

## A window onto Chesterton's way of writing

By Duncan Reyburn

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“Writing is learned by imitation. If anyone asked me how I learned to write, I'd say I learned by reading the men and women who were doing the kind of writing I wanted to do and trying to figure out how they did it.”—William Zinsser.<sup>1</sup>

“In matters of truth the fact that you don't want to publish something is, nine times out of ten, a proof that you ought to publish it.” —G.K. Chesterton<sup>2</sup>

In his biography on Chesterton, the poet and journalist, William Richard Titterton (1876-1963) noted of his friend that he was always busy writing, and if he was writing, then he was drawing. He would write on any piece of paper he could find, and sometimes even wrote or drew on surfaces not ordinarily reserved for that purpose.<sup>3</sup> Writing was not only his livelihood but, in a manner of speaking, his life. His sheer output as a writer is a testament to this. And, of course, Chesterton was not just a writer but an editor too. As the truism goes, *writing is editing*.

Chesterton not only edited his own work but also the work of others, especially for his own publication, *G. K.'s Weekly*. He attended, in this way, not only to the art of writing but also to the craft. His concern was not just with getting ideas out, but with getting them across in the best way possible. This is at least one of the reasons why Chesterton wrote so well: he had an extraordinary ability to marry form and content. His work concerned the truth as he saw it in his own time, yet remains persuasive today because it was also about conveying the relevance and resonance of the truth through elegant wordsmithing.

When I first began reading Chesterton's work nearly two decades ago, I often wondered not just about *what* he had written, but also *how* he had come to write what he had written. Confronted with such a towering genius—a man whose writings were always so enlivening, inspiring, and perceptive—I could not help but become interested in his thought-

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<sup>1</sup> William K. Zinsser, *On Writing Well* (Collins: New York, 2012), p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *A Miscellany of Men* (Methuen and Company: London, 1912), p.23.

<sup>3</sup> W. R. Titterton, *G. K. Chesterton: A Portrait* (Douglas Organ: London, 1936), pp.13, 16 & 80.

processes and perceptions, as well as in how those might have been reflected in his creative process.

One can hardly read Chesterton without considering the man behind the words, as is evidenced most obviously by the fact that most books published on Chesterton have a strong leaning towards biography. And similarly, a writer can hardly read Chesterton as a writer without also giving some attention to the question of how he wrote. Given my own curiosity about Chesterton's craft, it was therefore particularly meaningful for me to have the opportunity to spend some time, towards the end of 2014, exploring the Chesterton Library at the Oxford Oratory, as well as perusing many of Chesterton's notebooks and manuscripts in the British Library in London.<sup>4</sup>

During that time, I was working on my book on Chesterton's unique way of seeing the world—what I called “the drama of meaning,” as well as “Chesterton's hermeneutic.”<sup>5</sup> I was primarily driven by the old hermeneutical question of the conditions for interpretive understanding, at least as we find them in Chesterton's many works. However, in the process of researching more philosophical and abstract of matters pertaining to Chestertonian cosmology and ontology, I also wanted to get a sense of how Chesterton interacted with his own work; how he worked as a writer and made decisions about articulating himself. When it came to editing, for instance, what changes did he make to previous drafts? How extensive were the changes? And could we, fellow sojourners and writers, extrapolate some core principles about the craft of writing from looking at how this great man approached making changes to his own work? In short, I began to ask this question: What can Chesterton teach us about writing?

Obviously, we can tell a lot about Chesterton's writing simply by reading his work. We can look at his style, rhetoric, and attention to structure, for example. We can notice when his writing is particularly good, and perhaps where it might fall slightly flat.<sup>6</sup> These are important issues in their own way, and can certainly be kept in mind when analyzing his work. Discerning Chesterton's approach to writing becomes, in metaphorical terms, a bit like reverse engineering; we start with what we see and infer what led up to it. While this is part of the present exploration, my focus here is on a much simpler and perhaps more prosaic issue, namely Chesterton's writing process and editorial method. I am, in other words, more fascinated here with the actual procedure that Chesterton adopted as he saw his work

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<sup>4</sup> The vast collection of Chesterton's literary paraphernalia that is housed at the British Library was first established by his father, Edward Chesterton. This was then organised and looked after by his secretary and literary executor, Dorothy Collins, from her appointment in 1926 until her death in 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Duncan Reyburn, *Seeing Things as They Are: G. K. Chesterton and the Drama of Meaning* (Cascade Books: Eugene, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> See David Mills. *Why was Chesterton such a good writer?* (2017), <https://www.chesterton.org/shop/chestertons-writing-methods/>

through to its final published state. This, at least, is something that we can tell from the archive of Chesterton's literary paraphernalia.

