/not so much quiet as casual, throw-away. See the ending of 'Twelve Just Men' in Tremendous Trifles.
38. These lines from Shelley's The Skylark were (mis)quoted by Chesterton in T: see Ch.6, p.85.
39. In Tremendous Trifles, 'The Twelve Men' is on the value of an amateur jury; 'The Orthodox Barber' on the common man's genuine regard for humanity; 'The Dickensian' on the superiority of a popular view of Dickens' to that of the cultured literary one.
40. AD, 'The Man and His Newspaper'.
41. Chaucer, (1932) Ch.2, 'The Age of Chaucer', p.36.
42. O, 'The Ethics of Elfland', pp.80 and 94 respectively.
43. Avowals and Denials, 'On the Real Animal', p.79.

Chapter 3. Appendix A. The Controversy in The Listener, 1935-6, between Chesterton and Dr. G.G. Coulton. (Not directly related to the argument of this thesis, but included as highly informative of Chesterton as historian in the '30s context.)

This series of letters amply illustrates how irritating a professional historian found Chesterton.

In early July '35, Chesterton had given a broadcast talk describing modern England as a plutocracy, and praising the freedom enjoyed by medieval Catholic Englishmen; contrasting this, as usual, with the narrow restrictiveness of Protestant societies. Dr. Percy A. Scholes, a Free Church writer on the Puritans, attacked him in The Listener's correspondence columns for lack of scientific spirit, and cited 16C. legislation against dancing in Catholic Fribourg, contrasted with comparative permissiveness in Calvinist Geneva, as an example of the riskiness of Chesterton's generalisations. Several other letter-writers joined in with examples of Catholic or Protestant rigour or strictness according to their point of view, with Chesterton in reply amusedly dismissive of small detail at the expense of the larger view.

On 14th August, in the course of these rejoinders, Chesterton quoted Dr. Inge (the ex-Dean) writing in the Evening Standard against lotteries and the evils of drink: 'Why is it that we so seldom hear of these fanatically supported causes (i.e. for temperance, and anti-gambling) in Roman Catholic countries?' - intending a criticism of Catholic laxity. Chesterton knew very well that Inge was implying a slur against Catholics, but used him as a 'reluctant witness' tacitly admitting the greater permissiveness of Catholic states; and thereby providing useful evidence on Chesterton's side.

This brought in Coulton. He verified the Inge context, and accused Chesterton of mis-using Inge. In addition, he cited the existence of the Index as refutation of Chesterton's main argument that Catholics are intellectually free; and quoted the Catholic Tablet to the effect

that the reason why the Index could be virtually ignored in England was that the Protestant British were less pornographically inclined than the Catholic Europeans.

Chesterton ignored the Tablet reference, which by inference damaged his argument that Catholic freedom generated healthy-minded attitudes, and deflected attention to the British (and therefore Protestant) Press Monopoly which, he alleged, was as bad as the Index in preventing free speech and thought. He repeated that ideal freedom never exists, and the best any society can do is to put up boundaries and allow freedom within them.

On September 18th, Coulton picked up Chesterton's assertion that "Roman ecclesiastics were responsible for the golden age of Common Law", and accuses him of again mis-using his sources (Pollock and Maitland, 1, pp. 132-3) Pollock and Maitland had shown Henry II as the motivating power in this movement, only giving credit to the clerics to ^{balance} the picture.

Chesterton replied on October 2nd that the actual executives of a great work deserve more credit than its instigator - 'Is the Pope held responsible for the Sistine Chapel?' - which seems to me superficially impressive but not really analogous, and therefore an improper argument. He is on somewhat sounder ground when he defends the Index as based on large philosophical premises, while Protestant Puritanism vetoes out of petty fanaticism.

Coulton's October 9th letter challenges Chesterton to a public debate - proceeds to charity - in somewhat scornful terms, because on a previous occasion Chesterton had declined to defend his historical position on a platform. He then picks up Chesterton's claim for the clerics versus Henry II as legislators, and draws an analogy from Mexico. The Socialist Mexican Government had recently used Roman priests to draw up its constitution. Does this example not prove the instigator rather than the executive to be the main mover?

I am frankly puzzled that Chesterton did not gleefully pick up this idea and use it against Coulton, because it supports his proposition that Rome stands for freedom of thought, and that Catholic priests are free to be Socialist; had he done so, it would have been entirely characteristic of ~~his~~ puckish strategy in using his opponents' arguments against themselves. The fact that he did not suggests his carelessness in choosing his material from Coulton's letter for his next reply. His tone throughout has a cheerful dismissiveness which verges on insolence; some use of textual sources he will defend, others he ignores. No wonder Coulton was stung to comment in his October 30th letter: 'Mr. Chesterton dances through life in a whirl of journalistic confusion', and, in mentioning Dr. Scholes, he speaks of 'the contrast between that accurate unassuming scholar and the journalistic darling of the many...' The last few letters seem to have run out of steam - perhaps the Editor was anxious for them to finish - in spite of a further small argument on the 'thirties relevance of Cardinal Newman's confession that English Catholics were an ignorant lot.

Chesterton did not accept Coulton's challenge to platform debate; perhaps because he knew that although a general audience would cheer his wit, and the larger point he was making that 'we can roughly generalise about a community by its creed', Professor Coulton and his colleagues stood for a careful weighing of evidence which he himself could not match.

Reading the correspondence, I sympathise with Coulton; I would not have followed the convolutions of these letters, after all, had I not respect for scholarly method. However, fifty years later, Chesterton looks to have been right on Catholicism; in spite of Vatican proscriptions on abortion, contraception, and so on, the Catholic individual seems to me more ~~inclined~~ to be generous to humanity's failings than the modern Puritan - more likely Marxist than Christian in the 'eighties.

- Chapter Four. 'Unearthly Daylight': Chesterton's Imagination.
1. See Stephen Prickett: Romanticism and Religion. The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church. 1976.
 2. M.Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, Ch.1.section2, Mimetic theories.
 3. Preface to Lyrical Ballads,1800 and 1802.
 4. The Statesman's Manual, quoted by Prickett.
 5. Ibid. Ch.1.'Coleridge on Religious Language'.
 6. A,p.48. Chesterton gives no indication anywhere of knowing or liking Wordsworth particularly well, and I would not judge him to be consciously borrowing here.
 7. Ibid., p.32.
 8. See Edward Lucie-Smith, Symbolist Art, 1972. Most European Symbolists were Catholics.
 9. 'A Second Childhood', CP p.81
 10. 'By the Babe Unborn',CP p.319.
 11. STA,Ch.8.p.147
 12. 'As kingfishers catch fire', Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, O.U.P. p.95. (1948)
 - ~~13.~~ There is one difference, though; Hopkins the Scotist finds a unique quality in each separate identity, and generally Chesterton conveys a Thomist awareness of the same miraculous quality in all things.
 13. AD, (a)'The Wings of Stone',(b)'The Glory of Grey',(c)'The Strangeness of Luxury' .
 14. 'The Sword of Surprise',CP p.65. In CA, W.H.Auden described this as 'a poem of his which any poet would have been proud to have written.'
 15. O, 'The Suicide of Thought',p.69.
 16. George Bernard Shaw,1910. 'The Critic' p.90 et seq.
 17. 'Balfour': essay in G.K.'s Weekly,23.9.30.,quoted in The Man Who Was Orthodox by A.L.Maycock, 1963.
 18. See for instance the enormously stylish significant detail in

Boldini's 'Count Robert de Montesquieu' (1897) or the telling hands in Manet's 'Stéphane Mallarmé' (1876), in Lucie-Smith's Symbolist Art.

19. AMM, 'The Sectarian of Society', p.114.
20. T, 'The Usual Article', p.61.
21. The end of BAC is sensational and colourful, but much shorter. There is a violently eerie fire as the lunatic asylum burns down, "a tall and steady forest of fire", out of which walks the monk Michael 'singing as if he were alone in a wood in spring'. The devil-figure, Professor Lucifer escapes in his flying-ship, but two men he had carried with him fall out of it and are consumed in the fire.
22. TT, 'Toy Theatres', 1st ed.1909, p.150.
23. ATC, p.29.
24. See C. NNH came out 22.3.04. The Star, Manchester Guardian and Today all confess they cannot understand it. Eventually NNH earned the accolade of being the book which had so impressed Michael Collins, the Irish patriot leader, that Lloyd George made all his Cabinet read it when Collins visited London. (Hollis) Ch.7)
25. The action of the second half of MwWT deals with a band of brave men who have discarded their disguise as Anarchists, reveal their basic humane qualities, and know that a real and genuine Enemy is pursuing them - Sunday. This is really a highly developed allegory of the petty pretensions of anarchic thought, up against genuinely disturbing universal ideas. The types of anarchic philosophy - Nihilism, Decadence, Materialism - act out their characteristics. But the action happens with such speed, and the allegory is of such complexity, that a first reading cannot take in its rich texture.
26. CP, 'The Monster' p.3. Not published until 1932 but it has a

youthful energy which suggests it was written earlier.

