New Insights into Literature and Catholicism in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Edited by Paul Rowan and David Torevell

New Insights into Literature and Catholicism in the 19th and 20th Centuries

New Insights into Literature and Catholicism in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Edited by

Paul Rowan and David Torevell

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

New Insights into Literature and Catholicism in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Edited by Paul Rowan and David Torevell

This book first published 2021

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-7527-6
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-7527-1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors and contributors involved in this book have a passion for great literature which deals imaginatively, originally and subtly with religious and metaphysical ideas and practices. The focus of the text is on Catholic Christianity and how this finds imaginative expression in memorable and acclaimed 19th and 20th century works. It follows on from an earlier publication on the same topic offering different writers to explore and new insights to ponder.

The editors are deeply grateful to all the American, Irish and British academics who have contributed to this book. We thank them for their time, efficiency, warmth and generosity of spirit as we compiled their writings during a global pandemic. We would also like to pay tribute to the following individuals who have sustained us both personally and professionally, over a number of years: Michael Ford, Michael Paul Gallagher, Stephanie Modak, Laura Rowan, Patrice Haynes, Mary Grey, Elizabeth Harris, Richard Hooper, Clive Palmer, David Phinnemore, Damian Norton, Simon Lee, Mike Thompson and Gordon Abbs.

Gratitude is also owed to our close families for their love and support. Finally, a nod of appreciation is extended to Adam Rummens and Jamie George at CSP for their professionalism and for keeping us on track and to Antonia Phinnemore for her efficient proof reading.

FOREWORD

In his 1887 publication *On the Genealogy of Morality* Nietzsche claimed that 'man's self-deprecation, his *will* to self-deprecation' has been unstoppably on the increase since Copernicus. 'Gone alas, is his faith in his dignity, uniqueness, irreplaceableness in the rank order of beings – he has become *animal*, literally, unqualifiedly and unreservedly an animal, a man who in his earlier faiths was almost God...'.[1] This death of 'man', accompanying the death, of God is one trajectory in the unfolding history of (post)modernity's thinking. It rests on a narrowly scientific and reductionist understanding of what human beings are and promotes the view that they are nothing more than reproductive units acting out of self- interest and pleasure. In turn, it is associated with a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' with regard to the motivations and aspirations of humankind. Related to this development, Harari notes that what he terms *dataism* is beginning to dominate current scientific thinking about humanity and that we should be cognisant that such dogmatism dictates that we are simply processing machines of information and 'that organisms are algorithms, and that giraffes, tomatoes, and human beings are just different methods of processing data ...'.[2]

On this reckoning we are merely artificially intelligent robots whose behaviour is driven by the algorithms we put into them, a theme Kazuo Ishiguru explores in his latest novel, *Klara and the Sun* (2021). *Au contraire,* some (post)modern thinking promotes the view that humanity is capable of reaching extraordinary Faustian heights, committing a Pelagian error that 'man is the measure of all things', a dangerous characteristic which Pope Francis has often referred to in his writings. Vatican Council II's *Gaudium et Spes* puts it like this: a person 'either sets himself up as the absolute measure of all things or debases himself to the point of despair'.[3] In this collection, Daniel Frampton's contribution exposes such distorted anthropological understandings in his examination of the fight against

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality III, 25*. ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson. Trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 115
[2] Yuval Harari, *Homo Deus* (London: Harvill Secker, 2016) 368
[3] Austin Flannery ed., Vatican Council II (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1992), 913

secular ways of thinking with reference to the writings of Roy Campbell. The essay by Michael Kirwan too, discusses the work of novelist Donna Tartt in this light. She held that 'the novel in its history and genesis is an emphatically secular art form; the product of a secular society, addressing primarily secular concerns', a stance she seeks to address. This issue is taken up in Michael Kirwan's second offering on Czesław Miłosz, a poet who wrestles with the importance of faith, since '*someone* had to do this', a position endorsed by David Torevell's examination of the contemplative poetry of the Trappist monk Thomas Merton.

Reductionist approaches to the richness of human nature and endeavour discount the imaginative capabilities of human beings and disregard their spiritual dimension. Sacks comments that '...our ability to conceptualise and imagine worlds that have not yet been, our capacity to communicate deeply with others ...'[4] constitutes what is unique about humanity. Literature influenced by Catholicism has the capacity to explore these facets of human life and is indelibly linked with beliefs about the sacred dignity of each person. Literature within a Christian paradigm invariably tells of universal experiences of joy and hope, grief and anguish and 'cherish[es] a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history' since: 'Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo' in Christians' hearts .[5] This book explores how some literature written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries addresses the search for self-understanding and meaning amidst the vicissitudes of simply being alive and rests on the belief that human life is immensely valuable, needs to be celebrated and calls out for treatment with an inalienable respect. Terry Phillips's chapter focuses on the work of the Irish poet Thomas MacGreevy, and highlights how this pursuit of meaning is never an easy one, particularly in the face of war, besides outlining the poet's developmental theodicy over his lifetime.

Nicholas Boyle is right when he writes that literature is the employment of engaging language, free of instrumental purpose, which seeks to reveal an aspect of Truth. It captures the mysterious beauty of life and has an undeniable association with Being. It is revelatory. With regard to this position, David Deavel explores how the divine presence is encountered in the ordinary and extraordinary exigencies of the everyday by discussing Alice Thomas Ellis's Booker Prize-nominated third novel *The 27th Kingdom*. Terry Phillips takes up a similar endeavour as she investigates the

[4] Jonathan Sacks, *Morality. Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2020),242
[5] (Flannery, Vatican Council II, 903)

poetic language of Thomas MacGreevy, which she claims seeks to move the listener or reader into the realm of the supernatural.

The truth communicated in literature flowing from a Catholic sensibility conveys the belief that life *matters very much.* This insight is allied to a sense of the enjoyment of creation whereby every single thing is precious – even the sparrows on the window ledge. It echoes a *Genesis* trope – 'God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good' (Gen*. 1: 31*). Literature sustains this recognition by its memorable and innovative acts of representation of those things which reflect – and are of worth to – God. Whether comic or tragic, a Catholic approach to literature always communicates the worthwhileness of living, loving and dying. Brandon Schneeberger's analysis of Coventry Patmore's *The Unknown Eros* does just this as he explores how his ode compilation is infused with the Catholic doctrine of the sacrament of marriage. He writes: 'This particular compilation serves as Patmore's highest expression of the sacramentality of married love, that marriage ultimately points the soul to its future betrothal with God'. Literary representations are able to become acts of creation or more precisely *recreation,* since they encourage those who receive them to be reformed and re-energised in a shared response towards those things which are true and life-giving. There is an attractive intensity of life embedded in this literature which readers recognise in conjunction with their own lives, primarily through their shared humanity and the relationships they form; contrariwise, there is also the wasting of it.

Before the Enlightenment religion and literature were closely interwoven. In ancient Greece a tragedy was part of the festivities for the god Dionysius. Shakespeare included biblical teachings in almost all of his plays; the title of his 'problem play' *Measure for Measure* is a verse from Christ's Sermon on the Mount in St. Matthew's gospel (Matt. *7:2*). However, after the eighteenth century as science came to dominate epistemological methods of seeking truth, the relationship was severed and as Ghesquière notes, 'Literature turned into an autonomous entity' seeking to foster wisdom, spirituality and ethics outside metaphysical frameworks. [6]

The Catholic literary revival in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries attempts to counter this split through the writing of plays, novels and poetry that reflect unashamedly religious concerns and the quest for social justice

[6] Ghesquière, Rita 'Spirituality and Literature'. In *The Routledge International Handbook of Spirituality in Society and the Professions,* eds. Laszlo Zsolnai and Bernadette Flanagan (London: Routledge, 2020), 364

fueled by Catholic principles about the dignity of the human person often against a backdrop of dehumanizing industrial capitalism and totalitarianism. As Adam Schwartz notes in his discussion of Catholic thinking on the principle of subsidiarity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

> Less noted has been a distinctly Roman Catholic subset ... which has posited orthodox Catholicism as a counterstatement to industrial capitalism and its ideological contemporaries, including the totalitarian systems of the twentieth century. This body of British Catholic social criticism emerged in the late nineteenth century and persisted through the twentieth. It reflected the spirit of subsidiarity in its distrust of concentrated power and its preference for a decentralized polity animated by traditional Christian norms. Examining the sociology of Henry Edward Cardinal Manning, the distributism originated by Hilaire Belloc and Chesterton, and the Christian corporatism of Christopher Dawson will reveal the most vivid representatives of this modern British Catholic alternative public doctrine.

One aspect of this revival attempted to do what Mark Carney in his role as the Governor of the Bank of England sought – to fix the malignant culture at the heart of financial capitalism and expose the damaging effects of the free market, which ended in a crisis in values. He wished to oversee an economy that works for all. His *Value(s): Building a Better World For All* (2021) recounts his invitation to join a group of academics, policy makers, economists, business people and charity workers in the Vatican[7] and relates how Pope Francis shared a lunch and the following parable with them:

> Our meal will be accompanied by wine. Now, wine is many things. It has a bouquet, colour and richness of taste that all complement the food. It has alcohol that can enliven the mind. Wine enriches all our senses. At the end of our feast, we will have grappa. Grappa is one thing: alcohol. Grappa is wine distilled. ... Humanity is many things – passionate, curious, rational, altruistic, creative, self-interested. ... But the market is humanity distilled. ... Your job is to turn the grappa back into wine, to turn the market back into humanity. ... This isn't theology. This is reality. This is the truth.[8]

By analogy, the chosen literary figures discussed in these pages attempt to do the same as those who act on the Pope's words – to turn the insipid taste of much of life pressed down by competitive individualism, dehumanization and oppressive market forces into a far richer offering. They question, aka Wilde's aphorism: how did our culture come to know 'the price of

[7] Mark Carney, *Value(s). Building a Better World for All* (London: William Collins, 2021), 2-4

[8] (Carney, *Value(s). Building a Better World For All*, 3)

everything and the value of nothing'?[9] Their writing tries to offer a vision of life that redirects this dismal, cultural trajectory towards something far more wholesome and meaningful. Literature with a Catholic foundation, by means of gripping narratives, memorable images and rhythms or by dramatic clashes of values, is able to lay bare prejudices and false preconceptions. It sets forth ways of seeing, creating and revealing a better world. Emerging from and promoting a Catholic sensibility it confronts the bewildering and shifting sands of time as it offers hope for now and for the future.

Joseph Pearce (2014) suggests that Catholicism, although no longer illegal as it was in Campion's and Southwell's Reformation days, is still considered 'illegitimate' and rarely referred to in public and academic discourse. We prefer to use the word 'marginalised' to describe what has happened, basing our judgement on those critics and readers who airbrush Catholicism's presence in some literary works. As Terry Eagleton claims, our present Western age regards religion, interiority and a stable self as nothing more than 'a clapped out metaphysics' while warning 'to eradicate them is to abolish God by rooting out the underground places where He has been concealing himself' .[10] More broadly, David Jasper argues that the dialogue between literature and theology must be renewed, for it introduces us to the deep traditions by which we have been formed. We forget, to our peril, the nature of theological understandings of human nature and 'the place of humanity within the span of its history and *sub specie aeternitatis*'. [11]

The creation of memorable characters is often associated with great literature and the persons encountered in the chosen texts in his book remind us of our human nature, sometimes when it reaches dizzying heights of moral and spiritual achievement, or conversely when it gives in to temptation, weakness and much in-between. Shakespeare is often regarded as the best writer of the complexities of character for he was not only skilled at representing 'imitations' of human conduct but managed to communicate with depth 'the blueprint, the language, and the responses that taught us how to be us'. [12]Literature has the potential, therefore, to draw us into issues

[9] Wilde, 1892, Act III. Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*. London: Methuen Drama. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002)
[10] Terry Eagleton, *Hope without Optimism*. (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 186-7
[11] David Jaspar, *Literature and Theology as a Grammar of Assent.* (London: Routledge, 2016), 10
[12] Marjorie Garber, *Character. The History of a Cultural Obsession.* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021), 17

about Being – who we are and how we behave. It is why Boyle when discussing the distinctiveness of Catholic influences on literature argues that it is '*our* truth' that is being told to us and 'we look each other in the eyes and know that our truth is everyone else's'.[13] This democratic range which such literature encapsulates reflects its universal dimension. Religious understandings of life set forth a humanity we all share and recognise. As Eagleton wryly insists, 'a God who concerned himself with only a particular section of the species, say Bosnians or people over five foot eight inches tall, would appear lacking in the impartial benevolence appropriate to a Supreme Being'.[14] Readers can happily agree with Coleridge's estimation of the Prince of Denmark, that 'I have a smack of Hamlet myself, if I may say so'.[15] Along with this claim goes an emphasis on the uniqueness of each person. No two characters are the same and from a Christian viewpoint this dimension reflects the creative work of God. All the chapters in this publication contribute to these dual aspects of universalism and uniqueness, pointing to an individual's common but variegated human nature.

An underlying conviction in the book is that the literature discussed here is of immense worth, not because it provides neat answers to difficult questions, but because it prompts metaphysical reflections against the backdrop of an afterlife. As in the reading of sacred scripture, a hermeneutical task confronts the contributors and the reader as they negotiate their own interpretations of the literary texts. Equally, all the essayists keep a keen eye on the Catholic identity of their named writers illustrating how they convey Catholic themes and philosophies in creative but non-proselytizing ways. The discussions of literature here are not 'authoritative' in the sense of having been endorsed by the institutional church. Rather they demonstrate how light has been cast on the inalienable sacredness of human life and endeavour in all its complexity and variety.

The Catholic anthropology emerging in these texts gives central importance to freedom from which human dignity is never separate. Unlike the causal relationships under which science and technology operate, literature celebrates human choice and free will, the 'theo-drama' of existence, as the twentieth century Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar would say. This is what makes the works so thrilling and attractive. The denial of freedom and erasure of the open-endedness of human behaviour was a

[13] Nicholas Boyle, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures. A Catholic Approach to Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 130
[14] (Eagleton, *Hope without Optimism*, 188)
[15] quoted in (Garber, *Character. The History of a Cultural Obsession*, 18)

position Spinoza, Marx and Freud held, largely as a result of their empiricist, materialist philosophy. A certain dehumanization and joylessness of life then became more prevalent. Religious understandings counter this trajectory, claiming that moral choice and free will operate as pivotal aspects of human existence. The chosen authors highlight this sense of freedom and point to those decisions which make a person who s/he is and how they become caught up in a personal and cosmic drama where actions have inevitable moral consequences. Each person is faced with moral options in a world where the potential for totalitarianism and oppression can be unleashed at the click of a button, a world in which a value-neutral market rewards those who pay and where politics often fails to address the existential crises of the day. Michael Kirwan is all too aware of how Czesław Miłosz lived through the 'dark times' of National Socialism, Communist inhumanity and Stalinism, when such ideologies trampled unflinchingly on the deep spiritual currents which flow through the human heart of each person. Literature firmly rooted in a Catholic worldview offers an attack on this life-denying scenario.

Some of the writers discussed in this book were 'cradle' Catholics, others were converts. Certainly, autobiography features strongly in the portraits given, for many of the figures discussed drew deeply from their own spiritual experiences, which fueled their literary imaginations. Evans comments that what makes autobiography so appealing is the 'chance it offers to see how this man or that woman … has negotiated the problem of self-awareness and has broken the internalised code a culture supplies about how life should be experienced'[16]; it also gives readers an opportunity to stabilise the uncertainties of their own existence. These insights can be extended to those who write from their own personal Catholic sensibility and imagination. Daniel Frampton's piece focuses particularly on one Catholic convert Roy Campbell and demonstrates how his writings exhibited the paradox of the supernatural/otherworldly co-existing with the mundane/ordinary. Indeed, all the essayists reflect this dramatic and dynamic interplay of the temporal and the eternal. This sacramental emphasis pervades the entire book and records how the gift of life encourages glimpses into the sacral in each encounter, teaching us truths about ourselves, others and the world we inhabit. Paul Rowan writes in his summary of G.K. Chesterton's thinking and work:

[16] Mary Evans, 'The imagined self: The impossibility of auto/biography', In *Autobiography. Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Trev Lynn Broughton London: Routledge, 2007), 17

> This love of the dramatic and the creative, the ability to see the world as a vivid image, the power of imagination, and the sheer inability to see the ordinary and the everyday as anything other than extraordinary, never left Chesterton. It was the beginning of the Catholic sense that creation is sacramental – always pointing to something or someone beyond, or behind, or underneath itself. The humdrum everyday was for Chesterton a theatre, an arena in which the encounter with God takes place in an infinite and wonderful variety of ways. The ordinary and the everyday is what is later referred to in *Orthodoxy* as Elfland, the place of magical fairy tales. For Chesterton this cosmos is the magical gift given to us all and, therefore, exploration of this gift offers any number of entry points at which we can join the pathway to the Giver of the gift, God.

All the literary works discussed here act as mirrors to reflect the complexity and beauty of the human condition and contribute in vivid and memorable ways to what seeing the world through a Catholic lens might actually mean. Aristotle claims that through *mimesis* literature offers glimpses of reality and truth, producing not only pleasure but also learning. Auerbach's illuminating work *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (2003) traces this dominant trajectory, but he omits the important spiritual and religious dimension in his discussion. However, great twentieth century novelists like James Joyce and Iris Murdoch – and all the literary figures written about in these pages – know that literature benefits from conveying an 'epiphany' (using Joyce's religious word) or revelation about life which might be hidden due to the cultural conditioning of the times. It is what T.S. Eliot (1986) referred to as a 'deeper' or 'unnamed' reality which tends to escape people's perceptions. As Ghesquière points out, literature allied to spiritual insight 'puts the searchlights on this hidden reality: the unanswered questions, the mystery, the tragedy as an essential part of human existence'.[17] Ingarden (1973) extends this notion by arguing that the skill of the novelist is to invite the reader to contemplate in a calm manner human living. Thomas Merton certainly wished to evoke a contemplative experience through his use of language, sound and rhythm – in his case associated with the apophatic weight of silence *between the words* so that readers might share that experience too. The gaps and the 'unsaid' promote this evocation, offering the felt presence of an impalpable reality. As David Torevell notes, Merton loved to find spaces of silence within his monastery walls and records in *The Sign of Jonas* that his 'chief joy is to escape to the attic of the garden house and the little broken window that looks out over the valley. There in the silence I love the green grass. The tortured gestures of the apple trees have become part of my prayer. …

[17] (Ghesquière, '*Spirituality and Literature'*, 364)

listen to the sweet songs of all the living things that are in our words and fields'.[18] His poems offer parallel experiences. Michael Kirwan re-emphasises this point in his examination of Czesław Miłosz's poetry which aims to 'raid the inarticulate' in a way no other genre can.

Our hope as editors and contributors is that you will enjoy and be enlivened by the rich and uplifting Catholic vision of life portrayed in some of the great literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries discussed in these pages.

[18] Thomas Merton, *The Sign Of Jonas* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1953), 47

SMALL IS BRITISH: SUBSIDIARITY AND MODERN BRITISH CATHOLIC SOCIAL CRITICS

ADAM SCHWARTZ

Discussing the growth of industrialism in Britain, G. K. Chesterton once commented that 'every great Englishman with the gift of expression whom the world recognizes as specially English, and as speaking for many Englishmen, was either in unconscious contradiction to that trend or (more often) in furious revolt against it.' Several scholars have shown the essential validity of Chesterton's insight by elucidating a steady undercurrent in British thought premised on censure of modern industrial society, one that has run through the work of thinkers as diverse as the Romantic poets, Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, William Morris, G. D. H. Cole, C. S. Lewis, E. P. Thompson, and eco-activists.[1] Less noted has been a distinctly Roman Catholic subset of this heritage, which has posited orthodox Catholicism as a counterstatement to industrial capitalism and its ideological contemporaries, including the totalitarian systems of the twentieth century. This body of British Catholic social criticism emerged in the late nineteenth century and persisted through the twentieth. It reflected the spirit of subsidiarity in its distrust of concentrated power and its preference for a decentralized polity animated by traditional Christian norms.[2] Examining the sociology of Henry Edward Cardinal Manning, the distributism originated by Hilaire Belloc and Chesterton, and the Christian corporatism of Christopher Dawson will reveal the most vivid representatives of this modern British Catholic alternative public doctrine.

---

[1] See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983); Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (Cambridge: UP, 1981); Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain* (Cambridge: UP, 1994).

[2] David Martin defines subsidiarity cogently as 'a rich concept involving mutual aid…[and] devolution downwards to the lowest viable level of governance.' ("Some academic distinctions," *TLS*, 24 & 31 December 2004, 29.)

Manning (1807-1892) had a lifelong antipathy to liberal capitalism, and, after his elevation to Archbishop of Westminster in 1865, he was the first British Catholic prelate to take a sustained interest in 'the social question'. He postulated several pathbreaking principles. Styling himself a 'Mosaic Radical', Manning sought to translate the imperatives of biblical justice into the idiom of the machine age. One of his central avowals subverted laissez-faire doctrine by arguing that labour is a form of property, and hence deserves the rights and protections that the Church had traditionally recognized in private property. Calling labour 'Live Capital', Manning avouched that 'labour and skill are capital as much as gold and silver'[3] because 'there is no personal property so strictly one's own' as one's labour power: 'It is altogether and entirely personal. The strength and skill that are in a man are as much his own as his life-blood.'[4] Manning thus reasoned that workers should have broad (though not unlimited) freedom to dispose of this intimate property as they see fit. Not only may a man not be compelled to work, but he also must be able to combine with fellow labourers in unions to safeguard their shared natural property and withhold it from unjust employers through strikes. Moreover, Manning demanded that the state secure these rights of labour as vigorously as it did any other type of property. In short, because 'the principle of free trade is not applicable to everything', Manning felt, labour as 'true property' has a 'primary right to freedom, a right to protect itself, and a claim upon the law of the land to protect it.'[5]

From this central premise, Manning adduced additional conclusions. Again challenging liberal notions of labour, he maintained that labour is 'a social function and not a commodity'. [6] Its value, as expressed in wages, should therefore be determined not by market dynamics but by the significance of its purpose in serving the common good. Furthermore, Manning held that any socio-economic regime must be judged principally by its effect on the traditional family. In his outlook, 'the domestic life of the people [is] vital above all…sacred, far beyond anything that can be sold in the market', and thus any system that erodes this primal institution fails an elementary test of justice.[7] Manning found his era's industrial capitalism to be so flawed, as it 'put labour and wages first, and human or

[3] Manning quoted in Jay Corrin, *Catholic Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democracy* (Notre Dame: UP, 2002), 50, 53.
[4] Manning quoted in V. Alan McClelland, "Manning's Work for Social Justice," *The Chesterton Review* 18 (November 1992): 531.
[5] Henry Edward Manning, 'The Dignity and Rights of Labour' (1874); reprinted in *The Chesterton Review* 18 (November 1992): 626, 628.
[6] Manning quoted in Corrin, *Democracy*, 57
[7] Manning, 'Dignity and Rights of Labour', 626

domestic life second', thereby inverting the divine and natural order and degrading society's core unit.[8] He hence enjoined Britons to instead 'put labour and the profits of labour second – the moral state and the domestic life of the whole working population first'.[9] To that end, he endorsed a host of legislative measures, such as a living wage, limits on working hours for men, and restrictions on female and child labour.

Manning's convictions were seconded by many of his successors and became integral elements of modern Catholic social teaching. Yet, as Dermot Quinn notes, strict subsidiarists might be disturbed by his frequent calls for state intervention in economic life.[10] Much of Manning's oeuvre, however, demonstrates an overall acceptance of the principle of subsidiarity. Defending the right to unionize, for instance, he argued in 1874 that 'what a man can do for himself, the State shall not do for him';[11] promoting another proposed act in 1886, he stressed that 'the efforts of individuals and of societies are unequal to this task, and I *therefore* hold that the State should aid the aims' of its sponsors.[12] He also opposed compulsory state education on subsidiarist grounds, claiming that the government was usurping the rights of parents and churches to train children.[13] More generally, Manning charged that the 'worst danger in politics' is 'exaggerated centralization',[14] and concluded in 1873 that 'the natural antagonist of Caesarism is the Christian Church'.[15] Manning harmonized these latter two beliefs ultimately, contending that in his day the common people had remained more faithful to Christianity than the social elite had and therefore that a decentralized democracy was more likely to yield policies shaped by orthodoxy and hence hostile to despotism. To him, 'the tendency of political society is everywhere to the people. Of this we have no fear," for "the instincts of the masses are Christian'.[16]

---

[8] Manning quoted in Dermot Quinn, 'Manning, Chesterton, and Social Catholicism', *The Chesterton Review* 18 (November 1992): 508.
[9] Manning, "Dignity and Rights of Labour," 627
[10] Quinn, ''Social Catholicism', 509-11
[11] Manning quoted in Corrin, *Democracy*, 50.
[12] Manning quoted in McClelland, 'Social Justice', 533. Emphasis added.
[13] Jeffrey Paul von Arx, 'Catholics and Politics', in *From Without the Flaminian Gate*, ed. V. A. McClelland and M. Hodgetts (London: Darnton, Longman & Todd, 1999), 256-57.
[14] Manning quoted in Corrin, *Democracy*, 52.
[15] Manning quoted in V. A. McClelland, 'The Formative Years, 1850-92', in *Flaminian*, 10.
[16] Manning quoted in von Arx, 'Politics', 255.

As clear as this record is in retrospect, Quinn is nevertheless correct to see ambiguities in Manning's worldview, for he was not as rigorous a thinker as some subsequent Catholic social critics. But while his immediate descendants, Belloc and Chesterton, clarified and elaborated Manning's ideas, they acknowledged a debt to him.[17] From general Catholic countermodern notions the three men shared, Belloc and Chesterton fashioned the more precise and comprehensive plan of socio-political reformation known as distributism. Even sober scholars have usually dismissed this politique.[18] Recently, however, it has garnered greater respect, as in Jay Corrin's 2002 judgment that, in the early twentieth century, distributism was 'the single most influential Catholic socio-political movement in the English-speaking world'. In addition, critics have discerned increasingly an affinity between distributism and subsidiarity, epitomized by Joseph Pearce's declaration that 'what Chesterton calls "distributism" the Catholic Church calls "subsidiarity."'[19]

In brief, the distributist desideratum was a decentralized polity and the widespread, small-scale ownership of productive property by individuals and free families. Belloc argued (most famously in *The Servile State* [1912]) that societies based on traditional Catholicism had come closest to realizing this ideal, and that contemporary Britain must consequently recover that religious foundation if it was to secure the broad ownership of property and the liberty he thought was safeguarded by proprietorship. To him, solely in a 'universal Catholic society' could there emerge 'from the very sanctity in which it held property, a society in which the mass of citizens would own property'.[20] The alternative to such a Catholic commonweal, Belloc warned, was a new form of slavery in which the property-less proletariat would be compelled to work for the propertied elite, albeit in circumstances of greater economic stability and security than obtained under laissez-faire capitalism. He worried that early-twentieth-century Britain was approaching this servile condition quickly; he hence felt the state had a licit role to play in fostering the restoration of property through policies, like favourable tax and interest rates for smallholders, which reversed what he considered the predominant legal bias toward concentrated ownership. But he insisted that these steps would be insufficient without a fundamental ethical and religious *metanoia*:

[17] Race Matthews, 'The Seedbed', *The Chesterton Review* 38 (Spring & Summer 2012): 97-124

[18] See, e.g., Edward Norman, *Roman Catholicism in England* (Oxford: UP, 1985), 120.

[19] Corrin, *Democracy*, 155; and Joseph Pearce, *C. S. Lewis and the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 80

[20] Hilaire Belloc, *Times*, 22 September 1909, 8c.

'religion is the formative element in any human society…The conversion of society cannot be a rapid process…But it is the right process….Begin by swinging society round into the Catholic course, and you will transmute Industrial Capitalism into something other…But you must begin at the beginning.' Although it is unclear to what extent his views were molded directly by Catholic social teaching, Belloc recognized a kinship in his vision and the Church's, commending *Rerum Novarum* as 'a document of great force'.[21]

Chesterton provided an even richer articulation of distributist convictions. He used the doctrine of original sin to condemn liberal capitalism's first principles, especially in *Orthodoxy* (1908). He posited that theorists like Adam Smith presupposed people to be naturally sympathetic, and thus inclined to use their talents for the common good. The best path to public prosperity, then, was to eliminate restraints on private action, as all self-interest is enlightened; *amour de soi* does not decay into *amour propre*. Chesterton felt orthodox Christianity contravened this mindset at its anthropological core. If people are naturally subject to cupidity, capitalism is one great contradiction, for it holds that public virtue arises from private vice: 'God would overrule everything for good, if only men could succeed in being sufficiently bad'.[22] Far from producing general affluence, Chesterton admonished, removing restrictions on self-seeking persons would unleash a ruthless struggle for limited resources, ending with power concentrated in monopolies that exploit the poor's cheap labour to maximize their owners' wealth; *amour propre* will out if left unchecked. In sum, 'the whole case for Christianity is that a man who is dependent upon the luxuries of this life is a corrupt man, spiritually corrupt, politically corrupt, financially corrupt…to be rich is to be in peculiar danger of moral wreck'.[23] Chesterton found socialism to be similarly grounded in a naive, chiliastic anthropology, one that ultimately drowns ideas of personal property and liberty 'in a sea of impersonal materialism and fatalism'.[24] The doctrine of original sin also gave theological substantiation to Chesterton's lifelong preference for smallness. He sensed that the more power was centralized in large units, the more corrupt its wielders grew, as the innate tendency to selfishness is exacerbated by the tainting effects of acquisition. He thus deduced that small is not just beautiful, but necessary, for men can be trusted with only limited power

[21] Hilaire Belloc, *Essays of a Catholic* (1931; reprint, Rockford: Tan, 1992), 225-27.
[22] G. K. Chesterton, *The Common Man* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1950), 8
[23] G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (1908; reprint, New York: Image, 1959), 118
[24] G. K. Chesterton, *Illustrated London News*, 24 February 1923

over nature and their fellows. These perceptions are the metaphysical and theological underpinnings of distributism.

In *What's Wrong With the World* (1910), Chesterton's distributism showed additional affinities with orthodox Catholicism, especially in its emphasis on the family. Indeed, he asserted that his initial motive in forging an alternative to industrial capitalism and socialism was a desire to 're-establish the family, freed from the filthy cynicism and cruelty of the commercial epoch'. He held that capitalism threatened the family mortally by displacing male workers from the home, encouraging female wage-labour, and setting up the employer and state as rival authorities to parents; he feared socialism would further centralize power and diminish the autonomy of spouses and parents by blurring the lines between public and private affairs even more than capitalism had.[25]

Chesterton thus felt that families must gain independence from oligopolies and the state. He hence advocated redistributing wealth (rather than income) by breaking up concentrations of assets, so as to allow each family to own enough productive property to be free both of the need to sell its members' labour power, and of state-supported sustenance with what he deemed its concomitant controls. Chesterton recognized this idea's radical implications:

> The thing to be done is nothing more nor less than the distribution of the great fortunes and the great estates. We can now only avoid Socialism by a change as vast as Socialism. If we are to save property, we must distribute property, almost as sternly and sweepingly as did the French Revolution. If we are to preserve the family we must revolutionize the nation.[26]

He nevertheless believed that only such a social transformation would relieve many of the burdens that the poor especially bore under industrialism. Becoming self-sufficient economically would in turn make

[25] *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 4, *What's Wrong With the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 149. See also Ibid., 209, 224; and *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 3, *The Well and the Shallows* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 443

[26] Chesterton, *What's Wrong*, 213. In keeping with his commitment to the sanctity of private property, though, Chesterton explicitly rejected coercive confiscations as the proper means to this end, proposing instead gradual buyouts of large landlords (Ibid., 224). *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 4, *What's Wrong With the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 149. See also Ibid., 209, 224; and *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 3, *The Well and the Shallows* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 443

the common people self-governing politically, enabling them to conserve their traditions and to train their children in them.

Chesterton reiterated these contentions for the rest of his career. They animated *G.K.'s Weekly* (founded 1925) and the Distributist League (founded 1926), the formation of which goaded him to delineate the distributist programme in greater theoretical depth in *The Outline of Sanity* (1926). Chesterton suggests in that volume that distributism is 'natural', asserting that whereas monopolist and socialist ideals have never been (and perhaps never can be) realized, his own has occurred repeatedly: 'There cannot be a nation of millionaires, and there has never yet been a nation of Utopian comrades; but there have been any number of nations of tolerably contented peasants'. He argues additionally that this peasant ideal is 'the motive and the goal' of distributism because a peasant keeps 'a sort of balance in his life like the balance of sanity in the soul'. Chesterton observes that because peasants produce primarily for personal use rather than for market exchange, each individual perforce participates in creating and consuming a wide range of goods, and that such a commonwealth also eschews the relentless pursuit of wealth and emphasis on innovation that he felt characterized industrialism in both its capitalist and socialist forms. While the division of labour and growth will have their place in a distributist economy, Chesterton thinks, its guiding norms will be integration and autarky.[27] The distributist state is not an acquisitive society.

Yet, further accenting the idea of balance, Chesterton deemed it 'absurd' that a distributist or peasant state be one in which all people are distributists or peasants.[28] Rather, such designations mean that this sort of society 'had the general character of a peasant state; that the land was largely held in that fashion and the law generally directed in that spirit; that any other institutions stood up as recognizable exceptions'.[29] Distributism is the framework for community goals and policies, but room is allowed for non-distributist components; Chesterton considered this diversity the key to social sanity. For him, a distributist society preserves the equilibrium between its various facets instead of trying to homogenize them, as he thought capitalist and socialist orders do.[30] Because it

[27] *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 5, *The Outline of Sanity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 192, 98, 166, 170, 61, 134-40.
[28] 'Do We Agree?' *G. K.'s Weekly*, 5 November 1927.
[29] Chesterton, *Outline of Sanity*, 80-81.
[30] Chesterton, *Outline of Sanity*, 53; *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 21, *Sidelights on New London and Newer York* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press,

accommodates life's complexity, it can use safely things like technology that more rigid regimes have abused: a 'Distributive State in being, with all its balance of different things' would be 'a sane society that could balance property and control machinery'.[31]

Chesterton envisioned that the balanced mixture marking this state would be true too of its religious inspiration. He had converted to Roman Catholicism in 1922 and he avowed in 1926 that 'there is a doctrine behind the whole of our political position'; yet he acknowledged that 'it is not necessarily the doctrine of the religious authority which I myself receive'.[32] If non-Catholics were welcome in a distributist polity, though, Chesterton nonetheless saw Roman Catholicism as the sole intellectual system faithful enough to Being's variety to sustain a social mythos permitting that multiplicity: 'the first Distributists in the modern English group if not necessarily Catholics, were men with that sort of common sense which is actually produced by the complexity of Catholicism'.[33] Moreover, he maintained that 'the Catholic Church differed from all this new mentality' behind industrialism because the Church averred that 'ordinary men were clothed with powers and privileges and a kind of authority'. Distributism was this norm's current incarnation to him, for 'we alone, perhaps, are likely to insist in the full sense that the average respectable citizen ought to have something to rule'.[34] He therefore considered Roman Catholicism the solitary worldview that could substantiate distributism's ethos collectively, even if particular people could discover its tenets independently: 'most of the corporate traditional support in any tug of war for Distributism will be Catholic. No other *body* tends to it: though individuals so tend'.[35]

In Chesterton's mind, then, non-Catholic roads to the distributist state would complement Catholic ones, thereby shaping a religious network mirroring the diverse interaction of peasant and non-peasant elements. Catholicism would set the society's tone, but non-Catholic approaches would be embraced so long as they affirmed distributism's first principles of decentralization and proprietorship. In fact, Chesterton first met

1990), 482; and G. K. Chesterton, 'The Distributist', *The Commonweal* 12 (8 October 1930): 569.

[31] Chesterton, *Outline of Sanity*, 92-93.

[32] Chesterton, *Outline of Sanity*, 207.

[33] Chesterton, 'The Distributist', 569.

[34] Chesterton, *Outline of Sanity*, 207-9.

[35] Chesterton to Gregory Macdonald, 3 July 1933, G. K. Chesterton Archives, Manuscripts Department, The British Library. Emphasis in original.

distributist-style ideas among early 1900s Anglican Christian Socialists,[36] and he recounted that he 'took no notice at the time' when *Rerum Novarum* was issued, even as he was conceiving cognate concepts contemporaneously.[37] However, by 1931 *G.K.'s Weekly* was editorializing that *Rerum Novarum* 'presents so clear an outline of that social philosophy we call Distributism' that 'Distributists of any creed' would profit from reading 'a book so bound up with their aims'.[38] While never establishing a strict identity between distributism and Roman Catholicism, then, Chesterton did come to claim that Catholicism was the best corporate religious basis for distributism and that a distributist society should hence be governed by a Roman Catholic spirit.

The intellectual cousinage of distributism and Catholic social teaching extended to a subsidiarist suspicion of early-twentieth-century interventionist ideologies. Although Belloc and Chesterton admitted that the law could and should regulate some aspects of social and economic life, their regard for autonomy made them wary (as Manning was) of measures like compulsory state education. They were also leading adversaries of their era's incipient welfare state, particularly the 1911 National Insurance Act, which both men regarded as a pivotal turn on the path to the servile state.[39] Besides reproving this 'New Liberalism', each literatus recognized presciently the emergence of totalitarianism, a regime that Belloc called 'more absolute than any Pagan state of the past ever was…because it claims unquestioned authority in all things', an arrogation that means 'the Catholic Church must inevitably come into conflict' with it.[40]

Chesterton fused these concerns. He finally deemed distributism the lone sentinel of liberty in his day and saw all other modern political systems as potentially or actually totalitarian. As 'all the strong as well as the weak voices of our time are for the moment, in no unnatural despair, crying out only for Order', he judged in 1933, distributists must uphold 'those real rights of the real family and the real individual; which every sweeping

---

[36] Sheridan Gilley, 'Chesterton's Politics', *The Chesterton Review* 21 (February & May 1995): 36; and Corrin, *Democracy*, 88-92, 411, n. 37

[37] *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 3, *The Catholic Church and Conversion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 114

[38] 'Forty Years On', *G.K.'s Weekly*, 23 May 1931, 161

[39] See, e.g., Belloc, *Essays of a Catholic*, 57, 177, 179; Chesterton, *What's Wrong*, 153-99; Robert Speaight, *The Life of Hilaire Belloc* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1957), 314; Chesterton to A. G. Gardiner, n.d., 1911, Gardiner Papers 1/6 A, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics.

[40] Belloc, *Essays of a Catholic*, 56-57

social reform of every type and color and excuse, is now only too likely to disregard…let us stand up under the derision of the whole earth and demand to be free'.[41] Yet, feeling that 'the idea of liberty has ultimately a religious root', Chesterton concluded in 1935 that a totalitarian order could be averted in Britain only if orthodox Roman Catholicism stayed vital against secularist pressures: 'Catholicism created English liberty; the freedom has remained exactly in so far as the faith has remained; and where it is true that all our Faith has gone, all our freedom is going'.[42] Tom Buchanan thus claims correctly that distributism 'did much' to make opposition to statism 'the most distinctive feature of social Catholic thought' in early-twentieth-century Britain.[43]

Since distributism emphasized freedom, it is unsurprising that it was not a monolithic movement. Distributists battled, often bitterly, about a wide range of issues, and these fissures vitiated the cause as an active force in British politics, especially after Chesterton's 1936 death.[44] But distributism's bedrock tenets were echoed throughout the century by most members of the Catholic literary revival, most prominently E. F. Schumacher, whose best-selling *Small is Beautiful* (1973) grew from an essay originally entitled 'Chestertonian Economics'.[45] A less famous, yet equally trenchant, exponent and expander of distributist-type ideas was Christopher Dawson. Dawson frequently used the phrase 'servile state', wrote for *G.K.'s Weekly*, and restated the substance of the distributist critique of industrialism, as when he proclaimed in 1931 that 'the spirit of modern capitalist industrialism is profoundly alien from that of Catholicism'.[46] More particularly, Dawson upbraided 'the new economic

---

[41] G. K. Chesterton, 'Remember Liberty', *G.K.'s Weekly*, 1 June 1933.

[42] G. K. Chesterton, *A Miscellany of Men* (London: Methuen, 1912), 51; and Chesterton, *The Listener*, 19 June 1935.

[43] Tom Buchanan, 'Great Britain', in *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918-1965*, ed. Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 259.

[44] See, e.g., Dermot Quinn, 'The Historical Foundations of Modern Distributism', *The Chesterton Review* 21 (November 1995): 451-71; Michael Thorn, 'Towards a History and Interpretation of the Distributist League', *The Chesterton Review* 23 (August 1997): 305-27; Corrin, *Democracy*, passim.

[45] Aidan Mackey, 'The Wisdom of G. K. Chesterton', *The Canadian C. S. Lewis Journal*, no. 90 (Fall 1996): 39. For other like-minded figures, see Veldman, *Fantasy*; Joseph Pearce, *Literary Converts* (London: HarperCollins, 1999); and Adam Schwartz, 'Swords of Honor: The Revival of Orthodox Christianity in Twentieth-Century Britain', *Logos* 4 (Winter 2001): 11-33.

[46] Christopher Dawson, Introduction to *The Necessity of Politics*, by Carl Schmitt (London: Sheed & Ward, 1931), 24

Dawson also saluted the 'social leadership' of Manning (English Catholicism and Victorian Liberalism, *The Tablet*, 1950; reprinted in *The Dawson Newsletter*,

order which now threatens to destroy the family.'[47] He echoed Chesterton in claiming that this 'new urban-industrial civilization' focused on group-work in mines and factories, leading to 'the disintegration of the family into a number of independent wage earners and the degeneration of the home into a workers' dormitory'.[48] Dawson lamented that under these conditions the family 'ceases to be the bearer of social traditions and the tradition of culture is also lost or degraded',[49] a development he deemed 'the most important' social change wrought by industrialism.[50] Dawson also seconded Chesterton's suspicion of the socialist remedy for industrial ills, regarding it instead as a variant strain of the same materialist malady: 'socialism and industrial capitalism both share the same economic fallacy and the same urbanist and mechanical ideals: both alike lead to the disintegration of the social organism'.[51] He thus prescribed 'an extension of the rights of property to every citizen', which he found 'inconsistent with the individualistic society in which a small number of very rich men control the lives of the great masses of their fellow citizens; but it is also inconsistent with the communist society in which the economic life of the individual is even more completely controlled by the machinery of an all-powerful state'.[52]

Dawson further aped Belloc and Chesterton in foreseeing totalitarianism, but he analyzed it more acutely and thoroughly than any of his Christian predecessors or peers did. Dawson maintained that, unlike past dictatorships, totalitarianism demanded power not only over men's behaviour but over their thoughts and feelings as well. He thus deduced that this new type of tyranny had only become possible with the modern advent of methods for measuring and controlling public opinion and of psychological procedures for mass-conditioning the emotions. He concluded that this marriage of psychological discoveries and invasive technology allowed regimes the hitherto unknown opportunity to forge a normative political teleology, and to make its presence in the polity pervasive. Dawson postulated that such efforts to create 'an artificially

---

Fall 1993: 8), casting him as the principal galvanizing Catholic voice on his age's public questions ('Christianity and Modern Civilization' [1958], Dawson Manuscripts, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN).

[47] Christopher Dawson, *Christianity and Sex* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1930), 25

[48] Christopher Dawson, 'The World Crisis and the English Tradition', in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), 219

[49] Christopher Dawson, *Tradition and Inheritance* (1949; reprint, St. Paul: Wanderer Press, 1970), 8

[50] Dawson, *Christianity and Sex*, 7

[51] Dawson, 'World Crisis',223

[52] Christopher Dawson, *The Modern Dilemma* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932), 57-58 See also Dawson, *Dynamics*, 196-99

conditioned collective consciousness as the sole driving force of the social organism'[53] bred "a new principle of political authority.…It demands complete obedience and unlimited devotion from its members'.[54] He feared that this unmatched pursuit of undivided dominance over their citizens would prompt totalitarians to not merely persecute Christianity, for which there was ample precedent, but, uniquely, to attempt to extirpate it and the Western culture he thought it had built. To Dawson, then, traditional absolutism and modern totalitarianism were as dissimilar as gunpowder and the atomic bomb.[55]

Dawson felt that industrialism had fuelled totalitarianism's rise. For him, 'perhaps the most important factor' in facilitating the state's increased control over individuals was its enlarged economic remit, which he ascribed in part to the requirements of a 'highly organized industrial society'.[56] He therefore dreaded that this new despotism would exacerbate its precursor's cardinal sin, as allying industrialism's socio-economic peril to the family with growing state power would create 'one vast unit which controls the whole life of the individual citizen from the cradle to the grave'[57]; his age's 'chief problem' was thus the preservation of the 'minimum of social autonomy' needed for the family's survival in a collectivist culture.[58] Dawson apprehended that the family's possible fate was only the gravest index of totalitarianism's threat to all such intermediate institutions, and hence to the subsidiarist veneration of the private sphere. Dawson saw that zone of personal liberty where citizens could exercise their religious and cultural rights shrinking steadily in modern polities to the point where, ubiquitously, 'social control extends to the whole of life and consciousness'.[59]

As Chesterton did, then, Dawson regarded totalitarianism as not just a phenomenon to be noted in the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy; it was also a vital danger in Britain and the West. He asseverated that

---

[53] Christopher Dawson, 'Religious Liberty and the New Political Forces', *The Month* 183 (January 1947): 42

[54] Christopher Dawson, 'Religion and the Totalitarian State', *The Criterion* 14 (October 1934): 4

[55] Dawson, 'Religious Liberty and the New Political Forces', 42. See also Dawson, *The Judgment of the Nations* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1942), 10-11; 'Civilization in Crisis', *The Catholic World* 182 (January 1956): 248-49

[56] Dawson, 'Religion and the Totalitarian State', 2

[57] Dawson, *Christianity and Sex*, 8-9

[58] Christopher Dawson, *Medieval Essays* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1953), 75

[59] Christopher Dawson, 'Christianity and Culture', *The Dublin Review* 208 (April 1941): 147

> all modern states are totalitarian in so far as they seek to embrace the spheres of economics and culture, as well as politics in the strict sense of the word.…They have taken on responsibility for all the different forms of communal activity which were formerly left to the individual or to independent social organizations such as the churches, and they watch over the welfare of their citizens from the cradle to the grave.[60]

Like Manning and the distributists, Dawson perceived that one such duty those states usurped was education. In fact, he judged the introduction of universal compulsory education the 'most important step' in fostering totalitarianism, for it enabled secular ideologues to consolidate their expropriation of the family's and the churches' customary role:[61] with univocal state control of schooling, 'the power which the State has thus obtained over the mind of the community must inevitably bring about the triumph of a totalitarian order'.[62] Dawson's warnings about education reflected his broader disquiet with the modern state's assumption of responsibility for its citizens' well-being, one that spurred him to intensify Belloc's and Chesterton's alarm about the welfare state and thereby made him a forceful dissenter from the postwar British 'consensus' in favour of it.[63] In contrast, he asserted in 1947, only a regime rooted in Catholic social teaching could avoid the extremes of liberalism and totalitarianism. Unlike laissez-faire capitalists, he enounced, Catholics permit state intervention to protect workers' rights and to secure a well-balanced order of trade and industry; but unlike statists, they consider the rights of the government limited by countervailing individual, family, civic, and religious rights.[64]

Dawson voiced a practical vision of these Catholic convictions in his advocacy of Christian corporatism. He referred to the 'all-pervading pressure of a collectivist civilization' in his epoch that had arisen from the

---

[60] Christopher Dawson, *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 40

[61] Dawson, 'Religion and the Totalitarian State', 2

[62] Christopher Dawson, *Beyond Politics* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1939), 28

[63] See, e.g., Dawson, 'Religious Liberty and the New Political Forces', 44; 'The Outlook for Christian Culture Today', *Cross-Currents* 5 (Spring 1955): 132; 'Education and Christian Culture', *The Commonweal* 59 (4 December 1953): 220; *America and the Secularization of Modern Culture* (Houston: U of St. Thomas, 1960), 12-13; Dawson to John J. Mulloy, 30-31 December 1956; reprinted in *The Dawson Newsletter* 11 (Spring 1993): 15. Peter Coman's research suggests that such Catholics were a minority even among their co-religionists, as a majority of British Catholics seems to have given the welfare state qualified approval (*Catholics and the Welfare State* [London: Longman, 1977], 62-69).