We know, to begin with, that Chesterton always made copious notes before beginning to write. Sometimes his notes approximated a kind of shorthand, although often he would write in more detail even at the beginning of the process.<sup>7</sup> Towards the beginning of his career, his manuscripts were entirely handwritten and were then typed out. Later on, given the pressures of fame, travel, and the usual busyness of life, it seems he relied much more heavily on his secretaries, especially, towards on the end of his life, Dorothy Collins.

He would often dictate to his secretaries much of what would end up in print. It seems that Chesterton found it fairly easy to communicate not just on a page but also in speech, and indeed the difference between his speaking voice and his writing voice seems to have been rather small. It is noticeable from the few recordings that we do have of Chesterton speaking, that his spoken language and written language are very similar in style, and it was even noted by his contemporaries, as we should perhaps expect, that he wrote in the same way as he spoke. Maisie Ward notes, for instance, that Chesterton was an extravert,<sup>8</sup> and Dudley Barker references Cecil Chesterton's description of Chesterton's eagerness to externalise his ideas in conversation.<sup>9</sup>

However, one ought not to think that writing was as simple as that for Chesterton, even if he clearly liked to throw ideas into the world without being overly careful in the act.<sup>10</sup> As any writer will know, there is a difference between what the reader sees and what the writer goes through to ensure that the reader sees anything at all; and we might get some sense of this difference, if only incompletely, by looking behind the scenes. In doing so, one might also ask another question: When Chesterton made changes to a draft, what did he change and why might have changed it?

To find an answer to this question, my own method was fairly simple. Over the course of a week, from 8 to 12 December 2014, working almost non-stop, and then rereading my notes during lonely evenings in a hotel room, I reviewed several of Chesterton's manuscripts from the British Library, including the final typed manuscripts that were sent to the publisher, as well as the corrected printer's proofs. I compared these manuscripts and proofs in as much detail as I was able to, always looking for patterns that

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<sup>7</sup> Some examples of this can be found in G. K. Chesterton, *Collected Works: The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton, Volume 14: Short Stories, Fairy Tales, Mystery Stories, Illustrations* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> Maisie Ward, *Return to Chesterton* (Sheed and Ward: London, 1952), p.xvii.

<sup>9</sup> Dudley Barker, *G. K. Chesterton*, (Stein and Day: New York, 1973), p.135.

<sup>10</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (1905, rpt. John Lane Company: New York, 1919), p.244.

would hint at an underlying principle.<sup>11</sup> During this time, I also had a rather nasty cold, so my method included trying to disturb the other readers in the manuscript room as little as possible with sniffs and nose-blows.

For the sake of simplicity and owing to time constraints, I focused primarily on the final stages of Chesterton's writing process, which included: (1) the final draft of the manuscript, which was put together usually by Frances Chesterton or one of Chesterton's secretaries; (2) corrections to the final draft, usually by Chesterton himself, either in his own handwritten script<sup>12</sup> or typed up using a typewriter and stuck onto the side of the final manuscript; (3) the bound printer's proof; and (4) corrections by Chesterton to the proof copy, again usually either in his own hand or typed up and stuck onto the side of the final manuscript. Occasionally, I would discover changes to changes already made at, say, the manuscript stage, which indicates at the very least that Chesterton demonstrated a continuous commitment to perfecting what he had written.

That Chesterton would revisit his manuscripts repeatedly was something of a comfort to me, given how aware I am of the more tedious and difficult aspects of the process of writing. I have discovered, also in coaching students on writing, that when writing seems difficult, it is because it really is difficult. Even a master like Chesterton shows us that great effort is always required of us if we want to ensure that we say what needs to be said in the best way possible. In his book *Soul Survivor*, Philip Yancey articulates something akin to despair on his apparent discovery that Chesterton wrote quite easily and gave very little attention to reworking his projects.<sup>13</sup> Well, Yancey need not despair. Another writer's aphorism applies to Chesterton as much as it does to the rest of us: *writing is rewriting*. While writing may be easier for some than for others, and certainly it was not a chore for Chesterton, challenges will nevertheless always be a component of the process.