27. See above, Ch.2, p.25.
28. Chaucer, Ch.3 p.95.
29. O, Ch.6, 'The Paradoxes of Christianity', p.182.
30. For instance, the attack on liberalism ~~is~~ Ch.8 of O, 'The Romance of Orthodoxy'. The thesis is that liberalism, which his generation saw as liberating and 'freethinking', is in fact the opposite. Under the term, Chesterton includes sub-Christian sects such as Unitarians, and non-Christian philosophies and creeds; He opens by amusing us with the startling proposition that 1. the modern age of 'progress' is paradoxically one of mental inertia. A series of diverting illustrations of the loose use of terms current, 'idealist' 'materialist', finally 'liberal'. 2: 'Liberalism' (as understood in 1908) inhibiting: Examples: (i) it is 'liberal' to disbelieve in miracles, but disbelief is essentially restrictive rather than liberating; (ii) 'Liberalism' sees religions as all equally valid; Chesterton shows this concept slurs over questions of motivation; it is simplistic. (iii) The tri-partite God of orthodox Christianity is intellectually a richer concept than a single Deity (Chesterton is obviously thinking of Moslems or Unitarians here). (iv) Non-Christian religions so attractive to 'liberals' are fatalistic, determinist and therefore inhibiting to practical action. (v) Orthodox Christianity the only creed which propounds effectively a 'suffering' God ~~XXXXXXXX~~ involved with humanity's sufferings. Summing up: any comparison of 'liberal' and 'orthodox' religious thought must demonstrate the superior intellectual dynamism and enfranchising power of the latter.

This programme is clearly and vigorously argued in thirty small pages, with wit, humour and vivid imagery. Mention of Tennyson, Shaw, Robert Blatchford the journalist, Annie Besant, Swinburne, R.J.Campbell and Shakespeare indicate the breadth of

reference which characterises a Chesterton argument. The weakness of his position is that there are other factors which the dazzled reader never gets time to consider; for instance, dogmatic Christianity has also been responsible for cruel bigotry, which is restrictive; but the arguments Chesterton places before us are themselves so so forceful, that ~~they~~ they are irrefutable. I am not arguing Chesterton's infallibility here; I am only illustrating from one short chapter, the solid content of ideas from a writer whose style is so easy and colourful that he has often been accused of dilettantism.

31. Flambeau - 'The Blue Cross' in IFB.

Wilfred Bohun - 'The Hammer of God'; Ibid.

Israel Gow - 'The Honour of Israel Gow' -Ibid.

32. The Importance of Being Earnest, Act 1.

34. What's Wrong With The World, Part 4, Ch.14, 'Folly and Female Education'.

35. O, Ch.6, 'The Paradoxes of Christianity', p.147: 'It is this silent swerving from accuracy by an inch that is the uncanny element in everything':et.seq.

36. Prickett Ch.8, 'DeMythologisms and Myth-Making'.

37. AHA, 'The Bones of a Poem', p,102 (Tennyson quotation)

'Poetry-Old and New' p.86 ('cut all its connections')

In his ILN article on Blake, 21.10.33, Chesterton shows that he understands how 'the Image' is currently discussed; after referring to Yeats, he quotes Blake's verse, 'Mock on, mock on, Voltaire, Rousseau', and continues: 'That is poetry; that is a clear and direct image, which does convey perfectly what is meant... it is, in fact, a full and even final example of the Image; and therefore of the function of Imagination.'

38 CP, 'The Holy of Holies', p.343.

39. Among English writers of this period who were, or became, Catholics

were Oscar Wilde, Francis Thompson, Ernest Dowson, Alice Meynell, Lionel Johnson, Padraic Colum.

39a T, 'What we think about', pp209-10.

40. The Catholic Church and Conversion, Chapter 5, 'The Exception that Proves the Rule'; 'I know that Catholicism is too large for me, and I have not yet explored its beautiful or terrible truths. But I know that Universalism is too small for me; and I could not creep back into that dull safety, who have looked upon the dizzy vision of liberty.'

41. EM, Pt.2, Ch.1. 'The God in the Cave', p.214.

42. O, Ch.4, 'The Ethics of Elfland', p.105.

43. See 'On Books' ^{printed} ~~quoted~~ in Sullivan, 2: Chesterton Continued, 1968.

44. Biographia Literaria, Ch.4.

Chapter 5. The Haunted Imagination.

1. Evelyn Waugh, The Life of Ronald Knox, Chapman and Hall, 1959. Waugh quotes Chesterton's letter in full, pp.207-8. See note 3, p.149 above.
2. Oxford Book of Victorian Verse, p.929, from 'In a Meadow' by John Swinnerton Phillimore, b.1873.
3. A, 'How to be a Lunatic', p.82.
4. WB, p.94.
5. AD, 'The Nightmare'.
6. Oxford Book of Victorian Verse, 'Le Jeune Homme Caressant Sa Chimère', p.625. (last line)
7. A, 'How to be a Lunatic', p.93.
8. CP, 'The Modern Manichee', p.7.
9. I realise that all these horrors deal with heads; the idea of a peculiarly frightening head or face recurs.
10. IFB, 'The Invisible Man', p.108.
11. IncFB, 'The Doom of the Darnaways'.
12. In Chesterton's last decade, when G.K.'s Weekly often needed money, there were three FB collections: 'Incredulity', 1926; 'The Secret' 1927; 'The Scandal', 1935. Dorothy Collins has described Chesterton's working methods in CA.
13. SFB, 'The Song of the Flying Fish', p.55
IFB, 'The Sins of Prince Saradine', p.150
SFB, 'The Mirror of the Magistrate', p.15.
14. IFB, p.211.
15. 'The Secret Garden', IFB p.29, has the Chief of the Paris Police, Lord Galloway the English ambassador, the Duchess of Mont St. Michel, Commandant O'Brien of the French Foreign Legion, and a multi-millionaire called Julius K. Brayne. 'The Song of the Flying Fish', SFB, has Dr. Burdock a rising biologist, Count Yvon de Lara, 'that brilliant Oriental traveller and scholar', and a

bank manager. 'The Arrow of Heaven', IncFB, has Brander Merton the millionaire, a giant negro bodyguard, Barnard Blake the lawyer, a mythical murderer called Daniel Doom, and a 'mystagogue' in goggles. And so on, in nearly all the FB stories. These people all wield power, physical or mental, and they are all mysterious and in some way glamorous.

16. CA, p.81, 'The Achievement of G.K. Chesterton' by Stephen Medcalf.
- 17 H, 'Science and the Savages', p.152.
- 18 CP, p.344, 'A Mirror of Madmen' is an example of this.
19. AMM, 'The Mystagogue' p.145.
20. MWWT, Ch.11, 'The Criminals chase the Police', p.175.
- 21 Prickett, Ch.8 p.227.
- 22 BAC: (i) Ch.14, 'The Museum of Souls', p.288; (ii) Chs. 15 and 16, 'The Dream of MacIan' and 'The Dream of Turnbull'; (iii) Ch. 14, 'The Museum of Souls', p.268-9.
- 23 In BWH, Alfred is inspired by his memory of a picture in an old illuminated manuscript:

And he saw in a little picture,
 Tiny and far away,
 His mother sitting in Egbert's hall,
 And a book she showed him, very small,
 Where a sapphire Mary sat in stall
 With a golden Christ in play.

It was wrought in the monk's slow manner,
 From silver and sanguine shell,
 Where the scenes are little and terrible,
 Keyholes of heaven and hell.

In the river island of Athelney,
 With the river running past,
 In colours of such simple creed
 All things sprang at him, sun and weed,
 Till the grass grew to be grass indeed
 And the tree was a tree at last.

Fearfully plain the flowers grew,
 Like the child's book to read,
 Or like a friend's face seen in a glass;
 He looked; and there Our Lady was... (CP, pp229-30)

- 24 WB, p.141
25. AMM, p.90, 'The Priest of Spring'.

26. MWWT, 'The Feast of Fear', p.76
- 27 RB, Ch.8, 'The Philosophy of Browning', p.202.

Chapter 6. 'Openly and Indecently Humane'.

