The Worshipper's Half-Holiday: G.K. Chesterton and Parody

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Michael Ronald Shallcross

Abstract

This thesis constitutes the first study of G.K. Chesterton's status as a theorist and practitioner of parody. Employing a combination of original archival research, historical contextualisation, theoretical analysis, and textual close reading, I demonstrate that an extensive range of parodic strategies permeate Chesterton's diverse output, from his detective fiction, to his nonsense verse, journalism, novels, and critical essays. I particularly focus upon elaborating the affinity of Chesterton's work with the literary and cultural theory of Mikhail Bakhtin, in relation to the latter's principle of dialogism, and his account of the parodic basis of the carnivalesque. In this context, I interpret *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908) and *Father Brown* (1910-1936) as archetypal dialogic and carnivalesque texts. Reading Chesterton in this way not only produces a unified framework through which to understand his aesthetic method, but also enables a far-reaching reassessment of his relationship to aesthetic programmes that he opposed. In particular, I discuss his parodic engagement with the ascendant tropes of literary modernism, employing archival research into his youthful friendship with E.C. Bentley and close textual analysis of his later relationship to T.S. Eliot to trace the chronology of Chesterton's interaction with diverse voices of cultural modernity. In pursuing this analysis, I use the simultaneous inscription of similarity and difference encoded within the parodic act as a means of questioning compartmentalising approaches to genre and literary history which militate against accurate valuation of essentially dialogic thinkers such as Chesterton. In this way, I apply Chesterton's work as an exemplary model through which to develop a more comprehensive theory of the culturally disruptive operation of literary dialogism.

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Statement of Copyright

List of Abbreviations

Primary texts:

BL MS   Manuscript held in the British Library, London. See Works Cited for further details.

Bod MS   Manuscript held in the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. See Works Cited for further details.

CDN   G.K. Chesterton. *G.K. Chesterton at the Daily News: Literature, Liberalism and Revolution, 1901-1913.* 8 vols. Ed. Julia Stapleton. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012. Print.

CPP   T.S. Eliot. *The Complete Poems and Plays.* London: Faber and Faber, 2004. Print.

CW   G.K. Chesterton. *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton.* 36 vols. to date. Gen. eds. George J. Marlin, Richard P. Rabatin, and John L. Swan. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986—. Print.

FB   G.K. Chesterton. *The Complete Father Brown Stories*. Ed. Michael Hurley. London: Penguin Books, 2012. Print.

Periodicals:

DN   *The Daily News*
ILN   *The Illustrated London News*

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I first picked up a battered copy of the *Penguin Complete Father Brown* in December 2006, knowing almost nothing about Chesterton, but guided by the half-formed idea that the stories might offer some undemanding reading over the Christmas holidays. Two stories in, I set the book aside with the thousand-yard-stare of the thesis casualty. In a late *Father Brown* story, 'The Blast of the Book' (1933), Chesterton tells the story of a volume which, when opened, apparently causes the reader to vanish without trace. While my reading of the Penguin edition didn't produce quite such alarming physical consequences, my mind has been prone to disappear unexpectedly into abstruse regions of speculation ever since, leaving my body a cumbrous obstacle to anyone in the immediate area. It's a fine thing for Chesterton to argue that the well-balanced individual keeps 'one foot in earth and the other in fairy land', but if the washing up hasn't been done, this condition is enough to test the patience of the most tolerant of loved-ones. Consequently, my deepest thanks go to my family for the constancy of their love and support; and, most importantly, to Tracy—the Alice to my Unicorn.

In memory of Oliver

…an arrow-shower / Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain.

Philip Larkin, 'The Whitsun Weddings'

Introduction

> The real advice I could give to a young journalist, now that I am an old journalist, is simply this: to write an article for the Sporting Times and another for the Church Times, and put them into the wrong envelopes.
>
> <div style="text-align: right">G.K. Chesterton (*Autobiography* 183)</div>

When G.K. Chesterton entered public life in 1900, as a twenty-six-year-old fledgling journalist, he brought with him a carefully thought-out cultural programme, which he immediately began to elucidate in articles for *The Speaker* and, a year later, *The Daily News*. Chesterton's readers quickly discovered a truth already familiar to his boyhood friend, E.C. Bentley—that this highly original cultural thinker 'had at least a double dose of the faculty of enjoying things, from a nineteenth-century sausage-and-mashed to a fifteenth-century Madonna and Child' (*Those* 46). Though this remark may appear frivolous at first glance, Bentley's juxtaposition of extremes of the corporeal and the sublime offers an insight into the deeper programme underpinning the explosion of critical appreciation that Chesterton unleashed in the first years of the century. In article after article, areas of culture conventionally partitioned into discrete categories of 'low' and 'high' are juxtaposed, subjected to rigorous discriminative evaluation, and discovered to possess a distinct, equivalent, or analogous cultural value. The concerted challenge to received cultural wisdom that this methodology represented is particularly highlighted by Chesterton's early essays on aesthetics. From his 'defences' of nonsense and farce (collected in *The Defendant*, 1901), to his article on 'The Decline of Satire' (*DN* 14 Feb. 1902), to his advocacy of the grotesque in 'A Defence of Ugly Things' (collected in *The Defendant*) and *Robert Browning* (1903), Chesterton repeatedly focuses upon forms conventionally considered frivolous, scurrilous, or unrefined, which he re-evaluates as 'high and legitimate forms of art […] worthy of moral reverence and artistic ambition' (*Defendant* 123/125).

Having established this principle in his criticism, Chesterton went on to practice it in his early novels, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904) and *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908), in which farcical, uproarious scenarios form the basis upon which to build serious political critiques and searching inquiries into the

nature of human identity. The resulting 'medley of the sublime and the ridiculous' (*CW* 8: 235), as the method is described by the narrator of his later novel, *The Return of Don Quixote* (1927), finds most complete expression in his epic 'detective comedy' (Chesterton, *Autobiography* 323), *Father Brown*. Here Chesterton imbues the critically denigrated genre of detective fiction with elements of nonsense, farce, satire, and the grotesque, which are then employed as the formal means of conveying his most deeply held theological beliefs. When the narrator of the opening story, 'The Blue Cross' (1910), prefaces the first direct appearance of the heroes, Father Brown and Flambeau, with an account of 'the sublime vulgarity of man' (*FB* 13), we discover the same principle of dualistic counterbalance embedded within the core of Chesterton's existential vision.[1]

The present thesis makes the case that this consistent preoccupation with juxtaposing ostensibly incongruous binaries of 'high' and 'low', and 'serious' and 'comic', discourse is illustrative of an essentially parodic temperament, which not only suffuses Chesterton's poetics, but derives from a complex aggregation of mutually informing political, philosophical, and psychological concerns. The aesthetic modes acclaimed by Chesterton—nonsense, farce, satire, and the grotesque—all operate within the range of parody. Parody is a favourite tool of the satirist and the nonsense writer, its burlesque elements inform the farcical premises of pantomime and festive comedy, while the grotesque corresponds to parody in its hybridising ethos and frequent recourse to a 'clashing contrast between form and content' (Kayser, *Grotesque* 53). In exploring the diverse purposes to which Chesterton puts these interrelated forms in his life and work, I argue that analysis of his status as a theorist and practitioner of parody constitutes an indispensable means of recovering an accurate valuation of his contribution to early-twentieth-century letters, and of elaborating his enduring relevance as a cultural thinker.

This reading also sheds a prismatic light back upon wider parodic practice throughout the modernist era with which Chesterton's working life ran parallel, while illuminating the most pressing social and cultural disputes of the period, the

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[1] 'The Blue Cross' was first published on 23 June 1910 as 'Valentin Follows a Curious Trail', in the American periodical, *The Saturday Evening Post*. It was re-named for British publication in *The Storyteller*, in September 1910.

presuppositions informing which Chesterton consistently set out to challenge through parody. Appropriately enough, one of the cultural presuppositions that Chesterton most forcefully challenged was the critical orthodoxy on parody itself. G.D. Kiremidjian evocatively summarises the prevalent critical view of the time: 'The parodist is seen as some sort of scrofular, scurrilous second-rater who failed to make the grade himself and now indulges his spleen by jeering, mocking, and ridiculing his helpless subject' ('Aesthetics' 232). As Linda Hutcheon explains, this interpretation of parody stands within a 'long tradition—dating back to Quintilian […] at least—that demands that parody be considered pejorative in intent and ridiculing in its ethos' (50).

Late nineteenth-century discourse is rife with such readings. Famously, Matthew Arnold dismissed parody as 'a vile art' (qtd. in Tinker and Lowry 314), perhaps taking his cue from Goethe's blustering self-characterisation as the '"arch enemy of all parody and travesty […] because this vile breed abases the beautiful, the noble and the great in order to destroy"' (qtd. in Kiremidjian, *Study* 70). In a similar spirit, George Eliot charged burlesque dramatists with 'Debasing the Moral Currency', employing her critical alter ego, 'Theophrastus Such', to attack 'the sadly confused inference of the monotonous jester that he is establishing his superiority over every less facetious person, and over every topic on which he is ignorant or insensible, by being uneasy until he has distorted it in the small cracked mirror which he carries about with him as a joking apparatus' (95). With this atmosphere of high-handed deprecation as an immediate critical precedent, Chesterton added an unusually nuanced note to the cultural conversation with his own definition of parody: 'the worshipper's half-holiday' (*Varied* 186).

Chesterton coined the phrase in another of his early statements on aesthetics, an article on the nineteenth-century American parodist, Bret Harte (collected in *Varied Types*, 1903).[2] Rather than proceeding from a spirit of maladjusted mockery, Chesterton asserts that 'real parody [is] inseparable from admiration', and consequently '[m]ere derision, mere contempt, never produced or could produce parody' (*Varied* 184). Chesterton considers successful criticism to arise only from a prior grounding in appreciation, and this stress upon the

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[2] The provenance of this essay is uncertain. Julia Stapleton suggests that it may have been culled from Chesterton's contributions to *The New York American*, although I have been unable to verify this (message to the author. 7 Aug. 2012. Email).

juxtaposition of mutually corrective binaries informs his wider belief in the necessity of balancing praise and demurral in critical dialogue. In 'The Decline of Satire', he explains that this dual-mindedness is also essential to the production of effective satire: 'To write great satire, to attack a man so that he feels the attack and half acknowledges its justice, it is necessary to have a certain intellectual magnanimity which realises the merits of the opponent as well as his defects' (*Twelve* 52).

In a near-contemporaneous essay, 'Thomas Carlyle' (collected in *Twelve Types*, 1902), Chesterton slightly modifies the terms of this balancing act, in his account of the combination of qualities necessary to construct a cogent intellectual framework of one's own: the 'man building up an intellectual system has to build like Nehemiah, with the sword in one hand and the trowel in the other. The imagination, the constructive quality, is the trowel, and argument is the sword' (*Twelve* 125). As this suggests, for Chesterton it is not enough simply to argue against the grain, one must also produce an imaginative response which establishes alternative possibilities. Consequently, while he consistently projected himself as a contrarian jester in the court of culture, proudly vaunting his status as a 'controversialist' (*CW* 3: 339), he did not conceive this as a purely critical, oppositional role. Instead, as Hilaire Belloc noted, Chesterton 'approached controversy, his delight, hardly ever as conflict, nearly always as an appreciation, including that of his opponent' (39). Rather than simply implying praise or magnanimity, or a corollary of the prodigious capacity for 'enjoying things' remarked upon by Bentley, Belloc's use of 'appreciation' corresponds to Chesterton's invocation of the constructive 'trowel' of imagination as a tool with which to accrete new perspectives by building upon prior discourses. This additional connotation of critical appreciation closely resembles Barbara Hardy's definition of parody as '"a critical act of imaginative reproduction"', which seeks to '"criticize by creating"' (qtd. in Kiremidjian, *Study* 46).

In this respect, the combination of adherence (worship) and departure (holiday) conveyed by Chesterton's definition of parody also connotes a blazing of future trails informed by a measured observance of past conventions. This duality, which is closely analogous to Chesterton's enduring philosophical preference for 'the combination of something that is strange with something that is secure' (*Orthodoxy* 3), also corresponds to Hutcheon's account of the

'ambivalence set up between conservative repetition and revolutionary difference', which 'is part of the very paradoxical essence of parody' (77). The Janus-faced structure of parody is singularly amenable to Chesterton's philosophical programme, which Garry Wills accurately characterises as deriving from the conviction that '[r]ebellion and conservation are correlates, meaningful only when united in dynamic balance' (*Man* 101). As with Hutcheon's reading of parody, Chesterton's hybridisation of worship and holiday stresses the fact that by its very nature parody 'implicitly reinforces even as it ironically debunks' (Hutcheon xii).

In the 'Bret Harte' essay, Chesterton also discusses parody as a mode in which 'absurdity' and 'sublimity' (*Varied* 183) are comingled to produce a counterweighted balance. Consequently, for Chesterton, parody not only connotes an inextricable duality of adherence and departure, but also an inextricable duality of 'low' and 'high' (or comic and serious) discourse, so that a confluence of each of these apparent binaries becomes the structural *sine qua non* of the form. Since the term, 'half-holiday', most probably alludes to the popular comic, *Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday* (1884-1977), Chesterton's phrase also impishly conflates the sublime principle of worship with the absurd 'low' of a form of literature that would conventionally be considered artistically negligible. However, crucially, Chesterton argues that this interposition of the absurd is not intended to debase the sublime, as Goethe, Arnold, and Eliot assume. Instead, he sees the co-presence of these elements as the means of establishing a mutually balancing whole, whereas the excessive predominance of one or the other quality would be artificially delimiting. This again resonates with Chesterton's existential vision, which is based on the truth value of the grotesque as a mode of accumulative appreciation: 'the more serious is the discussion the more grotesque should be the terms. […] For a subject is really solemn and important in so far as it applies to the whole cosmos […] So far as a thing is universal it is serious. And so far as a thing is universal it is full of comic things.' In consequence, '[i]t is the test of a good philosophy whether you can defend it grotesquely' ('Spiritualism and Frivolity.' *ILN* 9 June 1906; *CW* 27: 205-06).

A comparable principle is discernible in Chesterton's advice to would-be journalists, which forms the epigraph to this introduction, in which the comparative examples cited—church and sport—again gesture towards the

conflation of reverence and play, the sublime and the absurd, or worship and holiday, in Chesterton's definition of parody. This further context also indicates that a comingling of the absurd and sublime not only guided Chesterton's philosophical principles, but also satisfied more prosaic material imperatives, since he posits the wilful confusion of apparent cultural antitheses as a means of piquing reader interest.[3] When Chesterton established his own newspaper, *G.K.'s Weekly*, in 1925, he announced that a comparable principle of 'contrast and combination' (qtd. in Ward, *Gilbert* 423) would guide the venture. However, by this stage he had discovered that the gambit also had its commercial downsides—his relationship with *The Daily News* had been strained to breaking point by his relentless submission of articles that derided the political values of its core readership. Consequently, Chesterton's continued advocacy of this method when establishing his own periodical represented a statement of philosophical adherence to the principle of the newspaper as a dialogic forum, as much as a strategy to secure commercial success.

The foregoing account demonstrates that Chesterton's approach to aesthetics, philosophy, and cultural and political controversy consistently turned upon imaginative concepts and discursive methods which conform to the structure of parody. Even his explanation of the surest means of maintaining psychological balance derives from the principle of parodic counterweighting: 'of a sane man there is only one safe definition. He is a man who can have tragedy in his heart and comedy in his head' ('The Travellers in State.' *DN* 6 June 1908; *CDN* 5: 85). Chesterton's rhetoric draws the parameters of parody far beyond literary comic play—though he delighted equally in textual parody as an exuberant formal game—to emphasise a considerably more profound and wide-ranging conception of the potential scale of its application. In this respect, Chesterton begins to emerge as a prescient herald of later theoretical perspectives, the most valuable of which echo his terms in emphasising both the formal dualism and exceptionally wide discursive range of parody, while eschewing the culturally loaded value judgements common to nineteenth-century criticism.

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[3] Chesterton first makes this point in 'Succeeding in Journalism' (*ILN* 21 Aug. 1909): 'A man might actually succeed in journalism by writing articles exactly appropriate to all the journals, and then putting them all into the wrong envelopes' (*CW* 28: 378).

For example, Chesterton's assertion that '[m]ere derision, mere contempt, never produced or could produce parody' receives a theoretical makeover in Robert Phiddian's contention that '[p]arodies *deconstruct* the discourses they invade; they do not blankly destroy' them ('Parody' 682). In discussing the formal range of parody, Hutcheon argues that '[a]ny codified form can, theoretically, be treated in terms of repetition with critical distance' (18), while Simon Dentith contends that '"[p]arody" should be thought of, not as a single and tightly definable genre or practice, but as a range of cultural practices which are all more or less parodic' (*Parody* 19). These accounts, which extend the parameters of parody to embrace 'general principles such as stylistic characteristics of a person, a period or a culture' (Sheinberg 187), are prefigured in the extra-textual terms employed by Chesterton in 'The White Horses' (collected in *Alarms and Discursions*, 1910), when he refers to motoring as an opportunity for the individual to conduct a 'parody of the military' (*Alarms* 105). Similarly, in 'Americans in Sport and Jingoism' (*ILN* 15 Aug. 1908), he uses parody as a means of explaining the interaction of nation states: 'America is a serious parody. America is an exaggeration not more comic, but more solemn, than its original' (*CW* 28: 159).

However, Chesterton's most important anticipation of later theory perhaps resides in the collapsed bipolarity of the phrase, 'the worshipper's half-holiday', itself, which finds an echo in Hutcheon's definition of parody as 'repetition with ironic critical distance' (xii). The dualism of Hutcheon's definition is built upon in Michael McKeon's more elaborate rendering: 'a single dialectical gesture of recapitulation and repudiation, imitation and disillusion, continuity and rupture' (13)—in other words, of worship and holiday. Indeed, the 'Bret Harte' essay was sufficiently innovative in its approach to the subject to persuade Chesterton's contemporary, the reviewer, E.C. Marsh, that '[t]he delicate, elusive art of the parodist has been grossly misunderstood [… and] I know of no critic who has done anything toward elucidating the philosophy of parody save Mr. Chesterton' (193). It is striking, then, that Marsh's recognition of Chesterton's pioneering status has not been echoed by any subsequent writers on parody. I can find only one glancing reference to Chesterton in the considerable array of theoretical texts that have emerged in the intervening hundred years (Hutcheon 11).

The increasing proliferation of such analyses corroborates Malcolm Bradbury's contention that over the course of the twentieth century, 'parodic activity […] vastly increased, moved, in art and literature, in practice and theory, from the margins to the centre' ('Age' 60), first through the high-cultural influence of the literary methods of modernists such as Eliot and Joyce, and later through the more thoroughgoing deconstruction of principles of 'high' and 'low' conducted within postmodern culture. In view of this cultural shift, it is curious to consider that over the same period Chesterton moved, inversely, from the centre to the margins of culture. In order to explain this ostensible paradox it will be useful to briefly examine the elements of Chesterton's reception that may have contributed to his occlusion from critical discourse on parody.

Chesterton's Critical Reception

> All reputations […] dwindle and rise again; capable men are praised twice, first for the wrong reasons and then again, after a cycle of obloquy, for the right.
>
> Chesterton, 'A Plea for Partial Historians' (*DN* 17 Dec. 1902; *CDN* 1: 449)

The absence of wider critical discussion of Chesterton's contribution to the theory and practice of parody becomes comprehensible when we consider that even critical works exclusively dedicated to him have consistently overlooked his reliance upon parodic modes of discourse. Brief references do appear in the most perceptive analyses. W.H. Auden admiringly acknowledged his flair for poetic parody ('Gift' 322), while John Coates corroborates Chesterton's benign reading of the parodist's intent when he argues that 'Chesterton's imaginative sympathy with authors like Browning resulted in what were quite arguably, his finest works of criticism, his parodies' (*Controversialist* 173). Despite being relegated to footnote status, Wills' appraisal offers perhaps the most penetrating insight: 'Chesterton was a brilliant parodist, and some of his finest criticism is parody meant to uncover strength instead of weakness. […] This appreciative mimicry is perfectly suited to his literary persona of metaphysical jester' (*Man* 226 fn.75). While such assessments are accurate and valuable, their understanding of parody remains restricted to textual close reading, and none of the extant critical work

builds upon these brief insights to consider large swathes of his cultural activity as formally and thematically parodic in conception.

This oversight can be understood to have arisen from a combination of factors, which have also contributed to Chesterton's critical neglect in a wider sense. First, many of the early biographical and critical readings suffer from an excessive weighting toward either the sublime or the ridiculous in his life and work, producing an imbalance comparable to that which Chesterton sought to avoid in his definition of parody. An adhesion to either pole characterises many of the essays collected in Denis Conlon's compendious volume, *A Half-Century of Views* (1987). In contrast to Bentley's intimate juxtaposition of Chesterton's diverse enthusiasms, here the sympathetic readings tend to be all Madonna and Child or nothing but sausage-and-mashed. In a comparable vein, the hostile accounts tend to draw upon one or another of the elements hybridised in Wyndham Lewis's pithy dismissal of Chesterton as a 'dogmatic toby-jug' (*Time* 387). Adherents to the latter pole emphasise the roistering Falstaff, perpetually wiring telegrams from Market Harborough, while those of a more solemn persuasion accentuate the doctrinaire religious visionary, conducting an obdurate one-man war against the modern world.[4]

The cognitive dissonance produced by such readings is particularly highlighted by Marshall McLuhan's essay, 'Where Chesterton Comes In' (1948). McLuhan's argument inadvertently evokes the incongruous separation of form and theme so central to parody when he explains that his sympathy with Chesterton's theological exposition of the sublime is tempered by hostility towards his apparently ridiculous mode of expression. This disparity leads McLuhan to imply that the responsibility for subsequent caricatures lies with the faulty, almost schizophrenically contradictious author himself.[5] In lamenting the 'desperate jauntiness' and 'self-conscious jollity' of Chesterton's prose, McLuhan figures Chesterton's style as an inexplicably indecorous, 'embarrassing' means of conveying the otherwise valuable philosophy of the 'essential Chesterton', the 'metaphysical moralist' (76-77). McLuhan's position endures in the habit of later

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[4] Conscious of the dangers of such misrepresentation, Chesterton dismissed the latter caricature as that of the 'notorious G.K. Chesterton, a reactionary Torquemada whose one gloomy pleasure was in the defence of orthodoxy and the pursuit of heretics' ('The Real Journalist.' *DN* 17 Dec. 1910; *CDN* 7: 42).

[5] See below, p.21, for Chesterton's use of the term, 'contradictious', to define his own position.

advocates to focus upon elucidating the philosophical messages of Chesterton's texts in isolation from their form, a tendency most recently discernible in William Oddie's otherwise illuminating critical biography, *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy* (2008). By arguing that McLuhan was 'surely' correct 'to direct our attention away from questions of "literary" merit' (64), Oddie implies that Chesterton will find no succour in the latter arena, and that a more elegantly constructed parsing of his philosophical teachings on the part of the critical interpreter offers the most likely path to Chesterton's critical rejuvenation.

This combination of factors—an excessive stress upon either forbidding dogmatism or buffoonish anecdote in the popular criticism, and a reluctance on the part of more high-minded advocates to defend his aesthetic methods—has fostered the cycle of obloquy that Chesterton identifies as the intermediate lot of the capable man. Valuable critical texts have sporadically emerged; either elaborating his formal merits (Wills 1961; Boyd 1975; Coates 2002) or offering illuminating contextualisation of his theological and political concerns (Canovan 1977; Knight 2004; Stapleton 2009). However, these isolated voices have been overwhelmed by a wider academic consensus that has learned to shun Chesterton in both formal and thematic terms, as an aesthetically negligible and socially reactionary anomaly in the twentieth-century literary canon, antipathetic to the aesthetically radical age of modernism, and with equally little of relevance to contribute to the philosophically pluralistic age of postmodernism.

This situation informs Mark Knight's rueful observation that having first made his name with a series of spirited countercultural 'defence' essays, Chesterton now stands in need of a good defence counsel himself (*Evil* 1). We might add that the weight of cultural misapprehension that Chesterton sought to clear with those early articles—not least his essay on parody—is now the task faced by the Chestertonian critic. As I have argued, the particular merit of Chesterton's account of parody lies in his eschewal of extraneous cultural value judgements in favour of a renewed focus upon the fundamental structural operation of parody, an approach which reflects his critical gift for 'looking to the artefact's own mode of existence' (*Man* 57), in Wills' phrase. Similarly, this thesis aims to clear away much of the accumulated cultural baggage that currently obstructs Chesterton's academic reception, through a detailed exposition of the complexity, sophistication, and ingrained ambivalence of his parodic means of

expression. In a complementary action, I employ the simultaneous inscription of similarity and difference encoded within the parodic act to enable a wider questioning of compartmentalising approaches to genre and literary history, which tend to marginalise figures whose methods defy conventional modes of categorisation.

Viewing Chesterton's work through the prism of parody enables us to transcend the limitations of periodization, instead locating Chesterton within a trans-generic, diachronic European cultural tradition of 'serio-comical' (*Problems* 106) discourse, in Bakhtin's terminology. As Chesterton's most doughty antagonist, George Bernard Shaw, was the first to recognise, 'France did not break the mould in which it formed Rabelais. It got to Campden Hill in the year 1874' ('Chesterbelloc' 136). Chesterton repeatedly drew attention to this lineage himself. In 'Prohibition and the Press' (collected in *Fancies versus Fads*, 1923), he lauds the strain of literary culture that runs 'from Pantagruel to Pickwick' (*Fancies* 84), while a later essay on 'Humour' (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* May 1928; collected in *The Spice of Life*, 1965) charts an ancestral line of humourists from Chaucer, Cervantes, and Rabelais, to Swift, Sterne, and Dickens (*Spice* 28). Here Chesterton closely anticipates Dentith's critical exposition of the parodic dynasty of European literature (*Parody* 75-81), the particular distinction of which is a shared propensity to propagandise and problematize simultaneously. With this framework in mind, we can begin to explicate the curious paradox of Chesterton himself—that of a self-styled propagandist who intuitively gravitates towards dialogically problematizing modes of expression. As Phiddian explains of a comparable disjuncture between Swift's rhetoric and practice, '[t]he main problem in reading [his work] as a general advocacy of the rhetoric of a small, clean, straightforward world is that the theory in it does not fit the most memorable of Swift's own writings' (*Swift's* 8).

Chesterton counsels a comparable return to the text in his own critical writing. In an early essay on Tolstoy, he argues that the typical writer 'teaches far more by his […] costumes, his idiom and technique—all the part of his work, in short, of which he is probably unconscious, than by the elaborate and pompous moral dicta which he fondly imagines to be his opinions' (*Twelve* 147). In this light, McLuhan might have profitably searched his own critical precepts for guidance—with Chesterton the medium truly is the message. Interestingly, the

first critic to grasp this was McLuhan's protégé, Hugh Kenner, who famously went on to become the critical documenter-in-chief of the *dramatis personae* of *The Pound Era* (1971), and whose first critical work, *Paradox in Chesterton* (1948), featured McLuhan's essay as a preface. Unfortunately, Kenner's insight that Chesterton's existential intuition of 'the complexity of being' (16) directly informed his grotesque mode of expression was not accompanied by an appreciation of the aesthetic consequences. Tangibly crestfallen at the duty before him, Kenner affirms that '[i]t is essential to consider him as an artist, however inartistic he may be' (103), before arguing that Chesterton's 'poetic failure' (107) was an inevitable 'by-product' (103) of his philosophical achievement.[6]

Thankfully, a criticism has finally begun to emerge which not only accurately elucidates the derivation of Chesterton's formal methodology, but also recognises its value. Michael Hurley's recent study, *G.K. Chesterton* (2012), sets out to examine 'the ways in which [Chesterton's] literary imagination and his philosophical thinking are mutually informing' (8). As Hurley explains, '[t]he atmosphere of his writing cannot be dismissed as adventitious; how he argues defines what he is arguing' (62). Consequently, Hurley devotes each of his chapters to a different genre or medium in which Chesterton worked, on the grounds that he 'must be taken whole, or you do not have half of him, you have none of him' (9). While I concur with Hurley in considering the texts' form to provide the key to their philosophical meaning, my approach modifies his compartmentalised, purposefully inconclusive methodology, by identifying Chesterton's parodic method as a coherent, unifying, and enduring framework through which to understand his life and work.

Of course, it is important to bear in mind that Chesterton's use of parodic techniques in differing generic contexts often serves differing purposes. For example, the pedagogic and/or whimsical intent of the close parodies that permeate his journalism is distinct in both form and function from the comprehensive philosophical method that underpins the parodic structure of *Father Brown*. Nonetheless, the 'conversation' of 'mutually correcting bearings' (17) that Hurley seeks to establish between Chesterton's diverse areas of literary practice is also promoted, in a trans-generic sense, by the balancing binaries that

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[6] John Gross debunks the McLuhan/Kenner position incisively in *Rise* 235-36.

underpin all forms of parodic discourse—adherence and departure, the serious and the comic, the secure and the strange—which enable us to take Chesterton in the round as Hurley prescribes, while guarding against the critical temptation to artificially schematise his fundamental *aesthetic catholicity*.

The latter quality stems from an attitude towards aesthetic contradiction that was considerably more sanguine than that of Kenner: 'Every book I write, every article I pen, every argument I use, contradicts some other book, some other article, some other argument of my own. What does it matter? Life is contradictious' ('G.B.S. v. G.K.C.' *The Adelphi Magazine* September 1923; *CW* 11: 582). If we approach Chesterton in this spirit we begin to comprehend the philosophical basis of the heterogeneous, amalgamative ethos that he consistently invoked to convey his literary ideal. This is aptly illustrated by his account of the disruptive narrative structure of dreams, which might equally serve as a definition of textual parody: 'works which mix up abstractions fit for an epic with fooleries not fit for a pantomime […] which present such a picture of literary chaos as might be produced if the characters of every book from *Paradise Lost* to *Pickwick* broke from their covers and mingled in one mad romance' ('Dreams', 1901; collected in *Coloured* 81-82).

