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

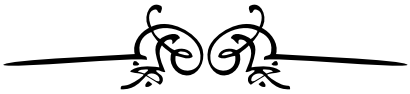
"Now, there is a law written in the darkest of the Books of Life, and it is this: If you look at a thing nine hundred and ninety-nine times, you are perfectly safe; if you look at it the thousandth time, you are in frightful danger of seeing it for the first time"

(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.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION

I want to begin by acknowledging the financial assistance given to me by the University of Pretoria, but need to note that the opinions expressed and conclusions reached in the following thesis are my own and therefore do not necessarily reflect the stance of this institution.

Then, I would like to thank those individuals whose encouragement, guidance and support have allowed me to finish this work. Danie and Amanda, I am deeply grateful for the invaluable part that you have both played in helping me to set the stage for new dialogue around Chesterton's work. Thank you for the many inspiring conversations that we've had over tea, coffee and cake, and for reminding me to stay true to the exuberant, generous spirit of GKC.

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This work is dedicated to my dear wife, Linda. Thank you for entering into this play with me, and for giving me the gift of discovering the re-enchantment of the world with you.

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All images in this study are taken from *The tree of life*
(Gardner, Green, Hill, Malick, Pitt & Pohlad 2011).

ABBREVIATIONS OF BOOKS BY GK CHESTERTON

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

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and background information

The English wordsmith Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936) — contemporary and friend of such literary figures as JM Barrie,[1] Hilaire Belloc,[2] Rudyard Kipling,[3] TS Eliot,[4] HG Wells[5] and George Bernard Shaw[6] — is surely "one of the most prolific writers that ever lived" (Maycock 1963:13). During a career of a little under forty years, he published nearly one hundred books and contributed to about two hundred others. In addition to these, he produced a vast number of essays for periodicals such as the *Daily News, The Speaker, The Nation, The New Witness*, and *GK's Weekly*. From 1905 until his death in 1936, he wrote over a thousand essays for *The Illustrated London News* and somehow found time to also produce work for publications like *The Independent Review, The Optimist, Commonwealth, Black and White, The British Review,* and *The Bystander* (Maycock 1963:13). As if this were not enough, he wrote many letters and reviews, participated in public debates, and delivered a great many lectures and speeches. It is no surprise, then, that a great portion of this torrent of work was "composed ... on the run — in a tea room, on top of a double-decker bus, standing in the doorway of a shop, or leaning against a wall scribbling in pencil in a penny exercise book or sometimes just on his cuff" (Beuchner 2001:85). Chesterton was forever writing. The sheer volume of work produced by him rivals the amount of work produced by his one-time debating partner, the analytic philosopher Bertrand Russell, who is recognised as the most productive philosopher of the twentieth century.[7]

I mention all of this to point out an obvious problem that faces any scholar who wants to tackle the work of this "tomboy among dictionaries, this philosophical Peter Pan, this humorous Dr Johnson, this kindly and gallant cherub, this profound student and wise master" (Hamilton, in Yancey

[1] James Matthew Barrie (1860-1937) was a Scottish writer and dramatist who is best remembered today as the creator of Peter Pan.
[2] Joseph Hilaire Pierre René Belloc (1870-1953) was a prolific Anglo-French writer and historian. He collaborated with Chesterton for many years and is perhaps best known for his influence on Chesterton's distributist writings.
[3] Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) was a British author and poet, referred to by George Orwell (1945) as the "prophet of British imperialism".
[4] Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) was an American born English writer. He won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1948.
[5] HG Wells (1866-1946) is, with Jules Verne, often considered the father of science fiction, but his writings include more than fiction. He was a scientific materialist and, like TH Huxley (1825-1895), a fervent Darwinian.
[6] George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) was a prolific and successful Irish playwright and a dedicated Nietzschean.
[7] Chesterton and Russell (1872-1970) debated on the subject *Who should bring up our children?,* which was broadcast by the BBC on 16 November 1935 (Ker 2011:716).

2001:54-55). It is the same problem that faces someone who wants to undertake the awkward and perplexing task of eating an elephant, namely that it is difficult to know both where to begin and whether such a task is even possible. To me, the most practical solution to this problem, the fruits of which are evidenced in this thesis, is to eat the proverbial elephant one bite at a time, slowly and selectively.[8] Fortunately for any reader, while Chesterton did not bother to stick to any particular genre or subject matter, his immense perception is remarkably coherent and surprisingly accessible. Moreover, his dabbling in various discourses over many years resulted in a great deal of repetition. AL Maycock (1963:14) notices that "[h]e never minded repeating himself; in a sense he may be said to have gone on repeating himself all his life. Anyone familiar with his books will recall instances of the same idea cropping up again and again in this place or that, and being driven home with every variety of illustration and emphasis". James Schall (2000:xiv) offers that when tackling the work of great writers like "Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Johnson, or Chesterton" one gains the "uncanny impression ... that everything that they knew and wanted us to know was somehow contained within a mere fragment of their work". He then points out that "[a]lmost any essay in Chesterton's early 1901 book *The Defendant* contains everything he stood for" (Schall 2000:xiv).

Despite being a polymath of formidable talent in many intellectual arenas, Chesterton tended to downplay his abilities and his importance. His constant stream of work had less to do with his own ambitions than it had to do with the fact that he loved sharing his interest in a great number of things with anyone who cared to know. Even in his *Autobiography,* we encounter "a self that reveals by effacing" (Paine 2006:11). He was utterly "unconcerned with renown" or literary immortality (Maycock 1963:14). For this reason, a great portion of his creative brilliance was given to addressing the ephemeral. In his own terms, he cared for nothing "except to be in the present stress of life as it is," saying, "I would rather live now and die, from an artistic point of view, than keep aloof and write things that will remain in the world hundreds of years after my death" (in Maycock 1963:14). On one occasion, when he was told that he "[seemed] to know everything," he responded, "I know nothing, Madam. I am a journalist" (in Ffinch 1986:175). On another occasion, someone called out for Chesterton to speak up while he was giving an address. Chesterton called back, "Good sister, don't worry. You aren't missing a thing" (in Ahlquist 2006:23). Setting this self-deprecation aside, there can be no doubt that Chesterton has been hugely influential far beyond what can be recorded here. For example, his ideas about national independence deeply affected the Irish revolutionary

[8] Chesterton, although not exactly a pragmatist, is certainly practical in his own outlook. On one occasion, for example, Chesterton was asked, "If you were stranded on a desert island with only one book, what book would you want it to be?" His response was, "*Thomas' Guide to Practical Shipbuilding*" (in Ahlquist 2006:23). I do want to note here that this particular quotation is not the only one in this thesis taken from a secondary source. Unfortunately, some of Chesterton's writings, especially those works that are no longer in print and are not yet available online, have been inaccessible to me owing to financial and spatial constraints. However, such quotations are very few and far between. Moreover, they are never relied upon as primary sources for the arguments put forward in this thesis, but are used only to add spice to my interpretation of Chesterton's other work.

Michael Collins[9] and the Indian nationalist Mahatma Gandhi,[10] and on the artistic, literary and philosophical fronts, Robert Farrar Capon, Neil Gaiman, Alec Guinness, Graham Greene, CS Lewis, Terry Pratchett, Dorothy L Sayers, JRR Tolkien and Evelyn Waugh can all be shown to having been significantly shaped by his writings (Giddings 2008:175; Griffin 2003:26; Milbank 2009a:viii; Reyburn 2007:27; Pearce 1996:10; Yancey 2001:44). Two critically acclaimed filmmakers, Ingmar Bergman and Orson Welles, have also acknowledged the impact of his work on their art (Giddings 2008:175).

Chesterton is still widely read and quoted today. He even has a scholarly journal (*The Chesterton Review*), and two magazines (*Gilbert!* and *The distributist review*) dedicated to his thinking, writings and writings about him, as well as a high school (*The Chesterton Academy*) and a non-profit educational institute (*The GK Chesterton Institute for Faith and Culture*) that root their ethos in an understanding of the life of Chesterton. Robert Giddings (2008:184) offers that "one of the great attractions of Chesterton's work to twenty-first century readers is its timelessness and uneasy relevance to the world we live in". However, it is Chesterton's preoccupation with Christian apologetics that seems to have attracted the most attention in recent scholarship. For this reason, and not unjustifiably, Chesterton is often regarded as a theologian (Griffin 2003:28; Nichols 2009:xi; Milbank 2009a; Wood 2011:12).

While this study takes his theological stance seriously together with his contributions to other fields of study, it presents a question that aims at a new approach to his work, namely the question of what the contemporary relevance of his writings may be to the field of visual culture studies in general and to discourse on visual hermeneutics in particular. To borrow the words of visual culture pioneer John Berger (1972:10), the answer is simply that his work provides a unique "way of seeing".[11] Chesterton was certainly very visually minded, having initially chosen to become an artist before shifting his focus to literature (Ker 2011:39). His first book *Greybeards at play* (1900) is filled with his own illustrations, and even after becoming a fulltime writer his life was clearly enriched by

[9] Michael Collins (1890-1922), the Irish revolutionary leader, played a crucial role in founding the modern Irish state especially in his positions as Minister of Finance for the Cork South parliamentary constituency, Director of Intelligence for the IRA and member of the Irish delegation during the Anglo-Irish Treaty negotiations that concluded the Irish War of Independence.

[10] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1868-1948) paved the way for Indian nationalism in British-ruled India through non-violent civil disobedience. It may be suggested that it was it was an article by Chesterton in the *The Illustrated London News* (18 September 1909) on the importance of viewing democracy in terms of who rules instead of on the basis of who is permitted to vote that was the catalyst for Gandhi's ideas surrounding nationalism (Stapleton 2009:106).

[11] According to Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell (1999:ix), the "emergent research field of visuality … may be analysed in terms of four 'levels' or 'orders' of visual phenomena": The first regards the practical, everyday experience and commonplace practices of representation; the second, of which this study is one example, considers various "interpretive problematics" that arise in the light of the fact that visual perception is not merely a structural or semiotic concern, but is a vital component of human experience; the third is more historical in its approach, taking into consideration the formation of critical theories around visuality; and, finally, the fourth is the "metatheoretical … emergence of critical discourses concerned to question and deconstruct the history and implications of visually organised paradigms and practices, institutions, and technologies these have legitimated" (Heywood & Sandywell 1999:ix).

various artistic expressions in the form of his love for drawing, his writings on the visual arts and even in his lavish use of visual rhetoric. It is therefore not much of a stretch to say that, while Chesterton cannot formally be considered a visual theorist, his work offers a distinctive hermeneutic strategy for understanding the relationship of images to the meanings they conjure and the contexts within which they occur. As straightforward as this answer may first seem, it introduces a much more pressing question with a more complex answer: What, then, is Chesterton's particular way of seeing? It is the aim of this thesis to address this question, first by proposing what I understand to be the general structure or shape of Chesterton's perceptual lens along with discussions on his primary interpretive goal and tools in Part One, and then by applying this structure practically to the interpretation of a visual text in Part Two.

Broadly speaking, visual hermeneutics deals with theories regarding the interpretation of visual texts of all kinds. In line with philosophical hermeneutics, it assumes that "interpretation is never presuppositionless" (Westphal 2009:14), and that "[t]he way we see things is affected by what we know and believe" (Berger 1972:8).[12] All interpretative understanding inevitably involves various levels of prejudice (Gadamer 2004:272). Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004:273) explains that prejudice, which may also be referred to as bias or pre-judgment, "does not necessarily mean a false judgment," but instead points to the idea that interpretation is never neutral. If hermeneutics "[teaches] us to be suspicious of the glaringly self-evident" (Eagleton 2003:53), then it seems fair to assume that Chesterton is at least a kind of hermeneutic philosopher, albeit somewhat accidentally. After all, he is concerned not so much with the methods or methodologies of interpretations as with "what happens to us over and above" methodological considerations, to borrow Gadamer's (2004:xxvi) words. Just as he may be viewed as a prolific writer, he is as easily considered a reader, perhaps in a similar to the way that Jacques Derrida is described as a reader (Johnson 1981:x). He is a reader who constantly engages with texts around him through thought and experience. I would even say that Chesterton's career beginnings as a reader in Redway's publishing house and then as a literary critic may be taken as an analogy for his approach to his work in general: he reads in order to excuse his desire to offer his own opinions on much more than what he is reading (Ahlquist 2006:78; Ker

[12] While hermeneutics emphasises the impossibility of objectivity and the inevitability of relativity, it by no means assumes that an "anything goes" approach is unavoidable (Westphal 2009:14). Such a conclusion can only be arrived at if 'objectivity' and 'truth' are conflated, and this is something that Chesterton does not do. Once, when asked if "Truth" is not merely "one's own conception of things," Chesterton responded: "That is the Big Blunder. All thought is an attempt to discover if one's own conception is true or not" (in Ahlquist 2006:24). Hermeneutical despair, which proclaims textual incomprehensibility, and hermeneutic arrogance, which assumes that there is only one correct interpretation, are not the only alternatives. For example, a hermeneutics like that of Gadamer allows for the possibility of better or worse interpretations, depending on the depth of dialogue between the reader and the text. Such a hermeneutics leaves room for various horizons of understanding and for different subjectivities to interact and fuse in order to contribute to a larger landscape of meaning in search for truth. The interpretive process, therefore, while being less a subjective act than it is a form of participation "in an event of tradition," is never complete (Gadamer 2004:291). The pursuit of truth in hermeneutics remains a priority, but always under the assumption that our human ability to reason through and understand truth must be recognised as being both limited and fallible.

2011:40). Although he would not use these words, it is my contention that he is concerned with the entire hermeneutic experience; that is, he is concerned with how each individual's approach to the world can bring about such radically different responses.

Hermeneutics warns that perception is affected by our historically-determined or historically-affected consciousness[13] and also profoundly grounded in human finitude. Significantly, this very idea underpins Chesterton's thinking on what it means to critique literature. He suggests that the art of literary criticism is generally treated in two ways.[14] The first uses chronology as its primary point of departure, where one dissects literature in the same way that one would "[cut] a current cake or a Gruyère cheese, taking the currants (or the holes) as they come" (VA).[15] The second uses a thematic approach; it divides the work "as one cuts wood — along the grain" (VA). However, Chesterton notices that both approaches are mistaken if they present the writer as someone whose work is isolated from "traditions and creeds" (VA). Julia Stapleton (2009:19) observes that "literature and tradition [are] intimately linked in Chesterton's outlook". Thus, Chesterton asserts that it is "useless for the aesthete (or any other anarchist) to urge the isolated individuality of the artist, apart from his attitude to his age. His attitude to his age is his individuality: *men are never individual when alone*" (VA, emphasis added).

While much more is said on Chesterton's interpretive awareness in the pages that follow, the above quotation introduces my basic contention and the foundation of this thesis, which is that Chesterton's hermeneutics is *dramatology*. As a neologism and thus a word that Chesterton does not use himself, *dramatology* is a notion that illuminates the kind of hermeneutic strategy that seems to underpin his work. This *dramatology* is related to Danie Goosen's (2007:20) notion of "*filosofiese dramatologie*" (philosophical dramatology), which arises from a view that reality is a metaphysical drama that promotes and allows for hermeneutic continuity particularly in the face of the hermeneutic discontinuity of nihilism (Goosen 2007:10). It is a way of rethinking philosophy as a means for disrupting and dethroning those views within the landscape of modernity and postmodernity that result in the de-dramatisation of life. Any philosophy that is rooted in a sense of existential abandonment and a pervasive mystical poverty results in hermeneutic despair; but Chesterton, who pre-empts some of the problems in modernity highlighted by Goosen, is the megaphone of joy. He suggests that there is a fundamental problem rooted in a "monomania of rivalry" that causes modernist culture to be obsessed with the new instead of the eternal: "The

[13] From the German "*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstein*" (Westphal 2009:74).
[14] I recognise, of course, that the visual and the interpretation of the visual cannot be treated in exactly the same way as literary criticism or literary interpretation. Nevertheless, in keeping with Nicholas Davey's (1999:8) observations, it would be absurd to think that a "strict division" between the conceptual domain of language and the perceptual domain of the image is possible. For this reason, I am treating the interpretation of literature as something that is comparable to the interpretation of images.
[15] Where page numbers are not indicated in this thesis, this is because an unpaged electronic book is being referenced.

notion that every generation proves the last generation worthless, and is in its turn proved worthless by the next generation, is an everlasting vision of worthlessness" (in Ahlquist 2006:57). His intention, then, is to call for the restoration of a deeper sense of the value of human experience. He notices that "a good many things in the modern world ... seem ... to be dead, not to say damned, and yet are considered very spicy," and suggests that there is always a need to reclaim the true "spice of life" that can only be found in recovering the "joy of living" (ID:377-378). This recovery of joy is arguably the core value of what I am calling *Chestertonian dramatology*.

The word *dramatology* is rooted in the Greek words *drāma*,[16] referring to the singular *act* and to the plural *actions* (Schindler 2006:184), and *logos*, meaning both *word* and *discourse*. Dramatology implies a number of crucial ideas that form the basis of my application of Chesterton's worldview as a (visual) hermeneutics. It serves to draw attention to "the fact that Chesterton's hermeneutics is rooted in a dramatic understanding of the nature of being" (Reyburn 2011:61). This connection is borrowed from David C Schindler's (2005:19) assertion that drama may be thought of as *"the expression of the structure of Being"* (emphasis in original).[17] Drama is not just an analogy for being, although it clearly is this as well, but somehow describes the very nature of being.

In general, hermeneutics concentrates on language as an event of disclosure that comes from being itself (Gadamer 2004:470). This gives rise to the task of hermeneutics, which is to integrate this disclosure "into one's life" (Schmidt 2006:96). This explains the shift from hermeneutics as a methodology to hermeneutics as an experience of being. Chesterton's dramatological vision is still grounded in the centrality of being (human), but emphasises the idea that the goal is not just to integrate interpretive understanding into one's life, but to find oneself positioned within a much larger drama. For Chesterton, the self remains "more distant than any star" until it is comprehended within a bigger story (HO:257, 282). The idea of dramatology is used to stress the fact that his hermeneutics is in no way derived from or dependent upon "the hermeneutical tradition of

[16] Schindler (2006:184) observes that "the [Greek] term [*drāma*] refers more commonly to life or theatrical performance involving tension and conflict that stirs the imagination and evokes the passions". Thus, *drāma* implies both a singular action as well as the theatrical interplay of a number of words and actions; consequently, the word *drāma* holds a paradoxical tension between singularity and complexity, and between part and whole. There can be no drama without this tension. Abraham Heschel (1955:301) observes that it is "impossible to understand the significance of single acts, detached from the total character of life in which they are set. Acts are components of the whole and derive their character from the structure of the whole". Throughout this study, I use the word *drama* to mean multimodal discourse that involves the interplay of character, action, setting and narrative. I specifically treat drama as something that is viewed from the inside, where participants have access to the direction of the story without necessarily having a total perspective on the complete narrative.

[17] Schindler's contention here is rooted in his interpretation of the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar (1988:265), who observes that theatrical drama "grants us an insight, however limited, into the world's embracing horizon of meaning" thereby allowing meaning to "interject itself into the concrete world [in such a way] that unites both actor and spectator". This is to imply that for von Balthasar, and, as is my contention, for Chesterton, transcendence as that which breaks into the materiality of existence is "essential to the possibility of drama" (Schindler 2005:22). This ties in with Chesterton's observation that by insisting that God is inside man, man must always remain "inside himself. By insisting that God transcends man, man has transcended himself" (HO:340).

Continental Philosophers like Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) and should therefore, in my view, be treated as a separate discourse" (Reyburn 2011:61). While much of Chesterton's dramatology complements the hermeneutics of Gadamer that it precedes, any overlaps and similarities between their interpretive processes can be taken here as being as purely coincidental.

In addition to the above, dramatology mirrors two notions expressed by Schindler. Firstly, it refers to the use of drama as argument or discourse with reference to Schindler's (2004:587) idea of the "drama of reason," which acknowledges that much of reason involves engagement with a drama that is both in and beyond itself. This presupposes an irreducibility in the dramatic structure of being that is crucial to understanding Chesterton's perception. Cutting the entire drama down to the size of any discourse is simply not possible. To attempt to do so would be as sensible as attempting to reduce a living person to a diagram. But this does not mean that discourse about the drama should not be permitted. If anything, the immensity of the drama of being should promote more dialogue, not less. Then, secondly, dramatology deals with conventions of narrative construction like narratology, but, unlike narratology, assumes that the conventions of narrative are applicable to the "dramatic nature of life," to borrow another of Schindler's (2006:183) phrases. In other words, dramatology references the analogical relationship between life and drama, pinpointing the way that Chesterton intends his ideas to be deeply connected to rather than remote from human existence. Ralph Wood (2011:43) suggests that Chesterton is a "Liberal in [the] precise existential sense" that declares the "acquisition of truth [as] the result of effort and struggle and engagement, of mistakes and wrong turns and dead-ends — in sum, of *experience*".

I believe that Chesterton's dramatology provides a response to a particular, large-scale problem that is found in both modernity and postmodernity, namely what Robert McKee (1999:17) calls "the decline of story".[18] In Chesterton's own time, many modernists were attempting to come up with a whole range of new unified theories, thereby often usurping the story of faith presented by Christianity. These theories came in a variety of guises. Therefore, Communism, Darwinism, eugenics, fascism, liberalism and pacifism were embraced alongside the feminism of the Suffragettes, Schopenhauerian egocentrism, Nietzschean existentialism, overconfident jingoism, a renewed

[18] McKee (1999:17), far from implying a certain end to storytelling on the whole, contends that "[t]he [primary] cause for the decline of story runs very deep. Values, the positive/negative charges of life, are at the soul of our art. The writer shapes story around a perception of what's worth living for, what's worth dying for, what's foolish to pursue, the meaning of justice, truth — the essential values. In decades past, writers and society more or less agreed on these questions, but more and more ours has become an age of moral and ethical cynicism, relativism, and subjectivism — a great confusion of values. As the family disintegrates and sexual antagonisms rise, who, for example, feels he understands the nature of love? And how, if you have a conviction, do you express it to an ever skeptical audience?" (McKee 1999:17). The loss of moral value that McKee addresses here is undeniably the consequence of the modern and postmodern incredulity towards metanarrative discussed further on (Berger 2003:xii). To be clear, this thesis does not attempt to address the various complexities of modernism and postmodernism as a whole, but only seeks to hone in on this one issue, namely the distrust of metanarrative.

interest in pagan spiritualism and varied forms of syncretistic or comparative religion. Scientistic atheism, forged in the fiery false dichotomy of faith and reason, also gained prominence in the culture of this time.

Thus, ironically, the unifying theories of the time became irrevocably divisive forces, caused largely by their neglect of narrative in favour of propositional essences. The resulting fragmentation, indicated by moral, political and intellectual instability during both the Edwardian (1901-1910) and Georgian (1910-1936) ages during which Chesterton wrote, may be referred to as a kind of cultural crisis (Coates 1984; Spiers 2006). In part, this crisis arose because the utopian dream that was embodied in the ideals of British cultural imperialism resulted only in ideological discord and social-cultural disharmony.[19]

To many it was an age of comfortable optimism, but for Chesterton it was an age of misguided enthusiasm. In his view, older, truer ideas were frequently rejected in favour of newer, weaker ideas. He explains that the upshot of "modern thinking" is found in that people invent new ideals, because they "dare not attempt old ideals. They look forward with enthusiasm, because they are afraid to look back" (WW:30). Here, Chesterton infers that a central problem with modernism is not merely the prevalence of a plurality of ideas and philosophies, but with the absence of a larger, more human story to give such ideas a suitable context. Owing to a frenzy of fads, fashions and a cultural obsession with the new in the wake of the industrial revolution, a sense of the historical backdrop or context of human understanding seemed to have been misplaced. This fits with the observation that modernism rejects history in favour of differentiation (Berger 2003:x). In addition to this, Chesterton contends that the problem of modernity is that "minor innovations [break] out all over the place" without ever properly tackling the "root and reason of anything" (IS:350). Modernity "is mimicry; it does not see the deeper difficulties in the things it adopts or spreads; it does not grasp their disadvantages or even their real advantages" (IS:350).

As the spectre of modernism, postmodernism also has its fair share of ideological discord and socio-cultural disharmony. The philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (2003:259-260) suggests that the postmodern condition, if explained via an oversimplification, is that which resents and even rejects

[19] The diversity of ideas and worldviews that were prevalent during this cultural crisis are reflective of the *Zeitgeist* of progress and freethinking that was so dominant in the post-Victorian era. Drawing from the impetus of the industrial and highly industrious Victorian era (1837-1901), it was a period in which the upper echelons of British society were supremely self-confident in their colonial accomplishments. It was the opinion of British aristocrats at the time that there had never been a greater empire in the history of humankind. They even had a slogan to support their arrogance, namely the claim that the "sun never sets on the British empire" (McGrath 2004:257). Chesterton was highly critical of this imperialism, stating the following, for instance: "To Imperialism in the light political sense ... my only objection is that it is an illusion of comfort; that an Empire whose heart is failing should be especially proud of its extremities is to me no more sublime a fact than that an old dandy whose brain is gone should still be proud of his legs (WW:66).

metanarratives in favour of multiple smaller narratives.[20] However, James KA Smith (2006:64) notices that a "bumper-sticker reading" of Lyotard's conception of postmodernism has lead many to believe that he is speaking of "grand, epic narratives (*grand reçits*) that tell an over-arching tale about the world". Such a bumper-sticker reading is found in Andrea Branzi's (1986:25) suggestion that a "disintegration of the legitimizing Great Tales" results in innumerable opposite poles, which in turn result in the loss of purpose in favour of chance and luck, leading to a state of being in which coincidence replaces significance.[21] But what Lyotard is offering, as Chesterton would probably agree, is that such opposite poles are precisely the result of legitimising metanarratives. A similar (mis)reading is provided by Slavoj Žižek (2008:1) when he claims that that in the postmodern era, "although the ideological scene is fragmented into a panoply of positions which struggle for hegemony, there is an underlying consensus: the era of big explanations is over".

The problem with such readings of Lyotard's idea is that they are inherently self-defeating and even self-negating. To suggest the end of metanarratives in such a way is to assume a new legitimising metanarrative, albeit a negative one, namely that the distrust of metanarratives has become the new metanarrative. In the same way, suggesting that the age of 'big explanations' is over is to offer a new big explanation, namely that there is no big explanation. And, whatever Lyotard's postmodernism may be, it certainly cannot be an outright attack on reason, especially in that it is presented by means of the tools of reason. If anything, it is that which is hyper-aware of the limitations of reason, and it therefore considers where reason, when taken as absolute, has failed.

A misreading of Lyotard assumes that it is large-scale stories, such as the narrative in the Christian scriptures, that postmodernism opposes. But this is not necessarily what Lyotard is saying. He is not referring to the scope of narratives, but to the nature of the claims made by such totalising schemas, especially in the arenas of scientific discovery and rationality. Put differently, "the problem isn't the stories they tell, but the way they tell them (and, to a degree, why they tell them)" (Smith 2006:64). Thus, Lyotard offers that postmodernism provides a fresh perspective on modernism's absolutist stance on the legitimating role of rationality, but without necessarily propagating absolute irrationality as an alternative. He is therefore echoing Gadamer's concerns about the employment of scientific approaches to the human sciences. Moreover, his postmodernism still contends for the vital importance of story as a means for people to travel beyond the narrowness of

[20] I am not in any way suggesting that modernism and postmodernism are merely opposites or that the array of discourses embedded in these broad periods of time can be reduced to a neat definition. My focus remains solely on the distrust of metanarrative, as well as the way that Chesterton's dramatology speaks into this distrust.

[21] This contention is echoed in the way that postmodernism, at least as it is sometimes outlined, is constantly caught up in a frenzy of looking back through the lenses of eclecticism, nostalgia, quotation, pastiche and parody (Jameson 1991:16,20,141; Lyotard 1984:76). However, these lenses divorce meaning from context, resulting in what Frederic Jameson (1991:25) calls a "crisis in historicity": an incoherent experience of spatial and temporal logic. Again, as in the modernism of Chesterton's day, meaning is de-dramatised and therefore frequently divorced from context.

egotism towards other possibilities of being. For example, Lyotard (2003:260) especially acknowledges the inescapability of narrative in the process of cultural formation and the transmission of tradition. This relates to Alasdair McIntyre's (2003:557) observation that "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth".[22] McIntyre (2003:557) argues that there is "no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources".[23] This recalls Kenneth Burke's (1973:293) idea that stories may be thought of as equipment for living. Any critique of metanarrative, then, is merely there to problematise any appeal to universal reason apart from the central importance of human relationships. If anything, it emphasises the need for the very same intersubjective discourse that is promoted by story over the hegemony of metanarrative. In the light of this, Richard Kearney (2002:11) suggests that postmodernism "does not spell the end of story but the opening up of alternative possibilities of narration".

While Chesterton may provide fuel for Lyotard's conception of postmodernism as a critique of modernism, especially in his emphasis on the importance of story, it would be a mistake to suggest that he is necessarily a postmodernist, especially if postmodernism is understood as being primarily anti-religious, cynical, nihilistic, pessimistic, sceptical, solipsistic and allergic to depth (Baudrillard 1994:2; Bywater 2004:236; Eagleton 2003:191; Manicas 1998:316; Taylor 1987:6). Moreover, if postmodernism is characterised by what Frederic Jameson (1991:25) calls a "crisis in historicity" — an incoherent experience of spatial and temporal logic (Derrida & Ferraris 2002:6) — then Chesterton would want nothing to do with it. It would be more accurate to call him a number of other things, including, perhaps, a medievalist or a romantic. But it is my view that he is better referred to as a dramatologist, as a reader who wants to find his place within a larger drama. His dramatology is one that pronounces the Fall to modernism, but also the distinct possibility of redemption. Even when he critiques the failings of his era, he does so with a strong sense of how to improve things. In his view, after all, it does not help to simply tell people "what is wrong" without pointing to "what is right" (WW:17). For him, there can be no drama, no story, without a sense of moral purpose.

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[22] This quotation, with its use of *man* to represent *human beings*, as well as its use of *his* and *he,* introduces a particular usage that is maintained throughout this thesis. To avoid constructions that distract the reader's eye (as in the case of the annoying alteration of *she* and *her* with *he* and *him*, the monotonous *he and/or she* and *him and/or her*, the cumbersome *s/he* and *her/him*, as well as the grammatically incorrect use of *they* and *them* as neuter pronouns), I have chosen to stick to the nonexclusive use of *man* with the pronouns *he, him* and *his*. This decision is simply intended to keep with Chesterton's usage and is in no way meant to incite a riot on such an issue as the problematic nature of gender biases in language.

[23] Narratologist Mieke Bal (1985:220) observes that while not everything can be called narrative, "practically everything in culture has a narrative aspect to it". Narrative is not only confined to literature or storytelling in the traditional sense, but a means for examining any object, process or a line of reasoning and its place among other cultural and cognitive processes. Moreover, Bal (1985:222) suggests that narrative, and the examination thereof, is a useful means for "uncovering cultural attitudes".

By placing moral purpose at the heart of his work, Chesterton's philosophy almost always takes on a narrative form. Even his most philosophical discourses have the characteristics of narrative. Chesterton does not merely expound or analyse ideas, he tells a story. Alison Milbank (2009a:11) observes that in Chesterton's eyes "everything is waving madly at us to indicate its divine origin and its storied character". This parallels Dorothy Sayers' (1952:9) contention that "his gift was naturally dramatic". However, as I aim to demonstrate in this study, Chesterton's mindfulness of narrative is at once orthodox and anarchic; it affirms the power of story as a unifying agent while simultaneously challenging the hegemonic rule of metanarrative. In other words, it manages to avoid the violence of dialectics as well as the reign of difference, both of which, as John Milbank (2009b:112) notes, are "bound in the same set of modern assumptions". Milbank (2009b:112) argues that "[t]he alternative to both is *paradox* — which one can also name 'analogy,' 'real relation,' 'realism' (regarding universals), or (after William Desmond) the 'metaxological'".[24] It is this way of reading, with paradox at its centre, that Chesterton's work represents. His dramatology creates a subtle interplay between indeterminacy and determination and between mystery and revelation that I believe invites further study and dialogue.

1.2 Aim, objectives and outline of the study

Bearing the above in mind, therefore, it is the aim of this study to present an overview, explanation (in Part One: Dramatological structure) and application (in Part Two: Dramatological application) of Chesterton's dramatology within the context of visual culture studies and visual hermeneutics. This is intended to represent Chesterton's desire for the retrieval of a clear view as being applicable to a reading of the visual today. A few argumentative objectives may be set out to fulfil this aim. In the first place, I provide a foundation to Chesterton's dramatology: an overview of his philosophy via a discussion about his cosmology, epistemology and ontology. This is tackled in Chapter Two with reference to his play *The surprise,* which acts as an analogy for the relationship between the unseen Creator God and his visible creation, as well as the consequences of this relationship for what it means to understand the drama of being. Obviously, the picture presented in this chapter stresses the way that Chesterton grounds his own opinions in a particular worldview, that of a specific understanding of Catholic theology.

[24] As can be seen in Chapter Four, while I do treat paradox as something that is most certainly related to analogy, I do not regard paradox and analogy as synonyms in the same way that Milbank does here.

With this basic foundation in place, the second objective of this study is to answer the question of what Chesterton's primary dramatological task is. This objective is tackled in Chapter Three under the assumption that for Chesterton's dramatology to be taken as a coherent whole, one clear point of departure and arrival needs to be pinpointed. While the second chapter grounds Chesterton's thinking in theology, this third chapter argues that he plays the part of a moral philosopher — an ethicist deeply shaped by his orthodoxy. The third objective of this study, which is addressed in Chapter Four, is to examine his rhetorical strategies as the elements by which he manages to present his philosophy as a unifying, but not totalising narrative. The fourth and final objective is to apply my own understanding of Chesterton's dramatology to a particular visual text. This objective is undertaken in Part Two of this study, in Chapters Five and Six, where I offer an analysis of Terrence Malick's film *The tree of life* (2011). The study ends in Chapter Seven with a summary of chapters, an outline of the contributions of the study, limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

1.3 Literature review

As noted above, it is no small task to tackle Chesterton's oeuvre in order to illuminate the nature and relevance of his dramatology. His work does not fall within any specific genre, nor does it stick to any particular subject. As both a help and a hindrance to this task, a great deal of secondary literature exists on Chesterton, a fact that is unsurprising considering the personality of the man and the prodigiousness of his work. Not all available literature is mentioned here, although an attempt has been made to indicate those works that are regarded widely to be of particular significance in contemporary Chesterton scholarship.

By far the largest number of books on Chesterton are biographical, including (in chronological order) Maisie Ward's *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (1943), still widely regarded as an unsurpassed work, Dudley Barker's *GK Chesterton: A biography* (1973), Alzina Stone Dale's *The outline of sanity: A biography of GK Chesterton* (1982), Michael Ffinch's *GK Chesterton* (1986), Michael Coren's *Gilbert: the man who was GK Chesterton* (1990), Joseph Pearce's *Wisdom and innocence: A life of GK Chesterton* (1996), Dale Ahlquist's *GK Chesterton: The apostle of common sense* (2003), William Oddie's *Chesterton and the romance of orthodoxy: the making of GKC (1874-1908)* (2008), and Ian Ker's formidable contribution, *GK Chesterton* (2011). There are many other biographies available on Chesterton, such as WR Titterton's personal reflection on his friend in *GK Chesterton: a portrait* (1936) and Kevin Belmonte's *Defiant joy: The remarkable life and impact of GK Chesterton* (2010),

but the ones mentioned above are the best both in terms of scholarship and scope. While these biographies do manage somewhat to bridge the divide between Chesterton and his work, I have made no attempt to do the same in this study. While I have taken fair heed of the cultural and historical climate in which Chesterton lived, I have in no way desired to digress into the sort of hermeneutic psychologism that tries to make sense of an author's work by reconstructing his persona. There can be no doubt that Chesterton was a witty and jovial character, and even that there is a deep connection between his work and his persona, as is observed by Hilaire Belloc (1940), but my focus in this study remains on his witty and jovial writings. I am following Chesterton's lead here. He writes on one occasion that it is more sensible to engage in "such superfluous trifling as the reading of [Shakespeare's] literary works," which we have access to, than to study Shakespeare as an actor, to whom we have no access (ID:149).

In addition to the various biographies on Chesterton, a number of works have been produced that attempt to wrestle critically with his writings, including the essay by Belloc (1940) and books by Cecil Chesterton (1908),[25] Julius West (1915), Hugh Kenner (1948), Christopher Hollis (1970), JD Coates (1984), SL Jaki (1986), Mark Knight (2000; 2004), Vigen Guroian (2005), Donald Williams (2006) and Julia Stapleton (2009).[26] Hugh Kenner's *Paradox in Chesterton* is particularly important for the present study in that it makes an attempt to engage with some of the philosophical implications and foundations of Chesterton's work. Then, a few recent books are particularly noteworthy for this study. James Schall's *Schall on Chesterton: Timely essays on timeless paradoxes* (2000) is a collection of essays inspired by Chesterton's essays. In dealing with Chesterton's work thematically, it is, as the author explains, the result of "[allowing] Chesterton to let me think" (Schall 2000:ix). This idea is reflected in the present study in that it also presents thinking guided by Chesterton. Stephen Clark's *GK Chesterton: thinking backward, looking forward* (2006) examines the influence of Chesterton's ideas on science fiction writing over the last hundred years. It outlines some of the central themes of Chesterton's fiction, but it does not connect these themes to a wider view of Chesterton's interpretive perception. Dale Ahlquist's *Common sense 101: Lessons from GK Chesterton* (2006) offers the reader a chance to "[look] at the whole world through [Chesterton's] eyes" (Ahlquist 2006:9). It is not, as he explains, a book about Chesterton, but a book about "everything else from a Chestertonian perspective" (Ahlquist 2006:9). It therefore, to an extent, precedes my own inquiry into Chesterton's dramatology. In a similar manner to Schall and Clark,

[25] The authorship of *GK Chesterton: A criticism* has been attributed to Cecil Chesterton and cannot therefore be considered with any kind of absolute certainty.
[26] Stapleton's (2009:3) book *Christianity, patriotism, and nationhood* is particularly significant for the way that it addresses the importance of Chesterton as a "political 'myth-maker,' a teller of persuasive stories at the center of which was the English nation" — a subject that is neglected in other Chesterton scholarship. Stapleton (2009:3) also emphasises the fact that Chesterton is not interested in myth-making that pretends to be objective or is in any way "unhistorical". This is a helpful insight for coming to terms with Chesterton's dramatology.

Ahlquist tackles Chesterton's work thematically. While such an approach is helpful and perhaps even inescapable, rather than treating Chesterton's work primarily thematically, my aim has been to examine his work in terms of its overarching narrative and hermeneutics. If thematic considerations come into play here, it is because they contribute to understanding the shape of his interpretive lens.

Alison Milbank's *Chesterton and Tolkien as theologians* (2009) masterfully accounts for the correlations between the theological standpoints of Chesterton and JRR Tolkien, and does both writers the favour of staying true to their literary roots. Milbank's book, with its focus on the way that literary considerations exemplify and dramatise theological meaning, is particularly significant for how it expounds the implications of Chesterton's views on fiction and reality, and stresses the importance of his use of defamiliarisation. Then, Aidan Nichols' *GK Chesterton, theologian* (2009) examines the nuances of Chesterton's theological stance. It provides an excellent introduction to what Nichols (2009:55) calls Chesterton's "metaphysical realism". Finally, Ralph Wood's *Chesterton: The nightmare goodness of God* (2011) presents a simple but potent thesis, namely that "Chesterton makes his deepest affirmations about God and man and the world in the face of nightmarish unbelief — the abiding fear that God's seemingly wondrous universe is, instead, devoid of divinity, that it is in fact a well-populated Hell unrecognized as such" (Wood 2011:2). Wood acknowledges the prevailing lighter side of Chesterton, but argues that the majority of his work is the result of conflict. This is indisputable. In many ways, Chesterton can be seen as a man at war with his time; a man who presented everything as a cure for nihilism, reality as an antidote to illusion, awareness as a solution to nightmare, and sanity as a remedy for despair (Medcalf 2004:1).

Other authors are referred to here who engage with Chesterton's thought even if only in passing. These writers include Mark Armitage (2007), Robert Farrar Capon (1990; 1995; 1997; 2004), William Desmond (1995; 2003), and Marshall McLuhan (1939; 1948), as well as authors of various introductions and postscripts to republications of books by Chesterton. Authors like David Bentley Hart (2004) and Evelyn Underhill (2005) are referred to here only because of particular conceptual overlaps with Chesterton's work. I have also elected to focus in particular on the work of Slavoj Žižek, whose writings are regarded as being of some importance for visual culture studies. He makes references to Chesterton particularly in his books *The puppet and the dwarf* (2003), *In defense of lost causes* (2008), *The fragile absolute* (2009), *Violence* (2009), and his collaborative books *The monstrosity of Christ* (2009), which also has contributions by Creston Davis and John Milbank, and *God in pain* (2012), which includes additional essays by Boris Gunjević. However, as Milbank (2009b:124) rightly points out, Žižek does occasionally misinterpret Chesterton. Nevertheless, his engagement with Chesterton's work is helpful for demonstrating how a dialectical, Hegelian reading of Chesterton can undermine the more paradoxical nature of his dramatological vision.

Then, with regard to writings that take Chesterton as a thinker whose works may be applicable to the study of visual culture, I seem to be in dialogue with only myself at this point. My own MA dissertation *Heroism in the* Matrix: *An interpretation of Neo's heroism through the philosophies of Nietzsche and Chesterton* (Reyburn 2007) deals at length with Chesterton's views on the ethics of heroism as apposed to the views of the German philosopher Frederich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Having now come to a more nuanced understanding Chesterton's work and ethos, I could probably write a fairly lengthy and scathing critique on this older work, but I would rather gratefully acknowledge that an understanding of Chesterton's work would not have been possible apart from this earlier study. I have also recently offered two minor contributions to peer-reviewed scholarship on Chesterton in visual culture studies in the form of an article, *Chesterton's ontology and the ethics of speculation* (2011) and a chapter, *The death of the feminine and the homelessness of man: A Chestertonian perspective on* Shutter Island *(2010) and* Inception *(2010),* in a book edited by Juliana Claassens and Stella Viljoen called *Sacred selves: essays on gender, religion and popular culture* (2012). In many ways, this thesis forms the context for these contributions and acts as the point of departure for what I hope will be a number of fruitful possibilities for further study.

However, ultimately, my primary source remains the work of Chesterton himself. While taking the wider corpus of his work into consideration, the following study refers to *The defendant* (1901), *Twelve types* (1902), *Robert Browning* (1903), *The Blatchford controversies* (1904), *GF Watts* (1904), *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904), *The Club of Queer Trades* (1905), *Heretics* (1905), *Charles Dickens* (1906),[27] *The man who was Thursday* (1907), *All things considered* (1908), *Orthodoxy* (1908), *Tremendous Trifles* (1909), *George Bernard Shaw* (1909), *The ball and the cross* (1910), *William Blake* (1910), *Alarms and discursions* (1910), *What's wrong with the world* (1910), *Appreciation and criticism of the works of Charles Dickens* (1911), *The innocence of Father Brown* (1911), *A miscellany of men* (1912), *Manalive* (1912), *The Victorian age in literature* (1913), *Magic* (1913), *The flying inn* (1914), *The wisdom of Father Brown* (1914), *The appetite for tyranny* (1915), *The crimes of England* (1915), *Utopia for Usurers* (1917), *A short history of England* (1917), *Irish impressions* (1919), *The superstition of divorce* (1920), *The new Jerusalem* (1920), *Eugenics and other evils* (1922), *What I saw in America* (1922), *The man who knew too much* (1922), *St Francis of Assisi* (1923), *William Cobbett* (1925), *The everlasting man* (1925), *The outline of sanity* (1926), *The incredulity of Father Brown* (1926), *The Catholic Church and conversion* (1927), *Robert Louis Stevenson* (1927), *The secret of Father Brown* (1927), *The return of Don Quixote* (1927), *The poet and the lunatics* (1929), *The thing: why I am*

[27] This biography on Dickens was considered by TS Eliot and Peter Ackroyd, among others, to be the "best book on Dickens ever written" (Ahlquist 2006:286). It was responsible, in part, for reviving interest in Dickens' works, both on popular and scholarly levels.

Catholic (1929), *Christendom in Dublin* (1932), *St Thomas Aquinas* (1933), *The well and the shallows* (1935), *The scandal of Father Brown* (1935), *The way of the cross* (1935), *Autobiography* (1936), and posthumously published books *The end of the armistice* (1940), *The common man* (1950) and *The surprise* (1952). I also refer to collections of essays, such as the *Illustrated London News* collections, as well as *In defense of sanity: the best essays of GK Chesterton* (2011).

Unfortunately, I have not been able to access some of Chesterton's work, especially some of his essays. This limitation, however, is has not been a hindrance to the present study. To be clear, I am not aiming to do the impossible by trying to represent everything that Chesterton has ever written. This, then, is more a slice of Gruyère cheese, holes and all, than it is a study along the grain, to borrow Chesterton's metaphor (VA). Instead, I am simply trying to present, with as much precision and argumentative dexterity as is possible in a qualitative study, my own hermeneutic interpretation of Chesterton's work. In essence, I am more concerned with the makeup of Chesterton's thinking than with the specifics of his particular opinions on all things, although his opinions on many things do come into play in the pages that follow. In all of the literature to date, there is none that explicitly suggests that Chesterton's approach is a kind of hermeneutics, nor is there a discourse that suggests that Chesterton's writings may be illuminating to visual culture studies. Therefore, it is to such discussions that this study aims to spark conversation and also offer a contribution.

Then, as noted above, the visual text to be discussed via Chesterton's dramatology is Terrence Malick's *The tree of life* (2011). While I have taken various opinions and debates surrounding this unique film into consideration in preliminary research, I have chosen in the end to isolate the film from those debates mainly for the sake of keeping a sharper focus. After all, the goal here is to argue for a Chestertonian reading, not for an amalgamation of such a reading with an array of other opinions. In the end, the only text referred to as a means to guide the reading of this piece of contemporary cinema is Malick's (2007) original screenplay for the film. However, since the final film does deviate somewhat from the original screenplay, only those parts in the screenplay that illuminate what we actually see are considered. While I have discovered, through sideline research, that Chestertonian dramatology does have applicability to other visual texts, *The tree of life* was chosen mainly because of the way that it echoes and complements Chesterton's interpretive outlook. As a richly layered and sometimes ambiguous cinematic drama, it invites a variety of interpretations. This makes it ideal for a Chestertonian reading. To explain why a Chestertonian reading of any film is of any value, this study is situated within the discourse of visual culture studies.

1.4 Theoretical paradigm and research philosophy

We live in an era that may be referred to as "ocularcentric" in that it is "dominated" by the visual sense (Jay 1993:3). Many shifts in media and culture, too many to discuss in any detail here, have brought about this ocularcentrism. Nicholas Mirzoeff (1999:1) argues that human beings are more affected by visual media in the electronic age than they have been in any previous age. However, inasmuch as this gives rise to a "wealth of visual experiences," it does not necessarily produce an equal wealth of ways to comprehend such experiences (Mirzoeff 1999:3). The fairly new discipline of visual culture studies seeks to counteract possible misunderstandings of this wealth of visual experiences, as Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell (1999:viii) suggest, by proposing various ways to investigate the complex "textures of visual experience" that are embodied in an array of "historical, political, cultural and technological mediations of visual human perception". This investigation is carried out "in the context of a more 'holistic' and 'reflexive' theory of the human condition" (Heywood & Sandywell 1999:viii). The fundamental aim of visual culture studies is therefore to provide insights into how visuality contributes to a broader understanding of our human reality.

Visual culture studies exists to bridge the gap between representation and reality, between meaning and context, and between experience and understanding. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000:14) writes that "[v]isual culture ... examines the act of seeing as a product of the tensions between external images or objects, and internal thought processes". It accepts that images present messages that originate from particular frameworks in order to communicate with specific exterior realities (Mirzoeff 1999:7). However, it also stresses that the act of perceiving is an act of influencing what is perceived by means of one's own subjectivity. Thus, the physical or virtual visual object must be considered as something that is in dialogue with the thoughts, worldviews and emotions of the spectator. Inasmuch as "men are never individual [even] when alone," so no image is really ever isolated from the playing field in which it may be found (VA). Meaning is only meaning within a context.

Visual culture takes place within a drama; that is, within what Kearney (2002:9) calls the "presentation" or manifestation "of action". Therefore, as crucial as dialogue is to understanding Chesterton's dramatology, it is just as important for understanding visual culture studies, which is a "multidisciplinary enterprise formed as a consequence of a convergence of ... a variety of disciplines" (Chaplin & Walker 1997:1). It is a field of study that engages with other fields of study, such as anthropology, archeology, art criticism, cultural studies, design history, film studies, linguistics, literary criticism, Marxism, media studies, philosophy, semiotics and structuralism (Chaplin & Walker 1997:3; Mirzoeff 1999:4). This list reveals that there has been a bias against or perhaps an indifference towards employing theological reflection in visual culture studies, but by considering

Chesterton's work, it becomes clear that this bias cannot be satisfied here. However, I am only interested in Chesterton's theology insofar as it affects and informs his interpretive lens. For better or worse, debates about his truth claims or the place of his theology within a larger theological discourse, such as those attempted by Nichols (2009) and Wood (2011), must be reserved for a different platform.

If a theoretical paradigm may be defined as that which guides the ordering of statements, then visual studies as a comparative paradigm is adopted for this study. This is particularly appropriate in that the ordering of statements here is geared towards the analogical relationship between a discourse and an example (Agamben 2009:18). To provide an example, as I do in the form of an application of Chesterton's dramatology to the text of *The tree of life,* is an involved process by which the ordinary context of Chesterton's work is given new life and a fresh perspective. This does not mean that the original context and meaning is deactivated or discarded, but rather implies that the original context is expanded to offer new shades and tints of meaning. The fact that Chesterton's work is brought into conversation with the paradigm of visual culture studies emphasises the fact that this paradigm ought not to be taken as given, static and immovable. Rather, with its ethos of hospitality towards the interaction of different disciplines, it is always something involved in a dance of becoming. The paradigm itself is a creative, generative process of interpretation, re-interpretation and self-reflection. By placing Chesterton's writings alongside a cinematic text and within the framework of visual culture studies, something new is exposed that resonates with what has been previously known.

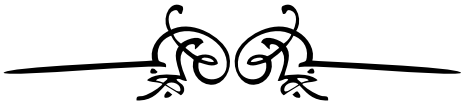
The paradigm of visual culture studies works in concert with the impetus of philosophical (visual) hermeneutics, which acts as the primary philosophical paradigm for this study, first with regard to the interpretation of the structure of Chesterton's dramatology in Part One and then, in Part Two, with regard to a dramatological analysis of *The tree of life*. One basic hermeneutical principle has guided this research process, namely the prioritisation of Chesterton's writings above secondary literature. I recognise and even applaud the fact that a completely objective reading of Chesterton would be impossible, and even undesirable, and that any interpretation or quotation of his work would, in terms of deconstruction, be a misquotation and a misinterpretation. Chesterton himself was sceptical of so-called impartiality, because he recognised that "[e]xperience and imagination and well-grounded conviction are required for discerning the real" (Wood 2011:4). Yet, I have followed the above core principle by trying to ensure that Chesterton's hermeneutics remains, at the very least, internally consistent. This is to say that I have let Chesterton's writings act as main

instruments by which his other writings are interpreted even while recognising that what follows remains my own subjective reading.[28]

I have therefore taken Gadamer's (2004:298) call for a considered suspension of prejudices very seriously as a guide for interpretive practice. Gadamer (2004:298) argues that this suspension of prejudices "has the logical structure of a question" and that "the essence of the question is to open up possibilities and keep them open". Visual hermeneutics follows this advice in its stress upon opening and extending rather than reducing and closing meaning (Heywood & Sandywell 1999:x). Understanding, after all, is not "what we aim at, it is what we do" (Davey 1999:5). This study, therefore, is not principally a criticism of Chesterton's writings. It is more concerned with the thoughts that underpin his dramatology than with whether or not his interpretive outlook ought to be adopted, discarded or changed. Therefore, even where my stance has differed from Chesterton's, I have attempted to let his opinions carry far more weight than my own and those of other writers.

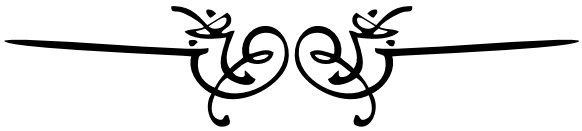
As shown above, there is a great deal that has been and is being written on Chesterton and his work. Therefore, this study is simply the addition of one voice to a much larger ongoing conversation. For this reason, while the title of this thesis — *Chestertonian dramatology* — suggests a new discourse, both with regard to visual culture studies and to Chesterton's work, an invisible subtitle — *An introduction* — may be added to clarify that this is really only the beginning.

[28] William Griffin (2003:31) explains that it is "safe to say" that Chesterton's work is open to multiple different interpretations, especially since it is so richly layered, literally, allegorically, morally and analogically. Griffin (2003:31) pinpoints three dimensions of Chesterton's work, namely "Paradoxy, Hilarity, and Humility" in his own interpretation, explaining that "[t]hese are three, but certainly not all, of the hallmarks of his writing," as well as "the three highlights of his spirituality". While Griffin's approach is certainly valid and even helpful, it is not the approach that I have taken, simply because, to me, it restricts his horizon of understanding more than is useful for gaining insight into his interpretive lens. I am sure that others will find other faults with my approach, but it is the approach I have taken nonetheless.



PART ONE

DRAMATOLOGICAL STRUCTURE



CHAPTER TWO

THE FOUNDATION OF CHESTERTON'S DRAMATOLOGY

2.1 Introduction to Chapter Two

AL Maycock (1963:79) points out that "[t]he difficulty in trying to write anything about Chesterton is that there is so much of him. Any sentence that one writes about him could be expanded into a paragraph; any paragraph into an essay; and any essay into a book". In short, Chesterton deals in big ideas and any attempt to present a neat summary of his thought through essentialised reductionisms can only fail to capture the many subtleties and nuances of his expansive philosophy. A further difficulty in trying to write about Chesterton's work lies in deciding upon a suitable point of entry for introducing the larger context within which Chesterton understands the place of people in the world. It has already been noted that Chesterton paints his ideas in detailed pictures rather than simplistic patterns or diagrams and, as Patrick Baybrooke (1922) suggests, is often deliberately obscure in his complexity. With this in mind, and in agreement with Aidan Nichols (2009), Alison Milbank (2009a) and Ralph Wood (2011) among others, I have decided to present Chesterton's ideas within a theological framework, since I believe that it best reflects his own sensibilities. After all, while Chesterton's work covers innumerable subjects and literary genres, it always somehow includes his own interest in Christian orthodoxy (Maycock 1963:46).

One of the critiques of Chesterton's work has been his tendency to drag religion into everything (Clark 2006:174). It is an odd critique, because it seems that it was hardly ever Chesterton's aim to do anything else. He is clear on the fact that any reference to someone's work should emphasise what he most values, and it seems obvious that what he most values is the relationship of his own faith and convictions to the world he encounters (ST:192).[1] He therefore strongly defends his use of propaganda in his work: "Personally, I am all for propaganda, and a great deal of what I write is deliberately propagandist. But even when it is not in the least propagandist, it will probably be full of

[1] Chesterton uses the example of writing a biography of a saint "without God" as being about the same as writing about the Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen without once mentioning his most important work, namely his expedition to reach the North Pole (ST:192).

the implications of my own religion, because that is what is meant by having a religion" (TH:56).[2] Obviously, one of the implications of his religion worth discussing is the way that it guides interpretive understanding. As I have already mentioned, however, this study does not concern Chesterton's place in history as a theologian among theologians; nor does it deal with the reliability or doctrinal specifics of his theological claims. I am simply interested in the ideas that he writes about and the implications that these ideas would have on interpretive experience. In other words, it is not my intention to debate the literal or allegorical correctness of Chesterton's ideas as they relate to a larger historical, theological or philosophical framework, but rather to examine the reasonable implications of his worldview on his dramatology.

The central aim of this study is to examine this dramatology, which is the name I give to Chesterton's "dramaturgical hermeneutics" (Reyburn 2011:51). The goal of this particular chapter is to provide the foundation required for achieving that aim. Consequently, I have chosen to begin by highlighting and explaining three particular facets of Chesterton's philosophy, namely his cosmology, epistemology and ontology. Each of these facets has a dramatic relationship with the other facets in that they overlap, intertwine and inform each other, thereby revealing Chesterton's recognition of his own horizon of understanding. My primary reason for examining each of these as distinct is to demonstrate that they operate in conversation with one another; the parts are presented only so that the whole may be better understood. Moreover, each of the facets of Chesterton's philosophy are dramatic within their own structures. His cosmology sees the universe as a drama, his epistemology considers human understanding in relation to this cosmological drama, and his ontology understands being as a dramatic event around, through and within a larger drama. In other words, being has a dramatic, metareferential relationship to Being.[3] The result of this picture of Chesterton's philosophy is that interpretation itself may be understood as a dramatic process that is part of the very drama that it seeks to interpret.

[2] In Chesterton's day, the word *propaganda* carried a less pejorative connotation than it does today in that it simply referred to the dissemination of information. Chesterton answers his critics by noting that his aim is to examine his own assumptions instead of relying on the "ready-made assumptions of the hour" (TH:56). In particular, he notes that no matter what the bias or dogmas of a writer may be, they will inevitably find their way into his stories (TH:56). The point, then, is not that it is bad or good for propaganda to be used, but rather how it is used and whether or not the writer is aware of his own use of it.

[3] When I refer to Being, I am specifically accounting for the Being of the God that Chesterton writes about. Being with a lowercase 'b' refers to all other being. I am therefore following the form adopted by Kenner (1948:34). As an aside, Chesterton finds the word *being* to be a somewhat weak, cloudy word in English (ST:140). I have stuck to using this word simply for want of a suitable alternative.

2.2 Chesterton's cosmology

Chesterton's love for drama is evident in a number of obvious ways in his life and especially in the fact that he attended, acted in and wrote for theatre (AU:276-279; Ker 2011:342). However, it is not only in this literal sense that he is fond of drama, for he sees drama as a metaphor for the whole of life (WW:129). From his perspective, life is not a random collection of accidents, coincidences and indecipherable illogicalities, but a coherent drama full of meaning. It is, as this whole study suggests, something to be read, interpreted and responded to. This sense of the ubiquity of meaning deeply affects Chesterton's philosophical approach, which I take here to include his theological cosmology, epistemology, and ontology. All of these are interwoven to inform his dramatology.

Chesterton's conviction that life itself is a drama is rooted in his understanding that everything and everyone is an actor or agent in a theatrical production initiated by the Divine Playwright: "God had written ... a play; a play he had planned as perfect, but which had necessarily been left to human actors and stage-managers, who had since made a great mess of it" (HO:282).[4] This statement is in fact taken as the premise for Chesterton's posthumously published play *The surprise* (1952); and, as simple as it may first appear, it coherently presents three key ideas that I take to be foundational to Chesterton's worldview. Thus, below it is my aim to exegete this statement in relation to Chesterton's cosmology.[5] In doing so I am following Nichols' (2009:57) lead since he argues that Chesterton's metaphysical realism is directly linked to the doctrine of creation, which I consider under three themes — the Creator, Creation and the Fall, and re-creation — with reference to *The surprise* and with the wider framework of Chesterton's philosophy in mind. Following this exegesis, I unpack how this cosmology forms the basis of Chesterton's epistemology and his ontology.