1. Conlon, under Manalive, Feb. 1912.
2. Conlon, under Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens, November 1911, review by W.L.Renwick in The Academy.
3. H, 'Smart Novelists and the Smart Set', p.209.
4. Shaw started reviewing for the Pall Mall Gazette under W.T.Stead in 1885, combining this with art criticism for The World, and also for The Scots Observer, (Henley). He contributed (with much acrimony over rates of pay) to The Daily Chronicle. Between 1888-1890 he was Music Critic for T.P.O'Connor's The Star, and also for The World from 1890-1894.
5. In 1899 he published an ^{unsigned review} ~~XXXXXX~~ in The Bookman on Velazquez and Pouissin, and in 1900 two articles on 'Literary Pictures of the Year: topics from Shakespeare, Tennyson and Dickens in June, and on 'Three Classes of Literary Art' in July. Otherwise, he published single poems in various magazines, including The Speaker.
6. 'Belles-lettres' are a distinctive genre between 1880-1920, if we take the term to mean refined poems, essays and other ephemera, often published with particular attention to quality of paper, binding and design. See Nelson, The Early Nineties: A View from The Bodley Head. Gardiner, Chesterton's editor on the Daily News, wrote such little pieces under the pseudonym of 'Alpha of the Floggh'. Chesterton did a wicked pastiche of the form in 'An Apology for Buffoons' in The Well and the Shallows, which conveys the emptiness, the whimsy, the vaguely cultural tone and the coyness which are characteristics of the 'belles-lettres' essay:

'The pond in my garden shows, under the change of morning, an apprehension of the moving air, hardly to be called a wave; and so little clouding its lucidity as to seem rather vacuity in motion. Here at least is nothing to sustain the bright negation of water; none of those suburban goldfish that look like carrots and do but nose after their tails in a circle of frustration; to give some sulky gardener cause to cry 'stinking fish'. The mind is altogether carried away upon the faintest curve of wind over water; the movement is something less solid than anything we can call liquid..' I think I might learn to do it some day; though not by a commercial correspondence course; but the truth is I am very much occupied.'

One of the periodicals which I have described as 'heavy' in the late nineteenth century, for instance, is The Fortnightly Review, an organ of free-thinking radicalism which is wide-ranging in its interests but Olympian in tone and utterly without humour. The style is exhaustive in more than one sense: H.D. Traill firmly slots William Watson and John Davidson in their poetic niches, working through comparisons with Milton, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Gray and Arnold! In the same bound volume there is a perfectly serious article by Hugh Chisholm on 'How to Counteract the Penny Dreadful', interesting here because the Penny Dreadful was something Chesterton Defended in The Speaker in 1900. Ernest Newman writes an attractive criticism of Flaubert, discussing the effect of the writer's epilepsy on his work with sympathy, but this approach is unusual.

In a typical mid-nineties volume of The Spectator, a serious but less authoritative weekly review, critics quote at length, notice their writers' characteristics, but make little attempt to appreciate (for instance, Coventry Patmore's conservative views on women's rights.) The article on Guy de Maupassant, who had just died, illustrates both the faults and virtues of 'impressionist' criticism which uses metaphors abundantly. When the reviewer writes that De Maupassant 'invented a verbal hand-camera and with it took snap-shots at men and things', it is helpful. But there is also: 'In France, fiction is tossing with feverish unrest upon the patchouli-scented dunghill on which M.Zola threw her.'

These are just a few examples of the reviewing which preceded

Chesterton, from the mid-nineties. They represent the solid but uninspiring mass.

7. R.L.Stevenson, Memories and Portraits, 'A College Magazine'. '...I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne...' the list continues.
8. For instance, in Virginibus Puerisque, 'Walking Tours' resembles Hazlitt's essay of the same title, and actually refers to it.
9. Keats knew Hazlitt through Leigh Hunt, and was keen at one time to become a journalist in the radical press: 'I hope sincerely I shall be able to put a mite of help to the liberal side of the Question before I die', he wrote to Dilke. (Colvin, Letters of John Keats, 1925 ed. p.324)
10. Quoted in Born Under Saturn: a biography of William Hazlitt, by Catherine MacDonald Maclean, Collins 1943.
11. William Hazlitt, 'The Spirit of the Age', 'Mr. Coleridge': '...He who has seen a mouldering tower by the side of a chrysal lake, hid by a mist, but glittering in the wave below, may conceive the dim gleaming uncertain intelligence of his eye; he who has marked the evening clouds unrolled (a world of vapours) has seen the picture of his mind, unearthly, unsubstantial, with gorgeous tints and ever-varying forms -

That which was now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.

...Hardly a speculation has been left on record from the earliest time, but it is loosely folded up in Mr. Coleridge's memory, like a rich, but somewhat tattered piece of tapestry...'

12. Centenary Edition ed. P.P. Howe, 8. 237 f., 'On Great and Little Things' is an example of the idiosyncratic, provocative tone Hazlitt could establish on occasion:

I do not care a fig for any woman that knows even what

an author means. If I know that she has read anything that I have written, I cut her acquaintance immediately. This sort of literary intercourse with me passes for nothing. Her critical and scientific acquirements are carrying coals to Newcastle. I do not want to be told that I have published such and such a work. I knew all this before. It makes no addition to my sense of power. I do not wish the affair to be brought about in that way. I would have her read my soul; she should understand the language of the heart; she should know what I am, as if she were another self! She should love me for myself alone. I like myself without any reason:- I would have her do so too.

By contrast, here is 'delicate passionate' Hazlitt writing on Romeo and Juliet in Characters of Shakespeare's Plays:

...he has given a picture of human life, such as it is in the order of nature. He has founded the passion of the two lovers not on the pleasures they had experienced, but on the pleasures they had not experienced. All that was to come of life was theirs. At that untried source of promised happiness they slaked their thirst, and the first eager draught made them drunk with love and joy. They were in full possession of their senses and their affections. Their hopes were of air, their desires of fire...The only evil that even in apprehension befalls the two lovers is the loss of the greatest possible felicity; yet this loss is fatal to both, for they had rather part with life than bear the thought of surviving all that had made life dear to them.

13. 'On Writing Well'.
14. Howe, Centenary Edition, 12. 136. 'On the Pleasure of Hating'.
- 15.
16. In 'An Apology for Buffoons', The Well and the Shallows, Chesterton says he would like to be regarded as 'the sort of man who deals with big things noisily' rather than the sort which deals 'with small things quietly.' And, 'we do not see why the audience should listen unless it is more or less amused': two points which Hazlitt would have endorsed.
18. A, Ch.4, 'How to be a Lunatic', p.95 et seq.
19. For a list of these, see Ward, p.562 et seq.
20. Kipling's Barrack-Room Ballads (1892) were influential here; they must have helped Wells to write his extraordinarily convincing lower-middle class conversations. Shaw had not Wells' gift- he was temperamentally a member of an elite - but he believed in 'practical' realities and thus ~~debanked~~ the precious. But his

than the more ebullient Chesterton; he would not have used metaphors of flashing chaos as Chesterton often did, to describe his vision. Nevertheless, the experience is the same, and 'power' was a key word for Wordsworth. De Quincey wrote in Letters to a Young Man: 'All that is literature seeks to communicate power; all that is not literature, to communicate knowledge,' and adds that he got this distinction from 'many years conversation with Mr. Wordsworth.'

36. In the opening chapters of M, where Innocent Smith is first seen, he is up a tree in a great gale:

Those in that garden felt themselves caught in an unaccustomed eddy of things happening; no one seemed to know what would blow away next. Before they could speculate, the cheering and hallooing hat-hunter was already half-way up the tree, swinging himself from fork to fork with his strong, bent, grasshopper legs, and still giving forth his gasping, mysterious comments.

"Tree of life...Ygdrasil...climb for centuries perhaps... owls nesting in the hat...remotest generations of owls...still usurpers...gone to heaven...man in the moon wears it...brigand.. not yours...belongs to depressed medical man...in garden...give it up! give it up!"

The tree swung and swept and thrashed to and fro in the thundering wind like a thistle, and flamed in the full sunshine like a bonfire. The green, fantastic human figure, vivid against its autumn red and gold, was already among its highest and craziest branches, which by bare luck did not break with the weight of his big body. He was up there among the last tossing leaves and the first twinkling stars of evening, still talking to himself cheerfully, reasoningly, half apologetically, in little gasps...Beyond that, Inglewood first felt the mere fact of colour. The brisk bright leaves, the bleak blue sky, the wild green arms and legs, reminded him irrationally of something glowing in his infancy, something akin to a gaudy man on a golden tree; perhaps it was only a painted monkey on a stick. Oddly enough, Michael Moon, though more of a humorist, was touched on a tenderer nerve, half-remembered the old, young, theatricals with Rosamund, and was amused to find himself almost quoting Shakespeare -

'For valour, is not Love a Hercules,
Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?'