[64] Dawson to the *Glasgow Observer*, 8 August 1947, Dawson Correspondence, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN.

effects of the industrial and totalitarian revolutions. The choice in such an age, he felt, is not between individualistic humanism and some kind of collectivism, but between 'a collectivism which is purely mechanistic and one which is spiritual'. Flowing from a core belief that religion is the basis of culture, and hence recalling his forebears' insistence that sustained social change depends on spiritual transformation, Dawson thus urged 'a return to spiritual solidarity…[and] to an organic spiritual order.'[65] To him, this 'restoration of a corporative social order' would yield 'a civilization and an economic system that shall be really Christian.'[66]

More specifically, he posited that this new society would subordinate politics and economics to a 'principle of spiritual order which is the source alike of political authority and social function'. With orthodox Roman Catholicism as its nuclear principle, Dawson contended, this polity would embody the subsidiarist stress on decentralization and the consequent protection of the private sphere.[67] Furthermore, he resembled Manning in making functionalism one of this ideal's central elements. For Dawson, 'the Catholic conception of society is not that of a machine for the production of wealth, but of a spiritual organism in which every class and every individual has its own function to fulfill and its own rights and duties in relation to the whole'.[68] In a Catholic corporatist community, then, 'a man's position will be determined by his function rather than by his possessions, and wealth will be subordinate and instrumental to work.'[69] In Dawson's mind, this emphasis on the primacy of service rendered to society in a discrete role was a particular application of Catholic social teaching: 'Catholic social philosophy maintains that a man's rights depend not on his wealth but on his social function.'[70] Indeed, he saw a corporatist civilization as the pragmatic avatar of his church's social doctrines. Dawson argued in 1942 that the corporative state owed much to Catholic social teaching; and he upheld this view even when he

[65] Christopher Dawson, 'The End of an Age', *The Criterion* 9 (April 1930): 399-400
[66] Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935), 135, 102
[67] Christopher Dawson, *Enquiries: into Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1934), 18, 56-57; and 'Civilization in Crisis', 252
[68] Dawson to the *Cambridge Review*, 17 February 1933; reprinted in *The Chesterton Review* 23 (November 1997): 530-31
[69] Dawson, *Enquiries*, 54
[70] Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, 135

later doubted his vision's practical viability, restating in 1961 that Catholic social theory is fundamentally corporative.[71]

Yet, as this last vignette suggests, Christian corporatism and distributism had little durable tangible impact on their epoch.[72] Part of this failure may be due to common, and chronic, misconceptions of this heritage of Catholic protest thought. These writers' thoroughgoing condemnations of liberal capitalism have led many critics to consider them socialists. Manning frequently faced this charge (to which he retorted tartly, 'I would call it Christianity'), and Belloc admitted in 1939 that distributism 'is vaguely regarded as Communism.'[73] As should now be evident, though, this tradition shared the subsidiarist dismay with both industrial capitalism and socialism. Agreeing with the papal encyclicals that all people have a natural right to own private property, these authors reproached monopoly capitalism because it produces too few capitalists, and deemed socialism its reductio ad absurdum because the government becomes the exclusive owner of capital. Manning held that since socialism makes the state 'the supreme and only landlord', it is contrary to 'all wisdom, justice, and experience'.[74] For his part, Belloc damned communism as 'a detestable heresy' in 1926, and declared flatly in 1931 that 'a Catholic supporting Communism is committing a mortal sin'.[75] Dawson reiterated this conflict, defining an 'irreducible opposition between Communism and Christianity,' as communism 'challenges Christianity on its own ground by offering mankind a *rival way of salvation*.'[76] The logic of these thinkers' arguments and their rhetoric, then, confirm their conformity to the Church's consistent censure of socialism.

A more complicated accusation concerns these writers' relationship to socialism's totalitarian sibling, fascism. Numerous scholars (Kevin Morris most notably) have labelled twentieth-century figures like Belloc, Chesterton, and Dawson as fascist sympathizers.[77] This indictment needs

---

[71] Dawson to Barbara Ward, 20 March 1942; and Dawson to Kevin Corrigan, 23 January 1961, Dawson Correspondence.
[72] See, e.g., Buchanan, 'Great Britain', 273
[73] Manning quoted in Corrin, *Democracy*, 51; and Belloc quoted in Speaight, *Belloc*, 483
[74] Manning quoted in Quinn, 'Social Catholicism', 510
[75] Belloc quoted in A. N. Wilson, *Hilaire Belloc* (New York: Atheneum, 1984), 296; and Belloc, *Essays of a Catholic*, 224.
[76] Dawson, 'Religion and the Totalitarian State', 7. Emphasis in original.
[77] Kevin Morris, 'Fascism and British Catholic Writers, 1924-1939,' *The Chesterton Review* 25 (February & May 1999): 21-51. A much more rounded, if still not entirely accurate, treatment of this topic is Tom Villis, *British Catholics and Fascism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

better contextualization than its prosecutors provide. In seeking a viable alternative to monopoly capitalism and socialism, several Catholic social critics pondered a modus vivendi with fascism, due to its disdain for materialism, its ostensible respect for tradition and Christianity's role in cultural life, and its putatively corporative basis. Chesterton, for example, descried in some of Hitler's (and Mussolini's) pre-war programmes 'the increasing influence of the Distributist State…he has his good policies'.[78] Dawson even went so far as to claim in 1935 that 'the Catholic social ideals set forth in the encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI have far more affinity with those of Fascism than with those of either Liberalism or Socialism'.[79]

However, in most instances, this attraction was short-lived. Belloc did praise men like Mussolini persistently as modern monarchs, who protected the poor from the rich by abrogating corrupt parliamentary democracy; but he was atypical of his peers. Chesterton, for one, was cooler towards Il Duce, despite some initial enthusiasm, and finally judged fascism antithetical to his core convictions. He deemed it as homogenizing and as enamoured of centralized, concentrated state power as either capitalism or socialism, and a worse foe of the family than both of them.[80] Moreover, he held, if fascist policies bore the mark of distributism, by promoting broader property ownership, they did so at the expense of liberty, the expansion of which he considered the purpose of wealth redistribution.[81] Additionally, Chesterton was convinced by the mid-1930s that, instead of accepting Catholicism and becoming its ally, the fascist 'wild worship of Race' was a pagan deviation from, and rejection of, the Church. He thus decided ultimately that, far from fighting modernity, fascism actually was stamped by 'heresy, license, undefined creed, unlimited claim, mutability, and all that marks Modernism', making his repudiation of it part of his own rebellion against secularist ideologies.[82]

---

[78] *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 5, *The End of the Armistice*, ed. Frank Sheed (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 567-68. See also 'Remember Liberty', op. cit.

[79] Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, 135

[80] See, e.g., G. K. Chesterton, 'Travelers' Tales', *The Listener*, 7 December 1932; 'The Human Heresies', *G.K.'s Weekly*, 9 August 1934, 360; 'Further Words on Fascism', *G. K.'s Weekly*, 5 September 1935, 416-17; and *Well and Shallows*, 442-44.

[81] Chesterton, 'Remember Liberty', op. cit.

[82] Chesterton, *End of the Armistice*, 585-86. See also *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 3, *The Thing: Why I am a Catholic* (San Francisco, 1990), 220-22; *Well and Shallows*, 510-13; 'Notes of the Week', *G.K.'s Weekly*, 13 June 1931, 211; 'First Reply to Fascism', *G.K.'s Weekly*, 29 August 1935, 401.

In Dawson's case, even in the same 1935 book where he detected similarities in fascism and the papal encyclicals, he dubbed fascism a species of 'the mechanized order of the absolute State', and deduced that the fascist thus considers the state 'its own absolute end', whereas the orthodox Catholic views it as 'the servant of a spiritual order' that transcends the political and economic spheres; Dawson thought this primary disagreement undercut the affinities between fascism and Catholic social teaching. In fact, he concluded that fascism's assertion of an all-powerful state rooted in race-worship 'goes far to neutralize the constructive tendencies in the Fascist movement'.[83] Dawson hence distinguished his corporatism explicitly from fascist corporatism, declaring that he desired a corporative community of free agents rather than a corporative rule by elite diktat.[84] If Chesterton and Dawson both felt at first that fascism was patient of baptism, their recognition of its essential hostility to their faith and its social precepts led them to regard it in the end as just another target for their countermodern protest. Their appraisal of fascism was therefore a more complex, but finally undeviating, application of their religious beliefs to temporal affairs.

If their Catholicism made these men enemies of modern ideologies, though, did it also make them champions of medievalist nostalgia, as intelligent critics like Raymond Williams, George Orwell, and Hayden White alleged?[85] Chesterton acknowledged that distributists drew on medieval organizations like guilds in crafting their counterweight to current socio-economic models. But he emphasized that he was concerned chiefly with certain tenets of a social philosophy that he thought happened to have been lived out in the medieval era, but that he found timeless and thus replicable in the modern epoch:

> what a reasonable man believes in is not this or that *period*, with all its ideas, good or bad, but in certain ideas that may happen to have been present in one period and relatively absent from another period…he thinks

[83] Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, 140, 136, 139.
[84] Dawson to Dr. Mayer, 25 December 1939, Dawson Correspondence. Dawson's critics, however, do not always attend to such discriminations (E.g., Morris, 'Fascism', 24, 29).
[85] Williams, *Culture and Society*, 185; *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 4: 97; Hayden White, 'Religion, Culture, and Western Civilization in Christopher Dawson's Idea of History', *English Miscellany* 9 (1958): 247-87.

> in terms of thought…the Guild method is no more medieval than it is modern, in so far as it is a principle apart from time.[86]

To Chesterton, these principles' universality arose from their theological grounding. He opined that genuine medievalism 'has behind it not merely artistic but historical and ethical enthusiasm; an enthusiasm for the Catholic creed which made medieval civilization'.[87] This true creed can hence translate permanently valid ideas into any age's particular idiom without violating their integrity or that of their various settings: 'Catholic doctrine [is] as modern as it is medieval'.[88] Chesterton's focus, then, was on restoring norms that he believed (however rightly) had been realized most fully in medieval times, but which transcended that season, rather than, as his detractors often charged, on reviving hidebound institutions peculiar to a specific historical moment: in Chesterton's mind, 'medieval history is useless unless it is modern history'.[89]

Similarly, the Middle Ages helped enkindle Dawson's Christian corporatism, as he judged them the best exemplar of a period in which social status and function were inextricable. He nonetheless cautioned that 'we cannot of course regard medieval civilization as the model of what a Christian civilization should be – as an ideal to which modern society should conform itself'.[90] Instead of wanting to reinstate medieval institutions, Dawson, like Chesterton, wished to reclaim aspects of a social ethic that he felt had happened to flourish in the Middle Ages, largely because its Catholic inspiration was most culturally vital in those years. Dawson held that since the social tradition and theory commonly identified with that era rested on a religion he considered True, they were not limited to one historical phase, but are fundamental and perennial. Modern polities could thus be governed by this 'medieval' paradigm without forfeiting their tangible advantages: 'The return to an organic type of society and the recovery of a spiritual principle in social life need not imply the coming of an age of obscurantism or of material squalor and decay'.[91] Redolent of Chesterton's maxim that medieval history must be

---

[86] G. K. Chesterton, *All is Grist* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1932), 225, 227-28. Emphasis in original.
[87] *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 21, *What I Saw in America* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 107
[88] *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 2, *St. Thomas Aquinas* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 485
[89] *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 18, *Chaucer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 180
[90] Dawson, *Enquiries*, 53-54, 301.
[91] Dawson, 'End of An Age', 400-401. In fact, Dawson intimated in 1953 that a twentieth-century Christian corporatist order might surpass its medieval

modern history to be meaningful, Dawson therefore rebuked romantic medievalist social critics for falsely idealizing the Middle Ages in a kind of medieval chic that had no bearing on the twentieth century's discrete political conditions.[92]

Clarifying this tradition of modern British Catholic social thought is essential not solely for the sake of accuracy, but also because a proper understanding of it adds hitherto overlooked voices to scholarly and political discourse. If in their own day even the most sapient members of this patrimony achieved only episodic influence, serious discussion of their outlook may seem even more quixotic at a time of what Perry Anderson dubs 'the virtually uncontested consolidation and universal diffusion of neo-liberalism', whose chief critics are those driven by what Stefan Collini calls 'the detritus of a debased postmodernism'.[93] Yet this hegemony and the otherwise flaccid response to it create intellectual space for a reconsideration of the subsidiarist critique.[94] Drawing on an enduring legacy of British protest literature and the venerable social teaching of the Church, the work of writers like Manning, Belloc, Chesterton, and Dawson has a heft absent from both value-free postmodernism and more accommodationist (if superficially similar) notions of a Third Way or a 'stakeholder society'. If the British Catholics' vision of decentralized, organic communities rooted in a Christian respect for the dignity of all their citizens and the 'little platoons' they craft has not gained purchase, neither has it been disproved. It stands as an unalloyed, abiding armory of specially English and Catholic precepts that have sustained creatively a radical, orthodox Catholic counterpoint to prepotent post-Christian policies. As T. S. Eliot eulogized Chesterton,

> Behind the Johnsonian fancy dress, so reassuring to the British public, he concealed the most serious and revolutionary designs…Even if Chesterton's social and economic ideas appear to be totally without effect, even if they should be demonstrated to be wrong—which would perhaps only mean that men have not the good will to carry them out—they were

---

predecessor, owing to its ability to utilize the intellectual and material advances of the intervening centuries (*Medieval Essays*, 11).

92 See, e.g., Dawson, 'Democracy and the British Tradition', *The Dublin Review* 212 (April 1943): 101; *The Formation of Christendom* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), 160.

93 Stefan Collini, 'Moralist at Work', *TLS*, 18 February 2005, 15 (Anderson is quoted therein).

94 Indeed, some analysts of the Great Recession have echoed this heritage, with one stating flatly, 'a central lesson from this crisis is that small is beautiful' (Sebastian Mallaby, 'Geithner on the High Wire', *The Washington Post*, 27 March 2009, A17).

> *the* ideas that for his time were fundamentally Christian and Catholic. He did more, I think, than any man of his time…to maintain the existence of the important minority in the modern world.[95]

[95] *G. K. Chesterton: The Critical Judgments*, ed. D. J. Conlon (Antwerp: Universitaire Faculteiten Sint-Ignatius, 1976), 531-32. Emphasis in original.

COVENTRY PATMORE'S DIVINE COMEDY: *THE UNKNOWN EROS*

BRANDON SCHNEEBERGER

From a young age Coventry Patmore's imagination was shaped by Dante, and as an older man, he noted that 'The longer I live the more I am convinced that no one—since the Hebrew Prophets—has ever written religious poetry, except Dante.'[1] He classes Dante with the likes of Shakespeare and St. Thomas Aquinas,[2] the Catholic writer who most influenced him, and it is *Paradiso* that for Patmore exemplifies the apotheosis of cheerful art. He adds that even in the *Inferno* the poet is brimming with the joy at seeing evil people receive their just deserts. In *Purgatorio*, the pain the poet experiences is the joyful scourging that allows for purification and precedes man's sanctification, a necessary element for joy.[3] This theme of purgation and sanctification is central to many of Patmore's own poems in *The Unknown Eros*, a compilation that I argue is heavily influenced by Dante's *Divine Comedy*. This particular compilation serves as Patmore's highest expression of the sacramentality of married love, that marriage ultimately points the soul to its future betrothal with God. Notably, the poems in *The Unknown Eros* explore earthly love and loss, transition to spiritual matters, and culminate in a litany of praise for the Blessed Virgin Mary, the paragon of all created beings.[4] This

---

[1] From Basil Champneys, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore*, 2 vols. (New York: George Bell & Sons, 1900), 2.98-99. Champneys, 1.31-32, records that Patmore is said to have mastered a reading of Dante as a boy.

[2] Patmore curiously uses the same comparison for both. See Coventry Patmore, 'Religio Poeta', in *Religio Poeta* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1893), 7. Google Books. Accessed 12 Aug. 2020; and Patmore, 'Rossetti as a Poet', in *Principle in Art, etc.* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1889), 107. Project Gutenberg, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/57192/57192-h/57192-h.htm#V. Accessed 12 Aug. 2020.

[3] See Patmore, 'Cheerfulness in Life and Art', in *Principle in Art*, 34

[4] See J. C. Reid, *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), 284. Reid, 110, curiously wonders that there are not more allusions to Dante in Patmore's poetry given Patmore's admiration for the Italian

organization more deeply suggests a connection between *The Unknown Eros* and *The Divine Comedy*, another poem that progresses towards praise of the Blessed Virgin. While *The Unknown Eros* does not strictly parallel *The Divine Comedy*, and while some differences may exist between Patmore and Dante in regards to their idea of love, internal evidence suggests a structure that not only follows Dante's epic but attempts to reach similar heights of spiritual transcendence.

It has been noted that the deliberate reordering of the poems in *The Unknown Eros* provides a clear direction and a progression of thought.[5] According to Patmore the goal of poetry is to progress from natural experience to the 'dizziest heights of spiritual probability', something of which he says Dante makes ample use.[6] But *The Unknown Eros* does not merely progress. Like Dante, the poet must first descend before he rises to higher things. In *The Unknown Eros*, Patmore (1) loves a woman who dies and is beatified (1.1-1.4), (2) descends into an underworld of grief after her death, as well as political despair (1.5-1.19), (3) begins to shun the worldly and rides a purgatorial path of sanctification (1.20-1.24), (4) reflects on Incarnational truths and through them turns his eyes toward heavenly objects (2.1-2.16), and, finally, (5) experiences a beatific revelation of the Blessed Virgin Mary that cannot adequately be described in human language (2.17-2.18). While I do not to contend that *The Unknown Eros* perfectly parallels the *Divine Comedy*, a close look at moments within the poems will be enough to suggest the above sequence.

---

poet. The evidence suggests otherwise. Edmund Gosse, *Coventry Patmore* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 54, reports that Patmore's planned the *Angel in the House* to be larger than the *Divine Comedy*. Alison Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 109-11, discusses the allusions to Dante in *The Angel*. See also Adela Pinch, *Thinking about Other People in Nineteenth-century British Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 133-34, where she discusses the allusions to Dante in Patmore's 'The Kiss'. Kathleen Verduin, "Sayers, Sex, and Dante," *Dante Studies* 111 (1993): 223-33, 226, 227, points out that Victorians linked ideas of feminine purity with poems like *The Angel in the House* and that Charles Williams was fond of referring to Dante mainly by reference of Patmore. Champneys, 1.92-93, 2.98, records Patmore as saying that Dante's poetry is the only real love poetry he has ever seen, expresses a desire to learn Italian solely for the purposes of reading Dante, and implies the *Divine Comedy* is the greatest poem ever written.

[5] Reid, 284

[6] Patmore, 'Religio Poeta', 4

I

The first half of Book I, consisting of twelve poems, deals almost explicitly with the love and loss of an earthly woman. In the fourth poem 'Beata' (a title calling to mind Beatrice) the poet is struck with gladness from his beatified lover. His earthly lover is now dead, but her heavenly rays strike the poet's soul and fill them both with joy:

> Of infinite Heaven the rays,
> Piercing some eyelet in our cavern black,
> Ended their viewless track
> On thee to smite
> Solely, as on a diamond stalactite,
> And in mid-darkness lit a rainbow's blaze,
> Wherein the absolute Reason, Power, and Love,
> That erst could move
> Mainly in me but toil and weariness,
> Renounced their deadening might,
> Renounced their undistinguishable stress
> Of withering white,
> And did with gladdest hues my spirit caress,
> Nothing of Heaven in thee showing infinite,
> Save the delight.
>
> (1-15)[7]

The rays from heaven land on the beatified, and through her blaze forth in a rainbow of colours, piercing the poet. This calls to mind the entrance of Beatrice in *Purgatorio*, in which incandescent and blazing lights cut through the air and reflect in the water (*Purg.* 29.16-35, 67-69).[8] The sky eventually becomes 'a painted flow / of seven bands of light' (*Purg.* 29.76-77), an image continued in *Paradiso* when Beatrice explains how the intellect works (*Par.* 2.97-11). Likewise do the circles of souls in the sun reflect off each other to create a rainbow of colours, which in *Paradiso* 12.12-18 symbolize Iris (Juno's 'handmaid'), the messenger from heaven, as well as God's symbol of a rainbow in Genesis 9:8-17.[9] Patmore, moreover, is struck with the heavenly light, so that Reason, Power, and Love must release their

[7] All quotes from Patmore's poetry are from *The Poems of Coventry Patmore*, ed. Frederick Page (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949). This edition does not include line numbers, so I have supplied them myself.
[8] All quotations from *The Divine Comedy* are from *The Portable Dante*, ed. Mark Musa (London: Penguin, 1995) and cited in-text.
[9] See the note to *Paradiso* 12.12 in *The Divine Comedy: Paradiso*, ed. and trans. Charles S. Singleton (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 2.207.

hold upon him. These three virtues likely correspond to the desires of flesh (lust/love), pride (reason), and riches (power) in 1 John 2:16. Likewise is Dante overcome with the virtue pouring out of Beatrice (*Purg*. 30.40-41).[10] When she describes God's creation of the angels as love pouring like light through crystal or glass (perhaps like a 'diamond stalactite'), the '*three flames* of [Dante's] desire are now quenched' (*Par*. 29.48, emphasis mine). In both cases the virtue of the beatified woman works to redeem the poet and draw him towards the light of God.

In 'Tristitia', a prayer to the beatified, Patmore questions whether he has "loved too laxly sweetness and heart's ease" (23), suggesting a temptation to love the beloved more than God. Patmore worries that for 'loving too much of thee' he may 'Love's last goal miss' (11). He will thus be like the souls in Dante numbered among the proud, fraudulent, envious, lustful, and hateful (22). Patmore's description of Hell echoes Dante's upper layers in the *Inferno*, the 'sky-borders of that banish'd world' where

> Wander pale spirits among willow'd leas,
> Lost beyond measure, sadden'd without end,
> But since, while erring most retaining yet
> Some ineffectual fervor of regret,
> Retaining still such weal
> As spurned Lovers feel
>
> (. 45-51)

Patmore's descent echoes Beatrice's explanation in *Purgatorio* that Dante needed to experience Hell before entering Paradise: 'To such depths did he sink that, finally, / there was no other way to save his soul / except to have him see the Damned in Hell' (*Purg*. 30.136-38). But unlike Dante, Patmore is tempted to embrace the punishments of Hell and attempts to reassure his lover that even in Hell he will retain whatever dimmed version of love he still has for her just as 'the poor harlot's, in whose body stirs / The innocent life that is and is not hers' (76-77). For this reason, some have found the poem unorthodox, or at least, in Gerard Manley Hopkins' opinion, a 'lovely expression of an overstrained mood'.[11] It clearly does not follow Patmore's own argument that Dante's happiness Hell arises from observing God's justice in action.[12] Nor does it follow St. Thomas's similar teaching

[10] Dante is blinded by Beatrice's light, as if he had looked into the sun for too long, and Beatrice's very words are described as light (*Purg.* 32.10-12, 33.75).
[11] See Ernest Fontana, 'Rossetti and Patmore's "Tristitia": "A Spanish Case",' *The Hopkins Quarterly* 40.3/4 (2013) 107-11, 107-8.
[12] Patmore, 'Cheerfulness in Life and Art', 33.

regarding the souls in heaven who likewise rejoice. While St. Thomas admits that the damned soul will remember things on earth, this memory will only ever be a cause of great sorrow for them, as will contemplating the blessed in heaven.[13] It seems then that Patmore entertains heterodox ideas when he says that though the damned in Hell retain 'still such weal / As spurned Lovers feel' (50-51).

Nevertheless, St. Thomas argues that good tends to happen in one way while evil happens in many ways. This explains why in the *Divine Comedy* the souls in *Paradiso* move freely and seem ultimately to be in one place. Hell, on the contrary, is more strictly layered, suggesting that *some* good exists there insofar as souls are punished unequally, based on their life spent on earth.[14] Given this, it is unlikely that Patmore is attempting to be unorthodox. The soul in 'Tristitia' merely acknowledges a 'good' insofar as being with other 'spurned lovers' contrasts with worse evils. The poem, as well, should not be read in isolation but within the context of the surrounding poems and the larger structure of *The Unknown Eros* in which the poet searches for peace through the storms of death and separation. Doing so gives some credence to Hopkins's view: 'Tristitia' should be read more as a temptation to doubt and despair – from some overstrained mood – than as an honest theological reflection on the nature of Hell. Due to his loss, Patmore feels and is tempted to believe that he loves his beloved more than God and that he may endure the fate of Dante's lovers in the second layer of Hell, but that if even this happens, both will be comforted to know they still love each other. Dante's souls in Canto 5 of the *Inferno* function similarly. They make 'reason slave to appetite' and cannot even hope to suffer less than they currently do (*Inf.* 5.39, 45). Just as the poet in 'Tristitia' worries he has loved earthly sweetness too much, so Paolo and Francesca are summoned from their 'sweet nest' and are said to have 'sweet sighs' (*Inf.* 5:83, 118). The temptation is for Patmore's poetic speaker to overemphasize this sweet earthly love – something possibly occurring in 'The Day After Tomorrow' (36-39, 68-70) –and entertain damnation and the perhaps unorthodox suggestion that she will be consoled by it.

As the rest of Patmore's descent continues in *The Unknown Eros*, he wrestles with life after the loss of his beloved, specifically contemplating her memory in four moving poems: 'The Azalea', 'The Departure',

[13] St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 Vols. (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1948), Suppl., Q. 94, Art. 3, 5:2961 and Suppl., Q. 98, Arts. 7, 8, 5:2994, 2995.
[14] St. Thomas, *Summa*, Suppl. Q. 69, Art. 7, 5:2824.

'Eurydice', and 'Tired Memory'. In 'The Toys' and '"If I Were Dead"' the poet's anguish plays out in the frustrations and reality of being both a widower and parent, and the similar frustrations are evident in the four caustic political poems '1867', 'Peace', 'A Farewell', and '1880-85'. In 'The Two Deserts' and 'Crest and Gulf' the poet turns to matters of science and progress and begins his departure from writing solely on earthly matters, a departure completed in '"Let be!"' This organization places 'Magna Est Veritas' in the direct middle of the 'Inferno' poems, as well as at the end of the first half of Book I. And rightly so, for it clearly denotes not only a change in tone but a transition: the poet leaves off writing about his lost wife and turns toward social matters. 'Magna Est Veritas', though a melancholy reflection, may yet be read hopefully, hinting at possible resolution later on in the poetic sequence.

> Here in this little Bay,
> Full of tumultuous life and great repose,
> Where, twice a day,
> The purposeless, glad ocean comes and goes,
> Under high cliffs, and far from the huge town,
> I sit me down.
> For want of me the world's course will not fail:
> When all its work is done, the lie shall rot;
> The truth is great, and shall prevail,
> When none cares whether it prevail or not.
>
> (1-10)

Patmore observes that whether he live or die, the waves 'will not fail' even though they appear both 'purposeless' and 'glad'. He is again tempted to despair, but the reflection here falls back on the unchangeableness (and greatness) of truth that will prevail even if no one is there to appreciate it. Whether Patmore is dead, or his country acts in a way that rejects the truth, he rests assured that truth will remain. It marks a hopeful turn from the sentiments in 'Wind and Wave', in which the 'heaving ocean heaves one way, / 'Tward the void sky-line and an unguess'd weal' (23-24).

While 'The Two Deserts' and 'Crest and Gulf' still speak of earthly matters, they hint at the progression of the poet towards the spiritual and away from the worldly matters of the preceding poems ('1867' to '1880-85'). In 'The Two Deserts' the poet reflects on advances in science and technology and concludes that without his telescope man may see better into the mystery of things eternal (18-21). Though he calls the microscope a 'nobler glass'' that magnifies things more near to us (22-26), he longs ultimately for a mind that appreciates the immediate beauty around him and does not stray into things

needlessly great or small. It is the poet who has such a mind as indeed in 'Crest and Gulf' he 'Unveils the tender heavens to horny human eyes' (18).[15] Patmore returns to the image of the waves and compares them to 'mankind's progress … / The heaving vain of life which cannot cease from self' that 'In endless chase … leaves the tossing water anchor'd in its place!' (26, 28, 31-32). By the end of the poem, the trust in progress and technology is contrasted with 'The fly-wheel swift and still / Of God's incessant will' that though mighty cannot thwart the free will of souls drifting to Hell (41-42).

Thus does the title of the next poem, '"Let Be!"' suggest an important transition. The title itself carries several allusions including Mary's fiat (*fiat mihi*) in the Gospel of Luke and the Lord's prayer (*fiat voluntas tua*) in the Gospel of Matthew. As St. Bernard, another highly influential saint for Patmore, argues, the salvation of mankind depended on Mary's fiat, which indicated a mark of desire specifically to behold her Lord in a physical, incarnational way.[16] But the title also harkens to Hamlet, who, likewise struck with the shortness of life and absurdity of ambition, quotes from the sermon on the mount ('there is special providence in the fall of a sparrow') and concludes 'Since no man … knows what is't to leave betimes, let be' (5.2.219-24).[17] Patmore, like Hamlet, has suffered a great loss. He has endured the frustration of single parenting, wrestled with political despair, and finally begins to come out of the depths in '"Let Be!"' The final four poems of Book I lead the poet out of the descent into Hell and into the purgatorial process that will lead to peace. '"Faint Yet Pursuing"' and 'Victory in Defeat' both more firmly establish the poet's decision to turn toward spiritual realms despite failings.[18] But in 'Remembered Grace' the poet alludes more pointedly to Dante. Patmore affirms his trust in God that 'Whom God does once with heart to heart befriend, / He does so till the

[15] See also Patmore's understanding of the poet as a prophet in Patmore, 'Love and Poetry', in *Principle in Art, etc.*, 72-76.

[16] St. Bernard, Homily IV, in *Sermons of St. Bernard on Advent and Christmas* (London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1909), 68, 71. Internet Archive. https://archive.org/stream/sermonsofstberna00bernuoft#page/n1/mode/2up. Accessed 6 Aug. 2020.

[17] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2d ed., ed. Herschel Baker, et. al. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 1183-1245.

[18] These two poems also mark the middle point in the collection as a whole. '"Faint Yet Pursuing"' is the twenty-first of the forty-two poems. If one includes the 'Proem'' it is the exact middle of the sequence. The title of '"Let Be!"' clearly points back while '"Faint Yet Pursuing"' points forwards.

end,' yet he is aware that salvation may include a 'cleansing flame' (23). As in 'Magna Est Veritas' the redeemed poet rests his faith in higher things:

> But constantly his soul
> Points to its pole
> Ev'n as the needle points, and knows not why;
> And, under the ever-changing clouds of doubt,
> When others cry,
> 'The stars, if stars there were,
> Are quench'd and out!'
> To him, uplooking t'ward the hills for aid,
> Appear, at need display'd,
> Gaps in the low-hung gloom, and, bright in air,
> Orion or the Bear.
>
> (32-42)

Just as sceptics may deny the stars, so too does Dante the pilgrim enter the 'starless air' of the Inferno, seeing the stars only after leaving (*Inf.* 3.23, 34.139). Moreover, he discovers himself to be on the opposite end of the earth: he is travelling from pole to pole, as does Patmore's soul point to its pole. Dante, of course, cannot see Ursa Major at the beginning of *Purgatorio*, since he is on the wrong side of the planet (*Purg.* 1.30). But in *Paradiso* he rejoices that 'all nine Muses point the Bears to me' (*Par*. 2.9). Ursa Minor, of course, contains the North Star, the guiding star for sailors, and given the poem following 'Remembered Grace' ('Vesica Piscis'), that Patmore also alludes to sailing is not without warrant. The fact that the poet looks to the stars at the end of 'Remembered Grace' may also be the first, albeit subtle, reference in *The Unknown Eros* to the Virgin Mary. As Dante's sails in *Paradiso* are filled by Minerva (*Par.* 2.8), the goddess of wisdom, for him Beatrice, so is Patmore's poet being guided by the Virgin Mary, the Seat of Wisdom, and the Star of the Sea.[19] St. Bernard writes of Mary, 'O you who find yourself tossed about by the storms of life, turn not your eyes from the brightness of this Star, if you would not be overwhelmed by its boisterous wave.'[20] So too does Patmore look to this star as he presses onward towards the culmination of *The Unknown Eros*, the Blessed Virgin.

[19] See the note to *Paradiso* 2.8 in Singleton, ed., *The Divine Comedy*, 2.40.

[20] St. Bernard, Homily II, in *Sermons of St. Bernard on Advent*, 46-47. See also St. Bernard, Homily III, in *Sermons of St. Bernard on Advent*, 60, as Mary's role of Mother of Wisdom. Accessed 6 Aug. 2020. On the influence of St. Bernard on Patmore, see Reid, 90-94.

The placement of 'Vesica Piscis' at the end of Book I is important, for it formally concludes what has been the poet's primary concern with earthly things. The title itself has layers of possible implications, from the fish the poet does not catch in the poem to the ancient symbol of the ichthys. So also does Dante use the vesica piscis image throughout *Paradiso*, most notably when the souls of the sun in St. Thomas's ring are met with those of St. Bonaventure's (*Par.* 12:1-30). As Dante and Beatrice stand in the middle of St. Thomas's ring, he describes himself as the 'needle pointing to the star' of the speaker, St. Bonaventure. Dante here symbolizes the needle of the compass which points to the North Star (*Par.* 12.30),[21] an image Patmore uses above ('his soul / Points to its pole / Ev'n as the needle points'). So too does Patmore sail his ship at night, in need of the North Star. Alluding to the story of Peter's miraculous catch of fish from the Gospel of Luke, the poet says aloud, 'I have labour'd through the Night, nor yet / Have taken aught; / But at Thy word I will again cast forth the net!' (4-6). In the Gospel of Luke, the account occurs early and suggests it is the moment St. Peter first decides to follow Christ. Patmore proceeds to blend this story with that of the miraculous discovery of a coin inside a fish. 'And, lo, I caught' he says,

> Not the quick, shining harvest of the Sea,
> For food, my wish,
> But Thee!
> Then, hiding even in me,
> As hid was Simon's coin within the fish,
> Thou sigh'd'st, with joy, 'Be dumb,
> Or speak but of forgotten things to far-off times to come.'
>
> (7-15)

Patmore, like St. Peter, recasts his net, but instead of coming up with fish, finds Christ. And in himself he discovers the coin that St. Peter finds after Christ agrees to pay the temple tax (Mt. 17:24-27). What the coin symbolizes in the gospel passage may be difficult to render, but given Patmore's connections to Dante, it may allude to the poet's faith. In Canto 24 of *Paradiso* Dante meets St. Peter who examines him on the first of the theological virtues. St. Peter asks, 'Now that you have thoroughly / examined both this coin's alloy and weight, / tell me, do you have such coin in your purse?' (*Par.* 24.83-85). When Dante replies in the affirmative, St. Peter describes faith as the 'inestimable gem / upon which every other virtue sets', suggesting its fundamental necessity for the virtues of hope and

[21] See note on *Paradiso* 12.29 in Singleton, ed., *The Divine Comedy*, 2.208.

charity. It is thus plausible that Patmore is in this moment acquiring this virtue of faith to write Book II, which will principally leave worldly matters and deal with spiritual love just as Peter and the others with him left their earthly trade to follow Christ (Lk. 5:11). In the story of the temple tax Christ likewise teaches Peter that he is to consider himself a stranger to the world and instead consider himself a child of God (Mt. 17:25-26).

II

In Book II of *The Unknown Eros*, Patmore sets his mind towards spiritual matters but does so not by entirely neglecting the world but through deeply meditating on the role of the Incarnation and its implications regarding marriage and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Because Catholic theology holds that Christ was fully man and fully God, the early Church rejected the neoplatonic and gnostic treatment of the body as something of lesser value than the soul. St. Thomas argues that God, as the essence of goodness and love, longed to communicate himself to others and did so through the Incarnation.[22] Patmore contemplates such an event in a poem deeply inspired by Thomistic thought, 'Legem Tuam Dilexi':

> Therefore the soul select assumes the stress
> Of bonds unbid, which God's own style express
> Better than well,
> And aye hath, cloistr'd, borne,
> To the Clown's scorn,
> The fetters of the threefold golden chain.
>
> (57-62)

The 'threefold golden chain' may be a subtle reference to Aquinas' statement (himself quoting Augustine) that the Word, a soul, and flesh makes up the Incarnated God.[23] In *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower* Patmore argues that mankind finds its salvation through a woman –'our life, our sweetness, and our hope', adding that God is only able to save us insofar as he is '"made flesh," *i.e.* Woman.'[24] This may seem heterodox, but Patmore merely emphasizes that God takes on the flesh of a woman and thus participates in, and in a way reverses, the creation moment in Genesis

[22] St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 3, Q. 1, Art. 1, 4:2020.
[23] St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 3, Q. 1, Art. 1, 4:2020. Cf. Reid, 88.
[24] Patmore, 'Aurea Dicta', LXXI, in *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1907), 23. Internet Archive. https://archive.org/details/rodrootandflowe00patmgoog/page/n60/mode/2up. Accessed 20 July 2020.

in which woman came from man. As Adam exclaims after Eve's creation from his rib, 'This at last is bone of my bones / and flesh of my flesh' (Gen. 2:23), so too might Mary, traditionally understood as the New Eve, wonder at her God having taken on her flesh. Thus does St. Bernard write that '[Mary's] will was in such great harmony with God's that he joined not only her will, but even her flesh, to himself so completely that from his substance and that of the Virgin's He made one Christ, or rather He became one Christ.'[25] Later in the same homily Bernard wonders at Mary's own wonder at holding and beholding the child who is also the creator of the world.[26] Patmore expresses such wonder in 'Regina Coeli', a poem not included in *The Unknown Eros*:

> True Virgin lives not but does know,
> ……
> That God lies really in her breast,
> Of thine He made His special nest!
> And so
> All mothers worship little feet,
> And kiss the very ground they trod;
> But, ah, thy little Baby sweet
> Who was indeed thy God!
>
> (10, 12-18)

Patmore's reflection on the Incarnation leads him to contemplate the connections between earthly love, marriage, and our divine betrothal with God and his mother. In the second poem of Book II, 'The Contract', Patmore reflects on the first marriage between Adam and Eve, and this reflection transitions him towards his veneration of the Blessed Virgin. In the dialogue of 'The Contract' Adam woos his wife Eve, who more coyly persuades Adam to refrain from sexual intercourse, out of a higher sense of spiritual purity. Patmore here directly draws connections between three types of marriage spoken of by St. Thomas. While Adam and Eve represent a literal marriage, their conversation echoes that of the *Song of Songs* and the allegorical and topological meanings hidden in that poem. St. Thomas argues that allegorically marriage symbolizes Christ and his Church while

[25] St. Bernard, Homily III, in *Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, in *Honey and Salt: Selected Spiritual Writings of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*, ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 2007), 326-27. See also where St. Thomas argues that it was most fitting that Christ take the flesh of a woman: St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 3, Q. 31, Art. 4, 4:2181-82.
[26] St. Bernard, Homily III, 336.

topologically marriage refers to Christ and the soul.[27] The back and forth, give and take, conversation between Adam and Eve serves thus as a sign between Mary and Joseph and the soul's dance with God. As the prelapsarian lovers are virginal in spirit – not having the stain of concupiscence – so Mary and Joseph in the final lines of the poem are both spiritually and bodily virginal.

> Thus the first Eve
> With much enamour'd Adam did enact
> Their mutual free contract
> Of virgin spousals, blissful beyond flight
> Of modern thought, with great intention staunch,
> Though unobliged until that binding pact.
> Whether She kept her word, or He the mind
> To hold her, wavering, to his own restraint,
> Answer, ye pleasures faint,
> Ye fiery throes, and upturn'd eyeballs blind
> Of sick-at-heart Mankind,
> Whom nothing succour can,
> Until a heaven-caress'd and happier Eve
> Be join'd with some glad Saint
> In like espousals, blessed upon Earth,
> And she her Fruit forth bring;
> No numb, chill-hearted, shaken-witted thing,
> 'Plaining his little span,
> But of proud virgin joy the appropriate birth,
> The Son of God and Man.
>
> (80-99)

Mary as the New Eve is central to Patmore's understanding of the Incarnation and Christian Salvation. Much of his thought on this likely comes from St. Bernard. In her role as the New Eve, argues St. Bernard, it is Mary's privilege to function as the mediatrix for the salvation of mankind. Bernard teaches that Eve too must have recourse to the Virgin Mary, who has made satisfaction for her sin. While Eve was foolish, proud, and in a sense conceived the fruit of death, Mary was prudent, humble, and gave us the tree of life to eat.[28] (It is fitting that Patmore's 'Arbor Vitae' directly follows 'The Contract'.) Likewise, while Eve ate of poisoned, bitter fruit,

[27] St. Thomas, Homily IV: The Duties of Marriage, in *Ninety-Nine Homilies of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. John M. Ashley (London: Aeterna Press, 2014), 30-31.
[28] St. Bernard, Homily II, in *Sermons of St. Bernard on Advent*, 35-36.

Christians will, with Mary, eat of the 'fruit of everlasting sweetness'.[29] So too does Dante tease out the Eve–Mary parallel and see her as a mediatrix for mankind. In *Purgatorio* Dante observes a depiction of the Annunciation and describes her as 'she who turned the key, opening for us / the Highest Love' (*Purg.* 10:41-42). In *Paradiso* the connections between the Garden of Eden and the Incarnation are made more explicit. Though God created the body in perfection, by their own act of free will, Adam and Eve were banished from the garden (*Par.* 7.34-39). In order for mankind to rise again, and the body to be reexalted to its original state, God took on human flesh (*Par.* 7.118-20). It is fitting, then, that Dante places Adam and Eve close to the Virgin Mary in the celestial rose, Adam to her left and Eve below her. Eve's position is described in terms of the wound she created that Mary healed: 'The wound which Mary was to close and heal / she there, who sits so lovely at her feet, / would open wider then and prick the flesh' (*Par.* 32.4-6).[30]

Patmore thus develops the connection between earthly marriage and our spiritual relationship with Christ as Book II unfolds. In 'Sponsa Dei', for instance, he writes,

> What if this Lady be thy Soul, and He
> Who claims to enjoy her sacred beauty be,
> Not thou, but God; and thy sick fire
> A female vanity,
> Such as a Bride, viewing her mirror'd charms,
> Feels when she sighs, 'Ah these are for his arms!'
>
> (45-50)

The implications here are decidedly sacramental for Patmore, as he elsewhere states that belief in the Incarnation is immortality itself, perhaps playing off Christ's words in the Gospel of St. John that 'this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent' (Jn. 17:3). Thus in our earthly loves do we see but a shadow of our future love and union with God, and Patmore, quoting St. Agnes, can write 'My *body* is already joined to God.'[31] The paradox, as Patmore sees

[29] St. Bernard, Homily II, in *Sermons of St. Bernard on Advent*, 36. Justin Martyr was likely the first to record the Eve–Mary parallel. See Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, trans. Thomas Buffer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 46-48.

[30] See also notes to these lines in Singleton, ed., *The Divine Comedy*, 2.531-32.

[31] Patmore, 'Aurea Dicta', XCVI, CXLVI, 30, 44, emphasis mine. See also, 'Aurea Dicta', LXXXVIII, 28.

it, is that the Church is both Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:27) and bride, for husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loved the Church (Eph. 5:25). Thus can Patmore argue that the soul is feminine in her relation to God ('What if this Lady be thy Soul'), that God loves her like a lover and desires her perfection but that he also loves us as things graven by his own hands ('He / Who claims to enjoy her sacred beauty be, / not thou, but God').[32] In St. Bernard's commentaries on the Old Testament *Song of Songs*, he similarly interprets the kiss in the opening line –'Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! / For your love is better than wine' (Sg. 1:2) – as signifying Christ's kiss to the beloved soul he has redeemed.[33] Christ and the soul are elsewhere depicted by Patmore as chaste and unchaste lovers, the individual soul as the bride of Christ, and yet the body as the house and image of God.[34]

In both 'Legem Tuam Dilexi' and 'To the Body' Patmore more pointedly contemplates the Incarnation. In 'To the Body', he writes that the disembodied soul at death looks with envy at 'Enoch, Elijah, and the Lady, she / Who left the lilies in her body's lieu' (45-46) and anticipates the dogma of the Assumption. But in 'Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore' Patmore speaks more specifically about being 'virginal of thought' (23).[35] Patmore has a glimpse of heaven and enters the 'Palace of Virginity' where sit the chaste crowned in roses. Here the Blessed Virgin only needs to smile to 'inflame / The sphere', and the blessed souls sing *Cor meum et caro mea* to Christ, 'The Husband of the Heavens', a scene described as a marriage feast (. 4, 18-19, 79-80). Here too the choirs sing praise to Mary, which are

> The nuptial song,
> Song ever new to us and them, that saith,
> 'Hail Virgin in Virginity a Spouse!'
> Heard first below
> Within the little house
> At Nazareth
>
> (. 93-98)

These praise songs are heard also in convents where virgin women become brides of Christ (99-100). So also in Dante are the souls in heaven Christ's

[32] See also Patmore, 'Aurea Dicta', XXI, XXXII, LXVII, 8, 12, 21.
[33] See St. Bernard, Sermons 2-4, in *On the Song of Songs*, in *Honey and Salt*, 59-79. See also Sermon 14, in *On the Song of Songs*, 99.
[34] Patmore, 'Aurea Dicta', LXXVI, LXXX, LXXXVI, 25, 26, 27.
[35] For the placement of this poem and an attempt at explaining the development of Book II, see Reid, 297-98.

bride and clothed in splendid white (*Par*. 33.3, 14-15). But 'Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore' more tightly parallels Dante's experience in Purgatory, where the souls of the Lustful sing hymns of praise to the Blessed Virgin, Diana, and the chaste spouses and virgins and where Dante meets the angel of Chastity who praises the pure in heart (*Purg*. 25.127-39, 27.1-9). 'Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore' furthermore marks the end of the halfway point in Book II, and it sets the tone for the final nine poems in the collection, which will tease out Patmore's apotheosis of human love in the Psyche poems ('Eros and Pysche', 'De Natura Deorum', and 'Psyche's Discontent'), undergo a final purgation ('Pain'), and enter into the blessed communion of the Virgin.

The poems 'Pain' and 'Prophets Who Cannot Sing' create an important bridge between the three Psyche poems and the climatic final poems. 'Pain' no doubt throws allusions to Purgatory and the idea that sanctification requires pain. But unlike earlier poems, such as '"Faint Yet Pursing"' or 'Victory in Defeat', 'Pain' explores the more nuanced nature of sanctifying pain in its relationship to joy. Pain is, for the poet, the 'Choice food of sanctity / And medicine of sin' (5-6). The pain referenced here is moreover associated with the pain of fire:

> Thou sear'st my flesh, O Pain,
> But brand'st for arduous peace my languid brain,
> And bright'nest my dull view,
> Till I, for blessing, blessing give again,
> And my roused spirit is
> Another fire of bliss,
> Wherein I learn feeling how the pangful, purging fire
> Shall furiously burn
> With joy, not only of assured desire,
> But also present joy
> Of seeing the life's corruption, stain by stain,
> Vanish in in the clear heat of Love irate,
> And fume by fume, the sick alloy
> Of luxury, sloth and hate
> Evaporate;
> Leaving the man, so dark erewhile,
> The mirror merely of God's smile.
>
> (. 12-29)

The allusions to Purgatory are clear, and the placement of this poem near the end of the sequence suggests it is meant to lead into the final vision of the Blessed Virgin. So too in *The Divine Comedy* is pain understood by the pilgrim as good and necessary for his salvation. Unlike the suffering souls

in Hell, the souls in Purgatory are suffering with hope of its ceasing (*Purg*. 10.106-11). Virgil therefore encourages Dante to persevere through the pain of having his sin, indicated by the seven Ps ('stain by stain'), cleansed by suffering. All this for hope of soon seeing Beatrice (*Purg*. 15.76-81). The symbolism of fire is, moreover, fitting, given Patmore's larger theme throughout *The Unknown Eros* of matrimonial bliss. For of course the final punishment for the souls in Purgatory are the flames that cleanse them of their lust. The penitents at the top of the mountain rejoice for their suffering, singing hymns to God, the Blessed Virgin, Diana, and all the married pairs who had remained chaste throughout life (*Purg*. 25.121-35). Dante reflects on their suffering:

> And this I think, they do continuously
> as long as they must burn within the fire:
> the cure of flames, the diet of the hymns—
>
> with these the last of all their wounds is healed.
> (*Purg.* 25.136-39)

But Dante is not merely a casual observer, and he too must go through the excruciating pains of the fires before he is allowed to enter into Paradise and ultimately see Beatrice (*Purg*. 27.19-54). Thus, 'Pain' is purposely placed, for it functions as the second to last poem before the poet enters into the blissful communion with the Blessed Virgin. In 'Prophets Who Cannot Sing' (and also, later, 'Dead Language') the poet declares he has not skill to speak too much about such visions he is about to see, echoing Dante's repeated pleas to the reader to forgive him for being unable to relate accurately the scenes of Paradise (e.g. *Par*. 33.61-63). Fittingly, Dante himself appears in 'Prophets Who Cannot Sing', as Patmore poetically renders his argument that none but the Hebrew prophets and Dante have written adequately on religion: no poets do 'Views of the unveil'd heavens alone forth bring / … At least, from David until Dante, none. / And none since him.' (12, 15-16). Indeed, if only the Hebrew prophets, especially the psalmist David, and Dante have written adequately about religious matters, it seems only natural that Patmore would allude often to the Italian poet in his most complete attempt at religious poetry.