2.2.1 The Creator

Chesterton's dramatic cosmology begins with "God ..." (HO:282). He writes that no one is able to understand his own Catholic philosophy apart from the realisation that "a fundamental part of it is entirely the praise of Life, the praise of Being, the praise of God as the Creator of the World. Everything else follows a long way after that ..." (ST:98). Naturally, Chesterton is referring to a very specific "personal God" as encountered and understood in the historic, orthodox Christian tradition (HO:347). He recognises this God as "the highest truth of the cosmos" (HO:389), implying that truth is directly related to the personality of this God and to those who bear his image. This is to say

[4] Chesterton's notion of the dramatic nature of life does somewhat reflect Shakespeare's (2001:173) idea that "[a]ll the world's a stage, and the men and women merely players". I would argue, however, that Chesterton holds human beings in far higher regard than Shakespeare does. Men and woman are not 'merely' anything, but the very centre of the drama of creation.

[5] *Cosmology*, as a metaphysical branch of philosophy that speculates on reasons why this world exists as it does, may be contrasted with *cosmogony*, which tends to speculate on how, physically, creation happened (Capon 2004:8). Chesterton aligns himself with what he calls "Christian cosmology" as a more rational explanation of the nature and state of the universe than any purely materialist doctrine (HO:330,347).

that truth is not bound up in mere propositions, but in the very person of God. It is clear that while other traditions present similar conceptions of the nature of God as the Supreme Being, as in the cases of Allah and Brahma for instance, Chesterton's God is not entirely like these. Chesterton acknowledges that the word *God* "is by its nature a name of mystery" (EM:24), and yet this mystery is not entirely inaccessible or incomprehensible . Thus, God may be understood as the originator and sustainer of all things, but he is first and foremost the Creator. Chesterton writes that "[t]here is no greater thing to be said of God Himself than that He makes things" (AU:51).

At the forefront of Chesterton's mind is his understanding that the Creator God is, in his very nature, good. He is certainly not like the vindictive, lightning-bolt hurling, tantrum-throwing Jupiter that inhabits some ancient superstitions (EM:117). Because of this understanding of the nature of God, Chesterton presents his readers with a cosmological perspective that places goodness both at the centre and the circumference of the created order. In fact, it is precisely the presence of order in creation that points to the goodness of the Creator, for we cannot know the good Creator apart from the order that may be perceived in his creation.

The goodness of the Creator is reflected by analogy in the opening of *The surprise,* which concerns a brief interaction between a Franciscan friar and a character known to the audience as the Author. To begin with, the Author explains that he is the "Master Puppet-Maker of the World, who has marionettes to move without wires and speak human speech as melodiously as a musical-box" (SU:13). He goes on to point out to the friar that his puppets operate in a world in which all creatures are virtuous and magnanimous, and where "heroic virtue always conquers" (SU:13). The insistence here is that the good, creative mind of the Author is reflected in the goodness of his created world. After their brief discussion, the Author and the friar leave the stage so that the play may continue with them hidden behind the curtain. The audience is then left with an awareness of the presence of the Author in his apparent absence. This confirms Chesterton's idea that the absence of God is not a negation, but a void (EM:92), and it is precisely in this void and the presence of the text that the Author's voice is heard. The audience has been enlightened as to the nature of the Author so as to be better informed of the nature of his work; it has been privy to the character of God in order to better understand the dignity of man.

Chesterton argues that there is a subtle argument embedded in the idea that "God 'looked on all things and saw that they were good'" (ST:100):

> It is the thesis that there are no bad things, but only bad uses of things. If you will, there are no bad things but only bad thoughts; and especially bad intentions. Only Calvinists can really believe that hell is paved with good intentions. That is exactly

> one thing it cannot be paved with. But it is possible to have bad intentions about good things; and good things, like the world and the flesh, have been twisted by a bad intention call the devil.[6] But he cannot make things bad; they remain as on the first day of creation. The work of heaven alone was material; the making of a material world. The work of hell is entirely spiritual.[7]

By avoiding the pantheistic connection between the gods of old and his experience of the world, Chesterton stresses the goodness of the Creator as a fact even when the goodness of creation may be disputed. When he contends that all things remain good even when they have been abused (ST:100; Schall 2000:15), he implies that God, as the uncaused cause of creation, is not merely a presence at the beginning of time, but one who causes creation to exist in every moment of its being.

God's creation of the world is not something that happens only once, but something that is happening continuously (Capon 2004:60). "It is possible," Chesterton writes, "that God says every morning, 'Do it again' to the sun; and every evening, 'Do it again' to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them" (HO:264).[8] He contemplates the possibility that "our little tragedy has touched the gods, that they admire it from their starry galleries, and that at the end of every human drama is called again and again before the curtain" (HO:264). In his view, the repetitions in creation seem willful rather than automatic, implying that there is someone to will them; that the magic of the world implies a magician; that the storied nature of life implies a storyteller; and that meaning felt in the universe must have someone to mean it (HO:264, 268). At all times, creation points back to the good Creator. The consequence of this theology is that Chesterton is not all that concerned about the origin of the universe in purely materialistic or rationalistic terms. His assumption seems to be that the precise process by which nothing came to being something detracts from the fact that at the centre of the story of the universe is the mysterious Being who sets everything into motion.

2.2.2 Creation and the Fall

After establishing God as the initiator and sustainer of the drama of creation, Chesterton shifts his focus to creation itself — to the act of creating and to the things created. When Chesterton writes that "God had written ... a play" (HO:282), he seems to be paraphrasing Genesis 1.1: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth".[9] The play, by inference, encompasses the homes of

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[6] This does not make the devil the author of all evil, but rather points to the devil as the cosmological instigator of the Fall in the third chapter of the book of Genesis.
[7] Chesterton's argument here is with particular reference to the Manichean heresy, which contends that it was Satan who created the world rather than God (ST:99).
[8] This particular passage has implications for understanding Chesterton's preference for picture over pattern (See Chapter Four).
[9] All biblical quotations are taken from the King James Version since, as Wood (2011:241) explains, "in both memory and imagination, Chesterton was decisively shaped by it".

God and man: heaven and earth. The act of creating is an act of bringing something out of nothing (ST:159).[10] In the creation account in Genesis, there is no reference to any kind of primordial substance out of which God formed the material world, hence the idea that creation is creation *ex nihilo*. God creates out of his own abundance, not his lack, and not even the ferocious silence of an eternal nothing can stop him from creating.

With Chesterton (EM:24), Capon (1995:159) argues that there is an element of absurdity to the idea that God creates out of nothing, but it is in this absurdity that one has to insist that there is a large element of mystery built into the created order just as there is mystery at the heart of understanding the nature of God, the Author of this cosmological drama. However, one has to allow for the fact that comprehensibility does not seem to be a criterion for engagement with or the enjoyment of what is (AD:31, 44). And if something is not comprehensible, that does not make it false, nor does it rule out the possibility of comprehensibility. In fact, it seems possible to comprehend something as being incomprehensible. If one cannot know the nothing before the something, then there may be nothing there to know. One's access to creation is all one has, and it is creation that both reveals and conceals the nature of God. As in *The surprise*, the Author is hidden behind the curtain for the greater duration of the play. This idea informs the paradoxical interplay between mystery and revelation that is discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

Chesterton does not leave the play merely as something created and then abandoned by God. The created text is not simply expelled by the author and then disposed of (HO:173). Creation is given up as an offering to the reader who participates in its being. The play cannot be a play without an audience. Chesterton argues that God's good creation "had necessarily been left to human actors and stage-managers ... " (HO:282). In *The surprise,* it is of particular significance that Chesterton begins by casting puppets as the first actors in the Author's drama. On returning to the stage after the first act, the Author notes that what makes the play particularly remarkable is the fact that he "wrote this play for a bet" and that he ended up winning the bet (SU:39):

> I did not incidentally end up with the money; because, to tell the truth, I made the bet with an itinerant artist like myself. He was a showman with a very popular and successful set of puppets; and his plays were infested with villains. They depended entirely on villains. Whenever the heroine was doubtful about the hero, up jumped the most valuable villain, with a tactful taste for poison or a diplomatic dagger; and then she knew that the hero *was* a hero. It seemed as if all virtue was really produced by villains. Well, he betted me I could not write a play without a villain.

[10] Chesterton points out the common doctrine held by evolutionists of his day that held that it was more conceivable to them that something came out of mere nothing rather than having a Supreme Being create something out of nothing (ST:159).

The "itinerant artist" that the Author speaks about, whether intended by Chesterton or not, evokes the dialogue between God and Satan in the opening chapters of the book of *Job*,[11] a book that Chesterton often refers to (See Chapter Five). Just as Satan challenges God about the presence of goodness in his play, so the itinerant artist challenges the Author about the possibility of a drama without evil. In both cases, these Authors point to the goodness within the drama that they have scripted. In his writing, Chesterton is well aware of the problem and presence of evil in the world, but his understanding of God as being fundamentally good forces him to contemplate the possibility that there is more going on in the drama than is readily apparent to the actors within the drama or even to those who are watching the play.

In *The surprise*, the Author notes that he created a play not only without a villain, but in which the whole play is comprised not only of "good people, but of good actions" (SU:40). In other words, there is not only no villain, but "no villainy" (SU:40). Perhaps unexpectedly, despite the lack of villainy, there is a great deal of humour and action in the first act of the play. Chesterton's Author succeeds in presenting the possibility that being and virtue are not inextricably bound to evil as well as the possibility that drama, while reliant on conflict and subtext or knowledge gaps[12] to move the plot forward, is not necessarily dependant on the negative charge of evil.[13] The Author then observes that the play's short length is owed to the fact that everyone in the play behaved well; after all, there is no doubt, hesitation or wrongdoing to hinder their actions.

However, the Author explains that he has found a single problem with his characters; they are "everything except alive" (SU:43). His puppets are "intelligent, complex, combative, brilliant, bursting with life and yet they are not alive" (SU:43). It is revealed that the reason that they are not alive is that they are still, in a manner of speaking, in the mind of the Author and thus do not have wills of their own. Thus, the first act of *The surprise* reflects Augustine's understanding of the first chapter of Genesis as a poetic reflection of creation as it is known in the mind of God before it becomes a reality (Capon 2004:78). This also mirrors Hans Urs von Balthasar's (1999:17) observation that no one can act on a stage if God, the Author, is "all" and Simone Weil's (1947:38) contention that for God to create he would have to hide himself, otherwise "there would be nothing but himself". The Author in Chesterton's play seems to acknowledge that for there to be any real action, human freedom becomes a necessary risk. Therefore, a "miracle" takes place by which the

[11] Wherever 'Job' appears italicised, it is the book in the Bible that is being referred to. Wherever it appears unitalicised, it is the character in that book that is being referred to.
[12] A knowledge gap is just that: a gap in knowledge. Such a gap in knowledge can exist between a reader and the characters in a story, or between the characters in a story. It is knowledge gaps that drive stories forward by relying on the audience's desire for closure.
[13] Robert McKee (1999:17) writes that values are at the heart of the art of storytelling, and that the "erosion of values" results in a "corresponding erosion of story". What is valuable is not necessarily defined in terms of good versus evil, but may be thought of in terms of what is deemed worthy of pursuit against what is not.

puppets turn into real people, leaving them free to reject the ideal play of the Author and make the play their own (SU:45).

When reflecting on the theodrama[14] of creation, Chesterton argues that the creative event is and in fact must be an act of "division," "divorce," "rejection" and "separation" whereby the author sets free what he has created (EM:236; HO:171, 281; MO:109; ST:153). This is precisely the "miracle" that Chesterton is referring to in *The surprise* (SU:45). While this may be mistaken to imply that Chesterton's God is merely a watchmaker who sets the created order into motion before receding into irrelevance, this would be the opposite of Chesterton's meaning, for, as I have already suggested, God holds all things into being at all times. Even creation *ex nihilo* is a continuous reality and not just a once-off event. And yet even in this there is a sense in which God creates by letting things be instead of forcing them into the embrace of any kind of absolute determinism. Freedom is embedded into the natural order of creation and the result is that rocks are free to be rocks, just as frogs are free to be frogs. Consequently, Chesterton's dramatology argues implicitly that any author is not the sovereign determinant of the meaning of his created text. The stage of the text is free to be itself, leaving its meanings to be able to shift and bend in ways that the author may not necessarily control, intend or predict. Chesterton writes that "[i]n everything that bows gracefully there must be an effort at stiffness ... Rigidity yielding a little, like justice swayed by mercy, is the whole beauty of the earth. The cosmos is a diagram just bent out of shape. Everything tries to be straight; and everything just fortunately fails" (AD:31). If one takes this as a principle for Chesterton's dramatology, the idea is that the text can retain its structure and even its rigidity, but reading and interpreting the text must allow for room to move and bend. Rigidity without flexibility may be taken as inhuman.

The freedom that God gives to the stage of creation is similar to the freedom that God gives to his human actors: "Man was free, not because there was no God, but because it needed a God to set him free. By authority he was free" (AM:104). Chesterton imagines the "fun" of having actors in a drama suddenly acting "like real people," by having them work in accordance with "what theologians call Free Will" (IS:257-258). An introduction of such a surprise would turn "genuine art" with all its predestined drama into "genuine life" with all its indeterminacies (IS:258).[15] If the universe was brought into existence by the free will of God, then the idea of human free will is perfectly sensible in accordance with the doctrine that man is made in the image of God (Gen 1.26). On this Nichols

[14] Nichols (2009:71) argues that it is not amiss to align Chesterton's notion of the "divine drama" (EM:173) with von Balthasar's *theodrama*. Thus, for the sake of conciseness and consistency, *theodrama* is used throughout this study to cover both ideas.
[15] "Every artistic drama" is named as being part of a particular genre right from the start, because "the last page is written before the first" (IS:259). But Chesterton notices that this is "not so in that terrific drama which Heaven has given us to play upon this earth" (IS:259). It is this very uncertainty that is at the heart of life that propels the human drama towards its end. All human life may begin as a tragedy, "for it begins in travail. But every human life may end in comedy — even in divine comedy," depending on the engagement of the Divine with human agents (IS:259).

writes that the "defense of free will is central to Chesterton's metaphysical realism inasmuch as the latter includes the recognition of human will as a genuine albeit conditioned choice" (2009:72). Man "is entirely free to choose between right and left, or between right and wrong" (NJ). This 'conditioned choice' mentioned by Nichols highlights Chesterton's assumption of the unavoidability of limitations, which becomes particularly important in considering revelation from his perspective (MO:118; Ahlquist 2003:27). Freedom is not only concerned with escape or a movement away from confines, but with constriction and a movement towards or within confines:

> Anarchism appeals to absolute liberty, renunciation of limitations as such — all this is incurably futile and childish, because it will not face a fundamental logical fact. This fact is that there is no such thing as a condition of complete emancipation, unless we can speak of a condition of nonentity. What we call emancipation is always and of necessity simply the free choice of the soul between one set of limitations and another. If I have a piece of chalk in my hand, I can make either a circle or a square; that is the sacred thing called liberty. But I cannot make a thing that is both a circle and a square. I cannot make an unlimited square. I cannot draw an emancipated circle. If I wish to make anything at all, I must abide by the limitations and principles of the thing I make ... And, of course, in moral matters it is the same; there is no lawlessness, there is only a free choice between limitations (MO:118).

However, human freedom is slightly different in its nature to the freedom built into the rest of the created order. Chesterton argues this point as follows:

> Whether or no the garden [of Eden] was an allegory, the truth itself can be very well allegorized as a garden. And the point of it is that Man, whatever else he is, is certainly not merely one of the plants of the garden that has plucked its roots out of the soil and walked about with them like legs, or, on the principle of a double dahlia, has grown duplicate eyes and ears. He is something else, something strange and solitary, and more like the statue that was once the god of the garden; but the statue has fallen from its pedestal and lies broken among the plants and weeds (MO:157).

The separation from God that gives birth to human freedom allows for the possibility of choosing either good or evil to enter the human drama (WW:129). The choices made by human beings have a moral weight that has the potential to affect the rest of the natural order even when that natural order remains "perfect according to [its] own plan" (MO:157). This is demonstrated in *The surprise* when the puppets of the first act are transformed into real actors in the second. What follows is supposed to be a reenactment of the first act, but because of the freedom of the human characters the result is mayhem and anarchy. When the human actors take over the Author's job of stage-managing, the consequences are less than desirable. This, it seems, is the upshot of the gamble taken by the Author in giving his characters freedom to be themselves, namely the risk that his original intention may be violated.

Nevertheless, freedom is not the sole purpose of the division built into creation. Division is a prerequisite for love, since love desires personality (MO:108; HO:337). God, who is in his very nature love, granted separation and freedom to the created order and gave man the ability to choose so that he would have the opportunity to love the God who had loved him into being. Chesterton suggests that God made man to come into contact with reality (ST:137, 170). In other words, built into God's good creation is a movement from division to union, from disconnection and disintegration to connection and integration, and from the absence of understanding to understanding. This movement is reflected in the central direction of the play performed in *The surprise*: a movement towards a wedding. This movement, however, following the narrative of Genesis, is not where the story ends. Humankind, having been given the power to choose, has chosen against God's original design in both real and symbolic ways throughout history, with dire consequences (HO:282). Division, as the mechanism of freedom, has resulted in further division. Thus, even virtues are found isolated from each other and wandering alone (HO:233). Consequently, even virtues like truth and pity can be separated, resulting in a pitiless truth or a truthless pity (HO:233). Following this reasoning, a lie is not the absence of truth, but rather the truth out of place. Misinterpretation is not the absence of understanding, but understanding without adhering to the boundaries of a larger context.

Therefore to summarise the above, the good Creator, like the Author in *The surprise,* holds his good creation in his mind. His authorial intent remains perfectly intact in his own knowledge of that creation. But for his intent to be properly realised, his imagined world has to be set free and released to live as text in its own right — a text that can be appropriated or misappropriated, understood and misunderstood. In Chesterton's cosmology, human beings serve a dual purpose: they are both the text and an audience to this creation. It is left to them to decide to work with or against God's good design and the order that he has instilled into creation. The doctrine of the Fall that Chesterton so often points to argues that human beings have made a great mess of God's good creation (HO:282; MO:158; Ker 2011:519). In other words, the actors in the play have often chosen, whether consciously or unconsciously, to move against the script of the Author precisely because the script has allowed them the freedom to do so. The outcome is a broken creation: this is not to say that creation is itself necessarily fallen, but rather that it is deeply affected by the Fall (cf. Genesis 3.17). So, for Chesterton, there is design in nature, order in the universe and an ethical pattern for human beings to follow. But when human beings move against or violate this pattern, all of creation is affected. The play is fractured and disconnected and therefore needs to be put back together again.

2.2.3 Re-creation

As desperate as the situation of the Fall may at first seem, Chesterton's fundamental belief in a good Creator remains in tact. This leaves open the way for an ethic of restoration (HO:315), meaning a revolutionary movement towards the original good. Once again, *The surprise* provides a fitting metaphor for how this restoration might take place. Just when two of the characters in *The surprise* are about to engage in an unholy war, the Author's head appears "bursting out through an upper part of the scenery" (SU:63). He then calls out, "And in the devil's name, what do you think you are doing with my play? Drop it! Stop! I am coming down" (SU:63). The "devil's name" here may again be symbolic of the itinerant artist that the Author mentions at the start of the play, since the play that has been left to the actors is now clearly following the itinerant artist's original assumption that drama cannot exist without villains or villainy. But the devil also evokes the image of the serpent in the Garden of Eden who instigates the Fall of man. Of course, it is highly likely that Chesterton is merely offering a joke. Where people might use the word *God* in an exclamation, the God-figure might use the name of the devil instead.

The main point of this surprise at the end of Chesterton's play is not to reinforce the failure of the characters to reflect the intentions of the Author through their actions, but rather to reflect the fact that the Author, who all the while has been hidden behind the curtain, has been involved all along. His desire to have the play reflect his original plan remains. This is to say that for Chesterton the Fall does not mean an inevitable movement towards degradation and decay, but rather catalyses the Author's ongoing desire for the possibility of reconciliation, reconstruction, redemption, reform, renewal, remaking, restoration, revision and revolution (AU:324; EM:241; HO:310, 315; OS:426).[16] Once again, the central idea here is the possibility of a return to the original good. It is, in short, re-creation. Chesterton even compares the word *recreation* to the word *resurrection* (OS:418). Like the Christian Sabbath — the first day of a week — it reflects the Pauline notion of a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5.17). It implies that even the myriad ways that humankind and nature have been defaced and defeated can be repaired.

Thus, Chesterton's cosmology, as his view on the way the universe began and remains, starts with a theological proposition, namely that the physical universe began with God and is still held into being by God. He then moves on to a moral proposition by claiming that this material world is good since it was made by a good Creator. This good creation was left in the charge of human beings, as per

[16] One example of Chesterton's belief in renewal is found in his explanation of Catholic Confession: "Well, when a Catholic comes from Confession, he does truly, by definition, step out again into that dawn of his own beginning and look with new eyes across the world to a Crystal Palace that is really crystal. He believes that in that dim corner, and in that brief ritual, God has really remade him in His own image. He is now a new experiment of the Creator. He is as much a new experiment as he was when he was really only five years old. He stands, as I said, in the white light at the worthy beginning of the life of a man. The accumulations of time can no longer terrify. He may be grey and gouty; but he is only five minutes old" (AU:325).

the biblical narrative in Genesis, who then "made a mess of things" by losing sight of the original divine, authorial intent. However, the divine intent, being hidden in some ways behind a curtain, is still discernible as being bound to the desire to put right what has gone wrong. In other ways, Chesterton argues that the divine intent is to have human beings participate with him in this very act of re-creation. Ultimately, Chesterton emphasises the importance of the physical world. If God had bothered to make the world in the first place, then it must certainly be meaningful; if he had taken the trouble to compose this play, then it is a play that is there to be viewed, interpreted and understood. It is the nature of this understanding that I investigate in the following section of this chapter.

2.3 Chesterton's epistemology

When one examines Chesterton's cosmology, as I have done above, it is clear that he does not work solely in analytical terms. While his knowledge of scientific theories may not be flawless or complete, it is by no means utterly lacking. And yet, he prefers stories, ideas and images to any kind of overtly systematic philosophy (AU:58). His cosmology is therefore more mythological than scientific. As a result, his arguments are bound to an analogical epistemology, meaning that his concerns about the nature, scope and limitations of knowledge are not necessarily easy to delineate in purely analytical terms. Therefore, I maintain Chesterton's use of images, and especially the narratives of Genesis and *The surprise,* to be just as foundational to Chesterton's epistemology as it is to his cosmology.

It is clear from the sheer scope and depth of Chesterton's work that he has great respect for the human capacity to understand. As I have already noted, he insists on the link between the mind and reality (ST:137), implying that it is possible for the human mind to know and understand what is being perceived. Chesterton observes that there is a need for a "working" philosophy that "nearly all philosophies" simply cannot provide (ST:170); and that there are those who espouse philosophies that simply do not work:

> No sceptics work sceptically; no fatalists work fatalistically; all without exception work on the principle that it is possible to assume what is not possible to believe. No materialist who thinks his mind was made up for him, by mud and blood and heredity, has any hesitation in making up his mind. No sceptic who believes that truth is subjective has any hesitation about treating it as objective (ST:170).

Chesterton again argues here for a definite, although not absolute link between theory and experience, and therefore implies that if we are to understand anything about the world, philosophy

should correspond with the reality that is there as we encounter it (AD:17). It is not necessarily a fault to imagine a philosophy that may be detached from reality, but it is wrong to believe that one can live by it. Any philosophy that divorces belief from action can only be existentially remote. This has definite implications for Chesterton's hermeneutics, especially in that interpretative understanding cannot be remote from the author, text or reader, but is a dramatic, dialogical connection between and overlap of their respective dramas.

The absolute scepticism that Chesterton is so often at war with in his writings reveals only that there is a break in the link between perception and reality. For Chesterton, the philosophy that best describes the reality he lives in is that of a particular kind of Anglo-Catholic theology. Therefore, Chesterton argues for reality as it is described by the Christian scriptures and, especially in his later writings, the doctrines and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church. He writes, "I have only found one creed that could not be satisfied with a truth, but only with the Truth, which is made of a million such truths and yet is one" (AU:332). If the key fits perfectly, argues Chesterton, it is the right key, especially when the lock is particularly complex (EM:248; HO:287). Chesterton's use of the metaphor of a key is fitting in three particular ways: firstly, because a key has a definite shape and "depends entirely upon keeping its shape," secondly, because its specificity clearly either works or does not, and, thirdly, because it allows for complexity even in its clarity (EM:215; Ker 2001:526).

Chesterton finds that there is a universal sense of the unity of meaning (AU:41). The world he lives in is not an impenetrable fog of non-sequiturs, but something decodable and decipherable; it holds the "fragmentary suggestions of a philosophy" that form a coherent whole (AU:41). Even things and ideas that differ do so because they share some commonality (OR:163). Moreover, Chesterton seeks to avoid any view of knowledge that sees the world purely in terms of neat propositions and reductionisms, hence his emphasis on the storied makeup of life (Williams 2006:23). This deep-rooted sense of the coherence and dramatic order of the world is rooted in Chesterton's opinions on the character of God. If God is good, and good is that which aligns with the true, then the authority of the senses can be trusted (ST:136). His epistemology, therefore, is directly linked to his cosmology. Thus, what follows is a brief exploration of three facets of Chesterton's epistemology, each corresponding with an aspect of his cosmology. The following discussion takes place under three sub-headings: *Divine knowledge, Human knowledge and non-knowledge,* and *Re-membering.*

2.3.1 Divine knowledge

I have already pointed out that Chesterton is a realist in the sense that he believes that at least some understanding of reality is open to human beings. If one begins with the acceptance of the realness of reality, "further deductions from it will be equally real; they will be things and not words" (ST:170).

To begin with the assumption of the real is to assume that the real can be discovered. This is perhaps a convenient metaphysical assumption made possible by the invocation of God, who in Terry Eagleton's (2009:80) words "is the ground of both being and knowing and thus the guarantee of their harmonious correspondence". For Chesterton, God "made the world of reason" and is therefore not a convenient concept or a mere abstraction (WS:165); he is not merely a neat presupposition to fuel further presuppositions, but the ultimate personal Reality, as well as the source of reality and our real ability to experience it. Therefore, Chesterton does not support the idea of a 'god of the gaps'.[17] As is evident throughout his work, he assumes that we know this God not by things we do not understand, but by things that we do understand (HO:231). Even when we embrace mystery, it is not the unknown that urges the discovery of meaning, but the known.

Chesterton assumes that the Author knows the work before it is separate from his mind. Creation is known before is it even a fact. This is reflected in what the Author says about the guard that he made for his play: "I knew him before he was made" (SU:12). Consequently, knowledge is not something to be simplistically reduced to pure empiricism. Empiricism can only really be taken as part of knowledge, not as the whole of it. The empiricist can only "clutch his fragment of fact, almost as the primitive man clutched his fragment of flint" (EM:41). The fact is never enough, because, as Chesterton's cosmology suggests, the fact is a fragment of a much larger knowing. The fact can only be understood, because the fact is known into being by an author who means for the fact to be understood in a particular way. Even while he supports the separation of author and text, Chesterton would oppose the postmodern, Gnostic movement towards absolutising the disconnection of text from author. There may be a varying distance between the reader's knowledge of the text and the intention of the author, but this distance is by no means infinite or absolute.

While Chesterton commits to the link between the human mind and reality, his epistemology is by no means an absolutist one, for human knowledge has definite limitations. He readily accepts that there is much to reality that we must first assume even before we can understand it:

> All argument begins with an assumptions; that is with something that you do not doubt. You can, if you like, doubt the assumption at the beginning of your argument, but in that case you are beginning a different argument with another assumption at the beginning of it. Every argument begins with an infallible dogma, and that infallible dogma can only be disputed by falling back on some other infallible dogma; you can never prove your first statement or it would not be your first (MO:91).

[17] In this, Chesterton is in agreement with Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1971:134), who was sharply critical of the way that God is sometimes conceived of as a kind of *deus ex machina*: a third-rate dramatic device used in Greek theatre to solve problems in the narrative of a play (Rollins 2011:14).

It is this very reliance on assumptions and dogmas that can prevent a philosophy of absolute scepticism. Thus, Chesterton argues that there are four assumptions in the alphabet of philosophy that one has to begin with before one can begin to philosophise. The first is that the world actually exists, since no one can really prove that the whole thing is not just a dream (HO:229; MO:92). The second is that the world matters (MO:92), for even arguments against meaning or truth are founded on some version of meaning or truth and would thus always be self-refuting. The third assumption is that there is such a thing as a continuous self (MO:92). Chesterton points out that while the material state of the self is in constant flux, one cannot argue coherently without assuming that the self is a constant; for if the self were discontinuous, all of reality would be perceived only as fractured, unstable and unreliable, making philosophical hermeneutics a time-wasting, hit-and-miss affair. The fourth and final assumption is that human beings have the ability to choose, implying that they have responsibility over their thoughts and actions (MO:92). With these four pillars in place, namely reality, meaning, the continuous self and choice, Chesterton argues that knowledge itself is rooted in faith. All four of these unprovable assumptions are taken on faith; and since any attack on the four pillars of reason mentioned above is ultimately an attack on knowledge, it may be said that faith is essential to Chesterton's epistemology. One cannot prove reality, meaning, the continuous self or the possibility of choice (MO:92), for indeed all of reason is a matter of faith (HO:236). In other words, faith is the fundamental pre-epistemological condition and is thus fundamental to Chesterton's dramatology.

Bearing this in mind, for Chesterton it is not much of a logical leap to assume, on faith, that there is a God whose own thoughts were the catalyst for reality as we know it. It is on faith in the good Creator that Chesterton assumes the possibility of human understanding. If God is the source of both being and knowing, it is not unreasonable to assume a correspondence between reality and perception. In other words, there is a definite connection between God's knowledge and the human ability know him:

> You cannot evade the issue of God; whether you talk about pigs or binomial theory, you are still talking about Him. Now if Christianity be ... a fragment of metaphysical nonsense invented by a few people, then, of course, defending it will simply mean talking that metaphysical nonsense over and over again. But if Christianity should happen to be true – then defending it may mean talking about anything and everything. Things can be irrelevant to the proposition that Christianity is false, but nothing can be irrelevant to the proposition that Christianity is true. Zulus, gardening, butchers' shops, lunatic asylums, housemaids and the French Revolution — all these things not only may have something to do with the Christian God, but must have something to do with Him if He really lives and reigns (MO:89,90).

This passage reinforces what I have already noted, namely that if God is to be known at all by people he must be known through the text of his creation. But this in itself is an epistemological problem:

since creation has been separated and freed from the mind of God and given a will of its own, it is difficult to decipher the exact will of the Author through the text. Indeed, the mind of any author remains hidden insofar as the exact meaning of the text has been left open to multiple interpretations. Chesterton acknowledges this difficulty for interpretive processes when he writes that in ages past,

> the minority, the sages or thinkers, had withdrawn apart and had taken up an equally congenial trade. They were drawing up plans of the world; of the world which all believed to have a plan. They were trying to set forth the plan seriously and to scale. *They were setting their minds directly to the mind that had made the mysterious world; considering what sort of a mind it might be and what its ultimate purpose might be.* Some of them made that mind much more impersonal than mankind has generally made it; some simplified it almost to a blank; a few, a very few, doubted it altogether. One or two of the more morbid fancied that it might be evil and an enemy; just one or two of the more degraded in the other class worshipped demons instead of gods. But most of these theorists were theists: and they not only saw a moral plan in nature, but they generally laid down a moral plan for humanity. Most of them were good men who did good work: and they were remembered and reverenced in various ways. They were scribes; and their scriptures became more or less holy scriptures. They were law-givers; and their tradition became not only legal but ceremonial (EM:265, emphasis added).

Throughout human history, people have tried to search the knowledge of God by examining the text of creation. And while Chesterton argues that this natural theology has revealed a great number of likely truths, the mind of God remains largely a mystery apart from any kind of definite revelation and possibly even in the afterglow of such a revelation. And mysteries are meant to be lived in, not necessarily understood (HO:231). Indeed, once again, understanding is only possible by means of what lies beyond the human ability to comprehend.

It is in praise of mystery that Chesterton argues that solitary facts are insufficient when it comes to understanding (CQ:32; HO:231). The interpretive experience therefore takes place within a drama of interconnected, personal truths. Even God knew the truth of the world before the world had become a fact, because the truth was in him (Capon 2004:35; SU:12). He understood the truth of the world even before it had any substance. When it comes to understanding Chesterton's view of the world, this particular insight is essential. Chesterton plays with the images in his mind and in his world to point to the connection of the transcendent with the immanent, and also to the link between what is beyond our ability to comprehend and what is as clear as daylight. Therefore, while he claims to be interested in Zulus, gardening, butchers' shops and lunatic asylums for what they might tell us about themselves, he is more interested in things like these for what they tell us about how we understand the mind of God. For Chesterton, reality is iconic and sacramental; it is something *looked through* and not just *looked at*. He begins with certainties and yet all the while remains aware that the primary limitation of human knowledge is its inability to fully comprehend

divine knowledge. However, all the while, the knowledge of the Divine is central to Chesterton's thoughts on how one may understand human knowledge. There remains, therefore, an ever-present tension between what can be known without being fully understood and what can be understood without being fully known. This is the first hint of the dramatic tension that exists between mystery and revelation in Chesterton's dramatology.

2.3.2 Human knowledge and non-knowledge

Chesterton contends that "[t]hinking means connecting things, and stops if they cannot be connected" (HO:238). The very act of thinking relies upon the awareness that things are separate, as per Chesterton's cosmology, and yet both theoretically and practically connected. However, mere connection is not the main aim of thinking, for then one could connect anything to anything else, creating chaos and confusion instead of understanding. It is clear that Chesterton has a number of checks and balances to ensure that knowledge connects realities in the right way. It is crucial to understand this in order to better understand Chesterton's dramatology. Therefore, what follows is a brief summary of Chesterton's specific parameters regarding the four, faith-sustained pillars of human knowledge already mentioned.

In the first place, when Chesterton asserts the importance of acknowledging the fact of reality, he assumes the place of human beings in reality and is, at least in a limited sense, a pragmatist. However, Chesterton argues that while he supports the idea that pragmatism may be a "preliminary guide to truth," he is against any kind of extreme pragmatism that results in "an absence of all truth whatever" (HO:239). Extreme pragmatism at its best is akin to utilitarianism and at its worst to solipsism. Obviously, utilitarianism is problematic in that is argues the value of a thing only by its end result, leaving almost everything, including knowledge, devoid of any intrinsic value. On the other hand, solipsism promotes the absence of any kind of objective measurement of truth or falsehood. Chesterton argues that pragmatism "is a matter of human needs; and one of the first human needs is to be something more than a pragmatist" (HO:240):

> Extreme pragmatism is just as inhuman as the determinism it so powerfully attacks. The determinist (who, to do him justice, does not pretend to be a human being) makes nonsense of human sense of actual choice. The pragmatist, who professes to be specially human, makes nonsense of the human sense of the actual fact (HO:240).

For the sake of understanding, one has to begin with presence of choice, but without refuting the facts that allow one to choose. One can only arrive at knowledge or understanding if one is thoroughly convinced that the patterns, words and images in one's own mind are more than just fictions of one's own making (ST:136).

In the second place, when Chesterton argues that one needs to assume that there is meaning to be found in the world, this meaning needs to be taken as both discernable and reasonable. I have already noted one of Chesterton's responses to sceptics, but that response needs to be put into context since a certain amount of scepticism can be reasonable and even helpful. In fact, Chesterton is just as critical of those who assume that they can navigate the world without a smidgeon of doubt as he is of those who doubt everything (HO:227). Doubt is helpful in that it points to mystery and therefore also to faith (AD:44). The problem, then, is not doubt *per se*, but rather the absolutisation of doubt. The trouble is not with indecision, but with radical indecision. One should be free to doubt or to believe, but never at the cost of reason. It is possible for a thought to stop a person from thinking, and Chesterton argues that this is the only kind of thought that should be stopped (HO:236). As an example, if the only thing that a man can be certain of is his uncertainty, epistemology can be of no use to him. Moreover, he will find that life itself is drained of any adventure, joy and purpose:

> The despair [of modern philosophy] is this, that it does not really believe that there is any meaning in the universe; therefore it cannot hope to find any romance; its romances will have no plots. A man cannot expect any adventures in the land of anarchy. But a man can expect any number of adventures if he goes traveling in the land of authority. One can find no meanings in a jungle of scepticism; but the man will find more meanings who walks through a forest of doctrine and design. Here everything has a story tied to its tail, like the tools or picture in my father's house; for it is my father's house (HO:362).

If thinking means connecting things, it also means connecting the self to things. It means recognising that even apart from our ability to completely comprehend the world, we are still related to it. The above passage has Chesterton musing about the connections between things in his father's house, but it is clear that he is also alluding to the house of God the Father. If God holds all things into being at all times, then the connection between things is primarily found in relation to him. Apart from this anchor in Christian epistemology, knowledge and understanding inevitably become fragmented (Williams 2006:67), because the fragmented self becomes the point of connection, thereby making connection as arbitrary as the fluctuating consciousness of the human subject. With God the Author as the unchanged yet dynamic Trinitarian cornerstone at the centre, epistemology can expect to make stable connections between one fact and another even within the fluctuations of human experience. With the self at the centre, egocentrism rules the roost, and such egocentrism almost certainly hampers understanding since it promotes movement without any kind of foundation.

In the third place, regarding the continuous self, Chesterton opposes the modernist conception of the self as absolutely stable. There is change and there is stability in the self. Chesterton argues that there is a paradox in the tension between movement and stillness: "it's possible to reach the same

results in reality by treating motion as a fixed point and stability as a form of motion" (TL). By asserting this paradox, Chesterton, by inference, exposes the inescapability of the continuous self. If one takes the self's discontinuity as a fact or as something known, this discontinuity becomes a stable point of reference; thus, even by asserting the discontinuity of the self, the self remains continuous, albeit less concrete. Obviously, there needs to be some kind of continuity for knowledge to be accessible. If the self shifts all the time, knowledge becomes impossible, and yet without movement, knowledge cannot be attained since there would be no room for change or growth in understanding. However, once again the paradox of the changing-stable self is that knowledge cannot rationally be bound to egotism or one's over-assertion of the self: egotism is something denied when one preaches it; for to promote egotism is to practice altruism (HO:241). Chesterton writes that it is "impossible without humility to enjoy anything — even pride" (HO:234).

In the fourth place, regarding human choice, Chesterton does not praise the human ability to choose alone. Choice is not an island, and without a purpose is not choice at all:

> [Many people] say that choice is itself the divine thing. Thus Mr. Bernard Shaw has attacked the old idea that men's acts are to be judged by the standard of the desire of happiness. He says that a man does not act for his happiness, but from his will. He does not say, 'Jam will make me happy,' but 'I want jam.' ... and the test of will is simply that the test of happiness is a test and the other isn't. You can discuss whether a man's act in jumping over a cliff was directed towards happiness; you cannot discuss whether it was derived from will. Of course it was. You can praise an action by saying that it is calculated to bring pleasure or pain to discover truth or to save the soul. But you cannot praise an action because it shows will; for to say that is merely to say that it is an action. By this praise of will you cannot really choose one course as better than another. And yet choosing one course as better than another is the very definition of the will you are praising. The worship of will is the negation of will. To admire mere choice is to refuse to choose. If Mr. Bernard Shaw comes up to me and says, 'Will something,' that is tantamount to saying, 'I do not mind what you will,' and that is tantamount to saying, 'I have no will in the matter.' You cannot admire will in general, because the essence of will is that it is particular (HO:242,243).

Choice as a key to participating in the drama is also the key to understanding. One chooses to accept or reject information just as one might choose between good and evil. Thus choice is at the heart of deciding to know things as true, untrue, unknown or mysterious. At every point in Chesterton's epistemology regarding the acceptance of reality, meaning and the continuous self, choice is of vital importance. To refuse to choose is to live in a permanent state of agnosticism, from the Greek *agnosia* meaning *to not know*. The less complimentary name for an agnostic is the Latin *ignoramus*. Even if agnosticism is the most natural attitude of human beings, at some point one has to admit that it does not work (HO:382), for willful ignorance is, as Chesterton contends, simply the suppression of reason (HO:244).

Choice is ultimately an "act of self-limitation" since choosing anything means rejecting anything else (HO:243). The very nature of any expression of truth is that by being inclusive of something, it must exclude other things. The basic law of non-contradiction, reliant on the actual limitations of human thought and the reality of the world, still stands. Ignorance is not the absence of knowledge, but rather the presence of incorrect knowledge (HO:354; WW:147). "There are no uneducated people," writes Chesterton; what we find is that "most people are educated wrong" (WW:147). And so the fight against ignorance is not a fight against a lack of knowledge, but rather a fight against non-knowledge masquerading itself as knowledge.

Consequently, while Chesterton takes great pains to defend the mystery of the "Divine Reason" or knowledge that is the radical of human reason (HO:235), so he also strongly defends human reason and knowledge. He observes that the world is frequently at war with reason, first in its rejection of mystery, but also in its absolute reliance upon scepticism and doubt (HO:235); and so he aims to recover the sense that we can be certain about some things. He acknowledges that there may be doubt about certain spiritual realities, but that human experience pertaining to the certainty of the self or the good can, at least to some degree, be trusted (HO:355, 357).

However, Chesterton's faith in the human capacity for understanding is tempered by his view that we live in a broken world, or at least that our perception of the world has been uprooted by an historical event. Indeed, the story of the Fall, as a "view of life" in the book of Genesis may be taken a myth that in part concerns the human capacity for misunderstanding — the human tendency to move from knowledge to confusion or non-knowledge (MO:158). Again, as a myth, it is a story that is perpetually true, since good gets confused with evil and evil with good all the time (Capon 1997:224). Chesterton observes that "when it comes to unfamiliar things," meaning things we do not know or understand yet, "we often mistake what is real for what is sham" (WW:101). Even eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil may be taken as a symbol for the misunderstanding of good and evil (or truth and falsehood) since even the choice between good and evil is not that clear cut.

The story of the Fall begins with the serpent asking the woman in Eden, "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3.1). This, at its heart, is a question about the woman's knowledge: *What do you really know about all of this?* The significance of knowledge here lies in its relationship to power. The serpent shifts the focus from God's knowledge and thus his management of creation to the woman's knowledge and thus the way she manages her existence. After this, the serpent explains that the fruit will not cause her to literally die, thus negating God's metaphorical revelation. In other words, the serpent explains that the woman's knowledge, which had previously

worked in images and historical realities, is wrong because it does not literally and immediately hold true. And all the while the serpent does not quite lie; he works in misplaced truths and half-truths (BC:44). Once again, since this story is taken here as a myth, the issue is not its historical accuracy, but rather what the story symbolises for Chesterton and how it affects his interpretive lens. He writes that the Fall

> is not only the only enlightening but the only encouraging view of life. It holds, as against the only real alternative philosophies, those of the Buddhist or the Pessimist or the Promethean, that we have misused a good world and not merely been entrapped into a bad one. It refers evil back to the wrong use of the will and thus declares that it can eventually be righted by the right use of the will. Every other creed except that one is some form of surrender to fate. A man who holds this view of life will find it giving light on a thousand things on which mere evolutionary ethics have not a word to say. For instance, on the colossal contrast between the completeness of man's machines and the continued corruption of his motives; on the fact that no social progress really seems to leave self behind; on the fact that first and not the last men of any school or revolution are generally the best and the purest, as William Penn was better than a Quaker millionaire or Washington better than an American oil magnate; on that proverb which says 'The price of liberty is eternal vigilance,' which is only what the theologians say of every other virtue and is itself only a way of stating the truth of original sin; on those extremes of good and evil by which man exceeds all the animals by the measure of heaven and hell; on that sublime sense of loss that is in the very sound of all great poetry, and nowhere more than in the poetry of pagans and sceptics — 'We look before and after and pine for what is not;' which cries against all prigs and progressives out of the very depths and abysses of the broken heart of man that happiness is not only a hope but also in some strange manner a memory; and that we are all kings in exile (MO:158).

As a rationalist, Chesterton argues that he likes "to have some intellectual justification for [his] intuitions" and therefore finds it convenient to accept that if he takes man is a fallen creature, he must necessarily conclude that at some point man fell (HO:347). For Chesterton, the Fall is an optimistic doctrine, because it argues that whatever human beings are they are not themselves (HO:363). The implication of this, both for ethics and epistemology, is that there may be a way for man to get back to his true nature. In a sense, knowledge may be repaired in the same way that creation may be restored; non-knowledge may be corrected.

2.3.3 Re-membering.

Just as Chesterton's ethic of restoration and re-creation is at the heart of his cosmology, so his epistemology allows for a process of re-membering or putting-back-together; that is, a process of correcting knowledge where it goes wrong. Even if this is not something Chesterton speaks of explicitly, it is clearly evident throughout his work. He is forever attacking false certainties, modernist egocentricities and conceptual inaccuracies, thereby demonstrating his belief that knowledge and truth are worth fighting for and reclaiming. In fact, it is precisely his understanding of the Fall that leads him to determine that one can be both "at peace with everything" and "at war

with everything else" (HO:364). In other words, there is a tension between the acceptance of what is in a state of ruin and the desire to set things right again. For Chesterton the doctrine of the Fall is not so much a pessimistic dogma about human degeneration as it is a reminder that we have forgotten who we are. In *Orthodoxy,* Chesterton writes:

> We have all read in scientific books, and, indeed, in all romances, the story of the man who has forgotten his name. The man walks about the streets and can see and appreciate everything; only he cannot remember who he is. Well, every man is that man in the story. Every man has forgotten who he is. One may understand the cosmos, but never the ego; the self is more distant than any star. Though shalt love the Lord thy God; but thou shalt not know thyself. We are all under the same mental calamity; we have all forgotten our names. We have all forgotten what we really are. All that we call common sense and rationality and practicality and positivism only means that for certain dead levels of our life we forget that we have forgotten. All that we call spirit and art and ecstasy only means that for one awful instant we remember that we forget (HO:257).[18]

Building on this idea in *The everlasting man,* Chesterton writes that even in pagan antiquity

> men were conscious of the Fall, if they were conscious of nothing else; and the same is true of all heathen humanity. Those who have fallen may remember the fall, even when they forget the height. Some such tantalising blank or break in memory is at the back of all pagan sentiment. There is such a thing as the momentary power to remember that we forget. And the most ignorant of humanity know by the very look of earth that they have forgotten heaven (EM:94).

The above passages contain a few details that are central to understanding Chesterton's epistemology. The first is that a loss of identity deeply affects the way that one knows and understands the world. A loss of self-knowledge becomes a barrier to knowledge itself. Therefore, the key to the recovery of understanding in general is the recovery of self-understanding. The second detail, directly linked to this first detail, is that it is in the act of appreciating creation and in creating that one is put back into contact with the self. This is to say that interpretive understanding, inasmuch as it is a means to understand written and visual texts, is also a creative means to engage with one's own self-understanding. As an act of imagination or creation, dramatology is a transformative activity for the interpreter.

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[18] It seems to me that Chesterton has at least some awareness of the notion of *anamnesis* that comes out of Plato's *Meno* and *Phaedo*. It is an idea proposed by Socrates to overcome the paradox of knowledge (Allen 1959:165). This paradox — How can we seek to find or anticipate what we do not know; and when we find it, how can we know with any certainty that it was what we were looking for? — proposes the question of whether anything genuinely new can be introduced to the soul (Schindler 2004:592). At the risk of skimming over a very large discourse, it may be said that *anamnesis* answers this paradox by suggesting that we, in a sense, discover what we already know; we forget our amnesia and thus recover what we had thought to be lost. Schindler (2004:605) proposes that "the soul anticipates its object, but because that object is not derivable from the soul itself, its anticipation gets recast in the encounter, so that its anticipation is simultaneously surprised and fulfilled. In this respect, the strangely satisfying upheaval that one experiences in great drama turns out to be —surprise!— not an exception to the normal act of cognition, but in fact simply a particularly intense instance of what occurs in every act of knowing whatever insofar as every act is the soul's grasping, and being grasped by, what is other than the soul itself".

Chesterton refers in particular to tales that speak of golden apples that exist "only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green" and tales that tell of rivers flowing with wine that "make us remember, for one wild moment, that they run with water" (HO:257). The third detail above concerns the forgetting or perhaps the *dis-membering* of heaven that would imply that re-membering is a movement that operates on two fronts: firstly, it looks back in order to recall how the pieces of a story have fitted together, and secondly, it looks forwards at what the result of the restoration can be. Re-membering, then, is not simply concerned with the past *per se*, but with the integration of one's knowledge of the past with one's hopes for the future (Ker 2011:533). This points to the fact that there is a strong eucharistic foundation in Chesterton's epistemology: the eucharist, from the Greek *eucharista* meaning *thankfulness* or *giving thanks,* is precisely an act of remembering that the body broken and the blood poured out for the healing of the world comes not out of a fallen man, but out of wholeness and goodness. In other words, re-membering may paradoxically involve breaking down, breaking apart and even a kind of deconstruction, even while its aim remains reconciliation.

The idea of integration is central to Chesterton's dramatic epistemology. Chesterton is particularly critical of any mode of thought that attempts to "split the human head into two" (ST:86). In particular, he addresses the one man's declaration that "a man has two minds, with one of which he must entirely believe and with the other may utterly disbelieve" (ST:86). He suggests, in tune with Aquinas, that it is possible for truth to be approached by different, even seemingly contradictory paths only if one believes that there is one truth: "Because the Faith was the one truth, nothing discovered in nature could ultimately contradict the Faith. Because the Faith was the one truth, nothing really deduced from the Faith could ultimately contradict the facts" (ST:86). In other words, even if one discovers a contradiction, where opposite sides of the contradiction both seem valid or true, it is possible to take the contradiction as a whole (HO:230). If such contradictions are irresolvable, then the truth, insofar as the limitations of human reason and perception are concerned, must be irresolvable. This is the beginning of Chesterton's reliance on paradox (See Chapter Four). Thus, for Chesterton, the supernatural and the natural, heaven and earth, spirit and flesh, science and faith, language and reality and many other seeming contradictions are all part of one truth. Therefore, reason and knowledge, even in their hair-splitting, are to be concerned with the real world as it is. It is good and yet fallen, mysterious and yet knowable. In short, reality should be treated as real (ST:29). This brings me to the last component of Chesterton's philosophy to be discussed in this chapter, namely, his ontology.

2.4 Chesterton's ontology

If knowledge is concerned with creating connections, perhaps the most fundamental component of Chesterton's ontology is the fact that the universe is actually connected. The connections in the mind are not merely constructs, but are reflections of the reality that is there. If reality is a drama, then it needs to be understood as a drama. Moreover, being itself may be understood as having a dramatic structure. This dramatic structure may be appreciated in terms of three considerations: the *riddle* of being, the *answer* of being, and the *romance* of being (Reyburn 2011:51).

2.4.1 The riddle of being

To begin with, in Chesterton's work, being is first and foremost viewed as a riddle. Therefore he writes:

> We all feel the riddle of the earth without anyone to point it out. The mystery of life is the plainest part of it. The clouds and curtains of darkness, the confounding vapours, these are the daily weather of this world. Whatever else we have grown accustomed to, we have grown accustomed to the unaccountable. Every stone or flower is a hieroglyphic of which we have lost the key; with every step to our lives we enter into the middle of some story which we are certain to misunderstand (WB:131).

This passage references a number of ideas already discussed: the storied nature of life, the need for a key by which one can understand the story, as well as the inevitability of misunderstanding. But it does something else as well: it points to the centrality of mystery in the Chestertonian canon. To say that being is a riddle is to say that things that exist — stand out or appear (*existere*) — do not exist because of any kind of precise, logical inevitability and thus do not necessarily presuppose intelligibility (Reyburn 2011:52; WB:132). Inasmuch as it may be comprehended, being remains a mystery. There is a riddle even in the obviousness of the text that has been created in that the text does not have to be. This idea is found in Chesterton's interpretation of an episode in Daniel Defoe's tale of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which tells of a man who escapes a shipwreck with his life and a few rudimentary possessions:

> The greatest of all poems is an inventory. Every kitchen tool becomes ideal because Crusoe might not have dropped it in the sea. It is a good exercise, in empty or ugly hours of the day, to look at anything, the coal-scuttle or the bookcase, and think how happy one could be to have brought it out of the sinking ship on to the solitary island. But it is a better exercise still to remember how all things have had this hair-breadth escape: everything has been saved from the wreck (HO:267).

Chesterton takes the shipwreck of Crusoe as a parable for the mysteriousness of all of life. He dares to conceive of a world that has been "saved from the wreck" of its own non-existence (HO:267). This is

particularly applicable to his view of human beings. For example, it seems nonsensical to speak of anything like the fallenness of great men of genius without first noticing the very miraculous, surprising presence of such men (HO:267). Chesterton observes that it is common to view the lives of the fallen as the "Great Might-Have-Been," but that it is far more concrete a realisation that "any man in the street is a Great Might-Not-Have-Been" (HO:267). Once again, we find the idea that there is a goodness that precedes the goodness of creation. The miracle of being is built into even the most obvious things. Echoing this, Chesterton explains that one of his central concerns is for "the problem of how men could be made to realise the wonder and splendour of being alive, in environments which their own daily criticism treated as dead-alive, and which their imagination had left for dead" (AU:134).

Ontologically and even probabilistically speaking, 'nothingness' is more likely than 'somethingness' or being. Chesterton allows for the possibility that being might never have been (Schall 2000:42, 58). This makes even the very presence of the reader to the text remarkable. It is worth asking, as Leibniz (1989:639) does, why there should be anything at all rather than just nothing.[19] But Chesterton, contra Leibniz, notices that the "world does not explain itself" (HO:268; ST:155), meaning that being is not fundamentally to be understood as a necessity. "Necessity is not the mother of all invention, but some hidden and generous mystery" (Reyburn 2011:52). There does not have to be something rather than nothing. Being is not a should-be or an ought-to-be, but a gift given without explanation. To parody Leibniz, Chesterton writes that this is not the "best of all possible worlds," but "the best of all impossible worlds"(CD:290)."Its merit is not that it is orderly and explicable," but "that it is wild and utterly unexplained" (CD:290). No human mind could have thought the world or existence up and therefore everyone is subtly compelled to acknowledge that he is swimming in an ocean of "miracle and unreason" (CD:290).

Alison Milbank (2009a:118) notes that gifts do involve a kind of exchange, even if the exchange is of nothing for something. While it may be said that God gives and creates out of his abundance rather than out of lack, in existential terms there is no such thing as a free gift. Every gift comes at a cost. Indeed, the very notion of a gift implies that the gift benefits the receiver far more than it does the giver, even when giving is a kind of receiving. A gift is a kind of positive injustice; it is unfair that one should receive so much more than what one has earned. Chesterton is certainly aware of negative injustices in the world, and he does not turn a blind eye to the problem of evil, but he is on the whole more perplexed by the abundant generosity of life. People are created and born without asking to be,

[19] Leibniz's (1989:639) argument is that nothing would be far simpler than something, but then moves on to make the assumption that just because things do exist that they *must* exist by necessity and must therefore have a reason for existing. This is not the line of reasoning that Chesterton follows. The answer to the question — *why is there something rather than nothing?* — may still exist, but it remains largely or entirely mysterious.

leaving Chesterton to wonder if there is not some Being, rather than some impersonal deterministic process, to thank for the "present of birth" (HO:258).

The idea that being is a gift is once again intricately connected to the idea that something can come out of nothing. Everything that is, Eagleton (2009:8) suggests, is always "overshadowed by the possibility of its own nonexistence". Being is, in philosophical terms, contingent, meaning that it is not absolutely necessary. The idea of being as a riddle needs to be introduced into one's understanding of being so as not to absolutise necessity and thus make it the mother of all invention. It is precisely in the riddle of being that human subjects are called to contemplate the possibility of a Being who is responsible for being. While the riddle of being may not necessarily be connected to the belief that there is a God, this is certainly the conclusion that Chesterton draws (AU:150). For Chesterton, as for his philosophical predecessors, being is derived from the "Pre-existent" (Aquinas 1951:113, 128; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987:98).[20] In other words, nothing, including the self, is self-sustained; therefore, even understanding the nature of the structure of being cannot be owed only to the one who understands. The plot of the drama of being cannot merely be framed as a liner movement from purpose to rising action to consequence (Poythress 2009:197); instead, it is a fluid toing and froing within the perichoretic theodrama of the Trinity.

This movement, for Chesterton, is an adventure story about discovery and rediscovery. If mystery underpins all of life, then it cannot be worn out and cannot run dry. The fatigue of familiarity is an illusion perpetuated by a refusal to engage imaginatively with the world that is there (EU:14). Thus, mystery cannot be explained away by simplistic plausibilities. Chesterton describes himself as a "man who with utmost daring discovered what had been discovered before" (HO:214). He comes across the old as if it were new and this forms the backbone of the riddle of being: it is a drama that moves from mystery to mystery and not from commonplace to commonplace. It is this very knowledge of the riddle of being that produces surprise. It considers the riddle of being on the premise that the riddle has already, to some extent, been answered. The riddle itself is an answer.

2.4.2 The answer of being

Chesterton admits that before he had come to a deeper understanding of philosophy, his earliest engagements with the world concluded with the obvious presence of "Anything"[21] which he humorously equates with the *Ens* of Aquinas (AU:150). On this point, a bridge is formed between

[20] While he does not write in any detail about Pseudo-Dionysius, Chesterton makes it clear that he is aware of the "supposed work of the Areopagite" (ST:28). However, he is aware of Pseudo-Dionysius's transcendentalism or Neo-Platonism and therefore tends to side with the more incarnational stances of St Francis and St Thomas.
[21] This *Anything* is not the same as the *aliquid* of Aquinas, which indicates the "thingness" of something: a thing must retain substantial consistency or relative completeness to sustain its own nature (Milbank 2009b:133).

the riddle of being and the second consideration of Chesterton's ontology, namely the answer of being. After all, being, as it is disclosed to itself via language, "is both mysterious and revelatory in character" (Reyburn 2011:55).

Continuing his idea that creation involves an act of separation and setting free, Chesterton argues that things that exist need to be seen as distinct in their being. Chesterton sides with Aquinas' argument for the individual character of things that would allow him to distinguish "between chalk and cheese, and pigs and pelicans" (ST:137). Capon (1995:155) builds on Chesterton's reasoning by arguing that

> [t]he physical question of what beings are made out of can never be allowed to preempt our proper metaphysical concern with what being *is*. Our alienation, our boredom, and our estrangement can be cured only by the recovery of the philosophical sanity that will allow us to meet things face to face. An egg is an egg,[22] and must be saluted as such. And china is china, and all *things* are themselves: mushrooms and artichokes, wine and cheese, earth and stars and sky and oceans.

Capon, like Chesterton, argues that there is clearly a dimension of objectivity to reality that is reliant on the separateness of beings. As problematic as the term *objectivity* has become in recent phenomenological discourse, it needs to be recognised as a valid term in Chesterton's philosophy, since he is by no means arguing that subjectivities are absent or irrelevant. Moreover, to point out that Chesterton adheres to the idea of objectivity is not to say that he sees entities as being completely and utterly unrelated or self-existent. In fact, it is on this point that he departs from the Aristotelian (2004:126) explanation of being as being self-sufficient. Chesterton is not a substance ontologist. He argues that "[l]ooking at [b]eing[23] as it is now, as the baby looks at the grass, we see ... [that being] looks secondary and dependant. Existence exists; but it is not sufficiently self-existent; and would never become so merely by going on existing" (ST:158). By saying that existence is *secondary*, Chesterton is alluding to the Being that brings and holds all things into being. By saying that existence is *dependant*, he is alluding to two things, namely that all things are dependant on the Creator for their being even though they have been divorced from his mind, as is evident in Chesterton's cosmology. Moreover, all things are dependant on each other for their relationship to their own being. It is precisely in their separateness that their interconnectedness may be allowed for (Reyburn 2011:55). Moreover, Chesterton recognises that the interconnectedness of beings is discovered through phenomenological perception, as in his reference here to *looking* (ST:158). So, while there is separateness to being, there is also a definite sense that being is reliant on connections

[22] Capon (1995:155) is in fact using the same example as Chesterton does (ST:137).
[23] I have made a correction to this text for the sake of clarification. Chesterton frequently writes *being* with a capital 'B' to reflect the use of a capital 'E' of Aquinas' *Ens*.

and relationships, and that it is precisely in these relationships that interpretation is made possible. Ultimately, nothing is intelligible in isolation, because nothing exists in isolation (VA).