In a comparable vein of multiplicity, Chesterton's life and work present a panoramic exposition of the extraordinarily varied purposes and practices of parody, from its most conventional connotation as a rhetorical tool wielded in controversy by the satirist, to its application as a more nuanced method of self-analysis and frank acknowledgement of inner contradiction. Chesterton's oeuvre also corroborates Hutcheon's stress upon the exceptionally wide textual parameters of parody: 'Its physical dimension can be as vast as Joyce's *Ulysses* or as small as the changing of one letter or word of a text' (18). Similarly, Chesterton's parodic repertoire extends from the most glancing of bathetic allusions—'Stilton, thou shouldst be living at this hour' ('The Shy Town.' *DN* 29 Apr. 1911; *CDN* 7: 120) and 'they also serve who only stand and wait for the two fifteen' ('Enjoying the Floods and Other Disasters.' *ILN* 21 July 1906; *CW* 27: 239) are just two of the many Milton-baiting skits scattered throughout his corpus—to the highly sophisticated parodic odyssey of *Father Brown*, Chesterton's divine comedy of 'the sublime vulgarity of man'.

Structural Overview

My opening chapter draws upon an eclectic range of examples from Chesterton's literary practice and his statements on aesthetics and culture, spanning the duration of his career, to demonstrate the centrality of parody to his oeuvre. I begin with a comprehensive account of the parameters of parody, framed by its relationship to verbal satire and the existential grotesque, which I discuss as the poles between which parody vacillates.[7] This account leads to an exploration of the extraordinary affinity of Chesterton's work with that of Mikhail Bakhtin, the pioneering Russian theorist of parody, a correspondence which has received scant critical attention to date.[8]

At first glance, a number of significant factors appear to differentiate the two men—Bakhtin's 'scholarly life' and writing, his unconventional theological stance, the role of 'Stalinist repression' (Dentith, *Bakhtinian* 4) in informing his work; in contrast to Chesterton's impatience with scholarly discourse, his orthodox religious dogmatism, and his location within a relatively tolerant liberal democracy. Nonetheless, detailed analysis of the philosophical sympathies that bridge these contextual divides offers a revelatory means of reading both figures anew. I argue that Chesterton's stylistic methods and thematic preoccupations closely anticipate Bakhtin's complementary principles of dialogism and the carnivalesque, thus locating Chesterton within a lineage of writers who operate beyond the monologic extremes of cultural authoritarianism and cultural relativism. In developing this reading, I elaborate the interrelated political, philosophical, and psychological utilities which cause parody to become such a ubiquitous discursive method in Chesterton's work. Within this account a number of key strands in my wider thesis emerge, including the efficacy of parody in balancing earnestness and irony through serio-comic discourse; the status of parody as an anti-Hegelian poetics and a democratically immersive medium; and

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[7] Chesterton's use of the grotesque has been discussed incisively by Coates (*Edwardian* 169-90) and Knight (*Evil* 59-124), though not in the terms that I elaborate in this thesis.

[8] Philip Thompson draws the two names together glancingly in a list of figures who evince a comparably 'unconcealed delight' (28) in the grotesque, as does Elmar Schenkel in relation to carnival (105). Don M. Shipley's unpublished doctoral thesis, 'Chesterton and his interlocutors: Dialogical style and ethical debate on eugenics' (Baylor University, 2007) includes a discussion of Chesterton's dialogic method, informed by Bakhtinian theory. The present study does not draw on Shipley's thesis because it is not currently available in the public domain.

the application of parody and self-parody as interrelated means of managing and disrupting the boundaries of authorial identity.

From my second chapter onwards I pursue a broadly chronological narrative, so as to establish Chesterton's consistent recourse to comparable structural methods, while exploring the evolving themes and concerns which he employed these forms to address as his career progressed and his allegiances shifted. My second chapter analyses the formative period of Chesterton's intellectual development, which I take to span the years 1890 to 1910. This chapter builds upon my introductory assertion that Chesterton already possessed a carefully though-out cultural programme when he first achieved prominence, by exploring the private prehistory of his emergence onto the public stage in 1900, with particular reference to his adolescent friendship with Edmund Clerihew Bentley. In doing so, I focus upon an area of Chesterton's imaginative life—his production of nonsense—which is commonly passed over with a tactfully averted gaze by Chesterton's critics, perhaps fearful that advertising such apparent frivolity might undermine his critical standing still further.[9] However, through sustained analysis of his relationship to Bentley, I demonstrate that Chesterton's ambivalent attitude towards nonsense operates as a vitally important context through which to understand his wider parodic philosophy, and the oppositional stance that he subsequently developed towards the culture of his time.

While it has become a critical and biographical standby to identify Chesterton's reaction against the ontological pessimism and scepticism of *fin de siècle* decadence as decisive in shaping his later worldview (Ffinch 30-46; Knight 29-36; Oddie 84-125), the formative significance of his youthful relationship to his closest friend in this period has so far eluded sustained and accurate critical examination. In rectifying this oversight, I employ the hitherto untapped resource of the Bodleian Library's archive of Bentley's diaries, as well as the British Library's archive of Chesterton's manuscripts and correspondence with Bentley, as the foundation upon which to build a theoretical analysis of the interrelation of nonsense, parody, and friendship in Chesterton's life and work. This reading situates Chesterton's highly ambivalent personal relationship with Bentley in the context of his equally ambivalent textual relationship with a number of near-

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[9] Important exceptions are Lynette Hunter's *Explorations* (25-30), and Elizabeth Sewell's 'Giant' (555-76).

contemporary literary influences—including Max Beerbohm, Lewis Carroll, Rudyard Kipling, Walt Whitman, and Oscar Wilde—in order to elaborate Chesterton's apprehension (in the fullest sense) of the philosophical drift of turn-of-the-century culture. I end this chapter with an account of how nonsense, parody, and friendship come together in Chesterton's most fully realised novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, drawing attention to a series of illuminating intertextual dialogues set up by the text, which have previously escaped critical attention.

My third chapter focuses upon a close reading of Chesterton's first three *Father Brown* stories, composed in 1910. The chapter borrows its title, 'Serious Things in Holiday Time London', from Chesterton's debut article for the *Illustrated London News* (*ILN* 14 Oct. 1905), since the phrase aptly encapsulates the serio-comic modulation of the stories under discussion. I argue that Chesterton's satirical premise in these stories is to send the detection genre on a carnivalesque urban holiday, in order to convey a multifaceted critique of contemporary society. While a number of commentators have recognised *Father Brown* as a deliberate departure from the generic model of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories (Boyd 139; Ker 287), the specifically parodic foundation of Chesterton's challenge to the generic archetype is a further aspect of his literary practice that has eluded critical examination. I argue that these stories constitute Chesterton's most audacious attempt to balance the poles of verbal satire and the existential grotesque, and that he particularly selects detective fiction as the locus of this aesthetic balancing act in order to prove a combined formal and thematic point—that a critically undervalued genre which he considered 'a perfectly legitimate form of art' also possesses 'certain definite advantages as an agent of the public weal' (*Defendant* 158).

Again, this analysis challenges the conventions of Chestertonian criticism. His most recent biographer, Ian Ker, claims that the *Father Brown* stories 'are not among his major writings, and they can hardly be called his "masterpiece" compared with his great non-fictional prose works' (290). Ian Boyd is similarly dismissive: 'they were occasional work, ordered in batches by magazine editors, and hastily written by Chesterton to help finance his own newspaper. The themes which are developed fully in the full-length novels are only sketched in them.

Consequently, there is no larger pattern to which they can be related' (xii).[10] However, when examined through the prism of Bakhtinian theory, it becomes clear that these stories are central to a proper understanding of the formal method through which Chesterton consistently conveys his social message. By elaborating their previously unexplored symbiotic relationship with his non-fictional prose works, I demonstrate that these stories are not only relatable, but integral to the larger pattern of Chesterton's life and work. I discuss 'The Blue Cross' as a satire of the urban reform movement, a premise that Chesterton employs to construct a utopian resolution of the agon of detection. I go on to argue that Chesterton purposefully inverts this conceit in the dystopian follow-up story, 'The Secret Garden' (*Storyteller* Oct. 1910), thus producing a sophisticated example of what Gary Saul Morson terms '[m]etaparody' ('Parody' 81). In the case of 'The Queer Feet' (*Storyteller* Nov. 1910), I identify Chesterton's self-reflexive manipulation of an array of generic tropes, which enable him to turn a carnivalesque account of a travesty of popular feasting into a vehicle through which to pursue artistically ambitious social satire.

My final chapter explores the evolution of Chesterton's relationship to cultural modernism, as emblematised by the progress of T.S. Eliot's interaction with Chesterton from 1910 to the latter's death in 1936. This reading disproves the critical shibboleth that Chesterton's engagement with modernist aesthetics was 'cursory' (Coates, *Controversialist* 8), that he 'never made the slightest attempt to understand the aims and ideas of the modernist movement' (Cavendish-Jones 186), and that he remained unswervingly and unreflectively hostile to the movement throughout his career (Hynes 85-86; Lodge, *Crossroads* 145). According to this critical orthodoxy, a seamless, un-shifting polarisation pertained between the figureheads of 'high modernism' who formed an aesthetically radical, though culturally elitist vanguard; and Chesterton, who led a culturally democratic, though aesthetically retrograde counter-insurgence. As a consequence of this narrative, which has derived much of its pertinacity from the public pronouncements of the artists themselves, Chesterton and Eliot have

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[10] Again, Hurley offers an antidote to this critical consensus. His recent edition of *The Complete Father Brown* (2012) includes an introductory essay which notes that the stories 'are bursting with speculations that exceed the traditional business of detection' (*FB* xxii).

conventionally been considered such pristine opposites that it would be 'almost ludicrous to compare them' (Mason 13).[11]

Luke Seaber has recently challenged this orthodoxy, with a subtle analysis that proceeds from the conviction that 'questions of similarity and difference in a comparative examination of Chesterton's and Eliot's artistic undertakings are far more complex and ambiguous than might initially appear to be the case' ('Meaning' 203). Nonetheless, Seaber's reading is tentative, and maintains the line that Chesterton's view of Eliot remained relatively antagonistic throughout his career. In building upon Seaber's foundational insight, I elaborate the ways in which an apparently static impasse of mutual incomprehension underwent various phases of subtle modification. I begin by elaborating the private development of Eliot's aesthetic sensibility during 1910-11. I then go on to analyse the parodic progress of the agon of Eliot and Chesterton between 1917 and 1925, before ending with an account of the *rapprochement* of the pair between 1925 and 1936.

While not wishing to overstate Chesterton's influence upon Eliot's aesthetic and philosophical development, which is well known to have been informed by a prodigious cornucopia of cultural influences, my analysis demonstrates that Chesterton occupied a more significant role in this retinue than is commonly supposed. By using parody as the prism through which to view this contest of cultural values, my reading serves not only to initiate a more nuanced understanding of Chesterton's ambivalent engagement with that which he rejects, but also to draw attention to the complex motivations underpinning the antagonism that modernist authors such as Eliot initially projected towards Chesterton. This approach reveals the utility of parody as both a constructive disrupter and unifier of different strands of culture, enriching our understanding of literary history by encouraging a technique of cross-reading which 'forces the reader to make associations between texts not normally placed together' (77), as Margaret Rose puts it.

Matthew Taunton has recently counselled against the temptation of 'seeking to make [Chesterton] safe for the canon by pointing to affinities with literary modernism' (204), and I am mindful that this endeavour would be as reductive as that of perpetuating Chesterton's reputation as unambiguously anti-

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[11] See also Kenner, *Paradox* 105-07; Kirk 184; Oser 39. In each case, Chesterton and Eliot are posited as antitheses.

modernist. Instead, my analysis seeks to retain an awareness of the clearly demarcated philosophical grounds upon which Chesterton parted company with leading modernists, while also demonstrating the ways in which the subtly comparable aesthetic methods of the two factions complicate the projection of a straightforward binary division. This inscription of critical dialogism operates as a macrocosmic corollary of the paradoxical dynamic of the parodic act itself, revealing the simultaneous co-presence of similarity and difference on a broad cultural canvas, and destabilising conventional approaches to literary-historical compartmentalisation in the process.

In view of my contention that both Chesterton and Eliot deliberately promulgated a belief in their aesthetic disparity, it is perhaps telling that Eliot was one of the first commentators to attempt to divert critical attention away from Chesterton's literary merits, when he argued, in his obituary notice in *The Tablet* (20 June 1936), that to 'judge Chesterton on his "contributions to literature," […] would be to apply the wrong standards of measurement' (*Critical* 531). Despite Kenner's faithful adherence to Eliot's line, his unique status as a thoughtful respondent to both Chesterton and modernism leads him to offer an early, tentative exception to the critical binarism discussed above. In a discussion of analogy and myth, Kenner compares Chesterton to Joyce, with the observation that '[i]t is surely a demonstration of the contemporary critical muddle to find the most advanced experimenter of his time building upon the same first principles, and exploiting the same kind of analogical perception, as the man whom avant-garde critics decry as the very type of hearty Toryism' (*Paradox* 127-28). Four years earlier, in 1944, Graham Greene had drawn attention to an equally marked stylistic correspondence between the two authors, noting the curious fact that 'a generation that appreciates Joyce finds for some reason Chesterton's equally fanatical play on words exhausting' (105).

The incongruous concept of 'fanatical play' returns us once more to the collapsed dualism of Chesterton's epigrammatic definition of parody, 'the worshipper's half-holiday'. Appropriately enough, my opening chapter will now turn to an analysis of the ways in which Chesterton employs parody to navigate the extremes of fanaticism and play in cultural discourse.

Chapter One

Renewing the Varieties For Ever: The Political, Philosophical, and Psychological Framework of Chestertonian Parody

> Holbrook Jackson: As soon as an idea is accepted it is time to reject it.
>
> Chesterton: No: it is time to build another idea on it.
>
> Inscription in Chesterton's copy of Jackson's *Platitudes in the Making* (13)

In this chapter, I introduce the three principal contexts that will inform my subsequent account of Chesterton's parodic method—the political, the philosophical, and the psychological. In political and philosophical terms, I discuss the mutually informing preoccupations that led Chesterton to employ parodic methodologies to express his opposition to the philosophical programme of G.W.F. Hegel and the cultural programme of Matthew Arnold. In developing this argument, I elucidate Chesterton's philosophical affinity with Mikhail Bakhtin, arguing that Chesterton consistently turned to dialogic and carnivalesque structures as aesthetic methods which mount a democratic challenge to cultural authoritarianism, eschewing critical detachment and valorising the corporeal realm over abstract intellection. I go on to discuss the psychological concerns that drew Chesterton to these positions, arguing that the balance of differentiation and identification embedded within the dynamic of parody constitutes a means simultaneously to preserve subjecthood and to preclude solipsism, thus maintaining identity while securing relation. However, before beginning this exposition, it will be helpful to preface what follows with a more thorough analysis of the parameters of parody. To this end, I begin with a brief account of two polarised critiques of parody, before challenging the partiality of these readings through an analysis of Chesterton's conception of the range and dexterity of parodic discourse.

Two Contrary Critics of Parody: Leavis and Barthes

In January 1962, the preeminent British literary critic of the day, F.R. Leavis, launched a scathing attack upon parody in the letters pages of *The Spectator,* railing that 'the cult of parody […] belongs to that literary culture [...] which, in its obtuse and smug complacency, is always the worst enemy of creative genius' (*Letters* 91). From this, he concluded that '[p]eople who are really interested in creative originality regard the parodist's game with distaste and contempt' (*Letters* 91). A month later, Leavis made his notoriously vituperative intervention in the 'Two Cultures' debate instigated by Sir Charles Snow, using his valedictory Richmond lecture to denounce Snow's assertion that the British cultural establishment should give greater recognition to the scientific disciplines, and should encourage the convergence of discrete specialisms to forge a common culture. Instead, Leavis asserted the fundamental cultural primacy of literature, while arguing that literary endeavour was unsuitable for co-option with other disciplines, since it occupies a state of annexation within an ephemeral 'third realm', in which creative genius renders the collective consciousness of any given era artistically coherent.

In order to sustain this vision of literature as an isolated special case, Leavis not only considered it necessary to guard against the infiltration of other academic disciplines, but also the infiltration of pollutants from popular culture. In this respect, his near-contemporary diatribes against parodic and academic dialogue can be understood to arise from an interconnected fear of encroachment upon the moral autonomy of literature from 'low' and 'high' culture alike. In his letter to *The Spectator*, Leavis refers to parody as 'a branch of "social civilization"' (*Letters* 91), a phrase that he used to connote the realm of mass entertainment, against which he ranged the embattled forces of 'culture' as a bulwark. The parodist becomes a particularly disturbing figure for Leavis because he/she breaches the divide between these two allegedly distinct arenas, a transgression implied by his simultaneous description of parody as a branch of 'literary culture'.

The tendency that Leavis consequently highlights to exemplify all that he disdains is 'the absurd and significant cult of Max Beerbohm' (*Letters* 91), an

Oxford alumnus whose work stands in an enduring tradition of academic parody, stretching from medieval monastic life to Victorian varsity culture (see Malcolm 119), the ostensible frivolity of which Leavis abhorred as an example of the enemy having breached the academic citadel. The disconcerting cultural dexterity of parody accounts for the defensive air of Leavis's claim that the parodist's incursion merely succeeds in demonstrating 'how *inaccessible* to any but the most superficial, and falsifying, imitation the truly characteristic effects' of writers of distinction are (*Letters* 91, my emphasis). As Gary Day argues of Leavis's earlier critique of mass culture, *Culture and Environment* (1933), '[w]hat is at stake […] is not the meaning of a text but its inviolateness' (71).

A decade after Leavis had discharged his critical fusillade, a comparable antipathy to parody was expressed by the post-structuralist critic, Roland Barthes, a figure who might be considered Leavis's antipode, insofar as he argues that there is no such thing as an inviolate text. Although, as Rick Rylance notes, Leavis and Barthes 'share an equal investment […] in the notion of spontaneous formal organisation' (115) as a justification for literature's privileged cultural status, Barthes's project essentially subverts Leavis's critical aims by identifying the reader as the locus of this formal organisation, arguing that 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination' (Barthes, *Image* 148). As this distinction suggests, while Leavis wishes to safeguard the writer's autonomy at all costs, Barthes delights in playfully undermining the very concept of 'creative *origin*ality' (my emphasis), insisting upon the writer's essential dispossession within the indeterminate play of textuality.

In highlighting the ways in which the act of reception productively complicates the authorship of meaning, Barthes evinces an affinity with Chesterton, who argues that 'if truth exists at all, it must be often possible for a writer to uncover a corner of it which he happens not to understand, but which his reader does happen to understand. The author sees only two lines; the reader sees where they meet and what is the angle' (*CW* 15: 278). Similarly, whereas Leavis virulently opposes the interpenetration of 'high' and 'low' culture, this is precisely the quality that Barthes identifies as a marker of superior art. In a close echo of Chesterton's account of the operation of parody, he particularly approves of works in which 'antipathetic codes (the noble and the trivial, for example) come into contact [so that two] edges are created: an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge

[…] and *another edge*, mobile, blank (ready to assume any contours)' (Barthes, *Pleasure* 6).

Barthes's account corresponds with exactitude to the purposeful juxtaposition of 'high' and 'low' (or noble and trivial), as well as the simultaneous repetition (obedience, plagiarism) and deviation (mobility), encoded within the parodic act. Consequently, it may seem surprising that when Barthes discusses parody directly, his understanding of its parameters proves to be as reductive as that of Leavis. In *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), Barthes negatively compares parodic texts to the novels of Flaubert, which are 'so radically ambiguous (ambiguous at the root) that the text never succumbs to the good conscience (and bad faith) of parody (of castrating laughter, of "the comical that makes us laugh")' (9). Here Barthes identifies the comic element in parody as a paradoxical means of stifling play, a timorous backward step from the brink of multivalence to the safe distance of bluff mockery.

Barthes's analysis criticises the form for possessing the very attributes which Leavis considers it to lack, portraying the parodist as a reactionary upholder of literary authority, whose coercive value judgements are based upon 'classic' notions of what constitutes literary legitimacy: 'irony acts as a signpost, and thereby it destroys the multivalence we might expect from quoted discourse.' Therefore, while 'multivalence (contradicted by irony) is a transgression of ownership […] parody, or irony at work, is always *classic* language' (Barthes, *S/Z* 44-45). As these contradictory accounts demonstrate, both Leavis and Barthes see parody as essentially univocal in its critical laughter, whether irreverently making 'game' of textual authority, or directing an authoritarian 'castrating laughter' toward multivalent discourse. The most tenable explanation for this contradiction is that parody is capable of activating *both* of these tendencies—even simultaneously—as the following account of Chesterton's theory and practice will demonstrate.

The Poles of Parody

> Gregory struck out with his stick at the lamp-post, and then at the tree.
>
> "About this and this," he cried; "about order and anarchy. There is your precious order, that lean, iron lamp, ugly and barren; and there is anarchy, rich, living, reproducing itself—" […]
>
> "All the same," replied Syme patiently, "just at present you only see the tree by the light of the lamp."
>
> <div align="right">Chesterton, The Man Who Was Thursday (CW 6: 483)</div>

In *Paradox in Chesterton*, Kenner identifies an important distinction between 'verbal paradox' and 'metaphysical paradox' (17) in Chesterton's work. Although Kenner makes no reference to parody as an aspect of Chesterton's exploration and application of paradox, these terms offer a particularly illuminating means of understanding the structure of parody as I define it in this thesis. As Kenner summarises the distinction, 'paradoxes arise either out of our own confusion, which thinking can more and more nearly resolve, or from the nature of Being which is unresolvable' (23). These two forms of paradox correspond with exactitude to Esti Sheinberg's account of satire and the grotesque as two distinct discursive manifestations of irony—irony being the rhetorical parent model from which both parody and paradox derive (Sheinberg 27-28; Hutcheon 25). As Sheinberg explains, the discursive ambiguity encoded within the ironic act can be employed either satirically, as 'a prolongation device in a deciphering process, at the end of which there will be a resolution', or as 'an autonomous reflection on unresolvable paradoxes' (15). Sheinberg discusses the latter application as an expression of existential irony, which is manifested artistically in the grotesque: 'an unresolvable ironic utterance, a hybrid' (207).

If taken to their respective extremes, these two approaches find expression in the authoritarian pedagogy of Juvenalian satire and the anti-authoritarian relativism of the Rabelaisian grotesque. For Dustin Griffin (after William Anderson), the former mode is predicated upon conveying an edifying 'moral indignation' (76), while Bakhtin argues that in Rabelais, conversely, 'a parodic attitude toward almost all forms of ideological discourse—philosophical, moral, scholarly, rhetorical, poetic […] was intensified to the point where it became a parody of the very act of conceptualising anything in language' (*Dialogic* 309). In

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Kenner's terms, these two extremes embody 'a rhetorical use that answers merely to the complexity of human folly [and a] metaphysical use of paradox that answers to the complexity of being' (*Paradox* 16). Finally, Kenner identifies a third context—'aesthetic paradox' (*Paradox* 18)—which serves to balance the two poles, allowing neither to gain total ascendancy. For Kenner, 'aesthetic paradox' involves 'a resolution of the tensions within things and the tensions within language into a third kind of tension from which art takes its vitality' (*Paradox* 18). This provides a strikingly apt description of parody as I conceive it in this thesis.

Reconsidering Kenner's terms in the context of parody is also helpful in lending a structural rigour to the slightly ambiguous phrase, 'aesthetic paradox'. Again, this opacity derives from Kenner's inability to adequately engage with Chesterton's artistry. As Wills notes, '"aesthetic paradox" becomes a maze of meaningless distinctions because Kenner tries to make Chesterton wield "aesthetic paradox" without engaging in the activities of the artist' (*Man* 38). While this leads Wills to question the entire validity of Kenner's framework, we can begin to explicate its usefulness if we consider the three forms of paradox outlined by Kenner—verbal, metaphysical, and aesthetic, which he defines as 'the Word, the World, and that union of the Word and the World which is Art' (*Paradox* 18)—to correspond to the artistic spheres of the satirical, the grotesque, and the parodic. In this sense, parody plies its trade in the space of tension between the Word, as challengeable discursive act, and the World, as unresolvable paradox.

Hurley shares Wills' misgivings over Kenner's terminology, arguing that the latter's account fails to show 'how different instances of its use may be identified as being either '"essentially verbal" or "essentially metaphysical"' (*Chesterton* 59). This failure can be explained by the subtext of the 'tension' invoked by Kenner, which suggests that in the case of parody (or 'aesthetic paradox') it is impossible to extract such essentials. Rather, as Thompson explains, satire, parody, and the grotesque should be understood to possess an essentially 'interdependent relationship' (*Grotesque* 41). For example, if the element of satire, or verbal paradox, is entirely expunged, we are left not with parody, but with uncritical pastiche (or imitation); whereas if the element of grotesque irony, or metaphysical paradox, is fully extracted we are left merely with a diatribe. Looked at another way, when taken to their respective extremes, satire unreflectively destroys, while the grotesque uncritically accumulates.

These extremes are exemplified by the discourses of the critics with which my account began. Barthes's valorisation of an absolute textual relativism is very close in principle to the endlessly appreciative action of the grotesque—as Sheinberg explains, structurally 'the grotesque is the result of an additive process, in which all meanings are accepted and accumulated' (209). However, his uncritical adherence to this approach causes Barthes to underestimate the epistemological dangers presented by an undermining of the viability of objective valuation. Conversely, Leavis's Juvenalian stress upon 'valuation and judgement' (Bradbury, 'Matter' 190) causes him to over-state the disruptive potential of textual play to such an extent that he becomes exorbitantly culturally authoritarian. In this respect, Barthes and Leavis come to embody extremes of the poles under discussion—Leavis is the aloof satirist on his judgement seat, Barthes the iconoclastic proponent of the multivalent grotesque—and consequently each sees in parody only a manifestation of the pole to which he is opposed. Wherever parody infiltrates such discourses, these extremes will be productively complicated, because its ambivalently imitative dynamic causes it to rebound intractably between a retention and subversion of authority. As Dentith explains this dynamic, parody possesses a 'mobility and flexibility' which enables it both to 'subvert the accents of authority and police the boundaries of the sayable', with the consequence that 'no single social or political meaning can be attached to it' (*Parody* 27-28).

This lithe fluidity derives from the etymological root shared by paradox and parody—'para', meaning both 'beside' and 'contrary to' (Barnhart 754)—which imbeds an interpretative duality within the linguistic core of each term. As Rose has noted, 'the ambiguity of the prefix "para" [lies in] its ability to describe both nearness and opposition' (8).[1] Consequently, the juxtaposition of 'para' with 'odos' in Aristotle's original coinage, *parodia*, enables the term to be interpreted either as 'oppositional song', or the less adversarial 'parallel song'.[2] Again, this reflects the capacity of textual parody to occupy a dialogic position at any point on a sliding scale between the most affectionate homage and the most critical polemic, since it

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[1] Rose is paraphrasing F.J. Leviere. Hutcheon also notes the interpretative duality of the 'para' in 'parody' (32). Hutcheon later discusses the 'paradox of parody' (69), but only in terms of its 'authorised transgression' (76). As with Rose's definition, Hutcheon does not link 'para' to paradox in the literal sense in which I am using it here.

[2] These are my terms.

is structurally predicated upon a variable admixture of adherence and departure. A comparable multivalence arises when the ambiguous prefix is conjoined to the 'doxa' of paradox, meaning 'opinion' (Barnhart 754). This renders 'paradox' construable as either 'opposing opinion', connoting a satirical contradiction of a cultural orthodoxy, or 'parallel opinion', connoting a grotesque accumulation of contexts—the latter serving to more subtly undermine the absolute authority of the orthodoxy, by drawing attention to the discordant aspect of any apparently coherent worldview, which is located in its slight off-centeredness in relation to every other conceivable worldview.

A particularly instructive example of the complex interaction of the poles of parody under discussion is offered by an early journalistic fracas involving Chesterton, in which parody and paradox come together. Chesterton's eagerness to challenge cultural orthodoxies had quickly established his reputation as a purveyor of extravagant verbal paradox, an idiosyncrasy which occasionally caused irritation among the readers of his earliest columns. One correspondent to *The Speaker* sardonically ascribed deliberate parody to Chesterton's ostensible excesses, ironically expressing his 'unbounded admiration for "G.K.C." as a humourist. As a parodist of that fantastical modern style which revels in forced and false *antitheses* he is simply un-equalled' ('Correspondence.' *Speaker* 1 Feb. 1902). Chesterton responded with a vigorous rebuttal ('Bacon and Beastliness.' *Speaker* 8 Feb. 1902), which anticipates Kenner's account of metaphysical paradox as the expression of 'something inherently intractable in being itself' (*Paradox* 17), by drawing attention to the element of existential irony in paradox. Chesterton surmises that his correspondent had 'got into his head [the] extraordinary idea that paradox is a flowery, artificial thing, invented by literary *flâneurs*', whereas the fact 'that paradox is continuous and ancient (the word itself dates from the time of Plato) is quite clear'. Chesterton goes on to account for the cultural permanence of paradox: 'the reason is that there is really a strand of contradiction running through the whole universe, in proportion as men perceive it, they admit a contradiction: in proportion as men become honest they become paradoxical' (BL MS Add.73381 ff.87).[3]

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[3] British Library manuscript references are given when the document has not been published elsewhere. The manuscript referred to here contains clippings of all Chesterton's articles for *The Speaker*, many of which have never been republished. Both sides of this correspondence are collected in BL MS Add. 73381 ff.87. Chesterton's side of the exchange is also quoted in Oddie 189-90.