Not all of what I discovered from exploring Chesterton's editing process pertained to the actual crafting of writing, such as the fact that he wrote the dedication, "To Dorothy Collins ..." only after receiving the printer's proof of his *St. Thomas Aquinas* (1933), or that

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<sup>11</sup> It is, unfortunately, rather difficult to get to Chesterton's manuscripts, but one can get a sense of the transition from manuscript to draft by comparing Chesterton's draft essay, "I Told You So" with the more polished product here: <http://exhibits.lib.byu.edu/literaryworlds/chesterton.html>

<sup>12</sup> Chesterton would write using various media and in a range of colours. In the draft of *Dickens*, he made editing changes to the typed manuscript mostly in black ink, sometimes a dark blue ink, lead pencil, coloured pencil (blue, purple, black, and even red). In fact, the manuscript of *Dickens* shows so many variations of paper as well as in handwritten corrections that it would be difficult to tell at a glance if we were in fact looking at a single work of literature. See G. K. Chesterton, *Dickens: A Critical Study, Draft and Printer's Proofs*, British Library Manuscript 73248 A. It is not without significance that many of Chesterton's drawings reflect this same approach: constant revisions and redrawn lines reveal a consciousness contented with altering what had been put down.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Yancey, *Soul Survivor*. (Hodder & Stoughton: London, 2001), unpaginated ebook.

his “Introductory Note” to that same book was not included in the original draft.<sup>14</sup> I found that Chesterton had made more than a few corrections to words that had been typed incorrectly. Some such corrections were likely needed only because the typist had misread Chesterton’s handwriting. Thus, for example, since Chesterton’s handwritten “r” looks a bit like an “n” we find the word “nationalist” where Chesterton had originally written “rationalist.”<sup>15</sup> Details like these may be interesting in their own way, but they are not my focus in what follows.

I begin with the most mundane of observations, which somewhat addresses the fact that many have criticized Chesterton for getting his facts wrong. Chesterton was often somewhat dismissive of this criticism since he felt quite strongly that trifling facts were not the primary concern of the sort of work he was doing or the arguments he was presenting.

Still, I discovered that even if it was never his primary concern, he paid rather close attention to getting his facts right wherever possible. We should remember, of course, that he lived in an age in which information was not nearly as readily and easily accessible as it is now in an age of digital archives. In Chesterton’s *St. Thomas Aquinas*, for example, he makes frequent, albeit minor, editorial changes to factual errors. For example, he corrects the date of St. Thomas’s birth from 1227 to 1226, and replaces a general description, “Some little time afterwards,” with a more exact description, “In 1274, when Aquinas was nearly fifty ...”<sup>16</sup>

A quirkier example of a change of date is found in the draft of *Robert Louis Stevenson*, where, at one point, Chesterton had simply written: “18\_\_” (It must have happened in the 1800s, after all, because it was the only century Steven lived in). Frances Chesterton had later added the actual date: “1850.”<sup>17</sup> Another example of fact-correction is found in the proof of *Dickens*, where Chesterton corrects “Lord Brabourne” to “Lord Braybrook.”<sup>18</sup> In undertaking my research, I noticed that *The Everlasting Man*, a book that is Chesterton’s most complex in terms of its argument and reliance upon anthropological research, has more editorial changes than any of the other books I had the privilege to view, especially along the lines of ensuring factual correctness. So there, for example, “Kikuama”

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<sup>14</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *St. Thomas Aquinas, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*. British Library Manuscript, 73265 A-E.

<sup>15</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Dickens: A Critical Study, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*, British Library Manuscript 73248 A.

<sup>16</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *St. Thomas Aquinas, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*. British Library Manuscript, 73244 AE. A similar example of fact correction is found in the original draft of *Dickens: A Critical Study*, British Library Manuscript, 73248 A, in which the date that Dickens sailed for America is changed from 1871 to 1842. Sometimes, naturally, Chesterton was not the one to correct facts, as we find when Frances Chesterton corrects one date in Dickens, and the editor of *Robert Browning* corrects six quotation errors of Browning’s poetry by Chesterton. See G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*. British Library Manuscript, 73244 D.