All of this culminates in the litany to the Blessed Virgin in "The Child's Purchase," and most notable is how Patmore's poem parallels St. Bernard's hymn in *Paradiso*. A close examination shows that virtually every point Bernard makes is alluded to in Patmore's poem, and a breakdown of the first half of Bernard's hymn will suffice. Bernard's hymn may easily be organized as follows: (1) the Virgin's role in the Incarnation and salvation

(*Par*. 33.1-9), (2) the Virgin's relation to souls in heaven and on earth (*Par.* 33.10-12), (3) the Virgin's role as intercessor (*Par.* 33.13-18), and (4) the Virgin as the apotheosis of all created beings (*Par.* 33.19-21). While Patmore's poem does not chronologically parallel Bernard's hymn, most of it is echoed using similar language. Bernard, for instance, opens by contemplating the strange nature of Mary as 'daughter of your son' (*Par*. 33.1), a concept not merely echoed but expanded upon in Patmore's lines 'To One, thy Husband, Father, Son, and Brother, / Spouse Blissful, Daughter, Sister, milk-sweet Mother' (86-87). Bernard's Virgin is also quickly heralded as 'chosen of God in His eternal plan' (*Par*. 33.2) while Patmore's litany begins by referencing her as 'Lady elect' (14). But the first part of Bernard's hymn primarily speaks to her role in God's incarnational plan. Bernard sings,

> you are the one who ennobled human nature
> to the extent that he did not disdain,
> Who was its Maker, to make Himself man.
>
> Within your womb rekindled was the love
> that gave the warmth that did allow this flower
> to come to bloom within this timeless peace.
> (*Par*. 33.4-9)

Both Bernard and Patmore stress the importance of Mary's womb, as God desired to enter it in order to save the human race. Patmore writes, 'with divine self-will infatuate / Love-captive to the thing He did create, / Thy God did not abhor' (66-68). Whereas in Bernard's hymn, the Maker makes himself Man, so in Patmore's litany, God is a captive lover to the very thing he did create. Moreover, through this act Mary receives her reward. Just as in Bernard's hymn she is responsible for the blooming rose, in Patmore she is the 'prism whereby / Alone we see / Heav'n's light in its triplicity' (79-81).[36]

Patmore's image of Mary as the light of heaven extends importantly to those on earth (and in its own way circles back to 'Beata'). Mary is not only

[36] See Mark Bosco, SJ, 'O'Connor's 'Pied Beauty': Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Aesthetics of Difference', in *Revelation and Convergence: Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition,* ed. Mark Bosco and Brent Little (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 99-117, 107-8. In his discussion of Hopkins's aesthetics (which may have had some influence on Patmore), Bosco connects the idea of beauty as a rainbow of light, as if through a prism, and its deep ties to the Incarnation, to the medieval theologian Dons Scotus.

'Heav'n's light in its triplicity' but 'Rainbow complex / In bright distinction of all beams of sex, / Shining for aye / In the simultaneous sky' (82-85). These lines echo Bernard's praise of the Virgin in her role as a guiding light to the souls in heaven and on earth. For all in the celestial rose she is the 'noonday torch / of charity, and down on earth, for men, / the living spring of their eternal hope' (*Par*. 33.10-12). Elsewhere does Patmore make the quick transition between heaven and earth, when he describes Mary as the 'Sunshiny peak of human personality; / The world's sad aspirations' one Success' (105-6). To 'aspire' is, of course, to hope strongly towards a worthy goal, but an older definition from its Latin roots means 'to breathe into or forth'.[37] For Bernard, Mary is the spring of hope. For Patmore, her victory as the New Eve breathes new hope in a world full of otherwise sad aspirations.

Bernard's hymn turns to Mary's role as intercessor. Mary is so great that 'he who seeks grace without recourse to you / would have this wish fly upward without wings' (*Par*. 33.13-15). Mary moreover has so much mercy within her that she prays for the intentions of the earthly souls even before they pray (*Par*. 33.16-18). Patmore renders this nicely when he seeks her intercession for his litany and writes,

> Grant me the steady heat
> Of thought wise, splendid, sweet,
> Urged by the great, rejoicing wind that rings
> With draught of unseen wings
>
> (26-29)

The soul in Bernard's hymn who does not pray with Mary's help is sending a prayer without wings. Patmore plays with the idea, suggesting that his prayer to the Virgin will be urged by a joyful wind that has 'unseen wings'. Patmore returns to this theme at the end of his poem, and in prayer to Mary writes, 'Mother, who lead'st me still by unknown ways, / Giving the gifts I know not how to ask' (155-56), mimicking Bernard's souls who receive intercession before praying and extending Bernard's concept to include help for those who feel at loss. Bernard's hymn, before he explicitly pleas on Dante's behalf, ends by praising Mary as the apotheosis of all created beings. In Mary is united 'all that is good in God's created beings' (*Par*. 33.21). Above, we noted how Patmore renders this in his line describing the Virgin as the 'Sunshiny peak of human personality', but this line is preceded by another title: 'the extreme of God's creative energy' (104). Indeed, as Bernard opened his hymn describing the unique combination of humility

[37] *OED Online*, 'aspire', v., s.d.

and greatness within Mary's person (*Par*. 33.2), so Patmore ends his poems on the same note. He asks Mary to grant him her 'shy fame' and ends the poem asking that 'Humility and greatness grace the task / Which he who does it deems impossible!' (168-69). Just as Dante notes that all the souls in heaven were praying with Bernard to Mary (*Par*. 33.37-39), so Patmore describes the very heavens becoming weak from one of Mary's petitions (33-35).

Patmore clearly realized in 'Dead Language' that he had reached his limits. It is likely that 'The Child's Purchase', which carries the subtitle 'A Prologue', was meant to begin a much longer work known as 'The Marriage of the Blessed Virgin', a culmination of his poetical writings on marriage, including *The Angel in the House*, *The Victories of Love*, and *The Unknown Eros*.[38] As it happened, Patmore deemed the subject too weighty for his powers. Like Dante who describes his final vision as if waking from a dream and feeling the passion but not seeing the vision (*Par*. 58-63), Patmore's monitor explains that the voice of truth may be as tender as the seeming embraces from a lost loved one in a dream (7-8). Patmore at once returns to the original theme of his work but also points forwards: the truth to be rendered from here out must be experienced through the realities of lived experience, not poetry. Patmore has elsewhere surrounded a religious poem ('Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore') with political poems ('"Sing Us the Songs of Sion"' and "Cries at Midnight') and so too is 'The Child's Purchase' surrounded by two poems that remind readers that even great religious experiences must be rooted in realism and do not, this side of Paradise, last. Just as at the end of a liturgical mass, one is sent out,[39] so too does Patmore send us away at the end of *The Unknown Eros*, nevertheless filled with dreamlike sensations of an unknown love.

[38] See Frederick Page, *Patmore: A Study in Poetry* (1933; Conn: Archon Books, 1970), 129-46. It is thought that 'Regina Ceoli' was written for 'The Marriage of the Blessed Virgin'.

[39] The "Imperial Tongue" is the Latin reserved for liturgical use in the nineteenth century and is the language Patmore's monitor wonders would not be better suited for his topic. At the end of mass the priest says, "ite missa est," "go, the mass is ended." See Reid, 300.

A JOLLY, JOBBING JOURNALIST WITH JUST ONE IDEA: GKC

PAUL ROWAN

'I think there never was a time when your heart was not a catholic heart. You were an "*anima naturaliter catholica*".'[1]

'…it is true to say with St. Irenaeus, "*ubi ecclesia ibi Spiritus*", but it would not be true to say, "where the Church is not, neither is the Spirit there". The operations of the Holy Ghost have always pervaded the whole race of men from the beginning, and they are now in full activity even among those who are without the Church.'[2]

'…there should be priests to remind men that they will one day die...at certain strange epochs it is necessary to have another kind of priest, called poets, actually to remind men that they are not dead yet.'[3]

The first problem faced by anyone who has been asked to write a piece on G. K. Chesterton is the word limit! Chesterton wrote about such a bewildering variety of topics in many different literary genres and there is a glimmer of genius in virtually everything he wrote. From the outset, then, there is the need for discipline and careful selectivity. Perhaps the best way of proceeding is to try to identify a key idea that lies at the heart of Chesterton's writing. To do this would be to be faithful to Chesterton's own vision of what he was attempting to communicate in his work. Though he had a great eye for detail and deeply appreciated the manifold wonders of life, he was much more interested in the fundamentals that underpin life in this cosmos. Although he never saw human beings as a faceless agglomeration of individuals, he wrote for the masses. Chesterton's work was written for ordinary citizens, rather than for academics. He always saw himself first and

[1] Vincent McNabb's comment (a re-phrasing of Tertullian) to Chesterton, in Ferdinand Valentine, *Father Vincent McNabb, O.P.: the portrait of a great Dominican* (London: Burns & Oates, 1955), 271.
[2] Gerald O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 316.
[3] G. K. Chesterton, *Manalive* (Rockville, MD: Serenity Publishers, 2009), 107.

foremost as a journalist trying to communicate a message that was crucial to human flourishing and happiness.

Having had a happy childhood, Chesterton lived through a period of scepticism, depression, despair and suicidal tendencies while a young man studying at the Slade School of Art. For a while Leibniz and Heidegger's question, 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' was, quite literally, a matter of life and death for him. He emerged from this long, lonely, terrifying experience with a renewed sense of gratitude for the gift of existence in a strange cosmos. He later discovered that the Christian Creed talked of a Creator. Having looked at the prospect of nihilism in the eye, Chesterton arrived at the conclusion that our world is "the best of all impossible worlds."[4] Convinced that in a created cosmos it is impossible for anything to signify nothing,[5] he had discovered his vocation as a jolly, jobbing journalist, writing about anything and everything in order to encourage others to engage with the varied and strange facets of the only life they had in the only cosmos there was. In this way he sought to help people truly live.

In this piece we will take a brief look at Chesterton's childhood, the pivotal nature of the Slade experience in Chesterton's life, and how that experience strengthened his childhood intuitions about the goodness of life (Elfland), and provided a foundation on which to articulate those intuitions. The central theme that Chesterton wrote about for the rest of his life, one theme expressed in multiple different ways, is the deeply Catholic idea that the cosmos points beyond itself to its Creator. The ordinary and the everyday is sacramental. As we look at Chesterton and his writings, therefore, we are also invited to look at this best of all impossible worlds through Chesterton's eyes and try to consider it *sub specie aeternitatis*.

As this chapter is being drafted, the world finds itself in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom has recently announced a second national lockdown. It is also the month of November, a time when the western world in general and the Church in particular reflect on human mortality. G. K. Chesterton always used the permanent wisdom of the past to address the present. Faithful to that tradition, we shall end by reflecting on how a Chestertonian perspective may shed light on our unusual present moment.

---

[4] G. K. Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 15 (*Chesterton on Dickens*) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 28.
[5] G. K. Chesterton, *A Handful of Authors* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1953), 40.

Punch and Judy on Campden Hill and Surviving the Slade: the Submerged Sunrise of Wonder

The all-pervasive, permanent importance of Chesterton's childhood is evidenced by the fact that he consistently refers to the sense of wonder which filled his boyhood and which became the fertile experiential soil in which his writing flourished. He saw this formative nursery period as time spent in the magical 'Fairyland' or 'Elfland'. A toy theatre in which he and his brother Cecil staged imaginary plays with miniature characters is the thing which he most vividly recalls.

> The first thing I can remember seeing with my own eyes was a young man walking across a bridge. He had a curly moustache and an attitude of confidence verging on a swagger. He carried in his hand a disproportionately large key of a shining yellow metal and wore a large golden or gilded crown…To those who may object that such a scene is rare in the home life of house-agents living immediately to the north of Kensington High Street, in the later seventies of the last century, I shall be compelled to admit, not that the scene was unreal, but that I saw it through a window more wonderful than the window in the tower; through the proscenium of a toy theatre constructed by my father; and that (if I am really to be pestered about such irrelevant details) the young man in the crowd was about six inches high and proved on investigation to be made of cardboard…The scene has to me a sort of aboriginal authenticity impossible to describe.[6]

This love of the dramatic and the creative, the ability to see the world as a vivid image, the power of imagination, and the sheer inability to see the ordinary and the everyday as anything other than extraordinary, never left Chesterton. It was the beginning of the Catholic sense that creation is sacramental – always pointing to something or someone beyond, or behind, or underneath itself. The humdrum everyday was for Chesterton a theatre, an arena in which the encounter with God takes place in an infinite and wonderful variety of ways. The ordinary and the everyday is what is later referred to in *Orthodoxy* as Elfland, the place of magical fairy tales. For Chesterton this cosmos is the magical gift given to us all and, therefore, exploration of this gift offers any number of entry points at which we can join the pathway to the Giver of the gift, God.

From fairy tales, especially George McDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin*, Chesterton was to learn some of the lessons in life which he considered the most fundamentally important: that ordinary, everyday life

[6] (Chesterton, *A Handful of Authors*, 27-28, 46)

is a wild and exciting place, an adventure; that human beings are simultaneously capable of the greatest good and the most atrocious evils; that there is a price to be paid for enjoying this world (a price which consists in obedience to the inherent rules of the adventure – a subject he later referred to as the 'fairy godmother philosophy' in the chapter of his work which reveals perhaps more than any other how his mind works: 'The Ethics of Elfland'[7]); that life is often harsh before it delivers happiness; and that we will face a life of incredible loneliness if we travel on our journey without companions. As we shall see, when in *Orthodoxy* Chesterton wrote about his subsequent discovery of the orthodox Christian faith of the Church, he said that it confirmed what he had already learned in the nursery from the Ethics of Elfland.

Responding to the not infrequent criticism that he was an overgrown child who had never really grown up and faced the real world, Chesterton never apologized for the sense of wonder and gratitude he had written about since being a child. '…I believe in prolonging childhood…I can only say that this nursery note is necessary if all the rest [of his autobiography] is to be anything but nonsense; and not even nursery nonsense.' He then points out that he knows plenty of

> the real world…In the chapters that follow, I shall pass to what are called real happenings, though they are far less real….I have been in political quarrels often turning into faction fights; I have talked to statesmen in the hour of the destiny of States; I have met most of the great poets and prose writers of my time;… There are many journalists who have seen more of such things than I; but I have been a journalist and I have seen such things.[8]

However, even if he can claim to be a man of the world, for Chesterton these many worldly experiences were not so much an encounter with reality as was that afforded to him in his childhood.

> [All of these adult experiences] will be unmeaning, if nobody understands that they still mean less to me than Punch and Judy on Campden Hill…In a word, I have never lost the sense that [childhood] was my real life; the real beginning of what should have been a more real life; a lost experience in the

[7] Chesterton, G. K., *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford Controversies*) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), Chapter IV.

[8] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford Controversies*), 50-51)

> land of the living…It is only the grown man who lives a life of make-believe and pretending; and it is he who has his head in a cloud.[9]

Wonder, gratitude and joy, produced by a sense that the world is an utterly free gift, were among the chief characteristics of Chesterton's childhood, during which he looked upon the world in the light of an eternal morning that 'had a sort of wonder in it as if the world were as new as myself.'[10] Looking back from the vantage point of the end of his life, Chesterton could write that his childhood had revealed to him that he lived in a cosmic setting which he shared with the rest of creation. Almost anything that Chesterton remembers from his childhood gave him this sense of primordial wonder. 'What was wonderful about childhood is that anything in it was a wonder. It was not merely a world full of miracles; it was a miraculous world. What gives me this shock is almost anything I recall; not the things that I should think most worth recalling.'[11]

This sense of the magical nature of human existence, the sense that the world is Elfland, is not for Chesterton something strange and abnormal, a privileged moment of existence, an exception to the rule of normal living of which we later become disavowed as we grow older, more familiar with (and perhaps more cynical about) 'reality'; no, the attitude of the child towards existence always itself remains reality, the proper criterion for judging adult attitudes towards life. The child's sense of the magical nature of existence, what Jacques Maritain referred to as the 'intuition of being',[12] of the world as a gift leading to a sense of wondering joy, is something instinctive and given with consciousness itself. One of the tasks of living, of growing up into adulthood, is to unpack the consequences of this gift. This unpacking led Chesterton to experience a deep sense of humility and joy before the reality of the gift of existence and the Ultimate Giver of the gift. It led him later to embrace the Christian Creed and eventually become a member of the Catholic Church.

---

[9] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford Controversies*), 50-51)

[10] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford Controversies*), 45)

[11] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford Controversies*),34)

[12] For an excellent summary of this and some of the other main themes in Maritain's work, see Michael Novak, "A Salute to Jacques Maritain", accessed 10 November 2020.
https://institutoacton.org/2017/12/19/a-salute-to-jacques-maritain-michael-novak/

Rediscovering the Submerged Sunrise of Wonder: Surviving the Slade Experience

In 1892 Chesterton decided to enter the Slade School of Art in the hope of pursuing an artistic career. The Slade is an important focus in a seminal work by William Oddie,[13] in which Oddie explores Chesterton's imaginative and spiritual development, from his happy childhood, through his schooldays and youth, to his emergence on the London literary scene and the period of intellectual maturity that is expressed in the 1908 work, *Orthodoxy*. Oddie sees *Orthodoxy* as laying the imaginative and intellectual foundations on which the remainder of Chesterton's prodigious and brilliant (if unsystematic) literary output was to be founded.

The *fin de siècle* movement known as Aestheticism was at its most influential from 1890-1895 (the year in which it collapsed, with Oscar Wilde's imprisonment). During this period Chesterton grew up from being a sixteen-year old adolescent to a man recently come of age. Chesterton's brother says that what Gilbert 'describes as 'the decadent school, which then dominated "advanced literature" had, I am certain, a more powerful effect on the development of Chesterton's thought than we have yet fully recognized.'[14] Oddie argues that it was not just the homosexual nature of Wilde's philosophy of life that alarmed Chesterton, but its subversive nature.[15] Chesterton's *Autobiography*, published in 1936 (the final year of his life), contains a chapter entitled 'How to be a Lunatic', which is vital if we are to understand Chesterton's mature thought and how it emerged from what happened to him at the Slade. There he tells us that the Slade crisis was both intellectual and moral in nature.

> At a very early age I had thought my way back to thought itself. It is a very dreadful thing to do; for it may lead to thinking that there is nothing but thought. At this time I did not distinguish between dreaming and waking; not only as a mood, but as a metaphysical doubt, I felt as if everything might be a dream. It was as if I had myself projected the universe from within, with all its trees and stars; and that is manifestly even nearer to going mad.[16]

---

[13] William Oddie, *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy: The making of GKC, 1874-1908* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
[14] (Oddie, *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy: The making of GKC, 1874-1908*, 111)
[15] (Oddie, *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy: The making of GKC, 1874-1908*, 111)
[16] G. K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (Sevenoaks: Fisher Press, 1992), 89

It is evident here that Chesterton was toying with solipsism. As well as this philosophical element, there was also an ethical element to the crisis, as Chesterton was searching and struggling to find some moral code by which to conduct his life.

> And as with mental, so with moral extremes. There is something truly menacing in the thought of how quickly I could imagine the maddest, when I had never committed the mildest crime…There was a time when I had reached that moral anarchy within, in which a man, says, in the words of Wilde, that 'Atys with the blood-stained knife were better than the thing I am.'[17]

So he was tempted by the 'very negative and even nihilistic philosophy'[18] that reigned in the culture, which cast a shadow of depression over his mind during his time at the Slade.

How did he emerge from the sadness and depression that this dalliance brought upon him? The *Autobiography* describes how he 'hung on to religion by one thin thread of thanks', explaining that,

> …no man knows how much he is an optimist, even when he calls himself a pessimist, because he has not really measured the depths of his debt to whatever created him and enabled him to call himself anything. At the back of our brains, so to speak, there was a forgotten blaze or burst of astonishment at our own existence. The object of the artistic and spiritual life was to dig for this submerged sunrise of wonder; so that a man might suddenly understand that he was alive, and be happy.[19]

Wonder, joy and gratitude for the gift of the ordinary and the everyday were the deeply human experiences that led him out of solipsism, despair and despondency. Oddie notes that, 'The particular virtue that lay behind Chesterton's recovery of optimism was the virtue of gratitude: and if we seek for a corresponding doctrinal element in his recovery of some kind of religious belief, it was his discovery of the fundamental necessity of the doctrine of creation.'[20] Chesterton travelled into the depths of the abyss, only to rediscover the submerged sunrise of wonder he had known as a child. As he explained to his friend Edmund Clerihew Bentley:

---

[17] (Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 90)
[18] (Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 88)
[19] (Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 92)
[20] (Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 123)

> Inwardly speaking I have had a funny time. A meaningless fit of depression, taking the form of certain absurd psychological worries, came upon me, and instead of dismissing it and talking to people, I had it out and went very far into the abysses indeed. The result was that I found that things, when examined, necessarily spelt such a mystically satisfactory state of things, that without getting back to earth, I saw lots that made me certain it is all right. The vision is fading into common day now, and I am glad. It is embarrassing talking to God face to face, as a man speaketh to a friend.[21]

Chesterton now had the beginnings of a vocabulary to articulate what he had lived through, and he knew that all would be well. He spent the rest of his life writing for others that all would be well, as an apologist for existence, life, colour, energy, joy and the Creator who underpinned all of these. He became a Christian (and eventually Catholic) apologist with a career dedicated to expanding on the goodness of the common things of life, as captured by the dedication he penned for his friend Bentley in *The Man Who Was Thursday*:

> Between us, by the peace of God, such truth can now be told;
> Yea, there is strength in striking root and good in growing old.
> We have found common things at last and marriage and a creed,
> And I may safely write it now, and you may safely read.[22]

His period of decadence and despair left wounds and scars which were to become, with the passage of time and thoughtful reflection, sources of wisdom and healing for others. In the personal trials and sorrows he faced in life, Chesterton considered evil to be something he knew from personal experience. It led him to conclude that the most popular leading modern thinkers of the day, such as Shaw and Wells, were hopelessly naïve in their philosophies of unrestrained evolutionary progressivism. It might be argued that the Second World War and other events of the twentieth century proved Chesterton right in his views on unbridled modernity, which ignores the Christian notion of fallen human nature at its peril. Nevertheless, Chesterton would also be the first to remind us of the hope-filled Catholic doctrines that evil need not be, that human nature is not irredeemably fallen, that there redemption has been won for us and that the Spirit of the Redeemer is at work in human history. Consequently, the world has to be loved because it is God's world, secularization has to be seen as a complex reality with all

[21] (Oddie, *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy: The making of GKC*, 124)
[22] G. K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* (Rockville, MD: Arc Manor, 2008), 21

sorts of hues and tones, and the Christian theologian has to live in the world with a hope-filled wisdom and realism, rather than a world-weary cynicism.

A 'both/and' approach of engaging dialogically with the world, both loving and critiquing, is more typically associated with Catholic theological methodology (at least theoretically, if not always actually). An 'either/or' approach, an 'over and against' way of looking at the world is, again more typically, associated with the Reformed tradition of seeing the ways of God and the ways of the world as dichotomous. From the Slade onwards, though he had never been a Catholic, Chesterton employed a both/and approach faithfully. Chesterton always acknowledged the truth, goodness and beauty of the world and the Church, as well as their falsehood, lies, evil and ugliness. He believed that we should unhesitatingly affirm all that is life-giving, wherever and in whomsoever it is found, but also never be afraid to say in addition, 'Oh, I admit that you have your case and have it by heart, and that many things do fit into other things as you say. I admit that your explanation explains a great deal; but what a great deal it leaves out! Are there no other stories in the world except yours; and are all men busy with your business?'[23] He constantly challenged people to broaden their perspective, whatever their religious or philosophical outlook.

A truly Catholic orthodoxy lays down markers which you must not trespass, boundaries which you may not cross; but those same frontiers are also lines to which you must go. Being Catholic means that at times we must not go too far – but we must still go far enough. As Chesterton grew older, there was a certain increased sympathy towards Oscar Wilde.[24] We also know from his lifelong friendships with George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells (among others) that Chesterton enjoyed mutually affectionate relationships with the people with whom he found himself debating, never pushing them away, never attacking straw men or making caricatures of their positions, and never deliberately misunderstood or ridiculed them. Rather, he listened to them and learned something from them, even if he did not ultimately agree with everything stated in their position and articulated those disagreements and that opposition with charity. For Chesterton, then, what we find most repugnant in each other must never blind us to what is most noble, for we are creatures and therefore siblings in a cosmos that has been

[23] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies, 223)

[24] Wilde "was so fond of being many-sided that among his sides he even admitted the right side. He loved so much to multiply his souls that he had among them one soul at least that was saved. He desired all beautiful things – even God." (Chesterton *A Handful of Authors*, 146) ed. D. Collins(London: Sheed & Ward, 1953), 146.]

gifted to us, and so we must continue to trust in our common task of seeking wisdom, truth, beauty and goodness, that we may live together in love on our common (though temporary) home. Wise and practical counsel in our increasingly fractious present moment.

Nothing Else to Say: the Ordinary and Everyday as Sacramental

To some critics Chesterton's work is repetitive and irritatingly ill-disciplined. Eamon Duffy notes that some people bemoan the fact that Chesterton was too much of a Christian or Catholic propagandist, especially in later years, citing George Orwell's complaint that, 'Every book that he [Chesterton] wrote…had to demonstrate beyond possibility of mistake the superiority of the Catholic over the Protestant or the pagan.'[25] However, Duffy argues that all of Chesterton's works contain profound insights and a breadth of vision that are communicated with wit, humour and imagination in a series of highly imaginative word-pictures. As Duffy says:

> If Chesterton is repetitive, and can be sectarian, Orwell was mistaken in dismissing the last twenty years of Chesterton's output. Even the worst of Chesterton's books show flashes of the old brilliance. [While writing of Dickens Chesterton commented, "The best of his work can be found in the worst of his works."] *Mutatis mutandis*, that applies as much to Chesterton himself as to Dickens: his verse apart, literary form was of less interest to Chesterton than the core ideas to which his writing so often returned.[26]

If it is arguable that Chesterton could be repetitive, it is more persuasive that, beyond the immediate irritation that this may cause for some, it need not be a major distraction, if the reader's chief concern is to seek wisdom rather than be entertained. Certain elements that are foundational to the quest for wisdom need to be repeated again and again, for human beings can be resistant to learning from experience. As Hugh Kenner put it, 'There is a penultimate stage of disillusion in the study of Chesterton wherein he seems to be saying the same thing over and over again; the ultimate stage is to realise that he says it so often because it can never really be said; in fact, because there is nothing else to say.'[27] There is a core theme to Chesterton's writing: it is, as we have stated already, the Catholic sense that creation is

[25] Kevin Morris ed., *The Truest Fairy Tale: An Anthology of the Religious Writings of G. K. Chesterton*, (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2007), 10.
[26] (Morris, *The Truest Fairy Tale: An Anthology of the Religious Writings of G. K. Chesterton*)
[27] Hugh Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*(London: Sheed & Ward, 1948), 9

sacramental, that it always points through itself to something beyond, or behind, or underneath itself. The humdrum everyday was for Chesterton a theatre, the arena in which the encounter with God takes place in an infinite and wonderful variety of ways.

This is why Maisie Ward, in her biography of Chesterton, describes how, 'Gilbert said once he was willing to start anywhere and develop from anything the whole of his philosophy.'[28] Perhaps in reaction to the marked tendency among the Edwardian intellectual elite to disregard the insights of the past, in *Orthodoxy* Chesterton always emphasized the wealth of wisdom that could be gleaned from tradition and says that his view of the cosmos consists of the few general ideas that he 'learnt in the nursery…I shall roughly synthesise them, summing up my personal philosophy or natural religion; then I shall describe my startling discovery that the whole thing had been discovered before. It had been discovered by Christianity.'[29]

These few general ideas were handed on in fairy tales and repeated through the generations. Like Disney movies, like the creation myths of Genesis and the other mythical parts of Scripture, the tales are told over and over again, not because they happened in some remote historical past, but because they happen all the time in the course of history, in the reality of people's lives. They are the stories of normal people, the common folk, in ordinary situations: tales of love and hate, passion and self-sacrifice, courage and rescue, knight and dragon, good and evil. Although Chesterton could teach his reader about particular lessons in the fairy tales – for example, Beauty and the Beast teaches us that something must be loved before it is loveable – he says, 'I am not concerned with any of the separate statutes of Elfland…I am concerned with a certain way of looking at life, which was created in me by the fairy tales, but has since been meekly ratified by the mere facts.'[30] The lessons which these tales offer are referred to by Chesterton as 'The Ethics of Elfland' and they formed his personal philosophy and led him to discover the Christian faith that harboured and protected them.

We can summarize them here, as he does at the end of *Orthodoxy's* fourth chapter.[31] Firstly, there is no necessary explanation and connection between

[28] Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), 196.
[29] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies, 252)
[30] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies, 253)
[31] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies, 268)

realities in Elfland. The world does not explain itself. Something or somebody has to explain it to us. It is astonishing that Elfland exists at all, and a cause of wonder and gratitude. Secondly, the beauty, wonder and magic of the cosmos, of Elfland, repeat themselves over and over. When apples fall to the ground, when suns rise and set, when eggs turn to birds and when trees produce fruit, they point beyond themselves. They *mean* something, they *signify* something, and if they mean something, there must be something or somebody to which they point (either that or the phenomena to be found in Elfland are deceptive and the people living in Elfland are behaving in a self-contradictory manner. For example, with the phenomenon of morality, how can anything be ultimately, not merely proximately, right or wrong if there are no ultimate grounds for that? Morality is one thing to be found in Elfland which points beyond itself). There has to be somebody to mean the meaning, which means that there is something personal at work in the world. Thirdly – and even though there are exceptions to the rule (such as dragons) – the design of the world, of Elfland, is beautiful. Fourthly, since Elfland is a gift, utterly unsolicited and unmerited, so it imposes on us a debt of gratitude, a debt paid by humility and self-control in the face of the limits of Elfland: 'we should thank God for beer and Burgundy by not drinking too much of them.' Obedience is owed to whatever made us. And finally, there is a sense that all that we have around us in Elfland was 'a remnant to be stored and held sacred out of some primordial ruin', as Robinson Crusoe and his ordinary, everyday goods were treasures from a shipwreck.[32] Chesterton says that, 'These are my ultimate attitudes towards life; the soil for the seeds of doctrine. These in some dark way I thought before I could write, and felt before I could think…All this I felt and the age gave me no encouragement to feel it. And all this time I had not even thought of Christian theology.'[33]

Having listed the fundamental attitudes, we can now draw out the main philosophical points which were to become 'the soil for the seeds of doctrine' in Chesterton's writing. The cosmos does not explain itself – it is 'magic', no matter how vast and sprawling it proves to be, and no matter how far science goes towards explaining its secrets. The cosmos has qualities which human beings have a tendency to forget. The cosmos has something personal both in it and behind or beyond it, and is a gift like a

[32] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies, 268)
[33] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies, 268)

work of art: it is a person-to-person gift and communication. Human beings should be grateful to the giver of the gift, and the best way to show gratitude is to enjoy the gift, which can only be done if one respects the law of the giver, inherent in the gift. 'The proper form of thanks to [the giver] is some form of humility and restraint...we should thank God for beer and burgundy by not drinking too much of them...we also owed an obedience to whatever made us'. So the personal gift of freedom is to be used by submitting it in obedience to the laws of Elfland, for therein lies human happiness. Finally, 'all good was a remnant to be stored and held sacred out of some primordial ruin. Man had saved his good as Crusoe saved his goods: he had saved them from a wreck.'[34] Life is not perfect. But to argue that it is not perfect begs the question with what are we comparing that imperfect state of affairs?

The problem of theodicy, of reconciling suffering and the existence of God, is one of the deepest questions there is. We do not have the space to pursue this theme in Chesterton's writings here. He discusses it in his reflections on the Book of Job,[35] where he points out that it is not a question that stands in isolation, but is intimately connected to other questions about the meaning of existence. In *Orthodoxy* he takes this up again as he writes:

> If Cinderella says, "How is it that I must leave the ball at twelve?" her godmother might answer, "How is it that you are going there till twelve?" If I leave a man in my will ten talking elephants and a hundred winged horses, he cannot complain if the conditions partake of the slight eccentricity of the gift. He must not look a winged horse in the mouth. And it seemed to me that existence was itself so very eccentric a legacy that I could not complain of not understanding the limitations of the vision when I did not understand the vision they limited. The frame was no stranger than the picture.[36]

Chesterton believes, then, that the profound question of theodicy is preceded by an even profounder question: the problem of existence and its goodness. As C. S. Lewis said, we only have some notion of a crooked line if we already hold some notion of a straight line. With what are we comparing this cosmos when we call it cruel, unjust and evil?[37] Or, as Chesterton puts it so brilliantly,

---

[34] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies, 268)
[35] G. K. Chesterton, "Introduction to the Book of Job", accessed 10 November, 2020, http://www.gkc.org.uk/gkc/books/job.html
[36] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies, 260)
[37] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Fount, 1977), 41-2.

> There is at the back of all our lives an abyss of light, more blinding and unfathomable than any abyss of darkness; and it is the abyss of actuality, of existence, of the fact that things truly are, and that we ourselves are incredibly and sometimes incredulously real. It is the fundamental fact of being, as against not being; it is unthinkable, yet we cannot unthink it, though we may sometimes be unthinking about it; unthinking and especially unthanking. For he who has realized this reality knows that it does outweigh, literally to infinity, all lesser regrets or arguments for negation, and that under all our grumblings there is a subconscious substance of gratitude.[38]

Darkness has to be seen against the ultimate background of light.

Chesterton's Ethics of Elfland were the soil in which grew his theological vision of life as sacrament, life as a constant religious experience. He himself lived, and he believed that all reality lives, in the presence of God. He saw Elfland, created reality, as pointing to and revealing the divine reality, the Creator God who is its source. The same sacramental understanding of the cosmos – real and very much there, yet symbolic and pointing to an invisible reality that is personal – is grasped by Gabriel Syme, the poet and undercover detective in one of Chesterton's novels, *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

> "Listen to me," cried Syme with extraordinary emphasis. "Shall I tell you the secret of the whole world? It is that we have only known the back of the world. We see everything from behind, and it looks brutal. That is not a tree, but the back of a tree. That is not a cloud, but the back of a cloud. Cannot you see that everything is stooping and hiding a face? If we could only get round in front…"[39]

Syme wishes to rouse the world to being truly contemplative, to what Chesterton refers to in *Orthodoxy* as being a mystic[40], to being wide awake to all that is there to be perceived in our human experience. When it does that, the world will see, 'not the creature-without-the creator, or the creator-without-the-creature, but the creature-and-the-creator-in-the-cosmological relationship.'[41] The world will recognize its contingency, which is to recognize God. Chesterton saw that there is a totality, an all-determining reality, which grounds everything that we experience in the cosmos. In

---

[38] G. K. Chesterton, *Chaucer* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), 36-7.
[39] (Chesterton, *The Man Who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, 123)
[40] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies, 230-1)
[41] See Austin Farrer, *Finite and Infinite: A Philosophical Essay* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1959), 16ff. and 45ff.

experiencing glimpses of this divine reality, in and through the experiences that we have in this cosmos, we also experience ourselves as contingent beings in a relationship with this God and as beings who are related to other beings that are dependent on this God.

Nothing Else to Say: the Largest Idea of All in Multiple Literary Genres

I began by saying that word limit is a problem when writing about Chesterton. Chesterton's understanding of the links between the various aspects of Elfland, between the world and the Church, between paganism and Christianity, and between nature and grace, and his capacity to perceive the paradoxical nature of reality,[42] meant that in his writing he was able to make the most astonishing links between things and ideas. The issues he discusses in print and in debate are vast in number and staggeringly different in nature. The very quality for which Chesterton praises the writing of Charles Dickens is something found in abundance in Chesterton himself.

> A man who deals in harmonies, who only matches stars with angels, or lambs with spring flowers, he indeed may be frivolous; for he is taking one mood at a time, and perhaps forgetting each mood as it passes. But a man who ventures to combine an angel and an octopus must have some serious view of the universe…the mark of the thoughtful writer is its apparent diversity.[43]

The myriad subjects on which Chesterton discourses, in all kinds of literary genres, are all ways of accessing the central treasure trove of beliefs which he professes expresses in *Orthodoxy*.

It is the over-abundant evidence of the concrete, everyday world and its simple, primordial lessons, its first principles, which led Chesterton to embrace Christianity.

> It is very hard for a man to defend anything of which he is entirely convinced. It is comparatively easy when he is only partially convinced. He is partially convinced because he has found this or that proof of the thing, and he can expound it. But a man is not really convinced of a philosophic theory when he finds that something proves it. He is only really convinced when he finds that everything proves it. And the more converging reasons he finds pointing to this conviction, the more bewildered he is if asked

[42] See Paul Rowan, "Chesterton and Paradox", *The Scrappy Evangelist: Chesterton and a New Apologetics for Today*(Charlotte: NC, 2017), 181-196
[43] (Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton,* 134)

> suddenly to sum them up. Thus, if one asked an ordinary intelligent man, on the spur of the moment, "Why do you prefer civilization to savagery?" he would look wildly round at object after object, and would only be able to answer vaguely, "Why, there is that bookcase . . . and the coals in the coal-scuttle . . . and pianos . . . and policemen." The whole case for civilization is that the case for it is complex. It has done so many things. But that very multiplicity of proof which ought to make reply overwhelming makes reply impossible.[44]

Chesterton's work consisted in him pointing to innumerable bits of evidence, all of which converge to convince him of 'the largest idea of all [which] is the idea of the fatherhood that makes the whole world one.'[45] Chesterton's apologetic for the existence of God is a matter of cumulative convergences.[46] The references in *Orthodoxy* to 'the dumb certainties of experience'[47] and the nuggets of wisdom concerning first principles found in his appraisal of the life and work of Charles Dickens, also support this interpretation.

> The thing that cannot be defined is the first thing; the primary fact. It is our arms and legs, our pots and pans, that are indefinable. The indefinable is the indisputable. The man next door is indefinable, because he is too actual to be defined. And there are some to whom spiritual things have the same fierce and practical proximity; some to whom God is too actual to be defined...The word that has no definition is the word that has no substitute...Precisely because the word is indefinable, the word is indispensable.[48]

Just as one can begin with any object and illustrate the reality of being, so one can select anything as a point of departure and end up arriving at the faith of the Church.

> There is, therefore, about all complete conviction a kind of huge helplessness. The belief is so big that it takes a long time to get it into action. And this hesitation chiefly arises, oddly enough, from an indifference about where one should begin. All roads lead to Rome; which is one reason why many people never get there. In the case of this defence of the Christian

---

[44] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies, 287)

[45] G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 95

[46] See (Rowan, *The Scrappy Evangelist: Chesterton and a New Apologetics for Today*) [delete, Charlotte: NC, 2017.]

[47] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies, 221)

[48] Chesterton, G. K., *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 15 (*Chesterton on Dickens*) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 3

> conviction I confess that I would as soon begin the argument with one thing as another; I would begin it with a turnip or a taximeter cab.[49]

He truly believes that one can start anywhere and find God; that 'You cannot evade the issue of God, whether you talk about pigs or the binomial theory' and that 'defending [Christianity] may mean talking about anything or everything.'[50]

However, remembering the days of his youthful agnosticism at the Slade, Chesterton was aware that several factors – in his case the pressures of the surrounding culture, a materialistic and scientistic epistemology, deep scepticism, solipsism and the sense of restlessness and desperation that these caused in him – can conspire to leave human beings with the feeling that ordinary, everyday experience is merely secular and has no reference to the transcendent at all. For this reason, though the evidence for God is everywhere, 'it takes a long time to get [belief] into action'. The things that seem ordinary and humdrum to us are the very things about which we are mistaken, for they point beyond themselves to the extraordinary and the special, but often we do not have the necessary disposition to see this.

Chesterton describes in *Orthodoxy* how his own spiritual journey, trying to make sense of the cosmos, had seen him go off course at the Slade, but recover. He had been something akin to an Englishman landing on what he thought was a South Sea island, only to discover that it was England all along.

> I did, like all the other solemn little boys, try to be in advance of the age…And I found that I was eighteen hundred years behind it…When I fancied that I stood alone I really was in the ridiculous position of being backed up by all Christendom…I did try to found a heresy of my own; and when I had put the last touches to it, I discovered that it was orthodoxy.[51]

He discovered that the very things that we take for granted all along are the very things that will lead us home if we follow them. 'Whatever it is that we are all looking for, I fancy that it is really quite close…Always the kingdom of Heaven is "at hand"…so I for one should never be astonished if the next twist of a street led me to the heart of that maze in which all the

---

[49] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies, 287)

[50] Daily News, 12th December 1903, cited in D. Ahlquist, *G. K. Chesterton: The Apostle of Common Sense* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 19

[51] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies, 214)

mystics are lost.'[52] That is why he always wrote in such a way as to get his reader to advert to the everyday realities that surround her, with a spirit of wonder, awe and gratitude.

When he wrote *Manalive*, which was published in 1912, four years after *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton's intention was to get those who read this novel to do precisely what they did when they read *Orthodoxy*: to look at common things in an uncommon way; to look at familiar things in such a way that they became unfamiliar. Just as Chesterton described himself in *Orthodoxy* as a man who set out on a voyage and ended up appreciating the ordinary in a totally new and wonder-filled way, so in *Manalive* the main character, Innocent Smith, often walks around his house in order to see his home from a new angle at regular intervals. He also leaves his home to walk around the world and arrive back home again with new eyes full of appreciation for his domestic situation. Smith regularly looks at his wife as if for the first time, aware that she, their home, all the things that they have in their life, and indeed life itself are all unmerited gifts, the proper response to which should be wonder, gratitude and respect. Innocent (but not naïve) is a name chosen to reflect the type of person who possesses these fundamental attitudes towards existence; Smith is a name chosen as representative of an ordinary, everyday (possibly non-intellectual or academic specialist) human being. Chesterton has Smith shoot guns at academic professors, not in order to kill them, but to rouse them with a start into realizing that no amount of analysis should ever blunt the sharp sense of the preciousness of a life that is sheer gift. Smith laments that such intellectuals are not alive enough to fear death and says that, 'that [although] there should be priests to remind men that they will one day die...at certain strange epochs it is necessary to have another kind of priest, called poets, actually to remind men that they are not dead yet.'[53]

For Innocent Smith the world is sacramental: it is full of signs, it points beyond itself and is loaded with eternal significance. We have seen that G. K. Chesterton spent his whole professional life trying to shed light on the eternal significance of this world and human life in this world. He took ordinary, everyday realities, historical events, local, cosmopolitan and global events, events big and small, obscure and notable, reflected on them *sub specie aeternitatis* and shared his reflections with others in over a hundred books, in penned contributions to two hundred other books, in

[52] G. K. Chesterton, "A Glimpse of My Country", *Tremendous Trifles* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 105
[53] (Chesterton, *Manalive*, 107)

novels, short stories, detective fiction (including the much-loved Father Brown priest-detective series), poems, plays and thousands of newspaper essays. He wrote pieces on art and literary criticism, social and cultural criticism, politics, history, economics, philosophy and theology. In multiple genres Chesterton sought to uncover the multiple layers of meaning that are to be found in the rich mystery that is life in the cosmos and the transcendent source of that meaning, all in order to help his cosmic siblings on their journey.

If he were writing for us today, one wonders what he might have to say about this period of Covid-19?

We will one day die, but we are not dead yet! Chesterton, the Beatitudes and Covid-19

As indicated at the beginning of this piece, this chapter is being written in the month of November and the world is in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Last weekend in the Western world it was Remembrance Sunday, when people of all faiths and none remembered the fallen of the wars, those who 'gave their lives that we might live'. The weekend before, some Christians (mostly Catholics) prayed for the dead (and even to the dead, as intercessors). On Halloween, the Eve, the Vigil of the Christian Solemnity of All Hallows, All Saints, people young and old walked around dressed as monsters, vampires, ghouls, mummies and other creatures of the night in celebration of Halloween. As the clocks go back and the dark nights and dank, cold weather draw in in the northern hemisphere, we consider our mortality.

The Catholic Church encourages such reflection, not to instill fear and panic, or to make people morbid in such troubling times, but to encourage us to face the truth, the bottom line about who we are and where we are heading. In the light of that pondering, we can then return to our everyday lives and really live them as we should have been living them all along, more joyfully. Communicating a message so that others might live more joyfully is deeply Chestertonian. Faithful to that practice, what might Chesterton write at this present time?

We have just seen that in *Manalive* Chesterton says that there are two things we must hold in tension: 1) we will die and 2) we are not dead yet! Any attempt to forget that this world is not the bottom line is unwise, because it is doomed to fail. Death is a fact of human existence. No achievement in life, no amount of money, pleasure, honour or glory, or any other good of

this world, can ever negate that bottom-line. However, what is also futile is any attempt to forget that the only way to get to Heaven is by engaging with this life as a gift from God, to be shared with others in love. John of the Cross reminds us that, 'When evening comes, you will be examined in love.'[54]

In reinforcement of that, in this year's Eucharistic Liturgy of the Word for the Solemnity of All Saints, Matthew's gospel of the Beatitudes was placed before us. These fundamental attitudes, snapshots of blessedness or flourishing from the mouth of Christ, seek to wean us off pleasure, power, honour and glory, lest we develop an over-reliance on or an addiction to the good things of the world. They encourage us instead to view these good things as various means to loving. They look to inspire a fundamental poverty of spirit, to look upon the cosmos and life in that cosmos as sheer gift, the way a beggar in the street looks upon alms, a sandwich or a hot cup of tea. Poverty of spirit is the Chestertonian sense that all is gift, all on loan for a while from the Creator while we live our adventure in this strange cosmos, which has been given to us for God's purposes – given that we may become a person of love (another word for which is saint).

Reflecting on our mortality every so often is good because humans have a tendency to forget. Humans can and do live in denial of death. It is not sinful to want to look our best, the older we get. A new fitness regime in an attempt to shed a few pounds off the beer belly; adding a bit of black or blonde to cover the grey in our hair; make-up; a bit of Botox or plastic surgery – these are not necessarily indicators of a culture that is in denial of death, not necessarily a throwback to the old mummification processes of ancient Egypt. However, they are probably precisely that if they are being used as what Pascal refers to as *divertissement*, diversion, distraction from reality.

Chesterton writes of what happens when people forget the sheer wonder of existence in this world, when they forget it is all a gift with a Giver behind it. They worship the gift instead. They become addicted to the gift, enslaved.