It is very clear that Chesterton understands perception as the glue that holds together the separateness and interconnectedness of things from the point of view of human beings. One can only determine the nature of being in accordance with one's own perception of being. This is where Chesterton's epistemology and his ontology are deeply interwoven. The recognition of being is connected to and part of being:

> [E]ven those who appreciate the metaphysical depth of Thomism in other matters have expressed surprise that he does not deal at all with what many now think the main metaphysical question; whether we can prove that the primary act of recognition of any reality is real. The answer is that St. Thomas recognised instantly what so many modern sceptics have begun to suspect rather laboriously; that a man must either answer that question in the affirmative, or else never answer any question, never ask any question, never even exist intellectually, to answer or to ask. I suppose it is true in a sense that a man can be a fundamental sceptic, but he cannot be anything else; certainly not even a defender of fundamental scepticism. If a man feels that the movements of his own mind are meaningless, then his mind is meaningless and he is meaningless; and it does not mean anything to attempt to discover its meaning (ST:136).

Chesterton goes on to argue that either "there is no philosophy, no philosophers, no thinkers, no thought, no anything; or else *there is a real bridge between the mind and reality*" (ST:137), emphasis added). With Aquinas, Chesterton begins with the assumption that reality is there and that it is, at least to some degree, knowable; "God made Man so that he was capable of coming into contact with reality; and those whom God hath joined, let no man put asunder" (ST:137, 170). He argues against the sceptics of his day by pointing out that their "philosophies are not philosophy but philosophic doubt; that is, doubt about whether there can be any philosophy" (ST:171). In doing so, he speaks as much to postmodern scepticism as to the scepticism of the Post-Victorian era.

If the self is physical, and thus actively capable of engaging with the world instead of forcing an erroneously constructed detachment from the world, dogmatic scepticism is simply a fool's errand. Chesterton argues that sceptical detachment from reality is particularly evident in how thinkers abstract and then divorce concepts from their source (ST:163). For example, he writes that "[the typical modernist] will not say there is grass but only growth" (ST:163). Here the concept of *growth* symbolises the transition, change and flux that is celebrated in both modernity and postmodernity. Nevertheless, when abstracted or detached from its object, it ceases to be dramatic (cf. Gadamer 1975:116). This is an essential component of understanding the conceivability of being, as Étienne Gilson (1952:2) suggests: "'Being' is conceivable, 'to be' is not. We cannot possibly conceive an 'is' except as belonging to some thing that is, or exists". However, as Gilson (1952:3) continues, "the

reverse is not true. Being is quite conceivable apart from actual existence; so much so that the very first and the most universal of all the distinctions in the realm of being is that which divides it into two classes, that of the real and that of the possible".

One may suggest that at the root of our dramatological engagement with the created text or world that we live in is the essentially acknowledgement that it exists alongside us.[24] Even before the self is aware of the self — that is, even in a pre-ontological state — the self is aware that "something is something" and that "there *is* an Is" (ST:153). There can be no bridge between the mind and reality if one negates the suggestion of such an *Anything* (ST:137), thus making such a negation seem nonsensical. With Aquinas, Chesterton's basic assumption is that truth is correspondence or equation of thought and thing: *adequatio*[25] *intellectus et rei* (Aquinas 1951:13). Thomas Merton's (1989:121) definition of truth highlights it as a dialogue between reality and the self: "Truth, in things, is their reality. In our minds, it is the conformity of our knowledge with the things known. In our words, it is the conformity of our words to what we think. In our conduct, it is the conformity of our acts to what we are supposed to be." In other words, understanding truth as correspondence with reality, as William Desmond (1995:467) observes, ought not to imply that "[m]ind is 'in here,' [and that] reality is 'out there'". Truth is not an "extrinsic relation between two univocally fixed determinacies," but a "community of mind and being" (Desmond 1995:468). Truth exists in dialogue; it is the correspondence of our whole being with reality as it is. But this correspondence, in keeping with Chesterton's dramatology, does not imply that being human in correspondence with reality is somehow the full realisation of truth. Being in the drama cannot encompass the fullness of reality, but is encompassed by the fuller reality of the whole drama. There is a dialogue between part (being) and whole (Being). There is Being in being, and being in Being, and yet the two remain distinct.

Reality and the recognition of reality are "two agencies at work" within being, and their meeting is "a kind of marriage" (ST:169). Perception and reality are impossible to split. Chesterton suggests that subjectivism forces the imagination inwards, creating a split between the subject and the object of his contemplation, but that the one who accepts the objectivity of reality has his imagination "forced outwards" (ST:168). The result is that the mind does not merely think about objects as external self-sustained entities, but "actually becomes the object" (ST:169); it

[24] Eagleton (2009:80) points out that the commonplace phrase "the external world": "In what sense is a laburnum tree 'outside' me, rather than alongside me? If I see it as 'outside,' then the real me must somehow be squatting inside my own body, like a man operating a crane. And who is operating him?" This echoes Heidegger (1962:80) who explains that to be is to be alongside the world, and that this 'Being alongside' the world is, in a sense, to be absorbed by the world. The world is a container for the self.
[25] While *adequatio* is often rendered in terms of mere equality in the English translation, the original Latin carries with it the ideas of adaptation and adjustment. This is to say that the 'equation of thought and thing' is dynamic and not static in Aquinas' thinking.

> becomes the object but does not create the object. In other words, the object *is* an object; it can and does exist outside the mind, or in the absence of the mind. And *therefore* it enlarges the mind of which it becomes a part. The mind conquers a new province like an emperor; but only because the mind has answered the bell like a servant. The mind has opened doors and windows, because it is the natural activity of which is inside the house to find out what is outside the house. If the mind is sufficient to itself, it is insufficient for itself. For this feeding upon fact *is* itself; as an organ it has an object which is objective; this eating of the strange strong meat of reality (ST:169).

Thus, while Chesterton uses words like *objectivity* and *subjectivity,* he does so in a very specific way that avoids causing a dichotomy between mind and matter (Reyburn 2011:56). The mind is not merely receptive so that the human being is conceived of as "wholly servile to his environment," but nor is the mind purely creative "in the sense that it paints pictures on the windows and then mistakes them for a landscape outside" (ST:139). Chesterton views the mind as an active participant in reality, and thus in its own being as well as the being of other beings. In fact, in Chesterton's work, it is precisely the fact that reality is objective rather than the reader. The reading remains subjective in that human beings simultaneously act and are acted upon, not only by other people, but also by the material world they live alongside. And so, once again, Chesterton's epistemology of re-cognition and re-membering is concerned with the reconciliation of the separateness of things without allowing things to lose their distinctness.

All of this fundamentally affects the way that human beings interpret and thus understand their own being and therefore the being of other beings. Chesterton does not describe the world or any text as remote or removed from human experience, but treats the intricate dialogical dynamism between thought and thing as crucial. For example, a white piece of chalk is not merely an impersonal object, but something "positive and essential" — a symbol of "religious morality" (TT:11). Moreover, colours are alive and filled with exuberant vitality: red is not just red, but red-hot; green calls forth the "live green figure of Robin Hood"; and blue invokes the "blue robes of the Virgin" (TT:11). Interpretation begins before thorough comprehension, in the moment of apprehension. The world is not made present through understanding, but is already readily accessible from the instant of apprehension. It is a subjective whole before it is perceived in its constituent parts. It is, to use dramatic metaphor, an entire play before it becomes an issue of actors, audience, plot, stage and experience.

As a result of this, dramatology begins even before the text has been contemplated. In fact, before the audience has had the chance to analyse or study the constituent parts of the drama, it has been implicated in the text merely by observing the play. The audience is part of the text, already inside the text in the act of observing. This idea is captured in the opening of the second chapter of his

Autobiography (1937), where Chesterton recalls his earliest memory, an image of a "young man walking across a bridge," which turns out to be a scene played out from the stage of a toy theatre made by his father (AU:40). From this he extracts a key idea:

> All my life I have loved edges; and the boundary-line that brings one thing sharply against another. All my life I have loved frames and limits; and I will maintain that the largest wilderness looks larger when seen through a window. To the grief of all grave dramatic critics, I will still assert that the perfect drama must strive to rise to the higher ecstasy of the peep-show (AU:41).[26]

This echoes the idea of the distinctness of things already discussed, but adds a phenomenological dimension. Chesterton speaks of the peep show, not to argue for the removal of the spectator, but to demonstrate that the spectator is so involved and enveloped in the drama that his sense of self is diminished. As a consequence, he feels like a participant in the drama. This is substantiated in the opening of *The everlasting man* (1925):

> There are two ways of getting home; and one of them is to stay there. The other is to walk round the whole world till we come back to the same place; and I tried to trace such a journey in a story I once wrote. It is, however, a relief to turn from that topic to another story that I never wrote. Like every book I never wrote, it is by far the best book I have ever written. It is only too probable that I shall never write it, so I will use it symbolically here; for it was a symbol of the same truth. I conceived it as a romance of those vast valleys with sloping sides, like those along which the ancient White Horses of Wessex are scrawled along the flanks of the hills. It concerned some boy whose farm or cottage stood on such a slope, and who went on his travels to find something, such as the effigy and grave of some giant; and when he was far enough from home he looked back and saw that his own farm and kitchen-garden, shining flat on the hill-side like the colours and quarterings of a shield, were but parts of some such gigantic figure, on which he had always lived but which was too large and too close to be seen (EM:9).

Once again, the audience — in this case, a boy — is so enveloped by the objective reality that he has not had the chance to properly contemplate it. Its objective truth does not initially affect the boy's awareness. As a result, Chesterton argues for objectivity, but never complete detachment. And it is precisely in this participation in the drama that human beings are able to hold themselves in relation to the drama. In this drama of being, there is a sense in which the object of contemplation becomes more itself while being contemplated, and the one who contemplates becomes more himself in contemplating the otherness of something.[27] The answer of being becomes more evident, because the audience is a part of the same riddle of being. In other words, the viewer comes more into his own being when he accepts that he is already lost in the drama, just as the actor becomes more himself when he willingly succumbs to the events of a play (Gadamer 1975:103). The fact that the reader

[26] The term *peep-show* refers to a sequence of images viewed through a lens or a small hole set into a box.
[27] This idea can be found both in the writings of Eagleton (2009:80) and Heidegger (1962:90), but obviously Chesterton's dramatology suggests a more exuberant, optimistic vision of this idea since it implies a movement towards redemption and integration rather than the Heideggerian tendency to view the movement towards fulfillment as a movement towards the abyss of death.

becomes implicated in the text and alive to the experience of reading the drama allows for the possibility of an answer to the riddle of being. And it is the reader's presence that gives birth to the dramatological experience, whereby the riddle of being and the answer of being, when understood in tension, give rise to the romance of being. With only riddles and answers, the interpretive process operates in dichotomies, but with the added dimension of romance, the interpretive process becomes a dialogue, and hermeneutics becomes dramatology. This is to say, that the interpretive experience is realised as a story within a story.

2.4.3 The romance of being

When Chesterton writes of the "two ways of getting home" (EM:9), he is reflecting a major theme is his writings, namely that while the wholeness of meaning is always present, one still has to strive to fully participate in that meaning. Interpretive understanding is already there to be discovered before it has been discovered. It is present even when it is felt to be absent. Or, in other words, even if one *is* at home in the completeness of things, one has to *get* home to the completeness of things. The other way to get home, as I have already noted, involves a journey of indefinite length that covers immeasurable territory, but arrives at the same place (EM:9). This mirrors Chesterton's introduction to his spiritual autobiography *Orthodoxy* (1908):

> I have often had a fancy for writing a romance about an English yachtsman who slightly miscalculated his course and discovered England under the impression that it was a new island in the South Seas. I always find, however, that I am either too busy or too lazy to write this fine work, so I may as well give it away for the purposes of philosophical illustration. There will probably be a general impression that the man who landed (armed to the teeth and talking by signs) to plant the British flag on that barbaric temple which turned out to be the Pavilion at Brighton, felt rather a fool. I am not here concerned to deny that he looked a fool. But if you imagine that he felt a fool, or at any rate that the sense of folly was his sole or his dominant emotion, then you have not studied with sufficient delicacy the rich romantic nature of the hero of this tale. His mistake was really a most enviable mistake; and he knew it, if he was the man I take him for. What could be more delightful than to have in the same few minutes all the fascinating terrors of going abroad combined with all the humane security of coming home again? What could be better than to have all the fun of discovering South Africa without the disgusting necessity of landing there? What could be more glorious than to brace one's self up to discover New South Wales and then realise, with a gush of happy tears, that it was really old South Wales. This at least seems to me the main problem for philosophers, and is in a manner the main problem of this book. How can we contrive to be at once astonished at the world and yet at home in it? (HO:212).

Further on, Chesterton announces that he is in fact the "fool" that discovers what already is. He is the man who boldly sets out to be some eighteen minutes ahead of the truth, only to find out that he is some 1800 years behind it (HO:213). Behind the humour of this passage, Chesterton is arguing that one's engagement with the world is not as straightforward as discovering what is known in the sense of arriving without ever needing to depart again. Rather, being in the drama involves a dialogue

between being and becoming, between longing and belonging, or, as Pseudo-Dionysius (1987:80) argues, between yearning as *eros*, and love or consummation as *agape*. Life is a drama that is experienced as a kind of homesickness whilst being at home (HO:284). In all of these elements, the clear line between opposites is both present and absent, since Chesterton operates in accordance with paradoxes rather than polemics. For Chesterton, being is fundamentally driven by desire and is thus a romance. If riddles and answers are seen as the substance of being, romance may be seen as its agency; it is the thing that drives the life of being.

While at home in the world, being may involve a sense of longing for home; whilst feeling estranged from the world, being may involve a sense of being at home (Reyburn 2011:59). In praise of metaphysical realism Chesterton contends that "we [are] all in exile, and ... no earthly house [can] cure the holy home-sickness that forbids us rest" (MA:108). There is, in other words, a movement between what is in stasis and what may yet be in stasis (TL). Both are fully present at all times. This romance or desire is intrinsic to the text of creation. Romance, a word with all "the mystery and ancient meaning of Rome" (HO:212), always contains something "strange" and something "secure" (HO:213). It is concerned with fleeing danger in order to claim health and life (HO:362). It is a courageous leap towards imagination, joy, delight, reality, and wonderment (EM:58, 248; HO:305).

Chesterton argues that there are two searches at play in the human psyche: the search for romance and the search for truth or reason. Both of these searches may be found in a mythology that happens to be true (EM:248). And Christianity, which fulfils these searches for Chesterton, provides the ultimate goal of romance, which is the awareness and worship of the Creator who made all things (AD:ii). Romance is never a perfect or complete state of arrival, but remains an ongoing journey "to the temple" — to the state of being in which one is given room to worship God (AD:iii). This romance is again symbolised in *The surprise* by the movement towards a marriage celebration (SU), and it is precisely this that gets corrupted when the actors violate the script of the Author: what was intended by the Author as a movement towards peace, harmony and connection gets turned into a discordant, chaotic quarrel (SU). It is not the riddle of being or the answer of being that gets corrupted, but the romance of being. For Chesterton, being is not just a dead, fixed or concrete thing, but a movement. This again aligns his ontology directly to his cosmology. Riddles, answers and romances are in a dance together; they are participants in the ongoing, dynamic drama of being. Chesterton's understanding of the romance or desire at the heart of being is directly related to his cosmology of re-creation and his epistemology of re-membering. In short, what Chesterton calls the "romance of orthodoxy" emphasises the storied character of life, a story that is always somehow in pursuit of its own beginning (HO:329). For this reason, Chesterton is truly an original writer: he always works towards understanding origins.

It was the task of this chapter to outline the philosophical framework within which this pursuit of originality or origins takes place. It is the task of the following chapter to focus the lens even more on what I deem to be the central aim of Chesterton's interpretive process, namely to promote and sustain human dignity. It became clear that Chesterton's dramatology operates along the lines of metareference or, in dramaturgical terms, metatheatre. Metareference is an event whereby the characters in a work of 'fiction' become aware that they are in a world or drama that is not of their own making. It presents the idea that what is contained within the drama (being) is given purpose and meaning by what is found both in and beyond the drama (Being). In literature, metareference is used to disrupt the enchantment of the constructed world — the work of cinema, drama or literature; but this is not the nature of metareference in the work of Chesterton. If anything, becoming aware of a transcendent order leads to the re-enchantment of the world. Life is re-encountered as coherent drama, bursting with surprise. The following chapter is founded on the realisation that the inside of Chesterton's hermeneutic circle is larger than the outside (AU:49; ST:131). This is to say that for Chesterton man is not made to serve a philosophy of abstract notions surrounding the nature of the human drama; rather, this philosophy ought to serve the man.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TASK OF CHESTERTON'S DRAMATOLOGY

3.1 Introduction to Chapter Three

The aim of this study is to examine, understand and apply Chesterton's interpretive lens, to which I have given the name *dramatology*. To this end I have already suggested that Chesterton's career beginnings as a reader in Redway's publishing house and then as a book reviewer may be taken as a symbol of his approach to his work in general: he reads in order to find an excuse to offer his own opinions on what he is reading (Ahlquist 2006:78; Ker 2011:40). This reading is done, as was detailed in the previous chapter, within a particular understanding of cosmology, epistemology and ontology. However, viewing Chesterton as a reader may make it difficult to argue that ultimately Chesterton has a singular, coherent interpretive lens. After all, to cite Ahlquist's (2003:19) exaggeration, Chesterton's subject is "everything". He deems anything that crosses his path worth contemplating and discussing. Thus, he is clearly aware of the richness and complication that is interwoven into the human story and is reluctant to present too constricted a view of that richness and complication (AT:107; MO:79).

Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that Chesterton uses a "narrow compass" to "focus a large range of material" towards the "great labor of synthesis and reconstruction" (McLuhan 1936:462). It is my contention that there is a single idea that acts as Chesterton's point of departure and return, an idea that informs and shapes everything that he considers in his work without prescribing any kind of reductionism. It is the idea of the "dignity of man" or "human dignity" (AU:239; EM:52-53; HO:94, 298; Nichols 2009:121-159; ST:36, 177; Williams 2006:15-24; WW:15). This assertion becomes especially pivotal later in the analysis of *The tree of life* outlined in Chapters Five and Six, since it too may be shown to reflect this same idea. "This is an age," Chesterton declares, "in which we must defend human dignity" (MO:74). McLuhan (1936:456) suggests that for Chesterton, "[human] existence has a value utterly ... superior to any arguments for optimism or pessimism". Therefore, rather than underplaying the wideness of Chesterton's gaze regarding the many causes and subjects that he addresses, this idea stresses the fact that his ultimate focus was not merely propositional or abstract truth, but personal truth. He always endeavours to attain a "freshness of perception" that "dignifies and illuminates" any of the present activities of people (McLuhan 1936:456).

As a rule, Chesterton therefore denigrates any notion or action that would compromise human dignity and applauds any notion or action that promotes it. His "creed" or "gospel of wonder" is one example of something that affirms human dignity in that "[m]an is more himself, man is more manlike, when joy is the fundamental thing in him, and grief the superficial" (HO:364; Ker 2011:100; McLuhan 1936:455). Chesterton's lifelong defense of Christian orthodoxy in general and Catholic orthodoxy in particular also comes back to an ideal view of humanity that he finds expressed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth (EM:185). And his "search for the overall [paradoxical] *logic* of Christian belief" is directly bound to the "incarnational paradox" that is represented by this same Jesus (Milbank 2009b:117, 177). Thus, Chesterton's affirmation of human immanence is simultaneously an affirmation of divine transcendence and his affirmation of human dignity is ultimately an affirmation of the goodness of God. He contends that the "common conscience of sane people" is something that is simultaneously "the voice of God" and "the voice of Man" (MO:120). However, while Chesterton certainly implies a paradoxical tension between the transcendent and the immanent, his emphasis remains on the immanent. He is, in this sense, more on the side of Aristotle than he is on the side of Plato, although it is clear that he takes the work of the latter into consideration (Armitage 2007:160; ST:29).[1]

Following this, it may be said that even when Chesterton's subject changes to consider the polyphonic, dramatic character of life, his dramatology remains geared towards this singular task of affirming human dignity. This naturally raises the question of exactly how Chesterton understands human dignity and it is the aim of this chapter to address this very question. To achieve this aim, three dimensions of Chesterton's views on human dignity are discussed below, namely the defense of the "old beer-drinking, creed-making, fighting, failing, sensual, respectable" common man, the defense of common sense and the defense of democracy (Ahlquist 2006:155; HO:70).

3.2 In defense of the common man

In Chesterton's mind, "[r]roughly speaking, there are three kinds of people in this world" (AD:70):

[1] What Chesterton writes about Aquinas may, as implied by this paragraph, be applied to himself: "The Platonists, or at least the Neo-Platonists, all tended to the view that the mind was lit entirely from within; St. Thomas insisted that it was lit by five windows, that we call the windows of the senses. But he wanted the light from without to shine on what was within. He wanted to study the nature of Man, and not merely of such moss and mushrooms as he might see through the window, and which he valued as the first enlightening experience of man. And starting from this point, he proceeds to climb the House of Man, step by step and story by story, until he has come out on the highest tower arid beheld the largest vision" (ST:148-149).

> The first kind of people are People; they are the largest and probably the most valuable class. We owe to this class the chairs we sit down on, the clothes we wear, the houses we live in; and, indeed (when we come to think of it), we probably belong to this class of people ourselves. The second class may be called for convenience the Poets; they are often a nuisance to their families, but, generally speaking, a blessing to mankind. The third class is that of the Professors or Intellectuals; sometimes described as the thoughtful people; and these are a blight and a desolation both to their families and also to mankind. Of course, the classification sometimes overlaps, like all classification. Some good people are almost poets and some bad poets are almost professors. But the division follows lines of real psychological cleavage. I do not offer it lightly. It has been the fruit of more than eighteen minutes of earnest reflection and research.

Chesterton deepens this playful classification by arguing that people are bound by various ethical commonplaces and a grounded clarity that comes from living in the world without trying to explain too much of it. He seems here to be particularly wary of those totalising metanarratives that certain supporters of modernism are so fond of. This clarity celebrates things like "hilarity," "a regard for helplessness," "sentiment," "pity, dramatic surprise, a desire for justice, a delight in experiment and the indeterminate" (AD:70). This celebration — that which unites the emotional, ethical and mysterious dimensions of human experience — underscores the fact that ordinary people live by subtle ideas even if they fail to convey their ideas with any subtlety.

The second class of people participate in the sentiments of ordinary people, but find that they are actually able to express the subtle ideas of people with genuine subtlety (AD:70): "The Poets carry the popular sentiments to a keener and more splendid pitch; but let it always be remembered that they are popular sentiments that they are carrying ... The Poets are those who rise above the people by understanding them" (AD:71). This is not to say that poets are necessarily writers or that they necessarily write poetry, but rather that they are simply the kind of people who engage with life in the world with more imagination and with a more acute awareness than is ordinarily found among the mob. The third class of people, professors or intellectuals, are those people who tend to be somewhat detached from the sensibilities of the masses. They possess ideals of their own, but their ideals lose track of the commonplace sensibilities and realities that most other people have to live with.

One cannot understand Chesterton until one understands that he is primarily concerned with combating the theories of this educated class of people. In fact, Chesterton's worldview is understood largely as the photographic negative of the vague ideologies of many of the intellectuals of his time (Maycock 1963:29). For dramatic emphasis, Chesterton uses the blanket terms *heresy* or *lunacy* to describe any number of worldviews that override the interests of the common man, and the terms *heretic, lunatic* or *maniac* to describe the one who subscribes to and promotes any such worldview.

Such labels may seem harsh to one who is unfamiliar with Chesterton's rhetoric, but there is a fair measure of good humour implied in the use of these melodramatic descriptors. In Chesterton's estimation, even the genius of his close friends, Rudyard Kipling, George Bernard Shaw and HG Wells, is regarded affectionately as a kind of madness.

Chesterton's work constantly unpacks the philosophical consequences of the ideas of these and other authors in such a way as to suggest that the authors themselves are not aware of their own philosophical assumptions.[2] For him, the lunacy of his friends is primarily found in that their thought processes are straitjacketed in such a way that reflective self-awareness is made unlikely. In other words, their thinking refuses to expose any "unconscious dogma" (MO:98).[3] Chesterton's success is owed, even by his own admission, to the fact that he has listened to very sound advice and then gone and done the "exact opposite" (AU:179). In this, Chesterton may be viewed as a "reactionary" who stands strongly against the "spirit of [his] age" (McLuhan 1936:456). While he never resorts to vulgarity, he refuses to elevate himself to the position of the aristocracy.[4]

Consequently, whatever the limitations of the above classification of people may be, it at least points out that for Chesterton the ideal perspective adopted for preaching and upholding human dignity is the perspective of the poet. His poetic perception "floats easily in an infinite sea" of subjects and sensibilities, allowing for understanding without reductionism (HO:220). His outlook also allows for the kind of ignorance that champions "the exquisite intuitions of innocence" (AD:71). However, for Chesterton, it is not the extraordinary things that are truly "poetical," but the "common things" (HO:55). His writings seem to indicate that this poetic perspective is the very ideal that he strives for in his reading of the world. There is one contradiction particularly in McLuhan's assessment of Chesterton that should be highlighted here. In one instance, he suggests that Chesterton is an "intellectual poet" (McLuhan 1936:464), and in another instance he contends that Chesterton is "not a poet," but a "metaphysical moralist" (McLuhan 1948:xxi). The second assessment, I believe, is misguided in that it creates a dichotomy between Chesterton's philosophical genius and his poetic instinct. Why can he not be both a poet and a metaphysical moralist? This is an issue that

[2] Chesterton particularly praises Thomas Carlyle for his ability to expose those assumptions that underpin the reasoning of those around him (Ker 2011:104; TW:35). In fact, he regards this as Carlyle's primary virtue. This is not to say that Chesterton always agrees with Carlyle, especially regarding his particular form of hero worship, but that he simply appreciates his desire to look behind the curtain of logic and poor reasoning.

[3] Chesterton points out that the "special mark of the modern world is not that it is sceptical, but that it is dogmatic without knowing it. It says, in mockery of old devotees, that they believed without knowing *why* they believed. But the moderns believe without knowing *what* they believe — and without even knowing that they do believe it. Their freedom consists in first freely assuming a creed, and then freely forgetting that they are assuming it. In short, they always have an unconscious dogma; and an unconscious dogma is the definition of a prejudice" (MO:98).

[4] In Chesterton's view, vulgarity refers not so much to the mind of the mob as it does to the "revelation" that someone can be stretching his mind to show off only to prove that his mind is stunted (ID:184): "[A] thing is only vulgar when its best is base" (ID:184).

Chesterton addresses in his assessment of Robert Browning when he notes that those who do not like Browning's work tend to say that he was not a poet, but a philosopher, whereas those who do like Browning's work tend to suggest, more reasonably, that he was both a philosopher and a poet (RB). Chesterton's poetic philosophy, which explores many of the heights of human achievement, is always tied to the concerns of ordinary people. He tries to bring intellectuals back down to earth (McLuhan 1939:464).

Maycock (1963:29) observes that "Chesterton has justly been called the poet and the prophet of the man in the street". He often intimates that there is "no such thing as the average man; and scattered throughout his writings there are numerous phrases that express his profound belief in the inalienable dignity of the individual person" (Maycock 1963:29). He admits that he more easily aligns himself with the "ruck of hard-working people" than with "that special and troublesome literary class" to which he belongs (HO:251). He therefore prefers the "prejudices of the people who see life on the inside to the clearest demonstrations of [those] who [claim to] see life from the outside" (HO:252).

From his point of view, every man should adopt the "gigantic humility of the Incarnation" by descending "into the flesh to meet mankind" (WW:70). In this he again negates the remote position of the professors by invoking the scripture that explains that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1.14), and thereby implies that turning flesh back into mere words is not desirable:

> Whenever you hear of things being unutterable and indefinable and impalpable and unnamable and subtly indescribably, then elevate your aristocratic nose towards heaven and snuff up the smell of decay. It is perfectly true that there is something in all good things that is beyond all speech or figure of speech. But it is also true that there is in all good things a perpetual desire for expression and concrete embodiment; and though the attempt to embody is always inadequate, the attempt is always made. If the idea does not seek to be the word, the chances are that it is an evil idea. If the word is not made flesh it is a bad word (ID:65).

In harmony with Chesterton's approval of concrete expression, Ahlquist (2006:53) observes that his rhetoric is largely visual so that his words "become flesh" and "spring to life". This observation aligns with Chesterton's insistence that "[n]o man must be superior to the things that are common to men" (WW:71). Furthermore, he suggests that the things that are "common to all men are more important than the things peculiar to any men" (HO:249). The "sense of the miracle of humanity itself should be always more vivid to us than any marvels of power, intellect, art, or civilization" and the simple image of a "man on two legs ... should be felt as something more heartbreaking than any music and more startling than any caricature" (HO:250). Man, in Chesterton's view, is elevated

above all other things in the whole of creation, including the products of creative thought. As discussed below, this ideal forms the core of his defense of democracy.

Ker (2011:89) observes that Chesterton's defense of the common man distinguishes him from the misguided Nietzschean arrogance that is found in the work of so many of his contemporaries. In particular, Chesterton criticises Nietzsche's *Übermensch* who exclaims that "[m]an is a thing which needs to be surpassed," because such an exclamation implies the end of humanity (HO:80).[5] It implies throwing the existing man out of the window and asking for a new kind of man instead of finding out if there is a way to improve the existing man (HO:70, 80). In his opinion, the Nietzschean mindset, which mirrors the mindset of the professors discussed above, is tantamount to a kind of conceptual blindness, because it dulls perception. It is a theoretical form of self-hypnosis that lulls its supporters into being bored by everything (AM:22-23). It refuses to be challenged by anything in the world of experience (AM:22-23). Chesterton therefore criticises the Nietzschean ideal by pointing out that such an ideal stands directly in the way of "seeing things as they are" (HO:68):

> It is not seeing things as they are to think first of a Briareus with a hundred heads, and then call every man a cripple for having only one. It is not seeing things as they are to start with a vision of Argus with his hundred eyes, and then jeer at every man with two eyes as if he had only one. And it is not seeing things as they are to imagine a demi-god of infinite mental clarity, who may or may not appear in the latter days of this earth, and then to see all men as idiots (HO:68).

The climax of the Nietzschean obsession with superiority is an attitude of general contempt towards things that are deemed to be inferior. And this, Chesterton argues, is what removes the delight of dramatic surprise that is at the heart of his ideal of human dignity (AD:70; HO:69). A further critique offered by Chesterton against the ideal of the *Übermensch* is that it is not actually clear what such an ideal really stands for. Nietzsche seems uncertain about what exactly he is aiming at, because he relies too heavily on physical, modernist metaphors of height and distance instead of considering the actual, commonsense consequences of his philosophy. Thus, instead of striving for a higher good, Nietzsche strives for an ethic that stands somewhere beyond good and evil (HO:309). And "when he describes his hero, he does not dare to say, 'the purer man,' or 'the happier man,' or 'the sadder man,' for all these are ideas; and ideas are alarming. He says 'the upper man,' or 'over man,' a physical metaphor from acrobats or alpine climbers" (HO:309).

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[5] In an undated letter to Robert Blatchford, Chesterton warns Blatchford against believing that "perfect heredity and environment make the perfect man" because such an assumption is directly linked to the uprising of a "political aristocracy" (in Ker 2011:246). In essence, Chesterton disagrees with dreaming up the idea of the *Übermensch* outside of the context of the present reality, which is that man will always have a self and will therefore always be in danger of selfishness. Circumstances, in Chesterton's view, do not ultimately determine character. He writes that "[m]an has something in him which is always conquering conditions;" it is the liberty of mind that "may make him happy in dungeons ... [and] in the slums" (HO:394).

Basically, Chesterton, who unlike Nietzsche is not blinded by his own metaphors, is not looking for an ideal that stands outside of humanity, but for one that is "more human than humanity itself" (HO:82; EM:204). He does not oppose improvement, which is what writers like Shaw and Wells call for, but insists that any kind of improvement is only possible if it truly celebrates our humanity (Clark 2006:5). He is not promoting a more detached, more stoic kind of human being, but a human being who experiences life more acutely and more fully. His point is not that ideals are to be done away with, but that the ideals that one holds need to keep with the ideals held by and supportive of ordinary people (HO:250). In the end, a Nietzschean hermeneutics is too aloof to be relevant to human experience, whereas Chesterton's ideal is found everywhere in the faces of ordinary (HO:68).

For Chesterton, the Nietzschean view is mistaken primarily in its assumption that man must be merely an "evolution" and therefore a product of the same chain of material causes and effects that has produced all earthly creatures (EM:19, 26). This supposed evolution presumes that man was something else at one time, an ape of sorts, and will therefore become something else, an *Übermensch* of sorts. However, man is not just an evolution, but "a revolution" (EM:26).[6] He does not quite fit into the expected scheme of nature. Therefore, the more one tries to see man as being merely an animal, the more one must conclude that he is not merely an animal (EM:17). The "simplest" and most obvious truth about man is that he is too odd to be considered the product of purely natural processes (EM:36). Man lives and acts in a way that is alien to the life and actions of any other animal:

> He cannot sleep in his own skin; he cannot trust his own instincts. He is at once a creator moving miraculous hands and fingers and a kind of cripple. He is wrapped in artificial bandages called clothes; he is propped on artificial crutches called furniture. His mind has the same doubtful liberties and the same wild limitations. Alone among the animals, he is shaken with the beautiful madness called laughter; as if he had caught sight of some secret in the very shape of the universe hidden from the universe itself. Alone among the animals he feels the need of averting his thought from the root realities of his own bodily being; of hiding them as in the presence of some higher possibility which creates the mystery of shame. Whether we praise these things as natural to man or abuse them as artificial in nature, they remain in the same sense unique (EM:36).

If man is merely an animal bound to entirely material processes, then there is no reason, Nietzschean or Darwinian, to see him as being better than any other animal. However, Chesterton does not reject the theory of evolution insofar as it presumes the idea that non-human species survive by a process

[6] Chesterton's use of the word *revolution* is not in keeping with the rhetoric of most revolutionaries in that he does not aim to abolish the past, but instead hopes to reform and reinvigorate it (HO:320). He suggests that "[a]ll revolutions are doctrinal — such as the French one, or the one that introduced Christianity. For it stands to common sense that you cannot upset all existing things, customs, and compromises, unless you believe in something outside them, something positive and divine" (SW:12). Moreover, he argues that conservatives do not react to their own assumptions, thus leaving change to be substituted with degeneration (SW:12).

called natural selection as long as it is in keeping with Darwin's original thesis (Nichols 2009:127; WS:61).[7] What he does reject is the suggestion that "Darwinism [can] explain the human soul — the distinctively human configuration of consciousness and activity" (EM:51; Nichols 2009:128). Man is too different from other animals, too dignified, to make the Darwinian position on the human spirit plausible. As a theory, Darwinism may be perfectly logical and even plausible on many fronts, but when it comes to explaining man by referring to such a thing as the "Missing Link," it starts to resemble "being on friendly terms with the gap in a narrative or the hole in an argument" (EM:42).[8] Accordingly, Chesterton contends that the sincere "agnosticism of Darwin" should be taken more seriously by his followers (EM:42). In other words, intellectualism needs a fair dose of humility resist being blind to its own prejudices.

As an alternative to the Darwinian theory, Chesterton proposes that the idea that best explains the uniqueness of the human creature among animals, and the idea that best supports his ethic of human dignity, is the idea that man is "the image of God" (EM:35; Nichols 2009:119; WW:42). If nature is "always looking for something of the supernatural," the figure of the dignified human being is a good place to start (EM:129). Obviously, this is not to propose that man is literally identical in physical likeness to the invisible God, but rather that the image of man is analogous to the nature of God. Chesterton suggests that an image is "outline" and therefore also a "limit" (in Ahlquist 2006:36). In this particular case, the limitations of human beings have been set by God. They indicate what it is actually possible for a human being to conform to. Man is the image of God and thus retains a kind of dignity, not because he actually manages to bear that image or stick to its limitations particularly well, but because it is possible for him to work within the outline and limitations evoked by this idea. In particular, this idea emphasises that man, like God, is a creator who has a moral nature and the freedom to make his own decisions (EM:34). If God is good and if he acts upon that goodness, then people ought to choose to be and do likewise. Indeed, insofar as Chesterton is concerned, the notion of human dignity is impossible to sustain apart from his creative moral status. Human dignity is directly bound to what people choose and not just to their ability to choose (HO:241).

Regarding the things that people choose, Chesterton is more interested in the choices of the common man than he is in the usually insane choices of the "Uncommon Man" like the professor or intellectual in the classification discussed above (ID:326). While the professor may choose to "found

[7] Chesterton explains that "[t]he point of Darwinism was not that a bird with a longer beak (let us say) thrust it into other birds, and had the advantage of a duellist with a longer sword. The point of Darwinism was that the bird with the longer beak could reach worms (let us say) at the bottom of a deeper hole; that the birds who could not do so would die; and he alone would remain to found a race of long-beaked birds. Darwinism suggested that if this happened a vast number of times, in a vast series of ages, it might account for the difference between the beaks of a sparrow and a stork. But the point was that the fittest did not need to struggle against the unfit. The survivor … survived because he alone had the features and organs necessary for survival" (WS:61).
[8] The idea of the 'Missing Link' refers to a gap in the record of transitional fossils, especially with regard to human evolution.

a sect" such as "Malthusianism or Eugenics or Sterilisation" or some other kind of elitist club, the common man probably has no interest in founding such a sect and is therefore probably more likely to found a family (ID:321). And while the professor may choose to "publish a newspaper," the common man would rather "talk about politics in a pothouse or the parlour of an inn" even if he could afford to publish a newspaper (ID:322). The common man would also rather "sing a song" than have a book published, and he would, in all likelihood, rather be outside playing cricket than indoors writing a doctoral thesis (ID:323).

When considering these examples, one should not make the mistake of assuming that Chesterton splits the pragmatic and the theoretical. Instead, he is merely noting that the common man is on the side of developing genuine relationships and connections with the world he lives in and the people he lives with rather than creating barriers between himself and his experience of the world by intellectual assent. Moreover, one should not assume that Chesterton is making human experience the measurement of all truth, since it is clear that truth is ultimately larger than what human experience can account for. Instead, he is simply suggesting that human experience allows for depth and complexity in a way that pure rationalism does not.

For Chesterton, the complexity of human experience is bound to the notion that the common man is the "heir of all the ages" (ID:242). Man is heir to a heritage, a history and a tradition even if he seems to be "the kind of heir who tells the family solicitor to sell the whole damned estate, lock, stock, and barrel, and give him a little ready money to throw away at the races or the night-clubs" (ID:242). By implication, Chesterton suggests that man has a historically-affected consciousness. This consciousness is bound to four broadly-defined aspects of the "spiritual story of humanity" (ID:243): the "spiritual element" in private human experience, the seasonal and ritualistic aspects of life, the communal religious order given to frame these spiritual and ritualistic aspects of life and, finally, the "controversial classification of the Christian system" (ID:244, 245).

The first aspect is the sense that a "vast and vague supernatural power ... pervades the world" (ID:244). This is a kind of shamanistic spirituality that plays in the territory of mystical non-specificity. The second aspect, still vague despite moving towards specificity, is that pagan sensibility proposing that the spiritual and the physical are one thing. Building on this idea, the third aspect of the spiritual story of humanity is the more concrete realisation that while the spiritual and physical are intricately connected, and are therefore deeply affected by one another, they are not one and the same thing. This means that human actions ought to be geared towards appeasing the supernatural powers that affect and control the natural world by means of religious assent. The fourth aspect, embodied in Christian orthodoxy, is the awareness that the "world could not save itself" (EM:210).

All human attempts to bridge the gap between themselves and the Divine only end up exacerbating the divide. All attempts at forging new forms of redemption via totalising metanarratives fail in praxis. Even the "strength of the world" is really weakness in this regard, and the "wisdom of the world" is ultimately folly (EM:210).

Finally, Chesterton contends that a "complete human being ought to have all these [aspects of spiritual awareness] stratified in him" in the correct order so that it brings him to the realisation that he is looking at the world "from the pinnacle of a tower built by his fathers" (ID:245). Such a realisation, Chesterton hopes, would prevent man from being a "contemptuous cad" who "perpetually [kicks] down the ladders by which he climbed" (ID:245). It is only by understanding his place in history that a person is able to see his own existence in the correct light and with a reasonable dose of humility. This insistence on the centrality of history to interpretive experience pervades Chesterton's work and becomes an important aspect of understanding the defense of democracy, which is discussed below.

Chesterton pre-empts a possible criticism against his celebration of the common man by pointing out that the common man is often wrongly accused for many of the "appalling blunders" that litter history (ID:326). But history has shown that an overwhelming number of the strange new ideas that have compromised human dignity have been "founded by merchants or manufactures of the comfortable, and sometimes of the luxurious classes" (ID:322). Such ideas have often been directed towards maintaining the wellbeing of the aristocracy at the cost of the wellbeing of the "lower classes" (ID:322):

> It is easy enough to argue that the mob makes mistakes; but as a fact it never has a chance even to make mistakes until its superiors have used their superiority to make much worse mistakes. It is easy to weary of democracy and cry out for an intellectual aristocracy. But the trouble is that every intellectual aristocracy seems to have been utterly unintellectual. Anybody might guess beforehand that there would be blunders of the ignorant. What nobody could have guessed, what nobody could have dreamed of in a nightmare, what no morbid mortal imagination could ever have dared to imagine, was the mistakes of the well-informed. It is true, in a sense, to say that the mob has always been led by more educated men. It is much more true, in every sense, to say that it has always been misled by educated men. It is easy enough to say the cultured man should be the crowd's guide, philosopher and friend. Unfortunately, he has nearly always been a misguiding guide, a false friend and a very shallow philosopher. And the actual catastrophes we have suffered, including those we are now suffering, have not in historical fact been due to the prosaic practical people who are supposed to know nothing, but almost invariably to the highly theoretical people who knew that they knew everything. The world may learn by its mistakes; but they are mostly the mistakes of the learned (ID:322).

The mistakes of the learned "academic priesthood" are many and varied, and Chesterton's writings are filled to overflowing with his critiques of such mistakes (Ahlquist 2006:105). As I have already

mentioned, he opposes Nietzsche and Darwin, but he also opposes Freud and Marx (Ahlquist 2006:108). This is not because he regards these thinkers as being entirely wrong, but because he notices that they build their theories on a "hundredth part of a truth" and then expand that fractional truth to explain "everything" (in Ahlquist 2006:109). Each of their theories "hangs the whole world on a single hair" until everything becomes a matter of will, biology, sex or economy (in Ahlquist 2006:110). McLuhan (1936:457) suggests that in the particular case of economics, Chesterton exposes a "Christless cynicism of [its] supposedly ironclad laws," but I would add that he exposes this same cynicism in other ideologies as well. As already mentioned, each of these 'single hair' theories — different strategies for presenting the totalising dogma of metanarrative — was part of the general intellectual climate of Chesterton's day.

Chesterton recognises the main problem with these new theories: they are all the result of making individual men the measure of things instead of the common man.[9] In this Chesterton foreshadows Allan Bloom's thesis that "the disorder of [the] soul found in ... society arises primarily through the academy" (Schall 2000:118).[10] It is the intellectual aristocracy that has fractured the masses by placing lofty theories above the equality and value of those human beings who make up the mob. In other words, it is precisely when man is not the measure of all things that things start to go wrong. In one instance, Chesterton attacks the philosophy of evolution in that it proposes a "prejudice" instead of a "dogma" or "doctrine" and therefore dethrones the idea that man is the measure of all things. This, then, turns abuses into uses: "It will be easy for the scientific plutocrat to maintain that humanity will adapt itself to conditions which we now consider evil" (WW:26). It therefore becomes reasonable that people need not make the effort to alter conditions on the theory that conditions will alter people: "The head can be beaten small enough to fit the hat" and the slave can be knocked instead of knocking "the fetters off the slave" (WW:26). Chesterton argues that this sort of prejudice is the "modern argument for oppression," which sets the "perfect man who isn't there" as the precedent. To counter this, the Catholic religion has proposed that the "ultimate sanity of Man" lies in the fact that man should be judged by an incarnate, human truth, not by divine superiority (WW:26). It is the "Son of Man ... who shall judge the quick and the dead" (WW:26).

[9] When Chesterton regards man as the measure of all things, he is defamiliarising and thus redefining the idea in a way that makes it distinct from the sense of the idea originally expressed by the Sophist philosopher Protagoras. While the exact meaning of Protagoras' words is not absolutely clear, making it ideal as a manipulable catchphrase for humanist philosophy, it does seem that he is proposing a kind of relativism apart from any divine or objective source, where individuals have the final say regarding what is true or not.
[10] Bloom's argument, as outlined by Schall (2000:118), is that the "Germans won World War II". What he means by this was that the ideas that have come to undermine the moral fabric of society and various human institutions are "of German philosophical origin, dating back to Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, and especially to Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Max Weber". Bloom also acknowledges the French intellectual descendents of these philosophers, which include Rousseau and the more recent trend towards deconstruction (Schall 2000:118). With Jack Caputo (2007), I do not reckon that deconstruction is an entirely detrimental philosophical process, unless its particular brand of rationalism is taken as a rule for the rest of existence.

Contrary to the professors and intellectuals, it is the common man who believes in the fundamental unity of things. He stands by his beliefs in verbal consistency, in the notion that one's creed should align with truth as it is, in the need for a connection between a promise and actions based upon that promise, in the general sanity of the masses and the occasional insanity of minorities, in human equality and the brotherhood of man, in peace, and in historical traditions (AM:108-110; EM:38). The common man believes that reality is a whole even if it may only be understood in part. In simple terms, it is the common man who trusts in common sense.

Chesterton argues that "[t]he most dangerous assumptions are the ones we don't discuss" (in Clarke 2006:176). For this reason, he makes explicit that which may have been taken as self-evidently true. He especially emphasises those things that are commonly held to be true by the common man and may therefore rightly be given the title of "Apostle of Common Sense" (Ahlquist 2003:14).[11] The question therefore arises: What constitutes Chesterton's philosophy of common sense? It is my aim to unpack an answer to this question in the following section by examining a few of the broad principles that underpin Chesterton's thinking, namely the ideas that attitude and doctrine are inseparable, that reality trumps illusion, that good supersedes evil and, finally, that the world should be understood as a picture rather than as a pattern.

3.3 In defense of common sense

The first principle of Chesterton's philosophy of common sense is found in considering the relationship of attitude to doctrine. Chesterton is clear that "the most practical and important thing about a man is his view of the universe" (HO:41). This view of the universe is not only rooted in particular propositions, but also considers the manner in which various propositions are held. Therefore, pivotal to his dramatology is the idea that one's apprehension of everything perceived is filtered through by one's attitude. This implies that before understanding can occur, one has to become aware of the attitude that would either facilitate or hinder the process of understanding (TT:7). For Chesterton, understanding is first dependent on a particular frame of mind before it is dependent on a particular assertion of doctrinal specifics. One's "ultimate attitudes" are the "soils for

[11] The idea of common sense has a long history, beginning with Aristotle's definition of common sense (or common sensibles) as that which refers more to inner sensation — that which unifies sensory experience — than to the experience of reality through sensory perception. Chesterton's view of common sense, however, is not entirely Aristotelian in that it has more to do with practical wisdom than it has to do with the way that one receives any particular sensation (Polansky 2007:376, 401). However, he is, like Aristotle and Aquinas, a great believer in the fact that reason is "fed by [the] senses; that [we] owe a great deal of what [we] think to what [we] see and smell and taste and handle" (ST:29).

the seeds of doctrine" (HO:268).[12] Discovering and understanding any particular thing is therefore deeply reliant on one's temper and temperament. The dramatological experience is a matter of the entire personhood of the reader and not merely a concern of rational processes alone.

The implication here is that it is not enough to merely defend a particular precept as if any precept can somehow not be a part of one's whole being; to do so is to divorce meaning from context and theory from action.[13] Thus, Chesterton is just as comfortable with disagreeing with a person's attitude as he is with disagreeing with his ideas; and he is equally comfortable with defending a particular attitude as he is with defending a particular idea (AU:161; WS:17). In fact, while Chesterton contends that attitude is an issue of "style," it is nonetheless by style that individuality is recognised (WS:17). Chesterton's marrying of thought and actions mirrors the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, which embodies an attitude of practical wisdom. By implication, if two people subscribe to the same dogma, but differ in attitude, the result is a different belief. It is arguably for this reason that Chesterton sees Protestantism as quite different from Catholicism. While the creeds of these two broad streams of the Christian faith are largely the same, the approaches and attitudes do differ substantially in many ways.[14] Chesterton's orthodoxy — believing in the right thing — is therefore directly linked to orthopraxy — believing in the right way. Just as his ontology automatically relates to his ethics, so his dramatology is dependent on character (Reyburn 2011:51).

However, to distinguish between attitude and doctrine is not to say that the difference between them can always be clearly delineated, nor that these two can necessarily be split and understood apart from each other. Instead, this distinction underscores the fact that one's experience and interpretations are bound to specific *a priori* conditions that are often implicit in one's demeanour. Thus Chesterton often sees attitude as being synonymous with worldview. For example, he describes atheism, Buddhism, immanentism, materialism, pantheism and stoicism as attitudes, implying that there is a subtle motivating force beneath the facade of ideas that needs to be recognised (EM:129; HO:333; WW:179). Chesterton's attitude towards the world is summed up in his spiritual autobiography, *Orthodoxy* (1908), where he explains that the main problem for philosophers is the question of how one may "contrive to be at once astonished at the world and yet at home in it" (HO:212). Chesterton's dramatology is caught in this very same tension, in the space between awe

[12] This reference to "soils" and "seeds" is possibly an allusion to the parable of the Sower told in Luke 8.4-15.
[13] A simple example of Chesterton's emphasis on the link between theory and praxis is in his belief that we "thank God for beer and Burgundy by not drinking too much of them" (HO:268). The 'theory' of gratitude is demonstrated in action. Action supports and in fact becomes the proclamation of the theory.
[14] Chesterton's views on Protestantism are lucidly and very critically set out in *The well and the shallows* (WS:29-60), where it becomes clear that he sees Protestantism as almost entirely negative (Wood 2011:3). The application of this idea can be very widespread. Sufism, for example, when compared to Islamo-fascism argues the same point. It seems that a difference in attitude suggests that the same text — the Koran in this case — may be interpreted and applied completely differently. Arguably, the text that argues for a specific attitude is misread as an argument for a specific set of laws; the letter of the law is obeyed, but the spirit of the law is neglected.

and peace, gratitude and humility. It is only in this tension that a richer encounter with the text of reality becomes possible.

Indeed, it is this tension that introduces the second principle of Chesterton's philosophy of common sense, namely the idea that "so long as a glimmer of it remains, in spite of all journalism and State it is possible to appreciate what we call a reality" (CC:111). "[W]ith all the facts before it," common sense is able to recognise the sharp distinctions between things and understand that "black is not white" (MM:84). Chesterton mocks the kind of "large-mindedness [that] is supposed to consist of confusing everything with everything else" and insists upon the power of making distinctions between "man and woman, religion and irreligion, the good and the unnatural" (MO:106, 109). Is it such distinctions "by which man in the true sense becomes distinguished" (MO:106).[15] Common sense, as the power of making such distinctions, is therefore Chesterton's primary weapon against what he calls the "age of scepticism" (AU:96).[16]

One example of Chesterton's attack on scepticism is found in his critique of the "philosophy of Impressionism," which in his estimation is little more than "the philosophy of Illusion" (AU:97).[17] Chesterton contends that there is a "spiritual significance in Impressionism" that is connected with the philosophy scepticism:

> I mean that it illustrated scepticism in the sense of subjectivism. Its principal was that if all that could be seen of a cow was a white line and a purple shadow, we should only render the line and the shadow; in a sense we should only believe in the line and the shadow, rather than in the cow. In one sense the Impressionist sceptic contradicted the poet who said he had never seen a purple cow. He tended rather to say that he had only seen a purple cow; or rather that he had not seen the cow but only the purple. Whatever may be the merits of this method of art, there is obviously something highly subjective and sceptical about it as a method of thought. It naturally lends itself to the metaphysical suggestion that things only exist as we perceive them, or that things do not exist at all (AU:96-97).[18]

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[15] Chesterton is highly critical of those critics who fail to make such distinctions. He writes that the "modern critic" whose "whole business" is speech, "professes to be entirely inarticulate": "Before Botticelli he is mute. But if there is any good in Botticelli (there is much good, and much evil too) it is emphatically the critic's business to explain it; to translate it from terms of painting into terms of diction" (ID:67).

[16] In one instance, Chesterton attacks the reasoning of sceptics who try "to prove that there is no such thing as supernatural experience by pointing at the people who have given up everything for it. [They try] to prove that there is not such thing by proving that there are people who live by nothing else" (HO:376). In other words, by making a distinction between the natural self and any kind of supernatural revelation, he points to the commonsensical experience of something that comes from beyond themselves that is mistaken by the sceptic as something that his mind has wrongly perceived or made up.

[17] While Chesterton does attack the philosophy of impressionism, he is not necessarily against impressionism as an art form. He writes, "Impressionism is but Christianity [applied] to a canvas" (MO:116). The "painter gives what the healthy moralist gives — hints" (MO:116). The problem with Impressionism as a philosophy is that it assumes that hints are all we have, whereas the actual artwork of the impressionist suggests precisely the opposite. Hints are hints because they hint at something specific.

[18] Oddie (2008:142-143) argues that Robert Louis Stevenson was an important force in Chesterton's thinking especially since his work seemed to oppose the philosophy of Impressionism. It was concerned with pirates and admirals, with fighting and fun. Stevenson, Chesterton writes, "was not really looking forward and outward to a world of larger [and more abstract] things, but backward and inward into a world of smaller ones: in the peepshow of Skelt, which was still the true window of the world" (in Oddie 2008:143).

As a philosophy, Impressionism turns all that is solid into air. It implies that "everything might be a dream" or "nothing but thought" (AU:97; in Ker 2011:32). As Roger Fry (1996:13) explains, "[t]he Impressionist realises above all things the truth that absolute rest and absolute identity are mental abstractions and have no counterpart in external nature".[19] Nothing is fixed and everything becomes a process in flux, suggesting that we "can never know anything about 'things in themselves'" (Fry 1996:13).[20] This sort of scepticism, of course, is more rigid than religiosity: it turns change into the unchanging standard and thereby inadvertently argues that there is something absolute after all. And if everything is a dream of anarchy, inconsistency, instability and fluidity, then everything is really a nightmare, as Chesterton intimates through the narrative of *The man who was Thursday*. It is only when the mask of the nightmare is removed that goodness can be recovered (Ker 2011:192). In other words, as argued in greater detail further on, it is only when scepticism is replaced by mystery that one can begin to distinguish between illusion and reality.

Chesterton suggests that scepticism needs to have limitations in order to be helpful. Absolute scepticism turns the world into a landscape of negations, which is to say that it somehow manages to celebrate difference without agreeing on similarity. It argues for the affirmation of "No," but not of "Yes" (ST:154). Additionally, it may also conflate affirmation and negation so that difference is both affirmed and dissolved instead of held in paradoxical tension with similarity (ST:154). Thus, for example, the sceptic Wells insists that no two chairs are alike, but Chesterton points out that if no two chairs are alike we cannot have much of a reason to call them all chairs (HO:238). Elsewhere he writes:

> I remember when Mr. H. G. Wells had an alarming fit of Nominalist philosophy; and poured forth book after book to argue that everything is unique and untypical as that a man is so much an individual that he is not even a man. It is a quaint and almost comic fact, that this chaotic negation especially attracts those who are always complaining of social chaos, and who propose to replace it by the most sweeping social regulations. It is the very men who say that nothing can be classified, who say that everything must be codified. Thus Mr. Bernard Shaw said that the only golden rule is that there is no golden rule. He prefers an iron rule; as in Russia (ST:160).

The first consequence of the vehement scepticism that Chesterton underlines here is that it does not produce the kind of freedom that upholds the ideal of human dignity, but rather only imprisonment. Instead of being bound by only a few specific boundaries, dogmas and doctrines, it suggests that one is in fact constrained by everything. The second consequence of scepticism is that

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[19] Roger Fry (1866-1934), an English artist and art critic, became an advocate for some developments in French painting, to which he gave the name *Post-Impressionism*. He is an important figure in that he raised awareness of modern art in Britain, emphasising the formal properties of paintings over entirely subjective readings conjured in the viewer by the content of paintings. It is undoubtedly Fry's essay *The philosophy of Impressionism* to which Chesterton is referring in the above passage.

[20] This is precisely the problem that Chesterton finds in the consumerist impetus of capitalism, which is bound to a process that does not necessarily consider the aim of the process (WS:167).

it results in an uncritical credulity. Ultimately, Chesterton contends, the sceptic is too easily fooled (HO:353). Owing to the fact that the sceptic has no standard, he may easily be taken captive by myriad misguided philosophies.

If everything is illusory, what remains is an ontology of violence that is typified by rigidity and ossification. The absence of a solid creed on matters pertaining to reality does not save people from fanaticism, but only leads them deeper into it (WW:24). Moreover, meaning itself becomes impossible. Chesterton argues that one "can find no meanings in a jungle of scepticism; but the man will find more and more meanings who walks through a forest of doctrine and design" (HO:362). This forest of doctrine and design insists that affirmation calls for the inevitability of "contradiction" or the ability to make "reasonable distinctions" (MO:105; ST:153).[21] Chesterton writes that even in a dream, the dream retains the "first fact of being," namely "that a thing cannot be and not be" (ST:153).

Keeping with the idea that common sense allows for distinctions between black and white and between reality and illusion, there must ultimately be a difference between what is false and what is true (ST:153). However, the commonsensical preference of reality over illusion does not suggest that there is a dichotomy between reality and fiction. Instead, fiction is a sub-reality rather than any kind of anti-reality and can therefore inform reality. Fiction is not the opposite of reality, but its complement (DE:17).[22] In reading Plato, Chesterton contends that it is vital to insist on the "fundamental fact that ideas are realities; that ideas exist just as men exist" (EM:125). But he is quick to add that there is a danger in allowing ideas to supersede the importance of people (EM:125). In this, he challenges the role of the intellectual by encouraging the view that people ought to be more important than ideas.

This danger is captured in Chesterton's description of one character in *The man who knew too much* (1922): "Harold March was the sort of man who knows everything about politics, and nothing about politicians. He also knew a great deal about art, letters, philosophy, and general culture; about almost

[21] Chesterton suggests "reasonable distinctions" as a remedy to confusion: "A fine distinction is like a fine painting or a fine poem or anything else fine; a triumph of the human mind. In these days when large-mindedness is supposed to consist of confusing everything with everything else, of saying that a man is the same as a woman and religion is the same as irreligion, and the unnatural good as the natural and all the rest of it, it is well to keep high in the mind the great power of distinction; but which man becomes in the true sense distinguished" (MO:106).

[22] Žižek (1993:88) presents another view on this issue, writing that "as soon as we renounce fiction and illusion, we lose reality itself; *the moment we subtract fictions from reality, reality itself loses its discursive-logical consistency*". He contends that Kant's name for these fictions is "transcendental Ideas," the function of which is more regulative than constitutive. To summarise, Žižek (1993:88) writes, "[These Kantian] Ideas are indispensible to the effective functioning of our reason. They are a '*natural* and inevitable *illusion*'". However, Chesterton's perspective needs to be distinguished from Žižek's. For him, fictions may be regulative to some extent, but they are also a constitutive part of reality insofar as they are consistent with reality. In other words, fictions are deemed valid in relation to what is real, not the other way around as Žižek's reading of Kant suggests.

everything, indeed, except the world he was living in" (MK:1). In this, it is precisely by misunderstanding the human dimension — by knowing about politics, but not about politicians — that this character misunderstands the world he is living in.[23] In order to avoid the trap of letting ideas supersede the importance of people, Chesterton tends towards the "sacramental sanity" of Aristotle, who seeks "to combine the body and the soul of things" (EM:126). He thus understands that ideas, as part of reality, are capable of shaping our perceptions of reality even while they should not be confused with reality.