<sup>17</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*. 73260 A-B.

<sup>18</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Dickens: A Critical Study, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*, British Library Manuscript 73248 A.

is removed and replaced with “Atuhocan,” a “horrible image” becomes a “phallic image,” the “sacred bull” is replaced by a “sacred monkey,” and what is “certain” becomes the merely “probable.”<sup>19</sup> While you may have your own views on whether such changes are absolutely necessary, in my view the more accurate information does improve the text.

On looking for further examples of how Chesterton aimed to create precision communication, we discover something else regarding his famously formidable memory. Many of Chesterton’s apparent factual errors are the result of only slight misrememberings of specific details. This is especially evident in many of Chesterton’s misquotations of Robert Browning’s poetry. Just one example of this is necessary, although others could have been provided. In the printer’s proof, we find that Chesterton has written the following:

Each life, unfulfilled, you see;  
It still hangs patchy and scrappy  
We haven’t sighed deep, laughed free,  
Starved, feasted, despaired,—been happy.<sup>20</sup>

He then corrects this to match Browning’s original poem:

Each life unfulfilled, you see;  
It hangs still, patchy and scrappy:  
We have not sighed deep, laughed free,  
Starved, feasted, despaired,—been happy.<sup>21</sup>

When the slightness of these changes is observed, anyone may wish to trade their memory with Chesterton’s. Similarly, we find other changes: “Now offers a mat to save bear feet” becomes “Now offered as a mat to save bear feet.”<sup>22</sup> Perhaps more pronounced, however, is the difference between “And find a poor devil at the end of his cares / At the foot of your rotten-planked rat-riddled stairs” and “And find a poor devil has ended his cares / At the food of your rotten-rugged rat-riddled stairs.”<sup>23</sup> There is evidence that Chesterton’s editor raised questions concerning the accuracy of Chesterton’s transcription of six poems, which shows that there was at least some improvement to the original manuscript in this regard.

As such examples show, and as is confirmed by his other writings, Chesterton’s mode of thinking was clearly one that preferred getting the big picture right before attending to the details. The details were always secondary to and supportive of a larger discussion,

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<sup>19</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*. British Library Manuscript 732568 A-B.

<sup>20</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*. British Library Manuscript, 73244 D.

<sup>21</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*. British Library Manuscript, 73244 D.

<sup>22</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*. British Library Manuscript, 73244 D.

<sup>23</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*. British Library Manuscript, 73244 D.

not the point of the discussion. Attending to the details was therefore often left for the later stages of his process. Thus, Chesterton says: “The writer knows he has plenty of elbow room, that he will have almost endless space for explanation and correction.”<sup>24</sup> This is an idea uttered towards the very end of his life and career, and clearly stems from more than a little experience.

Nevertheless, if Chesterton may have not always managed to get his facts right since he preferred insight over accuracy, he still aimed for clarity in his communication. In the printer's proof of *The Everlasting Man*, for example, his corrections are frequently found to be in keeping with an intention to be more precise in his meaning. In the second draft of that book, with editing changes evident, he refers to “modern critics of Christianity,” but then, recognizing that the trend is not entirely universal, changes this to “popular critics of Christianity.”<sup>25</sup> The trend in moving from the larger picture towards the details is therefore confirmed not only in his fact checking but also in his refinement of language. The change is slight, to be sure, but not insignificant.

Later on, in the same proof, after having suggested that it is really “from afar” that we see the “Church of Christ” more clearly, he originally wrote the following: “But this ... proposition requires serious *proof*, and I should here set myself to *prove* it.”<sup>26</sup> This very strong assertion is softened later to be more argumentatively compelling: “But this ... proposition requires serious *discussion*, and I should here set myself to *discuss* it.”<sup>27</sup> In summary of the above, therefore, we find an editing principle in favor of better communication, especially regarding improving the accuracy of information, his choice of words, and limiting generalizations.