> There comes an hour in the afternoon when the child is tired of 'pretending'; when he is weary of being a robber or a Red Indian. It is then that he torments the cat. There comes a time in the routine of an ordered civilization when the man is tired at playing at mythology and pretending that a tree is a maiden or that the moon made love to a man. The effect of this staleness is the same everywhere; it is seen in all drug-taking and dram-drinking and

[54] *Sayings of Light and Love*, in *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, eds. O. Rodriguez and K. Kavanaugh, saying number 57, p.90.

> every form of the tendency to increase the dose. Men seek stranger sins or more startling obscenities as stimulants to their jaded senses. They seek after mad oriental religions for the same reason. They try to stab their nerves to life, if it were with the knives of the priests of Baal. They are walking in their sleep and try to wake themselves up with nightmares.[55]

Any addict in recovery would probably admit that excess diversion is a substitute for joy. Addiction – to alcohol, food, sex, electronic gadgets, shopping, power, influence, popularity and all manner of finite objects of desire – controls and enslaves a person and causes him to increase the dosage in order to bring deadened appetites to life. As a person seeks legitimate goods but in excessive measures unworthy of human nature, she becomes less than human and the original good that was sought in the object of desire no longer brings enjoyment; on the contrary, a deep sense of boredom and even despair can overtake the person who is driven to possess such goods. Then he is driven to increasingly extreme measures (tormenting the cat) in order to find the joy that he seeks.

> The sound rule in the matter would appear to be like many other sound rules – a paradox. Drink because you are happy, but never because you are miserable. Never drink when you are wretched without it, or you will be like the grey-faced gin-drinker in the slum; but drink when you would be happy without it, and you will be like the laughing peasant of Italy. Never drink because you need it, for this is rational drinking, and the way to death and hell. But drink because you do not need it, for this is irrational drinking, and the ancient health of the world.[56]

Drink, like any good thing in this strange cosmos, is a gift that points beyond itself to a giver, and given that the recipient may enjoy it, and become what she was created to be – a mirror of her Creator, a joyful human being fully alive in love, a saint. Enjoy drink – share it with others, throw a party, go for a beer with a friend. Use alcohol to love, to become a saint.

Chesterton looked to enjoy every moment of life in this cosmos just as much as the hedonistic Aesthetes of his early adulthood. However, he and they did it for very different reasons.

> Many of the most brilliant intellects of our time have urged us to the same self-conscious snatching at a rare delight. Walter Pater[57] said that we were all under sentence of death, and the only course was to enjoy exquisite

[55]. (Chesterton, T*he Everlasting Man*, 159)

[56] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies, 92)

[57] An Aesthete, famous for the phrase ‘art for art’s sake’.

> moments simply for those moments' sake. The same lesson was taught by the very powerful and very desolate philosophy of Oscar Wilde. It is the *carpe diem* religion; but the *carpe diem* religion is not the religion of happy people, but of very unhappy people. Great joy does not gather the rosebuds while it may; its eyes are fixed on the immortal rose which Dante saw.[58]

The Aesthetes believed in living for the moment, seizing the day, *carpe diem*, but the Aesthetes did this because they saw no eternal horizon against which the world was set. If death is coming, says the hedonist, the best advice is to drink in as much experience as we can in whatever measure we like, without any consideration of the future, let alone eternity. For countless people throughout the centuries, this has been the preferred path to happiness. But for Chesterton, who saw the world as a sacrament pointing to eternity, a divine masterpiece in which human beings are co-artists, co-creators, this is not happiness, but the 'cult of the pessimistic pleasure-seeker.' Yes, said Chesterton, we should seize the passing days of our life, live them to the full, but 'it is not true that we should think of them as passing, or enjoy them simply for those moments' sake.' On the contrary,

> A man may have, for instance, a moment of ecstasy in first love, or a moment of victory in battle. The lover enjoys the moment, but precisely not for the moment's sake. He enjoys it for the woman's sake, or his own sake. The warrior enjoys the moment, but not for the sake of the moment; he enjoys it for the sake of the flag. The cause which the flag stands for may be foolish and fleeting; the love may be calf-love, and last a week. But the patriot thinks of the flag as eternal; the lover thinks of his love as something that cannot end. These moments are filled with eternity; these moments are joyful because they do not seem momentary…Man cannot love mortal things. He can only love immortal things for an instant.[59]

G. K. Chesterton wants us to keep our eyes on eternity, rather than on this passing world, even as we must enjoy this world as gift of the Creator. Gratitude – for the gifts of a cosmos and a life to enjoy the cosmos – is the seedbed of all virtue. To be humble enough to recognize the blessing of one's creatureliness and to be thankful for this infinite debt is the fuel that drives us towards the love of our fellow creatures, which is to share with them the gift of the cosmos in a way that is in accordance with the will of the Creator. The ordinary and the everyday might not have been, and so they

---

[58] (Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies92)

[59] Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford* Controversies,93)

are precious, full of beauty and majesty and a source of primordial awe, wonder and deep-seated joy for Chesterton. Sometimes we have to be jolted, shocked into noticing what is already there. Perhaps, Chesterton muses, this is the meaning of death. Heaven knows how we want to hang on to our toys, the *divertissement* of which Pascal spoke in *pensée* 139.[60] But perhaps, says Chesterton, in reality 'The way to love anything is to realise that it might be lost.'[61] Perhaps this is how Chesterton would read this period of Covid-19. It should make us love life more dearly and re-examine our priorities in the light of that.

As England goes back into a second national lockdown, in the hope that people might be afforded a better opportunity to be with their loved ones at Christmas, people are once more working from home, or being furloughed, or losing their jobs. As happened in the first lockdown, many may die alone in hospitals, with limited numbers of people or perhaps nobody at all able to mourn at their funerals. These have certainly been tragic and poignant times. But have we learned anything? Has Covid-19 done anything to our priorities?

In formulating an answer, one suspects that Chesterton would point out that there is a balance to be struck. He says that we are not dead yet, and so we should not be so obsessed with Covid-19 that we stop living our lives. However, in the spirit of the Beatitudes, he would also ask us at the same time (remember he was a 'both/and' thinker) to consider what lives we are actually living. Are we, in fact, really living at all? One sees the adjectives 'essential' and 'nonessential' being used to qualify a lot of nouns at the moment. The Beatitudes and Chesterton also talk about essentials and non-essentials. Innocent Smith says that we are not dead yet – but that we *are* going to die. Covid-19 does not change the bottom-line reality that we are going to die, but it *does*, potentially at least, change when we *might* die. I am fifty-two years old. Perhaps my death is three decades away, if God spares me. An event that is three decades away might not be all that urgent to me as I go about my daily life. An event that is potentially three weeks away because of a pandemic should, for a moment or two at least, make me stop and think about how I am living my life.

H.G. Wells, Chesterton's atheistic friend and debating partner, once asked Chesterton if, in the event that his atheistic interpretation of the cosmos was

[60] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, translated by W. F. Trotter (New York; Dover, 2003), 39-42
[61] G. K. Chesterton, *Tremendous Trifles* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 23

incorrect and Chesterton's theism correct, would he still be able to get into Heaven as Chesterton's friend. Chesterton assured Wells that he would still 'triumph…by being a friend of Man, by having done a thousand things for men like me in every way'.[62] The love of others, to make of one's life an act of self-giving, is to be who we are called to be in Elfland. In this gift of a cosmos, love is the surest indicator of a life pleasing to God and the truest criterion for evaluating the worth of a human life. Pain, suffering and loss, whether actual or potential, can be realities that bring us to our senses, in the sense of affording us an opportunity to see our true status in the cosmos and the preciousness of our time in that cosmos. We are the children of God: our existence is a sheer gift of God, and so we are utterly contingent beings, possessing nothing of which to boast; and yet we are called into existence in Elfland by the love of God, which is the call to the eternal life of a loving relationship with our Creator and each other. Humility, which is maintaining in harmony these two truths – knowing our place as creature and our destiny as a beloved child of God – is the seedbed of the love whose concrete manifestations are the criteria of judgment in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats.[63] Yes indeed, in the evening of life we will be examined on love – whether or not we became a saint is the only question on the eternal exam paper.

(Some of the material used in parts of this contribution was originally published in *The Scrappy Evangelist: Chesterton and a New Apologetics for Today*, Charlotte, NC: The American Chesterton Society, 2017. I am grateful to the world's leading Chesterton scholar, Dale Ahlquist, President of the American Chesterton Society, for permission to reproduce it here.)

[62] (Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, 370-1)
[63] Matthew 25:31-46

HOLY GOD MAKES NO REPLY / YET

TERRY PHILLIPS

Most critics who mention MacGreevy at all regret that his poetry receives little acknowledgement. James McNaughton comments that MacGreevy is 'one of those minor writers constantly in a state of rediscovery' and with some irony points out that of critics who claim 'that his work merits careful attention' some 'manage to heed their own injunctions'.[1] There are a number of reasons for this, not least the fact that after the publication of his collected poetry in 1934, he wrote very little poetry, only five poems.[2] John Coolahan summarizes a variety of reasons offered for giving up his creative writing, which seem to suggest that he just did not have the single-minded focus of the dedicated writer.[3] He spent much of the rest of his working life pursuing aspects of his lifelong interest in the visual arts, including working for the fine arts journal, *Formes*, and lecturing at the National Gallery in London. In 1951 he was appointed Director of the National Gallery of Ireland, a post he held until his retirement through ill-health in 1963.[4] However, there are other reasons for his neglect. In many ways he represents a strange amalgam of interests. A Catholic Irish poet may have appeared to be someone who would have attracted interest in the Ireland of the 1930s, but it was a period not noted for any engagement with literary modernism, dominated as it was by figures such as Daniel Corkery, whose cultural nationalism asserted that the country's literature should be rural, Catholic and in Irish.[5] The modernist poetic seems in some ways a denial of some of

[1] James McNaughton, 'Thomas MacGreevy's Poetics of Loss: War, Sexuality, and Archive', *Journal of Modern Literature* 35, no. 4 (2012): 130.
[2] Thomas MacGreevy, *Poems* (London: Heinemann, 1934).
[3] John Coolahan, 'Thomas MacGreevy: The Man and His Work', *The Listowel Literary Phenomenon*, no. Electronic Edition Information Published by: Susan Schreibman and Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities (1994): 60–82.
[4] Susan Schreibman, *Collected Poems of Thomas MacGreevy* (Dublin: Anna Livia Press, 1991), xv–xviii.
[5] See BrownTerence, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1920 to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 52.

the characteristics of the Revival, as was discovered by no less a person than W.B. Yeats, and certainly MacGreevy's enduring literary friends, Beckett and Joyce did not feel at home in the Ireland of the time and would not have acknowledged either nationalist or religious commitment. At the same time there was nothing conventional in MacGreevy's Catholicsm, nor, as will be seen in his nationalism. The two interests came together in a quite profound engagement with the Irish Celtic tradition.

Like Beckett and Joyce, his interests did take him beyond Ireland. After the conclusion of the First World War, MacGreevy attended Trinity College, and stayed in Dublin until 1924, when after expeditions to Spain and Switzerland, he moved to London. From 1927 until 1933 he lived in Paris, taking on a variety of work including teaching, writing and criticism of both literature and the fine arts. He moved back to London where he stayed until 1941, when he returned to Dublin. In that year, he began writing for the *Father Matthew Record* and *The Capuchin Annual*, an indication of his continuing if unorthodox commitment to Catholicism.

This chapter will examine in detail some of his poetry from the perspective of his religious beliefs. He was born in 1893 and brought up in a traditional family in Tarbert, in County Kerry. The son of an R.I.C. officer and a teacher he was, according to Coolahan, a devout Catholic as a child. However, he lived through three tumultuous events in his country's history: the First World War, the War of Independence (sometimes referred to as the Anglo-Irish War) and the Civil War of 1921-2 (between those who supported the Free State created by the Anglo-Irish Agreement and Republicans who opposed it, a war which ultimately cost more lives than the War of Independence). Two of MacGreevy's poems, which will be discussed below, offer direct descriptions of the First World War: 'Nocturne' and 'De Civitate Hominum'.[6] His response to the War of Independence is reflected in 'The Six Who Were Hanged', written between 1927 and 1929, which reflects on a particularly horrific incident which took place at Mountjoy Gaol, Dublin in 1921, when six Republican prisoners were publicly put to death by hanging.[7] The poem expresses his indignation that the war in which he fought, a war supposedly to protect the rights of small nations brought no relief to Ireland, occupied for 'seven hundred years'. However, written at least six years after the event, it goes beyond mere indignation to express his response to the events of the previous decade, summed up in this long poem by two significant lines: 'Tired of sorrow, / My sorrow, their sorrow, all sorrow'. The Civil

[6] (Schreibman, *Collected Poems of Thomas MacGreevy*, 1, 2-6.)
[7] (Schreibman, 7.)

War with its legacy of division, sometimes even within families, is the subject of the poem published in the 1934 volume as 'Autumn 1922'.[8] In its brevity it sums up the despairing state of mind of MacGreevy and others:

> The sun burns out
> The world withers
>
> And time grows afraid of the triumph of time.

Religious belief is notably absent from this poem. The horrendous events through which he had lived, as well as issues in his personal life, undoubtedly led him to re-examine aspects of his beliefs. McNaughton cites convincing evidence from his unpublished memoir which indicates a homosexuality which would have led to religious condemnation.[9] This chapter will argue that those of his poems which deal with religious subjects demonstrate a move away from the orthodox rules-orientated Catholicism of his upbringing towards a more mystical and spiritual vision. It will seek to demonstrate that the modernist form of his poetry, and his artistic vision assist the expression of ideas, which are not easily reducible to mere logical explanation but in fact move beyond it. To this end I will focus particularly on a small number of poems from the 1934 volume: 'Seventh Gift of the Holy Ghost', 'Gloria de Carlos V', 'Fragments', 'Arrangement in Gray and Black', and 'Sour Swan'. I will then look closely at 'Breton Oracles', a profound poem, the first version of which was not published until 1961.[10]

While none of MacGreevy's poems are widely read, it is probably true to say that the best known is 'De Civitate Hominum', a First World War poem included in Gerald Dawe's *Earth Voices Whispering*, an anthology of Irish War Writing spanning conflicts from 1914 to 1945. Interestingly Dawe's title is taken from the final lines of a four-line poem, by MacGreevy entitled, 'Nocturne' and dedicated to '*Geoffrey England Taylor, 2nd Lieutenant, RFA 'Died of Wounds.'* Its full title is 'Nocturne, St Eloi' and, it was written in 1918:

> I labour in a barren place,
> Alone, self-conscious, frightened, blundering;
> Far away, stars wheeling in space,
> About my feet, earth voices whispering.

---

[8] (Schreibman, 10.)
[9] (McNaughton, 'Thomas MacGreevy's Poetics of Loss: War, Sexuality, and Archive', 141.)
[10] (Schreibman, *Collected Poems of Thomas MacGreevy*.)

Its form, reflecting the early date of the poem, is somewhat traditional in comparison to most of MacGreevy's work, but nevertheless it powerfully evokes the stark conditions in which so many soldiers served and died. Schreibman describes Taylor, who had trained alongside MacGreevy as his 'closest friend during the war' and she goes on to describe his heartbreaking discovery of the news of Taylor's death while recovering from his own wounds in hospital in Manchester.[11]

To return to the better-known, 'De Civitate Hominum', I have taken the title of this chapter from the stark final lines. In the poem, MacGreevy (who enlisted in an artillery regiment in January 1917) describes an incident, which he recalls witnessing on the Salient of Ypres, of the shooting down of a British plane. In relation to this poem, Coolahan comments, quoting MacGreevy's memoir, 'One striking incident he recalls from the Salient of Ypres was the shooting down of an English plane "and its descent in flames inside the German lines on a morning of brilliant sunshine which I recalled in my poem *De Civitate Hominum*".'[12]

By a very powerful description, recalling 'A Matisse ensemble' (a three word stanza exploiting the modernist form which allows such emphasis), it conveys the absolute paradox of the beauty of what he sees and its utter destructiveness, 'fleece-white flowers of death.' The first draft of the poem was written in 1927 and it may be seen as expressing a very common sense both of utter disillusion with 'Our bitch of a world' and a loss of faith in God, culminating with two key lines, 'Holy God makes no reply / Yet.' That final word marks the beginning of what I see as a religious search, which can be traced through a selection of subsequent poems.

'Seventh Gift of the Holy Ghost', first published in *The Dublin Review* in 1929 is a short but powerful poem of only 13 lines and 43 words.[13] It very much suggests a struggling person who carries the legacy of a very traditional Catholic upbringing that would have included in its enormous range of rote learning a recitation of the 'Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost' (in more modern religious parlance, the Holy Spirit). The modernist form allows the highlighting of certain powerful and multi-faceted words, for example in the single-word line, 'Light'. The poem brings into sharp focus two very different Catholic traditions: the notion that God is Love, sometimes almost forgotten but living on through figures such as St. Francis of Assisi, and the religion of judgment and rules, manifested in that seventh

[11] (Schreibman, 97–98.)
[12] (Coolahan, 'Thomas MacGreevy: The Man and His Work'.)
[13] (Schreibman, *Collected Poems of Thomas MacGreevy*, 33.)

gift: 'Fear of the Lord.' The opening of the poem 'The end of love, / Love's ultimate good,' expresses that paradox, via the ambiguity of the word 'end.' MacGreevy's gift for visual description nurtures a hope that the word might mean 'purpose' with its heavenly vision of 'Yellow villages / In a vast, high, light-beaten plain.' The paradox of much Catholic teaching is conveyed as the poem reaches its conclusion, 'Imagining/ The pity we had to learn/And the terror-.' The force of pity as an expression of love is obliterated by the final line of the poem 'The ultimate terror.' Hope goes and the reader is left confronting an abysm of hopelessness.

First published in *Transition* in 1929, 'Gloria de Carlos V' ends on a more hopeful note.[14] Again, the influence of the visual arts can be seen in the fact that the poem was inspired by Titian's painting, *La Gloria* which MacGreevy saw on this first visit to Spain in 1924. This time the emotions which make faith difficult come not from church teaching, as in the 'Seventh Gift of the Holy Ghost' but from human failings, evoking once again the disillusion manifested in 'De Civitate Hominum'. Life in a postwar world is 'no longer the same Christianity.' This time the religious memory evoked is not of rules and an angry God but a long-lost world in which all felt secure and happy. As so often in his poetry, colour and visual images make his point. The contrasting perceptions of past and present between a happy world and one fraught with loss and suffering are represented by a contrast between east and west, and the means of contrast is colour. While, 'orient air expresses, / Golden horns / And silver gilded horns', the predominant colour in the west is black, a black to be seen on the uniforms of soldiers mingled with the scarlet of blood and ultimately in the funeral colours, 'Starch white streaked with cadaver black.' [15] The final stanza appears to continue the same theme, beginning with an evocation of the popular Irish ballad 'the Rose of Tralee' but lamenting that it has 'turned gray.' However, in the final lines, there is a turn to what can only be called a glimmer of faith, again expressed in terms of colour:

> But a moment, now, I suppose,
> For a moment I may suppose,
> Gleaming blue
> Silver blue,
> Gold,
> Rose,
> And the light of the world.

[14] (Schreibman, 36.)
[15] Note Matthias Grunewald 1470-1528 is a German renaissance painter of rather gloomy religious paintings.

It is the voice of a spiritual seeker who experiences a few moments of light, the opposite of what is often called 'the dark night of the soul.' It is expressed not in terms of reason or argument and can only be termed a spiritual insight of hope, tentative though it is.

A similar awareness of human failings, but this time with contemporary implications is present in 'Fragments.'[16] According to Schreibman, the earliest reference to the poem is January 1931, although it seems to have remained unpublished until the publication of the 1934 collection. The poem is subtitled '*Qui vive la pietà quando è ben morta'* a direct quotation from Canto 20 of Dante's *Inferno*. As Thomas McNaughton has commented, MacGreevy has 'purposefully' mistranslated '*qui*' as there rather than here in order to suggest that the supposed pitiless divine judgement of hell should not be brought to earth.[17] McNaughton suggests there is a contemporary aspect to the poem referring to the execution of Civil War veterans by the Free State Government, a government which was in turn strongly supported by the Catholic Church. Its implications for an examination of MacGreevy's evolving religious views suggest the incompatibility of the contemporary church's emphasis on the avoidance of 'mortal' sins, which it taught inevitably brought eternal punishment in the fire of hell for the perpetrator, with the Saviour who in his dying moments proclaimed: 'Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.'[18][19] In the poem the 'Jew high priest who crucified / A Man in A.D.33' is 'flayed with fiery rods', but the final words of the poem distance the poet from such pitiless punishment, '*There pity must be dead / For piety to live.'* In the here of MacGreevy, pity and piety are united in his vision of a loving and forgiving God.

'Arrangement in Gray and Black' expresses a stronger and less ambivalent faith than most of these poems. [20] The epigraph suggests the possibility that the dying woman who is the subject of the poem is a Salesian sister, and St. Francis de Sales with his influential spiritual writing and emphasis on love would undoubtedly have appealed to the writer. As in most of the poems, the subject has suffered disappointment and spiritual as well as physical

[16] (Schreibman, *Collected Poems of Thomas MacGreevy*, 38.)
[17] (McNaughton, 'Thomas MacGreevy's Poetics of Loss: War, Sexuality, and Archive', 139.)
[18] 'The Gospel of Luke', in *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Pocket (London: Dartmon, Longman and Todd, 1990), 23.24.
[19] *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Pocket Edition (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990), bk. Luke, 23.34.
[20] (Schreibman, *Collected Poems of Thomas MacGreevy*, 53.)

loss, 'Love failed her. / Life always fails.' Nevertheless, the poem concludes unambiguously with a declaration of faith:

> A hope
> Of unfailing life
> In unfailing love.

'Seventh Gift of the Holy Ghost', 'Gloria de Carlos V' and 'Fragments' convey a hesitant journey away from the near despair of 'Seventh Gift' towards a faith in a very different God from the God the poet knew as a child and a young man. There is a significant development in the next poem I wish to consider. 'Sour Swan' is an extraordinary poem which, as the title suggests, conveys some of the contradictions of religious faith, suggested by the pity and piety referred to above, and includes references to the suffering world which gives rise to such feelings of paradox.[21] The poem draws strongly on Shakespeare's well-known speech from *The Merchant of Venice*, 'The quality of mercy is not strained…'[22] The swan is an idealized image often linked with wisdom. Nevertheless, anyone interested in ornithology is well aware that the swan is in fact a fierce and aggressive bird. There is irony in the fact that the swan is closely related to the goose who, in popular culture represents not wisdom but its reverse, hence the opening call, 'Tarry serpent-goose! / Listen wise fool!' These two lines of innate contradiction introduce a poem which, on one level addresses the implicit paradox between the desire for justice and the desire for peace. A direct allusion to Shakespeare's words, 'When mercy seasons justice' concludes the second stanza of the poem: 'The seasoning of your justice / But leads to the child that leads.' This suggests all the contradictions, one might say the absolute folly, of Christian faith: the infant brought up in the scorned village of Nazareth, who became a great leader only to die and lead his followers to persecution and in some cases death. The following two lines return us to Shakespeare's words and remind us that there are no simple answers. While mercy has no limits, platitude which leads us to easy solutions has many. At this point the abstract principles with which the poem struggles are illustrated by reference to the three public tragedies which haunted MacGreevy and many of his contemporaries, the First World War, the War of Independence and the Civil War:

---

[21] (Schreibman, 54–55.)

[22] William Shakespeare, 'The Merchant of Venice', in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.211. IV.1.184.

Three turns of time now
The child of aspiration
Has been victim to terrestrial hallucination
Then to violence against self-deluding self.

The 'terrestrial hallucination' which has led to such tragedy can have only one solution, embraced unambiguously in a three-word stanza, 'Go to God', recalling Shakespeare's words about mercy in the passage referred to, 'It is an attribute to God himself'.

At this point the poet's internal struggle seems to have been resolved, but there is more to come, in an echo of St. Luke's Gospel and the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector,[23] when the poet expresses gratitude for not being like the military leader, 'Sounding orders and counter orders / In abysses of insignificance.'

While he does not directly express sorrow for such spiritual arrogance, nevertheless he resolves in the final stanza to cry, implying grief and perhaps repentance. Those who seek a solution in military force are reminded of the supremacy of love and the poem concludes with a stanza which expresses the paradox of suffering and divine love which underlies the whole poem:

"Song is dead. Yes. Song
Is dead. Long live song.!"

James Wilson describes MacGreevy's poetry as 'representing raw, often horrifying, modern experience in the light of an imminent, transcendental good and historical evil'.[24] The poems which follow 'De Civitate' have seen MacGreevy tread a somewhat hesitant path away from the near despair of the 'Seventh Gift of the Holy Ghost', summed up in the lines quoted above.

MacGreevy published only five poems after those in the 1934 volume. One of the later poems particularly deserves detailed attention in the context of this discussion. This is 'Breton Oracles',[25] a poem published in the journal *Poetry* in 1961.[26] It is a lengthy poem which brings together MacGreevy's artistic awareness, as well as his consciousness of his Celtic origins and is

[23] 'The Gospel of Luke', in *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Pocket (London: Dartmon, Longman and Todd, 1990),18.9-14.
[24] James Matthew Wilson, 'Thomas MacGreevy Reads T.S. Eliot and Jack B. Yeats', *Yeats Eliot Review* 23, no. 3–4 (2006): 23.
[25] (Susan Schreibman, *Collected Poems of Thomas MacGreevy*, 68–70.)
[26] Thomas MacGreevy, 'Breton Oracles', *Poetry* 99, no. 2 (1961): 87–89.

an assertion of the shortcomings of mere intellectual knowledge in the light of spiritual wisdom, a wisdom one feels that the poet has sought for much of his life. The theme of the poem is resurrection and it opens with an intellectual statement of belief in life after death, not particularly convincing and not intended to be, since it is spoken by 'She of the Second Gift', an allusion to the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost discussed above. It is important to note that the 'Second Gift' is 'understanding', a quality not to be confused with wisdom. The tones of intellectual debate are conveyed by references to opponents of the idea of life after death as widely different in time, place and belief as the High Priest Sadoc (believed by many to be the ancestor of the Sadducees) and Karl Marx.

An element in McGreevy's writing that brought together his religious and Irish national consciousness was his interest in the traditions of Celtic Christianity. Much of the poem takes the form of a pilgrimage, a strong tradition of Celtic Christianity. As Catherine Maignant comments, 'The pilgrimage phenomenon has been an important component of Irish spirituality since the early Middle Ages'[27] The poet's passage from intellectual debate to spiritual wisdom is expressed significantly by a passing from Nimes in southern France to 'Brittany of the tender legends' suggesting the Celtic heritage further reinforced by the poet's reflection 'I am of Ireland', in turn recalling the first line of an anonymous Medieval Lyric which continues, 'and of the Holy Realm of Ireland'.[28] Then begins what might reasonably be described as the poet's pilgrimage in words along the northern coast of Brittany, passing through La Latte, Kerjean, Ploumanach, which creates in him 'awareness, / Deeper, more intimate.' This marks a very clear reference to some of the insights of Celtic Christianity, lost in the nineteenth-century 'anglicization' of the Irish Catholic Church.[29] A significant point in his journey is reached when he comes 'as far as Trébuerden'. The ancient town itself, hosted many religious settlements over the years, the first of them notably begun by the Welsh monk, Preden, notable because of the shared Celtic heritage of Wales and Ireland.[30] In view of the darkness explored in the following lines, it may be significant that one of the orders was the Knights Templar, whose role in the Crusades

[27] Catherine Maignant, 'Postmodern Celtic Christianity and the Spatialisation of Time', *Nordic Irish Studies* 6 (2007): 18.
[28] 'The Hyper Texts', n.d., thehypertexts.com.
[29] For further details about these sites, see (Schreibman, *Collected Poems of Thomas MacGreevy*, 167.)
[30] '(Https://Www.Brittany-Ferries.Co.Uk/Guides/France/Brittany/Trebeurden).' Britanny Ferries, accessed 11 May, 2020 (https://www.brittany-ferries.co.uk/guides/france/brittany/trebeurden).

would not have endeared them to the poet, who has seen far too many examples of the cost of warfare, and is seeking the way of the God of love. In accordance with the ideas of Celtic Christianity, which emphasize the sacredness of all creation, the rocks themselves speak to him reminding him of the dark side of human existence, the ‘cataclysm’ of the Fall, and the fears of the future brought on by ‘an old world known only too well.’

In keeping with the poet’s profound spiritual understanding, reached one supposes after years of internal struggle, there is no quick solution to the contemplation of these cataclysmic horrors, although at first reading it is promised by the following stanza:

> But at Guimiliau,
> Lighted, at night, to the sky,
> I was near to the Son of Man,
> Living,
> Risen from His Sufferings

The cathedral town of Guimiliau is renowned for its raised crucifix, which means that the reader who is aware of this reads the above passage very differently. The glance upward, without the human dimension of time, is a glance to a resurrected being, but also to the sufferings of that being. Here as the next stanza states is, ‘the truth of the Kingdom’ which ‘prevails against all cerebration.’ For the observer gifted only with the second gift of the Holy Ghost, the image is an image of intolerable suffering, but spiritual enlightenment sees something different. The following stanzas reflect the emptiness of the poet’s journey through Brittany, ‘Yet, through the nightmare, / You were there,’. In the following stanza the phrase ‘you were there’ is repeated twice, and then a final time at the start of the final stanza.

This final stanza is worth quoting in full. It concludes this article and it concludes MacGreevy’s search:

> You were there;
> And, in the half-light,
> The dark green, touched with gold,
> Of leaves;
> The light green, touched with gold,
> Of clusters of grapes;
> And, crouching at the foot of a renaissance wall,
> A little cupid, in whitening stone,
> Weeping over a lost poetry.

An interesting observation made by a modern commentator on the revival of the Celtic pilgrimage reflects the essence of MacGreevy's search, 'contemporary pilgrimage reflects today's spirituality, which tends to be more holistic. Today's holistic pilgrimage […] may not be church-related at all but rather related to a widespread disillusionment with the institutional church.'[31] While MacGreevy would not have known of the scandals, which later all but destroyed the reputation of the Catholic Church, as discussed above, his own personal experience led him to seek a different route to God.

'Breton Oracles' expounds a faith which continues despite a life which has been overshadowed by war, by disappointment, by inadmissible love, not in some glorious light but in 'half-light' so that the shadows too are remembered. The painter's eye is there to the end, observing the interplay of colours, and creating a powerful concluding image in which nature predominates over human creation, and true spiritual insight is only glimpsed.

.

[31] O'Riordáin, *Irish Catholic Spirituality, Celtic and Roman*, 11, quoted in Maignant, 'Postmodern Celtic Christianity and the Spatialisation of Time', 20.

‘My verse was nourished by Toledo’s sun In whose clear light Ray, Sword, and Pen are one’: Roy Campbell’s Khaki-Clad Catholicism

Daniel Frampton

Introduction: A ‘Powerful Poet and Soldier’?

> I noticed a strange tall gaunt man half in khaki half in mufti with a large wide-awake hat, bright eyes and a hooked nose sitting in the corner. The others had their backs to him, but I could see in his eye that he was taking an interest in the conversation […] It was rather like Trotter at the Prancing Pony, in fact v[ery] like. All of a sudden he butted in, in a strange unplaceable accent, taking up some point about Wordsworth. In a few seconds he was revealed as Roy Campbell.[1]
> —J. R. R. Tolkien in a letter to Christopher Tolkien, 6 October 1944.

J. R. R. Tolkien’s 1944 description of his encounter with the South African poet Roy Campbell (1901-1957), who reminded him of ‘old-looking war-scarred Trotter’, in the Oxford pub The Eagle and Child is just as compelling as the description of Trotter himself, the character in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) later known as Strider or Aragorn. This ‘powerful poet and soldier […] limping from recent wounds’, as Tolkien described Campbell, made a significant impression on the Catholic don, meeting with a poet who ‘nearly lost his life’ during the Spanish Civil War ‘after sheltering the Carmelite fathers’, having also ‘fought through the war on Franco’s side’. How unlike W. H. Auden and others, ‘the corduroy panzers’, Tolkien scoffed, those poets ‘who fled to America’ at the outbreak of war in 1939.

[1] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (1981; London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2006), 95.

And it was the soldierly aspect of Campbell, twinned with the South African poet's conversion to Catholicism in 1936, which especially impressed Tolkien.[2]However, the character who sought out Tolkien, as well as his friend C. S. Lewis, in Oxford in 1944 was like Strider in more ways than one; in that, like Tolkien's Aragorn, *Don Ignacio Roig*, as Campbell was known in Spain, was in a sense a fiction – a literary creation of an arguably Catholic imagination, that is, standing as a living renunciation of the spiritless modern age that Campbell so much despised. For much of what Campbell communicated to Tolkien about his swashbuckling exploits, most of all on the battlefield, was at best an exaggeration – and at worst, as some have said, it was 'deplorable posing'.[3] As we shall see, Campbell had actually risked his life for Carmelites friars in the Spanish city of Toledo, but he had not fought for Franco; and while Campbell had enlisted in the British Army during the current conflict, 'old wounds' – or rather, a bad hip – had prevented him from seeing combat. In other words, we cannot take Campbell at face value. However, what this chapter seeks to show is that Campbell was essentially playing a character that was entirely of a piece with his poetry, his soldierly ethic and ultimately his Catholic faith. In this sense, 'such a rare character' as Campbell, as Tolkien dubbed him, 'both a soldier and a poet, and a Christian convert', ought to be considered in much the same way as Tolkien treated *The Lord of the Rings*, as 'a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision'.[4]When Campbell met Tolkien and Lewis in Oxford in 1944, 'things because fast and furious', especially at a second meeting at the quarters of Lewis. 'C.S.L.'s reactions were odd', Tolkien recalled. 'R. C. shook him a bit.' Lewis, who 'had taken a fair deal of port and was a little belligerent', insisted on reading out loud a lampoon that he had written about Campbell in 1939 titled 'To the Author of Flowering Rifle'.[5] In this work, Lewis had rebuked Campbell's lack of Christian compassion in his infamous epic *Flowering Rifle* (1939), his pro-Nationalist account of the Spanish Civil War, in which he had abused, in particular, British supporters of the Republican cause, most of all as gutless, slandering 'Charlies'. Reading the poem, Lewis replied:

> Loud fool! to think a nickname could abate
> The blessing given to the compassionate.
> Fashions in polysyllables may fright
> Those Charlies on the Left of whom you write

[2] (Tolkien, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkein*, 95, 96)
[3] John Povey, *Roy Campbell* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 7.
[4] (Tolkien, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkein*, 96, 172)
[5] Tolkien, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkein*, 95.

> No wonder; since it was from them you learned
> How white to black by jargon can be turned.

Cautioning Campbell that his 'shrill covin-politics and theirs / Are two peas in a single pod', Lewis encouraged 'Dear Roy', whose poetry he did admire, to find instead 'some feet of sacred ground [...] / Sacred because, though now it's no-man's land, / There stood your father's house; there you should stand'.[6]Although Campbell laughed when Lewis read his lampoon to him, Lewis was making a serious point that biographers have also made: that *Flowering Rifle: A Poem from the Battlefield of Spain* was, indeed, a 'monstrous poem' that seriously damaged his reputation. As the critic Desmond MacCarthy observed:

> He revels in the pleasures of scorn […] He can't stop banging at his enemies after he has knocked them down, and the display of his own zest often mitigates the sting of his satire […] He can't keep his anger on ice as the most formidable satirists of all can do.[7]

And Joseph Pearce concedes that there is a 'serious flaw at the heart of the poem'.[8]While it is not my intention to defend Campbell here, we should, I think, attempt to understand him, especially since Campbell's poetry, suffused with ire for the Left, was indicative of a mind afire with the same anti-modern sentiment that, I want to suggest, made him fundamentally Catholic; underling the notion that, as Josef Pieper observed in *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (1954), 'the power of anger is actually the power of resistance in the soul'.[9] While *Flowering Rifle* exhibited the worst of Campbell's fury and lack of charity, it is not a poem entirely lacking in Christian feeling, and nor was Campbell himself as a man. For where I do differ with Povey is with his assertion that *Flowering Rifle* was simply 'a political polemic exposing Campbell's vision of a very two-dimensional world'.[10] While much of the work is political, Campbell's view of the Spanish Civil War was not wholly 'two-dimensional'. For contained within *Flowering Rifle* and several other of Campbell's poems to come out of his

---

[6] C. S. Lewis, 'To the Author of Flowering Rifle', *Cherwell Magazine*, 6 May 1939, reproduced in *The Collected Poems of C. S. Lewis: A Critical Edition*, ed. Don W. King (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2015), 324.
[7] *The Sunday Times*, 7 July 1946.
[8] Joseph Pearce, *Bloomsbury and Beyond: The friends and enemies of Roy Campbell* (2001; London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2002), 221.
[9] Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (1954; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 193.
[10] John Povey, *Roy Campbell.* Twayne's World Author Series. No. 439. (Boston: Twayne, 1977), 156.

time in Spain is, we shall see, a vital theology of the martyr and Christian regeneration – relating most of all to Campbell's experience of Catholic martyrdom in the streets of Toledo – as a soldier-poet whose instincts, which were arguably in some ways Catholic from the beginning, were sanctified by the blood of the holy martyrs.

'Shackled Thunder'

Born in 1901 in the colony of Natal, Campbell's South African background played a crucial role in the development of his poetry and persona, which I argue are one and the same. As his friend, the South African-born poet David Wright wrote, Campbell's 'South African birth and half-pastoral upbringing' gave his 'work its unique bias', which, in 'the energy and flamboyance' of *The Flaming Terrapin* (1924), his first major poem, 'burst like a bomb in the middle of the faded prettiness of the "Georgian" poetry'.[11] As Campbell would state himself, arriving in England for the first time in 1919, he 'would sooner see one sakaboola rising in the wind than have a thousand nightingales sitting on my chimney top and singing for all they are worth' – and in this sense, Campbell felt trapped in such 'English scenery', which was to him 'like those pictures one sees on chocolate boxes'.[12] Accordingly, this vision of landscape went hand in hand with his lived experience as a native of Natal, which stood in stark contrast to the gentrified English poet, as Campbell was clearly implying when he claimed that, in South Africa, 'as children we used to amuse ourselves with scorpions much in the same way as English boys do with chestnuts or "conkers"'. And the persona that Campbell would cultivate throughout his life was founded on that disparity, which, from his days as an undergraduate at Oxford, alienated him from the intelligentsia, including fellow student Aldous Huxley, that 'pedant who leeringly gloated over his knowledge of how crayfish copulated […] but could never have caught or cooked one'. Campbell, to the contrary, had killed a stag with his 'bare hands' in Africa and lauded it as 'one of the happiest days of my life'. Reveling in the ferocity of the action, he claimed that he was 'knocked over with a flesh wound on the hip', but recovered to capture the animal by its horns and drown it in less than eighteen inches of water.[13]It is not entirely surprising, then, that Campbell should have developed a distaste for what he saw as the

[11] David Wright, *Roy Campbell* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1961), 5, 10.
[12] Quoted in Ethel Campbell, *The Life of Sam Campbell* (Durban: John Singleton & Williams, 1933), 354.
[13] Roy Campbell, *Light on a Dark Horse: An Autobiography* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1951), 83, 184, 66.

cheap, banal sentimentalities of 'Georgian' poetry, such as Vita Sackville-West's poem *The Land* (1926), since, as Campbell mockingly related: 'For who would frown when all the world rejoices, / And who would contradict when, in the spring, / The English Muse her annual theme rehearses / To tell us birds are singing in the sky?' But Campbell would spend much of his career contradicting the sentiments of *The Land*, which *The Flaming Terrapin*, a poem that ironically gained the admiration of Sackville-West and others, had in a sense already done in its portrayal of an 'old Earth', moving beyond its antediluvian origins, 'Writhes in the anguish of a second birth, / And now casts off her shriveled hide'.[14]

In its essentials, *The Flaming Terrapin*, published in 1924, is a post-war response similar to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922, appraising the current state of Western society that, like Noah and his family, has endured the Flood and now seeks spiritual renewal.[15] Campbell's poem, which distinguished him as a poet of great promise in England, expressed his hope that man could restore himself and come to embody what, in his mind, were the key virtues of strength, endurance and courage. These soldierly values were represented in the poem by the symbol of the Terrapin, marking the arrival of a world where 'Action and flesh cohere in one clean fusion / Of force with form: the very ethers breed / Wild harmonies of song: the frailest reed / shackled thunder in its heart's seclusion'.[16] Campbell would go on to explain to his parents that the 'moral of the poem' was really a relaying of Christ's declaration that 'Ye are the salt of the earth but if that salt shall have lost its savour it shall be scattered abroad and trodden under the feet of men'. The influence of Friedrich Nietzsche and Charles Darwin is apparent, too, when he explains how these words expressed a Christian 'doctrine of heredity and the survival of the fittest', which, in *The Flaming Terrapin*, takes the form of the Noah family who 'won through the terrors of the storm and eventually colonized the earth'. Moreover, in the aftermath of the First World War, 'in a world suffering from shell-shock, with most of its finest breeding-stock lost, and the rest rather demoralised', Campbell thought it 'interesting to conjecture whether a portion of the race may not have become ennobled by its sufferings to reinstate and even improve on the pre-war standard, and in the end to supplant the descendants of those who have become demoralised and stagnant'.[17] And here Campbell essentially

[14] Roy Campbell, *The Collected Poems of Roy Campbell*, Volume I (London: The Bodley Head, 1949), 181, 82.
[15] Roy Campbell, *The Flaming Terrapin* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1924)
[16] (Campbell, *Collected Poems*, Volume I, 59-60)
[17] Quoted in (Campbell, *The Life of Sam Campbell*, 356-7)

underlined the ethic that was to animate his future verse and actions as a poet, which he would later present to Tolkien – an ethic that, cohering with the flesh 'in one clean fusion' and rejecting the post-war nihilism of the period, was ultimately 'religious and Catholic', though 'unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision'.

'They hatch Utopia from their dusty brains'

Campbell's youngest daughter, Anna, said that what 'irritated' her the most about her father 'was that this very gentle man should spend so much time and energy trying to prove that he was tough'. 'He always made light of his gifts as a poet, but exaggerated his prowess in the fields of action.'[18] Wright, who first met Campbell in 1946, also saw 'a great and fundamental gentleness beneath a superficial truculence'. 'Campbell's ruggedness', he wrote, 'was theatrical; a thing put on; the vainglory and braggadocio, with which he embroidered his exploits'. He was, Wright noted, 'almost the exact reverse of the truculent *persona* he loved to project in his writing'. And I agree with Wright that this 'persona' was 'deliberately assumed […] a thing put on' in order to assert 'in dress and in behavior his uniqueness, his individuality, and his personality'.[19] In much the same way as his poetry was a rugged rejection of the Georgian school of poetry, Campbell's exterior personality, I believe, was renunciation of what he referred to as 'over-domesticated bourgeois', but especially the 'Charlies' whom he would so unmercifully scold in *Flowering Rifle*. More particularly, it was the English intelligentsia that he sought to shock, since, as he claimed in 1934: '"Shocking the bourgeois" is the silliest thing that we do. I have always preferred to shock the shocker of the bourgeois, who is naturally and always a tame little figure, an inverted bourgeois himself.'[20] For, as the 1920s progressed – and as Campbell was drawn further into the bosom of Bloomsbury, as detailed by Joseph Pearce in *Bloomsbury and Beyond: The friends and enemies of Roy Campbell* (2001) – Campbell became increasingly repelled by the intellectuals of the English Left, later denouncing them in *The Georgiad* (1931):

> They hatch Utopia from their dusty brains
> Which are but Hells, where endless boredom reigns –

[18] *Remembering Roy Campbell: The Memoirs of his Daughters Anna and Tess*, ed. Judith Lutge Coullie (Hamden: Winged Lion Press, 2011), 31, 99.
[19] (Wright, *Roy Campbell*, 39, 38, 9)
[20] Roy Campbell, *Broken Record: Reminiscences by Roy Campbell* (London: Boriswood, 1934), 71, 48

> Middle-class Hells, built on a cheap, clean plan,
> Edens of abnegation, dread to scan,
> Founded upon a universal ban:
> For banned from thence is all that fires or thrills,
> Pain, vengeance, danger, or the clash of wills –
> So vastly greater is their fear of strife
> And hate of danger than love of life.[21]

No doubt, Campbell's extreme animus towards Bloomsbury was elevated by his wife Mary's affair with Sackville-West in 1928, which his marriage nevertheless survived, but his break with the English Left was, I think, inevitable; Campbell declaring that same year that:

> Our age is dominated by the prophets of Domestic Comfort, Shaw, Wells and Bennett – two of whom have shown in their Utopias that they would be prepared to sell the experience of the human race – youth, pain, passion, courage and danger – for the hygiene of a few patent bath-taps or the moral serenity of meandering about in a sort of universal Fabian summer-school with a few fellow-vegetarians, in a state of almost maudlin contentment.[22]

As we can see, the English intelligentsia was to Campbell the antithesis of the red-blooded spirit of *The Flaming Terrapin*. Reeling from this discovery, in 1928 Campbell and his family escaped to Provence to begin anew.

A Modern Paladin

Of all the stories Campbell told Tolkien in 1944, the one Tolkien 'enjoyed the most' was that of the sculptor Jacob Epstein and how Campbell had 'fought him and put him in hospital for a week'.[23] Epstein, who later married Mary's sister in 1955, had in the early 1920s convinced himself that Campbell was a lover of both sisters. Epstein's paranoia had led to a fight in a restaurant, where Campbell, discovering that waiters were spying on him at the behest of Epstein, struck the sculptor down and, in his own words, 'sat quietly on his stomach as he lay philosophically blinking at the ceiling and quite conscious'.[24] While Epstein was shaken, Campbell's account of the fight to Tolkien was obviously an exaggeration, which we may relate to the persona he invariably sought to project. As Mary recalled, when she first met her husband 'he seemed to me the personification of poetry and when he recited couplets from *The Flaming Terrapin* which he had just begun to

[21] (Campbell, *Collected Poems*, Volume I, 223)
[22] Roy Campbell, *Collected Works*, Volume IV (Craighall: A.D. Donker, 1985), 247.
[23] (Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkein*, 96)
[24] (Campbell, *Light on a Dark Horse*, 251)

write I realized that I had met a poet in the flesh and blood'.[25] For it was important to Campbell, I think, that he should personify his poetry in the 'flesh', which goes some way to explaining his other combats; for example, in 1949, when, at a poetry meeting in Bayswater, Campbell leapt onto the stage and punched Stephen Spender, who had accused him of being a fascist. Although Campbell later regretted the act, it was nevertheless a premediated action in which he was playing the part of an indignant soldier-poet 'of the King's African Rifles', to which Spender generously responded: 'He is a great poet; he is a great poet. We must try to understand'.[26] *Broken Record: Reminiscences by Roy Campbell* (1934), a very much embroidered account of Campbell's exploits, especially in Provence, affords us some insight into what might have prompted such unbalanced exhibitions as a 'living physical poet' whose art nevertheless pointed towards his later acceptance of the Catholic faith. Stating his purpose as a poet in 1934, Campbell wrote that 'I believe that the artist, concerned as he is with spiritual values, is not subservient to his *period*, but on the contrary very independent of it'. Then, in another informative passage, Campbell asserted that 'our literature is obsessed with literature. Our poetry is poetry-about-poetry, and the modern consciousness is entirely obsessed with the modern-consciousness'. Taking these two statements together, it is apparent that Campbell's objective as a poet was, at least by this time, to assert his independence from the 'modern consciousness', which he defines as being essentially materialistic in nature:

> Humanity can be divided roughly into two classes, the Quixotes and the Sanchos. I belong emphatically to the former, and I live three-quarters of the time in my imagination, which is the highest and purest form of intelligence, the discarding of which for materialistic and scientific values has caused the misery of the modern world.

Campbell's self-identification with Cervantes's immortal creation Don Quixote is also significant, and this is underscored for us at the conclusion of *Broken Record* when he takes up the role of 'the knight of la Mancha' himself, who, spurning the materialistic impulses of modernity, 'lifts his lance, and on it, like a pinned cockroach, dangles the figure of Charlie Chaplin in the regulation uniform of Mr Quennell's compulsory pedestrian "business man" […] sissying, shuffling, giggling and waggling his moustaches.