In the example at hand, Chesterton's understanding of the complexities of the rhetorical framework under discussion enables him to wield the devices of parody in particularly dextrous fashion, to the detriment of his would-be opponent. His antagonist posits himself as a satirist—an ironical exponent of verbal paradox, delivered to correct the wayward rhetorician. Chesterton then counters with an exposition of the intractability of the existential grotesque which, ironically enough, he delivers in a pedagogic manner, thus satirically parodying the presumption of the satirist. In this curious exchange, the consistent coexistence and intertwining of the two poles of parody comes into focus with particular clarity. Later in his reply, Chesterton employs the paradox of courage to illustrate the existential 'strand of contradiction' that he is concerned with elaborating: 'I have only to say, "Courage involves the power to be frightened," and you have a paradox and a plain fact of common sense' (BL MS Add.73381 ff.87). As he explains elsewhere, in an account which corresponds to Maebh Long's description of irony as 'the hyphenation of extremes' (17), bravery is meaningless unless conjoined with potential cowardice, so that unresolved antithesis is ingrained within the conceptual structure of the word, 'courage', itself: 'the paradox of Courage [...] says, "You must defy the thing that is terrifying; unless you are frightened, you are not brave"' ('Fairy Tales.' *World* 27 Sept. 1904; qtd. in Ahlquist, *Common* 46).

Chesterton's example is an archetypal expression of the rhetorical grotesque, in which 'semantic contraries' (Sheinberg 207) are hybridised within a single lexical unit. As Chesterton explains in *George Bernard Shaw* (1909), through this procedure, 'two opposite cords of truth become entangled in an inextricable knot' (*CW* 11: 449). Notably, Chesterton's definition of parody—'the worshipper's half-holiday'—is itself a version of the existential grotesque, in the sense that the juxtaposition of worship and holiday conveys a collapsed conjunction of antitheses. These apparently contrary principles are also hybridised in the etymology of holiday itself, which, as Chesterton notes elsewhere, derives from 'holy day' (*Heretics* 54), a duality which suggests that reverence and play are indissolubly bound up with one another. Indeed, when we consider that a combination of repetition and deviation, producing simultaneous destruction and renewal, is the structural hallmark of parody, we can see that the act itself is founded upon the same hybridising premise as the grotesque.

A later attempt on Chesterton's part to define his terms again illustrates his understanding of the duality inherent in his preferred modes of discourse. In 'Paradox' (*DN* 28 Oct. 1911), Chesterton cites the Biblical example, '"Whosoever shall lose his life the same shall save it"' (*CDN* 7: 231), as a further instance of metaphysical paradox. However, he notes that this does not constitute paradox in the strictest etymological sense: 'In mere derivation, of course, the word means that which is against opinion; presumably public opinion' (*CDN* 7: 231). Chesterton argues that his use of this form of paradox, which corresponds to 'verbal paradox' in Kenner's terms, does not set out to challenge what he perceives to be the enduring consensus of 'public' opinion, but rather the transient orthodoxies of fashionable coteries: it 'does not mean that which differs from democratic tradition, but that which differs from intellectual fashion recently made current in a comparatively small circle' (*CDN* 7: 232). In a near-contemporaneous essay, 'The End of Parody' (*DN* 18 Mar. 1911), Chesterton anticipates this more adversarial reading of paradox by placing an emphasis upon the local, combative aspects of parody, in contrast to the more universal, ambivalent rendering of the earlier 'Bret Harte' essay, with its rhetorically grotesque definition of the form.

In 'The End of Parody', Chesterton figures parody as a tool of the satirist, employed in the cause of reasoning out errors in fashionable orthodoxies, thus reading satire as the 'end' for which parody offers the means. Chesterton argues that the modern state is in the process of enacting the literal end of this procedure, by criminalising the techniques through which such parody functions. He reaches this conclusion in response to a case of libel brought against his friend, W.R. Titterton, for a recently published parody of *Daily Express* journalism. As Chesterton explains, Titterton had 'adopted that method of satire […] called in Euclid the *reductio ad absurdum*' (*CDN* 7: 93). This is 'the most ancient and obvious of methods of light controversy—the turning of an opponent's case against himself' (*CDN* 7: 93), a technique comparable to that employed by Chesterton against his epistolary antagonist in *The Speaker*. To this end, Titterton's piece was composed with 'a monstrous and ironical gravity: like that of Voltaire's "Candide" or Swift's "Modest Proposal" […] But the obvious point was that it was a parody' (*CDN* 7: 93). The fact that such a parody could be prosecuted as a textual slur demonstrates to Chesterton that 'points of libel have gone very near to making literature impossible. At least, they tend to force literature to drop satire and adopt

pure eulogy' (*CDN* 7: 92). As Chesterton concludes, 'I think it is the twilight of liberty; but I am sure it is the sunset of satire' (*CDN* 7: 93).

As these examples demonstrate, the poles of satirical and grotesque parody inform Chesterton's approach towards—respectively—his social, political, and cultural moment, and his wider understanding of existence itself. However, he also argues that a recognition of the grotesque contradictions of existence should temper any inclination to be excessively adversarial or dogmatic in controversy. In a further irony, in *George Bernard Shaw*, Chesterton employs this insight to project a suspiciously pristine distinction between his position and that of his most famous adversarial antipode. He figures the poles of verbal satire and the existential grotesque—which he characterises here as 'wit' and 'humour'—as operating in a mutually dependent balance, since they embody the individual's capacity to adopt an ironic stance towards the contemporary social world and the self.[4] Chesterton argues that Shaw possesses only wit, and that this imbalance is his greatest failing, since it means that 'there is nothing really problematic in Shaw's mind' (*CW* 11: 447). In contrast, Chesterton approvingly notes that a 'humorous confession of futility was much of the force in Charles Lamb and in Stevenson', whereas '[t]here is nothing of this in Shaw; his wit is never a weakness; therefore it is never a sense of humour. For wit is always connected with the idea that truth is close and clear. Humour, on the other hand, is always connected with the idea that truth is tricky' (*CW* 11: 380).

In his essayistic definition of 'Humour', discussed briefly in my introduction, Chesterton again lays particular stress upon the mutually balancing nature of wit and humour as synonyms of satire and the grotesque. This much later essay demonstrates his enduring adherence to a dualistic position, belying the common critical view, articulated by David Lodge, that Chesterton's 'acceptance of Catholicism' ('Dual' 335) caused his later years to be increasingly characterised by 'a certain rigidity which did not combine easily with […] the idea of metaphysical duality' ('Dual' 327). Chesterton describes satire as possessing an essential critical function in maintaining objective value and containing the potential drift toward a nihilistic relativism: 'It is a grave error to underrate wit as something trivial; for certain purposes of satire it can truly be the sword of the spirit', because it

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[4] See Martin (25-46), for an account of the enduring distinction drawn historically between wit and humour.

represents 'reason on its judgement seat' (*Spice* 23). Nonetheless, he evinces a temperamental preference for the grotesque aspect of 'humour', because 'humour can be of the finest and yet lay open the guard or confess its inconsistency' (*Spice* 23). In other words, humour is more open and ambivalent than satire, and consequently more truly analogous to existence.

In Chesterton's early fiction, his protagonists are repeatedly situated as exemplars of an unresolved dialogue between the poles of wit and humour, certainty and doubt, or adherence and departure, that are tied together in the principle of the worshipper's half-holiday. For example, as Boyd notes, the contretemps between Wayne and Quin, in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, is 'not a confrontation between individuals, but a confrontation between earnestness and humour' (20). The pair end the story with an understanding that 'the pure fanatic [and] the pure satirist' are really 'two lobes of the [same] brain' (*CW* 6: 379), and in this spirit they are last seen wandering into the distance in friendly conversation. A comparable principle is true of the final reconciliation of the morally exercised policeman, Syme, and the existential anarchist, Gregory, in *The Man Who Was Thursday*; the purposeful irresolution of the quarrel between Chesterton's theological disputants, the religious fundamentalist, MacIan, and the iconoclastic atheist, Turnbull, in *The Ball and the Cross* (1909); and the picaresque partnership of the 'Conservative' Pump and the 'Radical' Dalroy (*Flying* 206) in *The Flying Inn* (1914).

Quin's complaint, in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, that he had 'tried to compose a burlesque, and it seems to be turning into an epic' (*CW* 6: 278) due to Wayne's intervention, also demonstrates the way in which the co-presence of these two extremes manifests itself artistically in the parodic juxtaposition of the absurd and sublime. This aesthetic outcome arises from the fact that each representative of the dyads listed above embodies a characteristic of his creator— reverence and critical distance, respectively—which cannot be sloughed off without producing an internal imbalance. Chesterton's contemporary, Dixon Scott, noted that Chesterton was, himself, accused of both 'undue flippancy, [and] of undue earnestness' (265) by baffled critics. This confusion arises from the dualistic nature of his philosophical programme, which explains why he consistently turned to parody as a mode that is not uncomplicatedly judgemental *or* relativistic, satirical or grotesque, but rather essays a delicate, ever-shifting

balance between the two. When viewed in this light, we begin to understand Chesterton's location within the enduring lineage of parodic writers outlined in my introduction—figures who, in the words of John Docker, 'parody conventionality at the same time as they parody themselves and their own claims to truth' (143), in a manner that essays a continual navigation of the 'third kind of tension' identified by Kenner in 'aesthetic paradox'.

A particularly instructive example of Chesterton's anxiety to balance the poles of satire and the grotesque through parody occurs in his essay, 'Pope and the Art of Satire' (1905).[5] Here Chesterton takes pains to offset his account of Pope's combative use of 'the great and civilised art of satire' (*Twelve* 51) with a re-emphasis upon the principle of the intractability of existence: Pope's 'antitheses were fully in harmony with existence, which is itself a contradiction in terms' (*Twelve* 50). Appropriately enough, Chesterton crowns his encomium to Pope's rhetorical genius with a parody of his literary style, employing the comic technique of exhaustively exaggerative verbalism to illustrate the superiority of Pope's extreme formal concision—and the grotesque hybridisation which it accommodates—to the baggy superfluity characteristic of lesser Edwardian poets:

Instead of writing,

"A being darkly wise and rudely great,"

the contemporary poet, in his elaborately ornamented book of verses, would produce something like the following:

"a creature
Of feature
More dark, more dark, more dark than skies,
Yea, darkly wise, yea, darkly wise:
Darkly wise as a formless fate.
And if he be great,
If he be great, then rudely great,
Rudely great as a plough that plies,
And darkly wise, and darkly wise" (*Twelve* 47-48).

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[5] First published as 'The Decline of Satire' (see above, 9). The text cited here was added to the amended version, collected in *Twelve Types*.

Here parody is used, counter-intuitively, to bolster the authority of a previous discursive statement, a goal which then becomes the occasion for the parodist's verbal satire of a third context. Hutcheon has noted that '[l]ike Pope's mock epics, many parodies today do not ridicule the background texts, but use them as standards by which to place the contemporary under scrutiny. The modernist verse of Eliot and Pound is probably the most obvious example of this kind of attitude, one that suggests almost a respectful or deferential ethos' (57). Although Hutcheon does not refer to Chesterton's essay, it offers a singularly apt corroboration of her reading, since the unspoken precedent that informs his methodology is Pope's *Dunciad* (1728), which employs Homer's *Iliad* as an exemplary structural template through which to launch a mock-heroic critique of his contemporaries.

In this respect, Chesterton's skit scrupulously balances the poles of parody in a formal, as well as conceptual, sense—it is a sympathetic pastiche (or 'parallel song') of Pope's method, bound up with an adversarial satire (or 'oppositional song') aimed at Chesterton's contemporaries. A further connotation of the prefix, 'para', is to protect, cover, or defend (from the Latin, *parare*; see Barnhart 754), an application discernible in 'parachute' and 'parasol'. In view of the recurring presence of epigrammatic collapsed ambivalence in Chesterton's own stylistics—not least in his definition of parody—this example not only serves to defend an aspect of Pope's achievement, but also to mobilise the satirist in tacit defence of Chesterton's own method. In this way, the forebear becomes a friend who the parodist takes into battle as 'cover' against unsympathetic contemporary fashions. In the process, the tension at the heart of parody is again evoked by a paean to the mysterious intractability of the existential grotesque ('a being darkly wise and rudely great'), which becomes the simultaneous occasion for a decisively bifurcating act of oppositional satire.

Perhaps the most telling proof of the centrality of these principles to Chesterton's life and work is their interrelated co-presence in his theological imagination. In an echo of his account of satire as 'the sword of the spirit'—an allusion to Ephesians 6:17—Chesterton states elsewhere that 'a creed is the sword of the spirit' ('The Evil Day.' *DN* 26 June 1909; *CDN* 5: 344), suggesting an imaginative correspondence between the moral framework and existential certainties offered by satirical and religious creeds. However, the principle of the

existential grotesque is also emblematised by a religious symbol of equal importance in Chesterton's imaginative landscape—the cross—which he discusses, in *The Ball and the Cross*, as 'primarily and above all things at enmity with itself. The cross is the conflict of two hostile lines, of irreconcilable direction' (*CW* 7: 41). Appropriately enough, the purposeful irresolution of the duel between MacIan and Turnbull—as representatives of certainty and doubt—is symbolised by Chesterton's repeated depiction of their swords meeting in the shape of a cross. At one perilous stage, 'the two bright, bloodthirsty weapons made the sign of the cross in horrible parody upon each other' (*CW* 7: 152), while the novel ends with a conceptually inverse image of the discarded swords having 'fallen haphazard in the pattern of a cross' (*CW* 7: 258), thus transmuting the 'horrible parody' into a benign image of reconciliation.

Dialogism and Variety: Chesterton's Anti-Hegelian Poetics

"[T]he whole object of despotism is to get some sort of unity."

Barker, in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (*CW* 6: 262)

As the final image of *The Ball and the Cross* suggests, the agon of Turnbull and MacIan is not resolved with one disputant triumphing over the other, either physically or intellectually, but instead comes to an end with Turnbull's final acceptance of MacIan's relation to him as an apparently antithetic binary—his 'friend and enemy' (*CW* 7: 236). This construction of a harmony in unresolved antithesis illustrates Chesterton's very deliberate departure from what he considered the ascendant philosophical doctrine of his age: neo-Hegelian idealism. Hegel's dialectic, within which philosophical enquiry proceeds from thesis, to antithesis, to a final higher synthesis of values, can be interpreted as an attempt to domesticate the disruptive energies of the existential grotesque, insofar as Hegel expressed a distrust of the 'negativity of irony' (*Aesthetics* 66) when conceived as an end in itself. In order to counter this putative negativity, Hegel reconceived irony as the subordinate, antithetic stage in the dialectical process, which is ultimately transfigured through the movement toward synthesis.

Hegel's dialectical structure can be understood to correspond approximately to Kenner's account of verbal paradox as a procedure through 'which thinking can more and more nearly resolve' contradiction (re-*solution* being conceptually akin to synthesis). As this suggests, idealist philosophy is prone to display overconfidence in the autonomous reasoning power of the intellect, unalloyed by a balancing conception that 'truth is tricky', as Chesterton's definition of humour has it. In this sense, dialectics is a fundamentally rationalistic system, its tripartite structure borrowed from Aristotelian logic, or what Chesterton terms 'the chains of syllogism' (*Twelve* 98). Chesterton coins this phrase in 'Charles II' (collected in *Twelve Types*), in a discussion of the systematising tendency of the 'intellectual bullies' (*Twelve* 98) responsible for seventeenth-century Puritanism, the doctrinal inflexibility of which could not accommodate 'all the chaotic and unclassed parts of human nature, the parts that are left over, and will always be left over, by every rationalistic system of life' (*Twelve* 100).

As Bakhtin argues, Hegel's pristinely abstract system attempts a comparable evacuation of all that is various, capricious, and unruly in human relations: 'Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgements from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics' (*Speech* 147). Bakhtin's 'anti-Hegelianism' (Pechey 14) derives from his belief that '[i]deological monologism […] found its clearest […] expression in idealistic philosophy' (*Problems* 80), specifically in 'Hegel's monological dialectic' (*Speech* 162). Bakhtin explains that the 'monistic principle, that is, the affirmation of the unity of *existence*, is, in idealism, transformed into the unity of *consciousness*' (*Problems* 80). In opposition to this monologic striving after unity, Bakhtin proposed the contrary principle of dialogic relation. As Julia Kristeva explains, although the structure of dialogism is superficially evocative of Hegel's system, it actually operates in an anti-Hegelian manner:

> [Dialogism] must not be confused with Hegelian dialectics, based on a triad and thus
> on struggle and projection (a movement of transcendence) […] Dialogism replaces
> these concepts by absorbing them within the concept of relation. It does not strive

towards transcendence but rather toward harmony, all the while implying an idea of

rupture (of opposition and analogy) as a modality of transformation (*Kristeva* 58).

Dialogism denies the desirability of Hegel's progress to a transcendent

unification of antitheses, instead halting the dialectical process at the irresolution

of the antithetic stage, which Habib characterises as the point at which 'the object

is viewed as mediated: its identity and essence are seen to reside in the diversity of

its relations with other objects' (130). Similarly, Coates has noted that

Chesterton's opposition to the neo-Hegelian philosophy prevalent at the turn of

the century led him to stringently 'insist on the discrete identity of objects', and

informed 'his resolute and continuous hostility to all the various rhetorics or

terminologies of merging, blending, changing, developing or evolving into higher

or unknown forms, which the age produced so liberally' (*Controversialist* 25). In

Chesterton's fiction, a retention of un-synthesised diversity is exemplified by the

conclusion of the duel of MacIan and Turnbull, when the pair abandon their

swords, which symbolise their dogmatic theses, in the shape of a cross, which

symbolises 'irreconcilable' antithesis, so that thesis and antithesis become frozen

in mutual relation. In this light, Chesterton's text can be understood as an

archetype of the 'polyphonic novel' espoused by Bakhtin as an aesthetic corollary

of dialogism, in which 'a plurality of equally-valid consciousnesses' (*Problems* 7)

are brought together in dialogic confrontation, the ultimate irresolution of which

enables a radical disruption of the agonistic premises of dialectical conflict when

played out in the cultural arena.

Chesterton outlines his anti-Hegelian position in an essay on 'The Cosmic

Stew-Pot' (*T.P.'s Weekly* Dec. 1910), the title of which constitutes a

characteristically burlesque analogy, parodically conflating the abstract with the

corporeal in order to bring the lofty, arcane rhetoric of synthesis literally down to

earth. Here Chesterton argues that '[t]here has crept into our thoughts [...] a

curious and unnatural idea. I mean the idea that unity is itself a good thing; that

there is something high and spiritual about things being blended and absorbed into

each other' (*Man Who* 108). Chesterton explains that his contrary philosophy of

existence is based upon the principle of 'renewing the varieties for ever' (*Man

Who* 109), a phrase which forms the titular heading to this chapter, in view of its

exemplification of the appreciative and restorative double action upon which

Chestertonian parody is based. Chesterton's emphasis upon the maintenance of variety is echoed in Bakhtin's account of the structure of parody, which closely corresponds to his exposition of the function of dialogism. In parody 'there cannot be [a] fusion of voices', since the voices are 'isolated from one another, separated by a distance', so that 'in parody the deliberate palpability of the other's discourse must be sharp and clearly marked' (*Problems* 193). Hutcheon concurs with Bakhtin's reading, considering parody to be predicated upon the 'differential but mutual dependence of parody and parodied texts. Its two voices neither merge nor cancel each other out; they work together, while remaining distinct in their defining difference' (xiv).

Chesterton's critical work features a number of parodies designed to emphasise the uniqueness of discrete textual entities, anticipating Gross's account of the parodist's pleasure that a writer such as Browning 'should choose to apprehend the universe in this one peculiar fashion. And […] that he should keep it up—that he can always be relied on to be Browningesque' (*Oxford* xii). Chesterton's own study of Browning features one such instance. He begins by taking two sublime lines from Tennyson—'Thou art the highest, and most human too', and 'We needs must love the highest when we see it'—before rendering them in absurdly heightened Browning-ese—'High's human; man loves best, best visible'—to demonstrate the drawbacks in comprehensibility of the latter's clamorous method (*Robert* 147). However, he goes on to demonstrate, through a deliberately pedestrian parody of his own, that Browning's 'outrageous gallop' is frequently preferable to a more 'conventional and classical' (147) rendering, thus elaborating the unique distinction of Browning's art. Through this approach, Chesterton not only illustrates the distinct value of the aesthetic entities themselves, but pragmatically demonstrates that they cannot be fused.

While Chesterton stresses the equivalent value of the expressive methods of each poet here, it is no coincidence that it is a sublime evocation of the 'highest' on Tennyson's part that prompts his irreverent tampering. In 'A Step of Progress' (*DN* 14 July 1906), he rounds upon 'the cowardly and detestable word "high" as used in speaking of "high ideals" and "high thinking". It is supposed to be so very ethereal, and it is really a gross material metaphor' (*CDN* 4: 5). This attack should again be understood in the context of Chesterton's distrust of the evanescent rhetoric of 'higher' synthesis, which, in his youth, was frequently employed to

lend a patina of philosophical respectability to the agonistic business of empire, through a transferral of Hegel's premise of the dialectical confluence of antitheses to the principle of one culture being subsumed within another, ostensibly superior culture. As Chesterton argued, the 'task of modern idealists [...] is made too easy for them by the fact that they are always taught that if a thing has been defeated it has been disproved' (*CW* 4: 59). In contradistinction, Chesterton's satirical adherence to verbal paradox, as a statement that runs contrary to conventional opinion, is predicated upon a programmatic questioning of the dominant ideology which, in Hegel, has triumphed due to its greater authoritative power. Appropriately enough, satire is the form to which Chesterton turns when deriding the adherent to Hegelian philosophy as a simultaneously weak and malign figure: 'ordinary people do not shrink from a Hegelian: they merely pity him. They do what they can to make his life happier: they make him Minister of War' ('The Daisy as Imperial Symbol.' *ILN* 8 June 1907; *CW* 27: 482).

Perhaps the first parody that Chesterton ever composed, when he was still a small boy struggling with basic spelling, was an inversion of W.E. Aytoun's *Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers* (1849), which sets out to challenge the official historical line on a defeated uprising. Maisie Ward discusses this as 'an excellent imitation [...] but on the opposite side', since Chesterton defends Lord Archibald Campbell, the first Marquess of Argyll, in his attempts to ward off the advance of English Royalists into Scotland, in the process turning Aytoun's 'hero into a traitor [...] and his traitor Argyll into a hero' (*Gilbert* 21). Chesterton's intuitive support for the underdog later translated into a more philosophically rigorous anti-imperialist stance, which was catalysed by the traumatic events of the Second Boer War (1899-1902). As Stapleton notes, this conflict alerted Chesterton 'to the importance of differentiation at a variety of cosmic levels' (*Christianity* 33). In an interview conducted in 1931, Chesterton asserted that '[p]erhaps the catastrophic event [of my life]—if you want one—was the South African War. There I saw something which seemed to me to be the meanest kind of financial grab' (*Man Who* 171). Forty years after the fact, the note of passionate indignation resounds with undiminished force in Chesterton's *Autobiography*: 'I hated the whole thing as I had never hated anything before' (113).

In an incisive crystallisation of the philosophical sophistries employed by imperial powers to justify land-grabs of this kind, Chesterton objected to what he

termed the '"opportunist cosmopolitanism"' (qtd. in Ker 134) of the philosophers of empire. Again evoking Hegelian synthesis, such apologists valorised the incorporation of other cultures into the imperial body in the name of a speciously utopian, cosmopolitan 'progress', the bad faith of which was exposed by the suspiciously opportune nature of the targets selected. The sophistries to which this principle led are illustrated by the discreditable position that Chesterton ascribed to his friend, H.G. Wells: 'He says that […] it might be necessary, in policing the planet, to force backward peoples to open their resources to cosmopolitan commerce' (*Autobiography* 225). In contrast, Chesterton derided the blithe, solipsistic assumption of superiority which imperialist powers brought to this clash of values: 'cosmopolitanism [is] really a rather one-sided affair […] It means that there shall be a Professor of Sloyd Carpentry sent among the Maoris of New Zealand; it does not mean that there shall be a Professor of Tattooing at Oxford or Cambridge' ('The Sacred Street.' *DN* 4 June 1904; *CDN* 2: 238).

As with his irreverent image of 'The Cosmic Stew-Pot', Chesterton frequently challenges the philosophical justification of territorial conquest by substituting material metaphors for sublime rhetoric. This reveals a further important application of the grotesque in his parodic repertoire—its emphasis upon the unvarnished physicality of the material world over the evasive abstractions of intellectual systems. Chesterton's consistent recourse to bathetically materialistic analogies as a means of debunking rhetorical duplicity inverts the conventional view of 'coarse' language as a morally dubious profanation of the sublime, instead employing the parodic modes of burlesque (situational parody, in which lofty themes are transposed into 'low' scenarios) and travesty (stylistic parody, in which lofty rhetoric is transposed into unrefined language) as the means of conveying a moral message. An example of the burlesque approach is offered by his essay, 'A Defence of Patriotism' (*Speaker* 4 May 1901), in which the empire's geographic extremities are referred to as 'its fists and its boots', an image which associates oppressive brutality with the furthest reaches of an imperial body-politic divested of a 'head and heart' (*Defendant* 167). Chesterton later essayed a comparable approach in *What's Wrong with the World* (1910): 'that an Empire whose heart is failing should be specially proud of the 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' (*CW* 4: 90).

In replacing the evanescent rhetoric of Hegelian synthesis with the material rhetoric of physical oppression and corporeal degeneration, Chesterton manipulates what Pope termed '"the very bathos of the human Body"' (qtd. in Crangle and Nicholls 4), in order to parody the sentimental cod-sublimity of a pristinely synthesised empire, upon which 'the sun never sets'.[6] As Kiremidjian argues, the function of this parodic approach is 'to degrade and ridicule the lofty by transforming it into imposture of some sort […] The moral point of [burlesque is] to reveal that all things have two faces, that the appearance of loftiness is [often] a projection of vanity' (*Study* 17). In this way, parody 'raises the question of what the relation is between form and content', and in the process 'forces us to become aware of the manner' (*Study* 17) in which form and content guide our reception of rhetoric. This stylistic device forms a key element of the 'trenchant satire of euphemism' (*Paradox* 17), which Kenner identifies as a mainstay of Chesterton's polemics. For example, in *Eugenics and Other Evils* (1922), Chesterton parodically exposes the tendency of advocates of eugenics to strategically adopt the passive voice as a means of obscuring the violence implicit in their policies. In one instance, he employs a reverse-travesty—the ironic translation of direct expression into arcane verbalism—as a parodic parallel to clinch his point: 'Hamlet said, "I should have fatted all the region kites with this slave's offal." The Eugenist would say, "The region kites should, if possible, be fattened; and the offal of this slave is available for the dietetic experiment"' (*CW* 4: 326).

Chesterton's mastery of this form of counterargument was particularly nurtured by his first journalistic position, at the Liberal newspaper, *The Speaker*. Stapleton notes that the senior staff of the paper were united by 'an antipathy toward philosophical idealism', especially 'its emphasis upon opposites merging into a higher unity' (*Christianity* 33). As Coates explains, this antipathy was expressed through an editorial tone which continually 'parodied and ridiculed the language and demolished the moral and intellectual pretentions of empire' (*Controversialist* 68), with a critical ear finely attuned to 'the connotations of language, [and] the relation of styles of discourse to the moral and emotional life

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[6] Luke Seaber makes a similar point about the controversial phrase, '"kick niggers"', in 'A Defence of Patriotism': 'Chesterton is unmasking the ugly truth behind the clean rhetoric of the empire builders' (*Literary* 310).

of individuals and societies' (*Controversialist* 52). One particularly notable feature of the paper was its implantation of stand-alone humorous pieces immediately after the serious leading articles. These articles employed parody, satire, and nonsense to recast the rhetorical sobriety of the opening pages as scurrilous invective, a juxtapositional technique which produces a formal echo of the conventional running order of the Greek drama, in which the final comic piece would parody the tragic events that preceded it.

In view of this recourse to comedic modes borrowed from Aristophanes as a means of deflating the sublime rhetoric of neo-Hegelian dogma, it is telling that Chesterton's 'defence' essays were originally published in *The Speaker*, since these not only include his burlesque critique of imperialist rhetoric, the 'Defence of Patriotism', but also his paeans to aesthetic variety—the defences of detective fiction, the penny dreadful, nonsense, and farce—in which Chesterton makes an explicit appeal to Aristophanes as an aesthetic standard: 'two thousand years have beaten as vainly upon the follies of the "Frogs" as on the wisdom of the "Republic"' (*Defendant* 127). Of course, Chesterton's adoption of the 'defence' format also constitutes a knowing allusion to the aesthetic 'defence' essay inaugurated by Sir Phillip Sidney ('The Defence of Poesy', 1595), and later pastiched by Shelley ('A Defence of Poetry', 1840). However, rather than mimicking Sidney and Shelley in recruiting 'high' forms of culture to defend the legitimacy of art, Chesterton opts to defend ostensibly 'low' literary forms *as* legitimate art. In this way, Chesterton's series parodically inverts the advocacy of the sublime which informed these earlier examples, so as to complement his political critique of sublime rhetoric on the world stage with a cultural critique of sublime rhetoric in the domestic arena.

As with his challenge to the discursive authority of the eugenics movement, Chesterton undertakes this critique as a means of highlighting the arbitrary nature of the social authority projected by contemporary cultural thinkers. In pursuing this line of argument, Chesterton chose to set himself in opposition to the defining critical voice of the Victorian era, the steadfast opponent of all things parodic, Matthew Arnold. Chesterton's challenge to Arnold particularly focuses upon re-establishing an understanding of the fundamentally complementary nature of seriousness and comedy which had characterised the Greeks' approach to genre, and which he believed to have been corrupted, from the Renaissance onwards, by

the imposition of extrinsic value judgements pertaining to the moral purpose and influential effect of literature. Before beginning his statements for the defence, Chesterton adopts the role of insubordinate prosecutor, curtly dismissing the notion that 'low' literature is morally degrading: 'This is the magisterial theory, and this is rubbish' (*Defendant* 22). In 'A Defence of Farce', he goes on to replace the rhetoric of 'low' and 'high', which he later argued 'logically means nothing, but morally means priggishness' ('Women, Worrying, and the Higher Culture.' *ILN* May 12 1906; *CW* 27: 189), with dispassionate generic discrimination:

> I have never been able to understand why certain forms of art should be marked off as something debased and trivial. A comedy is spoken of as "degenerating into farce"; it would be fair criticism to speak of it "changing into farce"; but as for degenerating into farce, we might equally reasonably speak of it as degenerating into tragedy (*Defendant* 121).