Along the lines of better conveying an idea, one finds in Chesterton's process examples of how a shorter passage or phrase is replaced by a longer one, or, sometimes, an entire paragraph might be added, as we find, for instance in the following, which did not appear in the proof of *The Resurrection of Rome*—a book that happens to contain extensive corrections and alterations by Chesterton:

Perhaps a truly great thing always tries to grow small; and there is hidden here a mystery of microscopic ambition. For though the Magnificat magnifies the Lord, it is only just after the Lord has minimised Himself. And there is here a mansion within a mansion, a new Bethlehem

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<sup>24</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Illustrated London News* (November 2, 1935).

<sup>25</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man, Draft and Printer's Proofs*. British Library Manuscript 732568 B.

<sup>26</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man, Draft and Printer's Proofs*. British Library Manuscript 732568 B, my emphasis.

<sup>27</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man, Draft and Printer's Proofs*. British Library Manuscript 732568 B, my emphasis.

or House of Bread, and in the smallest of the Tabernacles something yet more little than a child<sup>28</sup>

However, more often, Chesterton would edit with a view to shortening what he had said. This would mean either truncating a passage. An example of this is found in the draft of *Robert Louis Stevenson*. There we find the sentence, "For these people, all the light of life was in the foreground; there was nothing in the background but an abyss." This is followed by a passage that does not appear in the final edition:

Indeed even the fripperies that were paraded in front had much of this character, as of a rather fantastic funeral. The necktie seemed to be knotted like the noose of the hangman to indicate that they all wished to hang themselves on lampposts; and if they boasted of drinking green wine, it was partly because it looked like green poison. In a famous phrase out of all that folly, they did not seem to object to poisons, if they were the poisons from Paris. They were rather nihilists than atheists; for there is a difference between worshipping nothing and worshipping Nothing.<sup>29</sup>

In the final edition of *Robert Louis Stevenson*, all of this is replaced, and in the process both clarified and simplified, by the following: "They were rather nihilists than atheists; for there is a difference between worshipping Nothing and not worshipping anything."<sup>30</sup> As the reader can see, Chesterton, who is often criticised for meandering and being long-winded (although this is not something that I have ever found to be a fair criticism), still aimed for brevity. If something could be said in many or few words, Chesterton opted for the latter over the former—which no doubt contributed to making him such a formidable essayist. In certain cases, also in the interests of brevity, whole passages are removed entirely. In *The Everlasting Man*, for example, we find the following sentence: "But the professor of the future would err in supposing that the Russian army of 1916 was a naked Scythian tribe that had never been out of the woods."<sup>31</sup> What follows this in the first draft is a passage that does not appear in the final edition:

But the whole rests on a much larger form of fallacy, we might say a more common form of folly. It is the blunder of supposing that any similarity argues another similarity, unless we know the general cause and nature of the similarities. We cannot deduce the details of barbaric life, unless we know why it is that one man has become or remained barbarous or another man become or remained civilised. We hardly know enough to know whether similarity is what we call coincidence, still less whether it is a common rule that would really be everywhere coincident.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Resurrection of Rome, Draft and Printer's Proofs*. British Library Manuscript

<sup>29</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Draft and Printer's Proofs*. 73260 A-B.

<sup>30</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Draft and Printer's Proofs*. 73260 A-B.

<sup>31</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (1925, rpt. Hodder and Stoughton: London, 1927), p.65.

<sup>32</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man, Draft and Printer's Proofs*. British Library Manuscript 73256 A.



It is not difficult to see why a passage like this was cut. It does deal with an interesting problem of reasoning but it does so rather clumsily and without strengthening the overall argument. Chesterton knows this, and he dispenses with it. It is not totally awful, but it is not as good as it could be.