Even the immovable man of science had a bright, bewildered sensation that the Time Machine had given a great jerk, and gone forward with rather rattling rapidity.

The humorous, deprecating way in which Innocent Smith is treated, as Gilbert Chesterton himself was treated as a boy, as half-genius, half-fool, suggests that the character repays examination as Chesterton's own picture of himself; and this makes

the passage above of special interest as an unconscious self-image. It may well be objected that no-one can unconsciously portray himself and his problems for the length of a novel in the person of chief character; but Chesterton's unselfconsciousness of physical reality compared to intellectual problems, would allow him of all men to do precisely that.

37. In NNH there is all the panoply of the London Provosts, the King, and the President of Nicaragua. The whole point of Horne Fisher, The Man Who Knew Too Much (1922) is that he is connected with a galaxy of famous members of the Establishment, and is thereby compromised disastrously.
38. Buildings and places also generate mysterious presences of their own, comparable to that of the characters; for instance, this description of a block of London flats from 'The Invisible Man', IFB p.101:
- ...they swept up long white curves of road in the dead but open daylight of evening. Soon the white curves came sharper and ~~sharper~~; they were upon ascending spirals, as they say in the modern religions...Terrace rose above terrace, and the special tower of flats they sought, rose above them to almost Egyptian height, gilt by the level sunset. The change, as they turned the corner and entered the crescent known as Himalaya Mansions, was as abrupt as the opening of a window; for they find that pile of flats sitting above London as above a sea of green slate.
- The description of the robots inside the flats also continues the eerie sense of brooding power and meaning beyond what the plot itself demands.
39. Tremendous Trifles, 'A Piece of Chalk', p.1.
40. ATC, 'On Running After One's Hat', p.32. T, 'Why I am a Catholic', p.64.
41. ATC, 'The Fallacy of Success', p.27-28.
42. The Outline of Sanity, p.62.

Appendix B. (Chapter 6) 'Romantic' Journalism of the early 19C.

The early years of the century were dominated, as far as periodicals were concerned, by the two big reviews, the Edinburgh and the Quarterly. Although Gross attributes their liveliness to 'the irrepressible passion for discussion which succeeded the fall of old systems of the French Revolution', their tone was sharply insistent on conservative standards. Francis Jeffrey, the Editor of the Edinburgh, wrote of traditional values 'it was no longer lawful to question'. The Quarterly's attack on Keats is notorious.

Leigh Hunt was the editor who provided a platform for most of the anti-establishment poets and critics of the age, in The Examiner (1808-1821) and The Liberal (1821, 4 numbers only). He was sympathetic to new critical standards of spontaneity, political idealism and radicalism, and to the imaginative sensibility of the new writers. Byron and Shelley were his collaborators on The Liberal; Keats first appeared in print in The Examiner; Hazlitt was its theatre critic and regular contributor from 1808 until 1825.

The London Magazine was another medium for new voices; it is perhaps not quite irrelevant that its first editor, John Scott, was fatally wounded in a duel. Between 1820-1829 it published De Quincey's Confessions of an Opium-Eater, the 'Elia' essays, Hazlitt, Clare, Landor, Darley, and Stendhal's comments on the French scene.

William Cobbett's editorship of the Political Register should also be mentioned here, although he is not generally considered a Romantic writer. He launched it in 1802, and it continued throughout his lifetime to express his political views, which moved from Tory to extreme Radical in defence of working-class people. Chesterton saw him as an important precursor of Distributist ideas, and published William Cobbett in 1925.

Appendix C.(Chapter 6) Chesterton and the Great War.

In the 1890s, violence and death were glorified by poets like Kipling, Henley, Noyes - and also by Housman, in a gentler way. There is no doubt that Chesterton wrote verse which glamourises war; 'St. Barbara' (CP p.56) is the most flagrant example, though this was not published until 1922, but obviously refers to the French and Belgian battlefields in the Great War. Mr. Peter Widdowson, in an unpublished thesis on Illusion and Disillusion in the English Poetry and Painting of the First World War, calls these writers 'Action Poets', and argues plausibly that they encouraged the public to view war in favourable terms in the Edwardian period. Chesterton disliked the personal violence of Henley, as we have seen, but he held a highly idealised view of battle.

With hindsight, we deplore this romantic attitude, and we prefer Owen or Sassoon to Brooke or Grenfell. However, it is also a fact that many men not only went to the trenches full of romantic anticipation, but if they survived, apparently returned home with their idealism not wholly shattered; were this not so, Binyon's 'For the Fallen' would have been quite unacceptable at early Armistice Day services where ex-soldiers paraded. Only a minority felt like Sassoon and Graves.

Chesterton's great friend, Maurice Baring the novelist and war correspondent, was A.D.C. to General Trenchard, so that although he was not actually in the trenches, he knew very well what was going on in them. His hurried, pencilled letters to Chesterton at the time reflect his conviction that he is serving a noble cause among heroes. (Miss Dorothy Collins kindly allowed me to see the actual letters.) Chesterton, at home in London, could hardly have pooh-poohed his friend's attitude; and the correspondence seems therefore curiously unreal to a reader today who is familiar with the protest literature of the Great War. This is one of Chesterton's comments: 'When I hear of

these tragedies just now my first and most spontaneous sense is that of something beautiful, of men lying under a white light with their heads towards the morning...my second and perhaps wiser thought is one of extreme wonder that I should have been left alive.'

To be fair to him, enthusiastic descriptions of battles are less common in his post-war writings. His romanticising of war must also be set against The Ball and the Cross, where the nasty little man who is fascinated by violence is exposed as the unsavoury coward that he really is, and a horrific vision of London in the future reveals the dangers of romantic totalitarianism, to a gentleman with a passion for avenging honour.

Chesterton was forty when the Great War broke out, had recently been very ill, and although many over-age men enlisted, it would have been ridiculous to expect this obviously unfit fat man to volunteer. His younger brother Cecil joined up as a private in 1916, and Gilbert took over the editorship of his paper, the New Witness. Cecil died of illness contracted in France just after the Armistice, and Gilbert was always conventionally proud of his record as a soldier.

That Chesterton was part of the Edwardian restlessness which regarded a 'just war' as a re-statement of England's noblest beliefs, is illustrated by 'A Criminal Head', AD, 1910. He starts by pointing out that to be a criminal of Robespierre's dimensions, one needs some moral principle. England, he argues, lacks even that. 'We are not ready to fight all Europe on a point of justice. We are not ready to fling our most powerful class as refuse to the foreigner...we are not ready to trust ourselves in an awful moment of utter dissolution in order to make all things seem intelligible and all men feel honourable henceforth...' This, of course, whets the appetite for the moment when England will be ready.

My defence of Chesterton is made in the main text. The charge remains, is serious, but it must be seen historically. It would have

taken a far more informed economist and strategist than Chesterton
to imagine the horrors of the First World War.

Chapter 7. 'The Middleman in Poetry': Chesterton's Criticism.

1. Full length studies: Robert Browning 1903
 Charles Dickens 1906
 George Bernard Shaw 1909
 William Blake 1910
 Robert Louis Stevenson 1927
 Chaucer 1932

The other biographies are political, artistic or religious rather than literary appreciations.

A selection of the titles of some of Chesterton's essays will indicate his range:

<u>Daily News:</u>	2.4.01.	E.B.Browning
	2.6.05.	Mr. Masefield's Short Stories
	19.12.08.	After the Milton Celebration.
	12. 6.09.	The Case for Macaulay.
	5.8.11.	The True Romance (Cervantes)
<u>G.K.'s Weekly:</u>	17.3.28.	The Medievalism of Ibsen.
<u>Illustrated London News:</u>		
	22.3.30.	Dante and Beatrice.
	17.8.29.	Detective Story Writers
	16.2.29.	On the Essay
	2.1.32.	Mr. Thomas Gray.
	8.4.33.	On the Letter-Bag Novel
	22.5.09.	George Meredith.
	18.10.19.	The Merits of Shakespeare's plays.
	13.10.28.	Poetry Old and New.
	15.10.32.	Jonathan Swift
	25.1.30.	Swinburne (and 2 subsequent essays)
	14.8.09.	Tennyson.
	27.4.07.	Tom Jones and Morality.
	19.3.32.	Vachel Lindsay.
	27.7.29.	On 'Who Killed John Keats'?
	30.12.33.	Wordsworth.
	14.4.08.	The Zola Controversy.