Similarly, Chesterton draws attention to the consistent valorisation of only one element of Greek aesthetics—the sublime—in post-Renaissance culture, while highlighting the differing value judgements that have obtained in other eras and cultures: in 'the Middle Ages men broke away from the Greek standard of beauty' (*Defendant* 117), the narrowness of which is itself belied by the diversity of enduring Greek art, stretching from Plato to Aristophanes. Chesterton's argument challenges contemporary prejudices through a comparable technique to that which Morson identifies in parodic debunking: 'parody is most readily invited by an utterance that claims transhistorical authority […] Parody historicizes, and in so doing, it exposes the conditions that engendered claims of unconditionality' ('Parody' 78). Of course, there is an irony in this historicising gesture, since it coincides with Chesterton's engagement in an impish one-upmanship with what Stefan Collini has termed Arnold's '"Greeker than thou" tone' (84), a challenge which postulates Chesterton's own status as the guardian of an alternative trans-historical authority, based upon a balance of earnestness and play. Elsewhere, he notes that '[w]e have forgotten that Aristophanes and Rabelais stand with Aeschylus and Dante; that their folly was wiser and more solid than our wisdom, and that their levity has outlasted a hundred philosophies' ('Charles Dickens.' *DN* 8 Feb. 1902; *CDN* 1: 329). In this way, Chesterton

repeatedly reasserts the trans-historical authority of a 'forgotten' aesthetic model which he happens to practice himself.

This attempt to re-orientate the reader's aesthetic standards belies Chesterton's protestations, in his 'Defence of a New Edition' of the collected essays, that 'speaking legally, a defendant is not an enthusiast for King John or the domestic virtues of the prairie-dog. He is one who defends himself', and this is 'a thing which the present writer […] certainly never dreamed of attempting' (*Defendant* 6). Culturally speaking, *The Defendant* is as much an act of self-defence as dispassionate advocacy, much as Chesterton's defence of the method of a forebear becomes indistinguishable from self-defence in the Pope essay. The *Defendant* essays constitute a pre-emptive riposte to an intellectual atmosphere in which certain aesthetic forms with which the writer identifies are considered culturally invalid, with the further implication that this culture will consider the author himself invalid, unless it is educated in an alternative approach to culture. Chesterton's early criticism therefore takes its cue from Wordsworth, who famously argued (after Coleridge) that the 'great and original writer […] must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished; he must teach the art by which he is to be seen' (*Letters* 103). The necessity for Chesterton to pursue a comparable strategy is hinted at in E.C. Bentley's diaries, in an entry which refers to the early drafts of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* that Chesterton was working on when the pair began their careers in public life: 'Sat up with him planning an absurd story of a London war that he is busying himself with just now. The kind of thing that never can be published until he has educated the public up to liking anything he writes—then they would be capable of seeing the good in his frantic, fanciful tales' (4 Feb. 1900; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.869).

There is a circular irony in Chesterton's resemblance to Wordsworth in this area, since the latter was Arnold's great touchstone, and Chesterton's attempt to sculpt a place for himself within a cultural landscape in which present standards were unfavourable to his reception was founded upon a challenge both to Arnold's uncritical valorisation of the sublime, and his anti-democratic, authoritarian vision of culture. In his critical study of Browning, Chesterton employs Arnold as his subject's antithesis: whereas 'Browning [was] an intellectual democrat […] Arnold was an intellectual aristocrat' (*Robert* 41). In *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913), Chesterton claims acerbically that

Arnold's critical principles ultimately resolve themselves in an aristocracy of one: 'some may suspect that culture was a man, whose name was Matthew Arnold [… He] kept a smile of heartbroken forbearance, as of the teacher in an idiot school, that was enormously insulting' (*CW* 15: 454). Again, it is the pretence to trans-historical legitimacy that accompanied Arnold's aristocratic cultural precepts which Chesterton sets out to challenge. As he explains elsewhere, 'every aristocracy, must, in its nature, be parvenu. It represents merely the temporary worldly success of one particular worldly fashion' ('The Radical.' *DN* 19 Jan. 1907; *CDN* 4: 140).

It is interesting that this dismissal of 'temporary worldly success' should closely correspond to Chesterton's critique of neo-Hegelianism, since the aesthetic fashion that Arnold particularly sought to initiate was a deprecation of irony as thoroughgoing as that espoused by Hegel. A.W. Benn argues that Arnold's cultural theory possessed a close philosophical affinity with Hegel, 'for whose disciple Arnold passed at one time, probably without ever having read him' (55). Similarly, Leon Gottfried notes that Arnold's 'concept of the "poetic", which was inherited from Milton and Wordsworth, prohibited the use in poetry of whole ranges of tone, particularly the ironic tone or method' (21-22).[7] While Arnold's critical dogmatism never fully succeeded in expunging the vitalising irony and burlesque playfulness from his *own* writing, his precepts laid the foundations for the stress upon austere refinement that dominated the literary atmosphere of Chesterton's youth. As Gross puts it, while Arnold was 'seldom precious or over-fastidious himself, it must be conceded that he was often the cause of preciosity and over-fastidiousness in others' (Rise 68).

Both Arnold's cultural authoritarianism and his distrust of irony stem from an exorbitant anxiety over the ungovernable nature of the citizenry's reception of literature, which prefigures Leavis's anxiety over the inviolateness of the text, and helps to explain the comparably intemperate language used by Arnold in reference to parody. Arnold and Leavis exemplify Collier's account of the presence of an enduring critical anxiety from the Victorian age to the late-Modernist era, in which 'concern for reading habits was underpinned by a fear of contamination of the "best" by the "people"' (17). Perhaps the most alarming example of Arnold's

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[7] Meanwhile, Collini stresses Arnold's 'marked […] affinities with that Idealist tradition of political thought that stretches back from, most notably, Hegel [to] Plato' (91).

authoritarianism in this area is presented by an early letter sent to Arthur Hugh Clough, in which Arnold's anxieties over the unpredictable influence of literature lead him to some rather drastic conclusions: those 'who cannot read G[ree]k sh[ou]ld read nothing but Milton and parts of Wordsworth: the state should see to it' (Arnold, *Letters* 97).

In the case of Leavis, a fear of the instability of reception is discernible in his cautious stationing of the reader's response as a corroborative component in the construction of the syllogistic 'third realm'. Through this expediency, the antithetic energies of reception are harnessed in a dialectical movement towards an ultimate cultural synthesis which would countersign the author's vision. As Day argues, Leavis's overarching ambition was to foster 'a critically informed public who [would] endorse the judgement of the minority' (20), yet his anxiety over the likelihood of achieving this endorsement while disruptive parodists like Beerbohm were at large results in an Arnoldian urge to scrupulously monitor the reading habits of the citizenry. Appropriately enough, this urge is exposed to parody in Frederick Crews' *The Pooh Perplex* (1964), a hoax-symposium of academic papers on *Winnie the Pooh*, in which Leavis appears in the thinly veiled guise of 'Simon Lacerous'. Lacerous solemnly opines that 'we must give Pooh a zero for moral seriousness' (106) in the course of his essay, 'Another Book to Cross Off Your List', the title of which parodies Leavis's emulation of Arnold's relentless de-selection of approved texts.

Arnold's fear that if the lower orders were given access to the higher values they might not simply take spiritual inspiration from them, but might instead pollute and profane them, causes him to view the irreverence of the parodist as a particularly dangerous cultural precedent. It is no coincidence that Arnold juxtaposes 'artists envious, and the mob profane' (*Poetical* 314) in his poem, 'Heine's Grave' (1863), since for Arnold the 'artists envious' who produced parody represented an apparent proof of the volatility of democratisation. Arnold conceives the parodist as both an iconoclastic incitement to, and aesthetic analogy of, the potentially insurrectionary mob, a body which he notoriously discussed in intemperately punitive terms, approvingly citing his father's views on the subject: '"flog the rank and file, and fling the ringleaders from the Tarpeian Rock"' (*Culture* 203).

Arnold's position on this matter bears interesting comparison to Chesterton's depiction of Syme, in *Thursday*, who represents a monitory self-representation of the adolescent Chesterton, and possesses a paranoid belief that the world is a seething hive of dangerous anarchists, in which he is the lone guardian of cultural order. The narrator explains Syme's outlook as the psychological quirk of 'one of those who are driven early in life into too conservative an attitude by the bewildering folly of most revolutionists' (*CW* 6: 505). Syme's eventual overcoming of excessive conservatism is accompanied by a revelation of the benignity of '"the mob"' (*CW* 6: 604), comparable to that which dawned upon Chesterton prior to his emergence onto the public stage. It is appropriate, then, that Chesterton pointedly departs from Arnold on the matter of deprecating the mob, instead considering it 'painful to notice that at the present time mobs are not properly admired' ('The Hysteria of Mobs.' *ILN* 18 Jan. 1908; *CW* 28: 26), and noting, elsewhere, that 'to appreciate the virtues of the mob one must […] be on a level with it (as I am)' ('The Garden of the Sea.' *DN* 20 Aug. 1910; *CDN* 6: 313). By using his journalistic position to act as an advocate for the mob, Chesterton posits himself as a cultural loudhailer applied to a silenced majority, in opposition to the small coterie of neo-Hegelian and neo-Arnoldian intellectuals who he perceived to overwhelmingly dominate the political and cultural conversation of the age. In this way, Chesterton becomes the public's representative in the press, a disruptive fifth-column columnist: 'the only quite uncultured person in England who writes articles' ('The Orthodoxy of Hamlet.' *DN* 18 May 1907; *CDN* 4: 222).

Again, Chesterton first initiated this construct in the *Defendant* essays. For example, his 'Defence of Slang' implicitly challenges Arnold's presuppositions concerning what constitutes the 'best' use of language, by arguing that the language of the streets is the true locus of linguistic vitality in society, since it possesses an imaginative energy lacking in the discourse of the upper stratum: 'If a man of fashion wished to protest against some solecism in another man of fashion, his utterance would be a mere string of set phrases, as lifeless as a string of dead fish' (*Defendant* 144). Chesterton goes on to emphasise the contrasting literary dexterity of the streets through a puckish confounding of the ostensibly distinct domains of 'high' and 'low' literature: 'Keats never put into a sonnet so many remote metaphors as a coster puts into a curse […] the true nature of slang

[…] consists in getting further and further away from the original conception, in treating it more and more as an assumption. It is rather like the literary doctrine of the Symbolists' (*Defendant* 145).

Chesterton again took inspiration from Browning as Arnold's antithesis in this respect, arguing that the former's status as an 'intellectual democrat' was demonstrated by the discursive polyphony which characterises his work. Chesterton identifies the particular merit of *The Ring and the Book* (1868) to be its illustration of 'the belief, it might almost be said, the discovery, that no man ever lived upon this earth without possessing a point of view' (*Robert* 171). In taking the 'step of deciding, in the face of many serious dangers and disadvantages, to let everybody talk', Browning produces 'the epic of free speech' (*Robert* 173). In contrast, Arnold's apprehension of these 'dangers' leaves him exorbitantly suspicious of the challenge to authority presented by a democratisation of culture. As Dwight MacDonald argues of the Victorian era, '[n]ever before or since has there been such a popular appetite for the genre' (*Parodies* 565) of close parody. MacDonald accounts for this on the grounds that the 'nineteenth century marked the transition between the old elite culture and the new mass culture; on the one hand, the audience had enormously expanded with the increase in literacy; on the other, the newcomers were still close enough to the old culture to take it as a natural part of life' (*Parodies* 565).

Chesterton depicts this moment of cultural transition in *The Return of Don Quixote*, in which he sets up a dialogic confrontation between an Arnoldian critic, Almeric Wister, and a self-educated strike-leader, John Braintree. Appropriately enough, Chesterton encodes an allusion to Browning within the ensuing dispute. Braintree astonishes Wister's coterie with a series of criticisms of 'high' works of art, including Browning's verse, and the tenor of Braintree's critique echoes the predominant method of Victorian parody in emphasising critical close reading. Wister's Arnoldian credentials are first suggested by his complacent assertion that '[d]emocracy, of course, is not favourable to authority. And I very much fear […] that democracy is not favourable to art', because democracy leads 'us to neglect all artistic authorities' (*CW* 8: 81). Braintree confirms Wister in this opinion by answering back insubordinately to Browning with a violence that is simultaneously comically disproportionate and unnerving in its amalgam of the

discerning and the unrefined: 'Browning deserved to be killed for rhyming "promise" and "from mice"' (*CW* 8: 82).

Although Wister surmises that Braintree's attitude is 'all part of the mob and its hatred of superiority. Always wants to drag merit down' (*CW* 8: 83), Chesterton continually emphasises the status of parody not as a catalyst for cultural debasement, but as a form that enables a coherent questioning of the authority of dominant discourses, while guarding against an absolute relativizing of discourse, through its retention of critical discrimination. Here discrimination does not carry the devalued connotation of prejudice, in the sense that Arnold and Leavis's binary segregation of popular and 'high' culture discriminates, but rather conveys an open-minded investigation of all potential sites of cultural value.

This principle later informed Chesterton's parodic vision of the '"Golden Treasury Regilded; or, the Classics Made Cockney"' ('The Surrender of a Cockney.' *DN* 28 Aug. 1909; *CDN* 6: 36), in which he risks Arnold's spectral execration by singling out Wordsworth's 'Ode. Intimations of Immortality' (1804) for parodic emendation, translating 'The innocent brightness of a new-born Day / Is lovely yet' (Wordsworth, *Poems* 158) to 'The grimy colour of the London clay / Is lovely yet' (*CDN* 6: 37). Again, the intent here is not to debase the sublime, but rather to elevate the quotidian, in a manner which corresponds to Carlyle's interpretation of humour as '"a sort of inverse sublimity"' (qtd. in Martin 28). As Carlyle explains, in '"exalting, as it were, into our affections what is below us,"' the humourist '"is properly the exponent of low things [...] The man of humour sees common life [as] poetical [...] whatever has existence has a charm for him"' (qtd. in Martin 28). This temperamental quality is exemplified by the project of cultural salvage carried out by Chesterton in *The Defendant*, which he articulated thus: 'a defendant is chiefly required when worldlings despise the world [...] I have investigated the dust-heaps of humanity, and found a treasure in all of them' (*Defendant* 16).

While this venture sees Chesterton placing the judgement of wit at the service of the impartiality of humour, his imaginative conflation of the political and aesthetic virtues of the mob is also vitally informed by his insistent emphasis upon maintaining a balance between the critical faculty of satire and the appreciative action of the grotesque. As the title of his *Appreciations and Criticisms of Charles Dickens* (1911) suggests, Chesterton found in this dynamic

a sympathetic means of analysing the work of a figure who stands alongside Browning at the head of Chesterton's pantheon of exemplary literary democrats. As he explains elsewhere, Dickens's social polemics possessed insurrectionary satirical bite: he 'was a mob—and a mob in revolt' (*CW* 15: 455). Nonetheless, Dickens's literary imagination also turns upon grotesque appreciation: he had 'an incomparable hunger and pleasure for the vitality and the variety, for the infinite eccentricity of existence. […] This sentiment of the grotesqueness of the universe ran through Dickens's brain and body' (*Charles* 144). Consequently, the 'intoxicating variety of men […] was his vision and conception of human brotherhood', through which he evoked the 'feeling of a grotesque democracy. By that is more properly meant a vastly varying democracy' (*Charles* 126). While this image leaves us with a vision of Dickens 'renewing the varieties for ever', it is to the principle of 'grotesque democracy' that I will now turn in further detail.

Democratic Laughter and the Chestertonian Carnival

Chesterton's anxiety to stress that his use of verbal paradox 'does not mean that which differs from democratic tradition' offers an illustration of the 'devotion to democracy' which Father John O'Connor—the chief model for Father Brown—identified as 'a kind of mystic passion' (88) in his friend. This political position was just one of the personal attributes that Chesterton conceived as an unseemly affront to contemporary orthodoxies on his part: 'You must excuse me; I am a democrat; I know I am out of fashion in the modern world' ('The Shop of Ghosts.' *DN* 22 Dec. 1906; *CDN* 4: 117). O'Connor argues that this passion directly informed Chesterton's production of satire, since he felt that 'the people would have to cultivate their sense of the ridiculous' (89) as a shield against those who sought to criminalise satirical dissent through manipulation of the libel laws. Chesterton's discussion, in 'The End of Parody', of tolerance of the satirical element of parody as the benchmark of a functioning democracy finds commonality with the position of E.M. Forster, who famously cheered twice for democracy, because it 'admits variety and […] permits criticism' (79). As we have seen, these two qualities are also embedded within the dialogic structure of parody—it relentlessly propagates new varieties on old themes, while enacting a

measured criticism of the prior discursive statements that it constructively amends.

Through this double action, parody takes on ethical value. As Phiddian argues, '[w]hatever the ideology informing a particular parody, parody as a method is anti-authoritarian. […] It queries the grounds of discourses and demystifies their claims of self-contained validity by pointing in one direction to sources and in the other to implications' (*Swift's* 100). Consequently, Hutcheon notes that parody can potentially act 'as a consciousness-raising device, preventing the acceptance of the narrow, doctrinaire, dogmatic views of any particular ideological group' (103). This challenge frequently takes the form of exposing the other side of a discourse that has previously been dominated by a single narrative voice, in a spirit comparable to Chesterton's deprecation of the 'one-sided affair' of imperial cultural traffic. The retroactive impudence of the parodic act, which is explicitly highlighted by the title of Carol Anne Duffy's anthology of poetic parodies, *Answering Back* (2007), challenges the projection of monologic discursive authority, through an insistent exposure of hitherto effaced perspectives. This return of the repressed narrative voice is displayed in a wide range of ways in Chesterton's work. For example, he prefigures Duffy's collection in his range of 'answers to the poets' (*CW* 10.1: 332), which includes such conceits as 'Dolores Replies to Swinburne' (*G.K.'s Weekly* 28 Mar. 1925). Here Chesterton imagines the viewpoint of the writer's muse, the object of desire whose subjectivity has previously been obscured by the poet's obtrusive personality: 'Oh, pagan Priapean poet / You give me a pain' (*CW* 10.1: 332).

In *Robert Browning*, Chesterton discusses the particular value of such deliberate shifts of perspective, exclaiming 'how disturbing, how weird an experience it would be to read [the *Odyssey*] from the point of view of Antinous! Without contradicting a single material fact, without telling a single deliberate lie, the narrative would […] change the whole world around us' (172). This conceit involves the parodist in a kind of ethical police work, in which statements are scrupulously taken from all involved parties. It is no coincidence that Chesterton made *Father Brown* his most complete expression of the potential of parody, nor that so many of his other fictional works—*The Club of Queer Trades* (1905), *The Man Who Was Thursday*, *Manalive* (1912), *The Poet and the Lunatics* (1929)— are thematically satirical, while being structured as detective stories. As Helmut

Heissenbuttel notes, 'the crime novel derives its narrative movement from the "reconstruction of the unnarrated"' (83), and this is also precisely the function of parody.

As Wills notes, the game-structure of detective fiction is also predicated upon going 'against *doxa*' (*Man* 122)—that is, of confounding the expectations that the reader might bring to the text in the light of social convention, in order to produce a sense of surprise at the solution. In a further unconscious gesture towards the structure of parody, Wills explains that the technique of detective fiction 'is one of progress through negations to assertion', and is therefore based on a 'dialectic which creates by destroying' (*Man* 122). In a parallel action, parody demands, by its nature, that the reader should hone his/her own detective instincts in order to recognise that something *is* in fact being parodied. As Sheinberg notes, '[a]ll modes of ambiguity rely on an active reader' (28). Parody's pedagogically intentioned complication of the reception process presents a means of promoting Hutcheon's 'consciousness-raising' in the reader, much as detective fiction famously invites the reader to take a more-than-usually active role in the deciphering process of textual reception. This interactivity expedites the conversion motif identified by William J. Scheick in *The Club of Queer Trades*, through which the stories 'self-reflexively vex [their] generic conventions even while using them and also in the process involve the subsequently disorientated, detecting reader in a critique of the very social, political, and economic reality those conventions are designed to reinforce' (96-97).

Perhaps most importantly, detective fiction is not only predicated upon a confounding of readerly prejudice, but also compels the author to continually think against his or her own doxas, in order to consistently retain the element of surprise. It is a polyphonic genre, in the sense that, in order to function successfully, it must be composed of 'free people, capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him' (Bakhtin, *Problems* 6). Again, *The Ball and the Cross*—though not itself a detective novel—emerges as an exemplary polyphonic text in this light, since Chesterton compels himself to formulate Turnbull's atheistic arguments, which oppose the author's own creed in a manner which is finally 'unanswerable' (*CW* 8: 123), to produce an additional dialogic dynamic: an unresolved exchange between the author and his characters. This voluntary enactment of self-

contradiction on the part of the author demonstrates the inscription of a further level of democratic accountability within the structure of parody, at the level of the grotesque. While Chesterton's article on 'The End of Parody' discusses tolerance of the satirical element of parody as the benchmark of a functioning democracy, in a more subtle sense the grotesque pole of parody equally promotes democracy, insofar as it allows no-one to escape its critical lens, including the parodist.

In 'Two Cheers for Democracy', Forster argues that if there is to be any form of aristocracy within a democracy, it should be composed of those who 'can take a joke' (83), and for Chesterton this principle applies equally to the figure who makes the joke: 'We shall never make anything of democracy until we make fools of ourselves' (*Defendant* 110). This element of reciprocity in parodic humour reveals the importance of Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque to a proper understanding of Chesterton's poetics. For Bakhtin, the democratic laughter characteristic of the medieval carnival 'is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants [...] he who is laughing, also belongs to it' (*Rabelais* 11-12). This conceit is echoed in Gross's account of the immanence upon which successful parody is predicated: 'it is not enough for a parodist to detect absurdity in others. He must create something absurd himself' (*Oxford* xii). In Bakhtinian terms, what Gross is emphasising here is the requirement of an awareness on the parodist's part that he/she is fundamentally implicated in the world that he/she critiques and the laughter that he/she generates, in line with Chesterton's admonishment, in 'The Flat Freak' (*DN* 8 Jan. 1910), '[d]o not fancy you can be a detached wit and avoid being a buffoon; you cannot. If you are the Court Jester you must be the Court Fool' (*CDN* 6: 178).

As Chesterton's dictum implies, the principle of immanence is not merely an imperative for the production of satisfyingly sophisticated and/or intellectually honest parody, but is intrinsically inscribed within its formal makeup. Even if the reader is tacitly enjoined to prefer the parodist's model to the parodied discourse, the very act of parody reveals not only the arbitrariness of the *ur* text, but by extension also that of the parody, so that both come to possess a comparable logical validity, within a potentially infinite panoply of viewpoints. As Hannoosh explains, by providing 'a new version of an old story', parody

cannot legitimately propose itself as the definitive [version], since by its own example it belies the concept of a definitive or authoritative work altogether. Moreover, a parody must even allow for a critique of itself such as it has performed on the original [… so that] parody actually rebounds upon itself, calling itself into question as it does the parodied work, and suggesting its own potential as a model or target ('Reflexive' 114).

This phenomenon is invoked by the title of *The Return of Don Quixote*, which not only exposes the archetypal self-reflexive text to parodic revision, but in the process advertises its own status as a vulnerable text by making explicit reference, in Hannoosh's terms, 'to other examples of its own story, thus signalling to the reader that it is merely one among many possible' versions ('Reflexive' 117). Chesterton's recognition of the distinct value, as well as the inevitable presence, of this aspect of parody, is signalled by his account of 'humour' as a grotesque form which opens itself to inner contradiction, in contrast to the would-be detachment of the wit. He explains that humour is composed of

a certain sense of being laughed at, as well as of laughing. […] Wit is reason on its judgement seat; and though the offenders may be touched lightly, the point is that the judge is not touched at all. But humour always has in it some idea of the humourist himself being at a disadvantage and caught in the entanglements and contradictions of human life (*Spice* 23).

Chesterton's image of universal laughter as a symbol of willing entanglement in existence anticipates Bakhtin's account of 'the gaping jaws' that leave the individual 'not impenetrable but open' (*Rabelais* 339). By way of contrast, Chesterton frequently employs the sneer or smirk as a symbol of the inward-facing laughter of the 'judge' who is unwilling to be 'touched at all'. In *Chaucer* (1932), he employs this distinction to establish his subject as another antitype of Arnold, pointedly subverting the sublime intent of Arnold's rhetorical principle of the 'grand style' in an account of Chaucer's capacity to provoke a universal 'laughter in the grand style', before complaining of Arnold, in contrast, that 'for all his merits, [he] did not laugh but only smiled—not to say smirked' (*CW* 18: 161). The latter observation is, perhaps, an arch allusion to 'Heine's Grave', since Arnold's deprecation of 'artists envious, and the mob profane' arises

in the context of a discussion of Heine as an exemplar of the dangers of untrammelled irony, in which his subject's mode of humour is compared to the 'sardonic smile' (*Poetical* 317) of Satan. In drawing attention to Arnold's smirk, Chesterton implies that the arch-enemy of irony might be of the devil's party without knowing it, as Blake famously alleged of Arnold's exemplar of the sublime grand style, Milton. It is a curious irony in itself that Arnold's critical attitude often resembles Hegel's account of the proud ironist who establishes an aloof position from which to look down inscrutably upon others: 'the divine genius looks down from his high rank on all other men' (66). Again, one thinks of Chesterton's account of Syme's fanaticism in *Thursday*, the extremity of which finally causes him to appear 'a very satisfactory specimen of the very anarchists upon whom he had vowed a holy war' (*CW* 6: 506).

The urge to sidestep implication in the carnival by closing oneself off to laughter behind the private joke—or smirk—connotes an authoritarian refusal to democratically admit criticism, with the closed mouth symbolising the barring of a potential cite of admittance, and consequently this gesture is particularly likely to attract the parodist's irreverent attentions. However, it is again essential to note that the humourist's simultaneous capacity to engage in ironic self-examination lends an element of grotesque democracy to any such parodic critique. While parody identifies the discontents which derive from the lack of self-irony attendant to any monologic viewpoint, it also avoids the pitfalls of a comparable critical authoritarianism by producing 'something absurd' in turn, in Gross's phrase, here in the form of an artefact that is implicitly in discord with itself. Again, *The Return of Don Quixote* provides an apt case study. To return to the dialogue between Wister and Braintree, the latter's conversational victory reflects Chesterton's approbation of the autodidact as an embodiment of the increasing democratisation of culture discussed by MacDonald. However, Chesterton considered the socialism that Braintree espouses to merely replace the old class-based authoritarianism with an alternative form of detached paternalism.

In this light, Braintree's critical allusion to Browning's *The Pied Piper of Hamlin* (1842) is not adventitious, but instead subtly enables the author to speak ironically back to both the men engaged in dispute. The myth of the Pied Piper operates, in part, as an allegory of the *Danse Macabre*, or Dance of Death, a late-Medieval allegory of the skeleton leading men to the grave, which Sheinberg

considers perhaps 'the most characteristic instance of the grotesque' (219). Consequently, it might be thought that Braintree invokes the myth as an allusive reference to the imminent demise of Wister's social order, a demise presaged by his own violent expression of irreverence towards the high-cultural institution of Browning. However, according to *Webster's,* the Pied Piper also represents 'a charismatic person who attracts followers'; 'one that offers strong but delusive enticement'; or 'a leader who makes irresponsible promises' (Woolf 862).[8] For Chesterton, each of these qualities could be applied with equal validity to the Arnoldian critic and the Marxist firebrand.

Braintree's attack can be understood as an example of Bakhtinian '*double-voiced discourse*' (*Problems* 185). As Morson explains (while citing Bakhtin), the 'author of a double-voiced word appropriates the utterance of another *as* the utterance of another and uses it "for his own purposes by inserting a new semantic orientation into a word which already has—and retains—its own semantic orientation"' ('Parody' 65). By implicitly transforming a single 'utterance' into a 'hybrid construction' (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 304), the author of a 'double-voiced word' makes the character's rhetoric boomerang ironically back upon his- or herself, in a manner which subverts the private joke, and exposes the would-be detached wit to carnivalesque laughter. Indeed, the Dance of Death is an essentially carnivalesque principle in itself, since its allegorical message is that death comes to everyone, regardless of temporary social ascendency. There is a fathomless irony in having Braintree essay a private joke at Wister's expense, which simultaneously advertises the Socialist's own worldly triumph as the occasion of his eventual obsolescence.

In *Robert Browning*, Chesterton pre-empts his protagonist's criticism of the 'promise / from mice' rhyme, before justifying the apparent artistic lapse on the grounds that Browning was complicit in his own absurdity, depicting the poet as a carnivalesque figure whose compulsive displays of 'buffoonery' were of a kind un-witnessed 'since the time of Rabelais' (154). In this light, it might be argued that Browning has the last laugh at the expense of his would-be judge, Braintree, not least because his final couplet actually constitutes a fittingly inelegant finale to a self-consciously carnivalesque text. In a supreme irony, the socialist's criticism

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[8] The first of these connotations is drawn from the online version of the dictionary. "pied piper." Merriam-Webster.com. Merriam-Webster, 2013. Web. 31 July 2013.

misfires precisely because he slavishly applies the Arnoldian aesthetic standards of his adversary to a text inadmissible to such a system of judgement. At a further level of ambivalence, just as the title of Chesterton's novel advertises the transitory nature of its own adaptive authority, the 'double-voiced word' encoded within the reference to the Pied Piper—itself a cultural myth that has been subject to innumerable adaptations—can even be considered to rebound self-reflexively upon the author's own status as 'a charismatic person who attracts followers' (the novel was serialised in Chesterton's own periodical, *G.K.'s Weekly*, which lobbied for the institution of Distributism), so that the allusion also speaks ironically back to the author, who happens to be one of Browning's most celebrated critics. In a single discursive action, Braintree confounds Wister's detachment, the author confounds Braintree's detachment, and the author confounds his own detachment.