[25] Quoted in (*Remembering Roy Campbell*, 166).
[26] Quoted in Peter Alexander, *Roy Campbell: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 214.

Down with him forever!'[27] Campbell's oft-used reproach 'Charlie' is rooted in this rejection of the 'sissying' Chaplin-type, which he, as a sort of modern-day Don Quixote, delighted in prodding. But he also sought to represent the very antithesis of the 'Charlie', explaining in *Light on a Dark Horse* (1951) how he took 'the paladins of Chivalry for my Model – the Cid Campeador, Roland, Oliver, or some other worthy of that sort'.[28] But in terms of literally embodying those paladins, as what he would refer to as a 'living physical poet', there were a number of contemporary examples that he could look to and seek to emulate, as he reveals here:

> I certainly believe that [Albert] Lescot [the mounted bullfighter], if we set [Martial] Lalanda [the famous bullfighter] apart, is the greatest *living physical poet*, even including the aviators like [Michel] Detroyat.

Campbell, seeing himself as one such 'physical poet', employing the pronounce 'we', goes on to say:

> If, as I do not believe, the modern equestrian can be chased out and destroyed by mechanical people […] it will be a bad thing for humanity. If we are the last of one great era, and the shopkeeper is to take eventual control, at least it will have to be admitted that we did not struggle for "existence"; we struggled for life against death, we had physical joys, we had chivalry, kindness, generosity.[29]

As we can see, Campbell's modern-day paladin-poets are bullfighters, equestrians and aviators whose poetry, expressed through their performance, is physical and by its very nature courageous and anti-materialist. Moving forward, then, though we might view Campbell's own exhibitions as an accentuation of his poems, it might be more appropriate to say that his poetry underscored his deeds as an unshackled 'physical poet' in the mode of Lescot, Lalanda and Detroyat. And there was no better place than Provence for Campbell to compose such a performance. In 1931, Campbell had penned a short treatise on bullfighting, titled *Taurine Provence: The Philosophy and Religion of the Bullfighter*, asserting that it was 'the only sport which is at the same time a great art and in which the man opposes a terrific adversary with inferior weapons'.[30] Importantly, Campbell was speaking from first-hand experience, having played the role of matador in

---

[27] Roy Campbell, *Broken Record: Reminiscences by Roy Campbell* (London: Boriswood, 1934), 202-3, 201-2, 10, 207
[28] (Campbell, *Light on a Dark Horse*, 258)
[29] (Campbell, *Broken Record*, 188-9)
[30] Roy Campbell, *Taurine Provence: The Philosophy and Religion of the Bullfighter* (London: Desmond Harmsworth, 1932), 14.

the Provencal arena; at Istres, for example, where a bull actually had caught and thrown him. He was no Lalanda, of course, which he admitted to his friend Percy Wyndham Lewis, recording that it was a 'fiasco and I feel a fool […] It will take far too long for me to learn anything but cocarde snatching'.[31] Although his brief stint as a bullfighter was a failure, stepping inside the arena and failing was still preferable to being a spectator. This was important to Campbell, as we see in *Taurine Provence*, which rejected 'second-hand experience' in favour of the 'first-person'. 'One's real existence is not what happens in the looking-glass', he wrote, and it was the exchange of 'experience from the first to the collective third person', accentuated by the 'Hollywood cinema' of Charlie Chaplin, which was the reason why 'our civilization is crumbling', Campbell argued, concluding that 'the spirit implicit in tauromachy and in equestrianism is the direct opposite of this spirit'.[32] This view does explain why, as Anna recalled, 'Roy would take the opportunity to take part in all sorts of sports which, after […] [his] writing, were essential to his well-being. It was important also that the sport should […] involve a certain amount of risk which, for some paradoxical reason, restored his nervous equanimity'.[33] As we have also seen, that element of risk for Campbell was at least 'real' compared to the experience of the 'Charlies' whose dealings with the 'physical joys' of life were at best 'second-hand'. Provence allowed Campbell to fulfil what was, I think, an increasingly pressing need to finally realise what, in *The Flaming Terrapin*, he had preached.

'The Regular Army of Christ'

'Toril', a poem published in *Mithraic Emblems* (1936), signalling Campbell's embrace of Catholicism around that time, underscored his preoccupation with suffering and bravery, but from the perspective of the bull. In this short verse, the Ox rebukes the Bull who, facing death in the ring, asks 'what is blacker than this Death […] / More hideous than this martyrdom?' The Ox replies: 'My impotence […] / The Yoke!'[34] Although Campbell, in typical fashion, was expositing his belief that death in the bullring was preferable to living as a slave, by 1936 the prospect of 'martyrdom', especially Catholic martyrdom, had by now entered his purview. *Mithraic Emblems*, much of which was written during his period of conversion in Spain, had in a sense been anticipated by *The Flaming Terrapin*. However, where his

[31] Quoted in (Alexander, *Roy Campbell*, 116)
[32] (Campbell, *Taurine Provence*, 53-4)
[33] (*Remembering Roy Campbell*, 29)
[34] (Campbell, *Collected Poems*, Volume I, 147)

previous verse had been espoused from an unconsciously Catholic position of relative isolation, but nevertheless taking up the theme of spiritual renewal, by the mid-1930s we can say that *Mithraic Emblems* was produced from a situation of belonging, to the Church, that is, and the communion of saints.After fleeing Provence in late 1933 because Campbell was unable to pay compensation to a neighbour after the family pet goat destroyed some peach trees, Campbell and his family arrived in Spain and took up residence in a farmhouse in Altea, where they settled for a time in mid-1934. It was here that Mary decided that she and her husband should convert to Catholicism. Up to that point, Campbell explains, they 'had been vaguely and vacillatingly Anglo-Catholic: but now was the time to decide whether, by staying in the territorials, to remain half-apathetic to the great fight which was obviously approaching – or whether we should step into the front ranks of the Regular Army of Christ'. Indeed, 'from the very beginning', he claimed, they 'understood the real issues in Spain. There could be no compromise […] between Credulity and Faith' in 'the war between the East and the West', by which he meant Communism and Catholicism.[35] But it was Mary in particular who played a decisive role in Campbell's decision to convert, as he attested to himself in 'To Mary after the Red Terror', writing that 'You led me to the feet of Christ / Who threatened me with lifted quirt: / But by its loving fury sliced / I staggered upright from the dirt'.[36] Having long since drifted from the Presbyterianism of his parents, though still possessing some sense of religious feeling, evident in *The Flaming Terrapin*, Campbell might not have taken this final step without Mary. Campbell's attitude and reflections regarding his conversion to Catholicism, likening it to enlistment in 'the Regular Army of Christ', is suggestive and may be linked, I think, to what Anna said was her father's 'lifelong ambition to become a soldier'.[37] After his two elder brothers enlisted in the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War, Campbell attempted at the age of 15 to join the war effort in Europe, but was found out before he could leave South Africa. It is, of course, tempting to say that missing out on the war drove him onwards as a man determined to prove himself on the battlefield. Campbell's tragedy, as he might have seen it, was that he was too young to fight in the First World War, though his desire to participate physically in life went beyond any sense of war guilt I think. Accordingly, when he and Mary were received into the Church on 24 June 1935, Campbell's decision to take the name of *Ignacio*, after Ignatius of

[35] (Campbell, *Light on a Dark Horse*, 317)
[36] Roy Campbell, *The Collected Poems of Roy Campbell*, Volume II (London: The Bodley Head, 1957), 25
[37] (*Remembering Roy Campbell*, 99)

Loyola, had much more to do with his decision to baptise and accordingly sanctify his martial instincts; fathoming around this time, too, that Anglicanism simply would not suffice, asserting in *Broken Record* that 'Protestantism is a cowardly sort of Atheism, especially in the anglo-Oxfordish-Henry VIII sense'.[38] So, as of 1935, Campbell was no longer a lone Quixote tilting at windmills, but an initiate in the 'Army of Christ' joining the 'good Catholics' of Altea, who 'in their bravery, in their reverences […] took hold of us all imperceptibly'.[39] And Campbell would always place a premium on courage as the chief Catholic virtue. For it may be that it was in Spain, most of all, that Campbell realised what, in the words of Josef Pieper, is 'not so obvious, that in the Christian understanding of existence the highest incarnation of courage is not the powerful hero in arms but the martyr and that the highest act of courage is the testimony of blood'.[40]In Altea, Campbell was instructed by Fr. Gregorio, a 'valiant but rather uneducated priest of Altea (who was none the worse for that)'.[41] This description is typical of Campbell, elevating courage above intellect; and as Tess later observed, her father's 'religion was like that, it was rather simple. My mother was a great theologian but he wasn't. She read Thomas Aquinas right through. He preferred a simpler sort of faith'.[42] Pearce agrees as well, arguing that 'his Catholicism was more a matter of instinct than instruction'.[43] Nevertheless, there is a danger that we emphasize too much Campbell's instincts over his intellect. One of the problems we have with Campbell's persona as 'a thing put on' is that we take it entirely at face value, which may have led to an underestimation of Campbell's engagement with deeper Catholic concepts. As his wife said, introducing her husband's 1951 translation of the poems of St. John of the Cross:

> The violent side of his character was used as a cloak for a vulnerable contemplative soul. The tough soldier, the crack shot, the jouster, the convivial story-teller were all so many masks covering the retiring, gentle, creative spirit from a too brutal contact with everyday life.

And we should take the following insight seriously too:

> Roy could not have translated these most delicate and deeply theological poems unless he had known well what they were about; this knowledge he

[38] (Campbell, *Broken Record*, 157)
[39] Quoted in (Pearce, *Bloomsbury and Beyond*, 163).
[40] Josef Pieper, *An Anthology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 25.
[41] (Campbell, *Light on a Dark Horse*, 320)
[42] Quoted in (Pearce, *Bloomsbury and Beyond*, 214).
[43] (Pearce, *Bloomsbury and Beyond*, 241)

> acquired from Father Eusebio in Toledo, and from studying theology in the works of Calderón and other poets of the Golden Age. All of them, poets and dramatists, were full of theology, and Calderón de la Barca was the most subtle and imaginative theologian. Roy would not study this science from books of theology, but when it was poured from the mouths of the characters in *La Colmena, El Magico Prodigioso, La Vida es Sueño* he imbibed it with ease.

Of course, Campbell was a poet, not a theologian, and it should not come as a surprise that any developed theological understanding attributable to Campbell was engendered by an emotional, but not necessarily unthinking, response to the work of such poets as Pedro Calderón de la Barca and St. John of the Cross, underscored by one particular martyrdom in the city of Toledo, the death through which Campbell 'came to understand the spirit, not only of St John, but of the Cross, which then became for him as never before the central feature of Christianity'.[44]

Toledo, 1935-1936

When the Campbells arrived in Toledo in late June 1935, having decided to leave Altea, they were immediately struck by the beauty, history and spirituality of the city: 'a sacred city of the mind', wrote Campbell.[45] Indeed, one aspect of Toledo that might have impressed itself on Campbell was that, as G. K. Chesterton observed in 1926, it looked 'much more like Jerusalem than Jerusalem ever looked like most of the pictures of it [...] A man felt immediately that he was within the circle or radius of something that lay to the south, and that the same radius also touched Jerusalem at the ends of the earth'. This might, in part, explain Campbell's attraction to the south of France too, that 'one of the first impressions created by a visit to Spain, in any person with any historical imagination, is this sense of a world that runs around the Mediterranean'.[46] Indeed, Campbell's poems are generally set in, and for the most part suited to, such a world. But it was Spain, in particular, which Toledo epitomized, that Campbell claimed 'saved my soul'.[47] As his friend Lawrence Durrell said: 'Roy had taken from Spain the brocades and the dust of the bull-ring and how can anyone penetrate to the

---

[44] *St John of the Cross Poems*, translated by Roy Campbell (1951; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960), 13, 15, 11-12.
[45] (Campbell, *Collected Poems*, Vol. 1, 153)
[46] G. K. Chesterton, "Looking at Toledo", 12 June 1926, *The Illustrated London News*, reproduced in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Volume 34 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 108, 107.
[47] Quoted in (Pearce, *Bloomsbury and Beyond*, 166)

heart of Spain without embracing the faith which animates its brutal vivid life? It was totally right for him –"a second motherland"'.[48] And in this way, too, Campbell's discovery of Toledo was tantamount to his finding of the Faith, which was given further spiritual importance by the events that took place there in the summer of 1936.Campbell's stay in Toledo, which was to symbolize the 'war between the East and the West', over the next twelve months, was a defining moment for the poet. Standing atop a rocky knoll beside the river Tagus, it was here in Toledo that Campbell met his most significant Catholic influence, his confessor and spiritual director, the Carmelite friar Eusebio del Niño Jesús. Fr. Eusebio, belonging to the Carmelite community in Toledo, 'was perhaps the only saint we have ever known', said Mary.[49] His 'saintliness was noticed by everyone', Anna would add. In him especially, it seemed that 'sacrifice took on a new dimension. His feet, bare except for sandals in the icy Castilian winter, seemed to float rather than walk across the freezing flagstones.'[50] When the Campbells arrived in Toledo in 1935, Roy and Mary developed a close relationship with the local Carmelite friars. Stressing contemplation, prayer and self-denial – cornerstones of Carmelite spiritualty that, at first consideration, might not necessarily have appealed to Campbell's inclinations as a 'man of action' – it was Eusebio's dimension of sacrifice that brought out the best in Campbell, encouraging, too, a more theologically contemplative consideration of the nature of Christian courage. Pieper, the noted Catholic philosopher, wrote that the 'fear of losing *eternal* life, is the foundation of all Christian courage', the 'ultimate proof' of which 'may very well be marked by the total absence of anything spectacular'.[51] If this had not occurred to Campbell before his arrival in Toledo, I think it is reasonable to suggest, given Campbell's later poetry on the subject, that Eusebio imparted this essential Christian truism to him in Toledo. And Pieper is particularly useful here, as a stand-in for what Eusebio might have said, stating that 'the virtue of fortitude […] presupposes a healthy vitality', but 'has nothing to do with a purely vital, blind, exuberant, daredevil spirit', which Eusebio's actions in July 1936 were to prove.[52] In July 1936, at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Toledo was subject to a Republican attack, concentrated for the most part on the city's fortress, the Alcázar, which bore the brunt of the siege from 21

[48] Alister Kershaw, ed., *Salute to Roy Campbell,* (Francestown: Typographeum, 1984), 26.
[49] (*St John of the Cross Poems,* trans. Campbell, 11)
[50] (*Remembering Roy Campbell,* 66)
[51] (Pieper, *An Anthology*, 71, 68)
[52] (Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues,* 124)

July until 27 September, when the Nationalist force in Toledo was relieved by General Francisco Franco's Army of Africa. Although Toledo was not a militarily significant target in the summer of 1936, the subsequent battle, though hardly a Spanish Stalingrad, was for Campbell symbolic of the broader struggle for the soul of Spain, as we see in his poem 'The Alcazar Mined', in which he dubbed the fortress 'This Rock of Faith, the thunder-blasted – / Eternity will hear it rise'. Campbell lauded the 'Miracle […] / How fiercer tortures than their own / By living faith were overthrown; / How mortals, thinned to ghastly pallor, / Gangrened and rotting to the bone / With winged souls of Christian valour' withstood the Republican onslaught.[53] The implication of this poem is that 'living faith' is integral to 'Christian valour', which Campbell believed was vital to the Nationalist victory in Toledo in 1936.Campbell's eldest daughter Teresa has explained that her father's view of 'the victory at Toledo' was that it 'was one of the examples of the supernatural working during the Spanish war'. This seems to have been a belief shared by the family, or rather one transmitted by Roy to his daughters; as Anna said, 'supernatural tactics' were the only way 'to explain the resistance of the Alcázar to the overwhelming attacks of every kind by superior forces that it sustained'.[54] As we shall see in Campbell's other poems about Toledo, the successful defence of the Alcázar constituted, in his own words, 'a victory of the spirit over […] materialists'. Indeed, it underlined his notion, implied earlier in *The Flaming Terrapin*, that 'spiritual people' were 'better' than 'materialists […] and 50 times braver'.[55] In such poems as 'The Alcazar Mined' this idea is clearly present, as well as the attendant belief that suffering might rouse the supernatural into interceding on its behalf. While the Campbells escaped the worst of the siege – gaining transport out of the city, ultimately being evacuated out of Spain by the Royal Navy – far from being 'Charlies', they had bravely endured the initial terrors of the fight – violence that, in the first week of the battle, had claimed the lives of the Carmelite friars. Tensions were already high in Toledo in March 1936, following the election in February that saw the Popular Front, an anti-clerical coalition of left-wing parties, gain power in Spain. When riots against the Church broke out that month, the Campbells sheltered a number of Carmelites in their home, where they would also later house, at great personal risk, the papers of St. John of the Cross, the treasure of the Carmelite archives in Toledo. The Carmelite friars then went into hiding for the final time on 21 July when Republican troops from nearby Madrid entered Toledo. Fatally exposed, Eusebio and 16 other

[53] (Campbell, *The Collected Poems*, Volume I, 154)
[54] *Remembering Roy Campbell*, 234, 70, 83.
[55] Quoted in *Remembering Roy Campbell*, 83.

friars were soon discovered, rounded up and shot by Republican militiamen – Campbell later found Eusebio's body under a tarpaulin, above which was written 'thus strikes the Cheka', scrawled with the blood of the massacred monks. A total of 12 bishops, 4,184 priests (including Fr. Gregorio), 2,365 monks, as well as a few hundred nuns, were killed during the war.[56] Anna, recounting Eusebio's death, later described how 'it was he who kept up the spirits of his fellow monks when they were all dragged out to be shot. They died heroically – a friend of ours who was with them to the end said that Fr. Eusebio was smiling when he fell, and shouting, "Long live Christ the King! Long live Spain!"'[57] The effect of Eusebio's and other monks' martyrdom on Campbell can be seen in his subsequent poetry, including *Flowering Rifle*.

'Their wounds were swords'

Campbell's poem 'Toledo, July 1936' was his first poem to deal with the siege and the murder of the Carmelite friars together, which were to become synonymous with the Cross and Christ's Resurrection, apparent in the following lines:

> Toledo, when I saw you die
> And heard the roof of Carmel crash,
> A spread-winged phoenix from its ash
> The Cross remained against the sky![58]

In this work, the ostensible defeat suffered by Toledo and its friars in July has by some miracle purchased victory for the city. Echoing Chesterton's paradox that the cross cannot be defeated […] for it is Defeat', Campbell touches on a keystone of Christian theology here that he was to develop to a fuller extent in 'The Carmelites of Toledo'.[59] Completed in June 1937, 'The Carmelites of Toledo' is perhaps Campbell's most personal and honest work to come out of his experience of the Spanish Civil War, underscoring the 'joyful science' of martyrdom founded most of all on 'prayer':

---

[56] Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (1961; London: Penguin Books, 2012), 259.
[57] (*Remembering Roy Campbell*, 66)
[58] (Campbell, *Collected Poems*, Volume I, 153)
[59] G. K. Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross* (New York: John Lane Company, 1909), 207.

For in the City built with prayer
The Masters of the joyful science
Had held the ages in defiance,
Whose only study is to dare,
Who hardest on the anvil deal,
And thrive upon the hardest fare
Of all who work in fire and steel.

Reconciling his soldierly ethic with 'the joyful science', Campbell then goes even further by stating that the Carmelites – who through 'Their lives had won, at comfort's price', victory in Toledo – had managed 'To vanquish more with wound and scar / Than ever sword set out to do'. Here Campbell repudiates material computation, of course, 'Over a world of waving swords', in favour of the efficacy of the supernatural, so much so that 'No earthly conquest could suffice'. Similarly, Campbell writes of his confessor:

His radiant face when last I saw
Eusebio bade me take delight:
His flesh was flame, his blood its light
That sought the fire as fire the straw,
And of his so cruel
As ruthlessly devoured the spite
As eager flame devours the fuel.

It was only then, Campbell tells us, that as a Catholic he 'learned to prize […] / My Scapular beneath my vest […] / And there, like Romeo, the mad lover, / In the forbidden town, discover / And hold the Loved-One to my breast'. Indeed, Campbell is essentially communicating the idea that the Carmelites and Eusebio, whose 'valour seemed to fix the sun', had a transformative effect on his own faith 'Just when the third great Nail was hammered'. Finally, writing of 'The Flood-rush' of violence that 'Now filled the land with fire and slaughter', Campbell ends the poem on a note of promise and rejuvenation similar to *The Flaming Terrapin* years before, claiming that 'The Christian world with light may fill / And grind its life-sustaining flour' the 'sleepless mill […] / Where faith-starved multitudes may quarry / As in a mountain, and be fed'. 'And well might Hell feel sick and sorry', Campbell concludes:

To see the brown monks lying dead,
Where, as with coarse tarpaulins spread,
Each seemed a fifty-horsepower lorry
That to the troops had brought the Bread!

Their wounds were swords – how bravely worth
The care the angels took to smith them!
We thought they took their victory with them
But they had brought it down to earth,
For it was from their neighbouring spire
The proud Alcazar caught the fire
Which give that splendour phoenix-birth.[60]

'The Carmelites of Toledo' can be viewed as an answer to Campbell's conjecture in *The Flaming Terrapin* about 'whether a portion of the race may not have become ennobled by its sufferings' and 'won through the terrors of the storm'. Campbell believed that the Carmelites had done just that and accordingly served as an example to himself and others to follow. As he wrote in *Flowering Rifle*: 'The Carmelites rose up to show the way: / For martyrdom their eagle spirits burned / As fierce as angry captains for the fight – / In these charred cells where Victory was learned.' It is unfortunate that Campbell did not apply this Catholic ethic more consistently by sidestepping politics in *Flowering Rife*. Regrettably, the notion of how 'When what was gentlest in the shaken hand / Cut like a sword'had not fully taken hold of Campbell, as we can see in the following line, 'I foretold La Mancha's Knight would prance / With Charlie like a cockroach on his lance / Which I was called Romantic to believe', which, revelling in victory, still insists on characterizing his enemies as somehow less than human.[61] This is a great shame, especially given how such statements damaged his reputation. Just like a Toledo sword, Campbell's poetry gains strength through a softening of its excess spiritual steel, tempered by the intense fire of his feeling for his fellow men, such as the friar Eusebio, as we see later in 'Monologue' when he proclaims: 'Let me be there to share the strain / And with the poorest pull my weight / As in the Catacombs of Spain / When all the world was Red with hate.'[62] And it does seem that, after 1939, the 'shrill covin-politics' of Campbell, as Lewis put it, did abate somewhat; and Povey notes this mellowing of Campbell's personality too, which he suggests was a result of his Catholic faith 'becoming a more predominant motivation'.[63] For example, in 'Monologue' again Campbell appears to have come around to Lewis's point of view, admitting that:

[60] (Campbell, *Collected Poems*, Volume II, 26, 30, 31, 32)
[61] Roy Campbell, *Flowering Rifle: A Poem from the Battlefield of Spain* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1939), 85-6, 25
[62] (Campbell, *Collected Poems*, Volume II, 69)
[63] (Povey, *Roy Campbell*, 174); also see (Pearce, *Bloomsbury and Beyond*, 258)

> We all become the thing we fight […]
> For I have lived, of three crusades,
> The heroism and the pathos,
> Seen how the daft illusion fades,
> And I learned of victory the bathos.
> But when the lava has been poured
> Through huge ravines of change and loss,
> Of all most hated or adored,
> One thing remains intact, the Cross![64]

Conclusion: 'That Insatiably Fighting Thing…'

As for Campbell's insatiable khaki-clad Catholicism, which left such an impression on Tolkien, advanced in his poetry as an answer to the 'Charlies' and what Tolkien saw as 'the corduroy panzers' of the Left, he was in his mind a soldier of Christ who was prepared to give his life for his ideals. He had, it seems, attempted to enlist to fight in Spain, but the closest he came to the battlefield was a brief tour of the front in 1937. Although the 'war-torn' solider that Tolkien believed he was talking to in 1944 was an exaggeration of reality, it was true to the character he had created, and perhaps truer still to the spiritual realities Campbell had engaged with, as Anna noted:

> I know that Roy was very disappointed not to be allowed to join up […] He has been criticised for saying that he actually fought in the Spanish Army, but I find nothing wrong with this. It was Poetic Justice. He did his best to get in and that was equivalent, for him, with having done so. The courage needed was the same. He really longed to fight the communists physically, but since he was unable to do so *he fought for Christianity and against Communism with his pen.*[65]

But as I have argued, too, underlining his theology of fighting the good fight in his poems, Campbell also sought struggle as a 'living physical poet', exposing himself to risk, as had happened in Toledo when he was received into 'the Regular Army of Christ' in 1936, being confirmed by Cardinal Isidro Gomá y Tomás, Archbishop of Toledo. Having already sheltered Carmelite friars during the March riots, amid an atmosphere of anti-clerical violence it had been decided that Roy and Mary, being in 'mortal danger', should be confirmed as soon as possible, 'just in case'. They were accompanied

[64] (Campbell, *Collected Poems*, Volume II, 68)
[65] (*Remembering Roy Campbell*, 89)

to the Cardinal's palace by Eusebio and another friar, Fr. Evaristo, 'in their "full-regimentals" as Carmelites'.[66]

As Chesterton explained when he converted to 'that insatiably fighting thing, the Catholic Church', he was electing to join what he believed to be 'the one fighting form of Christianity', a conception that Campbell assented to as well.[67] And it was the Carmelites who, I think, impressed this notion on Campbell the most. As Graham Greene, the noted English Catholic novelist, observed:

> I think that for many people, especially the young, the priesthood must have the attraction of a crack unit. It's an organisation which has to train for combat, one which demands self-sacrifice […] I'm convinced that the drop in vocations has to do with the fact that we don't put across clearly enough the attraction to be found in a difficult and dangerous calling.[68]

Campbell could not become a priest, of course, as a family man, but such priests as Fr. Eusebio and Fr. Evaristo, who walked with him to the Cardinal's palace in June 1936, served as an example to be followed. As he remembered later, at this time in Toledo 'it was no longer safe to be seen in religious habit'. Nevertheless, 'the diehard Evaristo, a roaring lion of a man whose laugh could shake the rafters […] deliberately flaunted his habit in broad daylight'. Campbell said that it made him 'feel six inches taller to stride beside him'.[69] In his physical and poetical activities, which were in a vital sense synonymous, Campbell embodied this ethic as well, as a 'living physical poet', I have sought to show, in that his 'art', which he saw as 'robust and healthy', battled the 'philosophy of almost every writer' of his day whose 'fear of discomfort, excitement or pain' had overcome 'his love of life'.[70]

And in a Catholic and human sense, Campbell's 'shackled thunder' persona was finally consummated when, in Toledo, he was arrested and beaten by Republican guards who, that same day, had murdered a gipsy friend named Mosquito. Campbell, who no doubt also expected to die, later wrote that 'I never felt such glory / As handcuffs on my wrists. / My body stunned and

---

[66] (Campbell, *Light on a Dark Horse*, 347)
[67] Quoted in Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1944), 397. G. K. Chesterton, "The Style of Newman", in *A Handful of Authors*, ed. Dorothy Collins (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1953), 133.
[68] Marie-Françoise Allain, *The Other Man: Conversations with Graham Greene* (London: Bodley Head, 1983), 167-8.
[69] (Campbell, *Light on a Dark Horse*, 347)
[70] (Campbell, *Collected Works*, Volume IV, 247)

gory / With toothmarks on my fists: / The triumph through the square.' Accordingly, it was only in Toledo that Campbell's sometimes self-destructive ethic was sanctified and directed towards a higher concept of Christian combat, as Campbell, who I think knew this too, wrote later:

> My verse was nourished by Toledo's sun
> In whose clear light Ray, Sword, and Pen are one,
> One in her solider-poets of the past,
> And here again united in her last:
> The Pen a sword, prophetic in advance,
> Deriding probability or chance […]
> The sword a pen to chronicle its deed
> And write in scarlet for the world to read.[71]

[71] (Campbell, *Collected Poems*, Volume II, 23, 92-3)

SACER VATES: THE 'VELVET BRIDGE' OF CZESŁAW MIŁOSZ

MICHAEL KIRWAN

Introduction

As a close-hand witness of National Socialist and Communist inhumanity, Czesław Miłosz understood his task as a poet to bear witness, beyond cheap and easy theodicy, to this darkest of times. Przemyslaw Michalski notes that, as with the biblical prophets, Miłosz undertook only with reluctance the 'vatic mantle' of national bard, or *wieszcz*. The Polish terms implies a combination of seer, prophet, poet, and moral authority, as well as a subversive political function. The expectations associated with the role were unrealistic (at least in his case); Miłosz's poetry is concerned for the most part with religious questions, rather than political ones.[1]

His verse is often about prayer, even taking the form of direct address to the Divine. Prayer, for Milosz, 'constructs a velvet bridge' which leads to 'the shore of Reversal / Where everything is just the opposite'. Even if there is no other shore, we walk the bridge just the same. In this image, religious and moral aspiration on the one hand, and the paradoxical affirmations and negations of poetry on the other, are aligned in the mutual quest for human and divine integrity.

It may be that the role of the *sacer vates* is a more apt description, while noting an internet definition of *sacer vates* as 'a divine or sacred poet, *or a poet regarded as such*' (my emphasis). The accreditation of sacred status, in other words, may be independent of the poet's own self-understanding or intention.

[1] Michalski, Przemyslaw. 'Czesław Miłosz and R.S. Thomas as Prophetic Voices of Our Time'. In *Prophetic Witness and the Reimagining of the World*, eds. H. Davies Burrows and J. von Zitzewitz (London and New York: Routledge 2021), 165-188.

What follows is a theological reading of selected poems of Czesław Miłosz, read in two ways: firstly, in the light of some of his own essays which deal in general with the religious quest and his own beliefs; and secondly, alongside an essay by the German Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner, entitled 'Priest and Poet' (Rahner 1956).[2] In this essay, Rahner attempts to delineate two distinct vocations- poet and priest- and the relationship between them. He stresses their difference, and yet there is the eschatological hope that 'the highest possibilities' can and will come to pass. Among such possibilities is that 'one and the same person should be both priest and poet'; that the perfect priest and the perfect poet are one and the same.

Miłosz was most certainly a poet, and most certainly not a priest. And yet, read 'eschatologically', there are hints in his verse of the union which Rahner anticipates, a union of poet and priest in the same person. Miłosz's poetry corresponds in some measure to the religious calling of the *Dichter*, the responsibility for the word, especially the primordial word as Rahner expounds it. At the same time, without becoming a doctrinal or confessional poet, we can see in Miłosz a readiness to take responsibility for *God's* word, which is something different.

Two questions present themselves, therefore. What do Miłosz essays on religion tell us about how to read his poems? And is the vision of the poet advanced by Rahner (with the poet as a counterpart to the priest), helpful in relation to appraising Miłosz work?

Taking on the Mantle

Miłosz himself defines the task of the poet as 'to capture as much as possible of tangible reality'. Like all poets, he uses language to hypothesize an alternative world, in order to speak truth to this one. The poet's strategy is one of licensed indirection, of displacement; a willed estrangement, which enables the poet to 'raid the inarticulate'. The vocation of difficult paradox is heightened by this particular poet's life: a 'man in dark times' (to quote Hannah Arendt) who was a first-hand witness to the barbarity and distortion of first, National Socialist, then Stalinist oppression, in his native Lithuania and Poland. We are all too familiar with the challenges to human integrity and survival which this dark passage of history presents: what are the obligations, in such a context, of the poet, whose mode of address is necessarily indirect?

[2] Karl Rahner, 'Priest and Poet' *TI*, vol. III (1956b): 294-317.

In an epoch such as his own, Miłosz declares, the French symbolist ideal of a 'pure', disengaged poetry is not appropriate. At the same time, 'hot-blooded reaction' to the events of history rarely makes for great art. He urges the need, therefore, to find a distance from which to contemplate things 'as they are, without illusion'. His poetry is to be understood as 'a participation in the humanly modulated time of my contemporaries'.

I mention here the citation of Miłosz by Charles Taylor at a significant point in his monumental work, *A Secular Age*. At the climax of his chapter on 'The Immanent Frame', Taylor sets out to describe 'the open space … where the winds blow, where one can feel the pull in both directions.'[3] For Taylor, our culture – despite its secularist affirmations – is defined in terms of the 'cross-pressures', drawing us simultaneously towards transcendence and immanence.[4] He suggests two contrasting versions of this experience: the first, espoused by Thomas Hardy, is the acceptance of an ordered, but impersonal materialist universe, perhaps accompanied by a sense of loss or bereavement, which is linked to the past or to childhood.[5]

The alternative, says Taylor, is the search for some spiritual meaning, often God, while fully recognizing the possibility that this may be self-induced illusion. This is the 'Romantic crisis of European culture', according to Miłosz (following Erich Heller). It is the dichotomy between the world of scientific laws – cold, indifferent to human values – and man's inner world'.[6] The struggle means not consigning the central meanings of life to a lost past: Blake, Goethe, and Dostoyevsky are enlisted. Against the continuing regret of ex-believers is 'this sense that the struggle for belief is never definitively won.'[7]

What is the nature of the political and religious authority that is deployed, respectively, by the *wieszcz* and the *sacer vates*? To repeat, the exalted statement of the poet, and his or her pronouncements, may be less a matter of vocation and intention, and more a question of projection or wish-fulfilment on the part of the hearers. Certainly, with Miłosz there is a sense

[3] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belnap Press, 2007) 592

[4] William James in (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 592)

[5] Hardy's poem, *God's Funeral*, narrates this sense of God's absence, and our weeping exile from His presence.

[6] (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 593); Taylor is citing Czesław Miłosz, *The Land of Ulro* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984), 94.

[7] (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 593). For a survey of Taylor's extensive quotation of poetry (including Polish poets), see Tischner 2021, p. 130.

of his having to engage with religious themes because his contemporaries, including the Church, are unwilling or unable to do so effectively. In a brief essay entitled 'Why Religion?' Miłosz asserts that '*someone* had to do this' [i.e. talk about religious faith], at a time when such talk has become a matter of social embarrassment, 'as if a silent pact had been broken'. Miłosz notes how extraordinary this is: that what he calls the dawning of 'the age of homelessness' within his lifetime – the immense transformation of our cosmological and historical imagining, the cataclysmic collapse of two millenia of creeds and dogmas – should receive so little comment. Among his generation, he feels alone in even asking these questions.

The dual vocation within the notion of the *sacer vates*, and which, as we shall see, Karl Rahner explores as the vocation of the 'poet–priest', is neatly illustrated with reference to two poems from Milosz. The first, entitled 'Prayer', is straightforward enough. It is a poem in the form of a prayer (or vice versa), with an addressee ('You') who is clearly God. The poet, approaching ninety, attempts to speak honestly to God. The poem ends with petitions: for liberation from guilt, 'real and imagined', for certainty – even as the poet acknowledges that God's suffering cannot save the world from pain.

Another poem, 'On Prayer', is more complex. As the title suggests, it talks about conversation with God, rather than an enactment of that conversation. Its opening line is perplexing enough: 'You ask me how to pray to someone who is not.' The poet responds:

> All I know is that prayer constructs a velvet bridge
> And walking it we are aloft, as on a springboard,
> Above landscapes the color of ripe gold.
> Transformed by a magic stopping of the sun.

The tone is hard to decipher. Who is the questioner, and why is he or she asking a poet about prayer? Does the reply – 'All I know'– suggest a reverent unknowing, or is there a hint of exasperation at being asked in the first place? The poet goes on to assert that the velvet bridge 'leads to the shore of Reversal', a place of opposites. This aerial bridge is one which everyone walks, even if 'there is no other shore'.

'Prayer' has the conversational ease of proximity which we associate with the Hebrew Testament, in the psalms or the narratives of the Patriarchs. In 'On Prayer', by contrast, faith is looking over its shoulder. We are very much in Charles Taylor's windswept 'secular age', caught in the cross currents of immanence and transcendence.

Miłosz on Faith

Miłosz is an avowedly religious poet, though not a straightforwardly doctrinal or confessional one. Here, too, the challenge is complex; it is precisely his interest in religion which requires him to part company with his contemporaries, those with whom he wishes so much to be in solidarity. Nor is it the case that Miłosz's own faith is straightforward. His essay, 'If Only This Could Be Said' is a more extended discussion of Miłosz's beliefs; a prose companion, as it were to the poem 'Fr. Chomski. Many Years Later'. Both the essay and the poem explore why a straightforward affirmation of Christian identity and belonging is no longer possible.

Probing the mystery of human darkness and the mystery of God each require the poet's skill of indirection, of denial as well as affirmation; or rather a return to a place where 'there is no division into Yes and No'. For the theologian, this is the familiar imperative to think and speak analogically, to recognize the real but limited grasp of language on the transcendent, whereby affirmation must always contain a 'dialectical' moment of denial. The theologian is one who 'minds his language in the presence of God'. Miłosz as a poet takes on this double responsibility: as a 'man in dark times', but also as one called to speak of heavenly things, when no one else seems prepared or willing to do so.

As noted, Miłosz observes the respectful but definite disengagement of his contemporaries from religious faith, apart from ritual expressions such as marriage and funerals. The churches are populated by old people, but also this has always been the case; perhaps religious belief is only something that the elderly can arrive at (hinted again in poems like *Late Ripeness*). He admits his own estrangement from nationalistic Polish expressions of Catholic belonging, as well as his ambivalence about the liturgical changes of Vatican II, especially insofar as these have led to a weakened response to the human need for ritual. He expresses Lutheran doubts about free will and predestination (a theme concisely addressed in the poem *An Alcoholic Enters the Gates of Heaven*); he comments on the complexity of our transformed understanding of sexuality, not least around the decoupling of sex and procreation which has proved so neuralgic for Catholicism, while acknowledging that his own rather repressed upbringing leaves him uncertain about offering a balanced view. Certain practices, such as sacramental confession, no longer have appeal.

Amid such reticence, however, he is clearer about his refusals. He dismisses the hermeneutics of suspicion which undermines our confidence in reason

by privileging class struggle, libido, and the will to power. [8]He declares himself 'against incomprehensible poetry' (specifically, the elitist and subjectivist tendencies of much postmodern verse), and also against the accessible but despairing verse of Philip Larkin, his 'hectoring about nothingness'. For all his Catholic doubts, expressed at times in quite technical theological language, Miłosz condemns the Protestant isolation of individuals as delusive, and leading to unconscious social dependencies: 'It would be useless for man to try to touch fire with his bare hands'. The mysterious sacral dimension of being can be approached only through intermediaries: fatherland, customs, language. With regard to the afterlife: at funerals, Miłosz is as helpless and bereft of imagination as his respectful atheist contemporaries.

And yet he reluctantly, with embarrassment, ends his solidarity with them, by asserting that the four gospels tell the truth and that Jesus rose from the dead.

The witnesses cited here and in other essays testify to religious liminality: Lev Shestov and Simone Weil, Fyodor Dostoevsky and William Blake. Simone Weil, of course, is noted for her desire to 'stay at the gate', refusing baptism even though she was 'captured by Christ and convinced of the Church as guardian of God's truth'. Her declarations that 'absolutely unmixed attention is prayer', and that 'he whom we must love is absent', are echoed in Miłosz's advice on 'how we are to pray to one who is not'. In his essay on Weil, Miłosz looks to her for an articulation of ultimate commitment which is alternative to nationalistic Catholicism and official Marxist ideology.[9]

William Blake's heterodox dissent is an interesting presence in Milosz's work (he is perhaps another Albigensian 'Cathar', the term Miłosz uses of Simone Weil and Albert Camus). I would like to highlight the Blakean echoes of a delightful sequence from 1943 entitled, 'The World' (*NCP*: 36-56). In a note on its translation, Miłosz explains that this is intended to be structured as a school primer, with a deliberately naïve tone which has hardly any English parallel. In fact the atmosphere is that of Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, with a kind father figure, invested with magus- like authority, who unveils the world to his children: the road, the gate, the porch, the dining room; also the wider world and its cities, in 'Father Explains'. A

[8] Czesław Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems 1931-2001* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), 711

[9] Czesław Miłosz, 'The Importance of Simone Weil'. In *To Begin Where I am*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 246-249

poem entitled 'Fear' repeats Blake's nightmare of the lost child in the forest: 'Father, why do you not pity your children lost in this murky wood?', only to be reassured in the next poem, 'Recovery'. The final poem of the sequence, 'The Sun' needs little theological elucidation:

> All colours come from the sun. And it does not have
> Any particular colour, for it contains them all.
> And the whole Earth is like a poem,
> While the sun above represents the artist.

If one wishes to paint the world in its variety, then one should not look at the sun, which will only burn our eyes and erase sight's memory. Rather, the painter needs to lower his face, and find 'everything we have lost' reflected by the ground.

Another presence to note is Goethe's Faust, who exclaimed, 'Two souls alas dwell in my breast'. Miłosz describes himself torn between hypocrisy and exaltation:

> Struggling with my two souls, I cannot break free of them. One: passionate, fanatical, unyielding in its attachment to discipline and duty, to the enemy of the world; Manichaean, identifying sex with the work of the Devil. The other: reckless, pagan, sensual, ignoble, perfidious. And how could the ascetic in me, with the clenched jaws, think well of that other me?'

Rahner on the Priest-Poet

Karl Rahner's essay 'Priest and Poet' shed light on another duality, the distinct vocations of priest and poet, which he understands to be complementary. Rahner contends that there is a fundamental affinity between religious and poetic speech. He explains this in terms of his concept of primordial words [*Urwörte*]: words that intimate more than they say, and do so with freshness and power. A capacity for the poetic is essential for believers and for theologians. Poetry, in turn, shares or anticipates aspects of the religious imagination. However, aclose reading indicates that he does not have in mind a particular kind of word, so much as a way of using of words.[10]

[10] As Robert Masson has expounded, Rahner worked out his seminal notions of the 'primordial word', 'primordial symbol', and 'real symbol' [*Urworte, Ursymbol,* and *Realsymbol*] between 1953 and 1960, in essays in *Theological Investigations,* 23 volumes. Masson, Robert, 'Rahner's Primordial Words and Bernstein's Metaphorical

Human existence is a dynamic openness for God, achieved in the world, and in particular in the word. The word is the corporeal state in which thought is achieved: words themselves are a concrete expression, manifestation, and achievement of this transcendence. Some words are able to reflect the whole person, both our worldliness and our transcendence, flesh and spirit. Such primordial words open up *dimensions* of reality for the hearer; they open up the *hearer* to dimensions of reality; they have a redeeming mission; they are sacraments.

The essential affinity between religious discourse and poetry is that both require the use of primordial language. 'The poet is a person capable of speaking . . . primordial words in powerful concentration.' Both believer and poet express the openness of the human spirit to the mystery towards which we are directed, and which the believer names 'God.' 'The poet is driven forward' and speaks 'words of longing.' He or she calls, therefore, for another word, the one to which believers attend.

From the other side, believers are driven to the primordial and symbolic use of words – and hence to poetic words – to express more intimately and holistically than is possible in ordinary language the relation of that 'holy mystery' to our human existence.

Such is the state of the affinity between the poet and the religious believer. In 'Priest and Poet', the implication seems to be that priest represents an intensification of the qualities described above of every religious believer. Rahner conceives of the poet as someone to whom the word is entrusted. Primordial words are sea-shells in which can be heard the sound of eternity:

> The primordial words always remain like the brightly lit house which one must leave behind, 'even when it is night'. They are always as though filled with the soft music of infinity. No matter what it is they speak of, they always whisper something about everything. If one tries to pace out their boundary, one always becomes lost in the infinite. They are the children of God, who possess something of the luminous darkness of their Father. (297)[11]

In each such word 'a door is mysteriously opened for us into the unfathomable depths of true reality in general.' Poets speak primordial words in powerful concentration.

Leaps: the Affinity of Art with Religion and Theology', *Horizons* 33.2, Fall, 2006: 276-296.

[11] (Karl Rahner, '*Priest and Poet*', 297)

> If they utter these words, then they are beautiful. For real beauty is the pure appearance of reality as brought about principally in the word . . . It [the word] lives in transcendence. For this reason the primordial word, before all other expressions, is the primordial sacrament of all realities. And the poet is the minister of this sacrament. To him is entrusted this word, in which realities come out of their dark hiding place into the protective light of man to his own blessing and fulfillment.[12]

In some way, our very salvation depends on these words (298). 'Salvation' here concerns the dynamic drive toward fulfillment and unveiling which is to be found in all creatures. Through the word, spoken in powerful concentration, all realities are brought into the light of man, and redeemed from the imprisonment of their dumbness of reference to God. Rahner cites Brentano and Rilke, and their use of words like 'blossom, night, star and day, root and source, wind and laughter, rose, blood and earth'. We are here to *say* these words, 'more intensely than the things themselves / Ever dreamed of existing.'

> … O Earth: invisible!
> What, if not transformation, is your urgent command?[13]

Such is the priestly vocation of the poet. The vocation of the priest is similar. He is entrusted with the *efficacious* word of *God* himself. Where the poet redeems the things of the world from darkness by orienting them towards man, the word spoken by God enlightens all human beings. He comes precisely as word, similarly setting the creature free from its muteness by pointing beyond the created order. The word here is an event spoken by Christ himself and by others, handing on a message. The priest's own word is a signpost, pointing to the word spoken by another. In sum, the priest is he to whom the efficacious word of God has been entrusted, to be spoken in its absolute concentrated power.

These two modes of existence appeal to and mutually condition each other: 'The priesthood releases poetic existence and sets it free to attain its ultimate purpose. At the same time it discovers in the grace of poetic power a charism for its own perfection.'

'The priest calls upon the poet': we need to move away from an over-dependence on the *ex opere operato* effectiveness of the sacraments. These are indeed effective, independently of the minister; however, over-reliance

[12] (Karl Rahner, '*Priest and Poet*', 301-2)
[13] Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Ninth Elegy' In *Selected Poetry* (London: Picador Macmillan, 1987), 200-1, 203

on this truth can very easily impoverish sacramental life. 'The word of God in the mouth of the priest wants therefore, if it is to be spoken rightly, to absorb and subject to itself the life of the priestly individual. It wants to be made manifest in him'.[14] In other words, the priest's calling draws him towards a greater personal authenticity, that of the poet.[15]

At the same time, 'the poet calls upon the priest': the poet's words are like gates, good and strong, but they are gates into infinity and the incomprehensible. The poet is driven forwards by the transcendence of the infinite, overpowered by longing which the Holy Spirit has implanted in the human heart. His word calls up another word, which is a response to his own word.

The poet and priest are connected. One utters the (poetic) question, the other the (divine) answer. Speaking 'eschatologically', we can imagine the priest proclaiming poetically, and the poet, satisfied by the answer he receives, telling what he hears, so that the priest becomes a poet and the poet a priest. 'Such fortune is rare. If it happened often, there would be too much radiant beauty for our hearts'.

Rahner's account is beautiful and evocative, though probably works better as a broad-based suggestion of analogy, rather than a rigorous and comprehensive account of the relation between religious and poetic discourses. Masson has identified a number of limitations.[16] More positively, however, as Peter Fritz argues, this essay is important as a counter-argument to Martin Heidegger's teaching on the poetry of Hölderlin, where he gives the *Dichter* a demigod-like role.[17] This is problematic, because the *Dichter's* exalted

[14] (Karl Rahner, '*Priest and Poet*', 313)
[15] (Karl Rahner, '*Priest and Poet*', 316)
[16] Rahner's account arises from a problematic and inaccessible philosophical system, off-putting for many. Can his insights be expressed in a way which is less dependent on this philosophical idiom? Also, at times it can seem as if the poet and theologian have privileged access to an arcane vocabulary – not what Rahner intends. Finally, one may also ask whether the 'word' should have the absolute priority which Rahner gives it, as a vehicle for conveying transcendence and mystery (Masson, 277). For example, is music a better candidate (hence Masson's discussion of Rahner alongside Leonard Bernstein)?
[17] Fritz (2014). Martin Heidegger's four lectures of Hölderlin's major poems were written between 1936 and 1944. Hölderlin becomes 'the homecoming, the becoming housed in the condition of unhousedness.' Hölderlin expresses (along with Sophocles in *Antigone*) the fallenness of humanity, our 'ostracism from Being and the gods'. Themes of pilgrimage and festive homecoming in 'Heimkunft' and 'Wie wenn am Feiertag' enact the hope of an ontological homecoming. The *Dichter* is the incarnate 'clearing' in which Being [*Sein*] makes its radiant appearance.

calling is independent of the priest and of God. For Rahner, the role of the poet is fulfilled only when it coincides with the priest's teaching of the infinitude and love of God.

