



CHESTERTONIAN
DRAMATOLOGY



by

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DECLARATION

Student number: 04197003

I declare that *Chestertonian dramatology* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



Duncan Reyburn

August 2012

“Now, there is a law written in the darkest of the Books of Life, and it is this: If you look at a thing nine hundred and ninety-nine times, you are perfectly safe; if you look at it the thousandth time, you are in frightful danger of seeing it for the first time”



(SW:13).



SUMMARY AND KEY TERMS

This study proposes an answer to the question of what the contemporary relevance of the writings of GK Chesterton (1874-1936) may be to the field of visual culture studies in general and to discourse on visual hermeneutics in particular. It contends that Chesterton's distinctive hermeneutic strategy is dramatology: an approach rooted in the idea that being, which is disclosed to itself via language, has a dramatic, storied structure. It is this dramatology that acts as an answer to any philosophical outlook that would seek to de-dramatise the hermeneutic experience. The structure of Chesterton's dramatology is unpacked via three clear questions, namely the question of what philosophical foundation describes his horizon of understanding, the question of what the task or goal of his interpretive process is and, finally, the question of what tools or elements shape his hermeneutic outlook. The first question is answered via an examination of his cosmology, epistemology and ontology; the second question is answered by the proposal that Chesterton's chief aim is to uphold human dignity through his defenses of the common man, common sense and democracy; and the third question is answered through a discussion of the three principles that underpin his rhetoric, namely analogy, paradox and defamiliarisation. After proposing the structure of Chesterton's dramatology via these considerations, the study offers one application of this dramatology to Terrence Malick's film *The tree of life* (2011). This is sustained in terms of the incarnational paradox between mystery and revelation that acts as the primary tension and hermeneutic key in Chesterton's work.

Key Terms:

GK Chesterton; dramatology; Chesterton's cosmology; human dignity; common sense; the common man; democracy, Chesterton's epistemology; Chesterton's ontology; analogy; participation; paradox; defamiliarisation; visual hermeneutics, visual interpretation; *The tree of life* (film); Terrence Malick.



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(Gardner, Green, Hill, Malick, Pitt & Pohlad 2011).

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ABBREVIATIONS OF BOOKS BY GK CHESTERTON

AM:	<i>A miscellany of men</i>
AD:	<i>Alarms and discursions</i>
AT:	<i>All things considered</i>
AC:	<i>Appreciations and criticisms of the works of Charles Dickens</i>
AU:	<i>The Autobiography</i>
BC:	<i>The ball and the cross</i>
CD:	<i>Charles Dickens: a critical study</i>
CM:	<i>The common man</i>
CQ:	<i>The Club of Queer Trades</i>
DE:	<i>The defendant</i>
DQ:	<i>The return of Don Quixote</i>
EW:	<i>The essential writings of GK Chesterton</i>
EE:	<i>Eugenics and other evils</i>
EM:	<i>The everlasting man</i>
FB:	<i>Father Brown: selected stories</i>
FF:	<i>Four faultless felons</i>
HO:	<i>The collected works: Heretics, Orthodoxy, The Blatchford controversies</i>
IJ:	<i>Introduction to the book of Job</i>
IL:	<i>The collected works: The Illustrated London News 1920-1922</i>
IS:	<i>The collected works: The Illustrated London News 1911-1913</i>
IU:	<i>The collected works: The Illustrated London News 1932-1934</i>
MA:	<i>Manalive</i>
MK:	<i>The man who knew too much</i>
MO:	<i>The man who was orthodox</i>
MT:	<i>The man who was Thursday</i>
NJ:	<i>The New Jerusalem</i>
OR:	<i>Orthodoxy: The annotated edition</i>
OS:	<i>The collected works: The outline of sanity, The end of the armistice, Utopia for usurers and others</i>
SE:	<i>Stories, essays and poems</i>
ST:	<i>Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Francis Assisi</i>
SU:	<i>The surprise</i>
SW:	<i>The selected works</i>
TH:	<i>The thing</i>
TL:	<i>Tales of the long bow</i>
TT:	<i>Tremendous trifles</i>
TW:	<i>Twelve types</i>
VA:	<i>The Victorian Age in literature</i>
WB:	<i>William Blake</i>
WS:	<i>The well and the shallows</i>
WW:	<i>What's wrong with the world</i>