Elsewhere, Chesterton puckishly hints at his awareness of the ever-present danger of lapsing into hubristic demagoguery when he informs the reader, with mock-solemnity, that 'I will enlighten your barbaric blindness next week' ('A Dilemma about Demons.' *DN* 18 Jan. 1913; *CDN* 8: 227). This allusion to Arnold's description of the refined aristocracy as '[b]arbarians' (*Culture* 103) postulates a tentative similarity between Chesterton and his ostensible antipode, similar to that encoded within the character of Syme, while implying that the key distinction between the two men is Chesterton's greater self-awareness. In an essay devoted to Arnold, Chesterton depicts the former's unselfconsciousness as deriving from monologic intellection: 'the body *is* an animal and a very comic animal. Matthew Arnold could never have felt any part of himself to be purely comic—not even his singular whiskers' (*Matthew* viii). Chesterton goes on to observe that, in contrast, St. Francis 'called his own body "my brother the donkey"' (*Matthew* viii). Of course, Chesterton's poetic definition of the donkey, in perhaps his most frequently anthologised poem, is 'The devil's walking parody / On all four-footed things' (*Stories* 283).

Chesterton's vision of the 'entanglements' embraced by 'humour' consistently finds a corollary in the unruly physical body, which implicates the individual within the messy business of material existence, militating against a capacity to withdraw into the rarefied wit of intellection. It would seem telling that Chesterton's series of 'answers to the poets' features a particularly complex example in which 'The Sea replies to Byron (As it might have appeared to

Wordsworth)' (*G.K.'s Weekly* 21 Mar. 1925).[9] Here the material world has its repressed voice returned, and promptly declares that it will have the last laugh at the solipsistic poet's expense: 'Thy songs are speeches, void of all save Thee […] Till nature blows the man-hater sky-high […] And dashes him against the Truth' (*CW* 10.2: 333). This valorisation of an imminent relation to the corporeal is echoed in Chesterton's 'Sonnet to a Stilton Cheese', a parody which draws Wordsworth into the sphere of mockery in turn:

> Stilton, thou shouldst be living at this hour
> […]
> England has need of thee, and so have I—
> […]
> my digestion, like the House of Lords,
> The heaviest burdens on herself doth lay (*CDN* 7: 120).

Chesterton's burlesque, corporeal reimagining of Wordsworth's heady appeal to Milton would seem a singularly well-calculated affront to Arnold, killing the latter's exemplary duo of sanctioned songbirds with one stone. However, it is again crucial to note that Chesterton's parody not only sends up the occasional disposition towards monologic solemnity that he discerned in his targets, but also draws the parodist into the range of the mockery, via a carnivalesque invocation of his groaning digestive system. The immanence of the conceit is particularly evoked by an illustration that Chesterton appended to a later variation on the theme, 'Stilton and Milton':

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[9] Hurley refers to this poem as a 'double parody' (*Chesterton* 44).

In drawing himself into the frame, Chesterton refrains from casting the first stone, or at least knocks himself on the head with it first, accusing himself of the sin of gluttony even as he accuses Wordsworth of pride, by mocking the element of pomposity in the latter's state-of-the-nation address. This parody walks a particularly fine ethical tightrope, since it first appeared in the context of a journalistic article on the decline of localised food production, a theme which reinstates a Chestertonian moral even as the message is conveyed in a manner that mocks moralising rhetoric. This complex rebounding movement again results in an archetype of 'grotesque democracy' in action, framed by carnivalesque imagery.

While Chesterton's encyclopaedic knowledge of classical literature left him well versed in such carnivalesque motifs as 'the reversals of the Saturnalia' ('On Being an Old Bean', collected in *Fancies* 58), his extensive study of pre-Enlightenment theology also gave him an acute understanding of the medieval context of carnival. Indeed, the phrase, 'the worshipper's half-holiday', inevitably recalls Bakhtin's argument that the parodic function of the medieval carnival in relation to the authority of the church was to provide a brief respite, during which the citizenry were free to mock the very institution which they usually revered. Elsewhere, Chesterton goes so far as to employ the principle of carnival as a metaphor for his own theological worldview, in a burlesque account of the metaphysical value of all discrete entities: '"There is no fact of life, from the death of a donkey to the General Post Office, which has not its place to dance and sing in the glorious Carnival of theology"' (qtd. in Oddie 272-73).

This principle is given fictional life in the 'masquerade' that concludes *Thursday*: 'a vast carnival of people were dancing in motley dress. Syme seemed to see every shape in Nature imitated in some crazy costume. There was a man dressed as a windmill with enormous sails, a man dressed as an elephant, a man dressed as a balloon' (*CW* 6: 629). There is even a subtly reserved place for Arnold within this utopian construct. The narrator notes that in later years, when Syme happened to encounter any of these phenomena he would imagine 'that it was a strayed reveller from that revel of masquerade' (*CW* 6: 629), thus inserting a glancing reference to Arnold's poetic debut, *The Strayed Reveller* (1849), within a sentence conspicuously structured in the Arnoldian 'grand style', in which collapsed repetition is conventionally employed as an emphatic device. As this

detail suggests, the universal mockery of carnival simultaneously accommodates its utopian mirror-image, universal reconciliation.

In 'The Comic Constable' (*DN* 2 Apr. 1910), Chesterton explicitly invokes medieval carnival tradition, noting that '[w]hen England believed in Christianity there were jokes in the church door—and in the church—Boy Bishops and Lords of Misrule' (*CDN* 6: 226). This article was published just two months before the first appearance of Father Brown, whose adventures present Chesterton's most comprehensive fictional realisation of the principles of the carnivalesque. In his autobiography, Chesterton refers to the carnival licence that he exploited in reconfiguring his revered friend, Father O'Connor, as a character of grotesque dimensions, via a sublimated assault: 'I permitted myself the grave liberty of taking my friend and knocking him about; beating his hat and umbrella shapeless, untidying his clothes, punching his intelligent countenance into a condition of pudding-faced fatuity, and generally disguising Father O'Connor as Father Brown' (*Autobiography* 328). While this conceit is evidently jocular, it is also intriguing in the light of O'Connor's testimony that he did not share Chesterton's unreserved 'devotion' to democracy (see O'Connor 88). It seems that allies, as well as adversaries, who demur at democratic principles are liable to be subjected to forcible immersion within Chesterton's carnivalesque imaginative landscape.

In the stories themselves, Chesterton consistently employs irreverently carnivalesque language to portray his titular hero, whether discussing the 'grotesque figure' (*FB* 172) of Brown in vegetative terms as a 'turnip' (*FB* 118), 'as stagnant as any vegetable' (*FB* 661), 'a big, black mushroom' (*FB* 421); or in folkloric terms, as 'a short bolster in the semblance of a guy' (*FB* 365), 'a quadruped with a very comic human head' (*FB* 172), 'a goblin' (*FB* 24). In addition, Brown is noted to be unusually short, with a 'foolishly large head' (*FB* 24), while his ambivalent adversary/accomplice, Flambeau, is represented as 'a Gascon of gigantic stature' (*FB* 3)—the fairy-tale dwarf and giant, figures of vastly differing size, but of equally vibrant physicality. These images not only serve to render Brown ridiculous, but also, paradoxically, to exalt him within Chesterton's alternative aesthetic pantheon, in which the 'grotesque' body is celebrated. As Chesterton explains in 'A Defence of Ugly Things', '[i]t does not follow that either the Chinese dragons or the Gothic gargoyles or the goblinish old women of Rembrandt were in the least intended to be comic. Their extravagance

was not the extravagance of satire, but simply the extravagance of vitality' (*Defendant* 117-18).

Chesterton's dialogising of the narrative tone itself—whereby it becomes simultaneously debasing and exalting in its grotesque evocation of the protagonists—suggests an adaptation of the ambivalent, serio-comic mode of early-medieval hagiography, in which worship and holiday are juxtaposed within the same script. As Chesterton's school-friend, Digby d'Avignor, recalled, Chesterton's '"Greek primer [was] covered with drawings of goblins, all over the text as well as in the margins"' (qtd. in Ward, *Return* 13), a habit which links Chesterton's imagination to that of the medieval hagiographer, as explained by Bakhtin:

> [within] thirteenth- and fourteenth-century illuminated manuscripts […] we find on the same page strictly pious illustrations of the hagiographical text as well as free designs not connected with the story. The free designs represent chimeras (fantastic forms combining human, animal, and vegetable elements), comic devils, jugglers performing acrobatic tricks, masquerade figures, and parodical scenes (*Rabelais* 96).

In Bakhtin's theory of carnival, the overflowing of physical limits through 'animal, and vegetable elements' is connected to a disintegration of social boundaries. In carnival imagery 'all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable. This exaggeration has a positive, assertive character […] Manifestations of this life refer not to the isolated biological individual, not to the private, egotistic "economic man," but to the collective ancestral body of the people' (*Rabelais* 19). This challenge to the detachment of 'economic man' is particularly highlighted by the third *Father Brown* story, 'The Queer Feet', in which Brown and Flambeau are both invested with a demonic 'impudence' in their incursions into the exclusive world of a private gentleman's club, evoking the 'comic devils' in Bakhtin's account of medieval hagiography. While Flambeau penetrates the club's threshold in the guise of the Satanic '"archangel of impudence"' (*FB* 49), as Brown terms him, the priest enters the club with a hybridised binary of 'meek impudence' (*FB* 38). Brown is then identified as '"the most up-to-date devil of the present company"' (*FB* 48) by the colonel at the story's conclusion.

Bakhtin explains that in 'the diableries of the medieval mysteries, in the parodical legends and the *fabliaux* […] the devil is the gay ambivalent figure expressing the unofficial point of view' (*Rabelais* 41). Similarly, in *Father Brown*, the narrator implicitly gesticulates towards his hero when he moots the possibility that 'a person may become a public institution without becoming an official institution' (*FB* 657), while the series as a whole reframes the modern mystery story as a generic descendant of the medieval mystery play, which conventionally formed the aesthetic centrepiece of carnival. As Ker elaborates, Chesterton saw the mystery play as an essentially serio-comic form: a '"daring mixture" of tragedy and comedy', which he considered to have been '"far bolder in its burlesque" and […] more "democratic" in its "satire"' (qtd. in Ker 425) than subsequent forms of allegory. Correspondingly, Chesterton's burlesque representation of his heroes—the clown-priest, Brown, and the trickster-thief, Flambeau—is consistently accompanied by a satirical exposé of contemporary mores.

Bakhtin explains that 'the mystery devil is not only an extra-official figure. He is also an ambivalent image, like the fool and the clown, representing the destroying and renewing force of the material bodily lower stratum' (*Rabelais* 266-67). While Bakhtin's reference to 'destroying and renewing' immediately brings to mind the action of parody, his account of 'the material bodily lower stratum' is also suggestive of the narrator's depiction of Brown's extreme physicality. Crucially, the physical distinction everywhere emphasised between Brown and Flambeau not only serves to relate Chesterton's double-act to the 'typical comic pair based on contrasts: fat and thin, old and young, tall and short' (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 39), but also enacts a 'destroying and renewing' gesture on a generic level, by parodying the abstract intellection of the generic archetypes of Poe's Dupin and Doyle's Holmes.

Each of these precursors propounds a detached, rationalistic philosophy, which is related eulogistically to the reader by a humourless acolyte, producing a monologic projection of authority, emblematic of Bakhtin's view of the 'humourless seriousness of official culture' (Dentith, *Bakhtinian* 66). By challenging this archetype with *Father Brown*, Chesterton anticipates, and complicates, Michel Foucault's totalising assessment that modern detective fiction enacts the 'struggle between two pure minds' in a 'quiet game of the well

behaved' (69). Chesterton's series precisely reverses these premises, by having the heroes' grotesque physicality consistently complement their disruptive games of the badly-behaved. 'In this new genre, there were no more popular heroes' (69), writes Foucault, seventy-five years after Chesterton had argued, and pragmatically demonstrated, that the genre might potentially build a 'rude, popular literature [...] as rough and refreshing as the ballads of Robin Hood' (*Defendant* 161).

Despite the adversarial nature of Chesterton's construction of an alternative model to the generic archetype, the serio-comic mode again enables him to avoid the pitfalls of an equivalent lapse into cultural authoritarianism. While exposing the techniques of his antecedents to irreverent revision, Chesterton consistently focuses the laughter equally upon the text itself, in a comprehensive exposition of grotesque democracy, through which a 'combination in one discourse of praise and abuse' (Bakhtin, *Problems* 120) is meted out to Brown, Flambeau, the supporting cast, the generic precursors, and the reader, while the author, in the guise of obtrusive narrator, is also drawn into the range of mockery via the comically intemperate exposition of his manifold hobby-horses. 'The Resurrection of Father Brown' (c.1923-26) offers a particularly complex instance of this universal mockery in action. While the story parodies Doyle's highly implausible re-animation of Holmes, following the latter's apparent death, in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1904), it also operates as a pastiche of the metafictional self-awareness of the second book of *Don Quixote*—the priest has now become a famous celebrity, in the wake of the publication of a 'series of stories about him' that he is anxious to 'stop' (*FB* 367). The plot of the story itself leads Brown to complain of a gang of Doyle-esque conspirators, and, implicitly, the author beyond them, that they '"make copy out of me and run me as a sort of sham Sherlock Holmes"' (*FB* 375). Thus, Chesterton's protagonist answers back irreverently to his creator, in a manner which enables Chesterton to complicate the satire of Doyle, by drawing attention to the commercial motivations that underpin his own resumption of the parodic sham.

While Chesterton notes, in the *Autobiography*, that '[m]any cheap parodies of Sherlock Holmes have made him a blunderer' (280), his contrasting approach is hinted at in the depiction of the Holmesian detective, Valentin, in 'The Blue Cross'. In a more simplistic satire, Valentin might have been made to

represent a straightforward clone of the logician-detective, whose failure to outwit the ostensibly nondescript naïf, Father Brown, would parody the cognitive shortfalls of the Holmesian archetype. However, at the outset, the narrator rejects a mere caricatural model, employing an allusion to 'The Thinking Machine' (1907), by Doyle's acolyte, Jacques Futrelle, to establish that Valentin 'was not "a thinking machine"; for that is a brainless phrase of modern fatalism and materialism. A machine only *is* a machine because it cannot think. But he was a thinking man' (*FB* 6). Hanoosh's explanation of the function of parody is particularly suggestive in the light of Futrelle's title: 'Parody operates especially when the procedures of a tradition become mechanized; although by mocking the tradition, parody brings it to an end, it also regenerates it, altering its course rather than terminating it altogether' (*Parody* 24).

As this account suggests, the balance of observance and rebellion encoded within this dynamic also enables parody to move culture forward rather than being chained to its target in a cycle of retroactive negation. Elsewhere, Chesterton suggests that Doyle's rhetorical seriousness resulted in an example of the latter flaw, which he discusses in terms that recall Arnold's unproductive smirk: Doyle 'certainly weakened his excellent series of stories by being occasionally serious; especially he weakened it by introducing a sort of sneer at Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin' ('On Absence of Mind.' *DN* 23 Mar. 1907; *CDN* 4: 183). In 'The Blue Cross', the implication that Doyle's creation is superior to the efforts of his lesser pasticheurs is emollient, while the narrator's punning rejection of the 'brainless phrase' of the 'thinking machine' also comes directly on the heels of a brief narrative discursion concerning co-incidence, which is crowned with a 'well expressed […] paradox' (*FB* 6) from Poe.

Rather than introducing a 'sneer', Chesterton finds praise for his forebears even as he departs from them, thus maintaining the fine balance of '"filial rejection with respect"' (Thomas Greene qtd. in Hutcheon 10) which adheres to successful parody, and which leads Hutcheon to conceive parody as 'at heart, less an aggressive than a conciliatory rhetorical strategy, building upon more than attacking its other' (xiv). The principle of 'building upon' is exemplified by the epigraph to this chapter, which is taken from Chesterton's private annotations of Holbrook Jackson's collection of Nietzschean aphorisms, *Platitudes in the Making* (1911). In the act of demurring at Jackson's dictum, which espouses

unproductive rejection, Chesterton builds another dictum on top of it which modifies the original, precisely as his amendment prescribes, to achieve both rejection and affirmation formally, while advocating it discursively. This is, then, the exemplary epigram in a book-length exercise in dialogic intervention, which also forms a pragmatic exposition of the dexterity of parodic discourse. Chesterton subjects each of Jackson's would-be truisms to an enforced textual dialogue, some being uncritically approved, some absolutely rejected, but most subtly re-orientated to suggest new possibilities.

As I have demonstrated, Chesterton's dialogic and carnivalesque methodologies stand as aesthetic expressions of cogent political and philosophical principles. However, his anti-Hegelian poetics should also be understood to derive from more personal psychological anxieties, which also begin to explain why his advocacy of the corporeal grotesque is consistently invested with a pedagogic dimension which retains the existential reassurance of 'reason on its judgement seat'. For Chesterton 'humour', in its purest form, consists in 'passing the borderland, in breaking through the floor of sense and falling into some starry abyss of nonsense far below our ordinary human life' (*CW* 15: 387). As Sheinberg notes, the grotesque is frequently characterised by a disturbing breakdown of discrete relation: 'all boundaries […] seem to be blurred. Thus the difference between human, animal and vegetable is often unclear, as is the difference between the animate and the inanimate', with the result that 'another blurred fringe that is often purported by the grotesque [is] the boundary between sanity and insanity' (220-21). A burlesque reference on Chesterton's part to a period of change in the composition of *G.K.'s Weekly* is suggestive of his underlying anxieties in relation to ontological stability:

> We are in a Hegelian condition, a condition not so much of Being as of Becoming. And no generous person should spy on an unfortunate fellow creature who is going through the horrible and degrading experience of being Hegelian. It is even more embarrassing than being caught in the very act of evolution, which every clear-headed person would desire to avoid (*G.K.'s Weekly* 12 Dec. 1925; qtd. in Ward, *Gilbert* 424).

At this point it is instructive to return to Chesterton's stilton cheese, which is also in an unstable condition of becoming. As he notes elsewhere, '[b]ad cheese symbolises the startling prodigy of matter taking on vitality' ('Popular Jokes and Vulgarity.' *ILN* 21 Mar. 1908; *CW* 28: 67). Chesterton makes this remark in response to an article by Max Beerbohm, in which the latter had disdainfully complained of the banality of the 'public' sense of humour. As Chesterton glosses the piece, Beerbohm's argument was that 'the mob laughs [at] jokes about bad cheese' (*CW* 28: 66). Beerbohm begins a later article on 'Laughter' (1920) with an account of his alleged inability to understand the comic theory of Henri Bergson, mocking Bergson's academic convolution and his own postulated ignorance in one fell swoop, in a further practical example of grotesque democracy in action. Bergson's theory posits humour as a cultural policing of others' lapses into unnerving inanition, which contrasts with the humourist's intuitive preference for a state of evolutionary vitality: in the 'practical joke [the] laughable element […] consists of a certain *mechanical inelasticity*, just where one would expect to find the wide-awake adaptability and the living pliableness of a human being' (*Laughter* 10). The exploited quality is 'a certain rigidity of body, mind and character, that society would […] like to get rid of in order to obtain from its members the greatest possible degree of elasticity and sociability. This rigidity is the comic, and laughter is its corrective' (*Laughter* 21).

In conceiving humour as the expression of an urge to retain perpetual litheness, Bergson's comic theory forms an aesthetic corollary of his concept of the *élan vital*—the principle of the investment of inert matter with a mysteriously galvanic life-force, which he espoused in *Creative Evolution* (1907). Bergson's mystically inflected theory has much in common with the idealism of Hegelian rhetoric, as implied by Bertrand Russell's gloss on the clash that Bergson postulated between 'life, which climbs upward, and matter, which falls downward' (qtd. in Stannard 168). Chesterton would have been familiar with the principle of the *élan vital* through Shaw's enthusiastic advocacy (see Pharand 249), and one wonders whether he extrapolates his uncanny explanation of the fascination of bad cheese as a burlesque deflation of Bergson's evanescent thesis.[10] If so, it is interesting to note that Bergson's adaptation of Hegelian

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[10] Chesterton draws the names of Bergson and Shaw together in his *Autobiography* (338).

'becoming' to the subjective plane exerted an equally strong hold upon Yeats (see Parkinson 79), a figure of whom Chesterton complained that he 'tends always to talk of twilight, that is, of the mixed and vague thing, of the thing that is almost something else' ('George MacDonald.' *DN* 23 Sept. 1905; *CDN* 3: 198).

Consider, in this light, Patrick Dalroy's derisory parody of Yeats's 'The Rose of Battle' (1892), in Chesterton's novel, *The Flying Inn*: '"'Cheese of all Cheeses, Cheese of all the world'", as my compatriot, Mr Yeats, says to the Something-or-other of Battle' (238). This further parodic recourse to cheese draws our attention to parody's comparably uncanny demonstration of an apparently stable textual entity suddenly being invested with new vitality. However, in the same novel, the character of Dorian elaborates an important point about the limits to which this principle can be taken. In order to maintain integrity and coherence, 'you can [only] distort up to a certain point: after that you lose identity […] Don't you see this prime fact of identity is the limit set on all living things?"' (*Flying* 226-27). The implications of this proposition form the subject of my next section.

Chesterton, Self-Parody, and Identity

> "There is something very queer and close to the nerves, I think, about notions affecting identity"[.]

> Dr Boyne, in Chesterton's 'The Dagger with Wings' (*Nash's Magazine* Feb. 1924; *FB* 475)

In 'Mr. Yeats Revisited' (*DN* 19 Apr. 1901), Chesterton indignantly addresses certain amendments recently made by the poet to his early verses: 'Mr. Yeats has simply no right to alter a poem; it was not he that wrote it, but another man, the man of a moment, who will never live again. The moment a poem has really passed out of him, it no more belongs to him' (*CDN* 1: 76). Chesterton goes on to discuss 'the destructive character of the poet's improvements' (*CDN* 1: 76), a phrase which recalls the modus operandi of textual close parody—not least Chesterton's various cheese-related infractions—in which minor alterations are carried out with the purpose of rendering the *ur* text absurd. The implication is that the older Yeats has achieved such pristine distance from his younger self that he is unable to engage sympathetically with his own work. The schism between

the two Yeats's results in a curiously circular version of Barthesian misreading, in which the poet's misidentification with his own text leads him to corrupt the integrity of the original, producing an inadvertently bathetic self-parody.

Although Chesterton's analysis of the artistic lapse is persuasive, when he goes on to explain the grounds of his irritation, a telling note of emotionalism slips into his rhetoric: 'To see a poem which already belongs to us altered is like seeing a friend's face horribly deformed in a nightmare' (*CDN* 1: 77). This gruesomely corporeal rendering of the text evokes the purposeful '"disfiguration"' (qtd. in Kiremidjian, *Study* 77) that Borges identifies as the purpose of the exaggerative drive of parody. In an unrelated essay, Borges contends that Chesterton only succeeded in maintaining his sanity because he forcibly 'restrained […] something in the makeup of his personality [which] leaned toward the nightmarish' (84). As I will argue in this section, Chesterton's greatest fear is that of the non-integral self, a nightmarish vision which he restrains through the mastery of identity that he discovers in parody of others and intentional self-parody—forms which continually flirt with the non-self via a vertiginous juggling of parodic masks, but always seek to retain the restraints of subjective integrity through the distancing action of wit. While Barthes sees the latter, comic element of parody as a kind of moral-aesthetic betrayal, I will go on to argue that this constitutes the means through which Chesterton maintains both moral and aesthetic rigour.

As his discussion of Yeats's amendments implies, loss of self-mastery is bound up with a breach of subjective integrity in Chesterton's imagination as a complementary dyad of concepts that he finds disturbing. In a contemporaneous essay in the *Defendant* series, 'A Defence of Rash Vows' (1901), Chesterton notes approvingly that the 'man who makes a vow makes an appointment with himself at some distant time or place' (33). Chesterton argues that the modern lack of faith in the possibility of keeping vows derives from a 'fear that by that time he will be, in the common but hideously significant phrase, *another man*. Now, it is this horrible fairy tale of a man constantly changing into other men that is the soul of decadence' (*Defendant* 33-34). Of course, this fairy tale is also that of the parodist, whose art is predicated upon continually changing into other people, a build-up of selves that can be seen to proceed organically from the logic of the grotesque structure of parody—if the grotesque is a philosophy of

accumulation, this includes the accumulation of parodic selves within the subject. The parodist makes his or herself a one-person-mob—now one individual, now another, a constantly metamorphosing, multivalent crowd.

Inversely, the parodist is equally reliant upon other artists remaining sufficiently like themselves to be coherently parodied. In Chesterton's writing the target's relative aesthetic stability has a bearing upon the success or failure of any given parody, a dynamic which helps to account further for the anxiety that he exhibits over Yeats' temporal breach of subjectivity. It is notable that Chesterton's later parody of Yeats, in his shape-shifting series of poetic impersonations, 'Variations on an Air' (*New Witness* 10 Dec. 1920), suffers from its predication upon the faulty premise that Yeats's poetic style underwent no 'creative evolution', in Bergson's phrase, following the 1890s—it is all 'grey sea-folk' and 'fiddles of fairyland' (*Collected Nonsense* 42). Conversely, Chesterton's skits on the relatively stylistically consistent oeuvres of Browning and Whitman in the same collection are amongst his most perfectly realised parodies.

Nonetheless, this urge to pin the subject down is not merely agonistic or monitory, in the manner suggested by Bergson's account of the inelasticity which enables the practical joker to trip up the target, but is also connotative of a more neurotic insistence upon the ontological stability—Being, rather than Becoming— of figures with whom the parodist identifies. As Auden explains of the psychological reassurance derived from caricature, '[w]e enjoy caricatures of our friends because we do not want to think of their changing, above all, of their dying' ('Notes' 383). Chesterton's 'Variations on an Air' all concern textual friends of his youth, and his attempt to highlight their stylistic stasis can be understood as expressive of an urge to stave off his own fears of mortality, as the ultimate incidence of subjective dis-integrity.

Chesterton shared this desire to secure the homogeneity of the parodic target with the most celebrated parodist and caricaturist of the time, Beerbohm. Chesterton's argument regarding Yeats is echoed in more prosaically commercial terms in Beerbohm's pictorial sketch, 'One Fine Morning, or How They Might Undo Me' (1911), in which he imagines a pageant of his favourite objects of caricature robbing him of his livelihood by changing their appearances in various ways (Chesterton troops past with neat, closely-cropped hair). Beerbohm later adapted Chesterton's complaint about Yeats's poetry to apply to the physical man:

'As years went by, the visual aspect of Yeats changed a little […] I found it less easy to draw caricatures of him. He seemed to have become subtly less like himself' (qtd. in Felstiner 117). Beerbohm's preference for his targets to remain unchanging runs parallel with his own famous capacity to invade their stylistic terrain at will. As this dissolution of subjectivity through empathetic im*person*ation implies, while straining to establish the unchanging Browningness of Browning, the parodist simultaneously compromises his/her *haecceity* through an act of identification which potentially raises the spectre of a schizophrenic breach of coherent subjecthood.

Consequently, the parodist's emphasis upon ontological stability runs parallel with a continual refrain of lost self-control. This tension informs the title of Malcolm Bradbury's parody collection, *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1976), which not only evokes indignation on the part of the auspicious *ur* author at the presumed impertinence of the parodist, but also a more disturbing note of identity confusion engendered in both subject and target by the act of impersonation. It is surprisingly little remarked upon that Lewis Carroll's celebrated parody of Isaac Watts ('How doth the little crocodile'), in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), arises, in the context of the narrative, not from a spirit of conscious mockery, but from a loss of volition which Alice finds extremely disturbing. Alice attempts to recite Watts' poem so as to resolve the conundrum, '"Who in the world am I?"' (*Annotated* 37). Upon failing to recall the lines correctly, Alice concludes that she cannot be herself, but must instead be her inept friend, Mabel: '"I'm sure those are not the right words," said poor Alice, and her eyes filled with tears as she went on, "I must be Mabel after all"' (*Annotated* 38).

This phenomenon supports Derrida's assertion that 'somewhere parody always supposes a naivety withdrawing into an unconscious, a vertiginous non-mastery. Parody supposes a loss of consciousness, for were it to be absolutely calculated, it would become a confession or law table' (101). In the case at hand, while depicting Alice's disarray, Carroll also winks at the reader, who assumes that the unspoken purpose of the parody is to satirise the status of Watts' poem as a pompous 'law table', in Derrida's phrase. In this way, Carroll flirts with a 'vertiginous non-mastery' within the text, while retaining an ironic distance which tacitly confirms his grip on his materials. A comparable dynamic is discernible in the White Knight's unconscious parody of Wordsworth, 'Haddock's Eyes', in

Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There (1871). Here, the absurdity of the parody arises from the details of the original account having 'trickled through my head / Like water through a sieve' (*Annotated* 311). In turn, Alice regains a sense of mastery by recognising the tune which the White Knight has unconsciously borrowed.

This rebounding between flirtation with unconsciousness and reassertion of mastery is internalised in Chesterton's own Wordsworth parody, 'Sonnet to a Stilton Cheese', which is stylistically very similar to Carroll's preferred mode of close parody. Chesterton's broader career offers a particularly complex case study for Derrida's parodic 'loss of consciousness', since he was notoriously absent-minded, yet highly self-conscious. For example, he famously shared the tendency of Alice and the White Knight to produce unconscious parodies. As Canovan notes, in *Robert Browning* he 'misquoted a great many of Browning's lines; staggeringly, he […] even unconsciously invented a new line for Browning's poem "Mr. Sludge the Medium"' (13). Conscious that he had become publically renowned for such lapses, Chesterton glosses the 'Sonnet to a Stilton Cheese' with a wink to the reader which exploits an assumed foreknowledge of the author's absent-mindedness, as a means of ironically advertising his self-consciousness: 'I feel myself as if some literary influence, something that has haunted me, were present in this otherwise original poem; but it is hopeless to disentangle it now' (*CDN* 7: 120).