Contrary to Rilke's 'Ninth Elegy', it is not 'the Earth' which 'urgently commands' transformation.

Rahner and Miłosz

We have noted that Charles Taylor cites Miłosz at a strategically important juncture in *A Secular Age*, namely at the conclusion to the chapter on 'the immanent frame'. There are two possible stances with respect to the windswept landscape: either a resigned acceptance, and a continued sense of bereavement; or a resistance struggle in the name of humane values. This is the 'romantic crisis of European culture', a sense that the battle is never definitively lost.[18] In the closing pages of *The Language Animal*, Taylor asks, with the Romantics, whether it is possible to live in a purely disenchanted world. Answering in the negative, they undertook various modes of reconstruction and reconnection.[19]

We can easily recognize Czesław Miłosz in Taylor's landscape, where the believer, buffeted by crosswinds, is looking over their shoulder, so to speak. Can we recognize him in Rahner's drama of poet and priest, of mutual appeal and mutual recognition?

A fuller analysis of the writings of Miłosz, using the theology of Karl Rahner, would be instructive, whereby the notion of the 'anonymous Christian' might shed light.[20] There are 'eschatological' hints of this in several poems: of the 'shore of Reversal', reached by the velvet bridge of

---

[18] (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 593)

[19] Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal: the Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge, MA: Belnap Press, 2016), 343
Charles Taylor's own proposed study on poetry – an intended sequel to *The Language Animal* – has yet to emerge, though Tischner considers Taylor's treatment of Paul Celan and Gerald Manley Hopkins (Tischner 2021, 131-136).

[20] Rahner understands by 'anonymous Christian' a person who lives in the grace of God and attains salvation outside of explicitly constituted Christianity, for example in another faith tradition: 'of him I must say that he is an anonymous Christian; if not, I would have to presuppose that there is a genuine path to salvation that really attains that goal, but that simply has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. But I cannot do that.' (Rahner 1986: 207).

prayer, which we all walk whether there is another shore or not; or in 'Late Ripeness', where a door opens in the poet in his ninetieth year, into an early morning clarity: 'I knew, always, that I would be a worker in the vineyard, / As are all men and women living at the same time, /Whether they are aware of it or not.'

But before this eschatological fulfilment, the poet (*Dichter*) and the priest must find their way to one another. The *Dichter* is responsible for the word, especially the primordial words: 'The stars and the roses, the dusks and the dawns …'. To the poet falls the task of recovery, by means of attentiveness and intensification. But we have noted that Rahner undercuts Heidegger's view of the *Dichter* as the 'shepherd of Being'. The poet does not replace the word of the priest. Rather, the poet is coerced towards the priest, as the one who fulfils and completes their calling.

For all that Miłosz refuses the 'vatic mantle', there is a readiness, albeit reluctant, to take responsibility for *God's* word, because no one else is available to do this effectively. The self-consciousness of a poet in a secular age is shown in the tension between hypocrisy and elation. Miłosz's poetic religious affirmation causes him to part company with his contemporaries, in a gesture which he fears may smell of the pharisee's superiority.

A poem in which he is most lucid about his religious beliefs is oriented on the priest of his childhood, Father Chomski, beaten by thugs because he 'refused to bow before the world'. Poignantly, the elderly priest is worried for his parishioners because there is no one to succeed him. The rest of the poem, 'Fr Ch, Many Years Later', narrates Miłosz's distancing from the early piety of the school chapel, where 'Father Chomski approached on tiptoe and put out candles', and where the boy Miłosz was the 'least normal person' in the class. Later life sees the poet's preference for the marketplace – with the amphoras of wine, watching the dancers – rather than accompanying the disciples who wander between the cities of Asia Minor.

Has Miłosz been toiling against the world, or has he, without knowing, bowed to it? Is he a betrayer of Fr. Chomski; or has he in some mysterious sense succeeded him?

The question is poignant, in the light of the decline in vocations to the Catholic priesthood in contemporary Europe. It is at least a question, that the sources for certain modes of witness and commitment in the Church seem to be drying up. This can of course be framed positively, as the emergence and maturation of lay vocations and ministries. Nevertheless, the

equilibrium and mutual ordering of poet and priest which Rahner envisages seems to be less and less attainable. How many priests and seminarians of today would see themselves as here described? Would they consider their calling as 'releasing poetic existence and setting it free to attain its ultimate purpose' while discovering 'in the grace of poetic power a charism for [their] own perfection'?

One might press further, and observe that Vatican II's conceptualization of priesthood has severely dated the portrait of the priest in 'Priest and Poet'. We have become accustomed to speak of the priest in relation to his community, rather than the monadic figure delineated in Rahner's essay of 1956. How does this model square with the more communal, less clerical conception of eucharistic celebration of the post-conciliar Church?

Among the reservations about a Rahnerian account which we noted earlier, was the question as to whether 'word' should have the absolute priority as a vehicle for conveying transcendence and mystery.[21] The implicit sidelining of music, ritual gesture, silence, and other dimensions of the liturgy has indeed been well-noted by commentators – Czesław Miłosz among them – for whom post-conciliar reforms have impoverished our liturgy through their cerebral wordiness.

There is another aspect where the 'fit' between the poetry of Miłosz and Rahner's collaborative vision of poet and priest is an uneasy one. For all the Heideggerian urging of a fundamental ontological healing, of the *Dichter*, the Shepherd of Being, leading us to a festive homecoming, there remains the anguished mystery of the words which did *not* come to expression in post-war Germany. Heidegger's post-war silence on his complicity with National Socialism – and the implications of this complicity for his thought – is notorious.[22] But Karl Rahner was also 'a man in dark times'; in his writings, too, the dark themes are agonizingly absent. The failure to acknowledge, in 'Priest and Poet' and elsewhere, the terrible brokenness of thought, art, and poetry after Auschwitz is, surely, a serious lacuna.

Miłosz addresses the savagery of his time in his prose writings; 'The Captive Mind' is a classic diagnosis of the totalitarian mentality. As we have

[21] Masson, 'Rahner's Primordial Words', 277

[22] The iconic poetic statement of this is Paul Celan's poem 'Todtnauberg', which records the visit of Celan – a survivor of the death camps – to Heidegger in his mountain retreat, in hope of 'a thinking man's/ coming/word/ in the heart' (Celan 1990: 293). The hope, that is, of the word of remorse or atonement which Heidegger never uttered.

seen, he refuses as inappropriate the idea of disengaged poetry, even though distance is required from contemporary events so as to see without illusion. Poems where Miłosz speaks directly of the horror are comparatively few. In the most famous, 'Campo dei Fiori' the speaker reflects on what it means to be a bystander when atrocity is being perpetuated, firstly against Giordano Bruno, executed for heresy in the Campo dei Fiori in Rome in 1600, and secondly against the Jewish occupants of the Warsaw ghetto in April 1943.

The poem documents the failure of human solidarity, the 'loneliness of the dying'- Bruno, the victims in the ghetto – while those around them 'live on', oblivious to the suffering. Miłosz concludes with the hope for remembrance in the future, for these lonely forgotten ones, when 'all is legend', and when 'rage will kindle at a poet's word'.

The promise of future restoration, by means of the poet's remembrance and utterance, is a lacuna in the synthesis of priestly and poetic vocations which we have been discussing. Rahner's reminder is important, therefore, that the tension between poet and priest, between the one who questions and the one who responds, may only be resolved 'eschatologically'. Ultimately, through the poet's reply, the poet and priest, questioner and affirmer, may be one and the same person.

Nevertheless, Miłosz's insistence that his poetry is to be understood as 'a participation in the humanly modulated time of my contemporaries', means that there is more to be said. The poet's prophetic stance in *Campo dei Fiori*, who stands apart from the crowds, and passes judgment on their callousness, points to a dimension overlooked in Rahner, and Heidegger before him: the (primordial?) word which remembers the lost, and which kindles a rage against injustice.

THE MIDDLE GROUND:
THE AIM OF THOMAS MERTON'S POETRY

DAVID TOREVELL

Introduction - Merton's Philosophy of Poetry

Both as a priest and as an aspiring poet steeped in the Benedictine tradition, which he followed since the age of twenty-seven after completing his MA thesis on William Blake[1], Merton advocated a distinctive philosophy of poetry based on his own religious experience. In this, he was not unlike the Victorian Jesuit, Gerard Manley Hopkins, whom he admired greatly and who partly influenced his conversion and reception into the Catholic Church.[2] He suggests that poetry carries within it a distinct propensity to

[1] Michael Mott. *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton.* (London: A Sheldon Press Book, 1984)

[2] Merton, like Hopkins, had an ambiguous attitude towards his vocation as a monk and a poet. Certainly in the 1940s when *The Tears of Blind Lions* was published, he believed strongly in the creative darkness of contemplation, with night and silence featuring strongly in many of his poems. The title is taken from a line of his friend, Leon Bloy: 'When those who love God try to talk about Him, their words are blind lions looking for springs in the desert' (quoted in Shannon, 2002, 464). It was during this time that Merton had reservations about the ability of language to express an awareness and experience of God. As Cooper comments 'At a time when Merton believed that further progress in the spiritual life demanded a sacrifice of creative activity, his own poems corroborate that sacrifice by reminding him that "you need no eloquence, wild barn/exalting in your hermitage"' (23). As he puts it in *The Quickening of St. John the Baptist:*

> Night is our diocese and silence our ministry
> Poverty our charity and helplessness our tongue-tied sermon
> Beyond the scope of sight or sound we dwell upon the air
> Seeking the world's gain in an unthinkable experience.
> We are exiles in the far end of solitude, living as listeners
> With hearts attending to the skies we cannot understand.

However, although this tension between the monk and the writer was always with

make connections with a reader's or listener's 'depth of spirit', which cannot be as successfully done in other literary genres. Poetic words resonate and react with each other in a vital and memorable way and they go deep. A poem has an individual life and significance all of its own, at odds with factual information and declarations. He writes that: 'What the poem actually 'means' can only be summed up in the whole content of the poetic experience which it is capable of producing in the reader'.[3] Taking the example of the psalms – which are actually religious poems – he suggests they convey a metaphysical experience. But a distinction must be made between devotional verse and religious poetry. Disparagingly he writes the former is often a 'game in which souls …play poetic draughts with a certain number of devotional clichés'[4] frequently driven by a deliberate intention or purpose. The writing of religious poetry, on the other hand, is not 'willed' but a gift, like contemplation itself. Unapologetically dismissive he adds: 'It seems to me that such poetry were better not written' since it 'can deaden rather than revitalize a person'.[5] Poetry has the responsibility to enliven the human spirit, not subdue it.

Merton discusses how the psalms and the creation narrative in *Genesis* are replete with cosmic symbolism, an inclusion which is found in much great poetry. Its careful choice of language amounts to a stance against the 'tidal wave of trademarks, political party buttons, and advertising and propaganda slogans … an age of mass psychosis'.[6] The present age is intent on burying such symbolism 'under a mountain of cultural garbage'.[7] However, poets attempt to seek among such ruins the 'depth of the spirit', even if such debris

---

Merton, it was partly resolved as he grew older and his 1960s political writings demonstrated some reconciliation between these two vocations as he became more involved in world affairs. In *First and Last Thoughts* recalling his 25 years as a writer, Merton exhibits no qualms s about his vocation as a writer, but surprisingly has some about his identity as a monk:

> It is possible to doubt whether I have become a monk (a doubt I have to live with). But it is not possible to doubt that I am a writer, that I was born one and will most probably die as one. Disconcerting, disedifying as it is, this seems to be my lot and my vocation. It is what God has given me in order that I might give it back to Him (1989,17).

[3] Thomas Merton, *Bread in the Wilderness* (London: The Catholic Book Club 1953a),46
[4] (Merton, Thomas Merton, *Bread in the Wilderness,* 48)
[5] (Merton, *Bread in the Wilderness,* 48)
[6] (Merton, *Bread in the Wilderness,* 53)
[7] (Merton, *Bread in the Wilderness,* 54)

is manifest as 'starvation, madness, frustration and death' (1953, 54).[8] The employment of cosmic symbolism is revealed in 'Evening: Zero Weather'. During a bitterly cold time before Ash Wednesday, when the *snow* appears like veins in a wall of marble, the poet experiences a 'oneness' with the natural world and his fellow Trappists against the backdrop of eternity. The harmonic unity of the monks' work with the winter weather and season is conveyed by three similes – 'bare fields as silent as eternity': 'When all the monks come in with eyes as clean as the cold sky' and 'cowls as deep as clouds'.[9] The monks' habits become mystically suffused with the trees themselves as they 'shake the chips out of' their robes. [10]

The mood is quiet and prayerful, the tone one of intimacy, as the poet relates his own personal experience communicated as an act of gratitude for what has been given during the day. He relates the story in linear stages of time, as staccato punctuation divides the day into memorable photo shoots. To convey immediacy, the poem begins in the present tense with an emphatic 'Now'. It then takes the reader on a lyrical walk from the unyielding outdoors where the monks cut wood as part of their daily manual labour enshrined in the *Rule of Benedict*, to the church as they 'come in' from the cold; we then 'see' their silent, ritualized movement as they assemble for Vespers.[11] Inside, the monks' worldly senses begin to close down as they gradually forget the feel of the cold, the stark pillars and the sounds of the cloister. The poem's pitch becomes correspondingly more hushed as a prelude to the contrasting rousing last verse, whose upbeat, faster rhythm crescendos into a bold proclamation: 'And entering our blazing heaven by the doors of the Assumption'. Heaven is now experienced within the framework of eschatological time and the community start to rest in their homely, sacred space, relishing a 'fire' and an 'August', a spiritual warmth, an inner summer in the dead of external winter. Heaven cuts into the present and the words become more pronounced and assured as the monks prepare themselves for their overwhelming monosyllabic confession of faith at the end of the poem – 'For we have found'. The reader is invited to join their confidence, assured that the monks have felt a deep, uplifting joy which will never fail.

Merton was influenced by late seventeenth century elegiac writers. His

[8] (Merton, *Bread in the Wilderness*, 54)
[9] Thomas Merton, *In the Dark before Dawn. New Selected Poems of Thomas Merton* ed. Lynn Szabo (New York: New Directions, 2005)
[10] (Merton, *In the Dark before Dawn. New Selected Poems of Thomas Merton*)
[11] (Merton, *In the Dark before Dawn. New Selected Poems of Thomas Merton*)

'Elegy for a Trappist' extends the notion of monastic rest (*quies),* by rehearsing a common theme in monasticism – the remembrance and proximity of death.[12] Most monasteries choose to locate their cemeteries not far from their chapel, a reminder to the monks of their fragility, mortality and belief in the resurrection. The wistful but hopeful mood of the poem centres around one monk who tended the monastery garden with care and not without some exhaustion – he was 'careworn'; he was also responsible for decorating the altar with his carefully grown flowers. The garden was a familiar image for monks, for they believed their central quest was to cultivate a holy space, an Edenic garden (*hortus claustralis*) where a flourishing worship of God could take place naturally. In *The Sign of Jonas* Merton relates how his 'chief joy is to escape to the attic of the garden house and the little broken window that looks out over the valley. There in the silence I love the green grass. The tortured gestures of the apple trees have become part of my prayer. … listen to the sweet songs of all the living things that are in our words and fields'.[13] Woodcock's astute examination of Merton suggests that gardens and windows were common themes embedded in his poetry and prose writings.[14]

The rude interruption of the lorry within the monastic space emblemizing the fallen world, is conveyed by the thuddering, monosyllabic sound of 'big truck' and the assonance of 'clattered' and 'shut'. The truck's disturbance of silence evoked by the words 'battle cruiser' emphasizes how it is out of place in this tranquil setting of 'flowers' and prayer, for here monks have fled the world (*fuga mundi)* to cultivate an earthly paradise (*paradisus clustralis*) centred around the Divine Word.[15] As a student Merton studied Dante in the original Italian and was deeply influenced by the *Divine Comedy's* theme of the soul's journey to God, a way out of the evil of the world through purgatorial struggle into paradise. This poetic tribute to his fellow Trappist is the only time in the deceased one's life, apart from his requiem mass, that he would be publicly honored. With subtle humour Merton invents a new ecclesiastic phrase 'martyr of unbelievable gardens' for his beloved brother, since the official language of the church has no liturgical name to describe him. It suggests the deceased had a deep faith in immortality and gave his entire life to the service of Christ with the use of the word 'unbelievable' pointing to the astonishing, transcendent beauty of

[12] (Merton, *In the Dark before Dawn. New Selected Poems of Thomas Merton*)
[13] Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1953b)
[14] George Woodcock, *Thomas Merton. Monk and Poet* (London: The Catholic Book Club, 1978)
[15] (Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*)

the plot he tended. Merton sees his act of veneration as a hidden act of love for Christ as he surreptitiously 'smuggles' in his homegrown flowers, unostentatiously concealing them under his cowl. The poem gives a glimpse of the silent, almost invisible presence of the monk who has always been 'hiding in the flowers', living anonymously in the Spirit, to escape the noise of the world, one never seen by the blindness of those without faith, those who only seek 'some other blood', certainly not the Paschal blood of sacrifice; they are Leviathan-like, proud, exhibiting the worst of the deadly sins, in contrast to the humility of the one recently deceased. The city often became a symbol of noise and the fallen world for Merton. It was, as Lentfoehr comments, 'a symbol of "modern Society" and the emptiness of technological man who, in conforming himself to its dictates, tends to lose all spiritual orientation … a frequent Merton theme'.[16] Here is an echo of Augustine's city of God versus the city of humanity.

Similar ideas are repeated in Merton's 'On the Anniversary of My Baptism'. He recognizes his baptism as a violent and transformative eruption into his life, akin to an act of 'murder', an 'execution' of the spiritual death of his former life. This language is necessary for, Augustine-like, he believes his earlier existence amounted to a 'savage history'. The multivalent meanings of water pervade the entire poem. Different types of water characterize his pre-baptismal life; some are (inversing the comparison) 'as salt as sorrow' to capture its bitterness, repeating 'as' to emphasize its devastatingly negative effect on him; some waters returned him to his base existence once they had performed their sensuous attack on him and seduced him with their loudness and 'flash of white-caps'.[17] Then came the reinvigorating waters of renewal and repentance. Although he had been singled out for priesthood since his young days, it took some time before he was able to receive with gratitude the impact of baptism. After nine years in the Catholic tradition, he recounts how his baptism had come about, due to the patient waiting of God, but his eyes had been too blind to see the full significance of what he had received; nevertheless, he did have an inkling of the 'new-come Trinity' and a different life ensued. As St. Augustine recounts in autobiographical *Confessions*, it was necessary to feel 'death' towards all sensual things, for they invariably took him away from God. The authentic death which was necessary was 'in Christ' and this came about after a long, intense journey from his early days in Prades to 'the Cistercian Abbey of the poor men who

[16] Thérèse Lentfoehr, *Words and Silence*. New York: A New Directions Book, 1979), 95

[17] Merton, *In the Dark before Dawn. New Selected Poems of Thomas Merton*)

labor in Gethsemane'.[18] Merton's poetry about the nature of the monastic life reflects how it held for him a movement away from the ego towards the selfless love of God and neighbour.

Poetry and Contemplation

It is not surprising that Merton became fascinated with the association between poetry and contemplation and he began this exploration by offering a succinct definition. The contemplative person is 'one who seeks to know the meaning of life not only with his head but with his whole being, by living it in depth and in purity', and thus uniting himself to the Source of life – 'a Source which is infinitely actual and therefore too real to be contained satisfactorily inside any word or concept or name assigned by man… '.[19] Art is significant in this endeavour to find meaning because it reaches into realms that transcend the 'material conduct of everyday life'[20] and in 'the midst of ordinary life itself … seeks and finds a new and transcendent meaning'[21]. However, contemplation also offers a serious challenge to poetry because it goes beyond all language and concepts and rests in the inexpressible, as St. John of the Cross, one of Merton's favourite writers, recalls. Nevertheless, when contemplation is spoken about in its broadest sense, it becomes possible to recognize how it enjoys unique affinities with poetry, for it is 'not only compatible with poetic creation, but is stimulated by it, and in its turn inspires poetry'.[22] This is why Merton specifically names Gerard Manley Hopkins and Paul Claudel as great Christian poets, because in them it is 'hard to distinguish between the inspiration of the prophet and mystic and the purely poetic enthusiasm of great artistic genius'.[23][24] Here the sacramentality of the poetic vision is emphasized because it 'sees the spiritual reality, the inner meaning of the object he contemplates, which makes that concrete reality not only a thing worthy of admiration in itself, but also and above all makes it a *sign of God'*.[25] Poets

[18] Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948), 423

[19] Thomas Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, (New York: New Directions, 1981), 340

[20] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 340)

[21] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 340-1)

[22] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 341-2)

[23] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 344)

[24] As I have already noted, Merton admired Hopkins. The former's Marian poem *The Blessed Mary Compared to a Window* is imitated in the latter's *The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breath*e.

[25] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 345)

see God in all creation and in all the incidents and vicissitudes of life. Indeed, life itself is sacred and the poet imaginatively points this out. They have another aim, too, of reflecting the beauty of the world and its truth, challenging in a counter-cultural manner what a materialistic world deems beautiful. The poet also becomes skilled in her art by not only reading pious works, but also by acquainting herself with the good poets of her time. Merton mentions in particular Eliot, Auden, Spender, Pasternak, Dylan Thomas, Rilke and Lorca; the last two became sole subjects of his poetry. Poetry also has to offer contemplation of the dignity of aesthetic experience. Merton's sardonic wit is evident on this matter when he denigrates those admirers of paintings of dogs 'that you could almost pat. But naturally they soon tire of art, under those circumstances. They turn aside to pat a real dog ...'.[26] Lastly, aesthetic experience rises above the sensible order and reason itself: 'It is a suprarational intuition of the latent perfection of things'[27] and it 'outruns the speed of reasoning and leaves all analysis far behind'. [28]

Merton was influenced by St. Thomas Aquinas's understanding of 'connaturality', especially his emphasis on the kind of knowledge that emerges through an affective inclination towards the Real. [29]Artists and poets offer a concrete and refined 'affective identification' with 'inner reality, the vital substance of its object'[30] and in turn, pass this on to those who engage. Reflecting the Greek Fathers' notion of *theoria physica* (natural contemplation) poets enlist a glimpse of God through their expression of the inner spiritual reality (the *logos*) of the created thing. Because the poet is particularly attuned to 'natural contemplation' her being is receptive to 'infused contemplation', which is another way of saying open to God's grace and able to co-operate with the gift. Thus, 'less tempted … to reach out for vulgar satisfactions and imaginable thrills' and 'more "spiritual," if not more "religious"'.[31] But there are clear differences between the poet and the contemplative. The former understandably 'enters into himself in order to work' [32]whereas the latter passes 'through the center of his own soul' to 'lose himself in the mystery and secrecy and infinite

[26] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 347)
[27] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 347)
[28] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 347)
[29] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947) 1a, 1.6; Denys Turner, *Thomas Aquinas. A Portrait.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014)
[30] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 347)
[31] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 349)
[32] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 350)

transcendent reality of God living and working with him'.[33] Merton claims there is an imminent 'danger' when the poet allows her gift of artistic intuition to prevent her from passing into the 'most spiritual kind of contemplation, in which the soul rests in God without images, without concepts, without intermediary. The artist may be like the hare in the fable, who far outstrips the tortoise without talent in the beginnings of the contemplative life, but who, in the end, is left behind'. [34]

So, what does Merton propose as the way forward? He begins by asking whether there is in fact a clear-cut distinction and choice to be made between 'art' and 'mystical prayer'. One answer is to recognize that an artist or poet might not be called to the higher reaches of contemplative, mystical prayer at all: 'For such a one, to insist on spending long hours in prayer frustrating his creative instinct would, in fact, lead to illusion'.[35] Instead, he should realize that 'if he is called to be an artist, then his art will lead him to sanctity, if he uses it as a Christian should'.[36] 'We are dealing with the gifts of God, which God can give as he pleases, when he pleases, to whom he pleases'.[37] But a poet who is a Christian, has a moral duty to make known the 'unsearchable mystery of the love of Christ through her writings so that she may say along with 'St. Paul: "Woe to me if I preach not the Gospel"'.[38]

The Middle Ground of Poetry

Merton, schooled in the apophatic tradition, is acutely aware that language breaks down when it attempts to describe God and that 'non-saying' is often the most reliable way forward. In *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* although he articulates a key difference between Buddhism and Christianity, he acknowledges that both religions teach that direct experiences of truth are best left unsaid. The Divine is not an 'abstract objective idea but a fundamental concrete intuition directly apprehended in a personal experience that is incontrovertible and inexpressible'.[39] Zen is helpful in its 'unarticulated and unexplained ground of direct experience…'.[40] Nevertheless,

[33] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 350)
[34] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 351)
[35] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 353)
[36] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 353)
[37] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 353)
[38] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 354)
[39] Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: A New Directions Paperback, 1968), 26
[40] (Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, 36)

both religions never seek a wholesale rejection of sense and matter, but rather attempt to grasp the unity of the invisible and the visible – in Kantian terms, the noumenal and the phenomenal. Merton adds that Buddhist meditation specifically aims at paying attention to and becoming mindful of one's everyday existence, so that insights into truth may take place. Christianity is somewhat different since much of its history has rested upon revelation through words 'and depends on the believers' acceptance of the truth of these statements'.[41] It is based on revelation and on the gift of grace given through Christ. Hence, this faith is happy to use language and symbols which are at 'hand ready for immediate use'.[42] However, this trajectory can be fraught because Catholicism is always a 'living experience of unity in Christ which far transcends all conceptual formulations'.[43] It is not contradictory, therefore, to claim that both Christians and Buddhists practise Zen, since both encourage direct experience of metaphysical truths.

In one sense, Christian poetry is a natural extension of the need to record direct experiences of revelation rooted in the myriad exigencies of everyday living and this is the reason why Merton sees it as a vital part of his own vocation, as both monk and writer. Poetry presents him with a *middle ground* in this respect, between the debased language of the fallen world and the uplifting dynamic of contemplative silence, since it is able, primarily though symbolism, image, metaphor and rhythm, to communicate emotional depth against a horizon of eternity, in a manner no other literary form can do so forcefully. As Cohen comments: 'One motive to metaphor is the desire to communicate how one feels and why one feels that way'.[44] Since Merton had a confident sacramental sense of the transcendent within the ordinary, many of his poems became suffused with an other-worldly sense, conveying a space between heaven and earth, linguistically inhabiting both temporality and eternity and the borderline between them. They seek to the tell the truth by means of language free of instrumental purpose, a characteristic, according to Boyle, of a distinctive Catholic approach to literature: 'Literature ... shows us in words the truth about life'[45] and if we deny this claim 'we shall have great difficulty explaining how they tell us the truth about Being in general, how they amount, or are capable of

[41] (Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, 39)
[42] (Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, 46)
[43] (Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, 39)
[44] Cohen, T. 2004. 'Metaphor, Feeling and Narrative', ed. John and McIver Lopes In *Philosophy of Literature. Contemporary and Classic Readings,* ed. John and McIver Lopes (London: Blackwell, 2004), 239-240.
[45] (Cohen, *'Metaphor, Feeling and Narrative*', 128)

amounting to a Revelation'. [46]

Interpreters of Silence

As I have indicated, Merton possessed an ambivalent attitude towards the role and use of language. In *Cables to the Ace*, dedicated to his poet friend, Robert Lax, he bemoans the moral decline in the 'loud' language of the world that knows no silence for 'noises are never values'.[47] It has become 'a medium in which we are totally immersed, there is no longer any need to say anything'. … 'No one need attend. Listening is obsolete'.[48] Even '(Some of the better informed have declared a war on language)'.[49] How different this is from the *Rule of St. Benedict* which opens with the word 'listen' and advocates being attentive to the divine call primarily through the words of scripture and silence. Gioia avers to this dynamic in the *Rule of St. Benedict*: 'One of the most lyrical sentences of the *Rule* portrays God's voice inviting, calling, crying, warning monastics each hour of the day … "Let us open … our ears to the voice from heaven that every day calls out this charge"'.[50] For Merton, there is an inseparable link between contemplation attunement to revelation and the poetic instinct and this is the ground of great literature. As Szabo comments, he 'came to embrace the profound relationship that developed between his vocation to the silence of his monastic life and its rich and sacralizing effect on his poetry'.[51]

The intimate hushed tone of his poem 'A Letter to My Friends' epitomizes this combination. He invites his friends into the expansive space of silence to meet 'the quiet Christ' away from the noise of the world. The poem entices others to search for this treasure, to 'Look' and behold the 'holy House of God' and to listen to its silence and smell its 'fragrant' allure. This physical space is made visible and tangible by the accumulative use of monosyllabic words to express a heavy feeling of location and edifice: 'sheds', 'cloisters', 'stones', 'beams', 'hill', 'walls', 'rooves', 'door'. This contrasts with the present 'ruins' (repeated, suggesting a beauty that has been lost) and the 'moaning trains' of the mundane world. However, there

[46] (Cohen, '*Metaphor, Feeling and Narrative*', 128)
[47] Thomas Merton, *Cables to the Ace* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 150
[48] (Merton, *Cables to the Ace*, 150)
[49] (Merton, *Cables to the Ace*, 150)
[50] Luigi Gioia, *The Rule of St. Benedict and the Life of the Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2020), 200; prologue, 9
[51] Lynn Szabo, 'Introduction' in *In the Dark Before Dawn. New Selected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: A New Directions Book, 2005), xxx

is a sense that holiness can be regained as he calls out: 'Begone. The sad towns.' In the monastery and its surroundings, Merton insists that the earth touches heaven and 'fields are the friends of plenteous heaven'. In *Silence in Heaven* he writes: '… in the deep silence, wisdom begins to sing her unending, sunlit, inexpressible song: the private song she sings to the solitary soul'.[52] The 'monastic life is not dedicated to a sounding communication of men. It lives in a soundless communication in mystery between man and God, between man and his brother and between man and all created things'. [53]

In a letter to the Cistercian Abbot, Dom Francis Decroix, dated 21 August 1967, Merton wrote that the contemplative is one who has 'risked his mind in the desert beyond language and beyond ideas … in the nakedness of pure trust'. [54]There is no need to 'find your own way round the jungle of language'; it is far better to penetrate your own silence and risk the sharing of that solitude with the lonely other. Merton's poetry attempts to capture what Philip Gröning's film *Into Great Silence* (2006) strives for – an experience of something desirously 'Great'. Silence 'is at once overpowering and yet its awesomeness resides in its intimacy and gentleness'.[55] Merton wishes to do with language, rhythm and sound what the visual imagery of the film attempts – the communicating of alterity and Otherness, with its rootedness in the ordinary and commonplace. Like Anthony Gormley's human-shaped iron sculptures *Another Country* on Formby Beach (Torevell, 2017),[56] Merton's poetic silence beckons the reader towards an immortal shore, reflecting St. Benedict's encouragement in chapter 4: 46 of his *Rule* 'to long for eternal life with all spiritual desire'. There is a sense in Merton's writings that this longing, although strenuous, is always aided because it is played out against the encouraging backdrop of silent eternity. As Sister Laurentian Johns says of the *Rule*: 'Without such a dynamic pull heavenwards, any Christian community – any Christian – can become discouraged by current difficulties and lacking in energy'. [57]

---

[52] Thomas Merton, *Silence in Heaven* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1956), 24
[53] quoted in (Woodcock, *Thomas Merton. Monk and Poet*, 48)
[54] In William Shannon and Christine Bochen, eds. *A Life in Letters. The Essential Collection* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 168
[55] Torevell, David. 'From Absurdity to Apophaticism - Re-reading Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot'. In *Sources of Transformation. Revitalising Christian Spirituality*, eds. Edward Howells and Peter Tyler (London: Continuum, 2010), 149
[56] David Torevell, *Liturgy and the Beauty of the Unknown. Another Place.* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
[57] Laurentian Johns, *The Way of Benedict. Eight Blessings for Lent* (London: SPCK,

In his 1964 talk to Latin American poets, Merton claimed that they were 'children of the unknown … interpreters of silence' and their carefully chosen words could be stronger than the bomb. Poets ought to be proud of their use of language since 'the words that are given to us for nothing, not to teach anyone, not to confute anyone, not to prove anyone absurd, but to point beyond all objects into the silence where nothing can be said'.[58] Poetry assists as we wait for an everlasting silence beyond death and is a foretaste of its fruits. In 'How Long We Wait' the poet waits and asks, like the psalmist, for God's presence to be felt, to be heard like the 'Laughs' of a bridegroom and for the time when the trees will sing for 'our Sun rejoices like a dancer/On the rim of our hills?' Poetry fills in this time of longing and waiting, consoling listeners in their expectations. But it is necessary to stay awake (like the wise virgins in the gospel) for signs of this coming, both in the daytime and in the night-time. This is a period of mourning and rejoicing. In his Marian poem about the early morning Office, 'The Trappist Abbey: Matins', he encourages the soul to 'kindle in the windows of this ladyhouse' with 'childish, clear awakeness', and like Peter, 'mourn God's blood in the place'.

His role as a watchman in the monastery is described in his 'Fire Watch, July 4th 1952', the 'Epilogue' to *The Sign of Jonas* which the French Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain claimed was the best piece of American prose writing in the twentieth century. He homes in on the spiritual importance of the night. Four sentences capture his experience: 'At eight-fifteen I sit in darkness. I sit in human silence. Then I begin to hear the eloquent night, the night of wet trees, with moonlight sliding over the shoulder of the church in a haze of dampness and subsiding heat. The world of this night resounds from heaven to hell with animal eloquence, with the savage innocence of a million unknown creatures'.[59] The text focuses on the watchman as he moves from the attic to the steeple of the church, a symbol of the contemplative journey as it rises from earth towards heaven. In the dark '…the animals are children of God and the night was never made to hide sin, but only to open infinite distances to charity and send our souls to play in the stars'.[60] He adds, 'O God, my God, the night has values that day has never dreamed of … Only man makes himself illuminations he conceives

2019), 109

[58] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 374)

[59] (Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*, 342)

[60] (Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*, 342)

to be solid and eternal'.[61]

Influenced by Aquinas' understanding of beauty as a transcendental characterized by integrity, proportion and clarity and by one of his favourite poets William Blake, Merton believed in *claritas*, the '*splendor formae*; the glory of form shining through matter'.[62] Form is a revelation of essence – 'to see a thing as it is essentially, and how it is filled with God's glory'. Beauty here does not reflect Plato's unchanging 'form' but belongs to Blake's notion of 'particularizing.' 'Seeing the world in a grain of sand is the perception of *claritas'*.[63] This is not far removed from Hopkin's notion of *haecceitas* or uniqueness and is associated with immortality: 'To see the splendor of form in matter is to look through matter into eternity …'.[64] Imagination is defended against scientific reason, for 'poetry and metaphysics … seek a still higher kind of truth and intelligibility.[65] It is an 'ontological splendor that is revealed' not 'conceptual clarity. It is the perfection of an antelope or a flower, not the perfection of a theorem or of a syllogism'.[66] Beauty can be enjoyed 'directly and intuitively. The beauty it thus enjoys is that which is connatural to man'[67]; in other words, humanity possesses intuitive feelings for the depth of reality beauty affords. However, artistic creation can only be achieved through inspiration acquired over time and by disciplined training: 'The interior light given the artist by God must be cherished, that it may strengthen and come to burn brilliantly in the end'.[68] Persuaded by Maritain's philosophy of art, Merton argues that critical judgment is necessary for any artist and emanates from a good disposition; everyone understands his particular ends through the lens of what he himself has already become. This implies that artists ought to be trained in contemplation and like Hindu gurus, purge themselves of all personal desires. The aim is to visualize a 'subject as it is described in a given canonical prescription *(mantram*)'; he must then contemplate[s] this ideal model until he is able 'to "reflect" it, becomes identified with it, holds it in view in an act of nondifferentiation …'.[69] The artist should also be deeply conscious of the social and political issues of the day, but when reduced to propaganda, it becomes a deformation: 'The artist should preach

[61] (Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*, 348)
[62] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 443)
[63] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 443)
[64] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 443)
[65] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 444)
[66] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 445)
[67] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 445)
[68] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 448)
[69] (Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, 448)

nothing - not even his own autonomy. His art should speak its own truth and in so doing it will be in harmony with every other kind of truth - moral, metaphysical and mystical'. [70]

The Anti-Poet

In *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, Merton writes that the contemplative life must 'provide an area, a space of liberty, of silence, in which possibilities are allowed to surface …'.[71] He studied and was influenced by the Frankfurt School social theorist Marcuse from whom he learnt that contemporary culture had largely produced a 'one dimensional man' subject to the dehumanizing effects of mass technological oppression, which in turn produced an anti-culture. *In Zen and the Birds of Appetite* he agrees with 'Marcuse's analysis of the "one-dimensional thinking" in which the very rationality and exactitude of technological society and its various justifications, add up to one more total mystification'.[72]

---

[70] Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (London: Burns and Oates, 1993), 131

[71] Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (New York: A New Directions Book, 1975), 117; David Torevell, '"What we have to be is what we are". Re-discovering an Ontology of Unity in the Asian Journal of Thomas Merton', *Asian Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 2. No.1, 39- 56.

[72] Merton found in the writings of the Frankfurt School social theorist, Herbert Marcuse, a convincing theoretical model for what was occurring in western society. With an alarmingly contemporary ring, Marcuse argued that modern industrial and technological society had led to human alienation. Technological totalitarianism had become the order of the day. In Merton's late poetry, especially *Cables to the Ace*, his experimentation with the language of alienation was characterized by the 'renunciation of conventional syntax, patterns of rational cognition, and inherited standards of poetic truth - …' (Cooper, 1989, 251). This was a poetry stripped of symbolism to make a point. Merton claimed that language had been reduced to marketing and consumerist babble and a discourse of 'unmeaning'. His anti-poetry was a satirical denunciation of the process of dehumanization he saw advancing in modern culture. A 'one-dimensional man' to use Marcuse's memorable phrase, was clearly emerging. Merton was critical of the fallen world which reduced humanity to this flat level. But he displayed a more sensitive attitude to that world as his monastic years unfolded. In *The Sign of Jonas* published in 1953, he reveals his love for the world outside the monastery gates: 'How good are all the people in the world' and he discovered 'respect and love and pity for the souls' (1953, 92, Cooper, 1989, 92). After a trip to Louisville, on March18th 1958, where he had a memorable mystical awareness of the unity of all people, he became more aware of his former lapses into condemning the world too easily, and recognized them as 'defects of my own which I had projected on it' (quoted in Cooper, 1989, 17). However, he still felt

Merton uses the phrase 'anti-poetry' to mount his attack on such developments and employs the tool of linguistic deconstruction to achieve this. He exposes the emptiness of his opponents' use of banal language by sardonically critiquing their superficiality, in a manner similar to how Buddhist *Madhyamika* shows its combatants the absurdity of their position.[73] Parody is not required, simply the exposition of 'material of superabundant nonsense' … and 'feedback quotations into the mass consumption of pseudo-culture'.[74] His 'anti-poetry' uses the language of a debased culture to undermine the flimsy foundation on which it is constructed. *Ersatz* societies use words which are not needed nor wanted and which are not honestly meant; they are without integrity. They are 'anti-Beautiful' and modern man is deluged with useless words. Sometimes this strategy does not work and does not have the leverage it deserves since 'when his supposed values are returned to him in irony, so static, he will not accept the implications'. But 'That is *his* problem'.[75] Merton's *Cables to the Ace* reflects in abundance this technique of anti-poetry and was part of a broader canvas which was intent on exposing 'alienation as the distinguishing feature of life in advanced technological civilization'.[76]

'completely alienated from everything in the world and all its activity' (1953, 115) and this dual stance informed most of his poetry, as he swayed from one side to another with different degrees of acceptance for the fallen world, the world he had fled by going through the monastery gates. By the1960s Merton became astutely aware of his need to respond to the world and live out, what Cooper refers to as an 'all-embracing humanism' (Cooper, 1989, 92). He writes in the aptly worded title *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* published in 1965, that 'Although I often differ strongly from that "world", I think I can be said to response to it. I do not delude myself that I am still part of it' (*Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander,* vii). His main concerns became the Vietnam War, racial conflict and technology. In his essay 'Is the World a problem?' in *Contemplation in a World of Action* he writes, 'And it has now become transparently obvious that their automatic "rejection of the world" and "contempt for the world" is in fact not a choice but the evasion of choice (1973, 165). And later he asks the question: 'Do we really renounce ourselves and the world in order to find Christ, or do we renounce our alienated and false selves in order to choose our own deepest truth in choosing both the world and Christ at the same time? (1973, 171). He concludes: 'The world cannot be a problem to anyone who sees that ultimately Christ, the world, his brother and his own inmost ground are made one and the same in grace and redemptive love' (1973, 171).

[73] (Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, 139-40)

[74] (Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, 118)

[75] (Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, 118)

[76] David Cooper, *Thomas Merton's Art of denial. The Evolution of a Radical Humanist* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 1

His anti-poetry was his declaration of war on 'dehumanizing modes of contemporary discourse which exacerbate human alienation'.[77] It was a poetry of dissent, as strong as any of his anti-war writings associated with his involvement in politics during the 1960s.[78] In *Love and Living* Merton shows how symbols are crucially important because they go 'beyond practicality and purpose, beyond cause and effect'.[79] Symbolic language is also inextricably caught up with Being and depth. It carries spiritual resonances and conveys the inner meaning of life and the true nature of Reality. It forms communion: 'the awareness of participation in an ontological or religious reality: in the mystery of being, of human love, of redemptive mystery, of contemplative truth'.[80] The 'purpose of the symbol, if it can be said to have a "purpose", is not to increase the quantity of our knowledge and information but to deepen and enrich the *quality* of life itself by bringing man into communion with the mysterious sources of vitality and meaning, of creativity, love, and truth, to which he cannot have direct access to by means of science and technique'. [81]Its role is 'to express and encourage man's acceptance of his own center, his own ontological roots in a mystery of being that transcends his individual ego'.[82] However, because modern mass culture is insensitive to the symbolic and mythic, the non-utilitarian symbol is often drained of any significance and dismissed due to its non-practical value.

Artists and poets must repair the damage done to language: 'One thing is certain, if the contemplative … and the poet … forsake {that} wisdom and join in the triumphant, empty-headed crowing of advertising man and engineers of opinion, then there is nothing left in store for us but total

[77] (Cooper, *Thomas Merton's Art of denial. The Evolution of a Radical Humanist,* 2)

[78] Merton would have been highly supportive of the contemporary *Black Lives Matter* movement if he had lived today. He was acutely aware of racial discrimination in America and abhorred it. In his poem *Picture of a Black Child with a White Doll* the following sentence appears under the title – 'Carole Denise McNair killed in in Birmingham, Sept. 1963'. It is a devastating critique of American's consumerist and racist culture. 'That senseless platinum head' of the doll and of entrenched racist attitudes lacking love – the 'empty headed race/worthless full of fury/twanging and drooling in the southern night/Needed to know love' (Shannon, Bochen, and O'Connell, 2002, 420-422).

[79] Thomas Merton, *Love and Living* (London: Sheldon Press, 1979), 67

[80] (Merton, *Love and Living*, 65)

[81] (Merton, *Love and Living*, 68)

[82] (Merton, *Love and Living*, 65)

madness'.[83] Authentic poetry is far removed from this. It has the capacity to 'see' things through a transcendental lens and to express how a metaphysical intuition of Being is possible. The poet must present a direct experience of life, never erecting an obstacle between us and the reality we encounter. She must learn to see what is in front of them and to witness their inherent mythic qualities. To extend his point, he discusses with his novices at Gethsemane one of Edwin Muir's poems about plough horses which reveals their numinous qualities, seeing them as more than horses due to the fearsome presence they possess, a participation in God's presence. Merton claimed that Gerard Manley Hopkins did this very well – the craft of seeing the sacramental nature of ordinary things of life and their inherent glory.

Again in his talks to novices, Merton's shows them how the 'classics' reveal his own attitude towards poetry. Authors like Virgil, Dante and Milton were able to communicate those values, which living in a civilized way entails. They knew how to see this world in relation to a heavenly world and their 'spirit' was characterized by reserve, quietness and thoughtfulness. They envisaged a measured, orderly, balanced and co-ordinated existence in relation to its highest expression, resulting in a sense of joyful living. Merton demonstrates how the civilized person is able to tune into the harmony of heavenly things, which forms a virtuous way of being and living. In numerous poems, he contrasts this quiet awareness of metaphysical realities with the noise and flatness of the contemporary world.

But it was not only classical authors he admired. Merton had a great affinity with the Polish poet and writer, Czesław Miłosz with whom he corresponded. He especially admired his *The Captive Mind* which probed the plight of Polish intellectuals under a repressive Communist regime and dealt with one of Merton's favourite themes – cultural degradation brought about by debased images and language that result in alienation. On March 28th 1961, Merton wrote to him: 'The poison is exactly the alienation you speak of … what comes of being an individual helpless to liberate himself from the images society fills him with. It is a very fine picture of hell sometimes. When I see advertisements I want to curse, they make me so sick and I do curse them'.[84] Merton argues that the real tragedy during the early 1960s was a mistaken understanding of anthropology: 'Speaking in monastic terms, of fidelity to the truth, to the light that is within us from God, that is the horror: everyone has been more or less unfaithful …'.[85] In

[83] (Merton, *Love and Living*, 79)
[84] (Shannon and Bochen, *A Life in Letters. The Essential Collection*, 135-6)
[85] (Shannon and Bochen, *A Life in Letters. The Essential Collection*, 136)

a letter to Bruno P. Schlessinger on 8th December, 1961, he penned that the most important issue of the time was Christian humanism:

> What is important is the fully Christian notion of man: a notion radically modified by the mystery of the incarnation. … a program of Christian culture needs to be rooted in the biblical notion of man as the object of divine mercy, and of special concern on the part of God, as the spouse of God, as in some mysterious sense, an epiphany of divine wisdom. [86]

Conclusion

In summary I have claimed that Merton's distinctive contribution to twentieth century poetry rests on a spiritual foundation centred round the rhythmic dynamic of language and silence, which reflects his own mystical encounter with the Word and the ultimate Silence. The world he portrays in his poetry reflects the epiphany of God, but a life of contemplation is required to penetrate the Source of its riches and beauty. He invites his readers and listeners into this space with some degree of success and originality, I think.

[86] (Shannon and Bochen, *A Life in Letters. The Essential Collection*, 200); David Torevell, 'Theological Anthropology and the teaching of 'A' in Catholic Level English Literature Set Texts Schools and Colleges,' *International Journal of Education and Christianity*, Vol 24. Issue 3. November 2020: 296-314

FAITH, MIRACLES, AND THE SIGHT OF THE HIDDEN GOD: ALICE THOMAS ELLIS'S *THE 27TH KINGDOM*

DAVID DEAVEL

Introduction: Overlooked for a Retrograde Faith?