I have disregarded the book talks for the B.B.C., because in these he simply chatted on points selected for him from a great variety of books by his secretary - a perfectly reasonable expedient, but one unlikely to produce original thinking.

2. I have mentioned Leonard Bast, from E.M.Forster's Howards End, because he is historically, a most interesting character. He is based on the observations Forster had made as a lecturer for many years at the Working Men's College, then in Great Ormond St., Bloomsbury; and he is typical of many Edwardian readers: '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. He believed in sudden conversion...he hoped to come to Culture suddenly, much as the Revivalist hopes to come to Jesus.'

P.F.
See ~~Ronald~~ Firbank's biography of Forster, Vol.1, pp.173-176.

3. RB, 1903, English Men of Letters Series, ed. John Morley.
4. VAL, printed 1913, reprinted '14, '18, '19, '20, '23, '25 (twice), '31, '36, '38, '44. Reset impression '46, reprinted O.U.P. '47.
5. One lecturer at Aberystwyth in 1982 recommended Chesterton's essay on Vanity Fair to Honours students reading Thackeray in a course on Victorian novelists.

3. WH Auden wrote in his preface to A Selection of Chesterton's non-fictional prose which he edited in 1970 for Faber and Faber:

8...if one were to ask any living novelist or poet which kind of critic he would personally prefer to write about his work, I have no doubt as to the answer. Every writer knows that certain events in his life, most of them in childhood, have been of decisive importance in forming his personal imaginative world; the kind of things he likes to think about, the qualities in human beings he particularly admires or detests. He also knows that many things which are important to him as a man, are irrelevant to his imagination...This Chesterton understands...

The kind of critic an author hopes for is someone who will dispel these pre-conceived notions so that his readers may come to his writings with fresh eyes. At the task of clearing the air, Chesterton was unusually efficient...As a literary critic, therefore, I rank him very high.

- 5a. See Appendix D, 'Romantic Critics in the Nineteenth Century', at end of chapter.
6. See Arnold's 'The Function of Criticism': (Everyman edition, p.5):
'...the English poetry of the first quarter of the century, with plenty of energy, plenty of creative force, did not know enough'.

Et seq.

7. Swinburne praised and blamed extravagantly; preferred Browning to Tennyson, and defended his obscurity; adored Rossetti, disliked Arnold and George Eliot, but approved of Dickens and the Brontes. He liked Blake's poetry as well as his revolutionary views.

Chesterton holds similar opinions on all these authors, though he is shrewder and more detached than Swinburne. His remarks in VAL show his respect for Swinburne as an artist, whatever his moral reservations.

9. For modern comments on impressionistic criticism, see Literary Criticism: A Short History, 1957, by W.H.Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks. They quote as an example a 'pen-picture' from Oscar Wilde (here actually writing as one critic praising another):

...Who cares whether Mr. Ruskin's views on Turner are sound or not? What does it matter? That mighty and majestic prose of his, so fervid and fiery-coloured in its noble eloquence, so rich in its elaborate symphonic music, so sure and certain, at its best, in subtle choice of word or epithet, is at least as great a work of art as any of those wonderful sunsets that bleach or rot on their corrupted canvases in England's gallery.'

The reader here enjoys Wilde more than Ruskin or Turner; Wilde is simply using them as starting-point for his own performance.

8. See p. 141 for text of Pater passage from The Renaissance.
10. From Retrospective Reviews, 1893-5; 1896: 'First and Second Principles of Criticism'. Pater also wrote to much the same effect: 'What is important is not that the critic should possess a correct abstract definition of beauty for the intellect, but a certain type of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects.' (Wimsatt and Brooks)
11. Gross, Ch.5, 'The Bookmen'.
12. For Shaw's journalism, see p.165 above, Chapter 6 n.4.
13. ^EW.H. Henley edited several papers, most notably the 'National Observer', and his 'young men' included Yeats, G.S. Street, Conrad, Shaw, Wells, Barrie and Kipling. He was a pugnacious writer, but even he could produce exquisite 'aesthetic' prose, so pervasive was the influence. His criticism is collected in Views and Reviews, 1900.
14. TT, 'Pope': 'We have had a great revival in our time of the cult of violence and hostility. Mr. Henley and his young men have an

infinite number of furious epithets with which to overwhelm any one who differs from them. It is not a placid or untroubled position to be Mr. Henley's enemy, though we know now it is certainly safer than to be his friend.' The barb in the last line almost certainly refers to Henley's quarrel with his old friend R.L.S. Stevenson, in which Chesterton's sympathies lay with Stevenson.

Also see the essay on Kipling, H, p. 38, for Chesterton's comments on another 'hearty'.

15. There are lines from Pater, quoted by Wellek, which sound like Chesterton's 'poem to E.C. Bentley', quoted above, p. 146, notes on Ch. 2, n. 40.

...the grey things also, the cool things, all the fresher for the contrast - with a freshness that seemed to touch and cool the soul - found their account there; the clangorous passage of the birds at night foretokening rain, the moan of the wind at the door, the wind's self made visible over the yielding corn.

16. 'The Middleman in Poetry' in Sidelights: on New London and Newer York, 1932

17. VAL, p. 85.

18. AHA, p. 91, 'Browning and His Ideal'.

19. TT, 'Tolstoy and the Cult of Simplicity'.

20. Quoted by Wellek p. 373.

21. Orthodoxy argues that among the philosophies, only Christianity satisfies certain/psychological needs, and this demonstrates its truth. But much of this proof is based on the writer's perception of the physical world - the sunshine, flowers, the greenness of leaves. The acts of perception described above, in Ch. 4, were in themselves simply an artistic person's 'vision': but they led that person to religious conviction. Dudley Barker quotes Belloc as saying that Chesterton's Catholicism was more an aesthetic than a religion; but unfortunately I have not been able to find the source of this remark, and Mr. Barker has lost it.

22. Appreciations and Criticisms of Dickens, 1911: 'The Old Curiosity Shop'.
23. 'The Defence of Poetry'.
24. See Wellek. 'Historicism' was largely a European critical stance, and up to the mid-nineteenth century the English critics' view of literature as a static thing, precluded appreciation of historical flux. Wellek sees Arnold as primarily a historical critic, in spite of his reservations as to the method.; his 1857 Oxford lecture 'On the Modern Element in Literature' 'announced the arrival of historicism in official English literary history.' (Wellek, p.173) Although the Aesthetic critics were less interested in historical perspective, Pater 'preserved the fundamental critical insight of his time, the historical sense.'
25. VAL, Introduction, p.10.
26. Taine's book features in publishers' lists at the back of popular books throughout the period; for instance, Chatto and Windus advertised it in 1911 'in four volumes with 32 portraits'. This was the Van Laun translation first issued in 2 volumes in Edinburgh, 1871. Taine also wrote on Stendhal, La Fontaine, and the philosophy of art in general.
27. Chesterton makes some interesting, and typical, comments on the relationship between the individual and historic ideas, in his essay on 'W.E.Henley, Poet' in AHA, p.157:
- The changes that pass over great societies are often too big to be seen...It is the most secret part of every separate man that makes up a real social movement. The general philosophy is drawn not from what everybody says, but rather from what everybody does not say, but feels the more...The changes which men in any age are always talking about are never the changes which are really going on.'
28. For instance, a reading of The Bookman, the popular literary magazine, for 1900-1901, demonstrates why Chesterton's criticism was welcomed so heartily. Its articles lack vigour. The tone is one of cultured spirituality, but it easily deteriorates into chat.

29. In George Bernard Shaw, 1910, Chesterton wrote of even this great iconoclast as a pure republican inspired by 'shafts of illumination' who had become 'a complete and colossal mystic.' He implies, however, that he is less impressed by Shaw's mystique because it so completely lacks any religious dimension.
30. RB, Ch.1, makes clear Browning's role as Chesterton sees it; see also the mask image, quoted in Ch.5, p.75, above.
31. RB, Ch.6, p.145.
32. CD, Ch.1, passim.
33. CD, Ch.2, p.27.
34. CD, Ch.9, p.172.
35. WB, p.24.
36. WB, p.113
37. WB, p.119 et seq.
38. WB, p.148.
39. RLS, Ch.9, 'The Philosophy of Gesture', p.218.
40. Ivor Brown's review of Chaucer in The Observer, 11.4.32 expresses the mixture of pleasure and exasperation it evokes: 'We know where we are going with Mr. Chesterton at the reins. For him all roads lead to Rome. So there he sits in command, as grand and jovial a figure as Mr. Weller Senior...this study of medievalism is an illuminated missile (pun) that sparkles as prettily as it detonates fiercely...a grand persuasion to Chaucerian enjoyment.'
41. Chaucer, Ch.4, 'The Garden of Romance', p.116.
42. Blake is ^{also} a case in point; he is always at the back of Chesterton's imagination. He was writing freshly about him in the I.L.N. in 1929 and 1934, long after the full-length study in 1910. These essays are, in a sense, book-reviews; but Chesterton was in a position to choose what books he wrote about, and the quick response to Blake in a new context is obvious.
43. Republished in AHA, p.96.; two essays, 'The Bones of a Poem' and 'Tennyson'.