Such performances of self-awareness suggest that a complex mixture of parody of others and self-reflexive self-parody may form an effective means of managing one's sense of identity within the public sphere. The word, 'identity', is central to this dynamic. Although identity conventionally denotes a reassuring 'continuity' and 'separateness' (Rosenberg 194), it is also a pun, signifying both commonality and individuality, via the ambivalent relationship of the terms 'identification' and 'identical' to that of individual identity, or 'oneness' (Barnhart 505). In this sense, identity can best be understood as the subjective manifestation of analogy, which derives etymologically from the Greek *analogia*, meaning 'relation' (Barnhart 32), and is predicated upon the principle of simultaneous similarity and difference. Parody is fundamentally grounded in analogy in this respect, perhaps unsurprisingly since analogy is a further connotation of 'para': 'beyond or distinct from, but analogous to' (Thompson, D 989). Correspondingly,

Chesterton's understanding of parody is based upon the principle of analogy: 'Parody does not consist merely of contrast; at its best it rather consists of a superficial contrast covering a substantial congruity' ('The Pantomime', collected in *The Common Man*, 1950, 54). This highlights a further convergence between the philosophical positions of Bakhtin and Chesterton. Michael Holquist asserts that 'Bakhtin's work stands under the sign of plurality, the mystery of the one and the many' ('Answering' 59), while Chesterton explains the balancing act at work in his own dialogic sensibility thus: the '"agreement we really want is the agreement between agreement and disagreement. It is the sense that things do really differ, though they are at one"' (*Autobiography* 338).

The counterweighted balance between the self and the non-self at the heart of 'identity' again enables us to understand parody as a means of navigating the poles of satire and the grotesque, here represented by an excessive fixity and fluidity of subjectivity. Again, it is instructive to consider Chesterton's account, in 'Bret Harte', of parody as a form that combines 'absurdity' and 'sublimity'. In the literal sense, absurdity (from the Latin, *absurdus*) means that which is 'out of tune' (Barnhart [ed.], *Chambers* 5), while sublimity derives etymologically from a combination of 'up to' (*sub-*) and 'limit' (*limin*) (Barnhart 1083). Chesterton's terms imply that the balancing act of parody promotes an internalised discord, but only up to a certain limit, much as a further connotation of *analogia* is 'proportion' (Barnhart 32). At the grotesque extreme of the parodic spectrum, individuality begins to break down into the disorientating flux espoused by Barthes, which informs his complaint that parody places undesirable constraints upon multivalence. As Habib explains, 'the denial of identity is perhaps the deepest metaphysical basis of irony […] identity itself […] is revealed as a point of view, a way of freezing the dynamic relations of the world' (142).

Conversely, to return to my account of Leavis, pure satire is the art of the 'inviolate' individual. Etymologically speaking, the principle at the heart of individuality is indivisibility, as illustrated by Colebrook's explanation that the 'subject' is constituted of a stable, impregnable *haecceity*: 'The notion of the subject is derived from the Latin subjectum, referring to a ground, basis, or what exists independently' (72). Again, parody proportionately navigates these extremes. The principle of a 'ground' is of particular importance to Chesterton's thought, since he termed modern relativistic philosophy 'that final scepticism

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which can find no floor to the universe' (*CW* 6: 584), a situation which he considered to cause a simultaneous breakdown of psychological and ethical coherence, against which the moral certainties of satire form a bulwark. The correlated psychological and ethical importance of a sense of stable subjecthood is demonstrated by the example of Carroll's nonsensical 'How Doth the Little Crocodile'. It is no coincidence that Alice's lapse not only causes her to imagine she is someone else, but also causes Watts' highly sententious poem to be divested of all moral coherence; as Chesterton continually emphasised, moral integrity is bound up with subjective integrity.

In 'A Plea for Popular Philosophy' (*DN* 22 June 1907), Chesterton confronts the challenges set to the conventional understanding of subjectivity by recent scientific and philosophical advances. He outlines what he considers to be 'the three or four sanities and certainties of human free thought', each of which centres upon a discrepancy between the way '[a]ll sane men' intuitively behave, and what is nonetheless 'unproved and unproveable' (*CDN* 4: 242) about the world in which they find themselves. The third of these dictums states that although 'it is definitely disputed by many metaphysicians' that 'there is such a [thing as a] paramount "I"', nonetheless '[a]ll sane men believe that there is such a thing as self or ego, which is continuous. There is no inch of my brain matter the same as it was ten years ago. But if I have saved a man in battle ten years ago I am proud, if I have run away I am ashamed' (*CDN* 4: 242). In other words, despite compelling scientific evidence to the contrary, one must make a leap of faith in the existence of an enduring 'I' in order to extrapolate any ethical dimension to one's actions. While Carroll has Alice reason that 'it's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then' (*Annotated* 138), Chesterton turns to a different nonsense authority in his autobiography, when framing his enduring opposition to the Boer War as a vow that he has successfully kept: 'As no less an authority than Mr. Discobolus says in Lear's Nonsense Rhymes, I thought so then and I think so still' (*Autobiography* 115).

A comparable view of the ethical necessity of stable subjecthood has been articulated more recently by the cultural-materialist critic, Fredric Jameson, in his critique of postmodern pastiche. Jameson argues that the latter phenomenon derives from a deeply ingrained disbelief in the principle of subjectivity, or 'a unique self and private identity' (1964), within late-twentieth-century society, a

situation which he considers to result in a collapse of value into nihilistic relativism. As Rose notes, Jameson describes 'the death of parody and its replacement by pastiche as accompanying the "death" of the modernist individual subject' (226). Since pastiche particularly connotes identification over separation, it operates at the furthest reaches of the grotesque pole of the parodic spectrum— the point at which any satirical context evaporates into pure imitation. For Jameson, dissolution of stable identity eradicates the sense of critical distance that leads to the formulation of hierarchies of valuation, a situation which resolves itself in a value-neutral orgy of grotesque accumulation, first essayed within the self and then projected outward onto the culture. In contrast, Jameson valorises what he perceives to be bygone forms of parody which possessed clearer satirical judgement, because their oppositional nature extended from their creators' greater faith in the stability of discrete subjectivity.

Jameson might be reassured of the enduring cultural presence of the satirical judge by 'J.C. Carlier''s parodic mock-essay, 'Roland Barthes's Resurrection of the Author and Redemption of Biography' (2004), which looks askance at Barthes's valorisation of the 'transgression of ownership'.[11] In attempting to account for why Barthes should have chosen to extend 'apparently plausible reasoning to the point of patent lunacy' (117), Carlier's ostensibly ingenuous essayist comes to the conclusion that 'The Death of the Author' should be understood as a hoax in the manner of Swift's 'A Modest Proposal', in which the 'narrator is a character who earnestly recommends the deplorable option' (116). Consequently, Carlier claims to have successfully decoded Barthes's essay as a sustained feat of irony which should be read, counter-intuitively, as 'a defence of traditional authorship and of respect for biography' (115).

In prosecuting his case, Carlier employs the 'ironical gravity' which Chesterton discusses as the formal mode of 'A Modest Proposal', even as he claims this to be Barthes's own methodology. In a similar hall-of-mirrors effect, Carlier's wilful misreading of Barthes's essay as a purposeful *reductio ad absurdum* of the concept of anti-intentional criticism mischievously turns Barthes's valorisation of the multivalence of reception back upon his own text, curiously corroborating Barthes's vision even as he satirically exposes the bathetic

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[11] J.C. Carlier is a pseudonym used by Professor Cedric Watts.

convolutions and critical disarray to which it is likely to lead. However, the true sting in Carlier's satire arrives with the punch-line, in which he adduces the final evidence that Barthes's argument cannot be genuine from the fact that he 'not only signed the work but claimed the copyright' (119), a detail which exposes the hypocrisy attendant to the anti-capitalist utopianism which implicitly informs Barthes's doctrinaire deconstruction of *author*ity.

Chesterton considered modern scepticism to be a condition in which dogmatism and relativism ultimately meet full-circle, with an attendant collapse of moral value: '[t]he real sceptic never thinks he is wrong; for the real sceptic does not think that there is any wrong. He sinks through floor after floor of a bottomless universe' (*CDN* 4: 224). In this sense, the particular failing that exposes Barthes to parodic attack is the curiously monologic nature of his espousal of multivalence. Day identifies a comparable irony in Leavis's *Culture and Environment*, when he notes the curious fact that 'a text "committed to more consciousness" […] nevertheless remains "unconscious" of itself' (96). As with Chesterton's critiques of Shaw's inability to consider himself wrong and Arnold's inability to conceive of himself as 'comic', both Barthes and Leavis display an unconsciousness of the limitations of their dogmatic intellectual positions. In the case of Carlier's response to Barthes, this monologism incites the parodist to expose the grotesque discontents that must be effaced in the drive to systematise, through a complex demonstration of the principle that 'truth is tricky', as Chesterton's definition of humour has it. Here we perceive the parodist's art not only to constitute a satirical bulwark against attempts to break down coherent authority, or a strategy designed to stave off neurotic fears of dis-integrity, but also a means of reining in all forms of extremism.

Carlier's approach also echoes that of Chesterton's early antagonist, who wilfully misread the latter's early articles as a parody of excessive paradox-mongering. As I discussed earlier, Chesterton was able to rebut this satirical intervention precisely due to his capacity to scrupulous balance the extremes of certainty and self-doubt, in the forms of verbal and metaphysical paradox. Nonetheless, when Chesterton found himself under similar attack later in his career, a lapse into excessive certitude left him more vulnerable to the landing of satirical blows. This attack came in the form of another of Beerbohm's caricatures, in which the morally policing facility of satirically oppositional

parody is again foregrounded, in a conceit which turns the critique of Yeats'
temporal dis-integrity back upon Chesterton, while simultaneously accusing him
of socio-political extremism. Beerbohm depicts an encounter between the younger
and older Chestertons, in which the former scoffs at the notion of 'the
determination of the Jews to enslave us', to which the latter replies, '[w]ell, you
haven't met Belloc' (qtd. in Blissett, 'Max' 122). In this instance, Chesterton's
uncritical desire to emulate his friend, Belloc, is figured as the cause of a
fundamental breach in his integrity. Post-Belloc, Chesterton is no longer his own
man; he is hamstrung by an influence which compromises his integrity in both an
ontological and moral sense.

Once having undergone this schismatic temporal breach, Donald Barr
implies that Chesterton's anti-Semitism was subsequently perpetuated by the
reverse problem—an inflexible adherence to an *idée fixe*. Barr argues that in later
years Chesterton's 'anti-Semitism had become a tic' (*CW* 8: 41), implying a
degeneration into unconscious habit, a blind spot which vitiated his capacity for
self-reflection. As Auden notes, '[a]fter the rogue, the commonest object of satire
is the monomaniac' ('Notes' 384), and, as we have seen, it is equally true that
unselfconscious inflexibility is nectar to the parodist. Sure enough, Reginald
Arkell honed in on this failing in Chesterton with a cutting parody of the latter's
'Song of the Dog Named Quoodle' (*New Witness* 27 Nov. 1913), a poem which
famously conjures an image of the 'noselessness of man' as a symbol of
humanity's tendency to backslide into unreflective existence, while making a
fleeting, superfluous reference to 'the park a Jew encloses' (*Flying* 164).[12]
Arkell's variation on Chesterton's air identifies, in the latter remark, the beam in
Chesterton's own eye—a comparably unwitting lapse into unreflective thinking,
which the detective-parodist boasts of having rooted out: 'Gilbert oft discloses /
As only Gilbert can, / His curious hate for noses / Worn by the sons of Moses, /
He'd like them, one supposes, / Built on a different plan' (qtd. in Ward, *Return*
116). In Arkell's account, Chesterton's inability to sniff out the ridiculous in his
own contradictory rhetoric leaves him vulnerable to satirical attack. Again, these

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[12] In *CW* 10.3: x, Conlon notes that this line originally read 'the park Old Gluck encloses', and was
changed to 'the Jew' either by Frances Chesterton or the publisher, in order to avoid a potential
prosecution. Consequently, a pertinent critique of a specific individual on Chesterton's part came
to appear blithely anti-Semitic. Nonetheless, Chesterton could have rectified the amendment in
later republications and failed to do so.

examples demonstrate parody to be particularly effective as a method of policing one's fellows, reminding them of their critical lapses and sharpening their self-awareness.

Chesterton could be as pitilessly forensic as Beerbohm in identifying bathetic lapses in other writers. In *Robert Browning*, he notes that even in the greatest poets' work 'you will come upon passages which read like extracts from an American book of parodies', and goes on to quote a couplet from Swinburne which is 'nothing but a bad imitation of himself' (142). Elsewhere, of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's lines, 'Our Euripides, the human, / With his dropping of warm tears,' he observes, with burlesque relish, that '[n]othing can be well conceived as more ridiculous than Euripides going about dropping tears with a loud splash, and Mrs. Browning coming after him with a thermometer' ('Elizabeth Barrett Browning', collected in *Varied* 262). When identifying a similar instance of bathos in Blake, Chesterton explains such lapses as deriving from a 'blind spot' caused by a 'sudden inaccessibility to laughter' (*William* 28). The laughter to which Chesterton refers is that of critical self-policing, an act of measured distancing from the self, which produces the phenomenon of intentional self-parody, in which the direction of critical laughter is turned inward to the subject, rather than outward to a discursive precursor.

In the context of intentional self-parody, Chesterton's definition of 'humour'—to 'open the guard or confess its inconsistency'—can be read, conversely, as self-guarding. By confessing an internal inconsistency we demonstrate our recognition of its presence, thereby illustrating our self-awareness to the audience—a motivation detectable in such apparently confessional gestures as Chesterton's conceit of having Father Brown mock his creator's use of him as 'copy'. Anthony Burgess noted that in refusing to take 'himself seriously', Chesterton consistently 'anticipated the parodist and the satirical cartoon' ('Level' 251). As Chesterton explains, in terms which internalise the dynamic of 'praise and abuse' that Bakhtin ascribes to carnival, '[y]ou can say anything against a man who praises himself; but a man who blames himself is invulnerable' ('The Faults of the Press.' *ILN* 26 Oct. 1907; *CW* 27: 576). If, as Hutcheon states, parody enacts 'repetition with ironic critical distance', then deliberate self-parody is a guard against self-repetition divested of ironic critical

distance, forming a method of avoiding both aesthetic redundancy (repetition lapsing into cliché) and a humiliating absence of self-possession.

In *Robert Browning*, Chesterton diagnoses unintentional self-parody as arising, paradoxically, from an unproductive form of self-consciousness which derives from the element of theatricality attendant to modern literary celebrity. He argues that unswerving self-resemblance is 'the result of the self-consciousness and theatricality of modern life in which each of us is forced to conceive ourselves as part of a dramatic personae and act perpetually in character' (142). In Chesterton's career this danger of acting 'perpetually in character' is perhaps best illustrated by the dozens of encomiums to Christmas that he produced, year in, year out, for his various journalistic employers. Beerbohm again parodied this activity in 'Some Damnable Errors about Christmas', a mock-essay in his celebrated parody collection, *A Christmas Garland* (1912). While the title of Beerbohm's parody skewers Chesterton's occasional overenthusiasm for correcting his readers' putative subscription to idiotic fallacies, he has 'Ch*st*rt*n' end his article with the ominous threat, 'I shall return to the subject of Christmas next week' (22). The relentlessness with which Chesterton recurs to this subject is particularly interesting, since his vision of Christmas is directly comparable to his vision of parody. As he argues in one of his earliest Christmas pieces, 'Christmas Day' (*DN* 26 Dec. 1902), 'this season is created by worship and play, not merely allied, but mingled.' At Christmas, the 'world is at once a temple and a playground; all the idols are our dolls, and all the dolls our idols' (*CDN* 1: 455).

Despite the efficacy of self-parody as a pre-emptive defence mechanism, it is important to note that these strategies not only constitute a guard against attack, but also a method of aesthetic and ethical self-monitoring. A capacity for self-irony is conjoined with self-splitting in Baudelaire's account of the '"philosopher [who] has acquired, by habit, the power to quickly 'double himself' and participate as a disinterested spectator in the phenomena of his own I"' (qtd. in Sheinberg 42). As Sheinberg explains, Baudelaire's concept of *dédoublement* (splitting, or halving) operates as a tool of self-criticism achieved through a purposeful estranging of the self:

> [the] meeting point of ethics and aesthetics in irony is closely connected to the process of alienation. At this point alienation is required, either as […] a "parabasis" with which all critical processes begin, or as a personal Baudelairean act of *dédoublement*, the ability to see [oneself] from the outside, that eventually leads to philosophical laughter (41).

This principle corresponds closely to Chesterton's description of the progressive development of self-awareness which characterises his vision of 'humour': 'the various degrees in which the eccentric has become conscious of his eccentricity. […] humour does originate in the half-conscious eccentric' (*Spice* 22). Chesterton's analysis posits a fragmentation of the self, in which, rather than being schismatically split, the acting-self is kept under constant surveillance by the critical policeman at the artist's shoulder. In putting this theory into practice in his own life, Chesterton remained alive to the potential criticisms of parodists like Arkell, and frequently sought to anticipate them. For example, in *The Flying Inn*, into which the 'Song of Quoodle' was incorporated, a 'half-conscious' advertisement of eccentricity on Chesterton's part is surely responsible for the interpretation of the narrative put forward by a foolish correspondent to the 'Pebbleswick Globe', 'who called it all a plot of frenzied foreigners against Britain's shore' (91).

While this self-policing gesture only slightly militates against the air of paranoid xenophobia which permeates *The Flying Inn*, self-reflexivity is put to more complex and effective use in *The Return of Don Quixote*. As Hutcheon argues, self-parodic art 'calls into question not only its relation to other art but its own identity. Self-parody in this sense is not just an artist's way of disowning earlier mannerisms by externalisations […] It is a way of creating a form out of the questioning of the very act of aesthetic production' (10). This reading conforms to the self-parodic structure of Chesterton's later novel, which extends from the title's metafictional advertisement of its aesthetic lineage, to the monitory depiction of Michael Herne, another of Chesterton's representatives of earnestness, who espouses a number of views that might have come directly from the pages of Chesterton's polemics, but whose medievalist philosophy finally emerges as a dangerous monomania. Herne's structural antecedent is MacIan in *The Ball and the Cross*, who 'never saw a joke in his life' (CW 7: 94), and each

character's failings again demonstrate that an absence of internal critical laughter carries the ethical danger of a lapse into extremism. As Boyd notes, MacIan's dystopian dream in *The Ball and the Cross*, 'presents a criticism of the political position which is generally regarded as distinctively Chestertonian', in which the author's ideals 'are all given concrete and vivid expression, and are all rejected' (26).

In this light, the uniform humourlessness of Chesterton's earnest characters should be understood as a warning-to-self of the foolish and dangerous outcomes of a complete absence of 'humour', or self-irony. Lodge argues that '"[t]he dialogue between credulity and scepticism" would serve as a description of *Don Quixote*' (*Novelist* 44). Chesterton's novel establishes a comparable dialogue between Herne's credulity and the scepticism of Douglas Murrel, who stands as Chesterton's most thoroughgoing attempt to depict the well-balanced individual, and is frequently discussed by the narrator in terms comparable to Chesterton's vision of parody. He has the 'faculty of enjoying the absurd with a complete gravity' (*CW* 8: 235), he notes that '"I happen to be able to see two sides of a question"' (*CW* 8: 211), and is described as having a 'plain and pleasant and shrewd face […] wrinkled with a laugh of irony' (*CW* 8: 117). Murrel's moderating presence finally succeeds in reigning in Herne's extremism, while simultaneously enabling the latter to demonstrate self-mastery through an advertisement of self-awareness: '[f]or the first time in his life he seriously saw a joke and *deliberately* made it' (*CW* 8: 251; my emphasis).

Herne embodies Chesterton's principle of the dawning self-awareness of the 'half-conscious eccentric', who, like the critical parodist engaged in satirical controversy, 'also discovers a contradiction, but it is in himself' (Chesterton, *Spice* 24). Chesterton goes on to explain that there is, 'in the origins of humour, something of this idea of the eccentric caught in the act of eccentricity and brazening it out; something of one surprised in disarray and become conscious of the chaos within' (*Spice* 24). This account perhaps tacitly acknowledges the justice of exposures, such as Arkell's, of the contradictions in Chesterton's rhetoric when polluted by anti-Semitism, criticisms which can be seen to have played a part in rousing him to an ethical recovery. By 1933, Chesterton was at the vanguard of British social critics alive to the threat posed by Hitler, declaring his willingness to 'die defending the last Jew in Europe' from the Nazis (interview

with *The Jewish Chronicle* 22 Sept. 1933; 'Hitler' 100). As Chesterton conceded, with rueful self-irony, '[t]hus does history play its ironical jokes upon us' ('Hitler' 100).

Chesterton's recovery was not only ethical, but also psychological. At the nadir of his anti-Semitism, around 1913-14, Maycock finds 'a wildness of expression, a note sometimes rising almost to a scream, that makes one realize how near he was coming to breaking-point in those immediately pre-war years' (28-29). In 'The Insane Quiet' (*DN* 18 Feb. 1911), Chesterton observes that 'the process of going mad is dull, for the simple reason that a man does not know that it is going on' (*CDN* 7: 77). Conversely, intentional self-parody, as an expression of consciousness 'of the chaos within', preserves the individual from succumbing to this chaos, by setting up a single detached consciousness above a clamorous parodic mob which is skilfully manipulated, thus demonstrating a heightened mastery of identity. It is perhaps in this sense that we should understand Chesterton's riposte to another of Holbrook Jackson's dictums: 'In multitude of counsel there is confusion'. Chesterton replies, '[y]es: there is frequently. But a mob can drill itself' (Jackson 14). Again, in this concept we discern the balance of multivalence and moral coherence, grotesque profusion and satirical direction, which is at the heart of Chesterton's instinctive gravitation toward parodic methodologies.

An indication of the psychological grounds of Chesterton's consistent recourse to the self-estranging practices of critical self-parody is discernible in the alter-ego, 'Chester Gilberton' (*CW* 10.2: xxi), who came into being when Chesterton first entered the public arena. Gilberton's trenchant criticisms of Chesterton's first collection of serious verse, *The Wild Knight* (1900), were circulated amongst Chesterton's friends, who were advised that this 'maundering volume' (*CW* 10.2: xxii) was a product of 'fatuity and vanity' (*CW* 10.2: xxv), which advanced a 'shrill and frivolous philosophy' (*CW* 10.2: xxiii). In summary, Gilberton surmises that 'Mr Chesterton [is] mad enough for a whole guild of Hatters' (*CW* 10.2: xxvi). The context of the latter remark is Chesterton's poem, 'The Mirror of Madmen' (collected in *The Wild Knight*), in which the speaker is terrified by the nightmare of discovering his own face on every person he encounters, a conceit which hints at a further danger presented by the extremes of

self-consciousness which I have been discussing: that of withdrawal into a miasmic solipsism.

As Wills notes, Chesterton's fiction abounds in disorientating motifs of solipsism which either refer to 'a dream of never meeting anyone, or of meeting oneself everywhere one turns' (*Man* 33). Again, we can view these two extremes as subjective manifestations of the poles between which parody vacillates. In an echo of Jameson's account of pastiche, Morson explains that 'Bakhtin finds the relativist view to be particularly pointless, because it makes it impossible ever to encounter an *other*, inasmuch as the other simply becomes a version of oneself' ('Introduction' 4). However, the opposite extreme again carries an equivalent danger, as Leavis's response to Snow demonstrates. Leavis's withdrawal into inviolate subjecthood literally prevents him believing in his opponent. For Leavis, Snow represents 'intellectual nullity' (*Nor* 44), he is 'ineffably blank' (*Nor* 45), 'as a novelist he doesn't exist; he doesn't begin to exist […] the nonentity is apparent on every page' (*Nor* 45). For Chesterton, this state of disbelief is the solipsistic lot of 'The Bigot' (*DN* 19 Nov. 1910): 'Bigotry is an incapacity to conceive seriously the alternative to a proposition' (*CDN* 7: 26). Conversely, in parody the validity of the discrete subjectivity of the 'other' is always acknowledged—the interlocutor is never merely 'a version of oneself', as in the backhanded compliment of absolute identification, nor so unlike oneself as to be beyond comprehension or beneath contempt, as in Leavis's response to Snow. To borrow Leavis's own inadvertently helpful terms, parody is 'absurd and significant'. These adjectives wed the absurd—in the literal sense, discordant, denoting schism—to the significant—in the literal sense, conferring importance, projecting meaning—thus reflecting the way in which parody sets itself at discord with a previous discursive act, while simultaneously validating the meaningfulness of that act.

Characteristically, Bakhtin frames the flaws of each dogmatic extreme in terms of a shutting down of conversation: 'both relativism and dogmatism equally exclude all argumentation, all authentic dialogue, by making it either unnecessary (relativism) or impossible (dogmatism)' (*Problems* 69). Boyd observes that the dystopian dreams experienced by the protagonists of *The Ball and the Cross* teach them that if they take their views to their logical extremes 'there is a point at which the terms right and left become interchangeable' (30). This monitory

conceit, which corresponds to the '*crisis dream*' (Bakhtin, *Problems* 152)
commonly employed in Menippean satire, occurs towards the conclusion of their
picaresque adventure, in the course of which the duellers encounter figures who
embody extremes of dogmatism and relativism, and who each attempt to bring
their dialogue to a close. First, they encounter a Tolstoyan fanatic who attempts to
prevent them fighting entirely, and later they meet a Nietzschean relativist who
encourages them to fight to the death. By warding off each of these extremists,
Turnbull and MacIan succeed in prolonging their dialogue indefinitely. My next
chapter will elaborate the personal anxieties that first motivated Chesterton to
develop this dialogic sensibility in the crucible of the *fin de siècle*, as a means of
indefinitely prolonging the dialogue in which he was engaged with his best friend,
Bentley.

Chapter Two

The Chesterbentley: Nonsense, Parody, and Friendship at the *Fin de Siècle*

[E]ven on the most familiar terms [there exists] an infinite distance, the fundamental separation on the basis of which what separates becomes relation.

Maurice Blanchot, 'Friendship' (291)

It is a terrible thing to be always admiring people and always differing from them.

Chesterton, 'Nothing' (*DN* 2 July 1904; *CDN* 2: 251)

It is a joke, meeting your other half.

E.C. Bentley on Chesterton, diary 2 Oct. 1895 (Bod MS Eng.misc.e.864)

In this chapter I argue that Chesterton's youthful friendship with E.C. Bentley, the inventor of the 'clerihew' nonsense form, operates as a vital context through which to understand Chesterton's subsequent parodic programme. I demonstrate that a continual struggle between identification and separation—both with one another and with additional cultural figures and philosophies—characterises the interaction of both men, a dynamic that refigures 'the worshipper's half-holiday' as a model for the action of parody within friendship. Through a close reading of Bentley's diaries and the pair's early correspondence, in combination with analysis of their divergent approaches to nonsense verse, I argue that the ambivalence that Chesterton displayed towards literary nonsense in his later life was primarily engendered by the traumas that punctuated the progress of his friendship with Bentley; traumas which derived from the pair's shared sense of immersion in the atmosphere of *fin de siècle* decadence. Finally, I discuss Chesterton's attempt to reconcile his ambivalence toward nonsense in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, a text which manipulates a variety of popular and academic nonsense techniques to conjure reason from disarray, transmitting a utopian vision of friendship in the process. I argue that this resolution is achieved through a series of intertextual parodic games, which derive from the novel's nonsense-title.

One Soul in Two Bodies

In their respective memoirs, Bentley and Chesterton are equally effusive in their recollections of the importance of their friendship. In *Those Days* (1940), Bentley claims that their youthful 'relationship did not mean so much to [Chesterton]. For one thing, it did not change his life as it changed mine' (45). Nonetheless, he goes on to assert that 'if I have anything to be proud of, it is that to him our friendship mattered a great deal' (45), a contention supported by the fact that Chesterton refers to Bentley as his 'best' friend in works spanning thirty-six years—his first publication, *Greybeards At Play* (*CW* 10.2: 353), and the valedictory *Autobiography* (59). Both men also emphasised the centrality of nonsense literature in binding their friendship. In Bentley's obituary of Chesterton he recalls that a 'collaboration in the producing of oceans of nonsense with pencil and paper […] was the favourite amusement in [our] schoolboy circle' ('G.K.C.' 526). Similarly, Chesterton recalled that their sense of affinity was first cemented when Bentley quoted to him from W.S. Gilbert's *Bab Ballads* (*Autobiography* 59).

As these mutual tributes begin to suggest, in pursuing a proper understanding of Chesterton's philosophical development, the 'Chesterbentley' is in many ways a more significant composite creature than Shaw's famous Carrollean portmanteau creation, the 'Chesterbelloc' ('Chesterbelloc' 137). This should be unsurprising, given that Shaw intended his hybrid image to convey the essential temperamental misalliance of Chesterton and Belloc, whose public self-juxtaposition he compared to the comic disjunction of a 'pantomime elephant' ('Chesterbelloc' 138). As Shaw explained, 'Chesterton and Belloc are so unlike that they get frightfully into one another's way' ('Chesterbelloc' 138). As I illustrated in the last chapter with the example of Chesterton's parodic juxtaposition of Tennyson and Browning, such conceits invoke fusion precisely in order to demonstrate its impossibility, the very intimacy of the collocation serving to comically accentuate the distinction of each writer.