Just as the reality is always preferable to the illusion, so the true is always preferable to the false. This preference is echoed in Chesterton's contention that while some may contend that "a man can believe that he is always in a dream" on grounds that any apparently irrefutable proof that is given to him might be the same 'proof' that is offered in a dream, the result is less than livable (HO:229).[24] In essence, Chesterton assumes that existence requires certainty, and he refers to Aquinas to affirm this position:

> Against all this the philosophy of St. Thomas stands founded on the universal common conviction that eggs are eggs. The Hegelian may say that an egg is really a hen, because it is a part of an endless process of Becoming; the Berkeleian may hold that poached eggs only exist as a dream exists, since it is quite as easy to call the dream the cause of the eggs as the eggs the cause of the dream; the Pragmatist may believe that we get the best out of scrambled eggs by forgetting that they ever were eggs, and only remembering the scramble. But no pupil of St. Thomas needs to addle his brains in order adequately to addle his eggs; to put his head at any peculiar angle in looking at eggs, or squinting at eggs, or winking the other eye in order to see a new simplification of eggs. The Thomist stands in the broad daylight of the brotherhood of men, in their common consciousness that eggs are not hens or dreams or mere practical assumptions; but things attested by the Authority of the Senses, which is from God (ST:135).

Desmond (1995:22) argues that in order to test the validity of doubt as a philosophy for life, one ought to "radicalize" it: "Radical doubt defeats itself because doubt has *to be*, even in all its negations" (emphasis in original).[25] Chesterton firmly stands on this idea when he suggests that "[i]n dealing

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[23] Through this limiting of his vision and constraining the possibility of the infinite, the lunatic adopts an attitude that is "thoroughly worldly" and thus prevents himself from understanding of the world (HO:216). The paradox embedded in this particular phraseology lies in the fact that by definition *worldliness* implies excellent knowledge of how the world works to the neglect of more spiritual matters. Chesterton's opinion is that if a person understands only the world without understanding the spiritual connection with the material, he cannot understand the world. To rephrase an idiom, if what you see is all that you get, then you do not really understand what you see. This reflects the parabolic intention of Jesus mentioned in the Gospels (Matthew 13.13; Mark 4.12; Luke 8.10), which seems to be to disrupt perception. John Dominic Crossan (2012:6) suggests that Jesus' parables tend towards challenging accepted modes of thinking. This fits with what is written in Luke 8.10: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand".

[24] This echoes the skepticism of the 'brain in vat' problem posited by Jonathan Dancy as an extension of Descartes' doubt. Dancy (1985:10) intimates that one's experience of a particular 'reality' is not necessarily trustworthy if one's sensory impressions have been trained or mislead to accept 'reality' or 'actuality' in a particular way. This is to say that if one is unaware of the *a priori* conditions for knowledge, one cannot, in Dancy's view, begin with trust. The contradiction here is that one has to *trust* that one should not begin with trust.

[25] Desmond may not necessarily be a Chestertonian scholar, and yet it is clear that he is aware of Chesterton's work (Desmond 2003:78). The overlap of some of his ideas and Chesterton's is also noted by Milbank (2009b:112) particularly with respect to the nature of paradox.

with the arrogant asserter of doubt, it is not the right method to tell him to stop doubting. It is rather the right method to tell him to go on doubting, to doubt a little more, to doubt every day newer and wilder things in the universe, until at last, by some strange enlightenment, he may begin to doubt himself" (BJ:xxi). Even doubts should be doubted (HO:288). Without this radicalisation of doubt, Chesterton suggests that the maxim would read: "I am not; therefore I cannot think" (HO:238). But through this radicalisation of doubt, the maxim *cogito ergo sum* is reversed to become *sum ergo cogito* (Desmond 1995:22). In this, dreams and impressions are recognised as dreams and impressions. They may be very much like the reality, but to say that something is like something else is not to say that the two things are exactly the same (EM:114).[26]

The affirmation of reality over illusion and truth over falsehood both point to the third principle of Chesterton's common sense, namely his affirmation of good over evil. Chesterton finds that having a false view of reality can only ever arrive at the "certainty of ill" (HO:47). This can be understood in the light of an allegory: according to the doctrine of the Fall, in falling once the human race gained the knowledge of good and evil; but now "we have fallen a second time, and only the knowledge of evil remains" (HO:51). The first fall implies the difficulty of distinguishing between good and evil, while the second fall implies an inability to recognise that there is any good at all. A "modern morality" may end up being little more than the ability to observe "imperfection" without having any "perfection to point to" (HO:47). This "certainty of ill" without any certainty of the good is what Chesterton calls the "negative spirit" (HO:47). He writes that this

> is the arresting and dominant fact about modern social discussion; that the quarrel is not merely about the difficulties, but about the aim. We agree about the evil; it is about the good that we should tear each other's eyes cut. We all admit that a lazy aristocracy is a bad thing. We should not by any means all admit that an active aristocracy would be a good thing. We all feel angry with an irreligious priesthood; but some of us would go mad with disgust at a really religious one. Everyone is indignant if our army is weak, including the people who would be even more indignant if it were strong. The social case is exactly the opposite of the medical case. We do not disagree, like doctors, about the precise nature of the illness, while agreeing about the nature of health. On the contrary, we all agree that England is unhealthy, but half of us would not look at her in what the other half would call blooming health ... I maintain, therefore, that the common sociological method is quite useless: that of first dissecting abject poverty or cataloguing prostitution. We all dislike abject poverty; but it might be another business if we began to discuss independent and dignified poverty. We all disapprove of prostitution; but we do not all approve of purity. The only way to discuss the social evil is to get at once to the social ideal. We can all see the national madness; but what is national sanity? (WW:17).

[26] This introduces an idea that is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four, namely the analogical idea that there is distinction even in similarity, meaning that difference itself points to the interconnectedness of things (HO:238).

Every problem that Chesterton encounters in the world of modernity may be summed up in a single statement: "What is wrong [with the world] is that we do not ask what is right" (WW:17). Chesterton argues that when "things will not work" it is essential to find the kind of thinking man "who has some doctrine about why they work at all" (WW:19). There is, therefore, a definite need for the kind of idealist whose idealism would consider things in their "practical essence" (WW:19).[27] This idealism would "consider a poker in reference to poking before" considering "its suitability for wife-beating" (WW:19). Ultimately, all understanding is futile without some measure of what the good is, and Chesterton's dramatology, which certainly allows for cutting critique, is concerned with the recovery of ideals in pursuit of what is good. One may be tempted to overcomplicate the issue of what constitutes the good, but since Chesterton is concerned primarily with the dignity of the common man, which is really a desire to hear the voice of the voiceless, his philosophy of goodness is also a matter of common sense: the aim should always be towards "altering conditions to fit the human soul" instead of "altering the human soul to fit conditions" (WW:80). His aim is to recover what is "good for everybody" (Ahlquist 2006:272).

After considering how attitude precedes doctrine, how reality supersedes illusion and how good trumps evil, one is brought to the third principle of Chesterton's philosophy of common sense, namely the idea that faith precedes facts. Put differently, intuition precedes understanding and life precedes reason (Ker 2011:245). While it is argued above that Chesterton is opposed to the absolutisation of doubt, he is not opposed to doubt *per se*, especially considering that doubt is a common human experience. Therefore, he does not posit certainty or epistemological arrogance as the opposites of doubt. Rather, he suggests that even doubt ought to understood in relation to faith. For Chesterton, reason itself is a "matter of faith," implying that scepticism is a matter of a different kind of faith (HO:230). What this means is that any proclamation about reality or truth is only made possible by an underlying faith claim. Chesterton's work suggests a process by which one is constantly engaged in testing and challenging one's own assumptions as well as the assumptions of others. In short, he recognises that the familiar is dangerous when it induces a kind of "sleep and custom" — an unacknowledged, hidden faith — whereby one sees without seeing or dreams without recognising that one is dreaming (TT:163). He warns that through overfamiliarity, reality is perceived as illusory.

In order to address the uncommon lunacy that places facts above faith, many of Chesterton's stories are set is a world gone mad. Elements of this madness are found, for example, in the anti-

[27] This, I believe, forms one of the foundations of McLuhan's (1964:15) idea that "the medium is the message". As explained in the conclusion, the conceptual link between McLuhan's theories on the nature of media and Chesterton's work is one that can be explored in further research (See Chapter Seven).

revolutionary backdrop of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904), the nightmarish anarchy in *The man who was Thursday* (1908), the chaotic, lawless courtroom scenario and the strange events of *Manalive* (1912), and the militant teetotalism in *The flying inn* (1914). In particular, I want to highlight the way that Chesterton illustrates the problem of the lunatic in his first piece of detective fiction, *The Club of Queer Trades* (1905). Early on in this story, the reader is introduced to Basil Grant, a judge who "suddenly went mad on the bench" (CQ:5). Chesterton recounts the magistrate's apparent decline from sanity as follows:

> He accused criminals from the bench, not so much for their obvious legal crimes, but of things that had never been heard of in a court of justice, monstrous egoism, lack of humour and morbidity deliberately encouraged. Things came to a head in that celebrated diamond case in which the Prime Minister himself ... had to come forward, gracefully and reluctantly, to give evidence against his valet. After the detailed life of the household had been thoroughly exhibited, the judge requested the Premier again to step forward, which he did with quiet dignity. The judge then said, in a sudden, grating voice: 'Get a new soul. That thing's not fit for a dog. Get a new soul' (CQ:6).

In this, Basil Grant lurches past the symptomatic crimes to grip onto deeper attitudinal concerns. For instance, thieving becomes not so much a problem of economics, but a problem of human dignity and forgiveness. After this final outburst, the reader is informed that Basil Grant "retired from public life" to take up a new occupation alongside his brother Rupert Grant as a private detective (CQ:6-7). What follows this is series of stories centered around some very odd happenings: a respected Major receives a series of outlandish death threats, an old vicar, who later turns out to be an imposter, visits a stranger and tells him of a series of horrifying events, and a trapped woman refuses to be rescued (CQ). Amid these goings-on is the rationalist, Holmesian character of Rupert Grant, whose supposedly masterful deductions relating to these strange happenings always turn out wrong. This becomes Chesterton's means for setting up the real hero of the story, who, ironically, is the alleged lunatic, Basil Grant. In the end, it is the 'maniac' — the man who sees beyond mere symptoms — who is shown to be absolutely sane. It is the 'sanity' that most people consent to that is shown to be insanity. This is the madness of modernity. Chesterton's assertions here challenge consensus theories of truth and echoes Evelyn Underhill's (2005:14) quip that "sanity" may merely consist "in sharing the hallucinations of our neighbours". In the estimation of both Chesterton and Underhill it is precisely in the "sharing" of truth that we become aware that both our sharing and our 'truth' are incomplete. This indicates that there is danger that the standards by which we measure our perceptions may correspond with convenience rather than truth (Underhill 2005:14; IU:83). Chesterton presents the idea that the "word convention means literally a coming together" and that this sense of agreement is not automatically unhelpful unless it is "presented to the imagination as a silent mob" that exists to mask, hide or mystify (IU:83).

Basil Grant's seeming lunacy is really his ability to see truth without necessarily getting the "mere facts" right (CQ:32). This idea is pre-empted early on in the novel:

> 'Facts,' murmured Basil, like one mentioning some strange, far-off animals, 'how facts obscure the truth. I may be silly — in fact, I'm off my head — but I never could believe in that man – what's his name, in those capital stories? —Sherlock Holmes. Every detail points to something, certainly; but generally to the wrong thing. Facts point in all directions, it seems to me, like the thousands of twigs on a tree. It is only the life of the tree that has unity and goes up — only the green blood that springs, like a fountain, at the stars (CQ:16).[28]

For Chesterton, truth, which is linked to faith, it is not the 'mere facts'. Facts may be understood either as isolated truths or truths that exist prior to the intuition of the dramatological experience and Chesterton argues that these are both misleading points of departure. Consequently, it is possible to accurately represent all the facts whilst still missing or neglecting the truth that holds those facts together. This is perhaps why one may agree with another person on the specific description of an event in a drama, but not necessarily its signification or significance. In simple terms, therefore, the problem of the lunatic is this: insanity is established when the insistence upon 'mere facts' subverts, obscures or detracts from understanding rather than extending or supporting a larger understanding of the truth that contains them. With no anchor in even the possibility of a larger story, truth becomes, in Nietzsche's (1954:46) words, nothing more than an illusory "mobile army of metaphors" that have become worn out, or, in Jean Baudrillard's (1994:1) terms, a simulacrum that conceals the 'truth' that there is no truth. Without the recognition of the relationship between faith and the facts, what is left is only an abstraction or a copy of something that does not exist: a symptom of an illness that is not there, a signifier with no signified, a "liquidation of all referentials," or something meant that ultimately does not mean anything (Baudrillard 1994:2). Society becomes, as Debord (2002:1) argues, pure spectacle.

Chesterton demonstrates that the issue of the right-relationship between whole (faith) and part (facts) is not only applicable to how facts are commonly over-emphasised, but also to how logic (the particular) and truth (the universal) are related:

> Logic and truth, as a matter of fact, have very little to do with each other. Logic is concerned merely with the fidelity and accuracy with which a certain process is performed, a process which can be performed with any materials, with any assumption ... On the assumption that a man has two ears, it is good logic that three

[28] Schall (2000:187) argues that it is in this that Chesterton distinguishes between imagination and fancy: "Imagination is the capacity to put things into a harmonious whole, things that clearly belong together. Fancy, on the other hand, sees relationships not when things seem to fit together, but when they do not." Moreover, Schall (2000:187) suggests that Reality operates more like fancy than like imagination, since its "configuration is divine" instead of being "human". The suggestion, therefore, is that Reality acts like fancy but is understood through imagination.

> men have six ears, but on the assumption that a man has four ears, it is equally good logic that three men have twelve. And the power of seeing how many ears the average man, as a fact, possesses, the power of counting a gentleman's ears accurately and without mathematical confusion, is not a logical thing but a primary and direct experience, like a physical sense, like a religious vision … Logic has again and again been expended, and expended most brilliantly and effectively, on things that do not exist at all. There is far more logic, more sustained consistency of mind, in the science of heraldry than in the science of biology … There is more logic in *Alice in Wonderland*[29] than in the *Statute Book*[30] … The relations of logic to truth depend, then, not upon its perfection as logic, but upon certain pre-logical faculties and certain pre-logical discoveries (MO:103).

After acknowledging the role of the pre-logical, Chesterton argues that "you can only find truth with logic when you have already found truth without it" (MO:104). Here, both 'physical sense' and 'religious vision' are given as possible *a priori,* pre-factual, pre-logical conditions. For Chesterton, it is important to maintain the relationship between the abstract and the concrete. One's sensate experience of the physical world is cast into question only insofar as it ignores the possibility of a 'religious vision'.

In Chesterton's estimation, if doubt is taken as a given, trust, as bedrock of knowledge, is taken for granted and is therefore forgotten. And if trust, as the expression of our epistemological limitations, is taken for granted, the result is either the absolutisation of the sense-impressions of empiricists[31] or the hyper-rationalism of deconstructionists. Chesterton claims that "[t]he man who cannot believe his senses [the solipsist or 'panegoist'[32]] and the man who cannot believe anything else [the materialist] are both insane" (HO:229) Yet, their insanity is not necessarily a problem of argumentation, doctrine or logic, but a problem of "the manifest mistake of their whole lives". The problem of their lunacy is rooted in their neglect to realise the dramatic, interrelated nature of being. It takes faith rather than the totalistic assertion of knowledge to assert that our thoughts and experiences "have any relation to reality at all" (HO:230).[33] To deny this is to fall into a trap that Chesterton refers to as the "suicide of thought" (HO:233).[34]

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[29] *Alice in Wonderland* is the shortened title of *Alice's adventures in Wonderland* (1865), which was written by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson under the pseudonym Lewis Carrol.
[30] *The Statute Book* is the book of laws referred to by British Parliament. Being a legal document, *The Statute Book* undergoes constant revision.
[31] The principle here can be demonstrated by referring to David Hume's (1994:114) belief that "certainty" can only be achieved through observable quantification: "If we take in hand any volume; of divinity or metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain experimental mental reasoning concerning matter of fact?* No. Commit it then into the flames: For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion." This call for the abolishment of anything 'unscientific' is remarkably shortsighted, since it is also not based on any scientific reasoning, but is rather founded on a particular faith-claim. By Hume's own logic, such a call should be discarded. Doubt, in a very logical sense, is demonstrably self-destructive. This furthers my contention that the beginning of modernism and the 'end' of postmodernism is really the same *cogito*.
[32] The term 'panegoist' is Chesterton's own term. It implies not only egoism, but the widening, spreading domain of egoism.
[33] Timothy Keller (2008:xvii) posits that "[a]ll doubts, however skeptical and cynical they may seem, are really a set of alternate beliefs." Faith and doubt, in this view, are really both founded on faith; to believe is to have faith, to doubt is to play with the possibility of believing something else.
[34] Metaphorically speaking, the suicide of thought may be linked to actual suicide, which epitomises the solipsism referred to above, and is therefore, according to Chesterton, "the ultimate evil" (HO:276). It is the refusal to "take an interest in existence" or to pledge

A further implication of placing facts above faith is that one's conception of reality becomes terribly constricted. The lunatic may not necessarily be utterly oblivious to reality; he is not, so to speak, living in another world. However, his apprehension of the world he does live in is insubstantial. The lunatic "seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it is his head that splits" (HO:22). Through reason, he seeks to "cross the infinite sea and so make it finite" (HO:220). The suicide of thought, then, is not the absence of thought, but rather the absolutisation of thought: the assumption that thought can contain the reality in an absolute sense. Chesterton uses the phrase "as mad as a hatter" to highlight the point of this argument: the hatter is mad, because he has to "measure the human head" (HO:220). The lunatic's reality is wholly defined by the limitations of the human mind.

The final principle of Chesterton's philosophy of common sense is that he assumes that it is better to read reality as a picture than as a pattern (EM:244). To assume the opposite is to "think at the wrong end" (HO:230). Chesterton observes that a lunatic's "explanation of a thing is always complete, and often in a purely rational sense satisfactory" (HO:222). The "insane explanation, if not conclusive, is at least unanswerable" (HO:222). As an example, Chesterton writes that a man may come up with a theory that everyone has a conspiracy against him. Unfortunately, the only way to contradict his theory is to point out that those very same people deny being conspirators, and that "is exactly what conspirators would do" (HO:222). The problem here is not that the lunatic's theory does not make any sense, but that it does. And yet, he is wrong, because his theory may explain "a large number of things, but it does not explain them in a large way" (HO:222). It is typical of the professors and intellectuals to take a "thin explanation and carry it very far. But a pattern can stretch for ever and still be a small pattern" (HO:225).[35] That is, they take the pattern to be the absolute instead of actually looking at the picture before them in order to tell them what it is saying.

This idea and its implications for grappling with Chesterton's process of interpretive understanding is demonstrated directly in his short story *The song of the broken sword* through how many people in the story interpret the character of the story's main subject, Arthur St Clare. In the end, the central protagonist Father Brown begins to describe what "everybody knows," namely, that

allegiance to life (HO:276). He argues that the "man who kills a man, kills a man" but that the "man who kills himself, kills all men; as far as he is concerned he wipes out the world" (HO:276).

[35] Chesterton refers to the "popular philosophical joke" about whether the chicken or the egg came first as a further example of allowing a pattern to supersede the actual picture (WW:18). Ultimately, the endless "mental chain" is built upon an illusion, namely that the chicken and the egg have equal significance. In reality, they are "in different mental worlds" (WW:18). The one is a means and the other is an end. The egg exists to produce chickens, but the chicken does not necessarily exist solely to produce eggs. To enforce a pattern on the relationship between chickens and eggs is to make the mistake of divorcing a process from its "divine object" (WW:19).

> Arthur St. Clare was a great and successful English general. [Everybody] knows that after splendid yet careful campaigns both in India and Africa he was in command against Brazil when the great Brazilian patriot Olivier issues his ultimatum. [Everybody] knows that on that occasion St. Claire with a small force attacked Olivier with a very large one, and was captured after heroic resistance. And, [everybody] knows that after his capture, and to the abhorrence of the civilized world, St. Clare was hanged on the nearest tree. He was found swinging there ... with his broken sword hung round his neck (FB:154).

At the end of this monologue, Father Brown observes that there is something missing from this story that "everybody" supposedly "knows" (FB:154). In the story, St Clare is reputed to be a great and successful general whose life ends, because of a series of surprisingly poor decisions. This brings the reader, in tune with Chesterton's reasoning, to wonder if the reputation of this man was deserved. Father Brown explains this anomaly through metaphor: "Where does a man hide a leaf? In a forest. But what does he do if there is no forest? He grows a forest to hide it in ... And if a man had to hide a dead body, he would make a field of dead bodies to hide it in" (FB:159). The allusion is this: if there is an answer to this riddle, it is not concealed at all, but apparent in plain sight. It has been perceived as part of a pattern, when it is in fact an anomaly in a picture. Therefore, the problem is not with the answer, but with the reader's inability to perceive it. It is simultaneously revealed and concealed in its visibility. St Clare's virtues are only virtues in appearance. The idea of St Clare is somehow incongruent with the actual Arthur St Clare. Father Brown explains that while St Clare read the Bible, which would be a clear literary rhetorical device or symbol to demonstrate his virtue, paradoxically, this is exactly what conceals his fatal flaw: "He was a man who read his Bible. That was what was the matter with him" (FB:167). Even in this statement, Chesterton is challenging the reader to consider the nature of isolating propositional truth; on its own, this may be read as a heresy against Christianity, but such a reading becomes questionable in the light of what follows:

> When will people understand that it is useless for a man to read his Bible unless he also reads everybody else's Bible? A printer reads a Bible for misprints. A Mormon reads his Bible, and finds polygamy; a Christian scientist reads his, and finds we have no arms and legs. St. Clare was an old Anglo-Indian Protestant soldier ... Of course, he found in the Old Testament anything that he wanted — lust, tyranny, treason. Oh, I dare say he was honest, as you call it. But what is the good of a man being honest in his worship of dishonesty? (FB:167).

When referring to this same passage, Žižek (2008:97) argues that Chesterton is demonstrating tremendous "theological finesse" here in allotting responsibility for the general's downfall, not to his betrayal of the Christian faith through "moral corruption due to the predominance of base materialist motives" but rather to something that is "inherent" in Christianity itself. However, while Žižek praises Chesterton greatly, he does so without understanding the subtleties of his argument. Chesterton's argument is not for or against a particular theology, nor is it to support or oppose any particular doctrine or dogma through what he is writing here. He is suggesting

something that is not only relevant to theological discourse, but that is applicable for grappling with the nature and experience of interpretative understanding.

The problem with Arthur St Clare is not with the Bible, but with his assumptions — his human limitations — as an actor in the drama of life and as a reader of the text of the immanent and the transcendent. To suggest, as Chesterton does, that the "printer reads a Bible for misprints" or that the "Christian scientist reads his [Bible], and finds we have no arms and legs" is to intimate that the perspective of the reader has utterly overthrown the authorial intention underpinning the text as well as the text's actual meaning (FB:167). In other words, the reader has taken his own pattern of understanding and assumed that it accounts for everything in the picture before him. This does not give rise to the "birth of the reader," to use Barthean (1977) language, but rather to the death of the reader: the reader, in claiming totalitarian ownership of the meaning of the text, is not reading at all in the same way that someone who wears earplugs to an opera is not listening at all.

By reading like a lunatic, and therefore by allowing pattern to precede picture, one relinquishes one's right to understand what is being said. This is to say that the death of the author may be taken as that which oscillates between univocality or equivocality. Chesterton implicitly critiques this dualism in his use of the possessive pronoun: "*his* Bible" (FB:167, emphasis added). The reader, in claiming the ownership of meaning without acknowledging his own prejudices, actually distances himself from the text. Such a split between reader and text misses Chesterton's view of the drama of being. Žižek falls into the same trap that Chesterton is trying to warn his reader against: he sees only what he wants to see by what is there, rather than what is meant by what is there. As a consequence, he fails to see at all.

Another way of saying that picture should supersede pattern is to say that intentional story should supersede fragmented propositions. For drama to be present and dramatology to be possible, meaning or understanding must be meant for something. Milbank (2009a:11) notes that to "tell a story, whether one's own or a traditional tale, is to mediate the world in its intentionality and narrative character … [T]o tell a story is to affirm that there is meaning to life, and that experience is shaped and has entelechy". In contrast, the absolutisation of the reader's reading closes the text and closes the mind of the reader; ideas of interplay, movement and negotiated meaning are ruled out. Indeed, the problem of the lunatic as it relates to dramatology is ultimately that there can be no story.[36] The absolutisation of the reader's interpretation argues that interpretation exists only for its own sake, isolated from further dialogue. There can be no movement, no openness to possibility, and no

[36] Alison Milbank (2009a:11) argues that it is not surprising that "our own age has such trouble with plotmaking in novels" when "historical pastiche, novels based on real events, or postmodern bricolage" become substitutes for story.

character development with such an imposition: the unfolding of the story has been decided before the story has even been read; the nature of the performance has been determined before the actors have even walked onto the stage.[37]

To summarise, there are essentially five principles at the centre of Chesterton's philosophy of common sense that naturally promote human dignity. The first is that attitude and doctrine are inextricably linked, meaning that truths about the world need to be framed in such a way that they are both practical and personal. The second is the idea that reality ought to supplant illusion. This suggests that it is generally possible to know the difference between truth and falsehood. This gives rise to the third principle of common sense, which is that good should trump evil. It is this principle that emphasises Chesterton as a moral philosopher-poet. The fourth principle is that faith, as the bedrock of the dramatological experience, is what guides the understanding of facts. Finally, with the aim of distinguishing between reality and illusion, truth and falsehood and good and evil, one should look at life as a picture or as a story rather than as a pattern of predictable outcomes. With these principles in place, the dignity of the common man is preserved, and a way is opened for Chesterton's defense of democracy, which is the broad idea that is held up to support the common man and his common sense.

3.4 In defense of democracy

The greatest critique levelled by Chesterton against his Nietzschean friend Shaw is that he lacks "democratic sentiment" (Ker 2011:245; GB:30). Neither his humanitarianism nor his Socialism are democratic in that these are always formulated from the perspective of an egotist and are therefore inherently opposed to the common man and his common sense. Chesterton levels a similar critique against the more congenial Cardinal Newman[38] when he says that he lacks "democratic warmth" in that his views tend to neglect the concerns of the ordinary (Ker 2011:331). For Chesterton, the term *ordinary,* in its correct usage, implies "the acceptance of an order" (in Ahlquist 2006:271). He writes on the assumption that "ordinary people" share the "common ground" of a "desirability of an active and imaginative life, picturesque and full of a poetical curiosity" (HO:212):

[37] This echoes Chesterton's critique of a particular Calvinist-determinist view on education that holds that "if once a man is born it is too late to damn or save him" (WW:129). Chesterton believes that this is "the last lie in hell" in that it sees "earthly life" as an epilogue instead of as a drama (WW:129-130).
[38] John Henry Newman (1801-1890), who is regarded as a saint by the Catholic Church, was the leader in the Oxford Movement that sought to return the Anglican Church to various Catholic rituals and practices of worship.

> If a man says that extinction is better than existence or blank existence better than variety and adventure, then he is not one of the ordinary people to whom I am talking. If a man prefers nothing I can give him nothing. But nearly all people I have ever met in this western society in which I live would agree to the general proposition that we need this life of practical romance; the combination of something that is strange and something that is secure. We need so to view the world as to combine an idea of wonder and an idea of welcome. We need to be happy in this wonderland without once being merely comfortable (HO:212-213).

In support of this practical romance and the kind of order that he believes is good for everybody, Chesterton believes that "truth, in whatever form it is apprehended, should be a public possession" (Maycock 1963:14). This is arguably the impetus behind his consistent involvement as a journalist in the "present stress of life as it is" (Maycock 1963:14).[39] In connection with this involvement in disseminating truth to the masses, he maintains a democratic core at the heart of his defense of human dignity. He notices that because democracy may be and is attacked as the political expression of the common sense of the common man, it needs to be very strongly defended (IU:183). This means that democracy is not only as something to defend as a belief, but something to defend as the foundation of human action (OS:449). He admits that he is a democrat, but in order to understand what this means one needs to prioritise his understanding of democracy over contemporary definitions of the word (ID:326).

To begin with, Oddie (2008:191) suggests that Chesterton's love of democracy is more akin to a religious conviction than it is to primarily being a political stance. This is not to say that his understanding of democracy is divorced from public political aims, but rather that politics ought to remain subordinate to private, domestic concerns.[40] Thus, Chesterton praises the "enormous truth in the democracy of Christianity" that flattens all variations in material inequalities (Oddie 2008:191).[41] Christianity insists that "all men are equal, as all pennies are equal, because the only value in any of them is that they bear the image of the King" (CD:7; Ker 2011:165). Democracy, like religion, is capable of allowing ordinary people to feel extraordinary, but also has the remarkable quality of making extraordinary people feel ordinary (CD:7). Democracy is "profoundly Christian" in that it is an "attempt to get at the opinion of those who would be too modest to offer it. It is a

[39] Maycock (1963:15) notes that while it is worth viewing Chesterton as a journalist, he was a journalist "of a kind that is now extinct. He was never set a task by anybody. He wrote exactly what he wished to write". That is, his primary motivation was to deal with the subject matter that he found compelling. What journalism was to become was merely, as Chesterton explains, something written "on the backs of advertisements" — in other words, something driven primarily by commerce (Maycock 1963:15).
[40] This chapter unpacks democracy in terms of these domestic concerns. A more politically orientated discussion of the same subject, especially in connection with private property and Chesterton's distributist leanings is provided by Stapleton (2009:97). However, I do want to emphasise that Chesterton's Liberalism, with its elevation of the importance of domesticity, is not of the sort that divides the private from the public. Indeed, for him, setting the private world of the home in order was a means of preparing for one's engagement in public life. One of the reasons for his creeping disillusionment with Liberalism before the First World War was the fact that the "Liberal government had encroached on the democratic rights of the English people and the liberties of the English home" (Stapleton 2009:127).
[41] This ability to flatten the details or pay attention to all of the details is what makes philosophy and theology particularly democratic (Oddie 2008:272). Therefore, Chesterton does not oppose intellectual engagement or difficulty in his work, but does frequently question the purpose intellectual engagement.

mystical adventure; it is specially trusting of those who would be too modest to trust themselves" (HO:325).

Chesterton maintains that there are differences in class and qualification, but proposes that such differences ought not to undermine or overrule the human equality that is implied in the notion that man is the image of God. Society ultimately fails to uphold democracy when it demeans the value of the common man (DE:66-67). Thus, he does not see democracy merely as the opportunity to vote, and it is certainly not about having the common man vote to be ruled by the egotism of the aristocratic classes (Stapleton2009:79). While voting and canvassing remain part of democracy, its primary aim is to allow people to "have the opportunity to govern their own affairs" (Ahlquist 2006:155; Ker 2011:223).[42] Thus, democracy concerns the prospect that ordinary people may actually choose what they want to vote for rather than have it chosen for them (MM:13, 19). Indeed, democracy implies that politics may be carried out without the interference of politicians, especially considering the likelihood that the "best men" are unlikely to devote themselves to politics (MM:19). The best men, Chesterton suggests, are more likely to devote themselves, among other things, to practical things like farming pigs and raising children (MM:19).

By arguing that people should have the right to govern themselves, Chesterton is suggesting that the idea of a singular "Social Organism" is misguided (WW:15). Just because "every man is a biped, fifty men are not a centipede" (WW:15). The mob is not a blob, but a drama: a dynamic arena set for individuals with different styles of being and ways of seeing to interact. For Chesterton, the individual is great by virtue of his own sense of self-worth and not only by being merely a piece that fits mechanically into a larger puzzle (Ker 2011:165). Democracy leaves room for the fool to aspire to wisdom, thereby uplifting the rest of the collective (Ker 2011:165; CD:9). In short, democracy encourages the modest man to aim higher (HO:325; Ker 2011:224). For example, it allows this "graven image of God" to strive to own his own land and manage his own affairs within his own considered limitations (WW:42).

To defend his view of the common sense of the common man, Chesterton jokes that when someone "says that democracy is false because most people are stupid" one of the most appropriate and obvious philosophical responses would be to "hit him smartly and with precision on the exact tip of the nose"

[42] The "test of democracy is not whether people vote," Chesterton suggests, "but whether the people rule. The essence of a democracy is that the national tone and spirit of the typical citizen is apparent and striking in the actions of the state" (in Ker 2011:249). Chesterton suggests that votes may be one way of achieving this effect; "but votes are quite vain if they do not achieve it" (in Stapleton 2009:106). He continues to argue that there is a difference between having a conquered people demand their own laws and the same people demanding the laws of the conqueror. The article in which this argument appeared, in Chesterton's column of 18 September 1909 for *The Illustrated London News*, was to have a marked effect on Ghandi concerning his ideas on independent Indian rule (Ker 2011:249; Stapleton 2009:106).

(AD:28). The idea that most people are stupid is the equivalent of seeing the world in terms of a particular, restrictive pattern instead of seeing it as a picture, as discussed above. The word 'stupid' is also too relative to be helpful. To say that most people are stupid is as stupid as saying that most people are tall. It is obvious that "'tall' can only mean taller than most people," thus making it "absurd to denounce the majority of mankind as below the average of mankind" (AD:28).

In any case, the stupidity of people is not a reasonable argument for abolishing democracy. The academic aristocracy may wish that a man would do something only if he does it well (HO: 250). But this would violate human freedom and thus also human dignity. The common man wants to write his own love letters and blow his own nose. He wants to do these things for himself, "even if he does them badly" (HO:250). Chesterton summarises "democratic faith" as the opinion that "the most terribly important things must be left to ordinary men themselves" (HO:250). This would include things like procreating, raising children and setting up the laws of the state (HO:250). The practical essence of democracy may be framed as that which it sets up the ordinary as an ideal and therefore allows for the "Ideal Grocer," the "Ideal Plumber" and the "Ideal Postman" (DE:55). In other words, the reality and the ideal are seen as one and the same thing. Democracy allows man to truly be himself instead of always trying to be someone else.

In Chesterton's view, there are a great many things that masquerade as democracy that are ultimately detrimental to democracy: "Modernity is not democracy; machinery is not democracy; the surrender of everything to trade and commerce is not democracy. Capitalism is not democracy; and is, by trend and savour, rather against democracy. Plutocracy by definition is not democracy" (IU:114-115). None of these things are democratic, because they stand against the "primary principle of Democracy," which is the principle "that man corporate, like man individual, has an indestructible right of self-defense" (IU:184). Chesterton writes that the essence of democracy is both simple and self-evident. It is the idea that if "ten men are wrecked together on an island, the community consists of those ten men, their welfare is the social object, and normally their will is the social law" (IU:114). If one of those men wishes to plan a voyage or distill water, he may defend his choice in relation to the sovereignty of the community. He is, in short, "the servant of the community" (IU:114). If he violates the authority and welfare of his community, his community will rightly see no reason to submit to him. The individual's enterprise must therefore be seen in relation to the rule of his community. In other words, his enterprise is not just a matter of economics and personal gain, but must be understood within a larger social context. The same may be said of dramatology: interpretation is not just about the whims of the individual, but is also about the ways that it may affect and interact with the views of a larger community of people. Once again, there is no such thing as a person who thinks and acts in isolation.

It is because of the social dimension of human endeavours that Chesterton especially critiques the materialist doctrines of capitalism and communism. While representing different approaches to economics, they share a focus on price instead of on value and therefore reduce people to being merely tools of a transactional system. Thus, for example, instead of being considered as things to eat, apples are only considered as "things to sell (ID:263). Soon, conceptions of the "Good" are disposed of in favour of the "Goods," and the whole world is reconfigured solely in terms of production and consumption (ID:264). Chesterton writes that in the particular case of capitalism, it is nonsensical to say that "Trade is Good," since this would be tantamount to worshipping "the means instead of the end," as well as forgetting the intrinsic value of things (ID:264). In keeping with his preference for concrete expression over linguistic abstraction, he suggests that we should be asking whether economics and trade support the inherent goodness of life and living. One should ask, in this case, whether economics was made for man instead of man for economics; for, in the end, nothing can be built

> upon the utterly unphilosophical philosophy of blind buying and selling; of bullying people into purchasing what they do not want; of making it badly so that they may break it and imagine they want it again; of keeping rubbish in rapid circulation like a dust-storm in a desert; and pretending that you are teaching men to hope, because you do not leave them one intelligent instant in which to despair (ID:269).

Because of his democratic leanings, Chesterton again emphasises the importance of tradition, which manages to avoid this materialist reductionism (HO:251). Tradition is "democracy extended through time" (HO:251). It is what takes the voice of the common man into account even if that man is no longer present to speak for himself. Chesterton notices that when a person appeals to the work of "some German historian" instead of appealing to the "tradition of the Catholic Church," he is again ruling that the perspective of the aristocracy should supersede the opinion of the man on the street (HO:251). This is analogous to neglecting the stories told by the sane "authority of the mob" in favour of a book written by the one person in the village who is mad (HO:251).

> Tradition may be defined as an extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father. I, at any rate, cannot separate the two ideas of democracy and tradition; it seems evident to me that they are the same idea. We will have the dead at our councils. The ancient Greeks voted by stones; these shall vote by tombstones. It is all quite regular and official, for most tombstones, like most ballot papers, are marked with a cross (HO:251).

Chesterton underscores his appreciation of the marriage of democracy and tradition by suggesting that his philosophy was shaped primarily by fairy tales (HO:252). Fairyland, for Chesterton, is "nothing but the sunny country of common sense" (HO:252). From fairy tales, one is able to gain a number of helpful insights and healthy principles. These stories are capable of pointing to the reality of how things actually work. Thus, for example, Jack and the Giant Killer exposes the pride of the tyrant and suggests that "giants should be killed because they are gigantic" and Beauty and the Beast teaches that "a thing must be loved *before* it is loveable" (HO:253, emphasis in original). For Chesterton, therefore, stories are the worlds that reality is made of. Stories, with their firm adherence to reason, their affirmation of human responsibility and choice, as well as their promotion of the genuine possibility of miracles, are capable of reminding us who we are (HO:255-257, 263). Stories promote the best of all commonsense attitudes, namely that of gratitude: the feeling of adventure that permeates an existence open to being in awe of the world (HO:268). Stories expose the stale complacency of an audience by suggesting that a dance of wills lies behind every action in this human drama. The following passage, which has a bearing on defamiliarisation discussed later, illuminates Chesterton's view on repetitions that exist in nature and in the human story:

> All the towering materialism which dominates the modern mind rests ultimately upon one assumption; a false assumption. It is supposed that if a thing goes on repeating itself it is probably dead; a piece of clockwork. People feel that if the universe was personal it would vary; if the sun were alive it would dance. This is a fallacy even in relation to known fact. For the variation in human affairs is generally brought into them, not by life, but by death; by the dying down or breaking off of their strength or desire. A man varies his movements because of some slight element of failure or fatigue. He gets into an omnibus because he is tired of walking; or he walks because he is tired of sitting still ... The sun rises every morning. I do not rise every morning; but the variation is due not to my activity, but to my inaction. Now, to put the matter in a popular phrase, it might be true that the sun rises regularly because he never gets tired of rising. His routine might be due, not to a lifelessness, but to a rush of life. The thing I mean can be seen, for instance, in children, when they find some game or joke that they specially enjoy. A child kicks his legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, 'Do it again'; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, 'Do it again' to the sun; and every evening, 'Do it again' to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we (HO:263-264).[43]

[43] Žižek (2003:40) rightly argues that for Chesterton, "reality and magic are far from being simply opposed — the greatest magic is that of reality itself, the fact that there really is such a wonderful, rich world out there". Furthermore, he writes that this insistence upon the magic of the ordinary is perpetuated in Chesterton's insistence upon what he calls the "dialectical tension between creativity and repetition" (Žižek 2003:40). In this argumentative reversal, Chesterton insists that what seems most mechanical is really the greatest indicator of personality. The absence of choice would more likely produce chaos than this kind of clear order.

Here, even the pattern is transformed into a picture — something mysteriously willed into being and now accessibly part of the human experience. In the end, the human drama is found within the context of a much larger drama, and the pursuit of human dignity is sustained by something beyond the obvious boundaries of experience. This is the notion that permeates every defense discussed in this chapter. Chesterton recognises that the fairy stories that he discovered as a child have a sense of purpose, and that this sense of purpose permeates the whole of human existence. Furthermore, these same fairy stories have a sense of personality at their centre, the same sort of personality that Chesterton finds in all aspects of reality. He therefore concludes that just as there is always a storyteller behind the fantastical narratives of Fairyland, there must also be a storyteller behind the even more fantastical lives of ordinary human beings (HO:264). Thus, for him, even the commonplace affirms the supernatural, and the common indicates the sacred.

In this chapter, I have argued that the primary task of Chesterton's dramatology is to promote and sustain human dignity. Because of this, Chesterton may be thought of as a moral philosopher, who frames his dramatology around a particular view of ethics built on the assumption that life is meaningful as a matrix of relationships. I have suggested that the ideal of human dignity is defended from three interrelated angles: firstly, by defending the common man, then by defending common sense and, finally, by defending democracy. Chesterton considers each of these aspects of human dignity and all that they imply, and discovers that they all point beyond themselves. Ultimately, the human drama, as is discussed at length in my analysis of *The tree of life* later in this study, is properly understood only against a much larger backdrop. However, before delving into a dramatological exploration of the film in question, one task remains, namely the task of examining the primary elements or tools used by Chesterton to guide his interpretive process. It is to this task that this study now turns.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ELEMENTS OF CHESTERTON'S DRAMATOLOGY

4.1 Introduction to Chapter Four

For the purpose of examining, understanding and applying Chesterton's dramatology, I have outlined the philosophical context within which Chesterton operates and suggested that the primary task of his dramatology is to promote and sustain human dignity. I have thus argued that interpretation does not deal primarily with detached abstractions, but is something that needs to be rooted in the possibility of some kind of existential relevance. It has been shown that Chesterton's interpretive process may be regarded as an ethic geared towards preserving the voice and value of the ordinary man amidst the narrow-minded clamour of elitism.

In the present chapter, which concludes Part One of this study, I address what may be called the *elements* or *tools* of Chesterton's dramatology. These are the primary rhetorical and poetic considerations that drive his thinking towards reconciliation, reconstruction, reform, renewal, restoration, and revolution (AU:324; EM:241; HO:310, 315; OS:426). This focus starts with Kenner's (1948:24-25) contention that Chesterton's two strategies for engaging with reality are analogy and paradox. However, to this I would add a third strategy, which is bound up in these two, namely the strategy of defamiliarisation that is embedded in his use of analogy and paradox. In particular, my discussion of Chesterton's defamiliarisation takes Milbank's (2009a) research on Chesterton as the main point of departure. Therefore, the primary aim of this chapter is to answer the question of what boundaries or limitations need to be kept in mind as one begins to apply Chesterton's process of interpretation. This paves the way for a dramatology of Malick's *The tree of life* (2011) in the chapters that follow in Part Two of this study.

As argued in more detail below, there is an idea that directs Chesterton's use of analogy, paradox and defamiliarisation, namely the idea of the Incarnation. I have already noted that the defense of the common man that is the task of his dramatology is reflected best in the ideal common man that is represented by the Jesus of the Gospels (EM:185; Milbank 2009b:177; MO:120). Thus, it should be understood that the Incarnation is Chesterton's primary dramatological key. It is the anchor that unites the various strands that have been set forward in this and previous chapters. It is, as Wood

(2011:214) notes, "the lens for detecting what is evil and what is good, what reflects the glory of God and what obscures it". The very outline of this study, the move from structure and theory to application by example reflects this mysterious incarnational paradox — the "first act of the divine drama," whereby the word becomes flesh "on a dark and curtained stage sunken out of sight" (EM:173).

4.2 Analogy

To position Chesterton's use of analogy in terms of his defense of human dignity, one can begin with the first principle of Chesterton's common sense, namely that attitude and doctrine are interwoven. For this reason, his use of analogy is a more intuitive than empirical. Moreover, his entire mode of thinking is bound to the "wild" ethical idea of "decorum," which is analogical because it suggests that one ought to behave in a way that is congruent with one's being (Kenner 1948:29; WB:177; WW:48). However, as emphasised in the previous chapter, being is not an isolated thing, but a drama that unfolds in the company of other beings. It is precisely this that makes decorum wild for Chesterton: it is the "wildness with which a man binds himself by one pattern of behaviour when he might be sampling twenty million" (WB:179). It is the same wildness that is embedded in a rash vow, which is a promise or even a compromise that binds one being to another, and allows one's conscious thoughts to be constrained by a larger reality (EM:52; WW:48; DE:24). For Chesterton, this larger reality is formed within the context of a Trinitarian God who is in his very nature love (EM:228). Love acts as a limitation, because it "is in the nature of love to bind itself" (DE:27).[1]

Chesterton's use of analogy is also rooted in the second principle of common sense, namely that there is a reality. Analogy is the mode of thinking that accounts both for the complexity of reality and for the limits of language in its ability to explain reality (Kenner 1948:27). It is that which allows for the interconnectedness of things and thus the connection between a sign and the actual thing it refers to, as well as for the differences between things, like the difference between the sign

[1] The idea that love is the foundation of being fits in with Chesterton's affirmation, as per the Athanasian Creed, of the Trinitarian nature of God (EM:227; HO:340; ST:79). God is therefore conceivable as a God of love and relationship rather than a "God of colourless and remote cosmic control [like] the God of the stoics and agnostics" and therefore suggests that the act of creation is itself an act of love (EM:228). Chesterton argues that love in the nature of God appears to complicate the essence of a divine deity who is as "isolated and simplified" as the God of Islam (EM:228). Ker (2011:119) notes that, for Chesterton, the Trinity, unlike the God of Islam, "seems a contradiction in terms". As a statement concerning God's Being, the Trinity is one of the "great mysteries" (TH): a paradoxical belief that views God as being at once one and three. It is in this very paradox that the Trinity ought to be understood as a testament of the personality of God. As such, it promotes interdependence and intimacy. Love, the central component of the romance of being, is fundamental to the character of Chesterton's God. It brings unity, specificity, direction and wholeness to the dialectic of riddle and answer. Therefore, when the God of the Christian scriptures observes that it is "not good for man to be alone" (HO:340), he is proposing that the expression of the community of his own Being ought to be evident to some extent in the drama of his creation. It follows from Chesterton's contention that "it is not well for God to be alone" (HO:340).

and the thing it refers to. In short, as Kenner (1948:25) notes, "analogy has to do with comparison". It is the idea that reality may be understood primarily by juxtaposing things in order to see how they affect each other. Analogy is the device by which one finds "agreement between agreement and disagreement" (AU:332). It is the tool by which difference and sameness gain their meaning. For this reason, Chesterton argues that "[m]en tell more truth by their metaphors than by their statements" of fact (in Knight 2000:376). For him, metaphor, as one form of analogy, can be less restrictive in its representation of truths. It is not limited to literalism, thus making its inside larger than its outside (AU:49; ST:131).

It has already been suggested that Chesterton points to the dignity of man as the measure of all things, but it is crucial to note that, for him, the particular ideal man that he has in mind is Jesus of Nazareth (EM:185). As he reflects on the lives and work of two of his heroes, St Francis and St Thomas, he recognises that one could praise each for different reasons. St Francis, on the one hand, may be said to have "saved us from being Buddhists" simply by loving animals and St Thomas, on the other hand, may be said to have "saved us from being Platonists" by taking the whole of Greek philosophy into account (ST:28). However, both of them, in various ways, embody a singular "truth in its simplest form": "both reaffirmed the Incarnation, by bringing God back to earth" (ST:28). While Chesterton is writing about these two saints, he may well be revealing something of his own intention to affirm "a dogma that is now often regarded as the most superstitious Superhumanism," namely "that staggering doctrine of the Incarnation" that is the centre of the Christian faith (ST:33-34).[2] In simple terms, it refers to the belief "that deity or sanctity has attached to matter or entered the world of the senses" (ST:38). The event of the Incarnation is illustrated towards the end of Chesterton's *The surprise* when the Author, having observed the various disconnections and disharmonies that have resulted from the choices of his actors, pokes his head through the top of the scenery and speaks to the actors: "And in the devil's name, what do you think you are doing with my play? Drop it! Stop! I'm coming down" (SU:63). While more will be said shortly about the structural significance of the Incarnation for Chesterton in relation to paradox, suffice it to say for now that it is the key to understanding his use of analogy. Chesterton takes Jesus to be the anchor in any discussion on the dignity of man, but also as the key to any discussion of the Divine.[3]

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[2] The paradox of the Incarnation is explained by Capon (1995:309) as "*true* God and *perfect* man in an *inseparable* but *unconfused* union in *One Person*" (emphasis in original). Jesus is called *"true"* God as a reminder that "He is all the God there is; there is no God at all that is not in him" (Capon 1995:309). He is called *"perfect"* as a reminder that he is the drama as it was meant to be before the Fall (Capon 1995:309). And yet, while his God-nature and his human-nature are found in the same human form, his divinity and his humanity ought not to be confused. Differences need to be affirmed, not conflated. For example, to hold that Jesus thinks divine thoughts with his human mind is to destroy the paradox: the perfect man becomes a superman and is then no longer fully human. This paradox, therefore, is not a fusion of opposites but the meeting of opposites held in tension.

[3] Chesterton's insistence on the Incarnation is found in the idea that St Francis himself was a "Mirror of Christ" (ST:196). In other words, the dignity of St Francis is found in his being compared to the figure of Christ. However, this is not to say that St Francis loved mere abstracions. Rather, he is an example of one who "did not love humanity but men" and also "did not love Christianity but Christ" (ST:196). This demonstrates the primacy of the concrete over the abstract in Chesterton's reference to the Incarnation.

Analogy is the cornerstone of epistemology in that it allows for things to be explained and it is also foundational to ontology, because, as Kenner (1948:27) emphasises, "*being is intrinsically analogical*" (emphasis in original). Analogy is also dramatic, because the world may be said to be a "network of analogies" (Kenner 1948:35). The primary point of Chesterton's use of analogy is to notice that there is a definite sense of the coherence of life, which implies that a coherence of perception must also be possible. He is acutely aware of the mysteriousness of life and therefore of the inexplicability of many things, and yet he notices that there is a similarity even in the difference between the mysterious and the obvious:

> [T]he fact of two things being different implies that they are similar. The hare and the tortoise may differ in the quality of swiftness, but they must agree in the quality of motion. The swiftest hare cannot be swifter than an isosceles triangle or the idea of pinkness. When we say that the hare moves faster, we say that the tortoise moves. And when we say of a thing that it moves, we say, without need of other words, that there are things that do not move. And even in the act of saying that things change, we say that there is something unchangeable (HO:79).

Following this line of reasoning, to say that there are things that are unknown is to imply that there are things that can be known, including the fact that we can know things as unknowable. Analogy concerns the way that everything holds together: "with the way things can be different and yet [still] be things" (Kenner 1948:26). It is by his use of analogy that Chesterton affirms that the "things that differ are one" and in this way he continually thanks "All Being for the multiplicity of beings" (Kenner 1948:34). Consequently, analogy may be understood as sacrament: it is that which inevitably points to the reconciliation of creation to God. Agamben (2009:19) writes that "analogy is opposed to the dichotomous principle dominating Western logic". He goes on to point out in stronger language than what is used by Kenner that "[a]gainst the drastic alternative 'A or B,' which excludes the third, analogy imposes its *tertium datur*, its stubborn 'neither A nor B.' In other words, analogy intervenes in the dichotomies of logic (particular/universal; form/content; lawfulness/exemplarity; and so on) not to take them up into a higher synthesis, but to transform them into a force field traversed by polar tensions". This explanation stresses what is so evident in Chesterton's writings, namely that analogy resists reduction to mere structure. Rather, it suggests the transformation of structure into engagement with the drama. It insists upon a self-critical mechanism that self-reflexively admits that the theory is not the reality even while it participates in reality. Analogy thereby invites a deeper involvement in a larger story with all its mysteries and revelations.

It has already been emphasised that Chesterton upholds the dignity of man primarily by his instance that man is the image of God. This is the same as saying that man is the analogy of God. Man is both

like and unlike God. He should not be separated from God and yet he should still be distinguished from God (ST:36). For example, man, like God, has the quality of personal presence and yet the reach of man's presence is obviously limited in a way that God's is not. It would be fair to state that since God created him for good, God is good. But it would be absurd to say that man is as good as God or that man necessarily chooses to remain good, since that would be tantamount to declaring that man and God are absolutely the same thing (Kenner 1948:27). Just as the impression of a stamp does not necessarily indicate what the entire stamp looks like, analogy indicates that it may not necessarily be possible to understand the purity of the goodness of God simply by looking at man, unless, perhaps, that man is Christ. Analogy suggests that it is possible for goodness to be "possessed by man and by God, but not in the same way" (Kenner 1948:28). This is to imply that the way one thinks, acts and interprets must necessarily be congruent with the totality of one's being (Kenner 1948:29).

Kenner (1948:29) explains this issue of congruency by using the example that "[a]ngels know as angels are" just as "men know as men are". Accordingly, if man is confronted with "angelic knowledge," it may seem incongruent to say that he knows anything at all (Kenner 1948:29). The question embedded in this assertion relates to how man can know something that transcends his own epistemological and ontological limitations. However, the trouble here is not primarily with the limits of his language, but with the noticeable difference between his own being and the being of angels. Man can only understand and interpret as man. Moreover, each individual can only interpret as himself. This means that whatever he understands of that which is beyond himself needs to be translated via and for his own framework of being. This translatability is precisely what the tool of analogy supports. It allows for mysterious transcendence via the surprise of the immanent.

Chesterton takes this idea further when he notices that the understanding of individuals is affected by the particular mental worlds that they inhabit. To explain what he means, he refers to the story of the Tower of Babel found in Genesis 11:

> Among the cloudy and symbolic stories in the beginning of the Bible there is one about a tower built with such vertical energy as to take a hold on heaven, but ruined and resulting only in a confusion of tongues. The story might be interpreted in many ways — religiously, as meaning that spiritual insolence starts all human separations; irreligiously, as meaning that the inhuman heavens grudge man his magnificent dream; or merely satirically as suggesting that all attempts to reach a higher agreement always end in more disagreement than there was before. It might be taken by the partially intelligent Kensitite as a judgment on Latin Christians for talking Latin. It might be taken by the somewhat less intelligent Professor Harnack as a final proof that all prehistoric humanity talked German. But when all was said, the symbol would remain that a plain tower, as straight as a sword, as simple as a lily, did nevertheless produce the deepest divisions that have been known among men. (OS:489).

In the above passage, Chesterton begins with the story as he understands it, but then argues immediately that the meaning of the text, while lending itself to a particular direction of interpretation, namely how a collective task brought about actual divisions, is not absolutely self-evident when taken in the light of different, sometimes ill-informed perspectives or prejudices. This points to the idea that even the brute facts may not be brute facts. The text itself is interpreted by each reader just as various musicians would interpret the same piece of music differently. However, Chesterton discourages any ironclad interpretation that may be "flatly contradicted by an obvious fact" (ST:82). Moreover, he is clear that there is a problem with assuming a theory to be the obvious explanation of any obvious fact (ST:82). The most obvious fact remains the prejudicial limitations of the reader, who is only capable of seeing what he is expecting to see until he is willing to notice his own biases and the limitations of his own being.

Analogy as the bedrock of Chestertonian interpretation in its affirmation of the being of man is also the foundation for interpreting the world in all its diversity. In one particular passage, Chesterton discloses his view of the idea of analogy as well as his remarkable "intuition of being" or "instinct for Being" by noting that Aquinas' "first sense of fact is a fact" (Kenner 1948:30, 36; ST:154). In this observation, facts themselves are understood has having a strange quality in that they are "largely in a state of change from being one thing to being another" (ST:154). Moreover, their being is always bound to the being of other things, highlighting again the fact that being is understood in relational terms. But this dynamism does not undo or destabilise being, nor does it render everything merely relative or unreal. Instead, it affirms that things can only be one thing at a time as well as the simple idea that what is perceived must be understood as being incomplete, furthermore implying that there is something or Someone that is complete and unchanging, namely God (HO:79; ST:154). Chesterton, like Aquinas, is always defending the "independence of dependant things" and therefore, by implication, also the dependence of independent things (ST:36).

Chesterton contemplates the possibility that ultimately, by his limitations, man is able to recognise and pay tribute to the ultimate reality and the ultimate perfection that is God. In the end "God is more actual even than Man; more actual even than matter; for God with all His powers at every instant is immortally in action" (ST:156). This statement may seem at first to be enforcing a Platonic rupture between a human unreality and a divine reality, but this is not what Chesterton is aiming at. Rather, his intention is to point out that ultimately man is only real by virtue of his participation in the broad daylight of the perfection of God's Being (ST:157). Man's being is not something achieved by thinking in isolation, but something that is already part of God's drama. Being is not the result of thinking, as in the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*, but of Being. However,

Chesterton seems to be intimating that the awareness of the individual may be a barrier to recognising this.

Participation simply means "to take part in something" (Te Velde 1995:11). The Thomist doctrine of participation, which is the doctrine that Chesterton adheres to, is "a theory for rendering intelligible a 'many' in any order in terms of a higher one" (Clarke 1994:92; ST:37). I have already expressed this analogical idea by implication: Chesterton's central task of upholding the dignity of man (discussed in Chapter Three) is framed within a complex drama that I have argued is the foundation of dramatology (discussed in Chapter Two).[4] The idea of participation thereby suggested is a means for explaining what is held in common by a particular ontological order. Accordingly, one belongs to another by virtue of one's participation. Te Velde (1995:11) explains that "when a characteristic or perfection is possessed by a subject in only a partial or particular fashion, such a subject can be said to participate in that perfection". Therefore, participation essentially involves "receiving partially from another" (Clarke 1994:93). This is to suggest that the subject cannot be said to be indistinguishable from the perfection it possesses, which in turn opens up the possibility that other subjects may participate in the same perfection.

This participation takes place in three different ways. In the first place, it applies to the "logical relations of species, genus and individual" (Te Velde 1995:11). Thus, for example, to say that individual person participates in the species called man is to say, in accordance with Chesterton's defense of the common man, that the individual shares in those things that are common to all men and yet remains distinct in his own being. He is both the same as and different from man. His own being is not identical with what is called human nature and yet he shares in human nature (Te Velde 1995:12). To say that the many participate in the one is to say that there is a unique source (Clarke 1994:94). This implies that mere diversity is an insufficient reason for dissimilarity, since diversity itself is noticed by means of similarity. Consequently, there must be a transcendent order by which diversity is interrelated. Additionally, the possibility of participation suggests that the source must be abundant to overflowing by nature (Clarke 1994:94). In Aquinas's view, this application of participation is fundamentally logical rather than ontological, thus emphasising the uniqueness of each individual and species (Te Velde 1995:12). It is by this logical relation that the difference between things may be underscored.

[4] Chesterton only points to the idea of the "Many and the One" but even this brief mention is enough to confirm his agreement with Aquinas on the subject of participation (ST:37). Moreover, this notion of participation is underscored in Chesterton's theology of the Incarnation, which insists on the interrelationship between the whole, which is comprised of both mystery and surprise.