The work of Anna Haycraft (1932-2005), better known under her nom-de-plume, Alice Thomas Ellis, never quite gained the kind of broad international appeal or critical nod taken by writers such as Penelope Fitzgerald and Beryl Bainbridge, whose careers she helped midwife into existence in her role as fiction editor at Duckworth Publishing. In a review of Ellis's *The Summer House Trilogy*, Francine Prose observed that American literary acclaim was unlikely given Ellis's cleverness, humour, subtle depth, and capacity for beautiful sentences. American fiction in the 1990s, Prose suggested, displayed a preference for 'bursts of plain speech that bluntly make their point without troubling about snobbish effects like cadence, style or grace.'[1] True, her works were made available, though as David Heddendorf noted in 2010 with clear reference to the Akadine Press, they were 'mainly in small-press editions favoring flowery wallpaper designs.'[2]

In Britain it was certainly a bit different. Her first novel, *The Sin Eater* (1977) won a Welsh Arts Council Award for a 'book of exceptional merit,' and *The Inn at the Edge of the World* (1990) won the 1991 Writers' Guild Award for Best Fiction. *Unexplained Laughter* (1985) and *The Summer House* (first published together in 1991) were both adapted for British television. She was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1999. One of her novels, the subject of this chapter, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1982. Yet though she was often compared to writers

[1] Francine Prose, 'Life Without the Wriggling,' review of *The Summer House: A Trilogy* in *New York Times*, April 24, 1994, pp. 302-3

[2] David Heddendorf, 'The Gospels of Alice Thomas Ellis,' *The Sewanee Review* 119:2 (Spring 2011): 300-7, 300

including Evelyn Waugh, Muriel Spark, Iris Murdoch, and Virginia Woolf – not to mention some of those novelists she herself nurtured –and died over fifteen years ago, there has been far too little scholarly attention to her work. There are no biographies in print nor any scholarly monographs treating her work. Though there are some scholarly articles dealing with either individual works or aspects of her work, these are far too few for what she deserves. A search of the modern research sharing site Academia.edu yielded no papers dealing with Ellis while a search of ResearchGate rewarded me with thirteen papers dealing with Ellis, one of which was an essay by Ellis herself.

It is almost certainly the case that Ellis's work did not gain the same popularity as some of the others because of her very public Catholic journalism. Her non-fiction book *The Serpent on the Rock: A Personal View of Christianity* (1994) and her writing in *The Catholic Herald* and *The Spectator* marked her out as a relentless critic of post-Vatican II Catholic liturgy, ecumenism, feminism, and episcopal leadership. She was fired from her position as a columnist at the *Catholic Herald* in 1996 for her attacks on the so-called progressive reforms of recently-deceased Archbishop Derek Worlock of Liverpool (she thought that the reforms of Worlock and like-minded bishops were bringing about the dissolution of Catholic faith). At a time when the Catholic Church had rapidly changed and most bishops were desperately attempting to put any memories of the period before the Second Vatican Council behind them as benighted, narrow, and embarrassing, Ellis not only mocked the attempts at appearing up-to-date and relevant ('I sometimes think that the Devil lives in Islington and reads the Tablet,' she said late in life of the liberal Catholic periodical[3])but also defended the Church of the 1950s into which she had entered as a young adult. 'It is presently *de rigeur* to claim that Catholicism thirty-odd years ago was repressive, hidebound and frightening, but I found in it great richness and an abundance of people who made me laugh: a release from fear and the vague oppression of a childhood shadowed alike by the joyless strictures of Protestantism and the horrors of fairy-tale and terrifying legend.'[4] Her rage at what she considered the Church's descent into chaos after the Council was given powerful voice in her first novel, *The Sin Eater* (1977), published when she was 45 years old. Her vision of the riches and amusing population of the Church of the 1950s was fictionally delivered in its most charming

[3] Cited by Damian Thompson, 'Alice Thompson doesn't live here any more,' (obituary) in *The Spectator* (vol. 297, issue 9215), March 19, 2005.
[4] Alice Thomas Ellis, *The Serpent on the Rock* (London: Sceptre Publishers, 1995), 19

fashion in *The 27th Kingdom* five years later. Her literary reward in this life may well have been lessened because she paid more attention to her reward in the next life – and expressed her faith not only in her non-fiction work but her fiction as well. In an interview with literary critic Marian Crowe (one of the few who has written on Ellis in scholarly venues), Ellis observed: 'Once you take away the religious element, you can't write fiction. Well you can, but it's boring.'[5]

Secular critics do not agree on this claim, and some have no doubt consigned her work to the status of clever, well-done, but hopelessly out-of-date, religiously-oriented works that *will simply not do* for modern audiences. 'Saints and Sinners,' Brooke Allen's review of *The 27th Kingdom* in the *New York Times Book Review* signalled to readers of that journal of elite secular opinion that Ellis's book not only had God in it, but that it seemed to assume the truth of Catholicism in a way that Allen described as matching Ellis' views: 'monolithic.' In her view, 'the world' summoned up in the novel is:

> . . .composed of miserable sinners and happy believers, with the believers not so much a humble and holy throng as a smug, exclusive little club. Ellis's predominant tone is that of a stage English nanny, as portrayed perhaps by Joyce Grenfell. Why can't all those naughty humanists, Protestants, atheists, New Agers and liberals of all stripes simply stop being obstinate and accept the infinitely comforting (and indeed self-evident) facts of transubstantiation, the Resurrection and the authority of Rome? Then everyone would stop worrying about sex and success and 'personal fulfillment' and find their proper fulfillment in Christ. The world would then be a far nicer place.[6]

A casual reader might assume from Allen's review that the book was a kind of Catholic apologetics' course in fiction, but the theological topics mentioned above are not treated at all in the novel. Allen's review seems in passages like this one to be more a review of Ellis's outspoken faith than it is a review of the novel itself.

---

[5] Marian Crowe, 'Unexplained Laughter: The Life and Work of Alice Thomas Ellis,' *Crisis* (October 2005): 41-45, available at *Catholic Culture*. https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=6763. Crowe has examined the use of the liturgical year in Ellis's work in: 'In the Bleak Midwinter: Advent in Alice Thomas Ellis's *The Birds of the Air*,' *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 8:2 (Spring 2005): 107-29.

[6] Brooke Allen, 'Saints and Sinners,' *New York Times Book Review*, October 24, 1999, p. 22

A Monotonous Monolith or a Sophisticated Account?

When treating the novel itself, Allen seemed to misunderstand the nature of the Catholic characters themselves. Far from being a 'smug, exclusive little club,' the Catholic characters are all over the map in terms of their finding 'fulfillment in Christ.' Allen finds each character an 'abstraction,' none of whom can 'grow or change or surprise us because Ellis has already determined her spiritual status and her fictional function. Man proposes, but Ellis disposes.' Allen similarly thinks Ellis's use of miracle in the text is a straightforward piece of Catholic agitation, describing the genre in which Ellis works as 'a sort of supernatural comedy of manners in which the workings of the Divine are visibly complicit in our daily doings down here below.' She concludes that Ellis's work is 'too cocksure, too facetious, too knowing to let messy, uncategorizable life play any significant role.' In all of these particular judgments, Allen has come close but failed to secure the cigar – or, given Ellis's smoke of choice, the cigarette.

Instead of an unambiguous bit of Manichaean propaganda in favour of Catholic faith, what Ellis delivered in *The 27th Kingdom* was a superb fictional meditation on the difficulties of faith and also love that are not limited to those outside of the 'club.' While one character might be plausibly accused of being a static character, it is not clear that this is so, and the others are all richly complex and believable figures, capable of change even if they do not all do so. What they are all wrestling with is indeed the Divine's dealings with us in this world below, but the question of the visibility of those dealings is precisely what is at issue in Ellis's fiction. Revelation can indeed be surprising in the form of the miraculous, but it may not suffice to change lives either for those who can perceive it as the work of God or those who simply see it as an instance of the uncanny.

The plot of *The 27th Kingdom* concerns Aunt Irene (pronounced 'Irina'), a woman of Russian descent operating a boarding house in the bohemian environs of Chelsea, London, in 1954. Her nineteenth-century ancestors had so objected to an edict of the Russian government mandating confession for the purpose of monitoring revolutionaries that they had converted to Roman Catholicism and been forced to move to Ukraine. 'This had given them a taste for travel, and each generation had gone further and further away – to Lithuania and Austria and Turkey and Finland and places like that , or as the story-tellers would have it , across 27 lands and 30 countries until they came to the 27th kingdom – and at last Aunt Irene had come to rest in

Chelsea and her sister in a convent in Wales.'[7] Aunt Irene runs a boarding establishment in her house, known as Dancing Master House, after a legend about a previous inhabitant. In the house reside: Kyril, the son of Irene's other, dead sister, and a foreign man named Mr. Sirocco. She employs two charwomen. Mrs. Mason, a middle-class woman reduced to service because of her husband, a retired major in the army, is an alcoholic. The other charwoman, Mrs. O'Connor, is a cockney woman who lives with her two sons Victor and Jimmy next door. Berthe, Irene's sister in the Welsh convent who is now the superior, sends Valentine, a young black postulant from the West Indies, to live with Irene. Her stated reason is to give Valentine a chance to test her vocation in the secular world, but her real reason is that Valentine has picked an apple that has refused to decompose – a clear miracle. She does not want a 'fully functional thaumaturge' (86) in her community and thus has sent Valentine away until the power leaves.

Valentine is clearly meant to be seen as a messenger of God by virtue of her wonder-working powers but more importantly by virtue of her own quiet holiness. Her presence in the house and the bohemian neighborhood of Chelsea occasions all sorts of reactions. Most of these reactions remain on the surface or manifest a negative or neutral reaction to the goodness of Valentine and to her miracles. A movie producer wants to put the beautiful young woman in the movies. Attendees at a party at Dancing Master House want to woo her or seduce her. Mrs. O'Connor, one of the 'elite club' of Catholics, witnesses an apparent bit of levitation on Valentine's part in a church, but only takes it for a bit of preternatural power, never thinking to change her life of thievery. Mrs. Mason's husband somewhat miraculously gives up alcohol, an event that might be connected to Valentine, while Mrs. Mason herself experiences a miraculous changing of her dress's colour in a shop when another patron accuses her of stealing a dress of the original colour – clearly connected to Valentine. Yet both Mrs. Mason and Mr. Mason remain hostile to Valentine because of the colour of her skin. Kyril, despite an almost mindless habitual desire for sexual conquest, nevertheless finds Valentine interesting. The story ends at the banks of the River Thames where Mr. Mason witnesses another miraculous act: Valentine flying down to the water to rescue the man who has been hanging around Dancing Master House and intimidating Aunt Irene and some of her friends. He is the surviving family member of a family who were killed by Valentine's younger sister, Joan, in an accident.

[7] Alice Thomas Ellis, *The 27th Kingdom* (Pleasantville, New York: The Akadine Press, 1998 [orig. 1982]), 8. Future citations of the book will be in the text.

Despite Brooke Allen's judgment that Aunt Irene is incapable of transformation, Valentine does have a subtle effect on Aunt Irene, whom Allen does rightly describe as one who 'wishes to be good' but is beset by 'moral dithering.' She actually does move forward spiritually through the story because of the effect of Valentine, even if the effect was not dramatically visible to the *New York Times Book Review* critic. Only one figure is transformed dramatically by the Divine working in this young woman: Cassandra, the young Protestant granddaughter of Irene's friend Diana, who determines upon a monastic vocation even though she is not Catholic.

To understand the world Ellis presents, it is necessary to examine more closely these three groups: Valentine herself, with attention to Reverend Mother Berthe; those who respond to Valentine's holiness or miracles with insouciance or rejection; and those who do change. When this is done, a vision of the delicate interplay between God's revelation of himself and how humans respond to it will be seen, which does indeed account for the 'messy' and the 'uncategorizable' in life – including God's grace.

Valentine and the Religious Posture

Brooke Allen's complaint that Valentine is 'entirely good' is a plausible one. Ellis does indeed depict her as a kind of living saint whose presence catalyzes people for good or ill. She is depicted by the narrator in a similar way to Thérèse of Lisieux, of whom it was claimed by one of her confessors that she had never committed a mortal sin. On the train platform in Wales as she gets ready to leave for Chelsea, she says 'Goodbye. . .I am Eve, great Adam's wife,' to which the narrator explains that she says this, 'regretting sin, who had never committed it' (16). An unsigned review of the novel in *Foreword Reviews* echoes Allen's complaint but adds a more up-to-date one on the basis of Valentine's race and sex. Valentine, though not seeming to be 'shallow herself,' is nevertheless not fully realized and thus becomes a kind of stereotypical fantasy figure imagined by white people.

> Because she seldom speaks or thinks in the novel, however, she is always a strangely unreal presence—one made problematic by her race and her gender. Perhaps it is the novelist's intention to demonstrate Valentine's moral superiority midst the all white cast, but it unwittingly backfires. Valentine's unrelenting sensuality and island 'exoticism' and her possession of strange powers resemble the sexual, strangely powered and mystical

> stereotype of the Caribbean woman (Bertha Mason et al) in Western fiction. Both images present the Caribbean woman as other. Neither woman exists.[8]

This second complaint seems less interesting than the first. Any figure who is graced with both the holiness and the miraculous is vulnerable to the accusation of stereotyping in some way. And it is the combination of these two characteristics that makes Valentine interesting – not unreal, but certainly mysterious.

While a hazy, popular view of religious life has it that life within is a kind of perpetual bliss, the reader learns immediately from Aunt Irene's sister, the Reverend Mother, that 'The problems of the world were as nothing compared with the problems of the Enclosure' (13). Valentine herself echoes this when at Dancing Master House Aunt Irene complains of the complications of her own life that Valentine and her sister were 'clever to cut yourselves off from the cares of the world.' Valentine's noncommittal answer is, 'So people say,' but her thought is that 'the sister of Reverend Mother ought to know better' (31).

Valentine had been dispatched to Chelsea precisely because of the miraculous picking of an apple that is, like the bodies of certain saints, incorrupt. Reverend Mother's concern is first of all for the community itself, which would suffer from having a 'fully functioning thaumaturge in a small community'. The suffering would include 'more volatile ones' getting 'over-excited' while more stable sisters would be 'worn out with coping' with the crowds who would inevitably descend upon the community (86). 'How the vulgar loved portents, prodigies and the untoward,' she reflects. 'Only the religious knew how embarrassing they could be—and quite beside the point' (87). Yet there is the sense that Valentine has been sent away to Aunt Irene for some reason. Her original letter to her sister about Valentine's arrival was dated on the feast of Blessed Julie Billiart – and Reverend Mother has written to encourage her backsliding sister before (7). Blessed Julie (1751-1816) was the founder of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, whose charism was the salvation of poor children. What the Lord had in mind with this dispatch is unclear to Reverend Mother, but that she still thinks of her sister as a 'lazy generous girl' (13), one who needs some help spiritually as Valentine needs a place to stay, hints at a divinely-arranged exchange of gifts. Stay Valentine must, Reverend Mother thinks, for she is convinced, concerning the apple, 'that only when the beastly thing

[8] Review of *The 27th Kingdom*, *Foreword Reviews* (September-October 1999), available at: https://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/the-27th-kingdom/

conformed to the laws of nature – which after all were also God's laws – could Valentine come back' (87).

Though Valentine does not speak much, the *Foreword* reviewer has missed that we have several glimpses inside the mind of this character. She is not a Pollyanna either about the life of the convent or life in general. In a passage mocked by Allen ('How deep!'), Valentine reflects that if 'there was no God, this terrible world of pursued and pursuers would be hell, and if there was Hell then there must be Heaven, since that was in the nature of things. And Heaven would have no purpose save as the residence of God. . .' (40). Yet if the logic does not appeal to the secular reviewer, at least what should be noted is that the young woman's view of this world is brutally realistic and rooted in the tragedy of her past. A several page flashback to the accident in which her sister, Joan, had taken off in a speedboat and accidentally collided with a London family, killing a woman, her sister, and her mother – leaving only her husband alive – shows that Valentine's past was not one without its woe. Her father's descent into alcoholism and death after the loss of this daughter was a sorrow, but one that she took with hopefulness. Her sister's death, on the other hand, provoked her suspicion that she had been 'trapped in the light, the light that permits no shadow', no doubt a reference to Hell (49). Even here, however, her own sense of Hell is that it had its own reliefs: 'And yet in the course of whatever passes for time in Heaven and Hell, all would be resolved, since the good deserve that the bad should be forgiven, the nature of goodness being to love' (ibid.). Valentine's hopeful approach to eternity is anchored in gratitude for her Caribbean childhood past (33).

This attitude of trusting gratitude comes from her own silence and practice of prayer, in which she seems to thrive and see the symbolism of nature, going from light to dark, for instance (37), and an obvious attention to the Gospels. When her charwoman Mrs. O'Connor's son Victor brings over a set of tiles with Gospel scenes decorating them, Irene watches Valentine's concentrated look and realizes that 'She looked like a girl assembling a family album'. Further, 'She looked like a lover smiling at reminders of the beloved, dreaming of his babyhood, his first words, his last words'. Yet her intimacy was tinged with holy fear, muttering '*Noli me tangere*' upon discovering a tile with the risen Christ. 'God was fenced about with prohibition', the narrator says, presumably reflecting Valentine's mind, because he was dangerous and extremely strange'. When Kyril mocks her words by observing that a sign should be placed in Aramaic reading 'Keep off the grass', Valentine warns him, 'You should be careful' (44). It is clear the care that she is referring to has to do with his own soul.

Valentine herself has a keen sense of evil, noting when she was shown her room in Dancing Master House, filled no doubt with goods bought from thieves, that it reminded her of hell (22) and observing of the dirty London streets during a walk that what was problematic was the advertising: 'Everywhere there were invitations to commit foolish acts – Do this, Do that, Come here, Go there, Drink Blogg's booze, Wear Gubbins's shoes. Unnecessary and intrusive when life was really so simple. It was sometimes extremely difficult, though Valentine, not to be critical' (72). Despite this difficulty, her refraining from judgment of those doing evil is quite remarkable. The reminder to be careful to Kyril is about as strong as she gets. She reveals to Aunt Irene without comment what the latter dimly understood but would not admit to herself: that Mrs. O'Connor's goods were stolen (153). When Mrs. Mason uses a racial slur about her, she simply shrugs. 'She had seen evil before. She didn't like it, but it neither alarmed nor surprised her' (60). It is ultimately her Christian character, not the various miraculous events – even breathing life into a dead man – that Valentine is worried about. For she thinks, like Reverend Mother, that the ultimate question of life is not about portents and the untoward but about silence, prayer, and obedience to the unseen but always present God.

The Vulgar, the Proud, and the Evil

That such a judgment is surely the case of the narrator (and Ellis) is easily detectable from the depictions of the two charwomen, Mrs. O'Connor and Mrs. Mason, as well as Kyril. All three sense or experience something different about Valentine, but none of them, Catholic or not, respond fully to the revelation in any real way. Mrs. O'Connor may well accept the divine hand in creating miracles. She goes with Valentine one evening to Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament at the parish and is given 'a bit of a turn' afterward when she observes Valentine in the church alone, 'dark as a painted saint against the gilded evening, and just for a moment the light that outlined her completely Mrs. O'Connor could see light beneath her feet' (60). Upon returning to her house she demands the term for what she saw from her son Victor, who is baffled by her question. Only after consulting some tracts from the Catholic Truth Society does she triumphantly tell him what it was: '*Levitation*', citing St. Joseph of Cupertino and St. Martin de Porres – both known for this feat, the latter black like Valentine (61). Mrs. O'Connor does have a real faith, it seems, for she had just lit a candle for the conversion of the whole world (60) when she saw Valentine fly. And she has a sense of spiritual powers. When Mr. Mason, suffering from delirium tremens after an alcoholic binge, thinks that pigeons in the sky are

demons, Mrs. O'Connor refuses to say whether she thinks he's right: 'Only some funny fings 'ave bin 'appenin', 'n' all I'll say is—Devils don't bovver in this manner in the ornery way 'cos everyone 'ere's wicked enough already. They mos'ly spend their time in monasteries temptin' monks. They're idle, devils are—they don't do nuffin' they don' 'ave to. . . .' She assures Aunt Irene that it the devils only make appearances—'like flies roun' an 'oney pot'—when they are 'taunted by the presence of perfect goodness', meaning Valentine. Aunt Irene's complaint that she doesn't understand Mrs. O'Connor is met with the laconic reply that 'Lotsa people don't. . .on'y I'm a'ways right' (97).

While this spiritual perception might seem to indicate Brooke Allen was onto something in identifying a stacked deck of papist perception and goodness, a balanced account of Mrs. O'Connor's character would indicate that she suffers at least a kind of malformed faith – or, perhaps, in the argot of a traditional Catholic such as Ellis, a real faith coexisting with a lack of charity. She is famous for her 'prowess in brawls' (58) and volunteers to have her son rough up the man the tax man trying to intimidate her, though she assures Aunt Irene, 'Jimmy'll jus' beat 'im abaht the 'ead 'n' neck wiv an ole railin. . . 'E won' 'urt 'im. No' a lot' (145). Not only this, but as Valentine reveals to Aunt Irene late in the story, Mrs. O'Connor's attendance at the local parish is not purely out of devotion to the world's conversion: she has forced the priest's housekeeper to keep stolen goods at the Presbytery or else she will reveal to the parish priest 'where all the butter and eggs came from in the war if she doesn't do as she is told' (153). As the narrator observes of Mrs. O'Connor, 'She was herself an extremely sinful woman and the despair of her confessor, but she considered herself not to be evil, and as the word went through her mind she crossed herself' (122). While Mrs. O'Connor shows remarkable insight into the presence of devils and also the presence of divine goodness, she clearly shirks any real self-knowledge and nowhere shows an inclination to reform her own moral life of thievery and violence.

Mrs. Mason is a slightly different case. Non-Catholic, she is a proud woman of middle class status who has been reduced to working in service to a woman of foreign lineage by her marital status: her husband is an alcoholic for whom she has to care when he is, quite often, incapacitated by drink. She wages a silent war against her employer, Aunt Irene, constantly thinking of ways to be nasty to her and perhaps even get her in trouble with the tax man. Her initial response to Valentine is nastiness, and she says openly in front of her, 'I don't think it's right of me to clean the bedroom of a half-caste', though she is herself 'as appalled and astonished as the rest of

them to hear this remark hanging in the air' (58). Valentine's soft answer (she likes cleaning, she says) and her shrugging response to what the narrator tells us she understands as 'evil' does not win her any favour from Mrs. Mason. When her husband suddenly gives up drinking, it seems a miracle—and is designated so by Mrs. O'Connor, who looks at Valentine as she declares it (114). Finally, Mrs. Mason experiences even more directly the goodness and miraculous in Valentine when, walking in the market one day in a sea-green dress she had bought from Mrs. O'Connor (after Valentine refused it as a present) (57), is accosted by a woman who recognizes it as one of hers that was stolen. Mrs. Mason realizes that she is wearing stolen goods and might be in trouble when Valentine approaches her and congratulates her on her 'blue frock', at which point both Mrs. Mason and the woman both see the dress as blue, or rather turquoise (137-8).

Yet Mrs. Mason, despite this miraculous act and her having felt at the moment she was accused a bit of how Valentine 'must feel, loathed on sight for something you couldn't help' (136-7), now realizes 'who she was talking to—in public—and said goodbye very coldly' (137). Later, when the now-sober Major Mason is capable of making a living, she resigns with the nasty remark that her husband 'won't have me in a house where there's a *nigger*. . .'. 'She clearly hadn't', says the narrator, 'forgotten that Valentine had forgiven her for her earlier display of prejudice' (150). Mrs. Mason's sense of wounded pride makes her a truly nasty piece of work despite the fact that her experience of Valentine has been that of forgiveness and deliverance from a tight spot (not to mention the possibility that she had something to do with the Major's sobriety). What determines her place in the story is not her non-Catholic identity but her refusal out of racial and class prejudice to either acknowledge the grace delivered to her by Valentine in the form of miracles or, more importantly, the form of moral goodness and forgiveness. Unlike Mrs. O'Connor, she seems to reject both faith and love.

Worse yet is Kyril, himself nominally Catholic one assumes and yet the character who is most set apart from Valentine as a polar opposite. He is a 'total hedonist' (10) whose 'light, clear tone' of speaking, along with his 'semi-permanent archaic smile', made 'people want to beat him up' (27). These characteristics create this desire clearly because they are connected to his celebration of unkindness and death, his sensuality, and his 'strong and perverse' tastes (74) that are often aroused by his fear of boredom (70). A beautiful man, he habitually picks up mistresses only to toy with them and dump them. Remembering sexual congress with his latest mistress, of whom Aunt Irene thought and still thinks affectionately, makes Kyril feel

both ‘vicious and violated’, true feelings if understood that the violation is of his own doing (80). He seems to genuinely see the beauty in Valentine, realizing as he sits in a bar that ‘he was thinking about Valentine, and wishing she was here with him’ (71). His attempt to seduce her comes off as a comical affair, given his extreme self-confidence: ‘Whereas plainer men would offer champagne, flattery, meaningful glances, Kyril would merely remark in Anglo-Saxon that he was now ready, and the object of his desire would instantly comply with his wishes’. Yet turning to her he finds she has disappeared and the sound of laughter haunts him (110). Though Brooke Allen hates the passage and parodies it in the lines cited earlier, it is not an implausible depiction of a young man being upset most by the rejection because it upset his view that there could be no surprises for him because of a scientistic and materialistic view of the world:

> He saw himself as one of those unusual and fortunate men who were able to understand and fully exploit the new insights that were being developed in every field of human endeavour, both scientific and philosophical. Comte, Darwin, Freud, Einstein had, each in his own way, done his bit to soothe Kyrils’s conscience and smooth his path towards untroubled self-indulgence. Kyril now knew that there were no gods or ghosts, only taboos and neuroses and $E = MC^2$, and very nice too. The watches of the night held no terror for Kyril, for were not all things concrete and clear, and all mysteries explained? (110-11)

The final three words provide a counterpoint to Valentine, who ruminates on her own sense of the seemliness of personal letters being read in the convent because ‘There were mysteries, but only the devil had secrets’ (57). Kyril’s sexual life is a series of secrets that leave young women broken and perhaps men, too. When Valentine tells him that Mr. Sirocco the boarder who committed suicide loved him, he turns ‘a very horrible unhealthy colour’ and must ‘sit down’ (141). Though he has secrets, he has no mysteries because he allows none. Valentine’s exterior beauty can move him, but nothing about her inner self can do so. Mrs. O’Connor suspects that he may have seen Valentine levitate but knows that he ‘probably wouldn’t say if he didn’t think that he could make some sort of trouble by doing so’ (122). He is the witness of Valentine’s final miracle when she breathes into the nostrils of Stanley, the man whose family her sister had killed and who had been visiting Aunt Irene as a debt collector. And yet even breathing life into a man is simply an ‘anti-climax’ for him (159). If portent and the untoward do not change the vulgar, they cannot even penetrate into the consciousness of those whose souls are clotted by sensuality and whose minds are clouded by the kind of pride that discounts God entirely.

Them That Have Ears and Hear

The character who perhaps has the most dramatic turn exteriorly is Cassandra, the granddaughter of Aunt Irene's friend Diana. She is clearly influenced by Valentine and argues at a party held at Dancing Master House that instead of the contemporary understanding of religion causing problems, 'it was sex that made people most unhappy, and she'd never met a girl who was buying six bottles of aspirins because God had got her in trouble and run away. . .(120). In fact, Cassandra, though not being a Catholic, defends the monastic life and determines upon following Valentine back to the convent. In the book's final scene, she leaves the scene with Valentine (159).

But it is Aunt Irene whose changes, though not as dramatic as Cassandra's, are of most interest. She is, unlike Kyril, a 'partial hedonist' (10) and an 'artist' whose cooking and keeping house are mainly in order to have 'an appreciative audience'. Yet 'people weren't merely her audience but in a sense also her raw materials, to be disposed and manipulated as the fancy took her' (14). Aunt Irene's penchant for manipulation and games are everywhere; she gives as good as she gets in the subtle domestic war with Mrs. Mason. Sarah Sceats describes her as 'a woman who enjoys playing games and relishes oblique and encoded power'.[9] She overvalues physical beauty, the reason why she has always spoiled Kyril (122). She is slightly dishonest, the reason she is having problems with the tax agents in the first place. And she is, as a result, depressed quite often. Marian Crowe says that 'if not as vile as Kyril', Aunt Irene is 'almost as ridiculous'.[10] Crowe cites her practice of dealing with her depression by going to the local Orthodox parish to 'beat her forehead on the floor, and her dessicated ears would swell with the splashing syllables of the deep tones of the chanting priests and she would emerge again refreshed' (9). Perhaps this is ridiculous but it bespeaks a sense of penitence, whether acted on rightly or not.

Aunt Irene, though selfish and initially irritated by her sister's request to take in Valentine ('It'll be such a nuisance'), would not dare refuse lest she be thought 'unlikeable, costive, and mean' (10). She has a basic sense of duty, right, and wrong – even if she doesn't always act on them. She is not

[9] Sarah Sceats, 'The 27th Kingdom (1982),' in L. Sage, G. Greer, and E. Showalter (eds.), *The Cambridge Guide to Women's Writing in English* (Cambridge University Press, 1999) url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/camgwwie/27th_kingdom_the_1982/0?

[10] Crowe, 'Unexplained Laughter'.

privy to any of the miracles Valentine does, though she hears of them. Instead, her experience of Valentine is that she is 'happy'. She wonders first if this were merely a byproduct of having grown up with a lot of sunshine in the Caribbean (28). She gradually comes to see that Valentine's happiness is connected to her silence and her spiritual poverty. 'Valentine, she thought, had nothing and yet had *hilaritas*, while she – with all her things and her people was suffering from *accidie*, that most debilitating malaise'. She feels tempted by this recognition to give away all her goods, but, quite sensibly, realizes that she might not gain the 'contentment that characterized Valentine, and she's feel pretty silly, shivering, naked in the world and *still* unhappy' (64). She also realizes how 'pale' she feels next to Valentine – not just in terms of melanin but in terms of life (125). Further, she realizes that when Valentine returns to the convent, it 'would be as though the fire had gone out, the sun gone in. She would take away not only her own warmth and colour, but the warmth and colour from everything about her' (134).

These realizations do cause her to change. She does not want to lie to Valentine (102). She starts to reflect on how simple life might be if she mended her ways (130). She begins to feel 'an inconvenient and unwelcome sensation of cosmic pity' that breeds an urge to take in those wounded souls who want to commit suicide (140). She goes to Church and begins to pray at times at which she's bewildered such as when she realizes Mrs. O'Connor's Jimmy may kill the tax man (148) and when she is running through the streets of Chelsea to make sure Kyril and Valentine are all right (156). These prayers and this active care for them follow one of the most difficult realizations of all: that she has begun to think of Valentine as her child yet Valentine does not think so: '"Aunt?" said Valentine appearing, soundless and shadowed in the doorway. She would call Berthe "Mother", thought Aunt Irene, and felt for a moment that sense of endless loss that comes sometimes in dreams' (146).

Conclusion: Growth and Change

Aunt Irene does not run off to join the convent at the end as does Cassandra. Yet the change in her is real, despite Brooke Allen's understanding that 'she cannot grow or change or surprise us'. She is a woman who is, late in life, beginning to question her own choices and think about people not just as material to be disposed of and manipulated but as children to be nourished. Her path to holiness will not be a straight line, certainly, but it will now have a direction. T. S. Eliot famously observed that human beings cannot handle

too much reality. *The 27th Kingdom*'s world is not one in which people cannot change, but it is certainly one in which past habits do have an effect on how much reality, human and divine, they can take. And yet for both the young without much of a past (Cassandra) and the old backslider (Aunt Irene) change is possible. In both cases, it would seem, God's presence is not seen in the miracle primarily but in the life that is charged with silent holiness, integrity, and forgiveness. Ellis's world is one in which life is certainly messy and unpredictable, but so too are the ways of God who works through unlikely outsiders.

IRREVERENCE AND CONVERSION: DONNA TARTT AND RENÉ GIRARD

MICHAEL KIRWAN SJ

Introduction

Donna Tartt describes herself as 'a novelist who happens to be a Roman Catholic', declaring that 'faith is vital in the process of making my work and in the reasons I am driven to make it.'[1] The cultural theorist, René Girard (1923-2014), has made a similarly explicit affirmation about the centrality of his Catholic Christian commitment to his literary investigations: 'as far as I am concerned the subject of literature and Christianity is literally the story of my whole intellectual and spiritual existence.'[2]

Both novelist and critic identify a duality in the novel form, which is directly relevant to their faith positions. For Tartt, there is a 'constant tension' between her faith and her vocation as a novelist, given that the novel is an 'emphatically secular art form: the product of a secular society, addressing primarily secular concerns.'[3] For Girard, this tension is expressed as two kinds of literary writing, respectively committed to 'the romantic lie' and to 'novelistic truth'.[4]

---

[1] Donna Tartt, 'The spirit and writing in a secular world'. In *The Novel, Spirituality and Modern Culture: Eight Novelists write about their Craft and their Context*, ed. Paul S. Fiddes (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 25-40.

[2] René Girard, 'Conversion in Literature and Christianity', in *Mimesis and Theory: Essays in Literature and Criticism* (essays by Girard, edited by Robert Doran). (Stanford, Cal; Stanford UP, 2008a), 263

[3] Tartt, 'The spirit and writing in a secular world', 25-40

[4] The contrast is conveyed in the title of Girard's first work, *Mensonge romantique et verité romanesque*, published in English as *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (Girard 1965). Girard's essay, 'Literature and Christianity' (Girard 2005) revisits the argument of his first work. It was originally published in *Philosophy and Literature*,

And yet their respective positions do not precisely coincide. Girard's criticism is a suspicious hermeneutic, drawing a stark distinction between 'romantic lies' and 'novelistic truth'. This is the contrast between literature which merely replicates patterns of borrowed and dysfunctional desire, and *great* literature, which holds those patterns up to the light, and points to emancipation from their power. It is the distinction between illusion and truth.

Donna Tartt, on the other hand, sees her work as a writer as a kind of truce between reality and untruth. She embraces her calling as an illusionist. If we may cite with care the words of Theo Decker, the narrator in *The Goldfinch*:

> … there's no truth beyond illusion. Because, between 'reality' on the one hand and the point where the mind strikes reality, there's a middle zone, a rainbow edge where beauty comes into being, where two very different surfaces mingle and blur to provide what life does not: and this is the space where all art exists and all magic. And- I would argue as well- all love.[5]

This paper will examine the differences between the two: the zealous critic, searching out the truth of great literature, and the writer, careful to protect the artist's pact with illusion. As we shall see, the difference between them is perhaps not all that stark; Girard's position is softened in his later writing. In any case, both critic and novelist acknowledge a religious answerability. The phenomenon of 'conversion' is crucial to Girard's literary analysis, even as he acknowledges the limitations of the term. It is not to be confined to a process of religious transformation – Girard explains in detail his own experience as an aesthetic re-awakening of interest in Christianity, before a proper return to the faith he had left behind as an adolescent. Donna Tartt, by contrast, has not written specifically about the process of her coming to religious commitment – though its significance for her craft is crucial, as the above quotation makes clear.

The absence of explicit religious themes in Tartt's writing makes her 2000 essay intriguing. She claims that 'the novel in its history and genesis is an emphatically secular art form: a product of secular society, addressing primarily secular concerns.' Given this premise, how can the novel be a vehicle of religious experience and spiritual values? Like Flannery O'Connor, Tartt is wary of the damaging effect of a didactic or proselytizing

---

23.1 (1999): 32-43, having been presented at the Modern Language Association convention in 1998.

[5] Though these are the words of one of her characters, they chime with her claims in Tartt's essay, 'The Spirit and Writing in a Secular World'.

approach to writing fiction. An over-explicit reference to one's personal world view, be it Christian, Freudian, or whatever, will result in something which is either a bad novel, or not a novel at all.

Conversion and Illusion

We have noted that Tartt views a tension in her dual vocation as a believer and as a novelist, arising from the inherent secularity of the genre. The strangeness of such a comment is worth noting; it is hard to imagine any other artistic medium or genre being described as 'godless'. We shall return to this, having first looked at Girard's theory of the novel. In his essay on 'Literature and Christianity', Girard maintains that 'great literature literally led me to Christianity'; having already claimed that the subject of literature and Christianity is 'literally' the story of his whole intellectual and spiritual existence. The same itinerary is to be found in Augustine, Francis, Teresa of Avila, and in Dante.[6]

Girard considers the tutelary role of Virgil leading the poet in *The Divine Comedy*, specifically, through purgatory and hell. For Dante, 'the function of profane literature is to guide us through Hell and Purgatory' (*ibid*). Girard himself was 'guided through hell', not by Virgil, but by Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Dostoyevsky and Proust.[7] The modern novel is a downward descent into hellish circles which can be described in non-religious terms, i.e. the inferno of entanglement in identical and antagonistic mimetic desires. The finality or mortality of desire – its failure – is the open secret of the modern world, though it is not commented on beyond the great writers. And yet, understanding the 'necessary failure of undisciplined desire' leads to wisdom, and ultimately to religion.[8] To break out of the hellish circularity of mimetic entanglement is to undergo conversion, which is to experience a coercive impulse which cannot come from ourselves, but from God. Here, the Greek and Latin terminology is seen to be limited: 'metanoia'/'conversion' implies a circular movement, while the Christian

[6] Girard, René. 'Literature and Christianity: a Personal View', in *Mimesis, Desire, and the Novel: René Girard and Literary Criticism*, eds. Pierpaolo Antonello and Heather Webb (East Lansing, Mi.; Michigan State University Press, 2005), 281

[7] Girard, '*Literature and Christianity: a Personal View*', 281. The five named writers are the subject of *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. Girard wrote elsewhere on Marcel Proust (Girard 1962) and Fyodor Dostoyevsky (Girard 2012). The two non-novelistic writers who occupy a similarly prominent place in Girard's canon are William Shakespeare (Girard 1991), and Friedrich Hölderlin (Girard 2010, 109-135).

[8] Girard, '*Literature and Christianity: a Personal View'*, 283

experience is a linear, open-ended phenomenon: a transformation so deep as to be irreversible.

It is this transformation which underlies the lives and work of Girard's chosen novelists. Their genius is not a question of technique or natural born talent, but a 'belated acquisition', resulting from a personal transformation which is at least analogous to religious conversion. Girard can thus claim of Proust's great work that though it is not Christian, it is 'in its beliefs, morals, and metaphysics, an aesthetic and even spiritual autobiography.'[9](286)

Girard alleges 'two perspectives' in the novel, therefore. Firstly, the deceptive perspective of desire, whose illusions imprison the hero in the sterile processes of desire-frustration, or desire-acquisition-disappointment (*ennui*). Secondly, the liberation from desire, which occurs at the end of the novel, the omega-point of conversion. This releases the creative energy needed for the novelist to complete the work. Once again, Girard insists, the pattern of religious conversion is the appropriate analogy, with Proust in particular leading a quasi-monastic nocturnal existence in his hotel room.[10]

Insistence on the word 'conversion', not once but with each of the five writers, was a red flag to a bull, as Girard admits. With each, there is a central work which is the 'conversion novel'[11] – he identifies *Crime and Punishment* as the crucial text for Dostoyevsky. These key works each delineate a pre- and post-conversion perspective, and a complex relation to novelistic time. A similar characteristic, of being 'written from both ends at the same time', is to be found in the *Confessions* of Augustine, and in the synoptic gospels, especially Mark.

Donna Tartt speaks of the novelist's calling and craft as a practitioner, not a critic. Like Girard, she notes a 'constant tension' between her faith and the novelistic genre. This arises out of the inherent secularity of the novel, whose appearance coincides with the decline of religious conventions, and must be regarded as a kind of alternative to them. The novel is a means of exploring moral dilemmas without the benefit of God and heaven, though at an extended length. The 'moral' of *Madame Bovary*, for example, it is to be understood in the light of the biblical commandment against adultery. The 'godless' quality of the novel is necessarily grounded in its content. A boisterous record of movement and interaction of people according to the

[9] Girard, '*Literature and Christianity: a Personal View'*, 286
[10] Girard even suggests that Proust showed some serious interest in Christianity during this time of transformation, though was discouraged by André Gide.
[11] Girard, '*Literature and Christianity: a Personal View*', 269

laws of the world, 'it is ill-equipped to portray the constancy of faith', because its engines are driven by conflict, rather than peace and eternity. The novel resists a sympathetic portrayal of organized religion – but it is the 'organization' which is more problematic than the religion.[12] Didacticism of any sort is out of place in a novel, because it jars with the anarchic untidiness of the genre. The novelist's convictions need to be presented indirectly, if at all, because it must be refracted through the impure medium of human personality (Dostoyevsky is one of the few who get away with a more direct form of spiritual address). Nevertheless, Tartt is able to speak more confidently and directly about the spiritual dimension of writing:

> For me, writing has always been much more a mystical process than an intellectual one. My struggles in writing fiction are primarily spiritual, and solutions that arise to these problems are generally spiritual, as well. [13]

The Holy Spirit, which animates her faith life, and the spirit which informs her work – what Tartt calls 'Great Spirit and Personal Spirit' – are 'not precisely identical in definition'[14], though generally they move in the same patterns and along the same paths. The moments of surprised attentiveness, leading to creativity, which are recorded by Wordsworth, Mozart, A.E. Housman, Mary Shelley and many others, take the same form as moments of evangelical insight, such as we find in Saul's Damascus road experience, or Peter's shocked awareness when the cock crows. 'Still the mind … and Divinity enters.'[15] In each of these cases, the individual is brought back from a distracted state to attentiveness. Tartt recommends manual labour or drudgery as a way to clear the mind for inspiration. This serves of course as a reminder that grace is not the fruit of effort or will, but of a patient readiness and stilling silence.

The two Spirits are not the same. The Personal Spirit, or *daimon*, is insistent and amoral. It relates to Christian Spirit as body does to soul, insofar as we are forever having to negotiate with the body, and ignore its needs at our peril.[16] For Tartt, novel-writing is 'essentially an irreverent occupation'.[17] If the novelist is an entertaining illusionist, the religious novelist can hope that 'God can choose to manifest himself even in the

[12] Tartt, '*The spirit and writing in a secular world*', 26
[13] Tartt, '*The spirit and writing in a secular world*', 27
[14] Tartt, '*The spirit and writing in a secular world*', 28
[15] Tartt, '*The spirit and writing in a secular world*', 31
[16] Both *daimon* and *eros*, Tartt reminds us, were classically regarded as inhabitants of a middle region neither human nor divine.
[17] Tartt, '*The spirit and writing in a secular world*', 37

trickery and sleight-of-hand.' Citing Broch, Tartt makes a ringing claim for 'that which the novel alone can discover':

> In a world without God, the *only* way we can see actions and their complex consequences played out in the fullness of time is through the novel. … a good novel therefore enables non-believers to participate in a world-view that religious people take for granted: life as a vast polymorphous web of interconnections, predestined meetings, fortuitous choices and accidents, all governed by a unifying if unforeseen plan.[18]

Stories

Tartt's reputation and popularity as a novelist rest on three novels to date (one per decade over thirty years); there is also a small number of short stories. *The Secret History* (1992), *The Little Friend* (2002), and *The Goldfinch* (2013) are startlingly different from one another, though they share a theme, the traumatic impact of death and bereavement as catalyst for the central action in each of the novels. The second of her novels, *The Little Friend* will not be considered in detail here. In its portrayal of Mississippi life in the wake of a horrific murder – the hanging of a nine year old boy, Robin Dufresnes – it comes close to Flannery O'Connor's portrayal of 'southern Gothic'. The novel contains a great deal of extreme religiosity – specifically an evangelical snake cult – but the action centres on Harriet, Robin's elder sister, who years after the event has become obsessed with solving the mystery of his murder. By the end of the novel, the identity of Robin's killer remains unknown.

Very close in tone is Tartt's 1993 short story 'The Christmas Pageant', reminiscent once again of O'Connor. A viciously pious young girl, Sally, is enraged that the Christmas tableau she must take part in at the school pageant has been sanitized of religious meaning ("C" is for candy, and "M" for mistletoe, not Christ and Mary).

> Her stomach hurt and the lights were too bright; "Jingle Bell Rock" had given way to the Elves and "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus"; already the birth of Christ had been sadly profaned, yet somehow God allowed the pageant to go on.

In fact, the pageant is horrifically interrupted by one of the parents, drunk, with a deer knife, threatening his estranged wife. An atrocity is narrowly

[18] Tartt, '*The spirit and writing in a secular world*', 37-38

avoided, but the evening ends in chaos. In the midst of the panic, Sally is triumphant:

> It was funny, how ignorant they all were. Tonight they had seen the work of the Lord and understood it not; they had seen a miracle, and yet had not believed.[19]

Tartt's first and third novels will be the focus of this study. *The Secret History* brought her instant appreciation and cult status in 1992; *The Goldfinch*, published twenty years later, was adapted for film in 2019. The former is the story of a group of six students at Hampden, a liberal arts college in Vermont. They are studying classics together, under the guidance of a fascinating and charismatic professor, Julian Morrow. On the first two pages, we are told how one of the six, Bunny Corcoran, is murdered by the other five. They push him over a ravine, making the death look like a hiking accident.

This is a murder story, then, but one in which the victim and the killers are known from the start. The suspense consists in finding out what drove them to this act, and what are its consequences. The narrator is one of the students, Richard Papen, who has made his way to Hampden from his dismal home town of Plano, California. He is captivated by the self-assurance of the classics students, and he persuades Julian to admit him to this select group.

> I was giddy with the force of his personality … his students – if they were any mark of his tutelage – were imposing enough, and different as they all were they shared a certain coolness, a cruel mannered charm which was not modern in the least but had a strange cold breath of the ancient world: they were magnificent creatures, such eyes, such hands, such looks – *sic oculos, sic ille manus, sic ora ferebat.* I envied them, and found them attractive; moreover this strange quality, far from being natural, gave every indication of having been intensely cultivated.[20]

There is, unfortunately, more than a 'cold breath of the ancient world' about this cadre. Their obsessive immersion in the thought-world of the ancient Greeks leads to catastrophe, when their recreation of a Dionysian ritual involves the accidental killing of a local farmer. The need to cover up their crime leads them to commit a second killing, when Bunny has become a liability.

---

[19] Donna Tartt, 'A Christmas Pageant'. In *Harper's* 287.1723, December 1993, 45–51

[20] Donna Tartt, *The Secret History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 32-33

How does an ordinary young man like Richard become a killer? The novel's plot has been compared by one reviewer to Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, as a journey into the heart and mind of a homicide. There is a psychological realism to the sequence of events, that the first killing, even though it was accidental, makes it easier for them to contemplate the second: to cite Macbeth, they are 'so steeped in blood'. Suffice to say that, at the moment when Bunny is pushed over the edge, the motives of his friends are chillingly convincing.

There are two religious trajectories to this 'secret history'. One is made very explicit by Tartt, the other is intriguing, and more understated. They represent the Nietzschean distinction between 'Dionysus and the Crucified' which Girard acknowledges as the core of Nietzsche's thinking.

To speak of the first of these: the students are bonded together by an elitist contempt for the democratic dreariness of the world around them. They pride themselves on being very different from the majority of the students at Hampden, for the most part slacker hippies and cokeheads. Modern, soulless America appals them. Richard, above all, is desperate to leave his miserable existence in Plano, California far behind him. Julian encourages and plays upon this feeling of supremacy and desire for escape. When extolling to his tiny class the Greek rituals of ecstatic release, he finds a ready audience:

> 'If we are strong enough in our souls we can rip away the veil and look that naked, terrible beauty right in the face; let God consume us, devour us, unstring our bones. Then spit us out reborn ... and that, to me, is the terrible seduction of Dionysiac ritual. Hard for us to imagine. That fire of pure being'.[21]

The novel's major key therefore, is an exploration of what happens if this Dionysiac temptation is indeed taken seriously. The students attempt to recreate a Dionysian ecstatic ritual, with horrific consequences.

As noted, the students are enthralled by their tutor, who exerts a cult-like fascination; He insists on being their exclusive teacher, thus feeding their sense of superiority to the other students. Julian's mimetic attractiveness in fact has a subtle twist: the group do not model themselves directly on him, but upon Henry, their most intellectually gifted member, and the closest to Julian, with whom he has a quasi-filial relationship. Henry is the group's leader, and in many ways the author of their catastrophe. His suicide, just

[21] (Tartt, *The Secret History*)

as the students fall into bitter recrimination, has an atoning quality. The second trajectory is the novel's quiet Catholic episode, almost a coda, which we will examine below.