Conversely, in dedicating *Greybeards at Play* to Bentley, Chesterton figures the Chesterbentley as a genuine composite creature. His verse preface to the nonsense collection echoes Bentley's view of Chesterton as his 'other half', adapting Aristotle's conception of the highest form of friendship as '[o]ne soul

abiding in two bodies' (qtd. in Laertius, *Lives* 188) to produce an image of the pair as a nonsense creature possessing 'two hearts with single hope / Two faces in one hood' (*CW* 10.2: 353). This idealised imagery appears to corroborate Wills' arch observation that in Chesterton's juvenile sketches, Bentley 'is described in terms that a Copperfield would hesitate to use of Steerforth' (*Man* 13), while lending credibility to A.N. Wilson's contention that Chesterton was given to hero-worship, which led him to excessively idealise his friends (99). This view is backed up by Ward's assessment that in his youth 'Chesterton not only admired [Bentley]—as he was to do all his life—but wanted to be like him, to say the kind of thing he thought Bentley would say' (*Gilbert* 36). Ward argues that in their earliest correspondence, Chesterton tended to adapt his own mode of expression to the more detached, ironic style of Bentley, thus essaying a pastiche of his friend. This certainly seems true of Chesterton's highly uncharacteristic remarks in an unpublished, undated letter, most probably composed in 1891: 'as far as personal taste and instincts are concerned, I share all your antipathy to the noisy Plebeian excursionist. […] I think that the lower orders are seen unfavourably when enjoying themselves' (BL MS Add.73191 ff.11). As Ward notes, such sentiments were 'not in the least like either the Chesterton that was to be or the Chesterton that then was. But [they were] very much like Bentley' (*Gilbert* 36).[1]

Interestingly, in his maturity Chesterton summarised the basis of such dynamics in an essay titled 'The Snob' (*DN* 4 Apr. 1908): 'idealisation implies imitation' (*CDN* 5: 49). Chesterton's juxtaposition of the sublime—idealisation—and pastiche—imitation—again demonstrates the intertwined nature of his later philosophical and psychological distrust of the rhetoric of synthesis, which stems in part from his moral/psychological concern over the compromises to one's integrity that arise from an abnegation of subjecthood. Chesterton seems to recognise that if the ideal classical friendship posits the hybridisation of a single spirit within two bodies—in a further example of the accumulative principle of the grotesque—this excessive identification offers neither party a distinct individuality. In a discussion of pastiche in *Charles Dickens* (1906)*,* Chesterton suggests that such relations are structured upon uncritical deference to the other: 'youth in actual experience is the period of imitation and even of obedience' (35).

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[1] Ward appears to be alluding to this letter, though she does not cite it directly.

However, Sandra Lynch's discussion of the Aristotelian ideal of friendship suggests that the friend who strives to imitate the ideal may also be engaging in a more egotistical form of identification, comparable to Bakhtin's view of the dialogic shortcomings of relativism: the 'friend in philosophical literature becomes an impossible ideal—a reflection of oneself and perhaps even of one's own narcissism—but never a threat, never a challenge, never a genuine other' (101). In this sense, if divested of the rhetoric of the sublime, abnegation of the self comes to seem curiously equivalent to solipsistic assimilation of the other; in the act of grafting the other onto the self, the friend becomes an objective corroborator of one's own ego. As each participant in the relationship seeks to resolve this tension between deference and self-assertion, the complex reality of friendship comes to hinge upon the 'balance between identity and difference upon which [friendship] depends' (Lynch 106). Consequently, the dynamic of friendship can be considered to vacillate awkwardly between the intimacy of pastiche and the measured distance of parody—between worship and half-holidays—in a manner that challenges the stability of the bond, by undermining the possibility of a perfect symmetry between the expectations that each friend brings to the relationship.

Despite the apparently idealised, amalgamative terms of the *Greybeards* dedication, a comparable tension is detectable in the partially unpublished drafts of Chesterton's preface. In an illustrated draft, Chesterton expands upon the theme of spiritual and physical unity of purpose:

> One hope, one toil
> One pair of boots
> Joined us eternally (BL MS Add.73242 A ff.4).[2]

Here the incantatory repetition of 'one' again enacts a unification of the pair, while the juxtaposition of the sublime and the material—hope, toil, boots—serves to conjoin mind with body. However, the purposefully bathetic movement from top to bottom, or head to toes, also guards against any hint of grandiloquence, deflating the sublime rhetoric of one soul in two bodies with the burlesque

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[2] The first page of this draft is published in Chesterton, *Collected Nonsense* 2, but the second page, quoted below (103-04), remains unpublished.

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imagery of two bodies awkwardly occupying one pair of boots. This engenders a delicate critical distance, which is stressed further by the final phrase—'Joined us eternally'—in which a subtle semantic disjunction causes a permanent avowal to be rendered in the past tense.

An earlier draft contains another farcical juxtaposition of the material and the sublime—'I often ate his dinner up / To prove that we were one'—along with another confusion of tense: 'He *was* my nearest friend / We *wear* one hat: smoke one cigar / (one standing at each end)' (BL MS Add.73242 A ff.1; my emphasis). In this draft, the underlying grounds of Chesterton's anti-sublime rhetoric and tense-based implications of rupture become clearer, when he begins to stray free-associatively from the eulogistic tone of the public dedication into an airing of more private grievances: 'If I should make the Welkin thing— / (A thing I never tried) / Exclaiming "She would grace a King!" / Would he be satisfied?' (BL MS Add.73242 A ff.1). Chesterton's eschewal of 'the Welkin thing' perhaps refers to Bentley's annoyance at Chesterton's failure to refer to Violet Boileau, Bentley's fiancé, in sufficiently exalted terms, since 'Welkin' connotes a sublime invocation of the celestial sphere.[3] The hint of critical distance in these lines is then rendered startlingly explicit on the following page, as the deictic orientation switches from passive rumination ('would he') to direct second-person address ('you are'), while Chesterton's tone switches from frustrated departure to explicit enmity:

> For snobs and sinners are to me
> Like gases to Professor Dewar
> Be comforted: I never knew
> A more oppressive snob than you are (BL MS Add.73242 A ff.2).[4]

Since Dewar's particular scientific innovation was to freeze gases, Chesterton would appear to be threatening to freeze Bentley out of his affections here. In a subsequent revision of this stanza, Chesterton crosses out 'snob' and

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[3] The draft ends with the line, 'would it rhyme to Boileau?' (BL MS Add.73242 A ff.3). The 'Welkin' quatrain is quoted in *CW* 10.2 253-54, under Denis Conlon's tentative title, 'My Friend ECB in Love?', without any further gloss, other than a brief note on Boileau's relationship to Bentley.

[4] In *CW* 10.2 253-54, Conlon quotes the first two lines as a separate poem, which he titles 'To a Snob', therefore implying no link between the two verses, although they appear on consecutive pages of the same note paper, and are bookended by direct references to Bentley and his fiancé. Conlon also quotes the revised lines discussed below (fn.5), without reference to the amendments.

replaces it with 'cad'—perhaps the gravest insult in his vocabulary.[5] The uncharacteristic rancour of these lines is perhaps attributable not only to Bentley's snobbish attitude towards his love-interests—in the diary, he notes his approval of Violet's 'caste', in which regard 'she is rather an improvement on any other lady I know' (14 Apr. 1898; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.867)—but also to Bentley's intense dislike of Chesterton's own fiancée, Frances Blogg. This antipathy comes to light in several of Bentley's partially self-censored diary entries. For example, on 10 December 1898, Bentley records that 'I was [?] on by Frances Blogg's manner today. She is not—I won't mince [section cut out] too free and easy. She doesn't study, I suppose, to be young-ladyish [section cut out] she did. Unconventional camaraderie in a woman is a thing that I could live without' (Bod MS Eng.misc.e.869).[6]

While it seems likely that some sort of verbal expression of this distaste may have provoked Chesterton's outburst, his accusation of snobbery should also be understood in relation to a more long-standing schism between the pair, fostered by their differing attitudes toward 'camaraderie' in a wider cultural sense. This schism was particularly sharpened by their divergent responses to the culture of *fin de siècle* decadence, which Chesterton had come to passionately oppose by the late 1890s, but which Bentley responded to rather more ambivalently. For example, while Chesterton reacted with profound disquiet to the amorality preached by the decadent 'blackguards' ('The Diabolist.' *DN* 9 Nov. 1907; *CDN* 4: 339) whom he encountered while studying at the Slade School of Art, Bentley enthuses, in a diary entry composed at Oxford, over having recently met a 'Merton Decadent […] a wonderful man, all Oscar Wilde and Yellow Book' (3 Feb. 1895; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.863). In view of this temperamental divergence, it is telling that in the first draft of the *Greybeards* preface, Chesterton ends his attack on Bentley as follows:

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[5] The revision reads: 'Snobs are my joy: I never [knew?] / A more oppressive [aggressive?] ~~snob~~ cad than you. / Think me not flattering or fond / Nay do not blush: it is your due' (BL MS Add.73242 A ff.2). The text is written on T. Fisher Unwin headed paper, which indicates that it almost certainly must have been composed between 1898 and 1900, in the period between Bentley's first meeting with Violet and the end of Chesterton's tenure at the publishing house.
[6] Over a year later, Bentley's opinion remains unmodified: 'Called with [Violet] on Chestertons. Frances Blogg was there; whom I <u>cannot</u> bring myself to be enthusiastic about' (15 Mar. 1900; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.869).

> And ten years hence I feel that you
>
> Will be a replica of Hankin (BL MS Add.73242 A ff.2).[7]

This is almost certainly a reference to the playwright, St. John Hankin, a close predecessor of Bentley at Merton College (see Phillips 23), and a figure who Chesterton singles out in his autobiography as the quintessence of decadence:

> He was a pessimist [and] a fundamental sceptic, that is a man without fundamentals; he was one who disbelieved in Man much more than he did in God; he despised democracy even more than devotion; he was professedly without enthusiasms of any kind; [and] in all this he was […] very near to the centre of the culture and philosophy of London at that time (146).[8]

Earlier in the *Autobiography*, Chesterton recalls that by the late 1890s he 'was full of a new and fiery resolution to write against the Decadents and the Pessimists who ruled the culture of the age' (95). Chesterton's rejection of this perceived cultural oligarchy arose from a sincere belief in the importance of being earnest, a quality that he felt to be embodied by his devoutly Christian fiancée. At the same moment, Bentley was pulling in the opposite direction, a dynamic evoked by another reference to Chesterton's fiancé in the diaries: 'If society is to be maintained alive, Bloggs must, I think, be kept within limits. […] I am willing—I am anxious to know and value them and to admire and love them; but not to become as them. They are not my ideal' (28 Mar. 1897; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.866). The implicit stress upon the 'my' here suggests that Bentley's animosity may have derived from an irrational annoyance at his friend's acquisition of a new, discordant conduit of idealisation. Meanwhile, Chesterton's belief that Bentley was pursuing a converse trajectory that would ultimately render him Hankin's 'replica'—a term connotative of identity confusion brought about by uncritical emulation—implies Chesterton's comparable irritation at discovering in his other half a detached anti-democratic snobbery, allied to a radically sceptical temperament, which was drawn to the fathomless ironies

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[7] Conlon does not quote these lines in *CW* 10.2 253-54, which perhaps helps to explain why he fails to identify the text as a single, continuing commentary on Bentley.

[8] At the time in which Chesterton's *Greybeards* dedication was composed, Hankin was known as a drama critic for *The Times*, where he worked from 1897 to '99, as well as for writing 'short satiric pieces for *Punch*', from 1898 to 1903 (Phillips 24).

encrypted within the implicitly mocking title of Wilde's play. A more detailed analysis of Bentley's ostensibly playful preoccupation with nonsense demonstrates that there is much to back up this supposition.

Nonsense and Decadence: Modes of Detachment and Derangement

Nonsense and parody share an intimate, long-standing association. Dentith argues that 'parody is a close cousin, perhaps even a progenitor, of the tradition of English nonsense poetry that descends from the seventeenth century' (*Parody* 38). Susan Stewart's definition of nonsense illustrates the formal grounds of this cousinship: 'Nonsense results from the juxtaposition of incongruities', enacted to produce 'a dispersal of any univocal meaning' (76). While Stewart's final assertion recalls the anti-authoritarian action of parody discussed in the previous chapter, John Felstiner's definition of nonsense as a negative 'parody of the world's sense' (52) hints at a more thoroughly deranging drive, divested of the discriminatory element that links parody to the judicial realm of satire. In a corollary of Jameson's discussion of pastiche, the tendency of nonsense to withdraw from critical commentary upon objective reality leads Stewart to highlight 'the danger of nonsense not only as a valueless activity, but as an activity "without values"' (209).

In view of the parameters set out in the previous chapter, this dissociation of nonsense from value suggests that nonsense-writing tends to gravitate towards the absolutely relativistic pole of the parodic spectrum—the realm of the unfettered existential grotesque—an interpretation backed up by my discussion of the pertinence of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to Chesterton's assertion that 'changing into other men' is 'the soul of decadence'. This implication of a close conceptual relationship between nonsense and decadence is rendered explicit in Chesterton's 'Humour' essay, which analogically connects nonsense to the amoral 'art for art's sake' doctrine of decadence: 'Jabberwocky is not a parody on anything; the Jumblies are not a satire of anybody; they are folly for folly's sake on the same lines as art for art's sake' (*Spice* 29). Pursuing this line of argument, Chesterton contends that '[n]onsense may be described as humour which has for the moment renounced all connection with wit' (*Spice* 29). As we have seen, for

Chesterton wit is synonymous with the existential grounding of satire, while unalloyed humour opens a trapdoor beneath 'ordinary human life' to disclose an 'abyss of nonsense'. It is no coincidence that in *Thursday*, the narrator's account of Syme's apprehension of 'that final scepticism which can find no floor to the universe', comes just a few pages after the Marquis's baleful assessment of the progress of the plot—'"[g]oing to Jericho to throw a Jabberwock!" cried the other, tearing his hair' (*CW* 6: 577)—which conflates Carrollean nonsense with a descent into hell (for which Jericho is a colloquial synonym).

While Chesterton found pleasure and instruction in Carroll's playful manipulation of the restrictions of rationalist discourse, he also distrusted the academic detachment and vertiginous deconstruction of identity which characterise much of Carroll's work, and associated these qualities with the aloof cultural distance and relativistic scepticism of the decadent movement. Therefore, for Chesterton, nonsense and decadence come to represent extremes of both detachment and derangement—the two conditions which, perhaps above all others, Chesterton's parodic methods are conceived to rein in. Again, Chesterton succeeded in grounding his intuitive psychological aversion to these precepts within a cogent ethical framework, based upon political support for immersive democracy and philosophical rejection of abstract intellection. In 'A Defence of Penny Dreadfuls' (1901), he explains of the pessimism that suffused the decadent movement that to be 'hopeless […] is a class privilege, like cigars' (*Defendant* 27), while in a later essay ('Books of the Day: The Works of Oscar Wilde.' *DN* 19 Oct. 1909), he complains of the 'airy detachment' with which Wilde 'and his school professed to stand as solitary artistic souls apart from the public' (*CDN* 6: 98-99). Meanwhile, Chesterton's principled opposition to the systematising drive of philosophical idealism led him to distrust Carroll's parodies of the strictures of the syllogism as being suspiciously close to an exercise in abstract intellection in themselves: 'Everything in Lewis Carroll is part of what he called the Game of Logic' (*Spice* 67).

In 1930, Chesterton asserted in a public lecture that his youthful literary conversations with Bentley had first convinced him that there was no 'allegorical' element in the nonsense of Carroll and Lear to connect it to external realities (see Connolly 295). In convincing Chesterton that an element of ontological rupture inhered in Victorian nonsense, Bentley was also signalling a temperamental

rupture from his friend. Bentley particularly singled out Carroll's 'splendid book', *The Game of Logic* (1887), for praise while at Oxford (10 Apr. 1896; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.865), noting that he had read it with Chesterton, who presumably demurred at the unqualified laudation of Bentley's assessment. In 'Lewis Carroll' (*New York Times* 1932; collected in *A Handful of Authors*, 1953), Chesterton complains of a lack of humanity in the work of his subject, which produces a conceptual imbalance: 'there is nothing but nonsense in his nonsense. There is no sense in his nonsense; as there is in the more human nonsense of Rabelais' (*Handful* 118).

In view of Chesterton's perception of Carroll, which is perhaps also informed by the chess-game conceit that imbues *Through the Looking Glass* with the abstract principles of a logic game, it is instructive to consider the terms employed by Bentley in a letter sent to Chesterton in January 1894, which refers to a prior conversation on the subject of game playing. It transpires that Bentley considers certain forms of game playing to be 'unhuman', and therefore 'unmoral', a conviction that appears to have caused a disagreement between the pair. Bentley's explanation is emollient, yet reiterative:

> Of course, you did not take quite seriously what I said the other evening about games like chess: to do myself justice (my favourite game) I think that the games in which you are in lively conversation with the rest of the world worth mentioning, like Pool or Billiards, are not to be included in the category of quite unhuman games. One talks and enjoys oneself; while chess and those silent, rapt kind of wit-contests are […] a spiritualized fight. One plays them […] but one loathes them, for all that. Now billiards may be regarded as a means of promoting intellectual conversation […] it is distinctly a human game. [But where chess is concerned, the] word "unhuman", corresponding in ethical phraseology to the artistic "unmoral" ought, I think, to be used (BL MS Add.73191 ff.39).

While Bentley's terms imply an element of self-disgust in the 'unhuman' act of withdrawal ('one loathes them'), they also indicate a compulsive urge to attain this condition: 'one plays them' all the same.[9] The comparable act of psychic withdrawal conducted by the nonsense-practitioner is evoked in Elizabeth

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[9] Curiously, in the diaries, Bentley later claims to have forced himself to take up chess against his temperamental inclinations: 'This plan of compelling myself to play chess, for which I have absolutely no taste, is amusing to me' (4 Jan. 1897; BL MS Eng.misc.e.866).

Sewell's argument that 'one of the characteristics of Nonsense' is that 'people tend to be turned into things […] not in the sense of magic, where a frog becomes a Prince, but in the sense of being turned into playthings' (*Field* 137). Consequently, while '[p]eople are not excluded from the nonsense game […] it has a tendency to whittle down their humanity, to make them chessmen rather than men' (*Field* 137-38).

Sewell's insight is particularly instructive in relation to Bentley's poetic nonsense invention, the clerihew, which he conceived while studying with Chesterton at St. Paul's School. Structurally, the clerihew invariably takes the form of a single quatrain, with an AABB rhyme scheme, in which any of the lines may differ drastically in length to any of the others, producing a formal incongruity aptly characterised by Chesterton as a 'severe and stately form of Free Verse' (*Autobiography* 61). Thematically, the clerihew always enacts an irreverent manipulation of the biographical details (either accurate, fictionalised, or a touch of both) of a 'stately' historical or contemporary public figure, whose name must formally dictate the terms of the initial rhyme. In this way, public figures become playthings in a detached game of referential derangement, since the formal and thematic rules of the clerihew particularly encourage an arbitrary conflation of the proper noun with a random character trait, location, object, etc., so as to heighten the comic effect. This attribute corroborates Stewart's assertion that the purest forms of nonsense radically disrupt common-sense notions of relation: 'Nonsense does not undermine the idea of causality so much as it undermines the sense of contingency and necessariness underlying the everyday sense of causality. In nonsense, anything can cause anything else' (138). Absence of coherent relation is a particularly marked feature of Bentley's most successful clerihews, which frequently centre upon a deliberate derangement of referential norms. Take, for example, his inaugural clerihew:

Sir Humphrey Davy
Abominated gravy.
He lived in the odium
Of having discovered sodium (*Complete* 38).

Sewell identifies four principal 'ideas' of nonsense: 'inversion or upside-down turning', 'rhyme, the gift of a particular language in providing *un*fitting pairs', 'disproportion: "A grasshopper stepped on an elephant's toe"', and the 'most important' attribute: '"muddling things up"' ('Nonsense' 141). The Davy clerihew displays each of these elements. To address Sewell's first two precepts, Davy's principal claim to fame counter-intuitively leads to his infamy, an 'inversion' directly enabled by the '*un*fitting' rhyme of odium and sodium. Similarly, in an incongruous conflation of the material and the sublime, the juxtaposition of his alleged aversion to gravy and his greatest intellectual achievement produces a radical 'disproportion' in the selection of relevant biographical material. The effect of the whole is to 'muddle things up', in the sense that an apparently trivial quirk of temperament, which no conventional biographer would be likely to mention, is given anecdotal precedence over the one apparently indispensable fact of Davy's biography, his discovery of sodium, which is then claimed to have ruined his name, rather than made it. Through this approach, all the conceptual ties that conventionally unite to provide an objective framework for biographical assessment are splintered in a miasma of referential derangement.

Bentley's comic disregard for biographical verity is confirmed by a lengthy discursion on Davy's alleged biography, in *Those Days*. Bentley mock-portentously parodies the sense of elective affinity which draws the biographer to his/her subject, while alleging that Davy was expelled from Oxford for a series of outrageous, Rabelaisian pranks: 'Adolescent myself, it was with a wistful interest that I had learned how Davy, as a youth, had been indulged in his passionate fondness for cock-fighting, trout-tickling, and brawling in church. When I found that, in his second term at Oxford, he had gated for cutting off his tutor's ears, my enthusiasm knew no bounds' (154). The scholarly context of this account also draws attention to the clerihew's location within a tradition of nonsense that is academic, rather than popular. This trait is still more evident in a mock-confrontational clerihew, in which academic achievement is confused with moral rectitude, in a biographical context which throws an interesting light upon Chesterton's reference to dispatching snobs via the Dewar method:

Professor Dewar

Is a better man than you are.

None of you asses

Can condense gasses (*Complete* 39).[10]

In *The Origins of English Nonsense* (1997), Noel Malcolm identifies the co-presence of two parallel seams of nonsense in English cultural tradition. The first is represented by 'English popular writing and folk materials: drinking songs, humorous ballads, folktales, nursery rhymes' (4), while the second is discernible in the 'parodic routines and in-jokes' of sixteenth-century 'comic University dramas' (5), as well as the contemporaneous 'Christmas revels' of the Inns of Court, which were composed of a carnivalesque compendium of 'mock-trials, comic plays, processions, banquets and dances' (7). Of these strains, which correlate to the popular and the academic, Bentley evinces a marked preference for the latter, while Chesterton deliberately projects a preference for the former, while consistently employing elements of both.

Once having graduated, Bentley trained as a lawyer at the Inns of Court, while his period of study at Oxford, beginning in 1894 (Bentley, *Those* 70), drew him into an academic literary lineage steeped in both nonsense and decadence. Of course, Carroll had been an Oxford don, while Wilde, Hankin, and Beerbohm (another Mertonite) were all exponents of a variable admixture of decadence, parody, and nonsense in the generations immediately preceding Bentley's. Standing at the head of this roll-call of Victorian iconoclasts was the celebrated parodist, Charles Stuart Calverley, who was notoriously expelled from Oxford in 1852 for committing insubordinate pranks, in a prefiguration of Bentley's apocryphal tale of Davy's disgrace. Of the school of academic parody that Calverley fathered, Chesterton argued, with considerable ambivalence, that 'it is enduring in the sense that it is detached. They have got outside life, if only to laugh at it. In their frivolity [is] a somewhat sad philosophy' ('A Book of the Day: College Fireworks.' *DN* 5 Oct. 1905; *CDN* 3: 205).

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[10] Though most probably composed before 1900, this was first published in Bentley's *Biography for Beginners* (1905) with an illustration by Chesterton.

While Beerbohm has proved to be the most enduringly renowned Oxonian descendant of Calverley's school, both Bentley and Hankin were also skilled parodists. In the *Autobiography*, Chesterton recalls that Bentley produced burlesque parodies of Swinburne and Wordsworth in his schooldays (66/77), while Bentley's diaries record that he had a parody of Kipling's 'Danny Deever' published in *Isis* while at Oxford (29 Feb. 1896; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.865).[11] For his part, Hankin produced two well-received parody collections, *Mr. Punch's Dramatic Sequels* (1901) and *Lost Masterpieces and Other Verses* (1904), which focused, respectively, upon comic addendums to serious plays such as *Hamlet*, and parodies of famous verse. In the *Autobiography*, Chesterton acknowledges that Hankin's 'amusing literary travesties' showed him to be 'a man of real talent' (146).

Despite this inclination to parody, neither man shared Chesterton's enthusiasm for establishing stringent moral/cultural affiliations, nor of pursuing the satirical engagement with external realities that goes along with such a discriminative drive. While Chesterton sought to foster Bentley's parodic gifts in their youth, for example beginning a notebook of 'The New Rejected Addresses' (1891) which he anticipated as a collaborative project, in the *Autobiography* he acknowledges that 'clear and *unadulterated* Nonsense' (61; my emphasis) was Bentley's true *metier*.[12] In an inverse movement, Hankin's youthful parodies soon gave way to pure satire in the dramatic work of his maturity. However, the nihilism of plays such as *The Charity That Began at Home* (1906) suggests that far from taking an exorbitantly proscriptive moral-standpoint, Hankin's worldview is divested of all moral grounding, and is instead allied to the grotesque, as defined by Thompson: 'the grotesque writer does not analyse and instruct in terms of right or wrong, or true or false, nor does he attempt to distinguish between these. On the contrary, he is concerned to demonstrate their inseparability' (*Grotesque* 42).

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[11] Chesterton also composed several parodies of Kipling, including 'Folk Song', which he inscribed in a private copy of *The Secret of Father Brown*, dedicated to Father O'Connor (see *Collected Nonsense* 176).

[12] The notes for these 'imitations of modern poets' (BL MS Add.73348 ff.39-51) include half-finished parodies of Dante Gabriel Rosetti and William Morris. The original *Rejected Addresses* (1812) was a collection of parodies by James and Horace Smith, which was largely responsible for instigating the nineteenth-century fashion for close parody.

Consequently, we must further refine our understanding of the nature of satire, to incorporate two polarised permutations. The first—moral satire—identifies specific unsatisfactory elements in human conduct, and is exorbitantly judgemental in positing an ethical ideal against which this conduct falls short; while the second—which might be termed metaphysical satire—posits the unsatisfactory nature of the human condition *per se*, while disputing the very existence of ethical ideals, a position which characteristically resolves itself in moral nihilism. Chesterton later embodied these two poles in the persons of Syme and Gregory in *Thursday*, the former initially representing the pure satirist as moral policeman, and the latter representing the pure satirist as moral nihilist, who proclaims his determination to 'deny all those arbitrary distinctions of vice and virtue, honour and treachery', and derides the 'sentimentalists of the French Revolution [who] talked of the Rights of Man! We hate Rights as we hate Wrongs. We have abolished Right and Wrong' (*CW* 6: 490). For Chesterton, Hankin's plays are the work of 'a very fastidious judge' (*CDN* 5: 344) who damns the world *in toto*, mocking all moral values and social conventions equally, while positing no alternative framework to take their place. Phillips backs up this reading, arguing that Hankin typically 'satirize[d] the sacred cows of earnestness, duty, work, and marriage, while suggesting the probable meaninglessness of human endeavours' (97). One thinks of Chesterton's assessment of Swinburne, who 'set out to break down without having, or even thinking he had, the rudiments of rebuilding in him' (*CW* 15: 505), thus contravening the parodic principle of simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction that informs Chesterton's cultural programme.

In presenting us with a 'world of cool and almost heartless comedy' (*CDN* 5: 344), as Chesterton describes it, Hankin conjures a vision of an amoral nonsense world, dictated by a blind self-interest and arbitrary violence not far removed from the motiveless animus of Carroll's Wonderland or the inexplicable brutality of Lear's limericks. In translating these precepts to the everyday world, Hankin depicts life not only as 'vicious and competitive', but also as a matter of 'inconsequence' (Phillips 94), a dual-proposition which would appear to be informed by the anti-rationalist, pessimistic idealism of Arthur Schopenhauer, a philosopher who Chesterton considered an even greater cultural influence than Hegel at the *fin de siècle*. As Chesterton argues in 'The Great Pessimist' (*DN* 7

June 1901), at the moment of writing, 'the popularity of Schopenhauer […] far surpasses the popularity of any of his contemporaries in philosophy' (*CDN* 1: 94).

In *The World as Will and Idea* (1818), Schopenhauer argues that existence is essentially characterised by a perpetual rebounding between suffering and boredom, which stems from the individual's subjection to the uncontrollable exigencies of the will, a force that endlessly strives after the possession of extrinsic phenomena. Schopenhauer argues that if possession is achieved, the result is merely a profound ennui, which can only be stanched by the pursuit of further objects of desire, in a dismayingly perpetual cycle of competition with other wills, in pursuit of goals that are fundamentally inconsequential. Moreover, Schopenhauer's belief in the existential primacy of the ephemeral will leads him to consider the objective world essentially illusory, since it is merely composed of transient manifestations of a blind will-to-existence. This combination of beliefs leads Schopenhauer to a position diametrically opposed to another of Chesterton's four proofs of sanity—the conviction that 'this world not only exists, but matters', despite the fact that it is 'unproved and unprovable' that 'there is any […] duty to improve the things we did not make' (*CDN* 4: 242). Conversely, Schopenhauer's extreme ontological scepticism not only disturbingly undermines common-sense notions of objective relation, but simultaneously constitutes an exposition of moral nihilism. As Chesterton concludes, in another uncharacteristically rancorous judgement, insofar as he encouraged the inference that 'all good and happiness is an illusion […] Schopenhauer appears to me the most contemptible […] of all men whose souls have influenced the world' (*CDN* 1: 95).

Schopenhauer's cure for the cycle of suffering and boredom that he diagnosed was a withdrawal into a state of artistic dispassion which would enable the suffering individual to escape the pain of desire and overcome the loss of volition caused by slavery to the will, by learning to witness life as a detached observer (see Schopenhauer, *World* 102-03), a precept which can be viewed in comparable terms to the nonsense-writer's urge to establish detachment from objective reality. As Habib explains, 'Schopenhauer had envisaged the artist as stepping outside the human drama, a live person among the puppets' (75). That Bentley was also influenced by the precepts of Schopenhauerian scepticism and pessimism is implied by his recourse to the detachment of the 'unhuman' chess game, as well as his taste for the deranging mechanisms of the clerihew, through

which he treats renowned protagonists in the 'human drama' as puppets to be irreverently manipulated. This combination of detachment and derangement is also conveyed by a number of remarks found elsewhere in Bentley's correspondence with Chesterton between the summers of 1893 and '94, in which Bentley is clearly undergoing a period of psychological distress, which he conveys via a tone that curiously combines studied, ironical detachment with a rhetoric of lost volition before the exegeses of inscrutable forces beyond his control.