In the second place, participation concerns the basic limitations of being, namely the idea that the participant needs to actually be capable of participating in the same kind of perfection that is possessed by the source, albeit only in some partial way (Clarke 1994:93). The second type of participation therefore "concerns the relations of matter-form and subject-accident" (Te Velde 1995:13). This is to say that the "receiving principle may be said to participate in the received form" (Te Velde 1995:13). Accordingly, for instance, a planted acorn as the receiving principle is only able to participate in the received form of the oak tree that it is going to become and cannot, by reasons of the limitations of its own being, participate, at least insofar as oakishness is concerned, in the from of an elm tree or a barberry shrub. Moreover, the original source is confined, insofar as participation is concerned, to the restrictions of the subject or specific instance of matter in which it is received. The corollary of this kind of participation is found in a third kind of participation, which states that the participating subject may be said to be dependant upon the source. An effect may therefore be said to participate in its cause even "when the effect is not equal to the power of its cause" (Clarke 1994:93; Te Velde 1995:14). This idea is illustrated by the Dionysian analogy that objects may be illuminated by sunlight even though they are incapable of withstanding the full force of the sun (Te Velde 1994:14).

While Chesterton is not nearly as technical as Aquinas in his approach to analogy and participation, he holds the opinion that man participates in the perfection of God, because he was made in the image of God; and since God is a creator, it makes sense that man, as the image of God, would be one too (Ahlquist 2006:54; WS:173). Thus, he attacks a Cartesian mindset that renders everything only separate and therefore without unity.[5] The modernist renders the world in terms of isolation instead of participation and transaction instead of drama. Chesterton notices, for example, that according to this mindset property becomes an issue of money alone and sex becomes isolated from love, thereby eradicating the dramatic pleasures of domesticity and procreation. He argues that "[i]n both cases an incidental, isolated, servile and even secretive pleasure is substituted for participation in a great creative process; even in the everlasting Creation of the world" (WS:173).

The centrality of participation in creation is metareferentially expressed in Chesterton's last novel, the play-like, dialogue-driven *The return of Don Quixote* (1927) through the character of Michael Herne, a reclusive librarian who is asked to play a small role in a play called *Blondel the troubadour* (DQ). Herne initially declines the request, complaining that the play falls into a historical period —

[5] This is significant in that it clearly sets up Chesterton's way of seeing as something different from what is called "Cartesian seeing" in visual culture studies (Heywood & Sandywell 1999:xii). In particular, Chesterton's ontology, with its emphasis on analogy and participation, implies the transcendence of absolute distinctions between subject and object that are standard in positivist-empiricist regimes. This is to say that Chesterton allows for the possibility of our being influenced and moved by what we see instead of merely objectifying the world that falls within our gaze.

the Middle Ages — that he knows nothing about. However, he later agrees after recognising the similarities between his own field of expertise and the one the in the play. Chesterton depicts Herne as a highly astute, scholarly, eccentric lover of solitude. He is also shown to be very well read especially in the history of the Hittites. Therefore, when he finally decides to act in the play, Herne ends up "[devouring] volume after volume about the history, philosophy, theology, ethics and economics of the four medieval centuries, in the hope of fitting himself to deliver the fifteen lines of blank verse allotted by Miss Ashley to the Second Troubadour" (DQ). At one point, while pondering the relationship between history and the fiction that he is about to reenact, Herne observes the following:

> "I wonder," he said, "how much there is in that term we hear so often 'Too late'. Sometimes it seems to me as if it were either quite true or quite false. Either everything is too late or nothing is too late. It seems somehow to be right on the border of illusion and reality. Every man makes mistakes; they say a man who never makes mistakes never makes anything else. But do you think a man might make a mistake and not make anything else? Do you think he could die having missed the chance to live?" (DQ).

In this, Herne plants the idea in the reader's mind that one's perception of one's place in time lies between 'illusion and reality' and thus opens up the possibility that history is not irrelevant to the human search for experiential meaning in the present, especially since history allows one to ponder other ways of being. Without history, even a history riddled with mistakes, one is likely to miss out on life itself. The inference here, as discussed in Chapter Two, is that it is of vital importance to discover one's self within a larger story, in the borderlands between illusion and reality, in order to discover what it means to participate in a drama.

Herne is later recast as the Outlaw King and he performs his part in the play with great enthusiasm and sincerity. However, after the play is long over, Herne refuses to get out of his medieval costume. His obstinate refusal to step out of the drama becomes symbolic of his own revelation that he "found the play [he] acted [to be] something much more real than the life [he had] led" (DQ). In other words, the actor, having been enveloped in his own dramatological, interpretive experience, discovers that the inside of the drama is larger than the external drama that he had been living in. He therefore chooses to transport the mystical and moral vision of the Middle Ages into the lunacy of the present. Herne is arguably, in this scene, Chesterton's parody of himself. He recognises the seeming absurdity of insisting upon values and ideals long forgotten, but he also uses Herne to point out that such values and ideals can be rediscovered.

Participation implies that human beings can share in those things that are common to men: Chesterton uses the example of two men sharing a single umbrella and then points out that that if

each of them has got an umbrella, "they should at least share the rain, with all its rich potentialities of wit and philosophy. 'For He maketh His sun to shine …'" (WW:69). The weather, for Chesterton, is a metaphor for our participation in a much larger drama that is the goodness and perfection of God. It helps us to recognise "human equality in that we all have our hats under the dark blue spangled umbrella of the universe" (WW:69). While Chesterton repeatedly highlights the divisions and distinctions between things, he always ends up emphasising the unity of things. God may have broken the universe "into little pieces," but even this division is the result of the very love that binds all things together (HO:337). Paradox is at the centre of this analogy: love both divides and binds; it finds distinction and also union. This is no coincidence, for Chesterton's thinking is just as paradoxical as it is analogical. After all, analogy is a means for juxtaposing things in order to observe how they interact.

4.3 Paradox

While analogy pertains to comparison, paradox pertains to the shock of contradiction, since "putting things side by side is a necessary preliminary to having them clash" (Kenner 1948:25). The very idea of analogy contains a paradox highlighted by Chesterton in that there is similarity in difference and difference even in similarity. Just as saying that a thing is like another thing is to say that they are not the same thing, so saying that a thing is unlike another thing is to suggest that there is enough of a similarity between the two to make the difference noticeable enough to articulate.

Nichols (2009:87) observes that Chesterton has suffered grave misunderstandings because of his being associated with paradox. This is because the word *paradox* is often taken to mean a philosophical self-contradiction. In 1901, a reviewer of Chesterton's *The defendant* remarked that "[p]aradox ought to be used like onions to season the salad. Mr. Chesterton's salad is all onions. Paradox has been defined as 'truth standing on her head to attract attention.' Mr. Chesterton makes truth cut her throat to attract attention" (in Ward 2006:136). However, as Nichols (2009:90) observes, the general attitude towards Chestertonian paradox has been positive especially when it is acknowledged as a means for highlighting a particular truth instead of being merely a stylistic device. Ker (2011:83) notes that "Chesterton justified his use of paradox, not as a literary device but as a tool for understanding the world. Because 'there really is a strand of contradiction running through the universe,' it is impossible to avoid the use of paradox". For him, paradox is fundamental to existence itself (Ker 2011:101). He therefore never agrees with those who assume that he is merely "paradox-mongering" (Kenner 1948:14). He writes that

> [m]ere light sophistry is the thing that I happen to despise most of all things, and it is perhaps a wholesome fact that it is the thing of which I am most generally accused. I know nothing so contemptible as a mere paradox; a mere ingenious defense of the indefensible. If it were true ... that Mr. Bernard Shaw lived upon paradox, then he ought to be a mere common millionaire; for a man of his mental activity could invent a sophistry every six minutes. It is as easy as lying; because it is lying (HO: 213).

Chesterton suggests that there are, broadly speaking, two kinds of paradox. He contends that they are not "the good and the bad, nor even the true and the false," but rather the "fruitful and the barren; the paradoxes which produce life an the paradoxes that merely announce death" (IS:53). Furthermore, he says that a "paradox may be a thing unusual, menacing, even ugly — like a rhinoceros. But, as a live rhinoceros ought to produce more rhinoceri [*sic*], so a live paradox ought to produce more paradoxes" (IS:53). Even if a paradox is nonsense, it should be "suggestive" rather than "abortive" (IS:53). This is to say that paradox should be there to invite debate and discussion. It should be a conversation starter, not a conversation stopper. In keeping with a hermeneutic surplus of meaning, it should trigger thought, not end thought. As helpful as this distinction between fruitful and barren paradox may be for understanding the moral purpose behind Chesterton's use of paradox, Kenner's (1948:17) categorisation of Chestertonian paradox gives more insight into the specific functions of paradox in his work.

For Kenner (1948:17-18), the three types of paradox include rhetorical or verbal paradox, metaphysical paradox and aesthetic paradox. Regarding the first type, Kenner (1948:43) contends that the "special rhetorical purpose of Chesterton is to overcome the mental inertia of human beings". This mental inertia, Kenner (1948:43) argues, is itself a kind of paradox that needs to be uprooted or challenged, for human beings are often caught "in the strange predicament of seeing a thing and not seeing it".[6] When the eye is "lazy," there is a need to wake it up (TT:v). Therefore, the aim of rhetorical paradox, as the name suggests, is persuasion; its focus is on how something is said in order to draw attention to what is being said. It is Chesterton's way of encouraging the reader to not let his eye rest: "Let us exercise the eye until it learns to see the startling facts that run across the landscape as plain as a painted fence. Let us be ocular athletes" (TT:v-vi). Rhetorical paradox, especially when it is used as frequently as Chesterton uses it, draws attention to the tool of language itself in order to enquire as to whether it is assisting or hindering understanding.

The second category of paradox, which is unavoidably linked to the first, is Chesterton's central reason for using rhetorical paradox. Chesterton does not only seek to conquer mental complacency,

[6] This idea is taken from Chesterton, when he notices that looking a thing does not necessarily imply seeing it properly (SW:13). Chesterton may have taken it from the paradox expressed by Jesus when he says that his parables expose the ignorance, or perhaps the confusion of an audience that sees without seeing and hears without hearing (Luke 8.10).

as if the central role of paradox were to merely promote a momentary disruption of a pattern of thought. Instead, his aim is to introduce a new truth to the reader. After all, metaphysical paradox points to the principle that there is "something inherently intractable in being itself; in the Thing," implying that being is itself paradoxical (Kenner 1948:17).[7] The "immediate object" of metaphysical paradox "is exegesis: its ultimate object is praise, awakened by wonder" (Kenner 1948:17). Kenner (1948:17) writes that paradox "springs in general from inadequacy, from the rents in linguistic and logical clothing; paradoxy might be called the science of gaps". Not forgetting that Kenner's use of the word *science* here is more akin to the contemporary use of the word *discipline,* paradox, like analogy, points beyond itself to a new truth. Thus, paradox is paradoxical: it is both a celebration of the analogical potency of language in its ability to create a new kinds of awareness about reality, as well as being an expression of the failure of language to capture reality. Something is both gained and lost in the translation of the medium of reality into the medium of language.

One example of how paradox can introduce a new truth is found at the beginning of Chesterton's essay *The riddle of the ivy*:

> More than a month ago, when I was leaving London for a holiday, a friend walked into my flat in Battersea and found me surrounded with half-packed luggage.
>
> 'You seem to be off on your travels,' he said. 'Where are you going?'
>
> With a strap between my teeth I replied, 'To Battersea.'
>
> 'The wit of your remark,' he said, 'wholly escapes me.'
>
> 'I am going to Battersea,' I repeated, 'to Battersea *via* Paris, Belfort, Heidelberg, and Frankfort. My remark contained no wit. It contained simply the truth. I am going to wander over the world until once more I find Battersea. Somewhere in the seas of sunset or of sunrise, somewhere in the ultimate archipelago of the earth, there is one little island that I wish to find: an island with low green hills and great white cliffs. Travellers tell me that it is called England (Scotch travellers tell me that it is called Britain), and there is a rumour that somewhere in the heart of it there is a beautiful place called Battersea.'
>
> 'I suppose it is unnecessary to tell you,' said my friend, with an air of intellectual comparison, 'that this is Battersea?'
>
> 'It is quite unnecessary,' I said, 'and it is spiritually untrue. I cannot see any Battersea here; I cannot see any London or any England. I cannot see that door. I cannot see that chair: because a cloud of sleep and custom has come across my eyes. The only way to get back to them is to go somewhere else; and that is the real object of travel and the real pleasure of holidays. Do you suppose that I go to France in order to see France? Do you suppose that I go to see Germany in order to see Germany? I shall enjoy them both; but it is not them that I am seeking. I am seeking Battersea' (TT:162-163).[8]

[7] Chesterton writes that the "simplest and commonest of all the causes which lead to the charge of 'mere paradox' being slung about as it is, is one fundamental assumption. Everybody takes it for granted that universal and ordinary arrangements, historic intuitions, daily habits are reasonable. They are good, they are sensible, they are holy and splendid often enough, but they are not reasonable. They are themselves paradoxes; paradox is built into the very foundations of human affairs" (MO:166).

[8] This reflects the same thinking found in two passages quoted in the previous chapter (EM:9; HO:212).

In this exchange, Chesterton introduces a seeming contradiction, namely that by *leaving* Battersea he is in fact *going to* Battersea. This apparent contradiction acts to disrupt the "cloud of sleep and custom" and thus reveal a "spiritual" truth. Additionally, what seems to be a straight-forward statement of fact is really a drama. This idea only makes rational sense in relation to the story around the idea. This is not to say that a paradox always has to be completely reasonable or resolvable, but only that its accessibility to the reader is made possible when the context of the paradox is revealed. Therefore, the paradox acts both as a propositional truth and as that which transcends the propositional. Maisie Ward (2006:137) summarises the importance of paradox in Chesterton's work as follows:

> [P]aradox must be of the nature of things because of God's infinity and the limitations of the world and of man's mind. To us limited beings God can only express His idea in fragments. We can bring together apparent contradictions in those fragments whereby a greater truth is suggested. If we do this in a sudden or incongruous manner we startle the unprepared and arouse the cry of paradox. But if we will not do it we shall miss a great deal of truth.

Ward (2006:137) observes that the "cry of paradox" can be used as an excuse for neglecting a deeper engagement with what is really being said. Alison Milbank (2009a:88) echoes this idea in saying that "paradox leads to a moment of recognition beyond the contradictions in which the truth becomes manifest". John Milbank (2009b:163) refers to paradox as an "'overwhelming glory' (*para-doxa*)" or as "an outright impossible *coincidence of opposites* that can (somehow, but we know not how) be persisted with" (emphasis in original). Paradox belongs to the *metaxu* or the *zwischen*, suggesting that meaning is arrived at through an irreducible tension between apparently contradictory ideas (Milbank 2009b:163). In Chesterton's (2003b:53) own terms, paradox is "stereoscopic": it allows one to see two different pictures at once and yet be able to see "all the better for that" (EW:53). This idea is mirrored in Pseudo-Dionysius's (1987:61) claim that "there is distinction in unity and there is unity in distinction. When there are many lamps in a house there is nevertheless a single undifferentiated light and from all of them comes the one undivided brightness". The overall effect of paradox, then, is aesthetic (Kenner 1948:18): It agrees with the tensions within things, as alluded to by metaphysical paradox, and the tensions within language, as alluded to by rhetorical paradox, by accepting a third kind of tension "from which art takes its vitality" (Kenner 1948:18). I would suggest that *aesthetic paradox* may also be called *incarnational paradox,* since it accepts the union of the word and the world, the transcendent and the immanent. By maintaining this aesthetic tension, the multilayered, abundant natures of truth and being are retained and a sterility of perception is resisted.

Just as the Incarnation is at the centre of Chesterton's use of analogy, so it is also at the centre of his use of paradox. It is fitting, therefore, to take a look at this idea in more detail as it relates to Chesterton's dramatology. In the first place, Christ, the "God-Man in the Gospels," represents the fullest expression of the paradoxical nature of man as a mixture between body and soul, for "a man is not a man without his body, just as he is not a man without his soul. A corpse is not a man; but also a ghost is not a man" (ST:33).[9] This is to say that pure materialism and Gnosticism both fail to account for our humanity. Chesterton suggests that it is a mistake to place the body and the soul, as well as the body and the mind, at odds (ST:35). It is a further mistake to place reason and revelation at odds (ST:35). Christ not only symbolises, but fully embodies the union of all of these things. Indeed, his presence is even an argument against the division of people from God. Therefore, in the second place, Christ represents the analogical relationship between the human and the Divine. He somehow contains the double nature of being both the image of God and God himself (Nichols 2009:141). Christ is therefore at the centre of Chesterton's stereoscopic vision. And yet, to understand the centrality of the Incarnation to Chesterton's thinking, one needs to notice that he begins with the world he knows, as in *Orthodoxy,* or with the complexity of history, as he interprets it in *The Everlasting Man*. He asserts that it is only when one considers man only as an animal that we must deduce that he cannot be merely animal, and it is only when we consider Christ only as a man that we must deduce that he was more than a man (EM:17, 171; ST:30). In the above, the concrete, sensate reality of the dignity of man remains the primary point of departure.

Chesterton traces his own spiritual journey from a kind of paganism, through to his discovery of Christianity and finally considers his arrival at the person of Christ. At every point, he affirms that there is something in the paradoxes of Christianity and Christ that explains the way things actually are better than any other philosophical or rationalist system. As already stated, it is not my intention to present an apologia for Chesterton's Christianity. Instead, I only want to argue for how his worldview affects his interpretive lens. Therefore, what follows is a brief discussion that traces Chesterton's thoughts around the paradoxical subject of Christianity and the even more paradoxical figure of Christ.

When Chesterton discusses the problems of relying on the patterning of reality, he points out that life is "not an illogicality; yet it is a trap for logicians" (HO:285). Life "looks just a little more mathematical and regular than it is; its exactitude is obvious, but its inexactitude is hidden; its wildness lies in wait" (HO:285). Chesterton uses the example of the human form to illustrate his point. He notices that the human body looks like a duplicate. One man is, at first glance, really "two

[9] Chesterton contends that the "earlier school of Augustine and even of Anslem had rather neglected this" Thomist emphasis (ST:33).

men, he on the right exactly resembling him on the left" (HO:285). Because man has two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, two arms, two legs, two kidneys and two lobes of the brain, the logician may deduce that he must therefore have two of everything. But this is untrue. Just when the logician expects that a man would have two hearts or two stomachs, he would be wrong; just where the Platonist judges the theory to be superior to the reality, his theory fails. There is, in the end, an "uncanny element in everything" and "a sort of secret treason in the universe" (HO:285). This simple example demonstrates that a theory of life needs to account for both the regularities of existence and its irregularities, and Chesterton discovers that Christianity is just that sort of theory, for "whenever we feel there is something odd in Christian theology, we shall generally find that there is something odd in the truth" (HO:286).

On one occasion, he discusses the oddness of Christianity in the light of his interpretation of various non-Christian and anti-Christian accounts of the faith. Again, his own point of view is deeply informed by the antagonisms that surround him. He points out that Christianity is often "attacked from all sides and for all contradictory reasons" (HO:289). For example, it is criticised by some for being too gloomy and pessimistic, and then by others for being far too optimistic; it is accused of overemphasising human responsibility on the one hand, and then of stressing divine providence too much on the other; it is labeled a nightmare by some and a fool's paradise by others; it is lambasted both for fighting too little and for fighting too much (HO:289-191). Chesterton concludes that "[i]f it falsified human vision it must falsify it one way or another: it could not wear both green and rose-coloured spectacles" (HO:290). For him, the "shape of Christianity" is very odd indeed: it seems to carry "monstrous murder" and "monstrous meekness" quite comfortably together (HO:291). He follows his argument to its logical conclusion, intimating that in the end one may not necessarily deduce that Christianity must be true in the light of the many contradictory accusations that have been leveled at it. Rather, one may conclude that if Christianity is "all wrong" then it is "very wrong indeed" (HO:294). If "Christianity did not come from heaven" then it must have come "from hell;" and if "Jesus of Nazareth was not Christ, He must have been Antichrist" (HO:294).

Chesterton claims that Christianity, like life, is not merely a neat, sensible middle ground that answers to the frenzied critique of secularists (HO:296). It is not merely a synthesis of all contradictions, but a home in which all such reasonable contradictions are allowed to co-exist. In the end, it satisfies the one who does not want "resignation," "amalgam or compromise, but both things at the top of their energy; love and wrath both burning" (HO:296, 298). If one does not want "dilution" but the exuberant potency of things at their "full strength," then Christianity provides a clear answer: in a contest between two "furious" truths, one ought to be able to keep them both and

keep them both furious (HO:299). It is this "paradox of the parallel passions" that gives Christianity its clear vision (HO:300). It allows St Francis of Assisi to be more optimistic than Walt Whitman and St Jerome to be more pessimistic than Arthur Schopenhauer. The passions are "free" to be what they are, because they are "kept in their place" (HO:300):

> The optimist could pour out all the praise he liked on the gay music of the march, the golden trumpets, and the purple banners going into battle. But he must not call the fight needless. The pessimist might draw as darkly as he chose the sickening marches or the sanguine wounds. But he must not call the fight hopeless. So it was with all the other moral problems, with pride, with protest, and with compassion. By defining its main doctrine, the Church not only kept seemingly inconsistent things side by side, but, what was more, allowed them to break out in a sort of artistic violence otherwise possible only to anarchists. Meekness grew more dramatic than madness. Historic Christianity rose into a high and strange *coup de théatre* of morality — things that are to virtue what the crimes of Nero are to vice (HO:300-301).

The meaning of the paradoxes Christianity may be simply stated as follows: Christianity keeps the strong colours of red and white, "like the red and white upon the shield of St. George" while maintaining a "healthy hatred of pink. It hates that combination of two colours which is the feeble expedient of the philosophers. It hates that evolution of black and white which is tantamount to a dirty grey" (HO:302). Chesterton contends that Christianity

> sees life with thousands of eyes belonging to thousands of different sorts of people, where the other is only the individual standpoint of the stoic or an agnostic. It has something for all moods of man, it finds work for all kinds of men, it understands secrets of psychology, it is aware of depths of evil, it is able to distinguish between real and unreal marvels and miraculous exceptions (EM:183).

It is a worldview that strives to see things as they are, without resorting to dualism or conflation. In particular, its resistance to conflation is most potently symbolised by the figure of Christ, who is both "very man and very God" (HO:296). He is the symbol of the meeting of ultimate extremes: "[o]mnipotence and impotence, ... divinity and infancy" (EM:171). He represents the rebellion of the Divine against the rebellion of earth by establishing harmony, and answers the raging defiance of man by the almost silent compliance of God (EM:181). The Incarnation is the point at which the transcendent, supreme God takes the form of the lowliest, most socially insignificant man, as Søren Kierkegaard (2002:223) offers. Chesterton expresses this paradox with reference to the birth of Christ, where "the hands that made the sun and stars were too small to reach the huge heads of cattle" (EM:169). And, as Kierkegaard (2002:223) concedes, it is precisely in the lavishness of this paradox that the scandalous, even offensive nature of the Incarnation is exposed, leaving it to be either rejected or believed.

To clarify Chesterton's reading of the Incarnation, it is helpful to examine Žižek's (2009b:156) misguided suggestion that one may be tempted to "give Chesterton's [understanding of the Incarnation] a different reading — no doubt not intended by Chesterton, but none the less closer to a weird truth". And the 'weird truth' that Žižek (2009b:157) extracts is that the Incarnation signifies the loss of the "transcendent God" — the God who "guarantees the meaning of the universe, the God who is a hidden master pulling all strings":

> Instead, Chesterton gives us a God who abandons this transcendent position and throws himself into his own creation. This man-God fully engages with the world, even dies. We humans are left with no higher power watching over us, only the terrible burden of freedom and responsibility for the fate of divine creation, and thus for God himself.

Žižek is both correct and incorrect in this assessment. He is certainly correct in pointing out that Chesterton presents a God who abandons his transcendent position in order to take up residence in his own creation; and he is correct in asserting that this act seems to negate the idea of a God who is the guarantor of all meaning. But Žižek is incorrect to contend that the abandonment of transcendence must necessarily mean the negation of transcendence. Abandonment of authorial absoluteness does not necessarily mean the abandonment of authorship. Incarnation does not only refer to embodiment for God does not become man and thus cease to be God. Rather, it presupposes the persistence of the transcendent even in immanence (Gadamer 1975:418).

For Chesterton, Christ does not only represent the meeting of the extremes of transcendence and immanence, but also symbolises a unity of other things that had been divided throughout history. In particular, the entire line of argument Chesterton's *The everlasting man* shows that mythology, as a search for God by the imagination alone, and philosophy, as a search for truth by reason alone, had followed a parallel path throughout history, but had never been able to unite, even though both shared the quality of being "sad" (EM:240). Chesterton contends that "[w]hat the fighting faith brought into the world" to remedy this sadness "was hope" (EM:240). Moreover, the "Catholic faith is the reconciliation because it is the realisation both of mythology and philosophy" (EM:246):

> It is a story and in that sense one of a hundred stories; only it is a true story. It is a philosophy and in that sense one of a hundred philosophies; only it is a philosophy that is like life. But above all, it is a reconciliation because it is something that can only be called the philosophy of stories. That normal narrative instinct which produced all the fairy tales is something that is neglected by all the philosophies — except one. The Faith is the justification of that popular instinct; the finding of a philosophy for it or the analysis of the philosophy in it. Exactly as a man in an adventure story has to pass various tests to save his life, so the man in this philosophy has to pass several tests and save his soul. In both there is an idea of free will operating under conditions of design; in other words, there is an aim and it is the business of a man to aim at it; we therefore watch to see whether he will hit it (EM:246).

Once again, here is a hint at Chesterton's philosophy of common sense, namely that the instinct for stories, as represented by mythology, and the instinct for truth, as represented by philosophy, are both right. But implicit in this love for stories and truth is the "dramatic instinct" for the reconciliation of both (EM:246).

For Chesterton, rationalistic philosophy tends to "[starve] the story-telling instinct:" it destroys adventure and romance, and results in an "indifference and that detachment that is the death of drama" (EM:246). In other words, it divides "loving from fighting," thus forgetting that "the two things imply each other" for you "cannot love a thing without wanting to fight for it" and you "cannot fight without something to fight for" (AC:28). It also denies that "there is such a thing as a human story; and there is such a thing as the divine story which is also a human story" (EM:247). In the end, in Chesterton's view, this is why there is no Hegelian, Monist, relativist or determinist narrative, and why the fundamental scepticism that "dissolves … actors into atoms" ends up being so monotonous (EM:247). Philosophy that has not understood "the philosophy of stories" may do well to piece together its propositions, but it has often failed to speak to the common man who simply wants to hear a good story (EM:247). But then, mythology, has struggled and strained to take reason into account. With this in mind, Chesterton summarises his case for the effect of the Incarnation by contending that

> the sanity of the world was restored and the soul of man offered salvation by something which did indeed satisfy the two warring tendencies of the past; which had never been satisfied in full and most certainly never satisfied together. It met the mythological search for romance by being a story and the philosophical search for truth by being a true story. That is why the ideal figure had to be a historical character, as nobody had ever felt Adonis or Pan to be a historical character. But that is also why the historical character had to be the ideal figure; and even fulfil many of the functions given to these other ideal figures; why he was at once the sacrifice and the feast, why he could be shown under the emblems of the growing vine or the rising sun. The more deeply we think of the matter the more we shall conclude that, if there be indeed a God, his creation could hardly have reached any other culmination than this granting of a real romance to the world. Otherwise the two sides of the human mind could never have touched at all; and the brain of man would have remained cloven and double; one lobe of it dreaming impossible dreams and the other repeating invariable calculations. The picture-makers would have remained forever painting the portrait of nobody. The sages would have remained for ever adding up numerals that came to nothing. It was that abyss that nothing but an incarnation could cover; a divine embodiment of our dreams; and he stands above that chasm whose name is more than priest and older even than Christendom; Pontifex Maximus, the mightiest maker of a bridge (EM:248).

Arguably, the Incarnation, which Chesterton takes to be a fact, also informs how he reads a text. In the first place, the Incarnation may be understood as something that is always implicitly present in the text as a sacrament. In *The surprise,* for instance, the Author's intentions are already planted in his play even after his creations rebel against him. These intentions may have been misread by his

actors, and yet their misreading does not negate his intentions in the least. After all, the only way to properly misread something is to actually read it. Concerning the writings of Chesterton in practical terms, therefore, while he may not have direct access to Blake, Browning or many of the others whose lives and work he writes about, he assumes that something of who they are and what they think is knowable in the present tense through their writings. Reading is not, in Chesterton's view, solely an issue of guesswork and certainly does not assume the death or irrelevance of the author.[10] It is clear that reading is still concerned with reading the text instead of a work of psychologism that attempts to fully explain the nature of the author. The mindset of the author may still be guessed, as Chesterton often does, but the primary focus remains the text itself.

Incarnation, as a dramatological key, may also be understood as the revelation of the author's intentions through his very own arrival and presence in the text. This makes the author's intentions explicit by moving away from the propositional and the abstract toward the personal. As an example, while Chesterton is never properly present in his work, his 'presence' in invoked through what many have written about him, as well as what he has written about himself, in such a way as to clarify his authorial position.[11] Incarnation, therefore, is not something that happens in isolation from the text, but is precisely that which participates with the text. It is only a dramatological key if it fits in with the sacramental reality that has already been outlined in the text (EM:200).[12] The author's intention, narrative and argument gain new force and clearer direction when he is present in his own drama. However, to say that Incarnation acts as a dramatological key is not to suggest the absolutisation of a particular way of seeing. Meaning is not always necessarily made explicit by such an event. Just because there is surprise does not imply that mystery has been obliterated. The Incarnation implies that both are always present. The paradox persists.

For Chesterton, the Incarnation re-enchants the world. It affirms both wonder and welcome, mystery and surprise, and God and man (HO:213). All the dramatic possibilities of transcendence and immanence are reconciled in this event. All the heights and depths of participation become

[10] I have chosen to read Chesterton's work assuming the relevance of this idea. After all, his work continuously builds upon and remains consistent with his earlier work (Ker 2011:xii; Schall 2000:xiv).
[11] As an example of this I take the occasional references to Chesterton's supposed anti-Semitism (Adair 2007:vii; Clark 2006:86-87; Stapleton 2009:127; 139-146). To call Chesterton an anti-Semite, propositionally speaking, may be accurate only in the sense that Chesterton was sometimes critical of certain Semitic practices. But, then, Chesterton was often very critical of certain practices of the Christian church and the British Empire even while he remained fiercely loyal to both. Moreover, there is the fact that Chesterton himself points to the reality of his friendship with a number of Jewish people (AU:76-77). And Ker (2011:21) notes that there was certainly no malice towards the Jews in Chesterton; indeed, he was always one of the first to cry out in anger against the way that the Jewish people were maltreated. This biographical information, together with a close reading of Chesterton's work, becomes an 'incarnation' of Chesterton that clarifies the character of the man and thus clears him of being mislabeled and his work of being misunderstood in this way. Nevertheless, as I have already stressed, my focus in this study is not on the character of Chesterton, but on the actual deductions that can be drawn from his writings regarding the nature of his interpretive lens.
[12] Of course, as with any key, the issue is "not a matter of abstractions; in that sense a key is not a matter of argument. It either fits the lock or it does not" (EM:215).

possible in this meeting of extremes. Broadly speaking, this paradox falls under the single banner of a subject that Chesterton returns to frequently, namely that of domesticity. On the one hand, domesticity refers to the realm of God and, on the other hand, to the realm of man. Chesterton always insists on the importance and interdependence of both as the cornerstone to understanding. It is his opinion that the "first effect of not believing in God is that you lose your common sense and can't see things as they are" (SW:974):

> It's part of something I've noticed more and more in the modern world, appearing in all sorts of newspaper rumours and conversational catchword; something that's arbitrary without being authoritative. People readily swallow the untested claims of this, that, or the other. It's drowning all your all rationalism and scepticism, it's coming in like a sea; and the name of it is superstition ... and all because you are frightened of four words: 'He was made Man' (SW:974).

As this passage intimates, Chesterton assumes that it takes courage to adopt an incarnational view of reality, and yet for him it is the only key that really fits when it comes to unlocking the mysteries and surprises that are found in the very real extremes of life.

As the above detour into Chesterton's theology of Incarnation demonstrates, paradox does not undermine or disdain the dialectical antagonism that exists between two contradictions that must be overcome, but acknowledges that even dialectic needs a context when what needs to be understood is more complex than can be accommodated by the reinforcement of opposites. There is an inherent strain between the dialectical and the non-dialectical that paradox is able to account for. This is why paradox is central to understanding even the dramatic structure of being: it is analogical or metaxological and is therefore neither univocal nor equivocal (Desmond 1995:16). It is both a riddle and an answer, both a mystery and a surprise. As such, paradox refuses one-dimensional perspectives, deconstructionist equivocality and the potentially formulaic use of dialectical mediation. As Dunstan Moore (2007:175) suggests, it seeks an "intimate middle point" that opens a space that accounts for reasonableness of different ways of being. Again, this middle point cannot result in the dilution of two opposites, but needs to accept a necessary relationship between two irreducible wholes. To take each part of a dualism on its own terms, apart from the dramatic dialogue of paradox, results in a distorted and diminished interpretive experience.[13] Even though dialogue may be thought of as the interaction of two or more monologues (Žižek 2009c:235), dramatology assumes that no monologue is possible in complete isolation. Being, when considered to have a dramatic structure, cannot be

[13] This is precisely the line of reasoning used by Ross Douthat (2012) to explain the rise of heresy in America in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He argues that "what distinguishes orthodoxy from heresy ... is a commitment to mystery and paradox. Mysteries abide at the heart of every religious faith, but the Christian tradition is uniquely comfortable preaching dogmas that can seem like riddles, offering answers that swiftly lead to further questions, and confronting believers with the possibility that the truth about God passes all our understanding" (Douthat 2012:10). It is not all too surprising that Douthat arrives at this conclusion in that he frequently quotes from Chesterton in his book *Bad religion* (2012).

monological, and language, even when used in isolation, is reliant on a larger linguistic and spatial-temporal context.

By refusing reduction and conflation, paradox is thus inherently dramatic. It resists a narrow anthropomorphic outlook on the drama with all its inherent conflicts by withstanding any attempt to conflate truth into an over-simplified universality or proposition. Moreover, it dismisses what Desmond (1995:17) calls the "post-Heideggerian deconstructions that assault the ideals of univocity and unity for being totalistic". The natural problem with such an assault on univocity is that it reductionistically argues for a reverse-univocality or scepticism since the absolute non-existence of unity is itself is a kind of totalistic unity. Desmond (1995:17) suggests that metaphysical thinking is "plurivocal" and thus irreducible. Anti-metaphysical thinking seems to inevitably become reductionistic or positivistic, because it forms a totalising worldview.

Paradox, as already intimated, undermines the solipsistic indifference that forces notions to incessantly be shrugging off responsibility for the meanings that they confer. To reiterate what has been noted above, participation lies at the heart of paradox. Reason and faith, for example, do not work against each other, but participate with each other. Logic and imagination are not contradictory, but complementary. This paradoxical logic of participation re-envisions elements of the whole, not as divided from each other, but as interdependent. Milbank (2009b:114) contends that such a paradoxical outlook "does not require to be 'completed' by a dialectical one, but would in reality be betrayed by it". The dialogical nature of paradox also emphasises the relational nature of drama. To lean to strongly on one element of the paradoxical couple is to miss the significance of both. As a consequence, paradox is necessarily concerned with ensuring that resolving tensions does not necessarily mean synthesising them. Chesterton contends for the necessity of retaining tensions instead of arriving at "premature synthesis" (MO:131).

Again, paradox points again to the dramatic, multilayered structure of being. Being may be interpreted as a dialogical tension between mystery and revelation, the unknowable and the knowable, the riddle and the answer, the unnameable and the namable, and between the transcendent and the immanent. Being, within its whole unity, contains both part and whole, and yet, in Chesterton's terms, its inside larger than its outside (AU:49).[14] When contemplating the part it becomes bigger than the whole. To borrow again from Pseudo-Dionysius (1987:97), Being is somehow beyond being and understanding is somehow beyond understanding, meaning that the

[14] This is an idea that Chesterton uses in comparing the mind of Aquinas to a monastery after Aquinas' last revelation: "Those men [at the Council of Lyons] must have known that a great mind was still labouring like a great mill in the midst of them. They must have felt that, for that moment, the inside of the monastery was larger than the outside" (ST:131).

understanding of a text is never confined to its own substance, but is instead connected to the interplay of a being with other beings. In essence, the dramatic structure of being is paradoxical just as existence is paradoxical. However, paradox as an indicator of the dialogical nature of being is in fact reliant on the interplay not of twos, but of threes. It is Trinitarian in its structure, because all opposites need at least a third component — a *tertium quid* — in order to work in harmony, namely the paradoxical agency that binds them together. Even stereoscopic sight, for instance, is reliant on the mind that holds the two images together in tension.

I believe that Chesterton's reliance on paradox points to one of the broader fundamental aims of his work, namely the necessity of highlighting and exposing dogmas and prejudices and thus, as mentioned already, of choosing a side (AT:10; HO:331; WW:23). By refusing to resolve or abandon tensions, paradox confronts the reader with what and how he knows and believes. However, Chesterton's use of paradox is only one aspect of the rhetorical arsenal that he uses to point to the conviction or hidden bigotry of the reader. And yet, no matter what his rhetorical tactics may be, his aim remains the "recovery of a clear view" (Milbank 2009a:xiii). The Catholic idea of Confession, therefore, is always at centre of his worldview: his aim is to bring to light what may have been concealed (MO:158; WW:23).[15]

He suggests that there are "two things, and only two things, for the human mind, a dogma [or doctrine] and a prejudice" (WW:23). He explains that the difference between these may be understood as follows:

> A doctrine is a definite point; a prejudice is a direction. That an ox may be eaten, while a man should not be eaten, is a doctrine. That as little as possible of anything should be eaten is a prejudice; which is also sometimes called an ideal. Now a direction is always far more fantastic than a plan. I would rather have the most archaic map of the road to Brighton than a general recommendation to turn to the left. Straight lines that are not parallel must meet at last; but curves may recoil forever. A pair of lovers might walk along the frontier of France and Germany, one on the one side and one on the other, so long as they were not vaguely told to keep away from each other. And this is a strictly true parable of the effect of our modern vagueness in losing and separating men as in a mist (WW:23).

Chesterton insists that man "is a creature who creates cataclysms;" his "whole nature and object on earth is to draw those black lines that do not exist in inorganic nature" (MO:107):

> [Man] separates things and makes them special. Take, for the sake of an instance, the admirable and fascinating subject of meals. A cow eats all day; its hunger, I suppose,

[15] Chesterton writes that the "[a]ccording to [a modern critic], it is morbid to confess your sins. I should say that the morbid thing is to conceal your sins and let them eat your heart out, which is the happy state of most people in highly civilized communities" (MO:158).

> grows gradually and vaguely at the beginning, is slowly and increasingly satisfied, and then gradually again dies away. It is an evolutionist. But man is made for revolutions, or rather he makes them; he is formed for abrupt departures and great experiments. He faces the cataclysm called Lunch. It is a thing of black lines; decisive like a religion or a rebellion. It begins at some time and (except in extreme cases) ends at some time (MO:107-108).

Chesterton goes on to say that man makes "monogamy, patriotism, oaths before magistrates, monetary obligations, religion, honour, civic obedience, [and] theology, all on the same sacred principle on which he makes lunch" (MO:108). The point is that human beings are creatures whose lines may not necessarily all look the same, but who all create lines and boundaries between their ideas, ideologies and philosophies — their abstractions of the concrete (MO:179).[16] Chesterton contends that one should, so to speak, not only love the picture, but also acknowledge and appreciate the frame (MO:108). He does not argue that having a dogma or prejudice is necessarily wrong, but only that unawareness of these is less than desirable. He even equates an unnoticed dogma or prejudice with the ultimate crime of ignorance: ignorance of being ignorant (ST:103). The remedy to this is paradox, since it retains the boundaries between things.

This emphasis on uncovering dogmas and prejudices is not an argument for absolute agreement or epistemological arrogance. Instead, it is the hope that the reader will acknowledge that he, like all people, looks "at life through different coloured spectacles" (HO:290; ST:103) and that his particular philosophical stance does have limitations and consequences. Chesterton's aim, broadly speaking, is therefore hermeneutical in the sense that he promotes the kind of self-awareness — an awareness of the way in which one is reading and looking — that will allow for a better understanding of one's own interpretive experience. He writes, "I count it a service to contemporary thought to tell people what they do apparently think; if only to contradict it" (IU:530). Chesterton is always intent on exposing underlying assumptions, thereby suggesting that "when you have lost your way quite hopelessly, the quickest thing is to go back along the road you know to the place from which you started" (MO:101). However, this journey back to the "first facts" of a situation is concerned with more than mere "material facts" since "the first facts are never material facts. The invisible always comes before the visible, the immaterial before the material" (MO:101). Gadamer (1975:271) echoes this aim when he stresses the importance of becoming aware of one's own hidden "fore-meanings and prejudices" as one engages with a text, because a lack of awareness in this regard places the reader at

[16] Chesterton writes: "The abstract is a symbol of the concrete. This may possibly seem at first sight a paradox; but it is a purely transcendental truth. We see a green tree. It is the green tree that we cannot understand; it is the green tree which we fear; it is the green tree which we worship. Then, because there are so many green trees, so many men, so many elephants, so many butterflies, so many daisies, so many animalculae, we coin a general term 'Life'. And then the mystic comes and says that a green tree symbolizes life. It is not so. Life symbolises a green tree. Just in so far as we get into the abstract, we get away from the reality, we get away from the mystery, we get away from the tree ... God made the concrete, but man made the abstract. A truthful man is a miracle, but the truth is commonplace" (MO:179-180).

odds with the text. Acknowledging such prejudices is not meant to abolish the subjectivity of the reader, but rather encourages the reader to be critical of the ways that his prejudices may prevent or contribute to his interpretive understanding. In order to expose assumptions and open up dialogue, Chesterton casts a strange light on the fatigue of familiarity. It is this strange light, which may be called defamiliarisation, to which I now turn.

4.4 Defamiliarisation

Alison Milbank (2009a:92) points out that for Chesterton the world is a baffling place "incapable of being enmeshed in a phrase or a formula". It is the mistake of the lunatic to assume that it can be. This is to say that it is the mistake of the lunatic to rely entirely on his ability to grasp the answers instead of his awareness of the plenitude of questions. This is particularly well demonstrated in the novel *The poet and the lunatics* (1929) in which Chesterton imagines a particular conversation between the poet Gabriel Gale and a few men of science, who are the lunatics in the story. The dialogue begins with the poet discussing the way one ought to see flowers:

> 'The subject of flowers is hackneyed, but the flowers are not,' the poet was insisting. 'Tennyson was right about the flower in the crannied wall; but most people don't look at flowers in a wall, but only in a wallpaper. If you generalise them, they are dull, but if you simply see them they are always startling.' (SW:1239)

Here, through Gale, Chesterton argues that the subject of flowers, in being overused or unthinkingly reproduced, cannot be regarded with much awe. Surprise thereby gets reduced to sentimentality. In other words, by regarding flowers as a mere pattern instead of as a picture, they cannot really be admired. Familiarity breeds unfamiliarity and unfamiliarity breeds contempt (EM:15). The combination of absolutising and generalising the subject can become a mechanical process that, as is evident in this reference to William Morris's wallpapers,[17] apparently saps the life from the subject: wallpaper is meant to decorate, but not to draw attention to itself; each flower on the wallpaper remains, like a leaf hidden in a forest, hidden in plain sight; each flower exists to draw attention away from itself. But recognising each flower in nature as unique suggests a reason to be enthralled. For the human mind, the process of repetition restricts wonder and prevents apprehending anything in the world as it is. The archetypal lunatic, as already discussed, defaults to

[17] Chesterton clearly admires Morris, both as an artist and as a writer, but he is also clear that Morris's idealism fails to make the humbler necessities of everyday life beautiful primarily because "with all his healthiness and energy, he had not the supreme courage to face the ugliness of things; Beauty shrank from the Beast and the fairy-tale had a different ending" (TW:10). Nevertheless, Chesterton also suggests that some of the brilliance of Morris is in the way that he "draws attention to needs that he cannot supply" (TW:10). This is to point out that Morris possessed and presented an optimism that allowed people to consider things from a less sceptical, less pessimistic point of view.

reductionism that refuses to see what really is: "'Well, I can't see it,' said the man of science … 'I'm afraid we fellows grow out of the way of seeing it like that. You see, a flower is only a growth like any other, with organs and all that; and its inside isn't any prettier or uglier than an animal's …'" (SW:1239).

The lunatic here aims to make his world predictable in such a way that unpredictability or surprise is diminished, ignored or ruled out. The poet instead favours a mindset that allows for the possibility or inevitability of surprise. To continue the metaphor of the flower within reference to analogical participation, one daisy in a field looks like another daisy, thus allowing for the generalisation that gives the name 'daisy' to both flowers.[18] However, the poet here argues that the generalisation alone is not sufficient for perceiving accurately. All daisies that grow naturally are in a sense quite different; each has its own story and its own unique life while being connected to the life around it. Once again, the perception of the poet is Chesterton's ideal. The poet certainly argues for similarity and alikeness, since one flower is like another flower, and one person may be like another person. But he also argues for difference, since, once again, to say that something is like another thing is to say that the two are not exactly the same.[19] The lunatic argues for uniformity, but the poet argues for differentiation even within similarity. Chesterton demonstrates the applicability of exact propositional truth, but suggests rightly that the universality of propositional truth accounts neither for the larger story nor for the details within the larger story. The parts of the story are interconnected and interdependent, but each part of the story — each proposition — needs to be understood as something that participates in a bigger whole.

The human tendency to miss the uniqueness of each 'flower' by mechanising the understanding of reality arises, because of a kind of intellectual fatigue, and such fatigue should be acknowledged in order to be overcome. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Chesterton notes that the "variation in human affairs is brought into them, not by life, but by death; by the dying down or breaking off of their strength or desire" (HO:263). Consequently, Chesterton suggests that repetition is not a sign of fatigue, but of an appetite of "eternal infancy" that constantly returns, revises and revolutionises (HO:263). It is the eternal infant that has the strength of will and attention to be able to remain enthralled by the glory of the ordinary. Even God's repetitions in nature are theatrical encores and signs of his constant vigilance (HO:263). However, this appetite for repetition needs to be distinguished from the patterning and predictability that has been attributed to things by scientistic lunacy. Mere mechanisation, as a process that has been set into motion like a watch or a

[18] This rephrases Chesterton's argument that "[i]f all chairs were quite different you would not call them all chairs" (HO:238). Moreover, it points once again to Chesterton's sense of a participatory ontology, as discussed above.
[19] This reworks Chesterton's argument that "[s]aying something is like a dog is another way of saying it is not a dog" (EM:114).

time bomb, may well be impersonal and may rightly cause fatigue, because it suggests an absence of attention. Chesterton observes that the mistake is not that the mechanisms and mechanisation of engines are "too much admired, but that they are not admired enough. The sin is not that engines are mechanical, but that men are mechanical" (HO:113). In saying this, he reminds the reader that a mechanical man cannot enjoy or be aware of even the strangely unique drama of automisation. This is precisely the problem presented by scientific determinism, which in positing the presence of only cause and effect avoids the possibility of choice. In Chesterton's view, the determinist comes to "bind, but not to loose" so that the chain of causation becomes the "worst chain that ever fettered a human being" (HO:227).

Chesterton, as always, remains highly critical of any attitude that "proposes turning various laws in nature into absolutes," perhaps because "he is aware of the way that the language of apparently pure objectivity, particularly in the sciences, is a means for dulling the senses to the marvel of perception" (Reyburn 2011:52). Choice, therefore, remains imperative to the awareness that Chesterton is promoting. For example, as much as choice produces a number of disturbances and irregularities in *The surprise,* thus frustrating the purposes of the Author, it is still essential to the overall drama. However, the implication that every item within this drama of the real is uniquely placed is that each thing needs to be uniquely understood and noticed within its world. If life were a symphony, each note, rhythm, dynamic and instrument's significance to the unfolding of the music is noticed. In the drama of life, every setting, actor, gesture, conflict and resolution is uniquely suited for the unfolding of the story. While patterns may be evident in the unfolding drama, these patterns are ultimately an argument for a picture. They insist on the idea that there is a mind behind the order of things. For Chesterton, the determinist is a person who "sees too much cause in everything" and is therefore incapable of recognising the presence of choice (HO:221).

To encourage the reader to notice the presence of choice, he constantly attempts to disrupt perception. He uses the tools of analogy and paradox to create a process of defamiliarisation (Milbank 2009a:xv).[20] By presenting the familiar in a new way, he allows the reader to see a thing as if for the first time, thereby breaking the spell of habituation (Reyburn 2011:52). Defamilirisation, in Viktor Shklovsky's (1965:13) view, prevents the "algebrization" or "over-automization" of language that renders it unconscious of its own meaning and function. Defamiliarisation allows for the disclosure of meaning that would otherwise remain hidden. In Chesterton's own terms, it resists the "worship of law" (HO:246), and as Lawrence Crawford (1984:211) contends, results in "a *restoration* of

[20] The term *defamiliarisation* is a translation of the Russian *priem ostranenie* used by literary critic Viktor Shklovsky (Shklovskij) (1965).

difference".[21] Defamiliarisation allows for the revival of the "human sense of actual choice" (HO:240). It may be viewed as that which renders the text separate from the reader in order to allow the reader to distinguish between things. It restores the boundary line between the subject and his object of contemplation.

However, Chesterton's use of defamiliarisation is not perfectly congruent with Shklovsky's theory. Shklovsky's defamiliarisation, which is largely reliant on the construction of what he calls 'poetic' language, is difficult to decipher and define. It may thus be likened to Jacques Derrida's *différance* (Crawford 1984:212). Milbank (2009a:32) observes that Shklovsky lauds "avant garde obscurity" that allows the poetic to be cocooned within its own self-referentiality and thus remain untainted by the reality that it is supposed to be referring to. As such, it is a *différance* that is detached from a lived-in dramatic experience. Contrary to this, Chestertonian defamiliarisation is not merely concerned with the production of difference for the sake of creating an isolated or insulated chain of signifiers, but rather with a restoration of meaning and one's concrete engagement with reality. The aim is not to detach the text from its meaning, but to detach the perception of the reader from its own unconscious preconceptions in order for a new experience of present meaning to be possible.

Chesterton is acutely aware of the potential of any method or technique to produce a stale encounter with the world, and thus argues that imagination's central function is to disrupt or revolutionise "our whole orderly system of life": the prime function "of imagination is not to make strange things settled, so much as to make settled things strange; not so much to make wonders facts as to make facts wonders" (DE:53). Imagination, as the ability to see something as something else, does not operate on a plane outside of human experience, but rather argues for a deeper engagement with the drama of real life. As such, Chestertonian defamiliarisation is similar to Berthold Brecht's (1964:143) notion of the *Verfremdungseffekt* or "estrangement effect,"[22] which "consists of taking an object or relationship of which one is to be made aware ... from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected". The obvious may be represented in such a way as to render it incomprehensible at first, but only so that its genuine meaning may be revisited and better understood. If familiarity dulls perception, then defamiliarisation is that which brings about a new kind of awareness by stripping the familiar of its familiarity. It calls for the

[21] This is reminiscent of McKee's (1999:3) observation that narrative formation is concerned with the creative application of principles, not rules or laws. To say that we follow principles not rules may sound like another rule until we find that McKee's idea of a principle relates to Chesterton's stress of the importance of attitude over doctrine.

[22] Frederic Jameson (1998:85) notes that *Verfremdungseffekt* is often mistranslated as "alienation effect," which misunderstands Brecht's concept: Brecht is not calling for the audience to be completely alienated from the text, but rather to be open to a new kind of illumination. The Marxian use of alienation in German is *Entfremdung*. Thus, estrangement is a better translation since it is better aligned with its roots in Shklovsky's writings. Paul Johnson (1996:196) observes that Brecht, like many intellectuals, "preferred ideas to people". He had no close friends and "was not interested in people as individuals" (Johnson 1996:196). So, while his idea of the *Verfremdungseffekt* may be similar to that of Chesterton's idea of making "settled things strange" (DE:53), it needs to be said that Brecht and Chesterton are worlds apart in their approaches to the drama of life.

destruction of the assumption that the object of contemplation does not need an explanation (Brecht 1964:143).

Chesterton observes that it is a poetic dramatist like Shakespeare who truly understands the nuances and complexities of the drama of life; he is able to constantly revise and re-envision what is often simply assumed in order to encourage a deeper engagement, not just with concepts, but with reality itself (HO:219). His thinking here mirrors the analogical, paradoxical concept of the great reversal expressed by Jesus at various points in the Gospels: it is those who think they are of sound judgment that are often suffering from impaired judgment (Matthew 9.9-12);[23] it is the humble who are truly great (Luke 9.48; 14.11) and the last who will be first (Matthew 19.30); it is those who lose their lives for the sake of Christ that find their lives (Luke 9.24.), and it is those who claim to see (understand) whose blindness (ignorance) remains (Matthew 13.13; John 9.41). These reversals all follow a process of defamiliarisation whereby one detaches oneself from the object of attention in order to become fully present to it. Defamiliarisation, therefore, involves a kind of departure, followed by a kind of hospitality. And this hospitality suggests that the strangeness of a thing can give it its significance (EM:23).

The centrality of choice in the process of developing one's awareness is established when one recognises that to see things as they are, we need to also see things as they are not; or, at least, we need to see things differently from the way we have seen them. Moreover, choice needs to be highlighted as an act of the imagination and not just of the will. Indeed, Chesterton is particularly sceptical of the praise of the will that is promoted by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche precisely because it is against the choice, for choice is essential to imagination. Chesterton observes that to praise the will alone is really to paralyse it and to render any object of the will irrelevant (HO:243). The "essence of will" lies in its particularity (HO:243).

Chesterton's use of defamiliarisation re-establishes the particularity of choice. In destabilising the familiar, one is compelled to decide again. In asking the reader to reconfigure the context of a particular truth or idea, Chesterton encourages him to take note of its specificity. This is why, to refer to an example already mentioned, Chesterton can utter something that apart from its context is arguably blasphemous — "He was a man who read his Bible. That was what was the matter with him" (FB:167) — and then turn the idea on its head to reveal that he is arguing for a deeper engagement with the actual text — in this case, the text of the Bible. However, Chesterton shows that the real blasphemy lies in familiarity as over-automisation. By making the familiar 'blasphemy' or 'untruth'

[23] In this passage Jesus addresses the Pharisees – those who think they are 'well' (of sound judgment). The context of the passage suggests that the Pharisees do not recognise their own need because of their self-sufficiency.

unfamiliar, meaning is revealed in a new way. The untruth becomes a path on the way to encountering the truth.

Defamiliarisation is also a response to the lunatic's mythification and idolisation of science and rationality in his own time. When assumptions go unchecked, they become idols instead of icons; thus, things that were meant to be looked through become things that are merely looked at. By being given such a high status in culture, science and rationality gained a kind of religious significance in Chesterton's time. This undermines the entire purpose of scientific discovery:

> Physical science is like simple addition: it is either infallible or it is false. To mix science up with philosophy is only to produce a philosophy that has lost all its ideal value and a science that has lost all its practical value. I want my private physician to tell me whether this or that food will kill me. It is for my private philosopher to tell me whether I ought to be killed (AT:94).

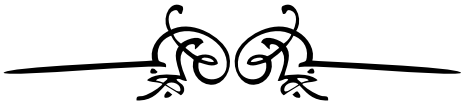
This does not recommend that science should not ever converse with philosophy or theology, but rather that science should not seek to be or to supplant philosophy or theology, meaning those discourses that are more obviously adept at considering the role of faith. It is clear to Chesterton that discourse answers to and interacts with scientific discovery, but that neither science nor faith exist to supplant the other. A scientist discovers what is there in a material sense; the philosopher is the one who ought to debate what to think about what is there, what its value might be and why it is there.

The demythification of science and reason thus calls the whole purpose of science into question, but also emphasises the purpose of faith.[24] Eagleton (2009:10) notes that "[s]cience and theology are for the most part not talking about the same kind of things, any more than orthodontics and literary criticism are. This is one reason for the grotesque misunderstandings that arise between them". The lunatic, in mythicising science as an absolute, is unable to distinguish his faith from his reason. This is essentially what over-automisation involves: it either over-emphasises or prevents difference, once again leading to a detachment of theory from reality. It renders reality disconnected or conflated by the violence of dichotomies. However, as per Eagleton's comment, the philosopher and theologian ought to also be as aware of the problem of over-automisation for their own understanding. A philosopher who absolutises his own claims may also conceivably be a kind of lunatic.

[24] Eagleton (2009:7) points out that "Christianity was never meant to be an *explanation* of anything in the first place. It is rather like saying that thanks to the electric toaster we can forget about Chekhov". I think that while Eagleton is correct in that Christianity in its Biblical point of view does not seek to explain things in the same way that science does. But it is misleading to suggest that it is utterly devoid of explanations as a general rule.

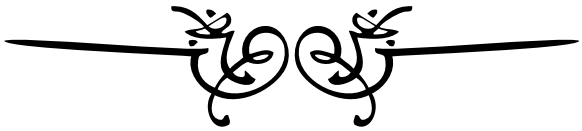
Defamiliarisation as the device that allows the reader to see something as if for the first time does not aim merely to help the reader to view what is actually meant by the text. It addresses the way that one apprehends and appropriates the meaning of the text into the drama of life. In other words, it asks the reader to be engaged in a dialogue with the text whilst simultaneously moving beyond the text, thus allowing him to consider his world in a new light. Chesterton, as Milbank (2009a:58) writes, "makes the object strange to us so that it may be reconnected by participation in a divine world". Ultimately, together with his use of analogy and paradox, his defamiliarisation is a sacramental window on the world. Against the dualistic biases of modernity, Chesterton's participatory lens promotes a view of the material world as a sacred place. He takes an analogical, paradoxical and dialogical connection between the human and the divine to be foundational to perceiving correctly. In the end, therefore, Chesterton's dramatology is a hermeneutics of accepting extremes in that it uncovers the divine participation with the human and the human participation with the Divine (EM:171; WW:70).

In this chapter, I have examined the tools that Chesterton uses as he reads the world. I have noted that his tools of analogy, paradox and defamiliarisation — each of which reflect the centrality of the Incarnation to his worldview — are dramatic in that they are always concerned with the relationships between things, as well as the paradoxical relationship between the human and the Divine. In the chapters that follow, I now turn to an application of this dramatological theory, which, for the sake of clarity, must emphasise one side of this paradox at a time. Thus, in Chapter Five, I examine the emphasis on mystery in the filmic text of the *Tree of life,* and in Chapter Six I examine the emphasis on surprise in the same text. It is in this practical application that I hope to answer the question of how Chesterton might interpret this specific film. In other words, it is my aim to ask and to answer the following question: if one were to watch *The tree of life* with Chesterton's dramatology in mind, what sorts of things should one look out for? It is demonstrated that Chesterton's penchant for defamiliarisation through analogy and paradox may be a means for encountering even a familiar visual text as something new.



PART TWO

DRAMATOLOGICAL APPLICATION



CHAPTER FIVE

MYSTERY

5.1 Introduction to Chapter Five

In Part One of this study, the basic structure of what I call Chesterton's dramatology was outlined. It was shown that this structure, which takes into account the dramatic interactions between Chesterton's cosmology, epistemology and ontology, is geared towards upholding the dignity of man by means of the tools of analogy, paradox and defamiliarisation. In the previous chapter, I noted the fact that his vision is stereoscopic in that it revolves around the meeting of extremes as symbolised by the paradox of the Incarnation. For him, this coexistence of extremes illuminates the whole of reality. He therefore tends to fulfil his role as a reader by adding various correctives to the many one-sided, monoscopic perspectives that he encounters. Such one-eyed perspectives are nightmarish until they are recognised as "one universal [and therefore momentary] wink" (AD:5). Thus, for example, he answers materialism and spiritualism, not by saying that the material world is bad or that the desire to come into contact with the spiritual is wrong, but by suggesting that mystery and miracles are more rational than the biases of modernism may suggest; and also that it is these very mysteries that bring meaning to our materiality and spirituality. Then, he answers the misty notion of progress, not by suggesting that it is misguided to desire improvement, but by pointing to the concrete reality of practical revelation and surprise: a standard by which improvement can be judged. For Chesterton, mystery and revelation are both required for a sane view of life (Knight 2000:381; Wood 2011:29). A sense of the strange as that which transcends the bounds of human rationality and the secure as that which conforms with what is conceivable remains essential to participating in his dramatology (HO:213).