If the tutelary spirit of *The Secret History* is Dostoyevsky, then *The Goldfinch* shows most clearly Tartt's affinity for Charles Dickens. Theo Decker's story echoes those of Dickensian epics such as Oliver Twist and David Copperfield. Theo has stolen a famous painting – Carel Fabritius' seventeenth-century masterpiece, The Goldfinch – in the traumatic aftermath of a terrorist attack on New York's Metropolitan Museum, in which his mother is killed. The painting becomes a lode-star for him, as his life spirals into chaos and nihilism. In one chapter epithet, Nietzsche is cited: 'We have art in order not to die from the truth'.[22]

It remains a largely secular story. Theo compares his plight to the chained bird in the painting, observing 'what a cruel life for a little living creature—fluttering briefly, forced always to land in the same hopeless place.' In the depths of his addiction Theo experiences a deep, nihilistic revulsion against the 'writhing loathsomeness of the biological order'; the painting, stashed with his drugs in a storage unit, is nevertheless like a satellite signal from the past:

> The painting had made me feel less mortal, less ordinary. It was support and vindication; it was sustenance and sum. It was the keystone that had held the cathedral up ... all my adult life I'd been privately sustained by that great, hidden savage joy.[23]

'A bit of trouble with my passport'

The major key of *The Secret History* is a Nietzschean intoxication with Dionysus, and its disastrous consequences. A Christian critique is beautifully rendered, as a kind of coda. Three of the group meet in Boston after the disaster, and they go together to mass on Ash Wednesday (all the conspirators except Richard, the narrator, are nominal Catholics). Richard joins in line in the crowded and drafty church to receive the ashes from a priest, 'bent, in black, very old'. Not knowing the drill, he gets up again to join the queue for communion, only to be hastily pulled back by the others.

[22] Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch* (New York: Little, Brown, 2013), 717
[23] (Tartt, *The Goldfinch*, 627)

'The three of us stayed in our seats as the pews emptied and the long, shuffling line started towards the altar again.'[24]

It is a poignant moment: a liturgical limbo, in which the murderers have enough conscience to acknowledge that they are dust, and to dust they will return; but not the strength of soul to arrive at the place of real communion, so different from the ecstatic but deadly encounter which had obsessed them earlier in the story.

The Goldfinch similarly has whispers of the divine. Theo talks about his mother's 'visitation' to him in dreams; his befriender and mentor, James Hobie, is a 'mystic carpenter'; the otherwise cynical Boris admits to being moved to tears by Biblical stories. Even Theo's hopelessly dysfunctional gambler father insists 'there's a pattern and we're a part of it'.[25] But the strongest echoes are in Theo's 'Conversion'. This is a coming to terms with the addictions which held him in thrall after the death of his mother: drugs, his doomed love for Pippa, and above all Fabritius' painting.

The lowest circle of Theo's hell is an Amsterdam hotel room at Christmas. He is on the run, having killed a gangster in an unsuccessful attempt to retrieve the painting, which he now thinks destroyed. His own life, and that of the man he had shot, are insignificant compared to the light which has been extinguished. After a messy suicide attempt he greets Christmas morning, resurgent like Scrooge. Boris, the artful dodger reappears, bring redemption – in the form of a bag of cash, the reward for the painting which he has recovered and returned. In their Christmas morning conversation, Boris cites Prince Myshkin in Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, as a warning against Theo's despairing judgementalism. God, he suggests, is a long-term pattern which we cannot decipher: relentless irony and divine providence being two names for the same thing.

Theo moves towards an acceptance of life, despite all its difficulties and insanities. Beauty alters the grain of reality, but it must be wedded to something more meaningful. But what? The maxim of great and popular artists, 'from William Blake to Lady Gaga', is to be yourself, and to follow your heart. But his is a self he does not want, and a heart he cannot help. To follow a heart that cannot be trusted is to be drawn away from health and domesticity, towards a beautiful flare of self-immolation. Should one

[24] (Tartt, *The Goldfinch*, 620)
[25] (Tartt, *The Goldfinch*, 780)

block one's ears? Or 'is it better to be like Boris and through yourself head first and laughing into the holy rage calling your name?'[26]

It is with this conflict as background that the painting's significance becomes clear. The shackled bird is striking for its 'refusing to pull back from the world', despite its captivity. Its summons, across the centuries, is:

> a psst from an alleyway … the place where reality strikes the ideal, where a joke becomes serious and anything serious is a joke. The magic point where every idea and its opposite are equally true.[27]

The painting enables us to speak to each other across time, and to sing ourselves out of despair. In the midst of our mortality, 'it is a glory and a privilege to love what death doesn't touch', and Theo has a 'small, bright, immutable part in that immortality', one of generations of people who have loved beautiful things.[28] The end of our journey may indeed be:

> a majesty unimaginable until the very moment we find ourselves walking through the doors of it, what we find ourselves gazing at in astonishment when God finally takes his hands off our eyes and says: Look!'

As cited above, 'there is no truth beyond illusion'. Theo's nihilistic revulsion has not altered- his protest against life is reminiscent of Ivan Karamazov's. And yet he perceives a pattern: whether because he has been staring too long, or because it is there, he cannot tell. Between reality and the point where mind strikes reality is 'a middle zone, a rainbow edge where beauty comes into being' … 'the space where all art exists and all magic'. The middle distance, like the space between stars, or music as the space between notes, is 'where despair struck pure otherness and created something sublime'.[29] Only this polychrome edge between truth and untruth is tolerable.

In her essay, Donna Tartt calls the novel a word-problem as opposed to a mathematical equation. It is a testing out in a simulation of real-life conditions the statement of a moral dilemma; the example given is the relation between *Madame Bovary* and the prohibition of adultery. One could in a similar vein think of *Middlemarch*, as the description of an

---

[26] (Tartt, *The Goldfinch*, 853)
[27] (Tartt, *The Goldfinch*, 859)
[28] (Tartt, *The Goldfinch*, 184. Tartt has claimed that the inspiration for *The Goldfinch*, as a meditation upon the fragility of beautiful art, was the destruction of two eighteenth century Buddha statues by the Taliban in Afghanistan.
[29] (Tartt, *The Goldfinch*, 863)

attempt to live life according to a Kantian ethical imperative, but without the support or consolation of religious faith.

The Secret History, in this vein, follows on from Dostoyevsky. It narrates the attempt to live according to Nietzsche's principle of the *Übermensch*, and the disastrous consequences of such a venture. It can be read in full accordance with Girard's adherence to 'the Crucified': *over against* Dionysus. We have noted the quiet but powerful Christian coda in the Boston church on Ash Wednesday, where the protagonists are situated in a purgatorial space, aware of the evil they have done, but incapable of life-giving conversion.

The novel concludes with Richard's narration of a dream in which Henry's ghost appears (the visitation is compared to the apparition of Patroclus to Achilles in the *Iliad*). Henry's post-mortem existence feels like a classical limbo: his movements are restricted, and information about his whereabouts is 'classified'. 'I'm not dead … I'm only having a bit of trouble with my passport'.[30] 'Are you happy here?' asks Richard. 'Not particularly, but you're not very happy where you are either.'

Girard, we may recall, suggests that the novelistic genre has a Dantesque format, the search for an escape-route out of hell. The process of 'resurrection from the underground' – the title of Girard's book on Dostoyevsky – is one of conversion. Theo Decker in *The Goldfinch* uses the word: (or does he?) The ordeal in Amsterdam 'was really my Damascus, the way station and apogee of my Conversion as I guess you'd call it'.[31] Does the colloquialism 'you' signify 'one'– thereby including the speaker; or is Theo distancing himself from the term, by attributing it to his reader? And is the capitalization of 'Conversion' sincere or ironic? Where René Girard (the critic), is in earnest about the experience he is describing, Donna Tartt (the novelist) tantalizes.

Conclusion

As we have noted, both Donna Tartt and René Girard are explicit about the vital importance of their Christian faith to their respective tasks, as novelist and as critic. Both assert that the relationship between faith and the novel is not straightforward. And yet their accounts of this relationship, and of the nature and purpose of novelistic fiction, are markedly different. Which

[30] (Tartt, *The Secret History*, 628)
[31] (Tartt, *The Goldfinch*, 861)

of these accounts is more appropriate to Tartt's own fiction, and can they in fact complement one another?

For Girard, in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, the search for 'novelistic truth' is familiar, as the ancient philosophical and theological quest to find what is 'really real', beneath the illusionary veil of appearance. It is the discernment between true and false transcendence. The 'resurrection from the underground' is nothing less than the journey out of Plato's cave.

For Tartt, fiction represents a more complex and ambiguous pact between reality and untruth. It is a middle space, 'the magic point where every idea and its opposite are equally true'. Her own craft is that of an illusionist (Theo, the narrator and authorial voice in *The Goldfinch*, is nicknamed 'Potter' by Boris, because of his glasses). A great novel is 'a finger pointing at the moon'[32] Though it is an inherently secular form, it offers for the non-religious person something, in microcosmic form, of what the religious person experiences: a patterned universe. The pattern appears, because we stare long enough, or because it is there to be discovered. But there is no revealing of a truth beyond or behind the illusion; nor, indeed, is Tartt apologetic for the deceitful nature of her craft.

Is there a meeting point between these two views? In fact, the contrast is not as stark as it may seem. *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* was René Girard's first work in a long career of refining and moderating the mimetic insight, during the course of which the stringency of some early judgements is qualified. Luca de Blasi notes contradictions and ambiguities in Girard's conceptualization of desire, which in fact took many years to work through. In particular the binary code of 'mimetic' *versus* 'authentic' modes of desire, while important for Girard as he worked out his theory in its early stages, was to become less pronounced.[33] It seems some kind of co-existence of Christ and Dionysus is possible, after all.

---

[32] Tartt, '*The spirit and writing in a secular world*', 38

[33] Di Blasi, Luca. 'Within and Beyond Mimetic Desire'. In eds. Pierpaolo Antonello and Heather Webb In *Mimesis, Desire, and the Novel: René Girard and Literary Criticism*, eds. Pierpaolo Antonello and Heather Webb (East Lansing, Mi.; Michigan State University Press 2005), 39-40. The collection of essays, *Mimesis, Desire and the Novel*, (Antonello and Webb 2005) examines Girard's literary criticism on the fiftieth anniversary of Girard's first book. Girard's chapter on Hölderlin in his last book, *Battling to the End* (Girard 2010) suggests a resolution between the 'Crucified' and 'Dionysus' because Christianity has transformed the pagan. Bacchus

So perhaps there is no need to set René Girard's inquisitorial zeal over against Donna Tartt's irreverance. She seeks to do justice to both Great Spirit and Personal Spirit, happy to acknowledge that their distinctive but similar activities may converge. The serious task is clear: non-religious people are drawn to the strong inner design of the novel, a power which they experience as illuminating, humanistic, and healing:

> Something in the spirit longs for meaning—longs to believe in a world order where nothing is purposeless, where character is more than chemistry, and people are something more than a random chaos of molecules. The novel can provide this kind of synthesis in microcosm, if not in the grandest sense; it conveys the impression (if not the reality) of a higher, invisible order of significance.[34] (38)

While her craft is 'essentially an 'irreverent occupation', the playacting and mischief may be a vehicle for getting in touch with the deepest spiritual truths.

Both Spirits are insistent in their summons, and must be attended to. From her first short story, 'Sleepytown', Tartt describes a sickly child, alone in her bedroom:

> And I was left, staring at the mottled shadow that the moonlit trees cast on the ceiling, waiting for that soft rap (Peter Pan? Jesus? I wasn't sure who) which I felt sooner or later was going to gently sound on my windowpane.[35] (1992: 66)

---

and Christ are synchronistically held together in Hölderlin's 'mystery of the vine'. For discussion, see Kirwan 2012

[34] Tartt, '*The spirit and writing in a secular world*', 38

[35] Tartt, Donna, 'Sleepytown: A Southern Gothic Childhood, with Codeine.' *Harper's* 285.1706, July 1992, 60–66

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahlquist, Dale. 2003. *G. K. Chesterton: The Apostle of Common Sense*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Alexander, Peter. 1982. *Roy Campbell: A Critical Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Allain, Marie-Françoise. 1983. *The Other Man: Conversations with Graham Greene*. London: Bodley Head.

Allen, Brooke. 'Saints and Sinners.' *The New York Times Book Review*, October 24, 1999, 22.

Aquinas, Thomas. 1947. *Summa Theologiae*. New York: Benziger Brothers.

Auerbach, Erich. 2013. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Boyle, Nicholas. 2004. *Sacred and Secular Scriptures. A Catholic Approach to Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Belloc, Hilaire. 1992. *Essays of a Catholic*. 1931; reprint, Rockford: Tan.

Belloc, Hilaire. *The Times*, September 22, 1909, 8c.

Bosco, Mark, S.J. 'O'Connor's 'Pied Beauty': Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Aesthetics of Difference'. In *Revelation and Convergence: Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, edited by Mark Bosco and Brent Little, 99-117, 107-8. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017).

Boyle, Nicholas. 2004. *Sacred and Secular Scriptures. A Catholic Approach to Literature*. London: Darton Longman and Todd.

Britanny Ferries. 'Referencing.' Accessed '(Https://Www.Brittany-Ferries.Co.Uk/Guides/France/Brittany/Trebeurden).' Accessed May 11, 2020. (https://www.brittany-ferries.co.uk/guides/france/brittany/trebeurden).

Brown, Terence. 1985. *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1920 to the Present*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Buchanan, Tom. 'Great Britain.' In *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918-1965*, edited by Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway, 259. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

Campbell, Ethel. 1933. *The Life of Sam Campbell*. Durban: John Singleton & Williams.

Campbell, Roy. 1924. *The Flaming Terrapin*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Campbell, Roy. 1932. *Taurine Provence: The Philosophy and Religion of the Bullfighter*. London: Desmond Harmsworth.

Campbell, Roy. 1934. *Broken Record: Reminiscences by Roy Campbell*. London: Boriswood.
Campbell, Roy. 1939. *Flowering Rifle: A Poem from the Battlefield of Spain*. London: Longmans, Green and Co.
Campbell, Roy. 1949. *The Collected Poems of Roy Campbell*, Volume I. London: The Bodley Head.
Campbell, Roy. 1951. *Light on a Dark Horse: An Autobiography*. London: Hollis & Carter.
Campbell, Roy. 1957. *The Collected Poems of Roy Campbell*, Volume II. London: The Bodley Head.
Campbell, Roy. 1985. *Collected Works*, Volume IV. Craighall: A.D. Donker.
Campbell, Roy.1960. *St John of the Cross Poems*, translated by Roy Campbell, 1951; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
Carney, Mark. 2021. *Value(s). Building a Better World for All*. London: William Collins.
Celan, Paul, 1990. *Selected Poems*. London: Penguin Books.
Champneys, Basil. 1900. *Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore*, 2 vols. New York: George Bell & Sons.
Chesterton G.K. *The Listener*, June 19, 1935.
Chesterton G.K. 1990. *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 21, *Sidelights on New London and Newer York*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
Chesterton to Gregory Macdonald, July 3, 1933. G. K. Chesterton Archives, Manuscripts Department, The British Library.
Chesterton, G. K. 'Introduction to the Book of Job', http://www.gkc.org.uk/gkc/books/job.html [last accessed 20th November 2020].
Chesterton, G. K. 1934. *Chaucer*. London: Faber and Faber.
Chesterton, G. K. 1953. *A Handful of Authors*. New York: Sheed & Ward.
Chesterton, G. K. 1986. *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 1 (*Heretics*; *Orthodoxy*; *The Blatchford Controversies*). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
Chesterton, G. K. 1989. *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Vol. 15 (*Chesterton on Dickens*). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
Chesterton, G. K. 1992. *Autobiography*. Sevenoaks: Fisher Press.
Chesterton, G. K. 1993. *The Everlasting Man*. San Francisco: Ignatius.
Chesterton, G. K. 2007. *Tremendous Trifles*. New York: Cosimo Classics.
Chesterton, G. K. 2008. *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare*. Rockville, MD: Arc Manor.
Chesterton, G. K. 2009. *Manalive*. Rockville, MD: Serenity Publishers.

Chesterton, G.K. to A. G. Gardiner, n.d., 1911. Gardiner Papers 1/6 A, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics.
Chesterton, G.K. 'Do We Agree?' *G. K.'s Weekly*, November 5, 1927.
Chesterton, G.K. 'First Reply to Fascism.' *G.K.'s Weekly*, August 29, 1935: 401.
Chesterton, G.K. 'Forty Years On.' *G.K.'s Weekly*, May 23, 1931: 161
Chesterton, G.K. 'Further Words on Fascism.' *G. K.'s Weekly*, September 5. 1935: 416-17.
Chesterton, G.K. 'Looking at Toledo', 12 June 1926, *The Illustrated London News*. Reproduced in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Volume 34, 107-108. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).
Chesterton, G.K. 'Notes of the Week.' *G.K.'s Weekly*, June 13, 1931: 211.
Chesterton, G.K. 'Remember Liberty.' *G.K.'s Weekly*, June 1, 1933.
Chesterton, G.K. 'The Distributist.' *The Commonweal* 12 (8 October 8, 1930): 569.
Chesterton, G.K. 'The Style of Newman.' In *A Handful of Authors*, edited by Dorothy Collins, 133. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1953).
Chesterton, G.K. 'Travelers' Tales.' *The Listener*, December 7, 1932.
Chesterton, G.K. 1909. *The Ball and the Cross*. New York: John Lane Company.
Chesterton, G.K. 1912. *A Miscellany of Men*. London: Methuen, 1912.
Chesterton, G.K. 1932. *All is Grist*. New York: Sheed & Ward.
Chesterton, G.K. 1950. *The Common Man*. New York: Sheed & Ward.
Chesterton, G.K. 1959. *Orthodoxy*. 1908; reprint, New York: Image.
Chesterton, G.K. 1986. *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 2, *St. Thomas Aquinas*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
Chesterton, G.K. 1987. *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 4, *What's Wrong With the World*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
Chesterton, G.K. 1987. *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 5, *The Outline of Sanity*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
Chesterton, G.K. 1987. *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 5, *The End of the Armistice*. Edited by Frank Sheed. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
Chesterton, G.K. 1990. *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 3, *The Thing: Why I am a Catholic*. San Francisco.
Chesterton, G.K. 1990. *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 3, *The Well and the Shallows*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
Chesterton, G.K. 1990. *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 3, *The Catholic Church and Conversion*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Chesterton, G.K. 1990. *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 21, *What I Saw in America*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
Chesterton, G.K. 1991. *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 18, *Chaucer*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
Chesterton, G.K. *Illustrated London News*, February 24, 1923.
Chesterton. G.K. 'The Human Heresies.' *G.K.'s Weekly*, August 9, 1934: 360.
Cohen, Ted. 'Metaphor, Feeling and Narrative'. In John and McIver Lopes ed. *Philosophy of Literature. Contemporary and Classic Readings*, edited by John and McIver Lopes, 231-238. (London: Blackwell, 2004).
Collini, Stefan. 'Moralist at Work', *TLS*, February 18, 2005: 15.
Coman, Peter. 1977. *Catholics and the Welfare State.* London: Longman.
Conlon, Denis. J. 1976. *G. K. Chesterton: The Critical Judgments*. Antwerp: Universitaire Faculteiten Sint-Ignatius.
Coolihan, John. 'Thomas MacGreevy: The Man and His Work'. *The Listowel Literary Phenomenon*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. 1994. Electronic Edition Information, published by Susan Schreibman and Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities.
Cooper, David. 1989 *Thomas Merton's Art of denial. The Evolution of a Radical Humanist.* Athens: University of Georgia Press.
Corrin, Jay. 2002. *Catholic Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democracy*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press.
Crowe, Marian. 'In the Bleak Midwinter: Advent in Alice Thomas Ellis's *The Birds of the Air*.' *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 8:2 (Spring 2005): 107-29.
Crowe, Marian. 'Unexplained Laughter: The Life and Work of Alice Thomas Ellis.' *Crisis*, October, 2005. https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=6763
Dante, Alighieri. 1975. *The Divine Comedy: Paradiso*, edited and translated by Charles S. Singleton Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Dante, Alighieri. 1995, *The Portable Dante*, edited by Mark Musa. London: Penguin.
Dawson, Christopher to John J. Mulloy, December 30-31, 1956. Reprinted in *The Dawson Newsletter* 11 (Spring 1993): 15
Dawson, Christopher to the *Cambridge Review*, February 17, 1933. Reprinted in *The Chesterton Review* 23 (November 1997): 530-31.
Dawson, Christopher to the *Glasgow Observer*, August 8, 1947, Dawson Correspondence, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN.
Dawson, Christopher. 'Christianity and Culture.' *The Dublin Review* 208 (April 1941): 147

Dawson, Christopher. 'Democracy and the British Tradition.' *The Dublin Review* 212 (April 1943): 101.
Dawson, Christopher. 'Education and Christian Culture.' *The Commonweal* 59 (4 December 1953): 220.
Dawson, Christopher. 'Introduction.' In *The Necessity of Politics* by Carl Schmitt (London: Sheed & Ward, 1931). Manning, Henry Edward. 'English Catholicism and Victorian Liberalism.' *The Tablet*, 1950; reprinted in *The Dawson Newsletter*, Fall 1993: 8.
Dawson, Christopher. 'Religion and the Totalitarian State.' *The Criterion* 14 (October 1934): 4.
Dawson, Christopher. 'Religious Liberty and the New Political Forces.' *The Month* 183 (January 1947): 42.
Dawson, Christopher. 'The End of an Age.' *The Criterion* 9 (April 1930): 399-400.
Dawson, Christopher. 'The Outlook for Christian Culture Today.' *Cross-Currents* 5 (Spring 1955): 132.
Dawson, Christopher. 'The World Crisis and the English Tradition.' In *Dynamics of World History*, edited by John J. Mulloy, 219. (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958).
Dawson, Christopher. 1930. *Christianity and Sex*. London: Sheed & Ward.
Dawson, Christopher. 1932. *The Modern Dilemma*. London: Sheed & Ward.
Dawson, Christopher. 1934. *Enquiries: into Religion and Culture.* London: Sheed & Ward.
Dawson, Christopher. 1935. *Religion and the Modern State*. New York: Sheed & Ward.
Dawson, Christopher. 1939. *Beyond Politics.* New York: Sheed & Ward.
Dawson, Christopher. 1942. *The Judgment of the Nations*. New York: Sheed & Ward.
Dawson, Christopher. 1953. *Medieval Essays*. London: Sheed & Ward.
Dawson, Christopher. 1960. *America and the Secularization of Modern Culture*. Houston: U of St. Thomas.
Dawson, Christopher. 1960. *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture*. New York: Harper & Row.
Dawson, Christopher. 1967. *The Formation of Christendom*. New York: Sheed & Ward.
Dawson, Christopher. 1970. *Tradition and Inheritance*. 1949; reprint, St. Paul: Wanderer Press.
Di Blasi, Luca. 'Within and Beyond Mimetic Desire'. In *Mimesis, Desire, and the Novel: René Girard and Literary Criticism*, edited by Antonello

Pierpaolo and Heather Webb, 39-53. (East Lansing, Mi.; Michigan State University Press, 2005).

Eagleton, Terry. 2015. *Hope without Optimism*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press.

Elliot, T.S. 1986. *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Evans, Mary. 'The imagined self: The impossibility of auto/biography'. In *Autobiography. Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, edited by Trev Lynn Broughton, 193-203. (London: Routledge, 2007).

Flannery, Austin. 1992. Vatican Council II. Dublin: Dominican Publications.

Garber, Marjorie. 2021. *Character. The History of a Cultural Obsession.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Ghesquière, Rita. 'Spirituality and Literature'. In *The Routledge International Handbook of Spirituality in Society and the Professions*, edited by Laszlo Zsolnai and Bernadette Flanagan, 363-371. (London: Routledge, 2020).

Harari, Yuval. 2016. *Homo Deus.* London: Harvill Secker.

Farrer, Austin. 1959. *Finite and Infinite: A Philosophical Essay*. Westminster: Dacre Press.

Fiddes, Paul S. 'Introduction: the Novel and the Spiritual Journey Today'. In *The Novel, Spirituality and Modern Culture: Eight Novelists write about their Craft and their Context*, edited by Paul S. Fiddes, 1-21. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000).

Fontana, Ernest. 'Rossetti and Patmore's "Tristitia": "A Spanish Case".' *The Hopkins Quarterly* 40.3/4 (2013): 107-11, 107-8.

Fritz, Peter Joseph. 2014. *Karl Rahner's Theological Aesthetics*. Washington: Catholic University of America Press.

Gambero, Luigi. *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*. Translated by Thomas Buffer. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991.

Gilley, Sheridan. 'Chesterton's Politics.' *The Chesterton Review* 21 (February & May 1995): 36.

Gioia, Luigi. 2020. *The Rule of St. Benedict and the Life of the Church.* Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

Girard, René. 'Literature and Christianity: a Personal View'. In *Mimesis, Desire, and the Novel: René Girard and Literary Criticism*, edited by Antonello Pierpaolo and Heather Webb, 279-290. (East Lansing, Mi.; Michigan State University Press, 2005).

Girard, René. 1962. *Proust: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Edited, with Introduction by René Girard. New York: Prentice-Hall [Reprinted: Greenwood Press, Westport, Ct, 1977].

Girard, René. 1965. *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure. B*altimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press [1961, *Mensonge romantique et vérité Romanesque*. Paris: Éditions Grasset].

Girard, René. 1978. *"To double business bound": Essays on Literature, Mimesis and Anthropology*. Johns Hopkins UP, Baltimore; Athlone, London.

Girard, René. 1991. *A Theatre of Envy: William Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press [reprinted 2000, Gracewing, England].

Girard, René. 2008a. 'Conversion in Literature and Christianity'. In *Mimesis and Theory: essays in Literature and Criticism* (essays by Girard), edited by Robert Doran, 263-67. (Stanford, Cal; Stanford UP, 2008a).

Girard, René. 2008b, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture. René Girard in Conversation with Pierpaolo Antonello and João Cesar de Castro Rocha*. (New York: T&T Clark Continuum International).

Girard, René. 2010. *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoit Chantre*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Girard, René. 2012. *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoyevsky*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press [French original 1963].

Gosse, Edmund. 1905. *Coventry Patmore.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Gröning, P. 2006. *Into Great Silence.* Soda Pictures.

Hart, Patrick. 1981. *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*. New York: A New Directions Books.

Heddendorf, David. 'The Gospels of Alice Thomas Ellis.' *The Sewanee Review* 119:2 (Spring 2011): 300-7, 300

Ingarden, Roman. 1973. *The Literary Work of Art. Investigations on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic and the Theory of Literature*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Ishiguru, Kazuo. 2021. *Klara and the Sun*. Faber: London.

Jasper, David. 2016. *Literature and Theology as a Grammar of Assent.* London: Routledge.

John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*. Edited by Otilio Rodriguez and Kieran Kavanaugh. (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1994).

Johns, Laurentia. 2019. *The Way of Benedict. Eight Blessings for Lent.* London: SPCK.
Kenner, Hugh.1948. *Paradox in Chesterton*. London: Sheed & Ward.
Kershaw, Alister. 1984. *Salute to Roy Campbell*. Francestown: Typographeum.
Kirwan, Michael. 'A Candle in Sunshine: Desire and Apocalypse in Blake and Hölderlin.' *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*, Vol. 19 (2012): 179-204.
Lentfoehr, Thérèse. 1979. *Words and Silence*. New York: A New Directions Book.
Lewis, C. S. 1977. *Mere Christianity*, London: Fount.
Lewis, C.S. 'To the Author of Flowering Rifle.' In *Cherwell Magazine*, 6 May 1939. Reproduced in *The Collected Poems of C. S. Lewis: A Critical Edition*, edited by Don W. King, 324. (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2015).
Lutge Couille, Judith. 2011. *Remembering Roy Campbell: The Memoirs of his Daughters Anna and Tess*. Hamden: Winged Lion Press.
MacCarthy, Desmond. *The Sunday Times*, 7 July 1946.
MacGreevy, Thomas. 'Breton Oracles.'*Poetry 99*, no. 2 (1961): 87–89.
MacGreevy, Thomas. 1934. *Poems*. London: Heinemann.
Mackey, Aidan. 'The Wisdom of G. K. Chesterton.',*The Canadian C. S. Lewis Journal*, no. 90 (Fall 1996): 39. Pearce, Joseph. 1999. *Literary Converts*. London: HarperCollins.
Maignant, Catherine. 'Postmodern Celtic Christianity and the Spatialisation of Time'. *Nordic Irish Studies* 6 (2007): 17–28.
Mallaby, Sebastian. 'Geithner on the High Wire.' *The Washington Post*, March 27, 2009: A17.
Manning, Henry Edward. 1874. 'The Dignity and Rights of Labour' (1874); reprinted in *The Chesterton Review* 18 (November 1992), 626, 628.
Martin, David. 'Some academic distinctions.' *TLS*, December, 24 & 31, 2004, 29.
Masson, Robert. 'Rahner's Primordial Words and Bernstein's Metaphorical Leaps: the Affinity of Art with Religion and Theology.' *Horizons* 33.2 (Fall 2006): 276-296.
Matthews, Race. 'The Seedbed.' *The Chesterton Review* 38 (Spring & Summer 2012): 97-124.
McClelland, V. Alan and Hodgetts, Michael. 1999. *From Without the Flaminian Gate*, London: Darnton, Longman & Todd.
McClelland, V. Alan. 'Manning's Work for Social Justice.' *The Chesterton Review* 18 (November 1992), 531.
McDonnell, Thomas. 1989. *A Thomas Merton Reader*. New York: Image

Book.
McNaughton, James. 'Thomas MacGreevy's Poetics of Loss: War, Sexuality, and Archive.' *Journal of Modern Literature* 35, no. 4 (2012): 130–50.
Merton, Thomas. 1948. *The Seven Storey Mountain.* New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.
Merton, Thomas. *The Tears of the Blind Lions.* 1949. New York: New Directions.
Merton, Thomas. 1953. *The Sign of Jonas*. London: Hollis and Carter.
Merton, Thomas. 1953a. *Bread in the Wilderness.* London: The Catholic Book Club.
Merton, Thomas. 1953b.*The Sign of Jonas.* London: Hollis and Carter.
Merton, Thomas. 1956. *Silence in Heaven.* London: Thames and Hudson.
Merton, Thomas. 1965. *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. London: Burns and Oates.
Merton, Thomas. 1968. *Cables to the Ace.* New York: New Directions.
Merton, Thomas. 1968. *Zen and the Birds of Appetite.* New York: A New Directions Paperback.
Merton, Thomas. 1973. *Contemplation in a World of Action.* New York: Image Books.
Merton, Thomas. 1975. *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton.* New York: A New Directions Book.
Merton, Thomas. 1979. *Love and Living.* London: Sheldon Press.
Merton, Thomas. 1981. *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton.* Edited with Introduction by Br. Patrick Hart. New York: New Directions.
Merton, Thomas. 1993. *Raids on the Unspeakable.* London: Burns and Oates.
Merton, Thomas. 1998. *Learning in Love. The Journals of Thomas Merton. Vol. 6. 1966-1967.* San Francisco: HarperCollins.
Merton, Thomas. 2005. *In the Dark before Dawn. New Selected Poems of Thomas Merton.* Edited by Kathleen Norris. New York: A New Directions Book.
Michael Novak, 'A Salute to Jacques Maritain.' Accessed November 10, 2020. https://institutoacton.org/2017/12/19/a-salute-to-jacques-maritain-michael-novak/.
Michalsky, Przemyslaw. 'Czesław Miłosz and R.S. Thomas as Prophetic Voices of Our Time.' In *Prophetic Witness and the Reimagining of the World*, edited by Mark S. Burrows, Hilary Davies and Josephine von Zitzewitz, 165-188. (London and New York: Routledge, 2021).

Milbank, Alison. 1998. *Dante and the Victorians.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Miłosz, Czesław. 2001. *To Begin Where I Am: Selected Essays*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.
Miłosz, Czesław. 2005. *New and Collected Poems* 1931-2001. London: Penguin Classics.
Morris, Kevin. 'Fascism and British Catholic Writers, 1924-1939.' *The Chesterton Review* 25 (February & May 1999): 21-51.
Morris, Kevin. 2007. *The Truest Fairy Tale: An Anthology of the Religious Writings of G. K. Chesterton*. Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press.
Mott, Michael. 1984. *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*. London: A Sheldon Press Book.
Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Genealogy of Morality III, 25*. Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson and translated by Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
Norman, Edward. 1985. *Roman Catholicism in England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
O'Collins, Gerald. 2011. *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
O'Riordain, John. 1998. *Irish Catholic Spirituality, Celtic and Roman*. Dublin: Columba Press.
Oddie, William. 2008. *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy: The making of GKC, 1874-1908*. Oxford: OUP.
Page, Frederick. 1970. *Patmore: A Study in Poetry*. 1933. Conn: Archon Books.
Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. Translated by W. F. Trotter. New York: Dover, 2003.
Patmore, Coventry. 1889. 'Religio Poeta'. In *Religio Poeta.* London: George Bell and Sons. Google Books.
Patmore, Coventry. 1889. *Principle in Art, etc.* London: George Bell and Sons. Project Gutenberg. Accessed 12 August, 2020. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/57192/57192-h/57192-h.htm#V.
Patmore, Coventry. 1907. 'Aurea Dicta', XCVI, CXLVI, In *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower*. London: George Bell and Sons. Internet Archive. Accessed July 20, 2020. https://archive.org/details/rodrootandflowe00patmgoog/page/n60/mode/2up.
Patmore, Coventry. 1907. 'Aurea Dicta', LXXI. In *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower*. London: George Bell and Sons. Internet Archive. Accessed July 20, 2020.

https://archive.org/details/rodrootandflowe00patmgoog/page/n60/mode/2up.

Patmore, Coventry. 1907. 'Aurea Dicta', LXXVI, LXXX, LXXXVI, In *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower*. London: George Bell and Sons. Internet Archive. Accessed July 20, 2020. https://archive.org/details/rodrootandflowe00patmgoog/page/n60/mode/2up.

Patmore, Coventry. 1907. 'Aurea Dicta', XXI, XXXII, LXVII, In *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower*. London: George Bell and Sons. Internet Archive. Accessed July 20, 2020. https://archive.org/details/rodrootandflowe00patmgoog/page/n60/mode/2up.

Patmore, Coventry. 1907. Aurea Dicta', LXXXVIII, In *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower*. London: George Bell and Sons. Internet Archive. Accessed July 20, 2020. https://archive.org/details/rodrootandflowe00patmgoog/page/n60/mode/2up.

Patmore, Coventry. 1949. *The Poems of Coventry Patmore*, edited by Frederick Page. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pearce, Joseph. 2002. *Bloomsbury and Beyond: The friends and enemies of Roy Campbell.* 2001; London: HarperCollinsPublishers.

Pearce, Joseph. 2003. *C. S. Lewis and the Catholic Church.* San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Pearce, Joseph. 2014. *Catholic Literary Giants. A Field Guide to the Catholic Literary Landscape.* San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Pennington, Basil. 1988. *Toward an Integrated Humanity. Thomas Merton's Journey*. Michigan: Cistercian publications.

Pieper, Josef. 1989. *An Anthology*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Pieper, Josef. 2010. *The Four Cardinal Virtues.* 1954; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Pinch, Adela. 2010. *Thinking about Other People in Nineteenth-century British Writing.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Povey, John. 1977. *Roy Campbell.* Boston: Twayne Publishers.

Povey, John. 1977. *Roy Campbell.* Twayne's World Author Series. No. 439. Boston: Twayne.

Prose, Francine. 'Life Without the Wriggling.' *The New York Times*, April 24, 1994, 302-3.

Quinn, Dermot. 'Manning, Chesterton, and Social Catholicism.' *The Chesterton Review* 18 (November 1992), 508.

Quinn, Dermot. 'The Historical Foundations of Modern Distributism.' *The Chesterton Review* 21 (November 1995): 451-71;

Rahner, Karl. '"Behold This Heart!": Preliminaries to a Theology of Devotion to the Sacred Heart.' *Theological Investigations*, vol. III (1953): 321-30.

Rahner, Karl. 'Poetry and the Christian.' *Theological Investigations*, vol. IV (1960): 357-67.

Rahner, Karl. 'The Theology of the Symbol', *Theological Investigations*, vol. IV (1960): 221-52.

Rahner, Karl. 1956a. 'Some Theses for a Theology of Devotion to the Sacred Heart.' *Theological Investigations*, vol. III (1956): 331-52.

Rahner, Karl. 1956b. 'Priest and Poet.' *Theological Investigations*, vol. III (1956): 294-317.

Rahner, Karl. 1986. *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews, 1965-1982* [edited by Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons]. New York: Crossroad.

Reid, J.C. 1957. *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Rilke, Rainer Maria. 1987. *Selected Poetry*. London: Picador Macmillan.

Rodriguez, Otilio & Kavanaugh, Kieran. 1991 'Sayings of Light and Love'. In *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*. (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications).

Rowan, Paul. 2017. *The Scrappy Evangelist: Chesterton and a New Apologetics for Today.* Charlotte, NC: The American Chesterton Society.

Sacks, Jonathan. 2020. *Morality. Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Sceats, Sarah. 'The 27th Kingdom (1982).' In *The Cambridge Guide to Women's Writing in English*, edited by Lorna Sage, Germaine Greer and Elaine Showalter (Cambridge University Press, 1999). url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/camgwwie/27th_kingdom_the_1982/0?

Schreibman, Susan. 1991. *Collected Poems of Thomas MacGreevy*. Dublin: Anna Livia Press.

Schwartz, Adam. 'Swords of Honor: The Revival of Orthodox Christianity in Twentieth-Century Britain.' *Logos* 4 (Winter 2001): 11-33.

Shakespeare, William. 'The Merchant of Venice'. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd edition, edited by Herschel Baker, et al., 1183-1245. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

Shannon, William and Bochen, Christine. 2008. *A Life in Letters. The Essential Collection*. New York: HarperCollins.

Shannon, William, Bochen, Christine and O'Connell, Patrick. 2002. *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia.* New York: Orbis Books.

Speaight, Robert. 1957. *The Life of Hilaire Belloc*. London: Hollis & Carter.

St. Bernard, Homily II, in *Sermons of St. Bernard on Advent and Christmas* London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1909. Internet Archive. Accessed August 6, 2020. https://archive.org/stream/sermonsofstberna00bernuoft#page/n1/mode/2up.

St. Bernard, Homily III, in *Sermons of St. Bernard on Advent and Christmas* London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1909. Internet Archive. Accessed August 6, 2020. https://archive.org/stream/sermonsofstberna00bernuoft#page/n1/mode/2up.

St. Bernard. 'Homily III', in 'Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary'. In *Honey and Salt: Selected Spiritual Writings of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*, edited by John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne, 326-27. (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 2007).

St. Bernard. 'Sermon 14', in 'On the Song of Songs'. In *Honey and Salt: Selected Spiritual Writings of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*, edited by John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne, 99 (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 2007).

St. Bernard. 'Sermons 2-4', in 'On the Song of Songs'. In *Honey and Salt*: *Selected Spiritual Writings of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*, edited by John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne, 59-79. (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 2007).

St. Bernard. Homily IV, in *Sermons of St. Bernard on Advent and Christmas* London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1909. Internet Archive. Accessed August 6, 2020. https://archive.org/stream/sermonsofstberna00bernuoft#page/n1/mode/2up.

St. Thomas, 'Homily IV: The Duties of Marriage'. In *Ninety-Nine Homilies of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by John M. Ashley, 30-31. (London: Aeterna Press, 2014).

St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. 5 Vols. Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1948.

Szabo, Lynn. 'Introduction.' In *In the Dark Before Dawn. New Selected Poems of Thomas Merton*, xxi-xxxiv. (New York: A New Directions Book, 2005).

Tartt, Donna, 'A Christmas Pageant', *Harper's* 287.1723, December 1993, 45–51.

Tartt, Donna. ‘Sleepytown: A Southern Gothic Childhood, with Codeine.’ *Harper’s* 285.1706, July 1992, 60–66.
Tartt, Donna. 2002. *The Little Friend*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
Tartt, Donna. 2013. *The Goldfinch*. New York: Little, Brown.
Tartt, Donna. 'The spirit and writing in a secular world.' In *The Novel, Spirituality and Modern Culture: Eight Novelists write about their Craft and their Context*, edited by Paul S. Fiddes (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 25-40.
Tartt, Donna.1992. *The Secret History*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belnap Press.
Taylor, Charles. 2016. *The Language Animal: the Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity*. Cambridge, MA: Belnap Press.
Thomas Ellis, Alice. 1995. *The Serpent on the Rock.* London: Sceptre Publishers.
Thomas Ellis, Alice. 1998. *The 27th Kingdom*. Pleasantville, New York: The Akadine Press, [orig. 1982].
Thomas, Hugh. 1961. *The Spanish Civil War*. London: Penguin Books.
Thompson, Damian. ‘Alice Thompson doesn’t live here anymore.’ *The Spectator* (vol. 297, issue 9215), March 19, 2005.
Thorn, Michael. ‘Towards a History and Interpretation of the Distributist League.’ *The Chesterton Review* 23 (August 1997): 305-27.
Tischner, Lukasz, 2021, ‘Beyond the ‘Immanent Frame’: Charles Taylor as a Reader of Poetry.’ In *Prophetic Witness and the Reimagining of the World*, edited by Mark S. Burrows, Hilary Davies and Josephine von Zitzewitz (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 127-137.
Tolkien, J.R.R. 2006. *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*. Edited by Humphrey Carpenter. London: HarperCollinsPublishers.
Torevell, David. ‘“What we have to be is what we are”. Re-discovering an Ontology of Unity in the Asian Journal of Thomas Merton.’ *Asian Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 2. No.1 (2012), 39- 56.
Torevell, David. ‘Distractions, illusion and the need for a contemplative. A Critique of Thomas Merton’s Advice.’ *Journal for the Study of Spirituality*, Vol 9. No.2 (2019), 152-162.
Torevell, David. ‘From Absurdity to Apophaticism - Re-reading Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot.’ In *Sources of Transformation. Revitalising Christian Spirituality*, edited by Edward Howells and Peter Tyler (London: Continuum, 2010), 147-158.
Torevell, David. 2007. *Liturgy and the Beauty of the Unknown. Another Place.* Aldershot: Ashgate.
Torevell, David. 2020. ‘Theological Anthropology and the teaching of ‘A’ Level English Literature Set Texts in Catholic Schools and Colleges.’

International Journal of Education and Christianity, Vol 24. Issue 3, November, (2020), 296-314

Turner, Denys. 2O14. *Thomas Aquinas. A Portrait.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Unsigned. 'Review of *The 27th Kingdom.*' *Foreword Reviews* (September-October 1999). https://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/the-27th-kingdom/

Valentine, Ferdinand. 1955. *Father Vincent McNabb, O.P.: the portrait of a great Dominican*, London: Burns & Oates.

Veldman, Meredith. 1994. *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Villis, Tom. 2013. *British Catholics and Fascism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

von Arx, Jeffrey Paul. 'Catholics and Politics.' In *From Without the Flaminian Gate*, edited by V. Alan McClelland and Michael Hodgetts, 256-57. (London: Darnton, Longman & Todd, 1999).

von Balthasar, Hans. 1988. *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory.* San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Ward, Maisie. 1944. *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1944.

Ward, Maisie. 1958. *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

White, Hayden. 'Religion, Culture, and Western Civilization in Christopher Dawson's Idea of History.' *English Miscellany* 9 (1958): 247-87.

Wiener, Martin. 1981. *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wilde, Oscar. 2002. *Lady Windermere's Fan*. London: Methuen Drama. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Williams, Raymond. 1968. *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell*, edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Williams, Raymond. 1983. *Culture and Society*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wilson, Andrew, N. 1984. *Hilaire Belloc*. New York: Atheneum.

Woodcock, George. 1978. *Thomas Merton. Monk and Poet.* London: The Catholic Book Club.

Wright, David. 1961. *Roy Campbell*. London: Longmans, Green & Co.

CONTRIBUTORS

Dr David Deavel is Assistant Professor, Catholic Studies at St.Thomas University, Minnesota, USA as well as editor of *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* and co-director of the Terrence J. Murphy Institute of Catholic Thought, Law and Public Policy. He is co-editor of *Solzhenitsyn and American Culture* (Notre Dame, 2020) and has published widely in academic, public and popular journals. His research interests include: John Henry Newman, G. K. Chesterton, English Catholic Literary Revival Literature, Catholic Thought and Political Philosophy.
Email: DPDEAVEL@stthomas.edu

Dr Daniel Frampton is an independent scholar working in England. His research interests include English Catholic intellectual and artistic culture in the twentieth century, the Inklings, the Catholic literary revival, theology and modernism. Most recently, his written work has focused on the noted Catholic author G. K. Chesterton, the poet Roy Campbell and the artist Graham Sutherland, focusing in particular on the theology of death and the interplay between lived Catholicism, mortality and the arts. He has been published in various journals, including the *Chesterton Review* and *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*; also contributing a chapter to the first volume of *Literature and Catholicism in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (2021), published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
Email: daniel.de.frampton@gmail.com

Rev Dr Michael Kirwan is Assistant Professor, School of Religion, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland. He is the author of *Girard and Theology* (T&T Clark / Continuum, 2009), *Political Theology: a New Introduction (*Darton Longman & Todd, 2008) and *Discovering Girard (*Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004). His research interests include the French cultural theorist René Girard and the implications of his 'mimetic theory' of religion, culture and violence, contemporary political theology, the public role of religion, theology and literature and Jesuit spiritual reflection in a globalising world.
Email: kirwanm6@tcd.ie

Dr Terry Phillips Liverpool Hope University, UK is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow. Her research interests are in the areas of Irish literature and conflict literature, in particular the literature of the First World War. She is the author of *Irish Literature and the First World War: Culture Identity and Memory* (Peter Lang, 2015). Other publications include 'The City of the Farset: Portrayals of Belfast in Three Novels by Glenn Patterson' in *Irish Urban Fictions* eds Beville and Flynn (2018) and 'Out on a Great Adventure: The Travels of Patrick MacGill' in *Voyages Between France and Ireland* eds Healy and Bastiat (2017).
Email:PHILLIM@hope.ac.uk

Rev Dr Paul Rowan STD, PhL Beaulieu Institute Jersey, UK has been a diocesan priest of the Archdiocese of Liverpool, England since 1995 and is currently working in the diocese of Portsmouth, England. He is Assistant Head and Director of Catholic Life and Formation, Young People and Skills at Beaulieu Convent School Jersey, in the British Channel Islands. He is also the Director of the Beaulieu Institute for Religious Literacy. He has taught theology, philosophy, ethics and religious studies at Primary, Secondary and Tertiary levels, worked in three Catholic seminaries and in secular and pontifical universities in England, Spain and Rome. He is the author of *The Scrappy Evangelist. A New Apologetics for Today* (ACS Books, 2017). His research interests include: Belief and Unbelief; the New Evangelisation; G. K. Chesterton; C. S. Lewis; Power, abuse and the Catholic hierarchy; LGBT+; Women in the Catholic Church; the writings of Pope Francis.
Email: paulmrowan@hotmail.com.

Dr Adam Schwartz Christendom College, USA is Professor of History at Christendom College. His chief research and teaching interests are in the Catholic literary revival and the Inklings. He has published widely in those fields, most notably in *The Third Spring: G. K. Chesterton, Graham Greene, Christopher Dawson, and David Jones* (The Catholic University of American Press, 2005).
Email: ajmschwartz@yahoo.com

Dr Brandon Schneeberger is Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Oklahoma State University, USA. He has published articles on William Shakespeare, Samuel Johnson, Kenneth Grahame and C. S. Lewis and has a forthcoming article that explores liturgical elements in G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* (*Religion & Literature*). He is the author of the Ben Jonson page for *Oxford Bibliographies* and serves as

Managing Editor for *The Ben Jonson Journal*. His research interests include the role of conversation and religion in literature.
Email: brandon.schneeberger@okstate.edu

Dr David Torevell taught in Catholic secondary schools before entering Higher Education in 1992. He was previously *Honorary Research Fellow* at Leeds Trinity University, UK and is now an *Honorary Senior Research Fellow* at Liverpool Hope University, UK and *Visiting Professor* at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland. He is the author of *Losing the Sacred: Ritual, Modernity and Liturgical Reform* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000) and *Liturgy and the Beauty of the Unknown: Another Place* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). He has edited many books and published numerous articles on a range of theological, philosophical and educational issues. His research interests include Catholic theology, theology and literature, theology and the arts, sport and religion and Catholic education.
Email: david.torevell@outlook.com