44. The Origin of Species was published in 1859, but its findings had been discussed and foreshadowed before the book itself was in print. In these essays Chesterton is considering Tennyson's Idylls of the King, which appeared between 1857-1885.
45. AHA, 'Tennyson', p.96.
46. Quoted by Gary Wills, Chesterton, Man and Mask (1961): review by Chesterton of a life of George Cruickshank by a Mr. Chesson, from The Nation, 3.10.08. H.G.Wells' reference: H., p.74, 'Mr. H.G. Wells and the Giants'.
47. VAL, Introduction, p.7.
48. VAL. Rogers, p.30; Mill, p.37; Carlyle, p.52; Pater, p.70; Morris, p.200.
49. For instance, 'Variations on an Air' of Old King Cole, (CP p.46) is typical of Chesterton's fine, amused sense of poetic values.

1st variation: 'After Lord Tennyson! This exposes Tennyson's facility in making trivial material sound important; but because he is a real poet, the most mindless versifyings will often throw up images of real power - so Chesterton makes up for him, 'and the King slept beside the northern sea' which is both magical and singularly irrelevant. The first line catches Tennyson's splendid dignity which teeters near bathos - 'Cole, that unwearied Prince of Colchester'; and the lines about the Virginia creeper have all the self-conscious decorative charm of Tennyson in atmospheric gardens. The images are stronger than the ideas, in fact, illustrating Chesterton's aphorism from VAL - 'Tennyson could not thin up to the height of his own towering style'.

2nd variation: 'After W.B.Yeats'. This is a gentle skit on Yeats' early verse; see 'The Fiddler of Dooney', for instance. Again, Chesterton is making the point that the poet is essentially a stylist who uses his topic merely as a starting-point for his own spell-binding activities. He has caught Yeats' artful 'naivety' - ballad metre adapted towards prettiness, and the verbal clichés of

current Irish poets - fairyland, fiddles, birds, 'grey sea-folk', 'the world's desire'. Chesterton suggests an earnest poet determined to be fey and poignant at all costs.

3rd variation: 'After Walt Whitman' is a brilliant collage of 'camarado'.. 'Me clairvoyant' reproduce the vocabulary precisely. Whitman words and gestures./Whitman's enormous naivety and self-satisfaction makes him an obvious butt for satire; here Chesterton shows how he turns every topic into a celebration of himself and his liberal permissiveness: ('I do not object to your spitting'), and Leaves of Grass is full of embarrassing lines meant quite seriously: 'I dote on myself, there is a lot of me and all so luscious' which were gifts for the parodist. And yet finally, Chesterton's Whitman is seen as a poet, in spite of the absurdities; so the penultimate line, 'I myself am a complete orchestra' is funny, satiric, and true at the same time.

Whitman did in fact call one of his poems 'So Long!', exploring the little phrase exhaustively; but Chesterton's last line here neatly suggests, also, the bland *dégagé* tone which ultimately places a limit on one's regard for Whitman.

50. T, 'If they had believed', p.229.
51. In 1910 Chesterton wrote an introductory essay to a one-volume Thackeray selection, which shows how perceptively he can feel his way into an uncongenial mind. Even Thackeray's sombre cynicism^{is} a kind of vision laid on him to utter.
52. Essay on 'Balfour', G.K.'s Weekly, 29.3.30., collected in The Man Who Was Orthodox, ed. A.L.Maycock, 1963.
53. Shelley's Defence of Poetry.

Appendix D. Romantic Critics in the Nineteenth Century.

Although they did not call themselves 'romantic', young radical writers in the early 19C. felt they were revolutionary:

English writers early had a clear consciousness that there was a movement which rejected the critical concepts and poetic practice of the 18C., that it formed a unity, and had its parallels on the Continent, especially in Germany.

(Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism*, 1963)

Leigh Hunt in Feast of the Poets (1814) and Hazlitt in his Lectures on the English Poets were full of admiration for this new spirit, and associated it with Wordsworth and his followers. Wordsworth's own preface to the Lyrical Ballads further explained the new poetic stance.

Critics such as Hunt and Hazlitt enthusiastically adopted the criteria of the new writers. Correctness became less important than imaginative power in a writer. From this it followed naturally that there was much greater interest in the author's own personality and motives than previously. Carlyle wrote an essay entitled 'The Poet as Hero' which itself indicates the new stature the writer assumes. He is a noble and sensitive being, peculiarly attuned to Nature.

Because of the revolt against 'correctness' and fixed literary canons, spontaneity became important. As we have seen, Hazlitt wrote of 'gusto' in works of art. The critic was no longer an impersonal arbiter of rules; he became sympathetically attuned to his subject, and proved this by his warmly personal style - Lamb, for instance, wrote Shakespeare criticism in a highly idiosyncratic tone. The critic's capacity for sensitive feeling became as important as his intellectual and moral powers of judgment; or rather, his sensibility was supposed to imply moral capacity.

All these writers regarded the French Revolution as the most important event in modern history, because then the spirit of man had risen against everything that would constrict it, and in the

disillusion of the aftermath, its first principles were remembered nostalgically. The grand heroic theme of the romantic poets was to portray aspiring man responding to Nature as they now saw her; for instance, in Wordsworth's Prelude, (Bk.6,566 et seq.):

The unfettered clouds, and regions of the heavens
 Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light,
 Were all like workings of one mind, the features
 Of the same face, blossom upon one tree,
 Characters of the ~~great~~ Apocalypse,
 The types and symbols of Eternity...

The critics, also, put these principles into practice. On the Continent, the movement became particularly self-conscious; such a critic as Victor Hugo demonstrates his 'romantic' sensibilities (the word was now acknowledged) in vivid, rhetorically-charged prose. The critic is also open to appreciate things the classicists of the 18C. thought ugly, such as grotesque forms. Hugo saw pre-romantic criticism as mean-spirited, and the critics' task was 'to place themselves at the author's standpoint, to view the subject with his eyes, in order to judge a work intelligently.' ~~XXXX~~ The rhetoric, the exalted view of the poet, ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ and the standpoint of sympathy rather than applying rules, are characteristic of mid-nineteenth century criticism on the Continent and in America - in the work of Poe, Emerson, Whitman and Lowell. In view of Chesterton's early enthusiasm for Whitman, it is worth while quoting from the Preface to Leaves of Grass which is typical of this kind of fervour among critics of the period. Here Whitman is apostrophising the artist:

This is what you shall do; love the earth and the sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labour to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence towards the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown...and your very flesh shall be a great poem and have its richest fluency, not only in the words, but in the silent lines of its lips and face, and between the lashes of your eyes, and in every motion and joint of your body.

This kind of exaltation ^{must have} made all the more impression on the young Chesterton, because English mid-Victorian criticism, like mid-Victorian

poetry, had lost the faith and passion of the early Romantics; and great a critic as Matthew Arnold is, his very 'disinterestedness' precludes the feeling such as Shelley, for instance, shows in his Defence of Poetry.

Chapter 8. Chesterton and Charles Williams.

1. The Well and the Shallows, 1935, 'The Reaction of the Intellectuals'.
2. Ibid.
3. Conlon gives a number of posthumous reviews reflecting this view of Chesterton, including the one quoted on p.5 of Ch.1/^{above,} in the Fortnightly Review.
4. Frank Swinnerton, The Georgian Literary Scene, p.68, 'Catholic Liberalism'.
5. James Brabazon, Dorothy L. Sayers: the life of a courageous woman, 1981, p.35. Dorothy Sayers also had a number of personal contacts with Chesterton; the first was when he lectured at Somerville in 1914 when she was an undergraduate. She was agreeably surprised to find him 'much sounder than I had expected, and less fireworky'; 'his speaking had none of that aggressive and dogmatic tone which his writings are apt to assume when read aloud.' She sent her early Catholic Tales and Christian Songs to the New Witness, hoping that Chesterton would publish them, but this came to nothing. In 1930 he was the first President of the Detection Club, and here he and Dorothy met on a number of occasions.
6. Charles Williams, Poetry at Present, 1930 Introduction to essay on Chesterton.
7. D, 'In defence of Detective Stories', p.158 et. seq.
8. MD is 'based' on Lord Arglay's flat near the Law Courts. SE Has two London bases, Sir Bernard's Kensington home and Roger Ingram's Hampstead flat. WIH has three London 'addresses'; the publisher's in Amen Court, the Duke's home in Grosvenor Square, and the Greek's house in Lord Mayor's Street. AHE is wholly set in a ghostly London which is nevertheless familiar and mapped out street by street. There are no long descriptions, but the London setting is always important in suggesting that the action takes place in a

'contemporary world, in the centre of worldly modern power.