Mystery and revelation always remain two sides of the same coin of dramatology: two wholes that interlink and overlap in a paradoxical dance. The absence of one of these wholes would negate the double nature of the Incarnation that is the key to understanding Chesterton's interpretive perception. As a result, while one may stress mystery and revelation in different ways (as I do here and in the following chapter), both need to be considered as integrated and integral parts of the same dramatological perception. As suggested in the previous chapter, the primary point of this incarnational outlook is to keep both 'colours' vivid and vital instead of reducing them to an insipid

mixture. The "trend of good," in Chesterton's view, "is always towards Incarnation" (MM:63). To borrow from Stapleton (2009:17), the "keynote" sounded in Chesterton's work "is one of furious energy and industriousness as humanity and God merge in one long, continuing act of creation".

In the first part of this study, the first two objectives of examining and understanding Chesterton's dramatology have been covered. All that has been covered until now is intended to act as the subtext of what follows. It is the aim of the second part of this study, beginning with this chapter, to address the third objective of the study, which is to apply Chesterton's dramatology to the visual text of Malick's *The tree of life* (Gardner, Green, Hill, Malick, Pitt & Pohlad 2011).[1] It has been my contention that Chesterton's dramatology may be applied to a range of texts and artistic creations (Reyburn 2011; 2012). However, one primary reason may be given regarding the applicability of Chesterton's writings to Malick's film: both are concerned with life, not as an isolated event in a fragmented, meaningless, story-free world, but with life as it may be understood as operating metareferentially as a drama within a much larger drama. This is observable especially in that both Chesterton and *The tree of life* wrestle with questions raised by the story told in the Old Testament's book of *Job*. While there are further connections between Chesterton and *The tree of life,* such as their connection to the Catholic faith and even shared references to Thomas Aquinas and Walt Whitman (Schwartz 2011; Wisniewski 2011; Wood 2011:188), this remains the central point of departure for the following reading: both assume that life itself is a drama within a drama. Both examine the meeting of extremes: mystery and revelation, the known and the unknown, "nature and grace, God and man, being and not being, the infinite and the mortal" in order to consider the meaning of human existence (Wisniewski 2011).

Simply put, these next two chapters seek to answer the following question as one possible application of Chesterton's dramatology: If Chesterton were to watch *The tree of life,* how would he read it? Naturally, any answer to this question must be speculative, and yet I think that it is possible to present an interpretation that stays true to Chesterton's dramatological perception. After all, Chesterton writes that "[i]f there is a curious and fantastic art, it is the business of the art critics" and, I would suggest, academics "to create a curious and fantastic literary expression for it; inferior to it, doubtless, but akin to it" (MM:64). In the case of the present curious and fantastic study, my aim is to say something about the way that Chesterton's writings may inform a reading of *The tree of life*. The following analysis must be open to debate, contestation and revisions that extend beyond the reach of this present study, since the entire hermeneutic process concerns the necessity of opening

[1] For the sake of simplicity, whenever I refer to the film *The tree of life* (2011) from here on out, this reference is implied. I refer to the film in this thesis as Malick's, because it is clearly the incarnation of his creative vision, and is also clearly based on his own original screenplay. Only where I refer directly to Malick's (2007) screenplay for the film, has a reference been included.

up the meaning of a text rather than closing it. This is in line with Chesterton's love for "fruitful" thinking rather than "barren" thinking (IS:53), as well as Gadamer's (1975:581) charge that one would be a "poor hermeneuticist" to think that one "could have, or had to have, the last word". As was made clear in the literature review in Chapter One, there is an ongoing dialogue that surrounds the work of Chesterton. It is therefore merely my hope to contribute meaningfully to that conversation here, especially regarding the discipline of visual culture studies.

In a number of ways, *The tree of life* is an ambiguous visual text, but its very ambiguity is a strong indication of its artistic richness. It is composed of layered narrative elements that are intercut with an array of images from nature and culture, and it does not seem that the filmmakers are that intent on telling the viewer exactly what to think about everything that is being presented. If a picture says a thousand words, then the myriad images of *The tree of life*, in companionship with the dialogical and musical elements of the film, must say many more words than a study of this kind could ever contain. However, the ambiguity of this film, together with the fact that it raises more questions than it answers, certainly invites a multiplicity of readings.

When contemplating the work of Chesterton, Wood (2011:187) suggests that "[a]ll great works of art are subject to diverse and even contradictory interpretations" to avoid being reduced to "disembodied formulation[s] of [their] significance". Ambiguity and the resulting multiplicity of readings should invite further engagement with the original text instead of merely treating it as an equation to be solved in disincarnate fashion apart from the being of the text. The interpretation, while being a text on its own, is not meant to replace the original artwork. To be clear, what follows is my own subjective application of my own theory regarding Chesterton's dramatology to the film in question. In no way can I pretend that it is exactly what this colossal genius would have said or deduced from watching such a film, and yet I am convinced on the basis of the things already discussed in the preceding chapters that what follows at least indicates some of the ideas that he may have highlighted given the kinds of issues he is wont to address in his work.

I have chosen to address the subject of finding mystery in *The tree of life* by focusing on the bookends of the film: the introduction, with its lengthy creation sequence and its focus on the tension between nature and grace, and the conclusion of the narrative referred to as the eternity sequence. This focus particularly highlights the Chestertonian consideration of the human drama as something that takes place within the mysterious drama of the Divine. It is also fitting that mystery should be dealt with in this way for a few other reasons. Ultimately it is mystery that forms the context or home for revelation and surprise. Also, the bookends of *The tree of life* focus on the figure of an adult Jack O'Brien (Sean Penn), whereas the main body of the film — in acts two to four —

focuses on the boyhood of the same character (Hunter McCracken). By framing the analysis of the film in this way, mystery is symbolised by the presence of maturation, whereas revelation is symbolised by the discoveries and epiphanies of childhood.

5.2 Finding mystery in *The tree of life*

The tree of life opens with a quotation from the book of Job (38.4, 7): "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? … When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" This scriptural reference is followed by an image of an abstract, fiery light surrounded by darkness, perhaps hinting at the burning bush encounter between Moses and the voice of God in the book of Exodus (Figure 1).

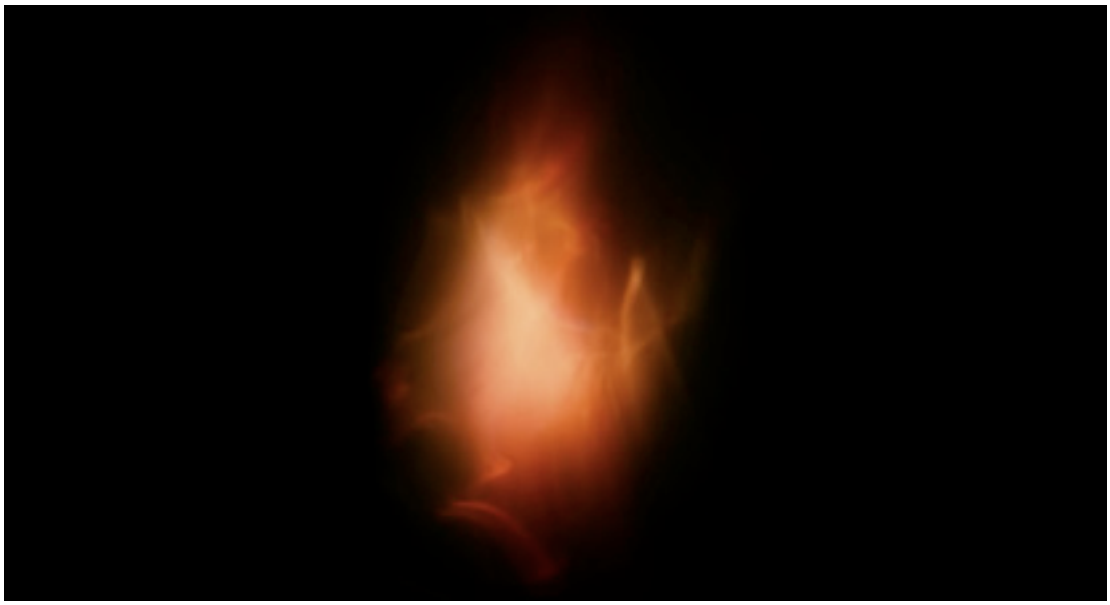


Figure 1. The light of God.[2]

As the light glows and changes shape, the voice of a man whispers, "Brother. Mother. It was they who lead me to your door".[3] If this utterance is taken as being addressed to God, the intimations of the entire film start to fall into place. The film seems to be a kind of prayer: a cinematic mediation on

[2] All images that appear in this thesis are taken from *The tree of life* (Gardner *et al* 2011). As with references to the narrative of *The tree of life*, and for the sake of simplicity, this reference should be taken as implied throughout, especially since all images in this study are taken directly from the film.

[3] Since the aim of this study is to present a Chestertonian reading of the film, any transcriptions provided, especially when they may seem ambiguous, are transcribed in such a way as to align with Chesterton's thinking. Thus, in the case of this quotation, I am aware that this same text can be rendered thus: "Brother, mother, it was they who lead me to your door," implying that the speaker is in fact addressing his brother and the mother. This reading does, however, make the *they* in the utterance more ambiguous than in helpful for the interpretation that I am offering here.

the intricate relationship between the divine and human dramas, and therefore also between the sacred and the secular. The voice of the man tells us that it was his brother and his mother that brought him to the dwelling place of God. Their embodied and remembered presence in his life has been a reminder of the presence of the Divine, and their concrete being has been an indication that the smallness of human life must be understood within a much larger drama.

The voice that utters these words belongs to an adult Jack O'Brien, the central protagonist in this story. But his pronouncement captures something beyond the specifics of his own life. In Malick's (2007:ii) first draft of the screenplay, he notes that "[t]he 'I' who speaks in this story is not the author. Rather, [the author] hopes that you might see yourself in this 'I' and understand this story as your own". The story, then, is not just the story of one man and his family in central Texas in 1956, but a story that evokes the story of every person at every time (Malick 2007:1). It is a story about what it means to be a human being participating in an incomprehensibly big drama.

Figure 2. Images of grace in nature.

As the image of the light in the darkness fades, tranquil choral music plays and the voice of Mrs. O'Brien (Jessica Chastain), Jack's mother, speaks:

> The nuns taught us that there are two ways through life: the way of nature and the way of grace. You have to choose which one you'll follow. Grace doesn't try to please itself, accepts being slighted, forgotten, disliked; accepts insults and injuries. Nature only wants to please itself, get others to please it too, likes to lord it over them, to have its own way. It finds reasons to be unhappy when all the world is shining around it, when love is smiling through all things.

Mrs. O'Brien's voice is accompanied by a series of images that are introduced to hint at awe, harmony and serenity: sunflowers waver in the breeze; sunlight seeps through a lone cloud; a girl gazes out at a farm from a window; the same girl is seen holding a kid goat, feeding some cows and being embraced by her father (Figure 2). These pastoral scenes — images of grace in nature — are then changed for a few images of the O'Brien family around which the film centres: Mrs. O'Brien sits on a swing

attached to a tree in the middle of the front yard, watching her three young boys play; the O'Brien family sits around the dining room table, prays together, eats, and then plays soccer outside; the three boys chase after their mother outside on a dirt road, laughing and smiling; they climb a tree (Figure 3). In these images, it is clear that the mother is "especially drawn to her middle son," named RL (Laramie Eppler), who is the "sweetest, most genial of the boys" (Malick 2007:1). RL is the brother that Jack has already referred to at the opening of the film.

The camera follows RL as he walks away on his own, and Mrs. O'Brien's voice explains that the nuns "taught us that no one who loves the way of grace ever comes to a bad end". The complexity of this statement is only hinted at as we shift from domestic scenes to an image of a raging waterfall, a symbol of power and danger in nature (Figure 3). The screen goes dark and Mrs. O'Brien continues: "I will be true to you, whatever comes". Again, this *you* referred to here implies God and it intimates what the rest of the film confirms, namely that Mrs. O'Brien has chosen to follow the way of grace, which "doesn't try to please itself". This intimation points to a dialectic that is at the heart of the narrative of *The tree of life*: Mrs. O'Brien is the incarnation of grace, while her more rigid and competitive husband, known to us only as Mr. O'Brien (Brad Pitt), is the personification of nature, which is filled with antagonisms and restlessness. The fact that this couple embodies a marriage of nature and grace tells us that the question of whether one ought to follow nature or grace is not as simple as choosing one in order to negate the other. Marriage, after all, is the union of the incompatible (WW:46). Nevertheless, it is particularly the bold presence of nature that acts as a preface to grace (Aquinas 1951:30).

Figure 3. Scenes in the life of the O'Brien family.

This dialectic of nature and grace that is captured in the paradox of the Incarnation reflects "two truths" that Chesterton sees in the world: "the truth of the supernatural world, and the truth of the natural world, which contradicts the supernatural world;" the truths of heaven and earth (ST:86).[4] Chesterton points to ancient myths in order to note that in "a hundred forms we are told that heaven and earth were once lovers, or were at once one, when some upstart thing, often some undutiful child, thrust them apart" (EM:91).[5] It is in this "primeval vision of the rending of one world into two" that one finds the hint of a few ultimate ideas (EM:91). As with any divorce, the split between heaven and earth does not mean that the two become entirely distinct as if there were no marriage in the first place; a memory of earth remains in heaven and a memory of heaven remains on earth. The presence of the one is still felt in the other. Those who view heaven and earth as utterly distinct are unable to reconcile the statement "God is Spirit" with the statement "the earth is his footstool" (BC:13). In addition, the split between heaven and earth does not mean that heaven and earth are two equal but opposite forces that are now in two entirely different places. Earth has always been contained within heaven, but in the event of the Fall, as explained in the third chapter of Genesis, human beings are simply less aware of the reality of heaven. The mysteriousness of mystery has become less than apparent.[6]

The narrative and various tensions in *The tree of life* demonstrate that the paradox of nature and grace is uneven. Nature and grace are not equal opposites anymore than earth and heaven are. Instead, just as the mysterious realm of the supernatural forms and informs the context of the natural, so

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[4] This idea ties in direction with Chesterton's understanding that temporality and eternity may be seen as directly interlinked via the paradox of the Incarnation. This can also be observed in von Balthasar's (1998:247) contention that when the Son, the second person of the Trinity, "definitively embraces the world in his Incarnation and enters the sphere of time, he does not leave eternal life behind". Moreover, the Incarnation — the revelation of God in human form — implies that it is precisely by God's indwelling of temporality that allows people to receive and share in eternal life (von Balthasar 1998:247). The event of the Incarnation and the ongoing work of the Incarnation through the body of Christ, the church, implies the meeting of temporality and eternity; the expectation of eternal life begins with the revelation that eternal life begins in the present (Willard 1998:19). Von Balthasar (1998:250) suggests that if, "in Jesus Christ, eternal life has genuinely penetrated the world's temporal sphere; this temporal sphere does not unfold 'outside' eternity but within it". In line with this, it is very likely that Chesterton's emphasis on the Incarnation allows him to see temporality and eternity as participants in the same dance.

[5] Because Chesterton's writings do not deal directly or systematically with the subject of the relationship between heaven and earth, it is difficult at first to decipher his exact opinions on the subject. He oscillates between referring to heaven as a future reality to referring to it as a present reality, a "playground" where people "love each other"(AT:43,54). He suggests that it is the dwelling place of God, and that God left this dwelling place to set the world right. He also contends that the "human instinct for heaven" is as "local as a home". Then, more commonly, he tends to use the word *heaven* metaphorically (EM:90). Of course, he is not a systematic theologian and, as discussed in the previous chapter, his thinking moves away from the over-automisation of any idea. These different uses of the word *heaven* suggest that Chesterton's view on the subject at least hint at the complexity of the idea as it is expressed in the bible. Heaven is both a present and a future state; it is both evident and hidden, real and metaphorical. Arguably, it is this very paradoxical engagement with heaven that Chesterton is considering when he discusses his sense that human beings are all a state of "exile" or "holy homesickness" and yet also capable of feeling at home while in this state of exile (HO:212; MA:108).

[6] The division between heaven and earth is not a dualism in the sense that heaven is the "good bit" and earth is the "bad bit," but rather a duality in the sense that both heaven and earth are part of the same good, although fallen creation (Wright 2005:176). Heaven and earth were once in a holy union and the divorce of heaven and earth is equally problematic for both. Wright (2005:51) argues that within "the twofold created universe, humans have the capacity to investigate things on earth; but only God, and perhaps other beings like angels, have the capacity to understand, and (should they wish) reveal to mortals, the things in heaven". From this perspective, earth is what is known and heaven is what is initially kept secret. As a result, revelation may be understood as the disclosure of the (present and yet-to-be) secrets of heaven on earth. Revelation may therefore be understood as making God's will known 'on earth as it is in heaven'; or, in Joseph Ratzinger's (2005:345) words, as "[making] God visible in the world".

grace provides a context for nature. The unevenness of this paradox is concealed by the fact that nature and the natural may be deemed more easily discernable than the supernatural and grace. And yet, as Malick (2007:14) claims, "competition" or "the struggle for existence" that seems to have resulted in the "ascent of life" is ultimately "not life's fundamental law". The grace of co-operation "succeeds where naked power and selfishness do not" (Malick 2007:14). Even Chesterton notices that the notion of the "Struggle for Existence" is often misunderstood to mean "an actual struggle between candidates for survival" or "cut-throat competition," when it really means that those who survive are simply those who have the tools to adapt (WS:61-62).[7] Nowhere does this imply that the tools of adaptation need to be hardy and violent. This struggle for existence has less to do with violent combat between competing animals than it has to do with the ability possessed by animals to co-operate with a changing environment. Even in Chesterton's reading of Darwinian evolution, he notices that there is a hidden mirth beneath the more obvious elements of the drama (HO:366; WS:62). He also notices the possibility that softness may be better armour than brittleness (MA:2).

Here we see that Chesterton sees no insurmountable conflict between nature and grace. I am aware that he sometimes overstates his case against science, as in the introduction of *The ball and the cross*, where "the narrator likens the creations and discoveries of science to the work of a demonic succubus" (Wood 2011:20). But this does not mean, as Wood (2011:20) concludes, that Chesterton makes "a complete disjunction between nature and grace". He may sometimes overstress the conceptual distinction between the two for the sake of rhetorical force, but he most certainly also considers the ways in which they overlap. On the subject of human nature, for instance, he suggests that "Man is a contradiction in terms" by being both part of nature while remaining somehow distinct from nature; "he is a beast," and therefore an animal, whose "superiority to other beasts consists in having fallen" (BC:5). If Chesterton argues for the difference between nature and grace, it is only to attack various "forms of scientific scepticism [and] determinism" for trying to do the work that religion should be doing (WS:62). He suggests that science needs to be acutely aware of its own limitations, lest it force itself into trying to accomplish what it was never intended to:

[7] Certainly, it may be deemed fair to empirically observe, as Charles Darwin (1859) does, that the one most adaptable to change is more likely to survive. Herbert Spencer (1864) repackaged this idea in the form of the famous phrase "survival of the fittest". But as soon as *adaptability* or *survival* are viewed as being somehow better than their opposites, the scientific stance of that observation has been transcended. It is precisely this imposition of such value judgments that makes the theory of evolution more philosophical or immaterial than scientific even when it presents good evidence for its value to the sciences. In accordance with what has already been discussed, it is the scientist who is required explain what has changed and, in observable terms, how. In Chesterton's terms, it is the job of the philosopher to explain or speculate on why the change may have occurred and whether or not the result is better or worse (AT:94). On the way that evolution straddles the line between science and philosophy, Wright (2007:95) observes that Darwin was not so much a great new thinker, "coming out from nowhere to his radical new idea, but rather the exact product of his times, one particular high-water mark in the onward rush of liberal modernist optimism...". It is exactly this that explains why Darwin's ideas were so readily and uncritically embraced by the first audience of his writings (Wittgenstein 1966:26). Accordingly, Darwin's compelling theory became a legitimising scientific anchor for a cultural mood and especially for the modernist myth of progress.

> Science can analyse a pork-chop, and say how much of it is phosphorus and how much is protein; but science cannot analyse any man's wish for a pork-chop, and say how much of it is hunger, how much custom, how much nervous fancy, how much a haunting love of the beautiful. The man's desire for the pork-chop remains literally as mystical and ethereal as his desire for heaven. All attempts, therefore, at a science of any human things, at a science of history, a science of folk-lore, a science of sociology, are by their very nature not merely hopeless, but crazy. You can no more be certain in economic history that a man's desire for money was merely a desire for money than you can be certain in hagiology that a saint's desire for God was merely a desire for God. All this kind of vagueness in the primary phenomena of study is an absolutely final blow to anything in the nature of science. Men can construct a science with very few instruments, or with very plain instruments; but no one on earth could construct a science with unreliable instruments. A man might work out the whole of mathematics with a handful of pebbles, but not with a handful of clay which was always falling apart into new fragments, and falling together in new combinations. A man might measure heaven and earth with a reed, but not with a growing reed (HO:117).

For the religiously minded person, the view of the naturalist fails "to throw any doubt on any religion" at all (IL:74):

> The Book of Genesis does not say that God formed the substance of the world out of atoms, and therefore a scientist cannot be rebuked as a Bible-smasher if he says it is formed not of atoms, but of electrons. The Council of the Church which laid down the dogma of the Co-eternity of Father and Son did not lay down any dogma of the Conservation of Energy. Therefore Mme. Curie could not be burned as a heretic even if, as some said, her discovery disturbed our ideas about the Conservation of Energy. The Athanasian Creed does not say that parallel straight lines never meet, so it would be unaffected by Professor Einstein saying, if he really does say, that they are not parallel or even straight. The prophets did not prophesy that a man would never fly, and are, therefore, not discredited when he does fly. The saints certainly never said there was no such thing as wordless talking, and therefore have nothing to retract if there is such a thing as wireless telegraphy (IL:74-75).

Here Chesterton seems to be suggesting that it is possible for science to be quite complementary to faith and thus for nature to be complementary to grace. But for the materialist, whose world is only made up of what is perceivable and provable by the senses, there can only be nature and "Darwinian biology" (IL:76). Chesterton repeatedly notices that the explanations of naturalists ultimately leave us in the dark about a great many things: "What remains is mystery — an unfathomed and perhaps unfathomable mystery. What remains after Darwin is exactly what existed before Darwin — a darkness which I ... believe to be divine" (IL:76). Chesterton recognises that this mystery may be interpreted differently, as divine or not, but that it remains dark nonetheless (IL:76). Still, assuming by faith that this obscurity is an indication of the Divine, he offers that if the changes in nature were to eventually be completely explained, he would be unsurprised if the theories of the naturalists were given some credence (IL:77). Chesterton is not intent on "exorcising the devil of evolution" in any absolute sense as Wood (2011:21) seems to argue, but only wants to point out that "any complete

explanation by a complete evolution is at present impossible" (IL:77).[8] If anything, in accordance with this penchant for defamiliarisation, Chesterton uses rhetoric to jolt the evolutionist out of his complacency in order to persuade him to reconsider the object of his faith.[9] Even in his later work, Chesterton admits to remaining "agnostic about the agnostic deductions" of Darwinians (AU:305). His problem is not with opening the evolutionary question, but with closing it (Ker 2011:721). His primary issue is not with Darwinism, but with treating Darwinism as an empirical proof of the irrelevance of theology or even as a genuine alternative to the Christian faith (AT:94; WS:62). Furthermore, he is at odds with any scientific theory that would seek to examine human nature an absolutely objective sense, thereby dehumanising the human subject (EM:23; Clark 2009:142).

By embracing mystery, the seeming contradiction between the natural and the supernatural, and between nature and grace, becomes a lopsided camaraderie. It is only sin — the introduction of evil into the good creation — that causes the breakup of this friendship between the two halves of the incarnational paradox. However, at the start of *The tree of life,* this camaraderie has not yet been resolved in the mind of Jack O'Brien. He seems to be asking himself whether he will follow the way of grace displayed by his mother and brother or the way of nature embodied by his father. The opening line, together with the utterances of Mrs. O'Brien in the exposition already hint at an answer: Jack, who is revealed in the film to be more in alignment with the way of nature, is still drawn to the way of grace. The way of nature seems to him to be inadequate for navigating life when it is isolated from the way of grace. This isolation is stressed by a few fleeting glances at Jack's obvious estrangement from his wife: the two of them occupy the same space and yet seem to find it difficult to communicate. His inability to reconcile nature and grace as a child seems to have had a lasting impact.

Nevertheless, this implied romance towards grace is not delimited within the comfort of an idyllic home life, but rather within the context of trauma. Embracing the way of grace, then, is to be understood as the acceptance of contradiction, for it assumes the reality and inevitability of suffering (Wisniewski 2011). Trauma, which is shown from various angles throughout the narrative, is first revealed when a "Western Union man" delivers a telegram to Mrs. O'Brien some years later that informs her of the death of her middle child, RL (Malick 2007:1) (Figure 4).

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[8] Clark (2009:132) points out that the hasty adoption of Darwinism was heavily criticised by Chesterton because it was unscientific and also that it was only in the 1930s that the synthesis of Darwinian theory and Mendelian genetics answered these critiques. Clark (2008:132) writes, "Nowadays, it is imaged that 'the theory of evolution' is a single theory, and that all those who criticized Darwin were therefore 'creationists'. The truth is otherwise". Some argue that there is much concerning the theory of evolution that is observable and demonstrable, but matters of macro-evolution and the idea of an evolutionary goal remain theoretical at best. Richard Dawkins (2006:50) concedes that evolution is "blind to a goal," but makes this judgment based on his own philosophical presuppositions of what it meant by a "goal".

[9] On one occasion, Chesterton parodies evolution in order to attack the "uncritical enthusiasm for evolution" shown by HG Wells in his *Outline of history* (Wood 2011:18). He uses the example of a rhinoceros who was "so benevolent a Futurist as to start an improvement that could only help some much later rhinoceros to survive," thereby suggesting that "the real riddles that arrest the eye" are not explained by evolutionary theory in a way that is completely satisfactory to the intelligence (IL:58).

Figure 4. A Western Union man delivers a telegram.

While the audience remains unaware of exactly what happened to RL throughout the duration of the film, the telegram to Mrs. O'Brien and the telephone call to Mr. O'Brien both indicate that their son was away from home. This distance, echoed and emphasised by the impersonality of the medium of the telegram as well as the spatial division between and vocal disembodiment of husband and wife in the case of the telephone call, draws attention to all the ways that the drama of humanity can become fractured and even disembodied. Yet somehow it is this very trauma that pulls people together and helps them to recognise their connectedness to others. The paradox of this trauma is therefore reminiscent of the paradox of the crucifixion of Christ, where the union between man and God is made possible by a division between the Father and the Son; where the anguish of Christ suggests "an abyss that is not for our thoughts" when "God had been forsaken of God" (EM:212).

We watch as two grief-stricken parents try to come to terms with the weight of their loss. Nature and grace seem to be irreconcilable at this point in the story. Soon after hearing the news, Mrs. O'Brien, distraught in her grief, tells her husband that she just wants to die, thus offering a second reference to the book of *Job*. There is an overtly religious overtone to the scenes that follow, where we hear someone utter the words, "He's in God's hands now" and another, whose voice resembles Mrs. O'Brien's, say, "He was in God's hand the whole time". The latter is uttered more as a question than as a straightforward statement, for if RL, who had followed the good way of grace, was in God's hand's all the time, how could God have let him come to such a bad end? This strikes a chord of scepticism that resonates throughout the film.

As we see Mrs. O'Brien interact with those who mourn with and for her, we hear her voice offer a short, disjointed prayer: "My hope. My God. I shall fear no evil. What did you gain?" An older woman, possibly her mother, tries to offer some comfort to her, but her comfort is poorly formulated, insensitive and taken badly. The woman explains, introducing a third reference to the book of *Job*, that the "Lord gives and the Lord takes away. That's the way he is. He sends flies to wounds that he should heal". The assumption in this pronouncement, a weakly formulated theodicy, is that God was the direct cause of their loss and pain. Even if he was the source of their suffering, no attempt is made in *The tree of life* either to absolve or condemn the Divine. The trauma uncovers the riddle that is at the heart of being without trying to resolve it with tidy rationalisations.

Figure 5. Jack enters a world of memory.

There is an obvious uneasiness between the comforters and the O'Briens as they fail to understand their grief. They "go away dismayed and apprehensive ... They are themselves bewildered" (Malick 2007:3). Malick (2007:3) suggests that death "reveals the emptiness that was there before". It exposes the fragility of everyone in proximity to its wake. Like Job's comforters, the general impression given by the comforters of the O'Brien family is "not that God is good but that God is so strong that it is much more judicious to call Him good" (IJ:xviii). They try to be optimistic by attempting to make "everything in the universe [fit] into everything else: as if there were anything comforting about a number of nasty things all fitting into each other" (IJ:xix). They fail to provide comfort by insisting upon explanations. They fall into a kind of insanity by losing everything except their ability to reason (HO:222). The screen goes black and the strange, shapeless light reappears. This is soon followed by fast moving, blurred city lights (Figure 5). Jack speaks again: "How did you come to me? In what shape? What disguise?" How, he seems to be enquiring, can one discern the

presence of the Divine in the midst of such trauma? These words are accompanied by another series of images: a fifty-something year old Jack walks through an open door, perhaps symbolic of the door of God mentioned earlier, and wanders around outside in the sun; seagulls fly up ahead; a vast open salt plain is traversed; Jack wakes up in silence without speaking to his wife; he lights a candle and remembers his life as a young boy playing baseball with his brothers and, on a different occasion, sitting next to RL, enjoying his company (Figure 5).

As he ponders the memory of his brother, Jack speaks: "I see the child that I was. I see my brother: true, kind. He died when he was nineteen" (Figure 6). As images of business meetings, cityscapes and skyscrapers fill the screen to indicate man's dominance over nature (Figure 7), Jack continues: "The world's gone to the dogs. People are greedy; it's getting worse ... How did I lose you? Wander? Forget you?" Once again, the *you* here is deliberately ambiguous, perhaps referring to Jack's loss both of God and of the memory of his brother. He considers the fact that the world that he lives in follows the way of nature. It is hostile and, in both metaphorical and literal ways, violent. It seems to understand nature, but has lost any semblance of grace.

Figure 6. Jack remembers RL.

Figure 7. Man's assertion of dominance over nature.

The world we are looking at in *The tree of life* is a world of memory, but it is especially a world remembered through the lens of grief. Chesterton borrows Maurice Baring's description of memory as a "puppet-show," thus indicating, perhaps recalling his puppets in *The surprise,* the fact that memory, while reflecting the reality that has occurred, remains a mental construction (AU:32). Again, by revealing a paradox, he contends that the trouble with memory is that "the things we remember are the things we forget" (AU:43):

> I mean that when a memory comes back sharply and suddenly, piercing the protection of oblivion, it appears for an instant exactly as it really was. If we think of

> it often, while its essentials doubtless remain true, it becomes more and more our own memory of the thing rather than the thing remembered. I had a little sister who died when I was a child. I have little to go on; for she was the only subject about which my father did not talk. It was the one dreadful sorrow of his abnormally happy and even merry existence; and it is strange to think that I never spoke to him about it to the day of his death. I do not remember her dying; but I remember her falling off a rocking-horse. I know, from experience of bereavements only a little later, that children feel with exactitude, without a word of explanation, the emotional tone or tint of a house of mourning. But in this case, the greater catastrophe must somehow have become confused and identified with the smaller one. I always felt it as a tragic memory, as if she had been thrown by a real horse and killed. Something must have painted and repainted the picture in my mind; until I suddenly became conscious about the age of eighteen that it had become the picture of Amy Robsart lying at the foot of the stairs, flung down by Vamey and another villain.[10] This is the real difficulty about remembering anything; that we have remembered too much — for we have remembered too often (AU:43-44).

This is not to suggest that memory cannot be reconciled to the events that have actually occurred, but rather that the mental impressions left by memory need to be understood as a form of grieving. Memory itself is the result of loss, for one only remembers what is no longer present. It is therefore primarily a reflection of that loss and the human inability to reclaim what has been lost. This is significant in that it points to the way that *The tree of life* does not pretend to be offering an exact, literal replica of actual events. Rather, it presents a subjective, sometimes distorted, always edited view of things. It is a construction, albeit one that aims at reconstruction and reconciliation. It may be considered a search or analogy for a truth that resides in and beyond the confines of its own mediated character.

In particular, the film, with its emphasis on the disruptive traumas that invade existence, raises a question that is at the heart of the book of *Job*, namely the question of "why the innocent suffer in this strange world" (Dell 1991:1). This question is especially pertinent in the light of the tension between nature and grace, because it asks how one can follow the way of grace when the way of nature so often seems to hold primacy. It is particularly potent to this dramatology in that Chesterton, with his theology of gift, has often been accused of being somewhat oblivious to the darker side of life (Knight 2000:373). Knight (2000:373) argues that this accusation is probably the result of Chesterton's emphasis on "the joy of existence" — a subject dealt with shortly — and his seeming marginalisation of the problem of suffering. However, with Knight and Wood (2011:2), I believe that this is a misreading of Chesterton. While the joy of existence remains paramount to his thinking, he certainly has a great deal to say on the darker, more nightmarish subjects in life. In fact, the question of suffering and its relationship to the problem of evil may be regarded as an implied

[10] With this reference to a historical event, it may also be possible that the particular image that Chesterton has in mind is *The death of Amy Robsart* (1877) by the British painter William Frederick Yeames (1835-1918).

theme is much of his writing, and especially by the fact that he so frequently refers to the very book of *Job* that *The tree of life* is paying homage to.

Chesterton returns to the subtext of *Job* time and again, reflecting his belief that the "*book of Job* is better worth hearing than any modern philosophical conversation in the whole philosophical world" (in Knight 2004:146). For him it embodies various battles, most obviously between good and evil, but also between justice and injustice, perception and reality, optimism and pessimism, and creation and evolution (IJ:xvii-xviii). I have already noted that *The surprise* presumes a hidden dialogue much like the one that takes place between God and Satan in *Job*, but it needs to be noticed that this same intertextual reference in found in some of Chesterton's other works of fiction as well. For instance, *The man who was Thursday* opens with a conversation between a civilised man named Gabriel Syme and an anarchic poet named Lucian Gregory before shifting to the main drama of the story (MW:12). In a similar manner, *The ball and the cross* (1910) begins in a flying ship high above the ground with a conversation between a humble monk named Michael and an arrogant scientist named Lucifer. It is only after this pretext has played out that the narrative shifts to the drama on the ground (BC:12). The names of these characters cannot be overlooked. *Gabriel* and *Michael* are the names of two archangels and *Lucian* and *Lucifer* recall the archangel who fell by standing against God — the very same angel who appears at the start of *Job*.

These examples clearly reflect an idea at the heart of Chesterton's dramatology, namely that even the smallest fight for morality has cosmic significance. Even the smallest matter of good versus evil is not small, and the drama within the larger drama is of paramount importance. The fact that Chesterton is dealing with references to angels and a fallen angel should not be passed over too quickly. Angels, symbolically speaking, are messengers and ambassadors of God whose primary task is to carry the words of God to man in a way that they may be perceived and understood. They are to the Judeo-Christian tradition what Hermes, from whose name we get the word *hermeneutics*, is to Greek mythology. They are a means by which God bridges the gap between earth and heaven, and therefore between nature and grace. The fallen angel Lucifer represents one who has distorted and misrepresented the message of God. Thus, these cosmic dialogues, figurative mirror images of the cosmic dialogue that takes place in the book of *Job*, deal with the question of how the will and ways of God may be negotiated and interpreted in the light of what is actually evident within the created order.

Chesterton observes that *Job* presents "a philosophical riddle and a historical riddle" (IJ:ix). To begin with, he addresses the historical riddle, which relates to the authorship of the book. He notes that there is a great deal of debate in academia surrounding the manner in which the book was

composed, but that such debate, still evident in contemporary biblical scholarship (Newsom 2003:3-11), should not be prioritised too highly:

> The Book of Job may have grown gradually just as Westminster Abbey grew gradually. But the people who made the old folk poetry, like the people who made Westminster Abbey, did not attach that importance to the actual date and the actual author, that importance which is entirely the creation of the almost insane individualism of modern times (IJ:ix-x).

By implication, Chesterton insists that one should read the text within its own historical context, at least insofar as we understand that context. And, for him, the context of ancient history reveals that there was "more unity in those times in a hundred men than there is unity now in one man. Then a city was like one man. Now one man is like a city in civil war" (IJ:xi). Chesterton insists that one should make an attempt to understand the book in the terms of its first audience to the extent that one can imagine what the first audience was like, and in relation to the kind of questions that the author was actually trying to address. He suggests, for instance, that if one expects Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to be about a "Danish pirate prince," one should be prepared to be disappointed by the time taken by the protagonist to kill his enemy (IJ:xii). In Chesterton's estimation, even a half-truth of an assumption, as in this example, is enough to throw one's interpretation drastically off course.

Chesterton goes on to place *Job* within the context of what he deems to be the central idea of the Old Testament, namely "the idea of all men being merely the instruments of a higher power" (IJ:xii). While he is arguably creating an overly contrived division between the Jewish scriptures and the Christian New Testament, he wants to show the reader that the narrative of the Old Testament hinges around the character of God, who from his own point of view seems like the only real character in the Old Testament; "compared with His actuality all the sons of flesh are shadows" (IJ:xiv). This note is struck repeatedly in the Old Testament to demonstrate that ultimately God "knows better what He is doing" than man (IJ:xiv). Within this context, Chesterton contends that *Job* stands quite alone among the Hebrew scriptures as the book that most emphatically questions the purpose of God that the other Jewish scriptures tend to take as a given: "What is the purpose of God? Is it worth the sacrifice even of our miserable humanity? Of course it is easy enough to wipe out our own paltry wills for the sake of a will that is grander and kinder. But is it grander and kinder? Let God use his tools; let God break his tools. But what is He doing and what are they being broken for?" (IJ:xiv). It is these same questions that resonate throughout *The tree of life*. For example, Mrs. O'Brien challenges the Divine to answer her in her grief when she asks, "What did you gain?" Whatever the answer may be, the three texts in question —*Job*, *The tree of life* and Chesterton's writings — do not provide an expected or simple answer.

In the light of these questions, Chesterton expresses his opinion that the "present importance of the Book of Job cannot be expressed adequately even by saying that it is the most interesting of ancient books" (IJ:xiv). He adds that even if we insist that it is "the most interesting of modern books" we do not begin to cover the matter, because it tackles philosophical issues that transcend the particularities of ancient and modern times (IJ:xiv). What is needed is a cosmic philosophy: a philosophy that is capable of fitting a cosmos (IJ:xvii). While this echoes back to the discussion of Chesterton's cosmology in Chapter Two, the primary point that Chesterton is making about *Job* is this: while it may be an ancient book that was constructed in accordance with ancient forms, its questions have a much larger resonance. Indeed, this eternal resonance is felt just as acutely in *The tree of life* as it is in that ancient story. And yet, just as *Job* moves from mystery to grace and an encounter with the Divine, so *The tree of life* foreshadows a similar event of reconciliation even at the start as we find Jack in a glass elevator, apologising to his father over the phone for some kind of misunderstanding. We are not privy to the nature of the misunderstanding, but this moment of reconciliation hints at a greater hope that propels the narrative of the film. The elevator seems to become a connector between earth and heaven, and therefore between nature and grace, much like Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28.12). Low angle images such as this one in the elevator are shown often in *The tree of life* (Figure 8). The viewer is frequently reminded to look up at the daylight sky, past buildings and trees, perhaps for some higher meaning. These low angles images transform the world into "sacred spectacles of exaggeration" (TT:5).

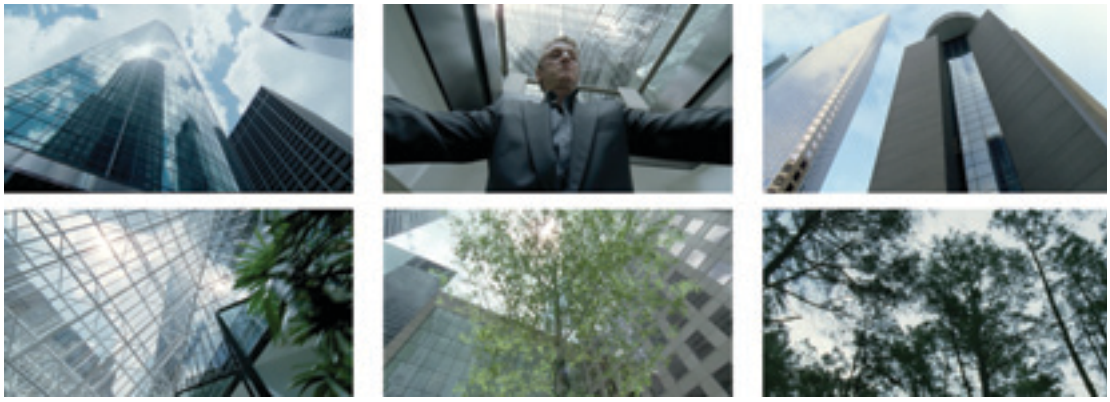

Figure 8. A few low angle shots from the first act of *The tree of life.*

Chesterton argues that looking at things from the position of smallness is preferable to seeing them from a great height (TT:6). After all, "Satan was the most celebrated of Alpine guides, when he took Jesus to the top of an exceeding high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth" (TT:6). These images remind us that greater joy is found, not in beholding smallness, but in beholding largeness:

> It is from a valley that things look large; it is from the level that things look high; I am a child of the level and have no need of that celebrated Alpine guide. I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help ... Everything is in an attitude of mind; and at this moment I am in a comfortable attitude. I will sit still and let the marvels and the adventures settle on me like flies. There are plenty of them, I assure you (TT:7).

This is the perspective of humility. The sky always points beyond itself: what is seemingly an opaque, pale blue is an illusion of the light that exposes the limitations of human vision. Behind it are "patterns of the cosmos" that people have put into "the shape of maps and genealogical trees" (EM:223). The sky, therefore, is iconic of God's drama — the heaven within which the human drama takes place. This interpretation is confirmed in one scene in *The tree of life* in which Mrs. O'Brien, holding her infant child in her arms, points to the sky and proclaims, "That's where God lives" (Figure 9). If one reads this moment too literally, one may assume that Mrs. O'Brien believes in a distant, remote God, but the larger backdrop of the film indicates that this is not so. She often speaks to God in whispers and sighs, always seemingly aware of a sacred presence in, through, around and beyond her.

Figure 9. Where God lives.

The tree of life again moves from scenes of Jack's life in the world of business to his memories of his parents. We see a cityscape at dusk, the sky swarming with birds, each one a dot moving perfectly in harmony with the flock. Mrs. O'Brien's voice is heard addressing God: "Was I false to you?" We see her walking outside in a forest, looking up at and through the tall pine trees. An expression of calm comes over her face and the screen goes black, again revealing the strange, edgeless light that appears at the very start of the film. This movement from the light of images to the blackness of the screen

points to the division between human perception and the divine drama, but also suggests ebbing in and out of sleep. It evokes the sensation of trying to wake up. The stories captured in a great deal of ancient mythology carry a similar sensation. They may be taken as "dreams about realities" (EM:113). As vivid and real as they seem when they come into contact with "tender or tragic things," they "can really make a sleeper awaken with the sense that his heart has been broken in his sleep" (EM:114). The melancholia evoked here is akin to the struggle faced by the O'Briens. They are unable to perceive the true radiance of reality, because grief, overwhelming enough to have almost become a new, hegemonic metanarrative, has also become an anaesthetic.

Mrs. O'Brien continues her interrogation of God: "Lord, why? Where were you?" The final question may be read as having a double nature. The speaker addresses God, but also allows her question to be spoken as if it is a question posed to her by God, as when God asks Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job 38.4). Chesterton suggests that God moves from this question to a statement that almost hints at a date "when the sons of God shouted for joy. One cannot help feeling, even upon this meagre information, that they must have had something to shout about" (IJ:xxiv). The fact that Chesterton highlights the same question that is quoted right at the start of the film, with the idea of joy at its centre, is significant in that it shows that he and Malick both recognise and long for the good end that grace has been rumoured to promise. It is Mrs. O'Brien's question concerning the whereabouts of God that ushers in what is arguably one of the most powerful sequences in cinematic history, referred to by Malick (2007:13) simply as "The creation": In this creation sequence — a visual feast that recalls the discussion on Chesterton's cosmology earlier in this study — we see "the growth of the cosmos, the great epic of evolution, from the Big Bang through the long ages of geological time, down to the present day". This sequence acts as an answer to the question that Chesterton believes is at the centre of *Job*, namely the question of what is actually real, rather than what only seems to be real (IJ:xvii). However, the answer to the question, reflecting the great entrance of God into Job's story, is ultimately a means to unveil even greater mysteries. In the end, the nature of reality is of greater importance than momentary afflictions. There is, in other words, a desire for a note of exclamation to resonate in order to satisfy and quieten the noise of interrogation (IJ:xxiii). Grace, in the end, does not conquer nature, but "transforms and renovates the natural" (Wood 2011:13).

Chesterton explains that a "more trivial poet would have made God enter in some sense or other in order to answer the questions" that have been posed to him throughout Job's story (IJ:xix). But God answers with about fifty questions in which a paradox is presented: God turns out to be even more remote and mysterious than Job and his friends had suspected; and yet his very presence in the story of Job at this point demonstrates his nearness; the rhetoric of the Divine is both understandable and

elusive (Newsom 2003:235). Similarly, a more 'trivial' filmmaker may have tried to order the grief of the O'Briens around more philosophical dialogue. However, just as "[i]n this drama of [the] scepticism [of Job] God Himself takes up the role of sceptic" (IJ:xix), so in *The tree of life* the human drama is pushed backstage in order to be replaced by a powerful reverie in the aesthetics of incomprehensibility. We watch as:

> [m]olecular clouds gather to make galaxies, which sail out through the void like ships on a sea without shores. New stars, new worlds are born and pass away, like wasted seed. They are the furnaces in which the elements of our future life are smelted. Many experiments must be tried and rejected before our system is hit upon; much labor expended, with continual improvements through long ages. At last the ancestral earth appears; a bulb of gases, more like a star than a planet, seared by the sun's fire, glowing like a coal from deep within (Malick 2007:13) (Figure 10).

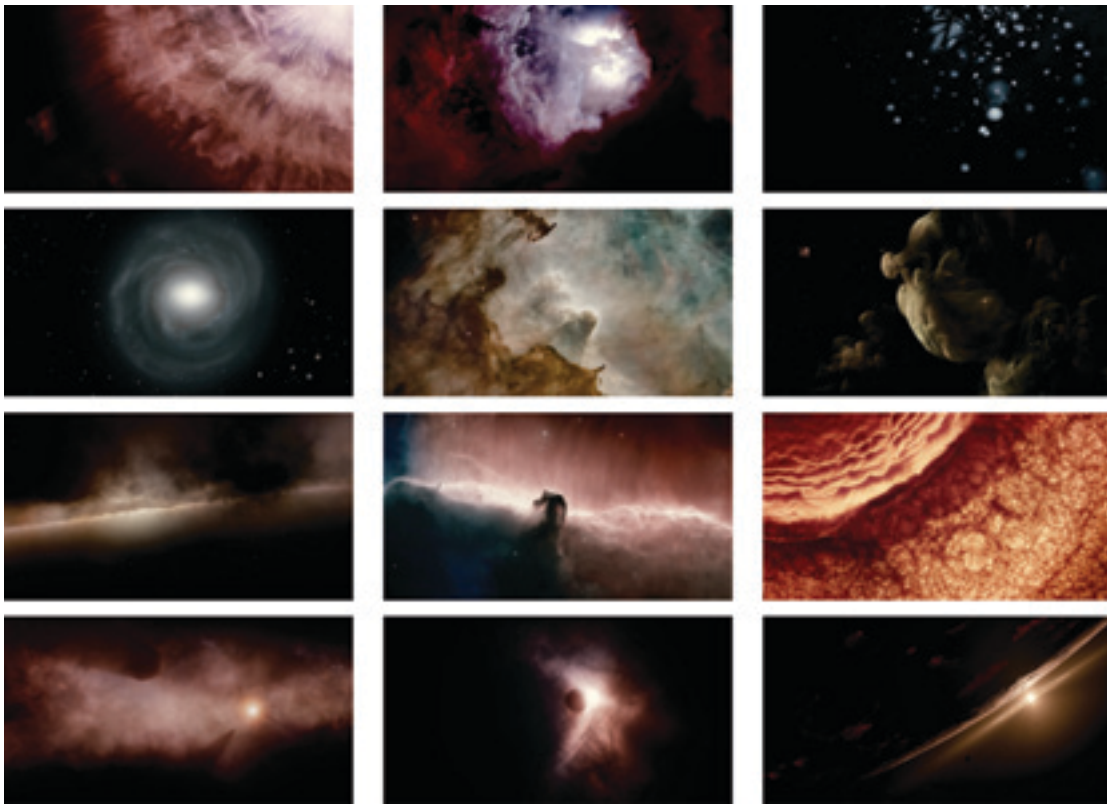

Figure 10. The beginning of the creation sequence.

What is also shown, although never explicitly explained in the film, is the "beginnings of need, of purpose and will; the unmistakable marks of identity, the first true signs of self" as well as the idea that creation is not "an event in the distant past, the result of a finished and forgotten act, but rather ... something which happens at every moment of time: no less a miracle now ... than it was in the beginning" (Malick 2007:14). All of this, however, is not meant to be a removed God's-eye-view of creation, but is something conjured by the imagination of the protagonist (Malick 2007:16). It is more man remembering God than God imposing his purposes on man. The clarity of a supposed

God's-eye-view perspective is not afforded the human spectator in any way that would not distort perception: After all, to echo an idea mentioned above, "[o]ne sees great things from the valley; only small things from the peak" (SW:477).

Creation, Malick seems to be saying, is always seen through "human eyes" with the result that "human shapes" are read into what is seen (Schwarz 2011). As these images pass before us, we are confronted with all the ways that reason fails to explain what is perceived. These are the marvels of God, through which God "turns rationalism against itself" as he does through the book of *Job* (IJ:xix):

> The poet by an exquisite intuition has made God ironically accept a kind of controversial equality with His accusers. He is willing to regard it as if it were a fair intellectual duel: 'Gird up now thy loins like man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me'. The everlasting adopts an enormous and sardonic humility. He is quite willing to be prosecuted. He only asks for the right which every prosecuted person possesses; he asks to be allowed to cross-examine the witness for the prosecution. And He carries yet further the corrections of the legal parallel. For the first question, essentially speaking, which He asks of Job is the question that any criminal accused by Job would be most entitled to ask. He asks Job who he is. And Job, being a man of candid intellect, takes a little time to consider, and comes to the conclusion that he does not know (IJ:xx).

God, who is cast as the ultimate sceptic in this play, completely uproots the scepticism of the other actors, not by suggesting that they are wrong to be sceptical, but by arguing that they are wrong to think that they have been sceptical enough. Chesterton writes that when "dealing with the arrogant asserter of doubt, it is not the right method to tell him to stop doubting" (IJ:xxi). Instead, it is "the right method to tell him to go on doubting, to doubt a little more, to doubt every day newer and wilder things in the universe, until at last, by some strange enlightenment, he may begin to doubt himself" (IJ:xxi). Doubt should never be turned into a prejudice that prevents understanding (IS:177). Chesterton's method is to take the thought to its logical conclusion, to push it until it breaks. This approach, he contends, has long since been the "logical weapon of the true mystic" (IJ:xx). It is by adopting an even higher scepticism that doubt is transcended. The supposition that the problem of human suffering will be solved on the basis of the assumptions made by the other sceptics is overthrown. This divine soliloquy forces those willing to listen into casting their scepticism upon itself. It is shown that to have "religious faith" one must also possess "philosophical doubt" (IJ:xxi). Doubt and belief are companions here. "God comes in at the end, not to answer riddles but to propound them" (IJ:xxi). In the same way that Sunday is revealed in *The man who was Thursday,* God steps into the story as an "amalgam of darkness and light, of distance and nearness, of the hidden and the revealed — a figure who, in sum, throws everything off balance by not being easily

identifiable" (Wood 2011:189). His presence, as Wood (2011:189) observes, is just as "discomforting as it is assuring".

The riddles of God are presented to Job in the form of a long series of questions, whereas in *The tree of life* they are shown simply as images. Malick's (2007:13-18) screenplay suggests that the purpose of these images, rather than simply inspiring awe or creating an aesthetic experience, is to raise questions and to entice the audience to contemplate each event in the light of human existence. So, for example, the narrative arc of the creation sequence suggests that nature "seems to be leading towards something" (Malick 2007:17). But this mysterious sense of purpose raises a number of questions: "Why this delay in arriving at its ends? Why does it feel its way along — wander, dawdle, delay? Why twist and turn and backtrack, as though it were finding its way through a maze? Why establish hindrances and obstacles only to put itself [through] the trouble of devising stratagems for overcoming them?" (Malick 2007:17). Whatever the answers to these questions may be, the images cannot tell. They are merely witnesses to a mystery. They are analogies and sacraments. We may ask as much as we like why things had to be the way they were, and yet our questions remain powerless and unanswered against the backdrop of this edited history of the cosmos. The "enigmas of Jehovah" ultimately seem "darker and more desolate than the enigmas of Job" and the questions of the O'Briens, and yet it is these very enigmas that bring comfort (IJ:xxii). We have been "told nothing" and yet we are confronted with the "terrible and tingling atmosphere of something too good to be told" (IJ:xxii). Chesterton writes that "[t]he refusal of God to explain his design is itself a burning hint of his design. The riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man" (IJ:xxii).

Chesterton argues that the two commonplace lenses used by people as they navigate the world, namely the lenses of optimism and pessimism, run into some difficulty as the riddles of God are divulged. But before this can be explained, it is worth pointing out the absurdity of the verbal explanation of these two ideas, which declares that optimism thinks the world "as good as it [can] be" while pessimism thinks the world "as bad as it [can] be" (HO:269). An optimist cannot be someone who thinks "everything right and nothing wrong" in the same way that everything cannot be right and nothing left (HO:269). Whatever optimism or pessimism mean, they cannot mean the absence of negativity on the one side and positivity on the other. Ultimately, Chesterton settles on an allegorical definition of optimism and pessimism "given" accidently "by a little girl": "'An optimist is a man who looks after your eyes, and a pessimist is a man who looks after your feet'" (HO:269). An optimist, Chesterton elaborates, is the "happier thinker who considers ... our primary power of vision and of choice of road" whereas the pessimist is "that more dreary thinker who thinks merely of our contact with the earth from moment to moment" (HO:269). Despite his concerns with further definitions of optimism and pessimism and those wear these lenses, ultimately Chesterton notes

that there is a "deep mistake" in this distinction between the optimist and the pessimist in that both terms assume "that a man criticises this world as if he were house-hunting, as if he were being shown over a new suite of apartments" (HO:269). This is precisely the error that God exposes when he interrogates Job.

> If a man came to this world from some other world in full possession of his powers he might discuss where the advantage of midsummer woods made up for the disadvantage of mad dogs, just as a man looking for lodgings might balance the presence of a telephone against the absence of a sea view. But no man is in that position. A man belongs to this world before he begins to ask if it is nice to belong to it. He has fought for the flag, and often won heroic victories for the flag long before he has ever enlisted ... [H]e has a loyalty before he has any admiration (HO:269-270).

Ultimately, Chesterton insists, any acceptance of the universe is more akin to patriotism than it is to optimism or pessimism (HO:270).

> The world is not a lodging-house at Brighton, which we are to leave because it is miserable. It is the fortress of our family, with the flag flying on the turret, and the more miserable it is the less we should leave it. The point is not that this world is too sad to love or too glad not to love; the point is that when you love a thing, its gladness is a reason for loving it, and its sadness is a reason for loving it more (HO:270).

When Chesterton suggests that optimism and pessimism are both "arguments for the cosmic patriot" (HO:270), he is pointing out that whatever we may think of the world, it remains our home. Even if we misunderstand it, like it or dislike it, we remain bound to it. Even if we choose for nature and against grace, the way of grace is still very much a part of its reality and vice versa. Chesterton explains that ultimately what acts as a transformative agent in the world is the love of a place that has "a transcendental tie ... without any earthly reasons" (HO:270). Thus, virtues, in his opinion, are cultivated primarily by devotion rather than criticism, as in the case of the Hebrews of the time of the Exodus who "gained their morality by guarding their religion" (HO:271). For instance, it is only by clinging to things by loyalty that one discovers the courage that one has to fight for them (HO:271).

This strange dance between optimism and pessimism is found in *Job* and, if only subtly, also in *The tree of life*. By always insisting that the explanation for tragedy is patently clear, Job's friends may be called pessimists, while Job, who insists that the explanation is not yet perceptible, remains the eternal optimist (IJ:xvii). But God steps in and "knocks down pessimists and optimists with the same hammer" (IJ:xxii). God is "explicit to the point of violence" when he insists "that if there is one fine thing about the world, as far as men are concerned, it is that it cannot be explained. He insists on the inexplicableness of everything; 'Hath the rain a father? ... Out of whose womb came the ice?'" (IJ:xxii-xxiii).

> He goes farther, and insists on the positive and palpable unreason of things; 'Hast thou sent the rain upon the desert where no man is, and upon the wilderness wherein there is no man?' God will make man see things, if it is only against the black background of nonentity. God will make Job see a startling universe if He can only do it by making Job see an idiotic universe. To startle man, God becomes for an instant a blasphemer; one might almost say that God becomes for an instant an atheist. He unrolls before Job a long panorama of created things, the horse, the eagle, the raven, the wild ass, the peacock, the ostrich, the crocodile. He so describes each of them that it sounds like a monster walking in the sun. The whole is a sort of psalm or rhapsody of the sense of wonder. The maker of all things is astonished at the things he has Himself made (IJ:xxiii).

By transcending the conflict between optimism and pessimism, and perhaps even between nature and grace, a deeper truth is unmasked, namely the fact that joy pervades all of creation. Paradoxically, the Almighty turns out to be more optimistic than the optimists while being more sceptical than the pessimists. Even the deepest grief is recognised, because it contravenes the deeper human desire for delight. Creation occurs out of joy, not necessity or despair, and, despite being interrupted with grief, life has its foundation in this very same joy. The riddles of God are ultimately driven more by happiness than sadness (IJ:xxiv). This is shown not to dismiss or diminish suffering, but rather to emphasise that the context of suffering is hope, which is an especially deep mystery. Whether suffering can be explained or not, at least in any clearly rational sense, it is neither the controlling narrative nor the end of the whole story insofar as Chesterton is concerned.

Chesterton, writing to his then-fiancée Frances Blogg concerning the death of her sister Gertrude in 1899 comes to the conclusion "that all good things are one thing" and that this "one thing" was sacramentally present in many good things in this world (in Ward 2006:97). Even in grief, we should not feel that "comedy has gone out of our theatre" (in Ward 2006:97). Chesterton points to the scripture that emphasises just how "precious" the "death of one of his saints" is to the Lord, and suggests that it is a "miraculous remark about anybody" (in Ward 2006:101). The death of a loved one could not be considered "happy or providential or sweet or even perhaps good," but it may be viewed as "precious" (in Ward 2006:101). He continues:

> It is this passionate sense of the *value* of things: of the richness of the cosmic treasure: the world where every star is a diamond, every leaf an emerald, every drop of blood a ruby, it is this sense of *preciousness* that is really awakened by the death of His saints. Somehow we feel that even their death is a thing of incalculable value and mysterious sweetness: it is awful, tragic, desperately hard to bear — but still 'precious' ... Forgive the verbosity of one whose trade it is to express the inexpressible (in Ward 2006:101, emphasis in original).