Then, also along the lines of seeing how Chesterton clarifies his argument, we might compare two passages—one that we find in the printer’s proof, and the one that we find in the final publication. The passage from the proof reads as follows:

It was the anti-clerical and agnostic world that was always prophesying the advent of universal peace; it was that world that was or should have been abashed and confounded by universal war. But people with short memories are not easily abashed. And these people have short memories as well as short tempers. That is, they are in a certain mood about the religious tradition; in a state of botheration about, in a state of mutiny against it. In a word, which is the essential word, they are in a state of reaction against it.<sup>33</sup>

The first sentence is kept as is, but the rest of it, beginning with the words “But people with short memories ...” and ending with the words “... are in a state of reaction against it” has been replaced with the following:

As for the general view that the Church was discredited by the War—they might as well say that the Ark was discredited by the Flood. When the world goes wrong, it proves rather that the Church is right. The Church is justified, not because her children do not sin, but because they do.<sup>34</sup>

Apart from the serendipitous discovery in this edit of something that has become widely quoted by many Chestertonians, we also find something of a moral category that has come into play in this alteration. This suggests that editing one’s own writing is not just a matter of style but of striving to ensure that the content is edifying. No doubt, this is a principle that is strongly at play in Chesterton’s work, and perhaps one of the reasons for the contemporary consideration of Chesterton’s possible veneration.

The earlier draft contains a generalised *ad hominem*, albeit a fairly tame one. In it, Chesterton deals less with a logical problem than with the mindset of those who perpetuate logical error. In the correction, Chesterton turns his attention to the argument itself and ends up making it stronger in the process. What is interesting to see from an even earlier draft is

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<sup>33</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*. British Library Manuscript 732568 B.

<sup>34</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (1925, rpt. Hodder and Stoughton: London, 1927), p.11.

that Chesterton had in fact added the comment about people with “short memories and short tempers.”<sup>35</sup> It was obviously something that troubled him even early on in the process.

The sheer beauty of an addition like this one indicates another principle behind Chesterton’s editorial method, which is that he would make changes along the lines of improving the rhetorical or aesthetic resonance of the text. This was never about “mere rhetoric,” but about clarifying truths he really believed through his rhetoric. Sometimes, this would involve making a line or phrase more poetic, or perhaps more humorous. With regard to the poetic, the already-lovely line “A chasm opened between a dreary hell and an equally dreary heaven and the world between them was an abyss” becomes “The boy in such surroundings is torn by something worse than Tannhauser. He wonders why he is attracted by repellant things.”<sup>36</sup> “Classic psalm” becomes “sublime psalm” and “various myths” becomes “various wild myths”. Also, “demented mythology” becomes “asphyxiating mythology.”<sup>37</sup> As for an example of making a change for the sake of humor, we find the following line added to *Robert Louis Stevenson*: “He never committed a murder without making a clean job of it.”<sup>38</sup> True, some of these changes may be thought of as issues of taste, but it is nevertheless likely in my view that behind the changes was not merely a question of the surface of things but was rather a question of the deeper essence of things.

It seems to me that Chesterton never wrote without doing it as well as he could. While we are no doubt aware of the significant pressures that faced him, with deadlines always looming and commitments pressing on him from all sides, he remained true to the craft in a way that is instructive to those of us who read him. It is really quite something to be able to look at his work, especially at the various changes he made and stages he went through to see a manuscript through to completion. It is remarkable to glimpse something of the mind behind the words. There is, indeed, something even rather romantic in seeing the writer’s own hand intervening in the text. This is something often missed in the world today, now that the screen has largely replaced the hand. Changes are made, as they have always been, but now traces of those changes and of the mental processes that have accompanied those traces are easily lost. Even the words you are reading right now have gone through a number of iterations, although even I no longer have a clear sense of what the earlier iterations looked like. Perhaps such a loss is not all that important.

Now, of course, we can still stick to general principles: edit your own work, clarify what you want to say, make the writing sing, bring out the best in your words. But something

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<sup>35</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*. British Library Manuscript 73256 A.

<sup>36</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*. 73260 A-B.

<sup>37</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*. British Library Manuscript 732568 B.

<sup>38</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Draft and Printer’s Proofs*. 73260 A-B.

I have learned from reading Chesterton, and from paying close attention to his writing, too, is that writing always concerns bringing about the best in yourself. It is never, in the end, a mere matter of style, but is always undergirded by a moral imperative, and even a spiritual principle. It is about the substance of writing and the sacramental character of writing: to seek what is good and Godly, and to make that manifest in every area of life, even in words scrawled, then typed, then read, on a blank page. For Chesterton, writing was a livelihood, and this fact has a profound symbolic quality, for it shows that writing can be life-giving and life-unifying. This, I imagine, is something that every Chestertonian knows very well, but it can do us some good to be reminded of it from time to time.