Williams first became a Londoner as a student at University College, 1901-1903. He worked at the Methodist Book Room from 1903-1908, and from 1908-1939 at the London offices of the O.U.P. On his marriage he lived in a flat at Hampstead. He taught evening classes at the City Literary Institute and Balham Commercial Institute for many years. His early poems show how much he felt London about him, and - by their omissions! - all his work shows how opaque he was to the joys of the countryside (he was much dismayed to be evacuated to Oxford in 1939.)

9. This external proof can be summed up as follows:

(i) The scripts of Williams' evening class lectures in which he deals with Chesterton and Belloc in one lecture, and refers to them as 'my adored idols'. This material is now in the Wade Collection, Wheaton College, Illinois, who were good enough to lend me transcripts and photostats. The lectures are not significant in adding anything otherwise not known to our knowledge of Williams' attitude to Chesterton. They date from around 1926/7.

(ii) Letters from Williams to his friend Raymond Hunt, in which he refers affectionately to Chesterton. These are also in the Wade Collection.

(iii) The essay in Poetry at Present.

10. Chesterton's father drew an income from the family business but was not required to attend regularly; Williams' father had been a clerk. When his sight failed, he and Mrs. Williams ran a shop for artists' materials in St. Alban's. The Williams's were a highly literate lower-middle class family.

11. For Chesterton's connection with the Meynells, see Ward p.125-6.

For Williams', see Anne Ridler, The Image of the City, intro.p.xvi.

12. Everyone who met Williams recalls his manners. For instance, Ridler, p.xx.
13. See note 81 above, p.188.
14. See The English Poetic Mind, *passim*., in which Williams identifies experiences of 'change and subversion' as crucial to creation in a number of major poets - Wordsworth, Shakespeare, Milton and others. Glen Cavaliero's Charles Williams: Poet of Theology (1983) shows the relationship of this interest to Williams' painful experience of unrequited love.
15. Letter to Raymond Hunt, see note 9(ii) above.
16. For T.S.Eliot, see his article on Williams in The Listener, 19.12.46: 'The nearest comparison I can make to these stories of Williams' is Chesterton's The Man Who Was Thursday. I admire that story very much; but I think it is Chesterton who suffers by comparison. Williams has not Chesterton's gift for humour and paradox. But on the other hand he is not writing his story to point a moral...'

W.W.Robson in CA also notes the apparent imaginative naivete in both men's novels.

17. C.S.Lewis's Surprised by Joy: the Shape of my early life(1955) describes the nature of his debt to Chesterton.

In his 1933 of STA quoted in Conlon, Lewis wrote that Chesterton's humour and goodness were 'the type that I liked best- not jokes 'embedded' in the page like currants in a cake...but the humour which is not in any way separable from the argument but is rather.. the 'bloom' on dialectic itself. The word glitters not because the swordsman set out to make it glitter but because he is fighting for his life and therefore moving it very quickly.'

Lewis wrote a letter to Time and Tide, 9.11.46, replying to James Stephens' indictment of Chesterton as (i) too public a writer and (ii) dated. Lewis compares WWT to Kafka's Chesterton

attributing to the universe a more complicated disguise, and admitting the exhilaration as well as the terror of the struggle, has got in rather more; is more balanced; in that sense more classical, more permanent.'

18. VII:An Anglo-American Literary Review published by Wheaton College, Illinois. First number, March 1980. The Marion Wade Collection at Wheaton holds primary material of all these writers.
19. See Chapter 4 above for comments on Chesterton's sensational characters, and for the action of MWWT; (pp.53 and 55); the 'sensationalism of the FB stories hardly needs illustrating. The early novels pile up the surprises most vigorously; but in all of them the unexpected happens with breath-taking frequency.
20. DIH and AHE are less like detective stories than the earlier novels, but the element of surprise still operates significantly; Pauline's fearful doppelgänger turns out to be an angel of grace, and when Simon LeClerc's magic turns against him, Lady Wallingford's life-blood drains into the doll instead of her innocent daughter's.
21. The happy transformation scene is a feature of Chesterton's, Lewis's and Williams' novels: compare the visionary set-piece endings of MWWT and BAC with those of WIH and The Hideous Strength.
22. GT, p.55, 'The Chariot'.
23. The New Jerusalem, Ch.10, p.195. (1920)
24. The Paraclete of The Descent of the Dove is noticeably European in his modern operations. The House of the Octopus is, interestingly, about Christians in the South Sea Islands; but the evil is native, and the chief Christian is European.
25. RDQ evokes ^{romantic} ~~Catholic~~ history specifically on several occasions in this poetic way; for instance, the end of Ch.15, 'The Parting of the Ways', but at nothing like Williams' intensity.

26. WIH, Ch.10, 'The Second Attempt on the Graal', pp.155 et seq.
27. See 'The Prayers of the Pope', in The Region of the Summer Stars, O.U.P. 1950, p.50. P'o L'u is also treated in The House of the Octopus, a missionary play written in 1945 for the United Council of Missionary Education. One wonders whether contemporary audiences consciously associated its malign power with the Japanese, ~~when~~ at that time had only recently been defeated by the Allies in the Second World War.
28. RDQ, Ch.6, 'A Commission as Colourman'.
29. Although there are swords and other weapons in all Chesterton's long stories and in many short ones (For instance, 'The Sword of Wood' in the Everyman Stories, Essays and Poems, 1948), this is never a J.T.Edson-type obsession with lethal weapons as such. A sword is a joy to handle, to wield, to see flashing, unlike Yeats' Japanese sword which he kept on his desk. BAC, pp.55, et. seq.
30. The endpapers of the first edition of Taliessin Through Logres, 1938, show a diagram of the Empire as a recumbent woman. Also see 'The Vision of the Empire', p.6.
31. The descriptions of the Holy Spirit as power are usually unexceptionable; however, the account of the Emperor Constantine at ^NNi^eaea, p.48, suggests that momentarily at least, the author is enamoured of the glamour of power; the writing is evocative but unstable.
32. See Corrin, p.180 et seq. for Chesterton's rejection of Mussolini's methods at a time when other Distributists approved of his schemes for dismantling capitalism. This seems to me a test case of Chesterton's attitude to power.
33. For examples in Chesterton, see Ch.5 p.73 above.
34. AHE, Ch.1.
35. POL, Ch.10, 'The Pit in the House', p.112 et seq.

36. AHE, See particularly, 'The Hall by Holborn', p.96 et seq.
37. For instance, the principle of Strength represented by the Lion, is felt as noble by Anthony Durrant, but as mere villence by the rapacious Mr. Foster. Subtlety, described as a precious intellectual quality, becomes evil in Dora Wilmot.

In MD the Stones are active for good in the hands of the innocent old Mrs. Ferguson, (p.85) but pliant to the greedy experiments of the millionaire Sheldrake and Sir Giles (p.68, and p.87 et seq.)

38. See Glen Cavaliero, Charles Williams Poet of Theology for a good account of Williams' experience and its reverberations in his criticism: Ch.3, 'Criticism, Biographies and Plays', p.25 et seq.
39. For Williams' association with the Order of the Golden Dawn, see Ridler, p.xxiii.

Later in his career, some of Williams' friends formed what they called the 'Company' under his leadership. (Ridler, p.xxvii)

The description of Taliessin's Comapny in The Region of the Summer Stars reflects some of the devotion and intensity generated between Williams and his (largely female) disciples. Williams was always deeply attracted by the idea of a Christian Gnosis, a secret wisdom imparted to choice spirits withdrawn from vulgar worshippers.

40. MD
41. WIH, Ch.6, 'The Sabbath', p.73.
42. For instance, the vulture in POL, p.128, and the ointment used by Gregory Persimmons, WIH, p.71.
43. For instance, the Witches' Sabbath enjoyed by Persimmons in WIH quoted on p.117 above, is described with a fascinated attention to physical detail which is both detached and unpleasant.