Chesterton grapples with the idea of loss as much as with the feeling of loss and decides that despite not knowing how exactly the universe is ordered, he must conclude that it remains good in the sense

that it is spiritual and thus connected to the dramatic purposes of God (Ward 2006:104). Death is not felt as beautiful, because it leaves an absence in its wake that is almost impossible to comprehend. But for Chesterton, death does not mean this absence to imply the absence of reconciliation or the termination of being. Rather, absence implies presence elsewhere (Ward 2006:104). Absence does not destroy the value of a thing, but heightens it. This sentiment is congruent with Chesterton's view of death as the most democratic event in human existence; it is that which "most levels men" (IS:223). Only in such universality can genuine fraternity and equality be possible (IS:224).

This stress on the value of things, and especially the profound value of people, is echoed in the images of the creation sequence in *The tree of life*. Everything seems to be "the fruit of long, painstaking labor and calculation — brought forth with equal care" (Malick 2007:17). Remarkably, all of life is just as alive as we are. It is the reminder of our instinct to dwell on life itself, rather than on the pain of death; to see the uniqueness of every being within the theatre of the cosmos and to notice that cheerfulness is always "breaking in" from the outside in much the same way that the Author in *The surprise* breaks into his own play (SU:63; Ward 2006:102).

The larger context within which *Job* and *The tree of life* places the human story points to the Chestertonian idea that the "Kosmos [sic]" should always be thought of first and "the Ego afterwards" (in Ward 2006:103). Existence is intoxicating only when it is not considered in egocentric terms (Ward 2006:104). Here again is a reminder of Chesterton's insight into the power of humility. Humility allows one to empathise with "an intrinsic and eternal point of view" that is the only view that will allow a person to truly enjoy anything (DE:80). As an example of this, Chesterton writes that "[a]ll full-blooded and natural people, such as schoolboys, enjoy humility the moment they attain hero worship" (DE:81). Egotism, which emphasises distance and objectivity, robs a person of the gift of seeing anything up close (DE:83). "The philosopher of the ego sees everything, no doubt, from a high and rarified heaven," writes Chesterton; "[O]nly he sees everything foreshortened or deformed" (DE:83). In particular, Chesterton says that he does "not believe" in adopting a non-human perspective that would result in him "being dehumanised in order to study humanity" (EM:23). But humility, as the "art of reducing ourselves to a point," allows us to see all "cosmic things" for what they "really are": they are things "of immeasurable stature" (DE:84). "Humility" is therefore "the mother of giants" (SW:477). The loss of humility ultimately results in the loss of this "colossal vision" that notices the value of things (DE:85). This is to say that it is humility that allows one's vision to be clear, even during the darkest of times.

Through his visual artistry, Malick (2007:18) notes that "[w]hile everything in creation "sings in the great chorus," man "alone does not. Why?" From Chesterton's view, the answer is that man has

tried to make himself out to be both more and less than what he is. It is true that man is the only wild animal in that he alone has broken from the mould set by nature, but he has also forgotten that he should admire nature and consider the part he has to play as a steward of the environment (HO:349; Wood 2011:28). Man is a tree — perhaps a tree of life — in a story about a forest. Malick's answer corresponds with this. For him, man's sense of being separate from the larger drama comes from having lost a sense of the eternal, both within us and outside of us (Malick 2007:18). The question of how we might recover the eternal, to which this creation sequence is hinting, becomes the central focus of the rest of the film. The solidity of the imagery before us is meant to be recognised as an icon in the cathedral of the universe; it is something that points beyond itself to that which is inexplicable. It is, so to speak, a stained glass window rather than a stone in the cathedral of the cosmos. If we fail to see grace beyond nature, we are in danger of seeing reality as an impersonal collection of conflicts, for nature is equally apt at giving and taking away without paying any attention to those who have been affected either by its generosity or its destructiveness. Nature, like Sunday in *The man who was Thursday*, may be a sign of God's immanence (Wood 2011:208), but it is also certainly a signpost to God's transcendence.

In Chesterton's work, just as there is a link between humility and democracy (DE:68), there is also a link between humility and Christian mysticism. The mystic "seeks a version of the universe in which everything becomes orderly, in which monsters become natural, and grasses supernatural, in which the mammoth is as mild as the primrose, and the lion lies down with the lamb" (ID:77). This should not be seen as the polar opposite of the humility that reduces the self to a point, but rather as its paradoxical counterpoint: humility produces a sense of both wonder and welcome. Mystical humility seeks a sense of the value and meaning of things without necessarily being able to explain everything. It suggests at least part of the journey that needs to be taken before the way of grace can be translated into ordinary life.

Mysticism "is not an exceptionally dark and secret thing, but an exceptionally luminous and open thing" that is sometimes "too clear for most of us to comprehend, and too obvious for most of us to see" (ID:78). As a sense of the mystery in things, mysticism is not an elitist or aristocratic discipline practiced by only the select, gifted few, but the product of enormously democratic common sense (ID:79). It is simply the conviction that everything has its right place and its right purpose, even if these are not discernable. Chesterton writes that the "true key of Christian mysticism is not so much self-surrender, which is a painful and complex thing, as self-forgetfulness, which we all fall into in the presence of a splendid sunrise or a little child, and which is to our highest nature as natural as singing to a bird" (ID:81). This self-forgetfulness, which I believe is at least part of the purpose of the creation sequence in *The tree of life,* supports Chesterton's belief that however we live and move in

the world, we ought not to try to tame it. We should not "sin against the variety of life" by assuming that everything ought to operate in accordance with our own restricted understanding of the world (DE:69).

One thing that *The tree of life* manages to do is represent life as an immense and complex thing, and I believe that Chesterton would applaud such a vision, especially since he particularly appreciates subtlety in the face of complexity (IS:165). On one occasion, for example, he accuses the ancient Greeks of "blighting the world with a stringent one-sided ethical standard," thereby disenchanting Elfland (DE:69-70). In particular, he refers to the way that the Greeks came to adopt a very one-sided view of what beauty is and therefore came to place a particular mode of representation above accepting things as they are. In Greek mythology, for example, "the chimera was a creature whom any healthy-minded people would have been proud; but when we see it in Greek pictures we feel inclined to tie a ribbon around its neck and give it a saucer of milk" (DE:70). For Chesterton, room needs to be left for the ugly and the grotesque even in matters of the imagination (Figure 11). Humankind has a "natural love of size, vitality, variety, energy, [and] ugliness" that needs to be cultivated and understood, not feared or suppressed (DE:70). It is only in smallness and humility that life can be received as a gift (HO:235).

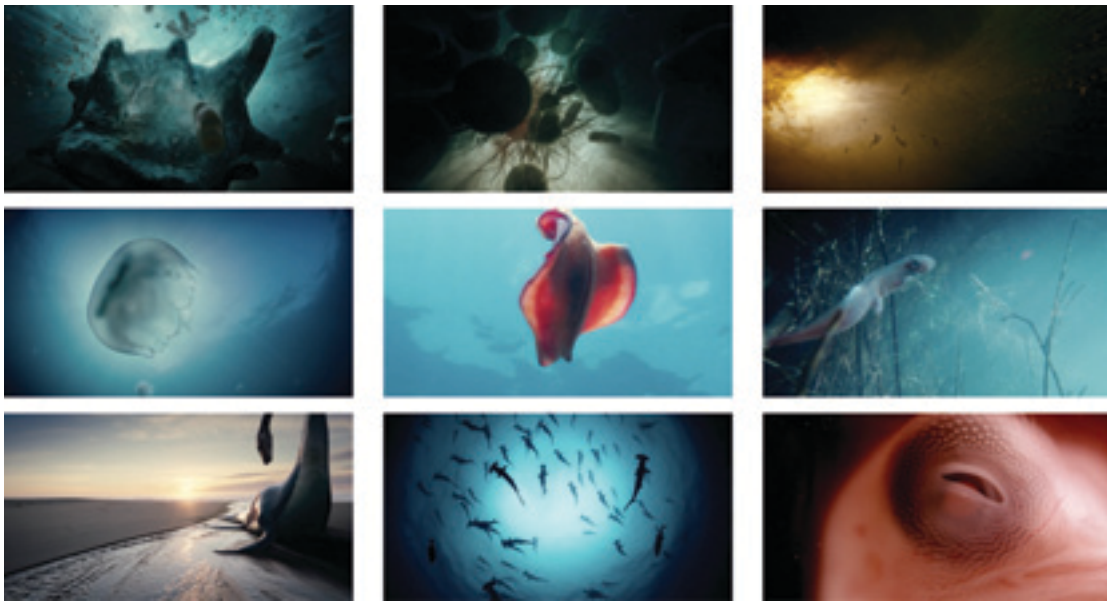

Figure 11. A complex and grotesque vision of life.

Arguably, this earth that the creation sequence in *The tree of life* paints is not the face of mystery, but its back. No one can look at God and live, and so we, like Moses, are forced to look only at his afterglow as it is found in his handiwork (Exodus 33.23). This idea is best expressed by Chesterton towards the end of *The man who was Thursday* when Gabriel Syme exclaims: "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?" (MW:160). On this, Wood (2011:213) writes:

> We have largely lost our liberty to relish the world's mystery ... not because we perceive and thus desire too much, but because we envision and thus create too little. Our pathetic purblindness shuts us off from both the perception and the creation of the fantastic. It blinders us from the mysterious transformation of one thing into another, especially the making of sinners into saints. This drastic *metanoia* occurs because everything natural has its own entelechy, its inherent aim and goal that pushes it toward its completion and fulfillment within a larger ... *telos*.

Chesterton claims that things may deceive us "by being more real than they seem. As ends in themselves they always deceive us; but as things tending to a greater end, they are even more real than we think them" (ST:164). He argues that most things are simply unfulfilled, more indicative of potentiality than of actuality (ST:165). The hope of getting to see the front of this hidden face of mystery is sometimes only achievable "by way of indirection, by means of what Hopkins names as the 'counter, original, spare, strange'" (Wood 2011:213). The problem is not that mystery, and thus the presence of God, is too far removed to be discerned, but that it is too close and too real to be defined (Wood 2011:214). Everyone needs to be surprised into seeing what is right before their eyes. The very fact that the creation sequence in *The tree of life* interrupts the narrative of the film so abruptly is perhaps an attempt to achieve this kind of defamiliarisation. But it does not do this by merely representing things that are beautiful. Granted, there is a great deal in the sequence that is aesthetically pleasing, but the passing of time through various stages of evolution includes a great deal that is, in the Chestertonian sense, grotesque and even ugly.

The grotesque is one of Chesterton's favourite tools for achieving defamiliarisation. Milbank (2009a:64) writes that "the effect of the grotesque is first to destabilize perception; second to render unstable the human belief in itself as the centre of the universe; third to make the reader experience the wonder and ecstasy of pure otherness". In the case of the third consequence of the grotesque, the purpose is "not an estrangement, but a participation" (Milbank 2009a:64). In the creation sequence, therefore, images such as those of volcanic eruptions, dinosaurs, jellyfish, bubbles and solar systems call the reader into a deeper engagement with the very nature of creation (Figure 12). Moreover, the viewer is compelled to consider his own position within this cosmic drama. The images become at once a reminder and an invitation: they remind the reader that man is a creator and that his ability to create is, by design and beyond reason, an invitation to participate in the creative nature of God (EM:34; Milbank 2009a:64). As a response to the grief portrayed in the drama, they are intended to

shake the reader out the blindness of habituation. They are mementos of the fact that whatever we may believe, our present experiences do not tell us the whole story.

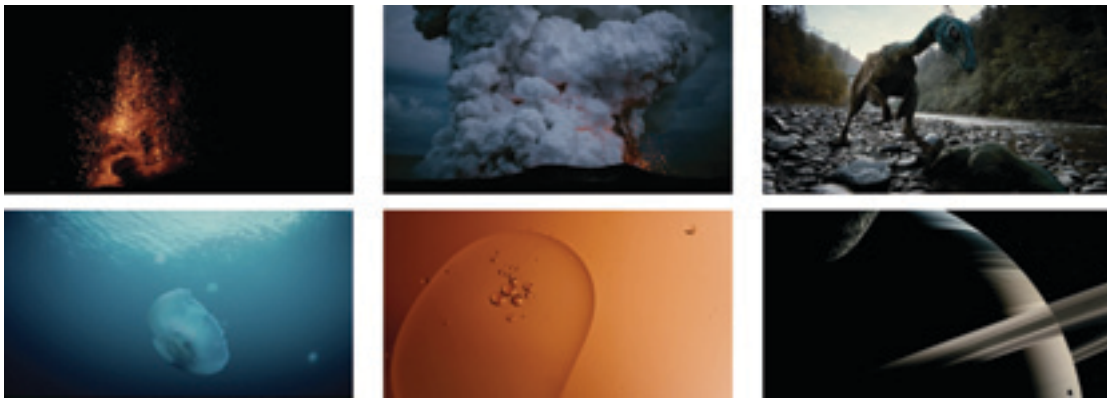

Figure 12. Volcanic eruptions, dinosaurs, jellyfish, bubbles and a planet from our solar system.

Suffering remains a mystery, but Chesterton acknowledges that it is precisely through suffering that people are given an opportunity to "discern and embrace the deepest and truest things — bravery, goodness and glory" (Wood 2011:217). Somehow suffering becomes a means by which a person can come into contact with the expansiveness of reality. It is clear from the narratives of *Job* and *The tree of life* that the various struggles of life are not necessarily the result of human sinfulness and that suffering is therefore not always deserved. Suffering may even be recognised as being unavoidable; as somehow intrinsic to human existence. Even the suffering that leads to the ripping of a solid curtain is somehow crucial for letting the light in. Chesterton looks at the story of *Job* and notices a paradox in history that presents the "best man in the worst fortune" (IJ:xxvii). Therefore, Job pre-figures the wounds of Christ (IJ:xxvii). His suffering, like the suffering of the O'Briens, is not intended as a suggestion that torment is overcome only when it is understood. In fact, it is precisely in torment that the bounds of reason are thrown into question. Even the nature of God is thrown into question. Moreover, his suffering does not merely encapsulate the "Greco-Roman ideal of 'education through suffering'" even while it may be a great teacher (Wood 2011:220). Suffering is not seen only as a factory of moral lessons. Rather, as Chesterton sketches it, it is the means by which redemption is made possible insofar as it is a kind of communion in God's suffering with humanity. By sharing in his suffering, the "People of God can suffer and redeem the abominations of both moral and natural evil" (Wood 2011:221). It is not by might or power that goodness overcomes, but rather by simply being good (IJ:xiii). Goodness, even in its smallness and apparent defeatedness, overcomes evil.[11] This, Wood (2011:221) observes, "is the staggering paradox that animates Chesterton's entire work". It is also the paradox of *The tree of life*: the way of grace is not only found beyond or apart from

[11] This is arguably why Chesterton uses the humble monk Michael to topple the arrogant stance of a Professor of science in *The ball and the cross*.

the way of nature, but is that which is found in nature. It is the inescapable core of all being that overcomes by being overcome.

"Grace," as Mrs. O'Brien says, "does not try to please itself, accepts being slighted, forgotten, disliked; accepts insults and injuries". Grace even accepts the incomprehensibility of its own nature. It allows the riddles of God to work their way into the human story. It sees, despite darkness and confusion, that everything belongs. This does not present us with a picture of cheery optimism, but acknowledges the complexities and traumas of life as being somehow, we know not why, part of the drama. This insight may not necessarily appease the desire that some have for tidy explanations, but it does point out that ultimately explanations, especially those bound to a karmic moral system of cause and effect suggested by the comforters of Job and of the O'Briens, fail to come close to what is really going on. To make any attempt to justify what God himself does not seem to justify is to enter into the domain of argumentative futility, because it attempts to speak of things that are not within the human limitations of understanding even while they shape and inform the hermeneutic experience.

For Chesterton, as I have mentioned, the central question in *Job* does not concern why the innocent suffer, but rather deals with the relationship between perception and reality (IJ:xvii). Grace, by accepting even what opposes human existence and peace, is essentially the acknowledgement that even in the context of the unintelligible, what is real is always preferable, even if it remains elusive (IS:259). This reality must always be chosen freely by individuals. Chesterton writes that "[r]eal human life differs from all imitations of it in the fact that it can perpetually alter itself as it goes along" (IS:259). It is this quality of freedom that makes life more dramatic than any drama by Shakespeare (IS:260). Human beings have the freedom to "[assert] the will against the power of nature" even while "thanking the Redeemer by partially sharing in his sufferings" (ST:96). Where Chesterton defends free will, he does so with one primary aim. Rather than merely invoking free will to explain the presence of evil in the world, he reminds the reader that it is possible to choose what is good. And it is in choosing this good that the value and dignity of people is rediscovered. This journey towards the good that being may be viewed as a romance, with romance referring to "that innate desire in human beings for a sense of home or belonging in the company of what is perceived" (Reyburn 2011:59). For Chesterton, "this romance as a preoccupation with coming home to the good involves constantly realigning oneself with the riddle of being in order to apprehend an answer" (Reyburn 2011:59). It embraces mystery, in gratitude and humility, in order to leave room for what can actually be known.

This is why I have noted that seeing clearly "is made possible because aspects of objective reality are concealed" (Reyburn 2011:60). One can only see by the light of the sun, for example, when one is not preoccupied with the eye-damaging activity of looking at the sun. What is apparent is directly dependant upon what is mysterious. Being that is all answer and no riddle is likely to produce only a kind of conceptual blindness. Seeing clearly is directly related to situating oneself within a much larger drama instead of simply getting stuck in a monologue. Chesterton says that the trouble with the modernist, is that his "musical instrument ... has broken all its strings but one" (WS:89). Nevertheless, he continues to strike "the same few chords of truth remaining in it," resulting in the consequence that it is only a narrow monotony that is inevitable with rationalism (WS:89). What he therefore asks us to do is to consider life in all its "fullness, ... richness, and ... variety" (WS:89). It is in considering life in its glory and participating in its goodness that one's interpretive experience is likely to be broadened and challenged rather than merely reinforced.

Figure 13. Jack walks through the doorway to eternity.

Towards the end of *The tree of life,* we hear the young Jack O'Brien speak to God of how he did not know how to name him even though it was so clear that God had always been calling him. And yet he also addresses his parents: "Father, mother, always you wrestle inside me". The tension between nature and grace is not an easy one to navigate, and every indication of the film is that it is never completely resolved in the protagonist. However, the romance of being is a romance of hope, always directed towards reconciliation and renewal. This hope is represented in the eternity sequence that acts as a counterpoint to the creation sequence. After watching Jack ascend once again in a glass elevator, we see him transported, if only in his mind, to an open desert landscape. The frame of a door — perhaps the door of God — stands alone out in the daylight sun, and we watch as he walks

through it (Figure 13). We then see a range of images that, like the creation sequence, seem to have no direct relation to the story of the O'Brien family: a small black dot, presumably the earth, floats against the backdrop of a violent cluster of solar flares; a river of volcanic magma flows towards an unknown destination; a lonely planet is burnt up by the heat of a dying star; a distant star is seen from a desolate landscape; a solar eclipse fills the screen (Figure 14).

Figure 14. The end of time.

We hear someone whisper, "Follow me" and watch as a woman, holding a candle in the dark, lights the candle of someone else. We then see a strange sight: the adult Jack O'Brien is found in a rocky landscape alongside his younger self. Both of them are walking away from us. A few more images are shown, all connoting a climb towards some kind of higher meaning: an open gate, an ancient landscape and a ladder (Figure 15). Jack prays, "Keep us, guide us, to the end of time". In these images, Malick (2007:124) is trying to represent the unrepresentable: "We pass beyond death. We arrive at the eternal, the real — at that which neither flowers nor fades, which neither comes into being nor passes away — that in which we might live forever".

Figure 15. An open gate, an ancient landscape and a ladder.

A hand reaches out from a grave, an image of resurrection, and is taken by an angelic figure (Figure 16). We see Jack walk through another door into the darkness, perhaps indicating that what we are seeing now and what we are about to see is not a neat, explicable picture of plausibility. This is *the* mystery.

Figure 16. Resurrection and eternity.

The primary content of the eternity sequence is made up of images of hundreds of people on a beach, walking peacefully together, barefoot as if they are on holy ground. The adult Jack is completely caught up in this event. He falls to his knees, but eventually stands up and keeps going. Eventually he finds his mother and embraces her. He finds his father too, but only puts his hand on his shoulder, perhaps as a sign of solidarity. Together, these two encounters reveal more obviously that Jack has found the way of grace, which accepts that "this is God's world, and not an infinite plain of chaos and sorrow after all" (Malick 2007:125). This new realisation brings Jack to accept that although "he must linger here a while yet, he will not despair. New life lies before him. [He now possesses a] faith which sees through death" (Malick 2007:125).

Figure 17. Reunion.

Following this, Jack sees RL, his brother who had died many years before. RL appears as he has appeared throughout the film: as a boy. There is no explanation given for his presence on the beach, but no explanation is intended or needed. After all, the beach symbolises a timeless state of being. The adult Jack picks up the boy RL and carries him a short distance. Soon afterwards, Mr. O'Brien, deep relief and a newfound kindness etched onto his face, picks RL up and carries him to his wife. She is

overwhelmed by the sight of her once-dead son, but soon finds comfort and peace in the mystery of his presence. She utters the words, "I give him to you. I give you my son" (Figure 17).

At this moment, Mrs. O'Brien is recognised for what she has been a symbol of throughout the film. Her first name has not been revealed in this story, but it would not be amiss to assume that it is Mary, for she is pointing very clearly to the Mother of Jesus. The *you* in her utterance is ambiguous once again, but as a reflection of an incarnational paradox it is probably intended for both God and the viewer. God remains God, the "Maker of all things visible and invisible" and "the Mother of God is in a rather special sense connected with things visible; since she is of this earth" and the created order; "through her bodily being God was revealed to the senses" (WS:130). She is indeed grace — a gift — that has made the invisible God visible to people. "Our Lady, reminding us especially of God Incarnate, does in some degree gather up and embody all those elements of the heart and the higher instincts, which are the legitimate short cuts to the love of God" (WS:130). RL, the child who by his death shares in the suffering of Christ, is the son that is given, freely and willingly, for the brokenness of the world. This is the final mystery that *The tree of life* points to. Chesterton has known all along that God is telling a story, but what this film is proposing, which also just happens to be what Chesterton has been proposing, is that God's story is also our story. God's drama has always been intertwined in ours. Even the deepest mysteries open the ocular athlete up to surprise and revelation. It is to the question of how this revelation may be found through Chesterton's dramatology that this study now turns.

CHAPTER SIX

REVELATION

6.1 Introduction to Chapter Six

It has become clear that to avoid degenerating into a nightmarish monoscopic or totalistic vision, Chesterton relies on a stereoscopic view that holds mystery in tension with what may be called surprise or revelation. In the previous chapter, I began a two-part application of Chesterton's dramatology to *The tree of life* by emphasising the mysterious dimension of his dramaturgical hermeneutics, which suggests that the theodrama of God permeates the human story in ways that are not always easily discernable, apparent or even intelligible. This chapter now focuses on revelation, which, while being discernable within material reality, does not mean the eradication of mystery or transcendence. Rather, revelation points to that which can be known and experienced within the confines of our own being.

The interaction between mystery and revelation is likened by Chesterton to the game of hide-and-seek. He observes that hide-and-seek "is a popular pastime [that] assumes the truth of the text, 'Seek and ye shall find'" (AT:65; Matthew 7.7). Any ironclad, totalistic mindset that refuses the hospitality of defamiliarisaiton prevents genuine participation with the text, resulting in the absence of both seeking and finding, and therefore the absence of both mystery and surprise. To remedy this, mystery or mysticism supports the recovery of a clear view and a deliberate appreciation of reality that goes beyond generalised impressions into the kind of specificity that transcends purely rational explanations. In this, a level of secrecy in our partaking of the sacrament of reality is presupposed. In other words, it is mystery — that which transcends our capacity for epistemological certitude — that makes revelation possible. In Chesterton's view, it is only by acknowledging the place of the human drama within the mystery of the divine drama that one is able to defend the dignity and value of human beings. It is only meaning or dignity that is conferred from the outside and understood from the inside that has authority. Self-generated meaning has no authentic authority and therefore does not genuinely uphold human dignity.

Chesterton explains that there are three classes of mysteries — what he refers to as *secrets* — that give rise to revelation (AT:65).[1] The first is a secret that is kept in order to be revealed at some point. The "whole object is not to keep the secret, but to tell it" at the opportune time (AT:65). This would be the kind of secret that is found in the plots of stories. In this case, mystery is found in playful partnership with ignorance and agnosticism. Chesterton submits that "being ignorant is the best and purest preparation for receiving the horrible revelations of the high life. Somewhat in the same way being an agnostic is the best and purest preparation for receiving the happy revelations of St. John" (AT:65).[2] Considered differently, this kind of revelation is a "novelty" that "depends on ignorance" (IL:93). Thus, Chesterton writes:

> The truth is, that all genuine appreciation rests on a certain mystery of humility and almost of darkness. The man who said, 'Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall not be disappointed,' put the eulogy quite inadequately and even falsely. The truth is, 'Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall be gloriously surprised.' The man who expects nothing sees redder roses than common men can see, and greener grass, and a more startling sun. Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall possess the cities and the mountains; blessed is the meek for he shall inherit the earth (HO:69).

The second kind of secret is the one that is kept because it is something already known to everyone (AT:65). The idiomatic elephant in the room that no one wants to expose would an example of this. This kind secret exists in a paradox, since we "are asked to be silent about these things, but we are not asked to be ignorant about them" (AT:66). In this instance, the most common thing to humanity is frequently also "most veiled by humanity" (AT:66). The third kind of secret is the one that is kept because it is too mysterious, delicate or vague to be explained at all. This kind of secret, like the mysteries of God discussed in the previous chapter, suggests something "too good to be told" (IJ:xxii). Here, ignorance is not bliss, but a kind of holy terror. Chesterton suggests that even the commonplace decision to go on a country walk is an example of this kind of secret (AT:67). In all of the above, he points to an irreducibility that is present in the tension between mystery and revelation. Even when something is existentially familiar, it may remain epistemologically fuzzy. Even if it is real, it may not necessarily be explicable in language. This allows for a constant return and remembering of that which has been experienced and understood in order to resist converting

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[1] These three classes of secrets correlate fairly well, although not exactly, with what McKee (1999:349) calls the "three possible ways to connect the audience to a story: *Mystery, Suspense,* and *Dramatic irony.*" With mystery, the audience knows less than the characters in the story. With suspense, the audience and the characters in the story have the same amount of information, leaving the sense that some kind of new revelation is on its way. And with dramatic irony, the audience knows more than the characters, and yet there is no way for the audience to inform the characters of the revelation they are about to receive. It is through these gaps in knowledge that a story is propelled forward into surprise (McKee 1999:355).

[2] Chesterton suggests that "we Catholics are all agnostics" (BC:62). As is his custom, he is not polarising belief and uncertainty of belief here, since he is usually very critical of agnosticism, but rather arguing that faith (Catholicism, in this case) and ignorance (agnosticism) need to be kept in tension with each other. Once again, faith and reason are not at odds, but partners in the same dance.

the perceived picture into a pattern of over-automisation. Chesterton's own writing reflects this in the way that he constantly revisits and revises subjects that he has already covered in some detail.

This revision is not undertaken to merely correct mistaken interpretations, although this may be a helpful byproduct of such revision, but rather to explore new ways of seeing the same thing. Chesterton writes that "[i]f you look at a thing nine hundred and ninety-nine times, you are perfectly safe; if you look at it a thousandth time, you are in frightful danger of seeing it for the first time" (SW:13). He also notices that even in repetition, there is a kind of wildness (AD:7). For example, repeating the word *dog* thirty times turns it into "a word like 'snark' or 'pobble.' It does not become tame, it becomes wild, by repetition. In the end the dog walks about as startling and undecipherable as Leviathan or Croquemitaine" (AD:7). Chesterton is not interested in the sort of revision that shrinks reality into what is only a construct of a mind, as if thought were able to operate apart from the world that forms and informs it. He is interested in the kind of ocular athleticism that would allow people to see that they are part of a much larger, more startling story than they may have first imagined. Again, he wants the reader to position himself within a larger framework of Being.

As in the example of Chesterton's remarks on the story of the Tower of Babel mentioned earlier, mystery is ultimately understood via the concrete reality available in the text. In this, we see one reason for McLuhan's (1939:455) reference to Chesterton as a "practical mystic". Nevertheless, in Chesterton's view, the pursuit of interpretive understanding is not concerned with adhering to rigid prescriptivism either on the side of literalism[3] or on the side of anti-literalism. Even while there may be no definitive interpretation, there may still be better or worse interpretations. These interpretations always operate in tension between what is remembered and what is forgotten, always acutely tied to Chesterton's analogical view of language.

When it comes to interpreting *The tree of life* through Chesterton's dramatology, it is important to acknowledge that the entire narrative of the film is built upon a memory, that is Jack O'Brien's remembrance of his childhood. The exposition of the film covered in the previous chapter points to the fact that for the greater part of his life Jack has followed the way of nature in a dog-eat-dog world. However, having recovered a sense of the mysteriousness of life, Jack finds himself drawn more strongly to the way of grace that was embodied by his mother and his one brother. With this newfound revelation of grace, Jack revisits memories of his childhood, including those memories of

[3] Chesterton writes, for instance, that "[r]outine and literalism and a certain dry-throated earnestness and mental thirst, there are the very atmosphere of morbidity" (AM:23). Routine and literalism oppose Chesterton's love for analogy and his insistence that reality should be viewed more as a picture than as a pattern.

the darker times in his childhood, not to change or distort what he remembers, but to revise the way that he had always understood it. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the way that Jack remembers his childhood, as well as the way that mystery makes room for revelation. As becomes clear below, a Chestertonian search for revelation is founded particularly upon his concern for the limitations of things. In his view, it is only within limitations that stories can work and characters can change. In other words, it is only by means of limitations that an experience of revolution and transcendence becomes possible.

6.2 Finding revelation in *The tree of life*

The creation sequence in *The tree of life,* which was discussed in the previous chapter, builds up to the birth of Jack O'Brien. The climax of this long story of the universe is found in the arrival of this "living soul" (Malick 2007:19). For Malick (2007:19), who affirms human dignity in much the same way that Chesterton does, the soul is "the crown apex of creation: the self, the center and inside of nature". The self is not particularly great "in space and time" but it is great "in capacity, in depth and power of apprehension" (Malick 2007:19). The human being enters the world as a spectator, an audience witnessing the spectacular drama of creation.

Figure 18. Jack's infancy.

A sequence that shows Jack as an infant underscores this: we see Mr. O'Brien utterly dumbfounded at the miracle of life that he holds in his arms; Mrs. O'Brien reaches out in affection for her newborn

son; the infant Jack watches transfixed as a refracted light plays on his bedroom wall; we see him baptised and blessed by a priest in a Catholic church; he plays with a colourful plastic ball, crawls, learns how to walk and run, joyfully shakes a rattle as his mother dances in the front yard; he runs after bubbles that "drift anywhere at any instant" (WW:45), and also 'helps' his father plant a tree in the front yard (Figure 18).[4]

These idyllic scenes are intercut with various disruptions: Mrs. O'Brien tries to shield Jack from seeing how a man has fallen down and had a seizure; Jack gets a cut on his foot and soon thereafter discovers that he cannot always get what he wants. This interplay of gravity and levity shows that this life comprises both hospitality and hostility. Throughout the film, life is shown as a complex tapestry of pleasure and pain, such as in one scene later on in the narrative, when the fun of children playing in a communal swimming pool is interrupted when Jack's one friend drowns. In the following scene, the O'Brien boys attend the funeral of the boy, but afterwards find themselves rolling and playing on the lawn outside the chapel without thinking it strange to do so. A similar tension between pleasure and pain is found in another scene that shows children joyfully playing in DDT spray. Here, their ignorance allows them to revel in something that is actually harmful. Another scene has Jack playing with a friend who has suffered severe burn wounds. This sparks a memory in Jack of his friend's house being consumed by fire. Still, the childlike qualities of innocence and earnestness are emphasised throughout the narrative of the film. This is not to intimate that children and childhood are perfect, but to stress that the lens that Malick wants us to look through — similar to the lens that Chesterton uses — is a lens that finds more redemption than degeneration in things.

The two things that Chesterton finds in children that draws grown up people towards them are found in this sequence of moments: seriousness and delight (DE:91). He writes that

> [t]he most unfathomable schools and sages have never attained to the gravity which dwells in the eyes of a baby of three months old. It is the gravity of astonishment at the universe, and astonishment at the universe is not [just] mysticism, but a transcendent common-sense. The fascination of children lies in this: that with each of them all things are remade, and the universe is put again upon its trial. As we walk the streets and see below us those delightful bulbous heads, three times too big for the body, which mark these human mushrooms, we ought always primarily to remember that within every one of these heads there is a new universe, as new as it was on the seventh day of creation. In each of those orbs there is a new system of stars, new grass, new cities, a new sea (DE:91).

[4] Chesterton refers to the image of bubbles floating to highlight the importance of being connected to other people. Conversation is only possible because of the way that we are able to be connected to others (WW:45).

What Malick calls our "capacity... of apprehension" and what Chesterton calls "astonishment at the universe" is pinpointed by a scene in which we see the toddler Jack test the boundary line between the front yard of the O'Brien's home and the front yard of their neighbours. It is very clear to the small boy that the line between the two properties is imaginary. "[H]e cannot tell" where "the vacant lot leaves off and the Stickley's yard begins ... and [he] does not care" (Malick 2007:25). He seems more preoccupied with the sheer wonder of being able to use his legs to run. The world that boyhood reveals is "a pleasant surprise" (HO:258) (Figure 19).

Figure 19. The surprise of boyhood.

Chesterton explains that a riddle that impressed him at an early age was the question of what the first frog said. The "answer was, 'Lord, how you made me jump!'" (HO:258). It is this very same wonder that is found in this scene and in the montage that follows scenes of Jack's infancy, where we find the young Jack and his two brothers caught up in the sheer wonder of being alive. Their way of valuing every breath and movement is not detached and philosophical, but profoundly incarnate: they simply breathe, interact, move and observe. They are firmly attached to the significance of the present moment and to their presence to each other without necessarily being able to comprehend the depth or even properly articulate of the miracle of being (Figure 20).

Chesterton argues that childhood is a romance because it is rooted in imagination — the capacity to live into possibility (ID:250). He suggests that the imagination of childhood is not just a dream: "I remember it rather as a man dreaming might remember the world where he was awake" (ID:251). He argues that transcending the "cloud of mere custom" requires the recovery of "the candour and wonder of the child; the unspoilt realism and objectivity of innocence" (EM:14). Innocence allows

for a kind of objectivity — one that is still subjectively interpreted (See Chapter Two) — because it approaches reality without pretext. Innocence is the mark of the wildest imagination precisely because it has the ability to see what is there (EM:14). Therefore, it may again be emphasised that Chesterton calls for an imaginative engagement with the world, but not in the sense that the imagination should be divorced from reality. Rather, imagination is that which is more deeply connected to what is there. It is concerned less with limiting meanings than it is with discovering an excess of meanings.

Figure 20. The miracle of being.

In the wakefulness and awareness of childhood, moral tales are loved and appreciated, because they put "imaginary limits" into place (ID:251). They are not primarily concerned with the infinite, but with the finite. This is precisely the "charm of Robinson Crusoe" (ID:252):

> [It] is not in the fact that he could find his way to a remote island, but in the fact that he could not find any way of getting away from it. It is that fact which gives an intensive interest and excitement to all the things that he had with him on the island; the axe and the parrot and the guns and the little hoard of grain. The tale of *Treasure Island* is not the record of a vague desire to go on a sea voyage for one's health. It ends where it began; and it began with Stevenson drawing a map of the island, with all its bays and capes cut out as clearly as fretwork (ID:252).

Similarly, what makes Noah's ark so appealing to the child is the fact that it presents a world of "compactness and isolation; of creatures so comically remote and fantastic being all locked up in one box" (ID:252). Self-limitation is one of life's secret joys. The same kind of moral limitations are found in the drama of the world as in the cosmic clash of good and evil intimated by Chesterton's and Malick's references to *Job*. It is this world of moral limitations that the O'Brien boys need to confront and navigate as they live within the finite world of a small, conservative Texan town in 1956.

The limitations that Chesterton is concerned with affect all aspects of existence. With regard to plot, Chesterton observes what he calls the "materialistic error" when it comes to enjoying stories. Our "interest in plot," he suggests, is not merely "mechanical" but "moral" (IU:515). Instead of being merely an issue of structure, plot is founded on subjectively apprehended events and not on measly, impersonal accidents. Additionally, he argues that "art is never unmoral, though it is sometimes immoral; that is, moral about the wrong morality" (IU:515). The thrill of story as one art form lies in its ability to reveal something about conscience and will that was not known before; it "involves finding out that men are worse or better than they seem, and that by their own choice" (IU:515). There is no such thing as a story that is merely a morality tale; rather, all stories are sustained and propelled by moral tensions of both personal and cosmic proportions. This point is stressed in Chesterton's proclamation that there are "two primary things in the universe, before all letters and all language": "a note of exclamation and a note of interrogation" (MO:89); put differently, there is a note of affirmation and a note of negation; a note of admiration and a note of a antagonism:

> The very shapes of them are startlingly symbolic; the first straight and simple, the second crooked and looking like a sneer. The note of admiration is Man, erect and wondering, worshipping the wonderful sky. The note of interrogation is the only thinking thing that was with him in Eden from the first. The note of interrogation is the Serpent, curved and at once cowering and insinuating. The first appreciates; the second depreciates. The two have been allegorized and repeated in every bewildering blazon of mythology and heraldry. St. George was the note of admiration; he was Adam in armour. The dragon was the note of interrogation gorgeously engraved, like a capital in a Gothic missal. They have come together in many ages with the sound of steel, the straight swords of simplicity and the curved scimitars of skepticism; nor has there been any other battle since the beginning of the world (MO:89).

I believe that all of Chesterton's stories work under this assumption of there being a mysterious, cosmic moral battle beneath the dramas that he writes about — a war between good and evil that is evident in all interpersonal and political conflicts. Although many examples of the moral purpose of plot as a sequence of revelatory events may be pointed out in Chesterton's work, one example may be highlighted here in the form of the unfolding story of the character of Innocent Smith in *Manalive* (1912). At the start of the novel, Smith is accused of a number of crimes: burglary, the damage of private property, attempted murder and adultery, all of which he seems to be indisputably guilty of despite his humble, childlike demeanour. However, as the story unfolds, Smith is shown to be truly innocent of all the above crimes in that the property he damages and burgles is his own, and his crime of adultery is committed with his own wife who has been wearing different wigs to impersonate other lovers. Even what appeared to have been an attempted murder turns out to be the result of his deliberate aim to miss, for Innocent Smith is a "specially good shot" who willfully misses four or five times at very close range (MA:64). Even Smith's apparent violence is reflective of a nonviolent love

for peace, but not for boredom and complacency. These strange non-crimes are all concrete illustrations of defamiliarisation, since they are committed so that Smith is able to "receive his own life back in the present" (Milbank 2009a:122). He distances himself from his life in order to return to a state of authentic innocence, free from any cloud of sleep so that he may be allowed to enjoy the gifts and revelations that fill his life. The innocence of Innocent Smith is very much the innocence of the O'Brien boys. They are able to live in wonder and astonishment at the gift of life.

The discovery of Smith's innocence confirms Chesterton's assertion that there is a thrill in discovering the true moral standing of the characters in the story (IU:515). Furthermore, the climax of the story presents the notion that the kind of moral purpose that underpins storytelling is more than an issue of mere "custom" (MA:123). It is more than an issue of blind prejudice or vain repetitions. Instead, moral purpose is fundamentally rooted in the notion of a "creed" (MA:123); it is something willfully and willingly accepted. Smith is able to distinguish between "custom and creed," thereby allowing himself to break with conventions without breaking the commandments (MA:123). Indeed, Chesterton suggests that he is able to do this precisely because he keeps the commandments:

> It is just because he does not want to kill but to excite to life that a pistol is still as exciting to him as it is to a schoolboy. It is just because he does not want to steal, because he does not covet his neighbour's goods, that he has captured the trick (oh, how we all long for it!), the trick of coveting his own goods. It is just because he does not want to commit adultery that he achieves the romance of sex; it is just because he loves one wife that he has a hundred honeymoons. If he had really murdered a man, if he had really deserted a woman, he would not be able to feel that a pistol or a love-letter was like a song — at least, not a comic song (MA:123).

For Chesterton, it is the absence of limitations — of constraints and commandments that bring about a paradox between custom and creed— that encourages boredom. In *The tree of life,* the young Jack also has to navigate this tension between custom and creed with his father embodying the former and his mother, the latter. This is shown particularly in the scene that follows the fun of the three boys playing happily together in open fields and suburban streets. As the sun goes down and darkness descends, the boys enter the safety of their home. Chesterton is almost too idealistic about the home when he writes that he "never doubted that the human beings inside [their] houses were themselves almost miraculous ... For [him], those brown brick boxes were really Christmas boxes" containing nothing but pure gift (AU:137). This ideal, like the playful mood of the preceding scene, is contradicted by the stilted conversation that takes place around the dinner table as the O'Briens sit down to eat (Figure 21).

Figure 21. The O'Briens sit down to eat.

Mr. O'Brien, too rigid in his observance of protocol and in his desire to be perceived as being in control, is not a natural communicator. In this scene, as in most of what follows, he is almost puritanical in his dogmatism. He pursues "health" to such a degree that he becomes "unhealthy" (HO:280). Beneath his hard exterior, he wants the best for his boys, but he does not have the ability to convey this sentiment to them. Being a man of rules, he is more concerned with living within the competitive bounds of nature than with living in close fellowship with his family. Mrs. O'Brien tries to smooth the rough edges of her husband to allow her sons to see grace even in his way of nature, but her efforts fail. It is clear that while the boundary line between the O'Brien's house and the property of their neighbours may have been illusory and even avoidable, the boundary line set around the interactions of this family is inescapable.

Chesterton, ever the defender of limitations, strongly encourages his reader to consider the purpose of a fence before absent-mindedly tearing it down. One ought to know, in historical terms, why a boundary has been established before one insists on destroying its social function (ID:173). In particular, Chesterton addresses the way that the family is sometimes attacked as an archaic and outdated institution. The modernist obsession with progress prevents a deeper engagement with the value of historicity. Chesterton notices that when people do attack the family, it is "not because they can see through it, but because they cannot see it at all" (ID:174). As one example of such an attack on the family, Samuel Butler (1835-1902) (2006:15) writes that "more unhappiness comes from this source than from any other — [that is] from the attempt to prolong family connection unduly and to make people hang together artificially who would never naturally do so". In this particular instance, Butler absolutises happiness and a very idiosyncratic understanding of what is 'natural' over

genuine human connection. It is precisely this sort of reasoning that Chesterton critiques when he says that such thinking seems to have been founded largely on an "individual irritation" that "varies with the individual" (ID:175). It may be true that a family is made up of imperfect individuals, but this fact is obviously not a good enough reason to attack the family, especially since no group of individuals is perfect. In any case, alternatives to the institution of the family seem less than desirable in Chesterton's opinion. He asks what would compel anyone to look after and put up with anyone in a society that has abolished the family and finds that that every answer is insufficient. In the end, he decides that the institution of the family is a fence that should stay up.

For Chesterton, this fence is both relational and spatial. Regarding the former, the family as an "omnipresent" institution asserts the importance of commitment. The family affirms that love is not just a feeling that ebbs, flows and dissolves, but a decision to honour and respect one another, even if only by compulsion of duty. Any notion of "free love" makes love seem like "an episode like lighting a cigarette, or whistling a tune" (WW:43). Love cannot be the same as preference or whim. Chesterton insists that the family is a "prolonged system of co-operation" that when treated as such is truly educational (WW:43). He notes that it is only within the bounds of the home that life is not merely made up of "the fragmentary experiences of the office or the shop of the bureau" but is felt to have the "character of unity and universality" (in Ahlquist 2006:148). The home is the primary, true school of life. Chesterton sees education as a kind of creative, paradoxical "violence" that "[interferes] with life and growth" in order to facilitate life and growth (WW:142). But education should always aim to ensure freedom and personal responsibility rather than the removal of those same things. It is better to be "flogged, and [even] unjustly flogged" than to "have [the] adventure story [of the child] taken away" (WW:145). For Chesterton, education is not the same as indoctrination. It is a vital and necessary part of bringing about an awareness of the very nature of the adventure of life. Education may even be more concerned with unlearning than with learning; it is easily more about challenging one's own perceptions than about reinforcing them.

Then, regarding the spatial nature of the metaphor of the fence, Chesterton points to an observable fact: the family occupies physical space. This again emphasises the need for limitations, for it is within the limitations of property that man is able to be an artist:

> The average man cannot cut clay into the shape of a man; but he can cut the earth into the shape of a garden; and though he arranges it with red geraniums and blue potatoes in alternate straight lines, he is still an artist; because he has chosen. The average man cannot paint the sunset whose colors be admires; but he can paint his own house with what color he chooses, and though he paints it pea green with pink spots, he is still an artist; because that is his choice. Property is merely the art of the democracy. It means that every man should have something that he can shape in his own image, as he is shaped in the image of heaven. But because he is not God, but

> only a graven image of God, his self-expression must deal with limits; properly with limits that are strict and even small (WW:42).

In many ways, including more than a few references to maintaining a garden, *The tree of life* manages to affirm the importance of the microcosm that is the family. It does not do this by painting an impossible picture, but by pointing to the nature of commitment and the value of stability. Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien do not have the perfect marriage, as is shown by frequent miscommunications and clashes between them, but they recognise the need for their devotion to each other and to their boys nonetheless. Jack and his brothers do not always avoid conflict with each other or with their parents, but they do at least strive to overcome any conflicts that do arise. This is not to say that their home is only tame and sedate. Chesterton recognises that order, especially of a moral kind, is the only way to produce adventure. The home is the only place where anarchy is welcome; it is "the only spot on earth where a man can alter arrangements suddenly, make an experiment or indulge a whim" (WW:48). It is within limitations that wildness finds room to breathe. This ties in with Chesterton's love for moral limitations. Without the moral interest in plot, there is no story, only "chaos," the result of which is an absence of choice, repentance and hope, and thus also the absence of any reason to fight (EM:235; WW:154). Without choice there can be coincidence, but no revelation (IU:170-172). Chesterton suggests that "[c]haos is dull; because in chaos a train might indeed go anywhere, to Baker Street, or to Bagdad. But man is a magician, and his whole magic trick is this, that he does say Victoria, and lo! it is Victoria" (MW:5).

Moral interest implies specificity and order, both of which are crucial to understanding Chesterton's dramatic worldview (Schall 2000:136). For him, life is not merely constituted of serendipitous or fluky progressions and evolutions, but something experienced as being deliberate (HO:264). Even coincidences are experienced as being important against the backdrop of our limitations. In fact, Chesterton levels some of his harshest critiques against the ideas of evolution and progress, because of the negation of decisiveness and freedom that these ideas presuppose. As argued in the previous chapter, Chesterton is not against evolution *per se*, but rather the way that it is used to negate the idea of design on the basis of an interpretive prejudice. One example of this can be found in a particular narrative turn at the start of *The ball and the cross*. Chesterton begins this novel by describing how the flying ship, piloted by its inventor and maker Professor Lucifer, sails through the skies "like a silver arrow; the bleak white steel of it, gleaming in the bleak blue emptiness of the evening" (BC:1). The ship and its contents are described as having that "fantastic and distorted look which belongs to the miracles of science" because "the world of science and evolution is far more nameless, elusive and like a dream than the world of poetry and religion; In the latter, images and

ideas remain themselves eternally, while it is the whole idea of evolution that identities melt into each other as they do in a nightmare" (BC:1).

The other passenger of the flying ship is a white-haired monk named Michael, who is in conversation with Lucifer, or is, rather, listening to his incessant, careless ramblings (BC:2). Lucifer is occupied in a long process of composing a confusing and implausible theory of how he believes religious people see and interpret the sky. He does this in much the same way as a plumber would if he were to attempt to explain an interstellar cloud to an astronomer. Michael suddenly interrupts his nebulous babble to warn him that despite his admirable rhetoric his flying ship is about to "run into something" which turns out to be St. Paul's Cathedral in London (BC:3-4). The lofty argument of the scientist is disturbed by the revelation of the building, and the "curious shape" of the cross on top of it, in front of him (BC:4). The irony is clear: in Chesterton's opinion it is the scientist or empiricist whose world is entirely mystical, and it is the religious or spiritual man who is most aware of the concrete reality before his eyes. This is the paradox of the absolutisation of a particular materialist mindset: instead of the world becoming more solid, it becomes more numinous (HO:222). Put differently, instead of becoming more concrete and objective, it becomes more subjective and solipsistic.

Chesterton pinpoints the theoretical as opposed to scientific nature of evolutionary theory in order to expose the inhuman core of the notion of the "survival of the fittest" that underpins the popular philosophies of social Darwinism and eugenics (Clark 2009:126).[5] These inhuman philosophies legitimise evil in their unspoken pronouncement that justice does not matter (Clark 2009:127). To be clear, it is not science that Chesterton opposes, but rather scientism as excessive faith in the ability of science to solve problems that move beyond its own disciplinary constraints. Indeed, he does much to expose the unempirical base of the empiricist not to dismiss the value of empiricism, but to deconstruct the idolisation of empiricism. He is especially concerned about the way that scientists rather undemocratically seek to impose their aristocratic constructs on the private domain of the family. It is unmistakable that his frequent references to such a debate are not even hinted at in *The tree of life*, but even this tells us something: *The tree of life* manages to affirm human dignity in so many ways by keeping its eyes firmly fixed on the importance of the family even amidst various social, political and scientific complications. It confirms the fact that the human story participates in empirical realities without insisting that it ought to be situated merely as one part of a scientific

[5]On social Darwinism, Chesterton writes, "If I am merely to float or fade or evolve, it may be towards something anarchic; but if I am to riot, it must be for something respectable. This is the whole weakness of certain schools of progress and moral evolution. They suggest that there has been a slow movement towards morality, with an imperceptible ethical change in every year or at every instant. There is only one great disadvantage in this theory. It talks of a slow movement towards justice; but it does not permit a swift movement" (HO:312).

process. Chesterton writes that "[m]an has lost his way" too often by getting caught up in "the pressure of certain upper-class philosophies" (WW:53). This only acts to emphasise the fact that "[m]an has always been looking for [a] home" (WW:53).

The very concrete, humble reality of the family that is represented in *The tree of life* offers an unintentional, indirect critique on the more misty ideas of evolutionary theory. Chesterton's own critique of evolutionary theory may be taken together with his critique of the modernist cult or myth of progress, since he views the two as being symptoms of the same egotistical impulse, and both are locked into a logic that is "highly vague" (OR:154-155). Progress is the worship of hubris and "worldly wisdom" and as such is destined to fail (HO:45). Even Mr. O'Brien's constant attempts to rise above the domestic status of others and his failure to achieve great success in his career are enough to demonstrate the verity of this. He wants to be an aristocrat and therefore misses the value of his own family. The problem in his outlook on the world is that he does not notice that "progress" has supplanted the possibility of "discussing what is good" (HO:51). Chesterton emphasises the fact that degradation in the material world is primarily symbolic of a problem of the soul (HO:322). What is required, therefore, is a revolution of the heart. Chesterton disagrees with those who blame poor moral standing on the environment, because it merely supports the egotism of those who have had the benefit of living in the upper classes: "Only the Christian church can offer any rational objection to a complete confidence in the rich. For she has maintained from the beginning that the danger was not in man's environment, but in man" (HO:322-323). Consequently, he argues that

> for the whole modern world is absolutely based on the assumption, not that the rich are necessary (which is tenable), but that the rich are trustworthy, which (for a Christian) is not tenable. You will hear everlastingly, in all discussions about newspapers, companies, aristocracies, or party politics, this argument that the rich man cannot be bribed. The fact is, of course, that the rich man is bribed; he has been bribed already. This is why he is a rich man. The whole case for Christianity is that a man who is dependant upon the luxuries of this life is a corrupt man, spiritually corrupt, politically corrupt, financially corrupt. There is one thing that Christ and all the saints have said with a sort of savage monotony. They have said simply that to be rich is to be in peculiar danger of moral wreck (HO:322).

This neglect of a moral aim points to Chesterton's central problem with myth progress, namely that it "maintains that we alter the test instead trying to pass the test" (OR:14). He observes,

> We often hear it said, for instance, 'What is right in one age is wrong in another.' This is quite reasonable, if it means that there is some fixed aim and that certain methods attain at certain times and not at other times. If women, say, desire to be elegant, it may be that they are improved at one time by growing fatter and at another time by growing thinner. But you cannot say that they are improved by ceasing to wish to be elegant and beginning to wish to be oblong. If the standard changes, how can there be improvement, which implies a standard? (OR:14).

Revelation, as the breaking in of an unexpected voice or meaning, also requires a standard; without a standard it is impossible. Schall (2000:221) contends that this is one of the primary reasons for Chesterton's anti-modernism: the modernist's "philosophy prevented him from even considering the revelation's possibility". In dramatic terms, expectations need to be in place in order to be confirmed or disrupted, for revelation requires both continuity and discontinuity (Schindler 2004:587, 589). In *The tree of life,* this relationship between a standard and the advent of surprise is demonstrated in a few ways, but I want to especially highlight one scene in which Mr. O'Brien is talking to the boy Jack about following his dreams. He explains that he had dreamed of becoming a great musician, but had been distracted. His dream faded because he had not kept to his goal. On one level, this scene points to the fact that Mr. O'Brien, constantly caught up in legal battles over patents and his aspirations for greater wealth and success in business, had placed more misty notions of progress above the clear goal of working at his music. But on another level, this honesty about his missed opportunity opens Jack up to something in his father's character that he had not noticed before. This scene acts to inform an expectation within the young Jack. He later watches, both awed and perplexed, as his father plays the church organ (Figure 22). Here, he notices his father's vulnerability for the first time. Beneath that mask of certitude and confidence is a fragile human being who has lost his dream. This realisation speaks powerfully even though it is soon eclipsed by various internal and external tensions that arise in the narrative.

Figure 22. Jack watches his father play the church organ.

Chesterton is content with the possibility that the way that ideals are interpreted may change, but he emphasises the need for some kind of constant. He insists that it is impossible to be progressive "without being doctrinal" (HO:53). Elsewhere, he writes:

> Progress should mean that we are always changing the world to suit the vision. Progress does mean (just now) that we are always changing the vision. It should mean that we are slow but sure in bringing justice and mercy among men: it does mean that we are very swift in doubting the desirability of justice and mercy ... Progress should mean that we are always walking towards the New Jerusalem. It does mean that the New Jerusalem is always walking away from us. We are not altering the real to suit the ideal. We are altering the ideal: it is easier (HO:310).

Chesterton then moves to use the "silly example" of a man who wishes to paint the world blue (HO:311). To achieve this end, he would set about transforming the world to fit his weird ideal with his paintbrush and myriad cans of blue paint. No matter how strange and unlikely this end might seem, it is rational and sane. But Chesterton argues that the "average modern thinker" has a formidable predicament on his hands: he alters the ideal almost daily. First he wants a blue world, then a maroon one, and then a vermillion or plaid one. This analogy indicates that as "long as the vision of heaven is always changing, the vision of earth will be exactly the same" (HO:12). No ideal will remain long enough to be realised, or even partly realised. The "modern young man will never change his environment; for he will always be changing his mind" (HO:12). Chesterton observes that some "fall back simply on the clock: they talk as if the mere passage through time brought some superiority" resulting in the equating of fashion or mere newness with the good (OR:155). In *Heretics,* Chesterton uses a parable to demonstrate the potential consequence of missing the problematics of the pseudo-ideal of this myth of progress:

> Suppose that a great commotion arises in the street about something, let us say a lamp-post, which many influential persons desire to pull down. A grey-clad monk, who is the spirit of the Middle Ages, is approached upon the matter, and begins to say, in the arid manner of the Schoolmen, "Let us first of all consider, my brethren, the value of Light. If Light be in itself good —" At this point he is somewhat excusably knocked down. All the people make a rush for the lamp-post, the lamp-post is down in ten minutes, and they go about congratulating each other on their unmediaeval practicality.[6] But as things go on they do not work out so easily. Some people have pulled the lamp-post down because they wanted the electric light; some because they wanted old iron; some because they wanted darkness, because their deeds were evil. Some thought it not enough of a lamp-post, some too much; some acted because they wanted to smash municipal machinery; some because they wanted to smash something. And there is war in the night, no man knowing whom he strikes. So, gradually and inevitably, to-day, to-morrow, or the next day, there

[6] It is possible that this pulling down of the lamp-post is a reference to the letter to the church in Ephesus in the book of Revelation (2.5) in which the church is admonished to turn back to God and do the works that they did at first lest God remove the lamp stand from its place. This speculation comes from the mention of the fact that the lamp stand is taken away, but this is not the only time a lamp stand is used as a symbol in the Bible. See, for example, Exodus 25.31-35, 26.35, 30.27, 31.8, 35.14, 37.17-20, 39.37, 40.4, 40.24, Leviticus 24.4; Numbers 3.31, 4.9, 8.2-4, 1 Kings 7.49,1 Chronicles 28.15, 2 Chronicles 4.7, 4.20, 13.11, Jeremiah 52.19; Daniel 5.5, Zechariah 4.2-11, and Hebrews 9.2. This allusion indicates that by choosing to avoid the light, it is not so much God who removes the lamp stand but rather those who choose against him. The implication, both in Chesterton's parable and in the book of Revelation, is that it is human beings who, in ignorance or arrogance, choose to reject the divine invitation. However, apart from this speculation, Chesterton's story demonstrates that progress is simply a metaphor that describes a movement towards something else; on its own it may be as aimless and mindless as a journey without a predetermined destination or faith without an object. Without any definite purpose or *telos* it cannot produce any revelation as to what the journey is for or what the traveler is moving towards. Ironically, as in Chesterton's parable, progress without the light of revelation cannot produce any real progress.

> comes back the conviction that the monk was right after all, and that all depends on what is the philosophy of Light. Only what we might have discussed under the gas-lamp, we now must discuss in the dark (HO:46).

This parable recalls Nietzsche's (2001:120) parable of the maniac, who runs throughout the streets proclaiming the death of God. In the frenzy of proclaiming the death of the source of *telos*, the maniac hurls his lantern to the ground, shattering it and leaving his listeners to consider his message in the dark. The removal of a transcendent point of attention leads to the removal of an immanent sense of meaning and understanding. For Chesterton, this *telos* is almost identitical to the Person of God and not just, as in Nietzsche's anti-theology, with the idea of 'God' (ST:161). By implication, true progress, for Chesterton, is only achieved through personal contact with the sacred reality of God.

The tree of life constantly shows how light breaks the pattern of the darkness, perhaps as an indication of the availability of goodness, beauty and truth even in difficult times, and even amidst mysteries (Figure 23). It is a simple and perhaps even simplistic metaphor, but it is significant nonetheless. Even the faintest glimmers of light are sufficient for the task of overcoming the darkness. Here, light, which always finds a way to triumph in the end, is symbolic of revelation. And while Chesterton does not say so explicitly in the parable above, he alludes to the idea that light is never quite absent. Rather, it is always somehow at hand even if it is only accessible as an ideal. It is still possible to discuss the philosophy of light in the absence of light, because light remains something desirable.

Figure 23. The philosophy of light.