R.T.Davies, in his article on Williams' treatment of sexual subjects, (Etudes Anglaises No.4 Oct/Dec.1955, 'Charles Williams

Romantic Experience') reacts, understandably, against the adulation of Williams which some readers show. He criticises Williams for being unaware of the erotic nature of his descriptions, and asks at what point the representation of evil becomes evil itself. 'Since they (the obscene episodes) are described with such seductive relish, one is inclined occasionally to feel one would, if one had it at all, prefer one's pornography honest.' I find this naive; Williams is quite aware of the moral ambivalence involved, in my opinion, and is simply being true to his own awareness. He is writing a novel, after all, not a devotional handbook.

44. An interesting tribute to this personal goodness comes from W.H.Auden, who, whatever his personal eccentricities, is a valuable witness simply because he was not a pious young lady. In 1940 he met an Anglican layman, whose name he did not know, in the O.U.P. offices where they were discussing the Oxford Book of Light Verse, which Auden was editing. '..For the first time in my life felt myself in the presence of personal sanctity. I had met many good people before who made me feel ashamed of my own shortcomings, but in the presence of this man - we never discussed anything but literary business - I did not feel ashamed. I felt transformed into a person who was incapable of doing or thinking anything base or unloving.' From his essay to the 1956 volume of essays edited by James Pike, N.Y., Modern Canterbury Pilgrims, in which he described his re-discovery of Christianity. Quoted by Charles Osborne in his W.H.Auden The Life of a Poet, p.202.

45. Examples of 'experiences of heavenly delight' in the novels are:

- WIH: p.117 The Archdeacon before the Graal
 137 The adoration of the Graal
 252 The Mass of the Graal
MD: 167 Chloe Burnett's Vision of the Stone
 258 The return of the Stone.
AHE: 77 Betty Wallingford in the City
 122 Betty's Baptism
 146 Lester saves Betty from Simon.
 225 The river; Lester's final death.
SE: 78 Roger Ingram listens to Considine's music.

- 203 Roger's vision of 'everlasting and universal life'.
TGT 100 Nancy and Henry see The Dance of the World.
 126 Sybil Coningsby in the storm.
 191 Nancy Coningsby's mission with the Tarots.
 226 Sybil Coningsby redeems the confusion.
DIH:168 Pauline saves John Struther and confronts her double.
 190 Stanhope's play; the performance.
POL: 40 The Butterflies.
 123 The horse and cart.
 142 The unicorn.
 182 Anthony's vision.
 200 The naming of the beasts.

When these descriptions fail, it is often because the characters involved are female; Williams' women tend to speak in over-sweet tones - for instance, Isobel Ingrams in SE, Sybil Coningsby in TGT. Chesterton is similarly sentimental over his female characters. Both Williams and Chesterton were devoted husbands who knew better, but they were old-fashioned in preferring women in stylised roles.

M.R.James is an example of a master in the occult whose characters are often church-goers and move in 'religious' settings, yet his supernatural is only evil and occult; I do not know of a happy paranormal experience in his stories.

46. AHE, 'The Acts of the City', p.225. et seq.
 47. This is the principal argument of O.
 48. As he saw pillar-boxes and traffic-lights. The Thompson poem is 'In no/strange Land'.
 49. POL, 'The Place of Friendship', p.183.
 50. POL, 'The Eidola and the Angeli', p.25.
 51. It has been said that Lionel Rackstraw in WIH presents one aspect of Williams' personality, and as this character is unhappy for reasons which are not fully explained, he suggests a basis in the author's experience too personal to be ^{consciously} transmuted into art.
 52. See Chapter 4 above, p.62.
 53. AHE, 'The Beetles', p.29.
 54. See Williams' essay 'The Image of the City in English Verse' and the following group of essays reprinted in Ridler, for an

exposition of 'the City' in his thinking.

55. AHE, 'The Acts of the City', p.228.

56. WB, p.208.

Chapter 9: The Problem Re-examined: a new assessment.

1. Penguin Modern Classics, 1974: detail from Paul Nash's 'Landscape from a Dream', 1936-8, in the Tate Gallery.
2. Lionel Trilling discusses the concept of pleasure in Romantic writers, and its unpopularity among modern writers, in Romanticism Reconsidered, four essays edited by Northrop Frye, 1962: 'The Fate of Pleasure; Wordsworth to Dostoevsky.'
3. The evidence for his creative thinking in the 'nineties is in the Notebooks, which only exist in manuscript, and are at present in Miss Collins' collection. There are good extracts from these in Ward.
4. See Corrin for a thorough account of the relationship of G.K.'s Weekly to the Distributists, Chs.6 and onwards.
5. 'In Defence of Baby Worship' in The Defendant, p.147, deals with a ^{on} topic/which almost any Edwardian would have been at his most sentimental. Chesterton makes a point which is both amusing and serious by maintaining a skilfully detached tone, while remaining as playful as his readers would demand.
6. The Catholic Church and Conversion, 1927, Burns Oates, is another autobiographical account which seems to me well written and genuinely revealing . It has been little noted.
7. H, 'On Mr. McCabe and a Divine Frivolity', p.232.
8. IFB was reprinted in paperback by Penguin 14 times between 1950 and 1974. The Everyman Stories, Essays and Poems by G.K.Chesterton, first issued in 1935, was repeatedly reprinted between then and 1948. Its most recent reprinting was in 1965. This is only one of 16 selections listed by CHE New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature between 1926-1970, including the following:
 - 1937 The Man Who Was Chesterton. Ed. R.T.Bond.(U.S.)
 - 1949 Selected Essays, chosen by D.Collins, Intro.E.C.Bentley.
 - 1955-6 New World Chesterton, 8 vols. New York.

- 1957 Chesterton; an anthology, selected with an introduction by D.B.Wyndham Lewis.(Selection of essays by D.Collins)
- 1963 The Man Who Was Orthodox. Uncollected writings selected by A.L.Maycock.
- 1970 Chesterton: a selection from the non-fictional prose, selected by W.H.Auden.
9. G.K.'s Weekly was poor in its administration, especially in its early years before it was locked into the Distributist organization. Chesterton himself wrote far more of it than was advisable. There were perpetual financial problems. The Distributists themselves differed, sometimes to the point of quarrelling, and while Chesterton was constantly acting as peace-maker, he lacked the ~~firm~~^{skilful} executive discipline which keeps a lively team happy. The strengths of the paper were its distinguished contributors, mostly inherited from New Witness days, and its independence from outside control. Its readership was small, but discriminating. See Corrin.
10. Byron - TT, 'The Optimism of Byron'.
Monks - TT, 'Francis'.
Original Sin - RB, Ch.1, 'Browning in Early Life', p.21.
11. O, Ch.3, 'The Suicide of Thought', p.55.
12. O, Ch. 6, 'The Paradoxes of Christianity', p.152.
13. H, 'Mr. McCabe and a Divine Frivolity', p.233.
14. For instance, after a sequence of jolly, colourful phrases on Kingsley (VAL, Ch.1 'The Victorian Compromise', p.72) comes one sentence which compels the reader to stop and try to verify its accuracy from his own memory: '..'When all the world is Young, Lad,' which comes very near to being the only true defence of marriage in the controversies of the nineteenth century.'
- Another example is in O, Ch.4, 'The Ethics of Elfland':
Chesterton is arguing that 'noble and healthy principles' come from fairy-tales for small children. But the Principles that he

identifies are profound and, again, the reader must stop to think.

In T, 'The Protestant Superstitions', p.158, Chesterton lightly but effectively hoists Dean Inge with his own petard. Inge had deplored Cardinal Newman's veneration of holy water as superstition.

But I cannot for the life of me understand why the Dean, or anybody else, does not see that the Incarnation is as much a part of that idea as the Mass...why a man should accept a Creator who was a Carpenter, and then worry over holy water.. that is a thing I do not understand; I never could understand; I have come to the conclusion that I never shall understand. I can only attribute it to superstition.'

15. O, Ch.6, 'Paradoxes of Christianity', p.147.
16. H, 'On Sandals and Simplicity', p.141.
17. See the Foreword to Auden.
18. Conlon quotes The Church Times posthumous review of A by Sidney Dark, 6.11.36: 'Chesterton had to preen, and he had to create an atmosphere in which he could preen'; Dark is implying a self-satisfaction in Chesterton which was profoundly indifferent to other people's opinions; an unpleasant remark, but it may have held an element of truth. Ward gives the comment of a debating opponent (p.498) that Chesterton showed a 'certain intellectual recklessness that made him indifferent to truth and reality... subconsciously- he was a thorough-going sceptic...' I think both these remarks distort, but they shed a light on Chesterton's strategy which should not be completely ignored. He appears as a clever, self-aware man, not a helpless bumbler.
19. Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media, title to Ch.1, p.15, 1974
Abacus ed.
20. A, p.340., 'The God with the Golden Key'.