Chesterton notices that in Genesis, the creation of light takes place before the creation of "luminous bodies" (ID:126). As absurd as such a sequence may seem, he contends that it is "rather Platonic" in that it suggests that "[t]he idea existed before any of the machinery which made manifest the idea. Justice existed when there was no need of judgment, and mercy existed before any man was oppressed" (ID:127). This is precisely the logic of creation, which contends that one can know "the atmosphere" of something before the thing itself is present (ID:127). One can know laughter before the joke has been told, or tears before the tragedy has unfolded; one can know what one wishes to create before creating it. All ethics needs "vivid pictures of purity and spiritual triumph" (HO:48). Every engagement with reality needs idealism (HO:49). At all times, as he does in the parable of the lamppost, Chesterton suggests that people should always be looking for the light, asking what is good instead of avoiding the good by talking about liberty, progress, success or even education (HO:51). These other things are secondary to the core issue, which is that everything depends upon one's philosophy of light.

In his parable of the lamppost, similar in its meaning to the metaphor of tearing down the fence of the family and to the way that Mr. O'Brien tore down his own desire of becoming a musician without understanding it, Chesterton hones in on the destructiveness of hastily attacking an assumption without properly examining its validity, and in so doing again emphasises the importance of a standard or a constant.[7] However, as Capon (1990:18) notes, Chesterton supports "laws of logic," like the laws that guide the progression of a story, but he argues that there are "no laws of likelihood". Chesterton argues that it is an error to create a law on the assumption that one can marry two incomprehensible things to create something comprehensible (HO:255). A law, he writes, "implies that we know the nature of the generalisation and enactment; not merely that we have noticed some of the effects" (HO:255). However, in most cases, the processes involved between ideas is far more complex and nuanced than a law can account for:

> When we are asked why eggs turn to birds or fruits fall in autumn, we must answer exactly as the fairy godmother would answer if Cinderella asked her why mice turned to horses or her clothes fell from her at twelve o'clock. We must answer that it is *magic*. It is not a 'law,' for we do not understand its general formula. It is not a necessity, for though we can count on it happening practically, we have no right to say that it must always happen. It is no argument for unalterable law ... that we count on the ordinary course of things. We do not count on it; we bet on it. We risk the remote possibility of a miracle as we do that of a poisoned pancake or a world-destroying comet. We leave it out of account, not because it is a miracle, and therefore an impossibility, but because it is a miracle, and therefore an exception. All the terms used in the science books, 'law,' 'necessity,' 'order,' 'tendency,' and so on,

[7] That Chesterton is aware of the problem of haste is aligned with Gadamer's (2004:280) argument that one of the primary causes of misunderstanding is "overhastiness". Overhastiness is a descriptor of any attitude that favours the new and also solidifies judgments before the authority of those judgments can be challenged (Gadamer 2004:279). Gadamer's critique of overhastiness is therefore similar, in some ways, to Chesterton's critique of the modernist doctrine of progess.

> are really unintellectual, because they assume an inner synthesis, which we do not possess. The only words that ever satisfied me as describing Nature are the terms used in fairy books, 'charm,' 'spell,' 'enchantment,' They express the arbitrariness of the fact that it is a mystery. A tree grows fruit because it is a magic tree. Water runs downhill because it is bewitched. The sun shines because it is bewitched (HO:256, emphasis in original).

Just as Chesterton is convinced about the importance of discussing one's philosophy of light, so he is certain of the fairytale nature of reality, which is inherently geared towards offering a story of goodness embedded in the world. To borrow Kearney's (2002:132) terminology, fairytales deal with discovery and creation; with disclosing "what is already there in the light of what is not yet (but is potentially)". Fairytales re-enact the actual as the possible. They are, therefore, a form of defamiliarisation that challenges complacent perception. The presence of Elfland in our present world is alluded to in *The tree of life* in two particular scenes, one in which we see Mrs. O'Brien floating and dancing on the breeze beneath the shelter of a tree, and another which has her sleeping like Snow White in a glass coffin in a forest (Figure 24). These two scenes are conjured in Jack's imagination as he recognises both the vulnerability and the potency of grace. In the first scene, her flight is evidence of her humility and her levity (HO:325). In the second scene, her death points to the weight and the glory of her life. Both scenes suggest that "fragility is force" (HO:325). If angels are able to fly, it is "because they can take themselves lightly" (HO:325).

Figure 24. Mrs. O'Brien in Jack's fairytale.

These fairytale pictures of Mrs. O'Brien, however, are not there to detract from the reality, but to point back to it. They are a means for demonstrating that while expectations abound, they may not necessarily be applicable to revelation. Nevertheless, one needs a light or a point of departure by which one can see what is anomalous in the drama. But Chesterton maintains that his argument against progress — as well as other scientific notions of law, necessity, order and tendency — is

precisely an argument in favor of progress (IU:314).[8] Progress is only progress when "effort" is present (IU:314; Stapleton 2009:195). Chesterton insists that "better things can grow if we take the trouble to grow them" (IU:314). This implies a readiness to accept the state of things as they are instead of falling back uncritically on a utopian "imaginary ideal" (IU:309).

Chesterton contends that a reliance on the rhetoric of laws and necessities in science undermines the intellect, and his argument proposes that the main reason for this is the fact that these laws and necessities present an "inner synthesis" that is not properly known (HO:256). Bearing in mind the corpus of Chesterton's writings, I would suggest that while he is clearly against laws that convey a sense of control to human understanding that goes against the grain of his epistemological humility, there is something else at play here, namely the fact that laws easily render the text of life dead and dissectible. This would violate Chesterton's whole philosophical project, which is to render things more profound and more alive (AU:134). As Schall (2000:222) observes, the primary problem with the modernism that Chesterton criticises is that it seeks to transcend paradoxes by resorting to featurelessness. When the paradox is kept intact, the mind is compelled to grapple and thus stay lively (ST:133). For example, it is the very paradox of nature and grace that keeps Jack from being complacent about the path that he should follow. In fact, even by the end of Jack's story, we find that the choice for one or the other is illusory: one cannot have one without the other.

While *The* tree *of life* presents a fairly hopeful view of the family, it resists what Chesterton would call optimism. After introducing the general environment of the O'Brien family in its first two acts, with its various tensions only hinted at, the film shifts towards a darker period in the childhood of Jack O'Brien. The one sequence in the film, which follows a scene in which we see Mr. O'Brien lose another patent case, is instigated by a massive conflict between Mr. O'Brien and the two people in the family — Mrs. O'Brien and RL — that embody the way of grace. The conflict begins over a lunchtime meal in the dining room when, for no apparent reason, Mr. O'Brien tells RL to speak only if he has something important to say. RL sits calmly in his seat and nods in agreement. Mr. O'Brien then continues to dominate the conversation at the table, first by conversing with his youngest son and then in his interrogation of Jack about a paperweight that he has in his possession. RL, to defend his older brother, softly speaks to his father, saying simply "Be quiet". What follows is a flurry of activity as Mr. O'Brien, enraged by what he perceives as his son's insolence, sends Jack and RL to their rooms. The tension in the home mounts as Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien later confront each other in

[8] It would be a mistake to assume that Chesterton is against the modernist presumption of the possibility of improving things, but he does ask what it means to "make things better" (HO:307). One problem with the modernist conception of time is that, in praising linearity and the mere progression forward in time, it ultimately promotes circularity: "Evolution is only good if it produces good; good is only good if it helps evolution. The elephant stands on the tortoise, and the tortoise on the elephant" (HO:307). Here, Chesterton's reference to Hindu myth is enough to suggest that he does not approve of the circular argumentation lauded by modernity.

the kitchen. Nature and grace, in this conflict, remain bound tightly together, but also simultaneously at odds (Figure 25).

Figure 25. Nature and grace at odds, yet bound together.

When the way of nature takes centre stage, everyone suffers. After this conflict, Mr. O'Brien leaves to go on a long business trip around the world. This gives rise, at first, to a riot of joy and delight as the three O'Brien boys revel in the freedom that has come from not having their domineering father present. Even their mother seems to flourish in the absence of an overbearing patriarchy (Figure 26). Soon, however, this joy turns to uncertainty and "matriarchy" turns into "moral anarchy" (EM:54). While Mr. O'Brien's regime has been oppressive, its boundaries were still needed. Even with its apparent tensions, the coherence between Jack's parents is precisely what is an indication of something good. They remain "one flesh … even when they are not one in spirit" (WW:44).

The scenes that follow, this conflict highlights the need for unity and reconciliation that Chesterton believes to be at the heart of human longing. As noted above, revelation comes out of a sense of the need for and belief in standards, but here it becomes clear that it also comes out of a sense of the ordering of such standards. As noted above, this is a revelation of a secret that is known even while it remains unarticulated (AT:66). This implies a surprise that remains concealed to a degree even when it is known and understood. It may thus be distinguished from the first kind of revelation in that it involves a continuous tension between concealment and discovery instead of describing a disruption of ignorance brought upon by the advancement of a story. In other words, ignorance remains out of the question (AT:66). However, it is precisely ignorance that remains a problem for this kind of revelation.

Figure 26. Freedom from patriarchy.

Chesterton addresses this problem in his interpretation of *Job*. As covered in the previous chapter, the book of *Job* opens with a wager between God and Satan on the exemplary devotion to God exhibited by the central protagonist (IJ:1-2). Then, after taking account of a number of severe tragedies that befall Job, the book moves to describe a number lengthy speeches given by Job and his "comforters" (IJ:3-4, 5-88). In these speeches, Job and his friends offer their best guesses as to the reasons for Job's suffering and the place of his suffering in the context of the divine plan. There is, therefore, a sense in which both Job and his friends are bringing to light things that they already know and understand. But this, of course, is precisely the trouble. Ultimately, God shows up to chastise this motley crew, asking, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" (IJ:89; Job 38.2). Chesterton finds the explanations of Job and his friends deplorable in that they seem to promote the "modern habit of saying, 'Every man has a different philosophy; this is my philosophy and it suits me'" (IJ:xvi). They have perpetuated a rigidity of mind and a plurality of subjectively determined perspectives, thereby standing directly in the way of the surprise of reality itself. Chesterton contests this pluralism on the metareferential grounds that a plurality of perspectives and perceptions does not negate the human desire to know what is actually going on (IJ:xvii). Pluralism does not negate the desire to feel that all things should be in their right place. And this desire, Chesterton intimates, is indicative of the a larger story: any "shadow of homesickness" implies that a genuine home must at least be a possibility (HO:284; WS:43).

I have already alluded above to the fact that the event of revelation is significant insofar as it is recognised as being personal (EM:104). But for Chesterton, its personal character is not the sole determinant of its significance. Its significance rests also on its ability to introduce coherence and

goodness into the human story. As already intimated, at the centre of Chesterton's dramatology is his belief in the human desire to find meaningful, moral coherence even in the face of the inexplicable. In fact, this desire for coherence seems to be at the heart of what it means to be human. I have already addressed a few of the totalising metanarratives that were prevalent in Chesterton's day, including the myths of pure rationalism, absolutism, legalism, scepticism, progress, scientism and evolution. Chesterton claims that all of these are all the wrong keys; they are false paths for navigating the human story and as such produce discontinuity, disconnection and a kind of staleness of thought that prevents wonder.

Figure 27. Mrs. O'Brien waits for Jack's return.

In *The tree of life,* the disconnection between Jack and his father alerts us to a number of similarly false stories that guide Jack's actions as he enters adolescence. His disconnection from his father is a picture of his disconnection from God. It is precisely when his disconnection from his father becomes as physical as it is emotional that he also feels disconnected from his mother, his brothers and his own sense of being at home in the world. He therefore often acts out in anger and rebellion. A few images show the antagonism he finds in himself and in his environment. He starts to navigate his own identity by spending more time with his friends. While playing in the street outside in the pale light of dusk, he sees a couple arguing in their home. Later, he and his friends act aggressively against the material world: one boy destroys an aluminium dustbin and another lights fireworks that he should not possess. The boys decide to tie a live frog to a rocket and launch to "to the moon". Jack participates in this same destructive behaviour by breaking a few windows and later by going into the house of his neighbour and stealing her sheer nightgown. Thereafter, he is visibly troubled by his own actions and sexual impulses. Confused, ashamed and annoyed, he disposes of the stolen

underwear by throwing it into a river. He runs home, tired, troubled and weeping. He is met at home by his mother, who has clearly been worrying about him (Figure 27). She does not say anything, but simply sits down with him outside by the tree in the front yard and wipes away her prodigal son's tears. Boyhood may certainly reveal a world of surprise and wonder, but Chesterton observes that it is also "a most complex and incomprehensible thing. Even when one has been through it, one does not understand what it was" (AU:62). It contains "a callousness, a carelessness, [and] a curious combination of random and quite objectless energy" (AU:62).

It seems that identity and understanding are formed in two primary ways, via two forms of conflict: through violence, both metaphorical and actual, and through dialogue (AU:63, 68). The former, explored particularly by Jack in these scenes, is the way of nature. It considers all of life through competition and the clash of dichotomies. The latter involves the same elements that are found in the way of nature and still allows for divergence, but it does not try to overcome or silence the voice of otherness. Dialogue, so fundamental to the way of grace, allows for difference where violence wants to destroy it by conquering or assimilating it. Violence blocks out revelation, whereas dialogue welcomes its possibility. The difference between dialogue and violence is determined quite simply by what is loved and therefore by what is deemed worth defending (IS:30). People easily love themselves, their own property and their own land, but find it harder to love others and what belongs to others.

Chesterton writes that it is not for the love of peace, for example, that war is avoided, but for the love of others. By referring to the relationship between England and Germany, he explains that it "would be far easier to make an Englishman love Germany than to make him love peace with Germany" (IS:24). He contends that "Germany is a loveable thing" while peace, a byproduct of love, is not (IS:24). "Germany is a positive thing; one can like its beer, admire its customs, love its children, … appreciate the beaming ceremony of its manners, and even (with brave effort), tolerate the sound of its language" (IS:24). Building on this example, we find that it is in loving otherness that genuine, empathetic dialogue is made possible. Violence and degeneration arise when the need to preserve the self and one's possessions supersedes one's love for the other. If the self is loved more than the other, war is inevitable. This is precisely the problem in the relational disconnection between Jack and his father. Both stick rigidly to protecting and defending their own views and egotisms without paying much heed to the possibility, firstly, that their own perspectives may not be absolute, and secondly, that their existences are not isolated from the larger drama of their family, as well as of humanity. Still, Chesterton's entire dramatology is founded on the idea that difference must be allowed for, but not at the expense of the self. This is why he is not a pacifist. The corollary of this, and the reason that Chesterton is also not a militarist, must also be mentioned: the self must be allowed for, but not at the expense of otherness. Ultimately, in Chesterton's view, dialogue ought to take precedence over

violence, for it is only in this creative tension — this paradox of alterities — that a revelation of human dignity can be upheld.

Until the departure of Mr. O'Brien from the story, the tension between nature and grace in Jack has been internal. Now, in Mr. O'Brien's absence, the tension becomes visible in Jack's actions and especially in his relationship with this mother. The final scene before Mr. O'Brien's returns has Jack caught in confrontation with his mother after having ruined a watercolour painting done by RL.[9] She tells him, "Come here". He yells a defiant "No!" Noticing how this affects his mother, he then says that he refuses to do what she tells him to. "I'm going to do what I want," he says. Then, almost as if invoking the spirit of his father's patriarchy, he says, "What do you know? You let him walk all over you" (Malick 2007:103) (Figure 28). Here, Jack sees grace as weakness, not strength. After this conflict, an image of Jack walking away from his home reveals him to be at odds with and, in his own mind, isolated from the world. In a scene that follows this one, we see him swimming in a rock pool with his brothers, uttering a simple prayer: "How do I get back to where [my brothers] are?" He wants to understand what it means to return to his innocence, but he cannot seem to find a way back from the turmoil he feels. He notices that the call of transcendence, so present in his play time, has been lost in the fact of this newfound seriousness (Malick 2007:101).

Figure 28. Jack ruins a picture that RL has painted for his mother.

Soon after this outburst, Mr. O'Brien returns from his business trip. While his departure seemed to incite Jack's rebellious behaviour, his return does nothing to quell it, at least at first. With the boundaries now once removed, the wildness of Jack's inner conflict has been left exposed. Mr. O'Brien tells his family about his travels; he "shows them towels and washcloths he has carried off

[9] The film does not explain why RL is creating this painting, but the screenplay explains that it is for his mother's birthday (Malick 2007:102). It seems that Jack ruins the painting because he realises that his own idea of a gift, a paperweight, is not as imaginative or as personal his brother's, "though it cost more" (Malick 2007:102). Here, in the subtext, we recognise how Jack misinterprets the nature of his mother's love. He has learned and believed a lie lived by his father, that love is something deserved and earned, rather than something freely given.

from hotels" and lies that he is "confident that [his] deal went through" (Malick 2007:80-81). In the short scenes that follow, it becomes clear to Jack "that he and his brothers remain alive through their father's sacrifice and bear their lives as an undeserved gift from him" (Malick 2007:81). Nevertheless, Jack is constantly suspicious of his father. It is difficult to trust a man so closed and demanding. Jack is always "bewildered by his father's indifference to the burdens he imposes on others; the absence of any consciousness of hypocrisy when he breaks those rules he imposes on others" (Malick 2007:82).

Later, as Jack watches his father work on the Studebaker, he wonders what would happen if he were to kick the jack out from under the car (Figure 29). Would it injure or kill his father? He no longer has the ability to fake love and admiration for his father. He prays that God would "kill him" or just "let him die" (Malick 2007:86). This prayer, dark as it is, reflects Jack's wish that he would not have to choose between his mother's way and his father's. It would be easier if the way of nature were not vying for his allegiance. At this point in the narrative, it seems that the relationship between Jack and his father is irreparable. Both characters remain equally obstinate and bad tempered. However, perhaps because of the absence of reconciliation between father and son, both characters start to become open to the necessity of the kind of self-confrontation that may make room for the possibility of dialogue.

Figure 29. Jack watches his father work on the Studebaker.

Jack cannot seem to bring himself to do what he wants to, and ends up doing what he hates. He seems to flaunt his feelings of worthlessness by living in contradiction, always wanting to do the right thing, but failing to. While out playing in the forest, Jack tells RL to put his finger over the tip of his BB gun, promising his brother that he won't shoot him. But Jack ends up firing the gun anyway,

causing RL to howl in pain (Figure 30). Jack suddenly catches a glimpse the darkness inside himself. He sees that he causes as much hurt and anguish as his father does. He is just as much of a hypocrite as his father has ever been.

Figure 30. Jack shoots RL's finger with an air gun.

Malick (2007:108) explains that "Jack is sick at heart. It could not have been he who acted in this way. Something acted on him. But no, he did it, though a strange he; not the real he". He understands that all the hatred that he has directed against his father has always, subconsciously, been self-hatred. It takes this revelation to bring a crucial turning point in Jack's character. It takes him recognising the evil inside him to open him up to the possibility of redemption. Having properly noticed his failings, he no longer needs to defend them. It is clear that the "mood of revolt will grow more and more bitter so long as we can prove we are right; we must pray for the higher talent of proving we are wrong" (IL:114).

This recognition of failings is the essence of what Chesterton calls "Christian optimism," which is obviously different from the kind of optimism discussed in the previous chapter (HO:283). It is precisely this recognition of their inhumanity that allows human beings to become more fully human. Christian optimism is "based on the fact that we do *not* fit in to the world" (HO:283):

> I had tried to be happy by telling myself that man is an animal, like any other which sought its meat from God. But now I really was happy, for I had learnt that man is a monstrosity. I had been right in feeling all things as odd, for I myself was at once worse and better than all things. The optimist's pleasure was prosaic, for it dwelt on the naturalness of everything; the Christian pleasure was poetic, for it dwelt on the unnaturalness of everything in the light of the supernatural. The modern philosopher had told me again and again that I was in the right place, and I had still felt depressed even in acquiescence. But I had heard that I was in the *wrong* place, and my soul sang for joy, like a bird in spring. The knowledge found out and illuminated forgotten chambers in the dark house of infancy. In knew now why grass had always seemed to me as queer as the green beard of a giant, and why I could feel homesick at home (HO:283-284).

In the few short scenes that follow Jack's epiphany of his own fallenness, we see him reconcile again with RL. Until now, Jack has always been reticent around his brother. He has been jealous, continuously struggling to comprehend RL's geniality (Malick 2007:86). Now, open to admitting the ways that he has veered from doing the right thing, he experiences RL's forgiveness. It is a

forgiveness that has always been there, always readily offered, but now for the first time it is readily received, not because it is deserved, but because it is needed. "I'm sorry," Jack tells his brother. RL puts his hand on his brother's head as if to offer him a blessing (Figure 31). Chesterton writes that "the point of all repentance is beginning afresh" (IL:85), and it is exactly this sort of new beginning that is captured so powerfully in this scene.

Figure 31. RL forgives and blesses Jack.

Just as Jack's egotism has been broken down, so Mr. O'Brien soon comes to realise that his own efforts to conquer the world have failed. Soon after reconciling with RL, Jack goes out to meet his father in the cabbage patch. No words pass between them, but Jack sits down to help his father tend to the garden. Then, as we watch Mr. O'Brien walk around his workplace we hear him speak: "I wanted to be loved because I was great — a big man. But I'm nothing. Look at the glory around us. Trees. Birds. I lived in shame. I dishonoured it all and didn't notice the glory. [I've been] a foolish man". He arrives home to announce to his wife that the plant at which he has been working is closing down, leaving him to choose between "no job or a transfer to a job nobody wants".

Figure 32. Nature and grace, no longer in conflict.

Jack, trembling "with a sense of wonder and discovery," hears the conversation between his parents (Malick 2007:111). For the first time in his memory, they do not seem to be in conflict, the tensions between them having been resolved (Figure 32). We see the two of them speak, but we do not hear what they are saying. The screenplay offers that Mr. O'Brien is finally admitting his failures to his wife: "I've driven my sons away from me. I thought I was making them tough so they could live in the world" (Malick 2007:112). Mrs. O'Brien offers only forgiveness. Her husband looks at her and speaks: "Thank you for loving me" (Malick 2007:112).

Figure 33. Jack reconciles with his father.

Now humbled, Mr. O'Brien comes to Jack and offers an apology: "Jack, all I ever wanted was to make you strong, [so that you could] be your own boss. Maybe I've been tough on you. I'm not proud of that". The subtext of this conversation is that Mr. O'Brien has "lost the light in [himself]" as well as "the power to give it to [his] children" (Malick 2007:113). Jack, not trying to impress his father anymore, offers that he is just "as bad" as he is, more like him than his mother (Malick 2007:113). To this, his father responds, "You boys are all I've done in life. Otherwise, I've drawn zilch. You're all I have. You're all I want to have" (Figure 33). Mr. O'Brien embraces his son, and calls him a "sweet boy". Malick (2007:115) explains that in this moment, Jack discovers that forgiveness — received first from his mother and then from RL — "has given him the key to reality. He sees it now: love is the answer to evil and sorrow. He will love every leaf and stone, every ray of light". Measured against the cosmic drama, this scene of reconciliation may seem small and insignificant, but it is clear from its emotional significance to both characters that Malick (2007:114-115) means it to symbolise a much larger reconciliation between man and God. This event — this small revelation — is enough to call Jack and his father into understanding their place in an expansive, redemptive mystery.

The fact that this conversation takes place outside in view of the tree that is in the centre of the front yard raises the question of what this tree symbolises, both in the *The tree of life* and in Chesterton's work. The tree and its context within a forest is one of the primary symbols used by him, as can be observed throughout this study. Obviously, the idea of the tree of life contains many meanings across various mythologies, but only those that directly connect the tree with Chesterton's work need to be of concern here. In the first place, it is helpful to begin by noticing Chesterton's connection of trees with genealogies: "The genealogical tree is really a most common or garden sort of tree. It is only the tree of life; a mere trifle" that reveals the "feeling of interest in one's own family" (IL:154). The tree of life is a symbol of the centrality of the family and of healthy growth. The drama of domesticity is a key to engaging in the drama of the cosmos. But, perhaps most importantly, the tree may be used to symbolise the entire narrative that informs Chesterton's dramatology.

To begin with, the genealogical tree reflects the structure of the cosmos (EM:223). It begins with a seed and grows into something grand and beautiful. To counteract the enthusiasm of the kind of "evolutionary monomania" that insists that "every great thing grows from a seed, or something smaller than itself," Chesterton notes that "every seed comes from a tree, or something larger than itself" (EM:87). In his view, the Trinitarian Godhead is the eternal family of three-in-oneness that calls all things into being. As observed throughout this study, Chesterton constantly shifts the focus of the reader to the idea that there is a much larger drama at work. His perception is therefore heliocentric rather than geocentric in the sense that the earth — mankind's story — revolves around the sun — God's story — and therefore participates in its light. Man revolves around God even when he is not aware of his participation. Just as we breathe without noticing how it nourishes us, so it is easy to overlook the fact of our dependence upon other things in a cosmic drama. Chesterton uses the symbol of a trees tumbling in the wind as being "typical of the visible world moving under the violence of the invisible" (TT:69). He always assumes that there is more than meets the eye. And this is precisely the idea that frames the narrative of *The tree of life*: no matter how much the story we are watching or living seems to dominate our perception, it is not the whole story.

The tree is also symbolic of Chesterton's epistemology in that it refers to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Chesterton is obviously supportive of the search for knowledge, wisdom and truth, but highly critical of the way that lies can supplant and get confused with truth. He appreciates the human capacity for understanding, but also acknowledges the human capacity for misunderstanding. For him, knowledge and wisdom are only accessible via the humility that recognises the drama of the

individual as being a smaller component of a larger drama. As suggested by the tree of knowledge, death comes into the world by pride and egotism; life comes into the world by humility. Humility, then, is symbolised by the tree of life. To gain life, one has to give in to one's dependence upon something else; to partake of the fruit of that tree is an admission of reliance and a call for gratitude.

In particular, the tree may be taken as a symbol of salvation for Chesterton (Elkink 2001:116). He pictures the forest of Eden as the home of humanity, a place of meeting and spiritual communion (Elkink 2001:117). It suggests a place were life is able to flourish. The tree, in the form of a ladder, points to the human desire for transcendence and a connection with the Divine, but also suggests the descent undertaken by God in the event of the Incarnation (Elkink 2001:119). In the form of the cross, the tree suggests the sacrifice made by the Incarnate God-man for the sake of humanity (EM:210). It also suggests, in tune with Malick's film, that surrender conquers, because it is the way of love. If power fails, it is because it is the way of silencing the voice of the other. In *The tree of life,* the dead wood of a tree is found in common objects that surround the characters in the story: in bedside lamps, chairs, cupboards, draws, church pews, floorboards, gates, a garden table, postboxes, shovel handles, tables, toys, window frames, and cricket bats, and even in the plank of a swing and the walls of the houses. Various musical instruments shown in the film are also made out of wood: RL's guitar, Mr. O'Brien's piano, and the church organ. The dead wood from trees — symbols of something sacrificed — is always there to support and enrich life by becoming extensions of the humanity of people.

Ultimately, the tree points to the idea that revelation is a sacrament. It is not always noticeable even when it is present. In a scene that appears in the screenplay of *The tree of life*, which is only implied in the film, while looking at the tree that stands in the front yard Mrs. O'Brien explains to Jack that the tree "doesn't care how it seems to others. It just is. It puts up with storms, rain, [and] bad weather" (Malick 2007:87). She then says that a "leaf might think it is separate and alone, but all the leaves are part of the same unfolding. They start from the same seed" (Malick 2007:87). This attempt to explain the way of grace only manages to elicit a confused response in Jack. He tells his mother that it is difficult to know what to do when what she says is so quickly contradicted by the messages that he receives from his father. Mrs. O'Brien simply responds by saying that "[e]verything will be all right" (Malick 2007:88). She is not concerned with proving her point in the way that her husband would be. Instead, her hope is that her son will simply see the difference between the ways of grace and nature so that he will be able to hold the two in tension. The true revelation, that grace is sacramentally enmeshed in and beyond the stage of the human drama, will be made clear to Jack at the right time.

Revelation is that which has always been present and yet has been easily overlooked. This idea, perhaps the most important for understanding Chesterton's view on revelation, is beautifully portrayed in Chesterton's short story *The invisible man* in which a murder occurs and the body of the victim goes missing under apparently impossible circumstances. Throughout the story the presence of the culprit James Welkin is 'felt' but somehow remains unseen. Just before receiving a letter, the central female protagonist Laura Hope tells of a strange experience: "'I heard James Welkin laugh as plainly as I hear you speak,' said the girl, steadily. 'There was nobody there, for I stood just outside the shop at the corner, and could see down both streets at once'" (FB:93). The characters that experience this 'presence' without being privy to its nature assume that there can be only two explanations, namely, that the presence is that of a ghost or spiritual energy, or that they are mad. Early on in the story, Chesterton dispels the second explanation on the somewhat simplistic grounds that it is only sane people who concede the possibility that they are mad (FB:94). This implies that the second explanation is the most likely in the opinion of the characters. Even the rationalist detective Flambeau, addressing his friend Father Brown, considers the supernatural explanation most likely: "'Father,' said Flambeau, after a pause, 'upon my soul I believe it is more in your department than mine. No friend or foe has entered the house, but Smythe [the victim] is gone, as if stolen by the fairies'" (FB:105). However, it is the priest Father Brown, who argues that this 'supernatural' explanation is equally ridiculous:

> 'Have you ever noticed this — that people never answer what you say? They answer that you mean — or what they think you mean. Suppose one lady says to another in a country house, "Is there anybody staying with you?" the lady doesn't answer "Yes; the butler, the three footmen, the parlour-maid, and so on," though the parlour-maid may be in the room, or the butler behind her chair. She says: "There is *nobody* staying with us," meaning nobody of the sort you mean (FB:106).

Father Brown argues that Laura Hope's claim to have been alone just after receiving a letter cannot be true (FB:107). It is not that she has been lying out of volition, but rather out of a lack of observation or awareness. Father Brown continues: "A person can't be quite alone in a street a second before receiving a letter. She can't be quite alone in a street when she starts reading a letter just received. There must be somebody pretty near; he must be *mentally invisible*" (FB:107, emphasis added).

From this, Father Brown pulls back the curtain to reveal what was obvious and yet unseen: the postman who delivers all the letters in the story is the criminal; he, like the truth, remains 'concealed' — again, like a leaf in a forest, hidden in plain sight — because of the prejudice that regards postmen as 'nobodies'. It is the priest — the mediator of the supernatural — who ends up providing the sane, rational explanation precisely because the priest understands the relationship between the immanent and the transcendent. This *dénouement* is common in Chesterton's *Father Brown* stories:

the plump little priest is continuously out to debunk the foolish superstitions of the characters around him. Alison Milbank (2009a:46) argues that Chesterton's Father Brown stories are

> object-lessons in the fantastic, because each begins in a credible world of service flats, tea-shops or seaside resorts out of season, but then proceeds to destabilize that comfortable sense of normality by a mysterious fact that seems inexplicable in rational terms: a dead body vanishes from a room and appears in a tree; an arrow from heaven shoots someone; a dagger flies; an automaton commits a murder; the sun kills its worshipper. The reader is faced with a seemingly supernatural incursion into the real and tries to find an explanation in which both normal context and supernatural fact can be accommodated.

It is the priest Father Brown who injects common sense into the apparent incongruity between the natural and the supernatural, into the dichotomy of nature and grace. Ironically, it is the believer in miracles who ends up demonstrating that no miracle has taken place (Milbank 2009a:47). Both Clark (2006:13) and Žižek (2009d:25) observe that Chesterton's preference is always for the "prosaic explanation". However, it is clear that Chesterton's prosaic explanations are not meant to detract from the possibility of the miraculous or the mysterious in any way, but in fact highlight the very miraculousness of the prosaic. Chesterton describes the miraculous as that which is strange, but not strange enough to completely alienate. He demystifies the spiritual in much the same way that he defamiliarises the perceptible, not to discredit or abandon the spiritual absolutely, but to demonstrate that the spiritual is in fact a welcoming presence, somehow evident in the material realm of human experience. Moreover, Chesterton demonstrates through his stories, and especially through the words and actions of Father Brown, that revelation may be present to all, but recognised by only the select few who are willing or open enough to see it. It is precisely this sentiment that is carried across in *The tree of life*, which presents an obviously ordinary life as a truly extraordinary life. It seems to me that there are those like GK Chesterton and Terrence Malick who are charged with communicating that simple, yet profound insight to others.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary of chapters

I began this study by noting the sheer magnitude of Chesterton's output as well as the fact that his writings resist any kind of simple reductionism, and what was implied in these observations is that any writings on Chesterton must, almost by necessity, be incomplete. Put otherwise, one can more easily fit one's own head into the work of Chesterton than fit his work into one's head. Additionally, his work, which crosses into the territory of many genres, covers a wide range of categories: art criticism, detective fiction, economics, essays, journalism, literary criticism, novels, philosophy, plays, poetry, theology, and travel writing (Ahlquist 2006:312-314). Therefore, far from trying to cover all of his genres and subjects, the aim of this study has been to present an overview, explanation and application of his dramatology — a dramaturgical interpretive framework inferred from his work — as an approach that contributes to the general context of visual culture studies and the specific context of visual hermeneutics. To stay true to hermeneutic discourse in general, I have made no attempt to enforce any notion that this discussion is or could ever be complete. Rather, what appears in the pages of this thesis is a small contribution to an ongoing discussion, both on Chesterton's work and on visual hermeneutics and visual culture studies.

Four basic objectives were set out at the outset for the purpose of achieving the primary aim of the study. In the first place, I sought to provide a foundation to Chesterton's dramatology. To do this, I gave an overview of his philosophy via a discussion on his cosmology, epistemology and ontology in order to describe the conceptual world — the historically-affected horizon of perception — that guides Chesterton's thinking. In the second place, I sought to answer the question of what his primary dramatological task is. Here, I set out to discuss the primary goal of his interpretive process. The third objective of this study was to examine his rhetorical strategies as the elements by which he manages to present his philosophy as a unifying, but not totalising narrative. While the first two objectives address the context and the goal of Chesterton's thinking, the third objective addresses his interpretive attitude — the way in which he reads and thus a way that others may also read. The fourth and final objective was to apply knowledge gained through investigating the first three objectives of the study to the analysis of a particular visual text, namely Terrence Malick's film *The*

tree of life (2011). In the present chapter, it is my intention to highlight some of the ideas that I have covered. By doing this, I open up the way for my discussion on the contributions of this study, its limitations, as well as suggestions for further research.

Following the introduction and overview of the study in Chapter One, Part One commenced with Chapter Two, which presented the foundation of Chesterton's dramatology. This began by spotlighting the chief difficulty of engaging with Chesterton's work, specifically that it is both vast in scope and immensely rich in ideas. That said, it was noted, especially following certain recent developments in Chesterton scholarship, that it seems most appropriate to present his work as being situated within a theological framework; for, in spite of or perhaps owing to the myriad subjects he addressed, Chesterton always finds an opportunity to introduce the subject of his religion. His theological awareness is ultimately what guides and shapes his way of reading. Nevertheless, it was explained that this study does not attempt to position him within a larger theological discourse, but rather argues for the way that his theology affects his interpretive approach, as well as the way that one might understand that approach.

With this in mind, Chapter Two presented an outline of Chesterton's philosophy by addressing three aspects of his worldview — his cosmology, his epistemology and his ontology — via an exegesis of the implications of Chesterton's play *The surprise* in the light of his other writings. It was shown that these aspects, each with its own dramatic character, follow the structure of a narrative consisting of particular components: a mysterious dimension (God, divine knowledge, and the riddle of being), a revelatory, incarnate dimension (creation, human knowledge and the answer of being), an antagonistic force that disrupts the paradoxical connection between the mysterious and the revelatory (the Fall and human non-knowledge), and, finally, a drive that seeks to re-establish this paradoxical connection (re-creation, re-membering, and the romance of being). These components all point to the narrative structure that underpins Chesterton's thinking. The stories he tells affirm each of the elements of this narrative structure, always in search of recovering a clear view.

It was argued that Chesterton's cosmology is based on the idea that a particular, good, personal Creator God had written the story of the universe, but had set it free to have its own being (EM:236; HO:171, 281; MO:109). The defense of free will, then, becomes central to Chesterton's philosophy. Man is not just a victim to external forces, but a creature with agency and the power to decide. In all of this, Chesterton affirms the goodness of material existence and claims that evil is a problem of the spirit — something born out of the free will of people — more than it is a problem of materiality. He also proposes the possibility that this Creator God remains intricately and continuously involved in the processes of nature even though his original good world has been contaminated by the Fall —

that is, by the choice of mankind against the good plan of the Creator. For Chesterton, there is no higher compliment that can be paid to God than that he is a creator, making it reasonable to assume that man, as the image of God, must be one too (AU:51; EM:34). Therefore, it became clear that Chesterton sees the role of the human being as fundamentally creative. For him, "[a]rt is the signature of man;" it is the primary thing that separates man from other animals (EM:34). His dramatology may therefore also be understood primarily as a creative action; as an act of building something new and thus making a contribution to the larger drama within which it operates.

However, Chesterton does not mean this creative act to be creation *ex nihilo* or *pro nihilo,* but creation *pro bono*, for the good. He always remains committed to reconciliation, reconstruction, redemption, reform, renewal, remaking, restoration, revision and revolution (AU:324; EM:241; HO:310, 315; OS:426). Such commitments are fenced in by Chesterton's paradoxical insistence that "we must be fond of this world, even in order to change it" and that "we must be fond of another world (real or imaginary) in order to have something to change it to" (HO:310). Reform implies form: a shape or ideal by which to mould and reshape what has been deformed. This is no less true for Chesterton's dramatology, where reading is a creative act of matching a text up with a particular form or worldview. If the text deviates from his ideal, Chesterton then takes the liberty of trying to set things right. Thus, his dramatological vision is always geared towards an ethical aim. It is not merely that man has the ability to choose, but that man can choose what is good or bad (IS:260). This is what makes this "act of self-limitation" profound (HO:243). What is good is ultimately an issue of love, which is the decision to bind oneself in commitment to another. It is a decision to notice and uphold the complementary nature of divisions and differences in the created order.

In the discussion of Chesterton's epistemology, it became obvious that, in keeping with his cosmology, he prioritises consistency, coherence and integration when it comes to structuring one's understanding. It does not help, for instance, to be sceptical when such scepticism is impossible to live by (ST:170). This is to say that it is of no benefit to have a theory when one's theory is utterly remote from and useless for existence. The implication that ideas have an impact on human actions is central to Chesterton's outlook. His search for knowledge, then, is a search for a key that fits a particularly complex lock (EM:248). He sees that the world has an order to it, and therefore concludes that it must be possible to understand it. He finds that life feels like a story, implying that there must be a storyteller who composed it.

He suggests that there are four basic, unprovable assumptions in the alphabet of philosophy. The first is that the world actually exists and can be known and interpreted, the second is that the world actually matters and has meaning, the third is that there is such a thing as a continuous self that can

engage with this meaning, and the fourth, to reiterate Chesterton's perpetual love for limitations, is that human beings have the ability to choose, which is to say that they have responsibility over their thoughts and actions (HO:229; MO:92). These four pillars of philosophy all argue that knowledge is reliant upon faith and that interpretation is equally faith-bound. Chesterton does not mean this to imply that human knowledge is in any way diminished by this fact, but simply wants to emphasise that when it comes to encountering the world, it is not our own ability to control and determine reality through mere mental projection and rationalisation that ultimately matters. Rather, what becomes important is our awareness that we are part of a drama that is not of our own making. Moreover, this awareness indicates that reality is not merely a conglomeration of coincidences. Even if everything is ultimately random and meaningless, it is always perceived through a mind that makes meaning.

Still, Chesterton pays close attention to human fallibility in the arena of knowledge. While he acknowledges and applauds the human capacity for understanding, he proposes the need for a kind of humility that recognises both the limitations of our understanding and where it can go wrong. He offers that everyone is educated, but that a great number of people are educated "incorrectly" and thus are open to being further mislead (WW:147). In this, he again seems to be highly aware of the way that a person's horizon of understanding affects the way he perceives. When it comes to the unfamiliar, as that which falls outside our current framework of understanding, it is possible to mistake "what is real for what is sham" (WW:101). The purpose of the pursuit of knowledge, then, is to strive to reclaim what is true over what is false and what is real over what is perceived, because a lack of such knowledge leads to a lack of self-understanding (HO:257). The aim of Chesterton's dramatic epistemology is to understand that it is possible to come into contact with reality, however incompletely, as it truly is. However, when coming into contact with reality, man and his epistemological prowess still remain secondary to and dependant upon the drama in which they occur. No man is an island, even when he perceives himself to be in isolation (VA).

Having covered the foundations of Chesterton's epistemology, Chapter Two then outlined his ontology. It was clear at the outset of the chapter that Chesterton does not present his worldview in as systematic a way as I have done, but there are clues and statements that can be drawn upon in order to present a cohesive picture. It became certain that Chesterton contends that thinking has to do with "connecting things" only because he holds very strongly to the notion that things are already somehow connected (HO:238). Being itself is a drama that, as I proposed, may be contemplated via three considerations. In the first place, being may be regarded as a riddle. This points to the idea that there is a mystery at the core of being that is not necessarily intelligible. And yet, the presence of this mystery in and beyond all things is what makes other things intelligible. Solitary facts are therefore

not sufficient for bringing intelligibility about (CQ:32; HO:231). Rather, it is mystery that brings about clarity (HO:231). For Chesterton, the world that we inhabit is the "the best of all impossible worlds"(CD:290). Its greatest "merit is not that it is orderly and explicable" but "that it is wild and utterly unexplained" (CD:290). This awareness of mystery gives rise to the idea of gratitude that is at the heart of Chesterton's attitude to things. Life is a gift, and if any answer to being might be discerned, that too would be a gift (HO:258). This is discerned by gratitude, which is given life by humility. Thus, regarding Chesterton's interpretive understanding, the aim is not exegetical dominance over the hermeneutical landscape, but rather interpretive modesty within a space of intersubjective possibilities. However, this modesty ought not to be confused with doubt and uncertainty. Rather, it is a means for holding certainty lightly, in faith and in community. It does not mean that truth is relative in any pejorative, solipsistic sense, but rather that truth is relational; it is discovered in a network of dramatic relationships.

I pointed out, when shifting focus from the riddle to the answer of being that "[b]eing is both mysterious and revelatory in character" (Reyburn 2011:55). Being, for Chesterton, is ultimately "secondary and dependant" (ST:158). It does not seem to him that existence is sufficiently self-sufficient to go on existing without any kind of divine assistance (ST:158). Being is therefore both separate and interconnected, not just in the material realm, but in the metaphysical realm as well. It is disclosed to itself as a paradoxical drama by means of the tool of language. For Chesterton, reality and the recognition of reality are "two agencies at work," and their meeting is "a kind of marriage" (ST:169). This is to say that perception and reality are impossible to disconnect from each other. Even if one's perception ends up being incorrect, that incorrect perception would still be tied to the world that is being perceived.

While there is clearly something like an objective world, Chesterton uses terms like *objectivity* and *subjectivity* in such as way as to avoid creating a clear Cartesian dichotomy between mind and matter. The mind is not merely "servile to his environment," nor is it purely creative (ST:139). Chesterton argues that (interpretive) understanding — the answer to the riddle of being — takes place from within and alongside a world (EM:9). As Chapter Two concluded, it was put forward that there is an innate romance in being that compels us to contemplate the dance between the riddle and the answer of being, and thus between mystery and revelation. Romance, a word with all "the mystery and ancient meaning of Rome" (HO:212), finds hospitality both in the "strange" and in the "secure" (HO:213). It is that which compels the imagination towards deeper wonderment. Chesterton's dramatic philosophy, which contemplates the intricate connections and disconnections of things, reveals that the interpretive experience is never static. The way that we interpret, therefore, is less akin to dissecting a corpse than it is to participating in a play. As Chapter Two concluded, it was

noted that this play is metareferential; that is, for Chesterton, it is an issue of becoming aware of one's place within a story that is not of one's own making.

A central aim in participating in this play was argued in Chapter Three. There it was offered that there is a single idea that acts as Chesterton's point of departure and return, informing and shaping everything that he considers in his work without prescribing any kind of reductionism. It is the idea of the "dignity of man" (AU:239; EM:52-53; HO:94, 298; ST:36, 177; WW:15). Chesterton sees his own era, and would probably then see the age in which we live today, as one "in which we must defend human dignity" (MO:74). For him, human dignity is of greater importance than any other subject, discourse or argument. Everything he writes is therefore geared towards introducing and maintaining this ideal, which strives to find what is "good for everybody" (Ahlquist 2006:272).

Chapter Three proposed that the ideal of human dignity is found in various expressions of the paradox of the Incarnation, which sees the "common conscience of sane people" as something that is simultaneously "the voice of God" and "the voice of Man" (MO:120). The paradox of the Incarnation may be regarded as the primary key to unlocking Chesterton's dramatology by means of an understanding of three dimensions of human dignity that should be defended: first, the common man, then common sense, and finally democracy. It was noticed that Chesterton's interpretive lens is focused away from the pride of the privileged aristocracy and towards the common man. The fact that he is more supportive of orthodoxy than of heresy is one example of this focus. However, while he supports the dignity of the common man, he recognises that the masses do go wrong, often because they follow the lead of the aristocracy. To follow the thin, totalising philosophies of Darwin, Freud, Nietzsche and Marx, for example, is tantamount to losing our humanity. For this reason, it may be suggested that Chesterton did not neglect the importance of leadership. For him, those in power ought to serve those who have none.

With regard to his defense of common sense, Chesterton writes that "the most practical and important thing about a man is his view of the universe" (HO:41). Ideas have consequences, he notices, and ultimately words are deeds. He even contends that "[p]hilosophy is always present in a work of art" (in Ahlquist 2006:61). At the heart of Chesterton's dramatology — what I believe to be a valuable contribution to hermeneutic discourse in general — is human attitude and character. Chesterton is not just interested in getting the facts right, as if interpretation were merely concerned with literal correctness, but with reading in the right manner. The facts are important, and interpretive accuracy is to be applauded, but these are not to be deemed more important than a sense of wonder at a world filled with wonders (HO:212). Thus he observes that "[t]he world will never starve for want of wonders; but only for want of wonder" (TT:7). This is not to say, however,

that he promotes blind credulity; in fact, his greatest critique of sceptics is that they are "too credulous" (HO:353). In the absence of a definite ideal with a definite sense of limitations, the sceptic is more easily taken in by weaker ideas. Even Žižek (2009c:298) seems to agree with this idea when he writes, "Chesterton was right: if we do not believe in God, we are ready to believe in anything. Belief in God is a constitutive exception which enables us to assert the factual rationality of the universe". Chesterton is always looking for the ways that "doctrine and design" illuminate the "forest" of reality (HO:362). Common sense, in his view, should aim towards "altering the human soul" to comply with reality, rather than trying to change that reality in order "to fit the human soul" (WW:80). I have taken this idea as central to the larger metareferential character of Chesterton's dramatology, which is not just to illuminate the meaning of a text, but to situate the self within the larger theodrama of creation and redemption.

One aspect of this theodrama is the place of the individual within a specific historical context. This is an idea that is frequently addressed in Chesterton's writings. Man is a historical being, deeply influenced in his outlook by temporal constraints. This idea is fundamental to Chesterton's defense of democracy, which is coupled with his defenses of the common man and common sense. Democracy is not merely a political concept, although it does affect one's politics, but is a form of interrogating what it means to participate in the things common to man. In other words, Chesterton's democracy is more akin to a religious conviction than to a political ideology (Oddie 2008:191). It affirms that, despite many trivial differences, man remains the image of God . Therefore, truth should always be something possessed by the public and not just the elite. In this way, democracy places the value of individual humans and their activities over intellectual systems, and claims that reality has more unity in it than any representational schema may conclude.

The "most terribly important things [should] be left to ordinary men themselves" (HO:250). This is the primary way that Chesterton undermines the hegemony of a totalising schema: he deflects power to those who have none so that they may continue to be preoccupied with the common domestic activities of ordinary life. He recognises that when the state or any other institution takes charge over such matters, the common man always ends up suffering. This is not to say, however, that such things as reality and representation in the life of the common man should not be discussed. In fact, he proposes that the "most dangerous assumptions are [always] the ones we don't discuss" (in Clarke 2006:176). Common sense, as manifested in a democratic ethos, does not mean that there is such a thing as the absence of a need for interpretation. Rather, it means that questioning our original assumptions is vital to the interpretive task, and this includes the importance of questioning and doubting our doubts. For Chesterton, there is always a social dimension to the drama of the individual. Democracy, therefore, is permanently connected with tradition. Tradition

brings the individual into conversation with those who are no longer present. It is that which gives a voice even to the dead.

Towards the end of Chapter Three, I discussed the importance of fairytales for understanding Chesterton's thinking. Fairytales use fictional stories to underscore truths that transcend the merely factual dimension of human perception. They point to ideals and values that are common to all people, and especially provide insight into the human need both for something settled and for something strange; for a sense of being at home and yet also a feeling of being on an adventure. This tension, between fiction and fact, and between the settled and the strange, paved the way for the discussion in Chapter Four, which centered on what I called the elements of Chesterton's dramatology. It was suggested, in line with Kenner (1948:24-25) and Milbank (2009a), that Chesterton's primary tools for driving his thinking towards reconciliation, reform and revolution are analogy, paradox and defamiliarisation. It was stressed, in keeping with the defense of human dignity presented in Chapter Three, that the paradox of the Incarnation anchors Chesterton's use of these devices. Analogy points to the idea that language is a means by which reality is accessed, but is not necessarily the reality itself. It is a window, but not the view. It was shown that analogy ruptures dichotomies in logic and rationalisations by self-critically exposing its own limitations. As a device by which one finds "agreement between agreement and disagreement" (AU:332), it affirms both difference and sameness, and is therefore paradoxical in character.

Paradox, perhaps the device for which Chesterton is best known, is a means by which the mind is kept lively, always questioning and engaged in the drama that it participates in. As something formed around Chesterton's emphasis on the Incarnation, paradox points beyond the tensions that it contains to a truth that language cannot hold. It resists reduction or conflation and therefore, together with its emphasis on the dignity of the common man, also resists the totalisation of metanarrative. If one does not want "dilution" but the exuberant power of things at their "full strength," then the conviction of Chesterton provides a clear answer: in a contest between two "furious" truths that seem to contradict, one ought to be able to keep them both and keep them both furious (HO:299). Paradox is an event of language that creates startling contrasts, forcing the individual to always rethink his assumptions in the light of the picture before him. For Chesterton, life is more a picture with shades of variation and specificity than a pattern of mindless repetitions. However, he notices that the human tendency is to take the picture and conform it to a pattern of the mind, thus reducing life to something mechanical and merely theoretical. Therefore, what is needed, which is evident in both analogy and paradox, is a process of defamiliarisation by which perception is unsettled and destabilised. The primary function of this defamiliarisation is to leave

room for the individual to once again receive what is being perceived as a gift. As always, Chesterton prioritises an interpretive lens that leaves room for wonder.

In Chapters Five and Six, I then offered an application of Chesterton's dramatology to Terrence Malick's *The tree of life*. This was done through a discussion of the two angles of his stereoscopic, incarnational vision: first by analysing the film through the lens of mystery, and then by analysing it through the lens of revelation. With mystery and revelation kept in tension, and with both guided towards recovery via the romance of re-membering, it was recognised that — as Chesterton notes of the book of *Job* —perception concerns the link between appearance and reality. Therefore, one ought to always be rethinking one's assumptions in the light of new discoveries. Mystery compels one to consider how what one does not know can inform and shape one's perception, and revelation compels one to examine things along the lines of particular perceptual and physical limitations. Interpretive understanding, therefore, is always presented as a dance between the unknown and the known, the invisible and the visible.

As Chesterton demonstrates by constantly revisiting old ideas through new metaphors, his dramatology may be considered revolutionary. He suggests that "[t]he corruption in things is not only the best argument for being progressive; it is also the only argument against being conservative" (HO:320). The conservative tries to maintain things by leaving them alone. But this is hermeneutically detrimental, since by leaving "things alone you leave [them] to a torrent of change. If you leave a white post alone it will soon be a black post. If you want it to be white you must always be painting it again; that is you must always be having a revolution" (HO:320). This becomes a principle that does not only apply to "inanimate things" but to "all human things" (HO:320). It is a general principle that I take to hold true for Chesterton's dramatology: he invites his readers to look at old things and old ideas only because it is the old ideas that are really new.

7.2 Contribution of the study

As noted in Chapter One, this study has been formulated to contribute to two particular arenas of discourse, namely scholarship on the work of GK Chesterton and scholarship for the discipline of visual culture studies. Regarding this study's contribution to Chesterton scholarship, it has aimed to provide a map of sorts by which Chesterton's dramatology may be navigated. For obvious reasons, many others have remarked upon the fact that Chesterton has a unique and important way of seeing things, but, to date, most works that deal directly with Chesterton's interpretive lens outside of his

biographical context deal with it thematically, as in the work of Ahlquist (2006), Clark (2009) and Schall (2000). However, following the lead of such scholars as Kenner (1948), Milbank (2009a), Nichols (2009) and Wood (2011), I have tried to step slightly beyond this purely thematic approach by presenting a uniquely structured way of understanding the dramatic shape of that interpretive lens. This is not to say that I have abandoned the thematic approach completely in this thesis, as is especially noticeable in the analysis of *Tree of life* in Chapters Five and Six. Rather, I have simply tried to sketch a framework or context by which the themes of Chesterton's writings may be navigated in terms of his articulations around his own interpretive experiences. I do not doubt that another scholar would have taken a different approach and may have even arrived at slightly different conclusions, but I think that the present study has at least provided valid justifications for viewing Chesterton's interpretive lens in this way, especially through an interrogation of the foundation, task, elements and application of his dramatology.

By arguing the shape of Chesterton's dramatology in the way that I have, I have offered that Chesterton's philosophical stance is not only unique on a propositional level, but offers insights into a hermeneutic experience that moves beyond the perspectival Cartesian gaze. I have proposed that his writings can and do provide illumination into the way that interpretation actually functions, not as a narrow objectivism, but as a participatory activity. While I have clearly drawn upon the work of other scholars to guide my own research, my contention that Chesterton's dramatological approach provides insights into (visual) hermeneutics in general is my primary contribution to Chesterton scholarship. In particular, as just mentioned, I have suggested that Chesterton's dramatology resists totalisation by stressing the importance of the common man — the individual — and by offering that attitude precedes doctrine and thus also methodology. In other words, inasmuch as dramatology is concerned with dogmas, truth claims and propositions, it is primarily concerned with a deeper camaraderie in the dramatic nature of human relationships with the world and with each other.

Even though I have kept biographical detail at a distance throughout this study, two such details do help to show the relevance of such a claim. Firstly, there is the fact of Chesterton's deep friendship with his intellectual opponents, George Bernard Shaw and HG Wells. While differing significantly from these two men on an ideological front, their friendship was so full of deep care and admiration precisely because Chesterton prioritised their personhood over his own dogmas. The fact that Chesterton's hospitality was reciprocated by these men is a further confirmation of the importance of attitude and intellectual humility over dogma and intellectual arrogance. Then, secondly, the importance of this camaraderie is emphasised by Cosmo Hamilton's account of his own experience of debating against Chesterton. He writes:

> To hear Chesterton's howl of joy ... to see him double himself up in agony of laughter at my personal insults, to watch the effect of his sportsmanship on a shocked audience who were won to mirth by his intense and pea-hen-like quarks of joy was a sight and sound for the gods ... and I carried away from that room a respect and admiration for this tomboy among dictionaries, this philosophical Peter Pan, this humorous Dr Johnson, this kindly and gallant cherub, this profound student and wise master which has grown ever since ... It was monstrous, gigantic, amazing, deadly, delicious. Nothing like it has ever been done before or will ever be seen, heard and felt like it again (in Yancey 2001:54-55)

The complementary nature of this quotation, while highlighting the way that Chesterton's joy dismantled the potency of a volley of insults, also points to a possible shortcoming in this study that I am highly aware of, namely that it is not particularly critical of Chesterton. However, this is only because my intention has not been to provide a criticism. Instead, I have desired only to look at his way of seeing. Throughout the study, I have chosen to prioritise Chesterton's opinions over and above those of others in accordance with the Gadamerian call for a suppression of hermeneutic prejudice. I have thus focused more on finding ways to assume the validity of his opinions than on finding ways to discredit them. This, however, has not been to suggest in any way that he is an utterly flawless thinker. Such an assumption, more hagiographical than hermeneutic, would sound unjustifiable even to Chesterton.

Then, regarding the contribution of this thesis to the field of visual culture studies, its primary function of has been to add to discourse around visual hermeneutics. To date, I am the only scholar who has suggested that Chesterton's work, and especially his way of seeing, may be helpful for engaging with contemporary images and representations in visual culture studies. And while I have already contributed some work to presenting the relevance of Chesterton's work to this field, this thesis outlines a larger context for understanding Chesterton's interpretive perception. One application of Chesterton's dramatology was offered by bringing it into conversation with a particular visual text: Malick's *The tree of life* (2011). In addition, this study suggests that the work of this profound British journalist, who is not an intellectual elitist, may also be relevant to the field especially in that it encourages the reader to look at old things in new ways in the hope that they will be seen as if for the first time (SW:13).

7.3 Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research

It is fitting that this study must own up to its limitations, especially following Chesterton's admission of his own love for "edges; and the boundary-line that brings one thing sharply against another" (AU:41). While the aim of this study — to present an overview and explanation of Chesterton's dramatology for the context of visual culture studies and visual hermeneutics — has been achieved with regard to a specific application, a few additional avenues regarding Chesterton's interpretive practice have been left unexplored. This is not surprising considering the primary aim of hermeneutics, which is to contribute to a conversation rather than to offer a way to end discussion. One avenue left unexplored in this study is noticed in the fact that it has not compared Chesterton's close readings of the work of other writers — like Austen, Browning, Chaucer, Dickens, and Shakespeare, among others — with their own work or with the work of other commentators on their work. Such study, I believe, while more appropriate for the hermeneutics of literature criticism, would provide further valuable insights into his dramatology, especially on a metatheoretical level; it would also, perhaps, open up new ways of broadening and deepening an understanding the applicability of Chesterton's work to visual hermeneutics.

Then, as was disclosed even in my preliminary literature study, it became clear that Chesterton's dramatology shows some similarities with the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, especially in the way that he insists upon the different functions of scientific research and frameworks of understanding within the human sciences. It has not been my aim to compare their interpretive approaches in this study, although a few of the footnotes and side comments that I have offered do make this link apparent. Still, I do believe that further comparison and study would prove insightful for grappling with the complementary outlooks of both of these intellectual giants. While coming out of quite different contexts, and despite writing for vastly different purposes, somehow, as far as I can tell for now, their interpretive practices seem to overlap more than they diverge. It should follow, then, that it may also be worth exploring Chesterton's dramatology in comparison with and in contrast to other hermeneutic philosophies and practices. Certainly, as in the case of Gadamer, Chesterton strives for interpretive truth beyond method, and even allows for the fact that reading is less an act of capturing absolutes than it is an act of participating in a drama.

Through this research, I have also discovered a link between Chesterton's thoughts on the materiality of existence and the media theory of McLuhan that further research could elaborate upon. It may be especially worthwhile studying the similarities and differences in their outlooks on account of the fact that McLuhan was deeply influenced by the work of Chesterton and agreed with the Thomist ontology that is foundational to his thinking. Finally, regarding Chesterton's applicability to visual hermeneutics in general, I have intimated from the start that this is only the

start. In other contexts, I have already demonstrated that Chesterton's dramatology is appropriate for other expressions of visual culture (Reyburn 2011; 2012). In my mind, this research can definitely be both deepened and expanded. I am absolutely certain that there is much more that can still be said about the importance of Chesterton's work for our present historical horizon of understanding, and it will take a fair amount of violent restraint from friends and family to prevent me from taking some of the ideas explored in this study into new territory.

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