In an exchange in the summer of 1893, Bentley refers to an apparent attempt on Chesterton's part to initiate a parodic correspondence, perhaps motivated by a desire to draw Bentley out of himself with another of their knockabout games. On this occasion, Bentley is less than enthusiastic about joining in: 'as for this notion of writing things to people in imitation of the styles of other people, I find it, in this delightful weather, quite hard enough to imitate my own style' (19 Aug. 1893; BL MS Add.73191 ff.36). Despite the cheerfully conveyed excuse of the weather, Bentley goes on to admit to a more profound debilitation, having recently passed 'the most miserable night I ever remember to have had'. He then seeks to reassure Chesterton with the suspiciously extravagant claim that 'my existence has never been marred by a shadow of doubt or uneasiness on any subject whatsoever. In fact, I am at this moment hardly able to hold the pen on account of a paroxysm of light hearted merriment' (BL MS Add.73191 ff.36).

Bentley's protestations of pristine intellectual certitude are somewhat undermined by the repeated intimations of lost volition that suffuse his letter—the inability to 'imitate my own style', accompanied by the 'paroxysm' of laughter which hinders his physical mastery of the pen—details that employ playful rhetoric to hint at a sense of combined mental and physical loss of control. As Sewell notes, apropos of Chesterton's own work, '[n]onsense writing may not be merely a clever exercise in wit; it may be an unconscious distress signal' ('Giant' 556). Sure enough, several months later Bentley confessed to a tendency to dissimulate, writing of his habit of '[h]iding my feelings behind a sickening mask of gaiety,' through which 'I endeavour fruitlessly to dissemble the state of mind I am in' (BL MS Add.73191 ff.39). Another of Bentley's letters begins '[t]hank you for replying to my last two; I almost expected you to refuse to notice them.

You must think I am going mad: I daresay I am' (25 Aug 1893; BL MS Add.73191 ff.37). In the margins, Chesterton has sketched a stormy-browed, despairing figure.

On the unpublished second page of the illustrated draft of the *Greybeards* dedication, Chesterton addresses Bentley's period of mental disturbance at length. Page two follows directly on from the line, 'joined us eternally', expanding upon the hint of temporal disjunction in the proceeding line:

> But a time came when he was changed
> He wept & tore his clothing
> And foamed & rolled upon the floor
> (The others noticed nothing)
> But I, with Friendship's keener view
> Watching him writhe & yell
> And turn a vivid blue, conceived
> That all might not be well.
>
> I said "Cease rolling in the grate"
> "Relax this stoic pride"
> He hurled the fire-irons at my head
> And dreamily replied
> "To you, O friend this mask of calm
> Can scarce conceal my pain"
> He idly stood upon his head
> And seemed himself again (BL MS Add.73242 A ff.5).

These stanzas were excised from the published version, and replaced with a briefer, sanitised version.[13] As will be observed, the lines attributed to Bentley in quotation marks closely paraphrase his remarks in the correspondence, while Chesterton's reference to watching Bentley 'writhe and yell', and the combination of sudden violence and implied somnambulism that permeates the draft is suggestive of Bentley's consistent rhetoric of abnegated self-control.[14]

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[13] 'I marked the absent-minded scream, / The little nervous trick / Of rolling in the grate, with eyes / By friendship's light made quick. / But youth's black storms are gone and past…' (*Collected Nonsense* 3).

[14] The lines perhaps also allude to the dialogue of the King and Queen of Hearts in *Alice*:

> "…you never had fits, my dear, I think?" he said to the Queen.

When Chesterton refers, in the published dedication, to himself and Bentley as 'Dolls living' (*Collected Nonsense* 3), one thinks of Freud's citation of Jentsch's account of the disturbing sense of the uncanny evoked both by 'dolls and automata' and by 'epileptic fits and […] manifestations of insanity' (*Uncanny* 135), which disturb because they imply that 'mechanical […] processes may lie hidden behind the familiar image of a living person' (*Uncanny* 135), much as Schopenhauer argues that the apparently freely willing individual is actually the dupe of existential forces outside his/her control. While this context evokes Chesterton's fear of derangement, his allusion to classical philosophy in the exhortation to '"relax this stoic pride"' also suggests that Bentley's projection of an aloof detachment was inspired by the influence of Greek sceptic philosophy, of which Schopenhauerian pessimism constituted a modern reboot. In particular, the precepts of Pyrrhonist scepticism posit a philosophy of withdrawal, in which scepticism is rendered an absolute principle, resulting in a total suspension of judgement, or withholding of assent (*epoche*), a strategy pursued with the aim of achieving mental imperturbability, or *ataraxia* (see Mates 61-62). Moral satire, as an exercising of judgement which ends in an expression of allegiance, or selective assent, is consequently inimical to the precepts of classical scepticism.

The motif of absent-mindedness is again discernible in another of Bentley' letters, composed on 28 March 1894, in which he notes that '[t]he above paragraph, which my pen wrote of its own accord, I take to be of the nature of an imitation of somebody's style; but I don't know whose' (BL MS Add.73191 ff.43). As with the examples from Carroll's *Alice* cited in the previous chapter, Bentley's uncertainty evokes a loss of control, echoing his inability to 'imitate my own style', while recalling the language of spiritualist channelling and automatic writing. The same quirk makes an appearance in the self-consciously comedic account that Bentley later gave of his invention of the clerihew: 'The pen was in my hand. Musing, I hardly knew what it was tracing on the page. Then, with a start, I saw that I had written' the Davy clerihew (*Those* 153). Bentley's account echoes Carroll in suggesting an intimate relationship between nonsense and subjective disorientation, which Bentley converts, long after the fact, from a

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"Never!" said the Queen, furiously, throwing an inkstand at the lizard as she spoke (*Annotated* 160).

disturbingly visceral personal experience into an urbanely comic account of the inscrutable processes of artistic inspiration.

Having evidently become alarmed by Bentley's confessions of mental disturbance, Chesterton drops the tone of adolescent flippancy that often served as a distancing 'mask of gaiety' in their correspondence, and adopts an uncharacteristically earnest mien in an undated letter of 1893. Referring to an earlier conversation, Chesterton reminds Bentley that 'the real remedy for such faddists [as pessimists] is, as you said, genuine friendship' (BL MS Add.73191 ff.33). Chesterton reports that he has discarded a letter 'in which I summoned up all my powers of spiritual consolation in the hope of fixing your state of mind, your hints of which worried me'. He then offers the following anti-Schopenhauerian advice: 'Face for a moment the conception of the world being a sham, of the <u>sum of all things</u> being barren, and you will <u>feel</u> it is impossible'. These underlinings emphasise an anti-idealist recourse to intuitive, sensory experience, as opposed to the intellectualised detachment of *non*sense, which is entirely new to their correspondence, and would ultimately become Chesterton's primary defence against the temptations of scepticism in his maturity. Chesterton ends his peroration on a rhetorical note that is immediately recognisable as the future voice of G.K.C., in a discussion of his recent holiday game-playing, which differs radically from the 'unhuman' form of game playing discussed by Bentley: 'I sally out in the evening and play with children on the sands: coastguards' and visitors' children alike, except that the coastguards' are rather the more refined' (BL MS Add.73191 ff.33).[15]

The final remark could be considered to represent the birth moment of Chesterton's strident populism, conceived in an attempt to impress a more healthy outlook upon his friend, while signalling a telling divergence from his previous, Bentleyan remarks that 'the lower orders are seen unfavourably when enjoying themselves'. While Chesterton's advice constitutes an expression of departure from Bentley in this respect, it is curious to note that Bentley's period of mental instability formed a point of convergence with Chesterton. In the summer of 1894, Bentley writes that 'I have not been for some time quite normal. There was a time

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[15] Oddie quotes from this letter, but suppresses all references to Bentley's mental condition, thus withholding the context which directly prompted the correspondence, so as to imply that the pair are simply discussing the perils of pessimism in a detached, theoretical sense (see Oddie 102-03).

in your own experience when you had something of the sort' (BL MS Add.73191 ff.63). This 'time' has long been discussed by Chesterton's biographers as the period of crisis which he endured while studying at the Slade School of Art between the autumn of 1893 and the summer of 1894 (see Oddie 89/123)—a timespan almost exactly coterminous with Bentley's period of disturbance.

In the *Autobiography*, Chesterton identifies a delusion 'of being God' (92) as the basis of his particular madness, explaining that a miasmic process of solitary reflection induced a 'mood of unreality and sterile isolation' which led him to doubt the existence of external reality: 'It was as if I had myself projected the universe from within' (92). Curiously enough, Chesterton depicts *himself* as a replica of Hankin here. If the latter 'disbelieved in Man much more than he did in God', Chesterton confesses that while atheists would tell him 'so pompously that [they] did not believe there was any God [...] there were moments when I did not even believe there was any atheist' (*Autobiography* 92). As Chesterton's avatar, Syme, remarks to Dr Bull at the final extremity of his disarray in *Thursday*, '"I do not believe that you really have a face. I have not faith enough to believe in matter"' (CW 6: 620).

Another of Chesterton's four proofs of sanity states that '[e]very sane man believes that the world round him and the people in it are real and not his own delusion or dream', despite the fact that the principle that 'anything exists except myself is unproven and unprovable' (*CDN* 4: 242). Although Chesterton claims, in the *Autobiography*, that he 'was not mad, in any medical or physical sense', but 'was simply carrying the scepticism of my time as far as it would go', the specifics of his condition—a 'calm horror of detachment' (92)—strongly resemble the psychological disorder of derealisation, in which the individual's perception of the external world becomes distorted in a manner which causes his or her immediate environment to appear unreal or dreamlike (see Johnson 232). Rather than a considered, philosophical espousal of solipsism, this condition should be understood as an involuntary psychiatric state, in which the individual becomes unable to conceive the world as possessing a meaningful existence external to his or her consciousness. In turn, Bentley's descriptions of his condition recall the psychological phenomenon of depersonalisation, in which the individual experiences the sensation of watching his- or herself act, while having no control over the actions performed, producing 'the feeling that one is not oneself'

(Rosenberg 193).[16] Each of these dissociative disorders 'usually begins in adolescence' (Johnson 232), and they are closely related (and frequently coexistent), yet carry contrasting symptoms: derealisation promotes a sense of the unreality of the outside world, while depersonalisation promotes a sense of the unreality of the self, a distinction which produces ample grounds for mutual misapprehension.

Despite Chesterton's own testimony that 'my morbidities […] sounded the most appalling depths of fundamental scepticism and solipsism' (*Autobiography* 341), Oddie has argued that Chesterton's malaise was probably not as serious as he claimed: 'the evidence is that his morbid state of mind was never at any point wholly debilitating, and that his struggle against the blight of what he termed "pessimism" [was] seen as an external and cultural threat rather than as a personal problem […] there was probably never a time when he was wholly engulfed' (90). Similarly, Oddie claims that Chesterton had safely passed through this phase by the time that he left the Slade. Oddie draws this inference from another letter sent from Chesterton to Bentley, which is undated, but which Ward speculates may have been sent in the 'Long Vac., 1894' (*Gilbert* 48). Here Chesterton appears to be speaking of a crisis that has been fully resolved:

> Inwardly speaking, I have had a funny time. A meaningless fit of depression, taking the form of certain absurd psychological worries, came upon me, and instead of dismissing it and talking to people, I had it out and went very far into the abysses, indeed. The result was that I found that things, when examined, necessarily spelt such a mystically satisfactory state of things, that [… I was made] certain that it is all right (qtd. in *Gilbert* 48).[17]

Again, the tone here is pedagogic, seeking to reassure Bentley—through a projection of similarity—that Chesterton can personally vouch for the presence of a light at the end of the tunnel. Oddie cites this letter as proof that by the summer

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[16] An example of the rhetoric of depersonalisation is discernible in Bentley's diary, in his ostensibly flippant account of a debate at Oxford on 'the aesthetic movement of the present day […] I spoke myself, too, which I was glad to hear myself doing; because speaking is a thing everyone ought to try and do, if he thinks he has anything to say. And I always make a point of thinking that' (26 Nov. 1894; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.862).
[17] This letter is not collected in the British Library's holdings of Chesterton's correspondence. It is first referred to in Ward, which is perhaps where later biographers have taken it from. Sufferers from derealisation frequently 'experience anxiety disorders and depression' (Johnson 232).

of 1894, 'the nightmare through which' Chesterton had past was 'ended […] forever' (124). As Oddie (over) stresses, at this stage Chesterton's troubles were '*already over*' (132). However, a series of entries in Bentley's diary of late 1896 directly contradict this assertion, instead demonstrating that Chesterton's debilitating neuroses continued at least up to the time of his first courting of Frances. These diary entries initiate an awareness that Chesterton's psychological problems were not pristinely left behind in a manner both reassuring to the biographer, and preferable to Chesterton in his construction of a pedagogic autobiographical narrative. Far from being disturbing emotions later recollected in tranquillity, these were on-going difficulties with which he continually battled. On 12 October 1896, Bentley writes, 'Gilbert, returning, was very nervous and unwell. It appears [… that] he gets into a state of nervous frustration and terror, and gets overwhelmed by his imagination' (Bod MS Eng.misc.e.865). This account strongly suggests that Chesterton was suffering from 'panic disorder', a recognised symptom of which is derealisation (see Johnson 179). The following day, Bentley records that

> Gilbert had a very bad attack this evening—when I had gone to bed, and almost to sleep, he suddenly turned up in my room—as far as I could gather, unable to face the thing alone, and only finding relief in talking to somebody. I did my best to converse, and kept on dropping asleep and dreaming short dreams between the sentences—awful work! He really ought to be seriously taken in hand. It would never do—few things would so seldom do—to have him breaking himself down for good (13 Oct. 1896; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.865).

With its weariness and wordplay, this account retains a curiously detached tone. Bentley interrupts the flow of his recollection to police his use of rote phraseology, employing the archetypal nonsense-trick of literalising a figure of speech ('never do'; 'seldom do') to inject an arch emotional distance into the account, a trait echoed in the ironical, distancing phrase, '"relax this stoic pride"', with which Chesterton urbanely responds to Bentley's loss of volition in the abandoned *Greybeards* preface. It is as though each man retreats into self-preserving detachment upon encountering an objective manifestation of his own mental state. However, on 17 December 1896, Bentley adopts the note of unguarded earnestness that had emerged earlier in Chesterton's correspondence: 'I

love, and can't help loving, a man who has been to me all that he has been; but it only makes my fear and sorrow for him the more acute. I am afraid, deeply afraid for this man's future; for he has made his bed' (Bod MS Eng.misc.e.866).

The meaning of Bentley's final, enigmatic remark is difficult to determine, though one plausible context is Chesterton's increasingly strong attachment to Frances at this time. Another possible context is his increasing sense of literary purpose, which is brought to light by a slightly earlier entry, in which Bentley records that on another visit, 'Gilbert toiled away at his story of the man who would be God. I wonder if it will be good. It should be, by the pains he's taking with it' (21 Sept. 1896; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.865). Chesterton later asserted that he first began to draft *Thursday* in the early 1890s (see Oddie 329), a project which he pursued throughout the following years in a variety of titular guises, including 'The Picture of Tuesday' in 1896. Consequently, it seems likely that a nascent form of the novel is the text to which Bentley is referring here.[18] Bentley's diary entries shed an illuminating new light upon what Evelyn Waugh later intuited to be 'the night-fears' ('Man' 74) that inform *Thursday*. It seems probable that Chesterton's fictional reconstruction of his psychological struggles—which took the form of a delusion of God-hood—initially contributed further to the author's own disturbance, as he sought to establish a more healthy, creative means of 'project[ing a] universe from within'. As Conlon rightly contends, in *Thursday*, 'Syme's nightmare and Chesterton's personal nightmare from the 1890s merge: Syme undergoes his nightmare because he is a fragmented multi-schizoid personality […] broken up like light in an Impressionist painting' (*CW* 6: 39).

Syme's antagonist, the sulphurous amoralist, Lucian Gregory, is also a 'man who would be God' in a more Miltonic sense, and a figure with whom Chesterton strains to dialogically engage in the final text. Since Bentley was not always on hand in the next room, Chesterton perhaps found the 'relief in talking to somebody' that he needed through this opening up of textual dialogue. As Knight explains, Chesterton ends *Thursday* with Syme and Gregory deep in conversation because in 'recognizing the presence of another person, conversation offers a form of defense against solipsism' (*Evil* 126). Bentley's account of his friend being 'overwhelmed by his imagination' suggests a traumatic grappling with the

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[18] See Oddie 160-61 for a more full account of the connection of this sketch to the final novel.

polyphonic principles that Chesterton would later refine within the final text. Bakhtin conceives the polyphonic novel to be a medium in which the author 'is not required to renounce himself or his own consciousness, but he must to an extraordinary extent broaden, deepen and rearrange his consciousness […] in order to accommodate the autonomous consciousnesses of others' (*Problems* 68). Roberts characterises Bakhtin's position as a means of staving off solipsism while maintaining subjecthood: 'the Bakhtinian self is dynamic but inalienable, continually constituted in the dialogic armature of "I" and a world of Others' (116). As the following account will demonstrate, Chesterton's formative attempts to establish a comparable framework of dialogic relation simultaneously resulted in his first expressions of departure from his friend.

Decadence and Dialogism

Bentley's private diaries occasionally focus upon the reassurance that he found in Chesterton's conversation. For example, he writes that '[r]eading Gilbert's letters one always feels he is talking to you, and one almost converses' (1 Nov. 1895; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.864). There is a rather sad irony to this account, since Chesterton's most consistent complaint against his friend was that his temperamental detachment had the effect of shutting down the conversation that Chesterton relied upon as a bulwark to support his own mental balance. This critical refrain is discernible in a number of subtle gestures in Chesterton's private and public engagement with Bentley, beginning, in a particularly cryptic instance, with the illustrations with which Chesterton adorned the offending section of Bentley's epistolary account of the 'unhuman' chess-game as a 'silent, rapt kind of wit-contest' (see below):

Christ Church Vicarage.

Hadley. Barnet.

January, some day 1904.

Dear GILBERT:-Here I am, and I am sure I hope I like it. Two sets of relatives are at this house, because the STOBERRY cousins, of whom I may have occasionally spoken to you, are also quartered upon us; which saves me the trouble of going a walk when I wish to be very domestic. I calculate that I have three days or so of holidays left, before I begin working again, and it is being passed in playing-just playing. Of course, you did not take quite seriously what I said the other evening about games like Chess: to do myself justice [my favourite game] I think that the games in which you are in lively communication with the rest of the world worth mentioning, like Pool or Billiards, are not to be included in the category of quite unhuman games. One talks and enjoys oneself; while Chess and those silent, rapt kind of wit-contests are distinctly relics of mediaevalism, like everything else. The idea of them is a spiritualized fight. One plays them, of course, in a way; but one loathes them for all that. Now billiards may be regarded as a form of promoting intellectual conversation, because there is something to say when the talk lags, such as "Good stroke" or "hard lines": though it is, certainly true that one says very little else. Still it is distinctly a human game. The word "unhuman", corresponding in ethical phraseology to the artistic "unmoral" ought, I think, to be used.

And how is one? now one has attempted the account of one's own. One has time to think of one. One hopes one is writing to one at this moment; though per-

These sketches bear a marked resemblance to Bentley, and it is particularly significant that Chesterton should have chosen to place a prominent monocle on each image of his friend. Knight asserts that '[f]or Chesterton, spectacles offer a terrifying instance of the grotesque because they involve the

possibility that behind the appearance of the grotesque there might be nothing at all' (*Evil* 103). Knight's analysis is corroborated by these sketches, in which no eye is depicted behind the monocle, but rather a perfectly circular void. The 'mono'cle is also significant here, since it particularly implies a monoscopic, rather than stereoscopic, mode of vision, with attendant loss of perspective. In *Orthodoxy* (1908), Chesterton employs this ocular distinction to differentiate between the 'morbid logician' and the 'healthy […] ordinary man' (20), in an account which centres upon the latter's willingness to accommodate metaphysical paradox, in contradistinction to the systematising drive of the rationalistic intellectual. For Chesterton, the former 'has always cared more for truth than for consistency. If he saw two truths that seemed to contradict each other, he would take the two truths and the contradiction along with them. His spiritual sight is stereoscopic, like his physical sight: he sees two different pictures at once and yet sees all the better for that' (*Orthodoxy* 20).

In the same passage, Chesterton turns once more to the cross as a positive emblem of this vein of existential contradiction: 'though it has at its heart a collision and a contradiction, [the cross] can extend its four arms for ever without altering its shape. Because it has a paradox in its centre it can grow without changing' (21). In contrast, Chesterton employs the circle as 'the symbol of reason and madness' (20). Discussing the rationalistic certainties of the intellectual, he notes that 'the circle of the moon is […] clear and unmistakable […] as the circle of Euclid on a blackboard' (21), much like the pristine circle of the monocle that he affixes to his caricatures of Bentley. Chesterton concludes that '[d]etached intellectualism is (in the exact sense of a popular phrase) all moonshine; for it is light without heat, and it is secondary light, reflected from a dead world' (*Orthodoxy* 21). In Chesterton's fiction, monocles are invariably worn by characters who represent aloofness, worldly success, and social conformity. For example, a politician in 'The Red Moon of Meru' (*The Storyteller* Apr. 1927) possesses a 'monocle that was the only gleam in his hard, legal face' (*FB* 618). Perhaps the most significant of Chesterton's references to monocles arises in his essay, 'The Dulness of Cliques' (*DN* 11 May 1912), in which he employs the monocle as a metaphor of the dangers of scepticism:

> A fixed creed is absolutely indispensable to freedom. For while men are and should be
> various, there must be some communication between them if they are to get any
> pleasure out of their variety. […] If we all start with the agreement that the sun and
> moon exist, we can talk about our different visions of them. [… But] if once it be held
> that there is nothing but a silver blur in one man's eye or a bright circle (like a
> monocle) in the other man's, then neither is free, for each is shut up in the cell of a
> separate universe (*CDN* 8: 77).

Here Chesterton particularly focuses upon the tendency of ontological scepticism to breed alienation by dispensing with the shared contexts that foster mutual understanding while enabling individuals to remain 'various'. Chesterton argues that only a faith in the analogic nature of the things with which we mutually identify can offer a context that secures our freedom to cogently separate, without becoming locked in the solipsism of a private 'cell'. Chesterton's parody sequence, 'Variations on an Air', pragmatically illustrates this principle by setting up a comparable analogic model, in which highly distinct modes of expression are employed by various poets as a means of relating their personal visions of a shared folk memory—the nursery rhyme, Old King Cole. Through this conceit, Chesterton sets up a symposium of heteroglossic interaction in which the presence of a common cultural context enables the respondents to employ diverse stylistic approaches to express their simultaneous individuality and commonality.[19]

A similar principle informs another of Chesterton's later parodies, 'School English Composition: *Exercise CCXXII. B: The "Tomato" in Prose and Prosody*', in which the objective standbys of the sun and moon are replaced with a burlesque equivalent, the tomato.[20] Here, a series of poets, including Poe, Burns, Milton, and Edith Sitwell, offer their bathetically couched 'different pronunciations of the word "tomato"' (*Collected Nonsense* 54), and Chesterton employs Sitwell's interpretation to convey the dangers of an excessive withdrawal into sceptical subjectivism: 'The sky bulges through the skylight like a blue tomato' (*Collected Nonsense* 55). As the composer of the school exercise sardonically glosses, this

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[19] Bakhtin explains that heteroglossia connotes '*another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way' (*Dialogic* 324).
[20] This piece was composed as a private gift for Joan Nicholl (see Ward, *Return* 170). Although the precise composition date is unknown, it must have been written after summer 1928, when the Chestertons first met the Nicholls (see Ffinch 319).

account 'throws no light on what accent she gives to the word, or indeed what meaning she attaches to it' (*Collected Nonsense* 55). With these imitative *tours de force*, Chesterton sets up a form of parodic community, in which the moderating voice of the parodist celebrates each participant's unique mode of expression, while also contriving to reign in any signs of extremism which might threaten to fracture the cohesion of the community.

Chesterton's conception of the value of analogic relation bears comparison to Blanchot's assessment of the dynamics of friendship, 'the fundamental separation on the basis of which what separates becomes relation'. Rather than one soul occupying two individual bodies, the principle here is of two distinct souls collaborating in one collective body-politic, a conceit which again emphasises dialogism over synthesis. In the context of Chesterton's dialogic sensibility, it is also notable that his account of scepticism's depredation of relational contexts particularly emphasises the finality of this philosophical position—its capacity to shut down 'communication'. This danger is invoked in his discussion of the retardation of the dialogic process discernible in novels that depict the decadent movement, which Chesterton contrasts with the 'capping' games of the Greek symposia:

> The most remarkable trait of the dialogue made fashionable by such works as 'Dodo' or 'The Green Carnation' is the entire absence of any social feeling whatever, of any glow of [the] great atmosphere of friendship […] The aim of the 'Dodo' conversationalist is to cut short another man's idea, not, as in the great conversations, to extend and perfect it. Proverbially, in fact, it was the aim of the wit to 'cap' the last saying; the new comment is not meant as a cap, but as an extinguisher. Its inspiration is flippancy, the blackest of all the enemies of joy ('Critics and Conversation.' *DN* 21 May 1901; *CDN* 1: 86).

If the notion of capping recalls Chesterton's admonishment to Holbrook Jackson that one should constructively build upon, rather than destructively reject one's discursive predecessors, it is notable that Jackson went on to become a celebrated chronicler of the decadent movement, with his critical study, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (1914). Chesterton publically discusses his thoughts on Jackson's earlier book of epigrams in 'Two Kinds of Paradox' (*ILN* 11 Mar. 1911), an essay in

which he also articulates his view of the dialogic merit of paradox, employing very similar terms to his account of the 'cap' and the 'extinguisher' to differentiate between contrasting applications of paradox: 'the fruitful and the barren' (*CW* 29: 53). Chesterton advances the principle of 'live paradox', in opposition to the mode that he perceives to be at work in Wilde and Shaw, while also drawing nonsense into his account: 'a live paradox ought to produce more paradoxes. Nonsense ought to be suggestive; but nowadays it is abortive. The new epigrams are not even finger posts on the wild road: they are tablets, each set into a brick wall' (*CW* 29: 53).

Chesterton's reference, in 'Critics and Conversation', to the 'absence of any social feeling' which finds expression in 'flippancy' sheds an interesting light upon his apparently fond tribute to Bentley in the *Autobiography*, which soon proceeds towards a more ambivalent tone, in which the youthful Bentley's 'rigid flippancy' (77) is particularly emphasised. This phrase, which enacts a grotesque hybridisation of extremes to again suggest the poles of dogmatism and relativism meeting full circle, also recalls Chesterton's description of Hankin as an inscrutable 'omnivorous observer' who 'had a slight smile always on his face' (*CDN* 5: 344). He argues that Bentley's flippancy endured into later life, leaving him 'too detached and ironic to become conspicuous in connection with a cause, or any of the things in which youth is generally both communal and combative' (*Autobiography* 67). Whereas Chesterton made the reverse complaint about Belloc—'[t]here is always such a *sundering* quality about Belloc's quarrels' (qtd. in Ward, *Gilbert* 472), because he pursued them with such monologic self-belief—in the case of Bentley, Chesterton argues that it is his very disinterest in controversies that has a sundering effect, a flaw which emerges from Bentley's comparably extreme inability to believe in himself. As Chesterton notes in 'The Extraordinary Cabman' (*DN* 7 Apr. 1906), '[m]y best friends are all either bottomless sceptics or quite uncontrollable believers' (*CDN* 3: 337).

Learning from these negative examples, Chesterton sought a middle-ground between the extreme positions of his two closest friends. Unlike Belloc, he retained a kernel of detached self-irony which guarded against the excessive aggression that accompanies an inability to countenance alternative points of view, since he conceived absolute self-belief to represent as sure a path to madness as absolute scepticism: '"The men who really believe in themselves are

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all in lunatic asylums"' (*Orthodoxy* 6). However, he never abandoned his belief in the central importance of exercising judgement, since, in an echo of his appraisal of Browning's even-handedness, while he was able to imaginatively engage with other perspectives, he nonetheless 'held that there was a truth to discover. […] that in a dispute every one was to a certain extent right; not the decadent doctrine that in so mad a place as the world, every one must be by the nature of things wrong' (*Robert* 175). As Chesterton summarised his position, '[m]oderation is *not* a compromise; moderation is a passion; the passion of great judges' ('Tennyson', collected in *Varied* 255).

A comparable ethos of arbitration and moderation is discernible in the parodic dialogue which he initiated with Bentley's clerihew form, when Bentley's school-friends began to join in with the production of clerihews, in which Chesterton pragmatically demonstrated his belief in the 'moderation' practiced by 'great judges'. The illustrated 'Dictionary of Biography' which ultimately found publication as Bentley's *Biography for Beginners* (1905) was originally produced as a collaborative project of their 'Junior Debating Club' (J.D.C.) in 1893 (see *CW* 10.2: 317 and Chesterton, *Autobiography* 61). Chesterton employed illustrative symbols to differentiate the contributions of the various members, distinguishing Bentley's offerings with the symbol of the dodo, while representing his own contributions with the judicial symbol of the gavel (*CW* 10.2: 317).[21] In Chesterton's account of novels that depict decadence, his reference to E.F. Benson's novel, *Dodo: A Detail of the Day* (1893), complements his description of the extinguishing of dialogue that he finds in such texts, to imply a pun on the extinct bird.[22] When combined with the purposeful infertility of the green carnation, these images evoke the atmosphere of suicidal, willed finality that suffused the decadent movement. In 'Milton and Merry England' (collected in *Fancies versus Fads*), Chesterton echoes the famous exchange between Lord Henry Wotton and Lady Narborough in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) (see Wilde, *Complete* 137), explaining that '[i]t is now almost impossible to bring home to anybody, even to myself, how final that *fin de siècle* seemed to be; not the end of the century but the end of the world' (*Fancies* 220).

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[21] Other entries are marked with both the dodo and the gavel, to indicate a collaboration.
[22] There is also a reference to Bentley having 'the Dodo on his crest' in Chesterton's mock-heroic paean to his friend, The Legend of Sir Edmund' (BL MS Add.73307 ff.93), again written in 1893, the same year as Benson's novel.

Chesterton's apocalyptic conception of the period leads William Blissett to argue that there is a 'note of melodrama' in the 'exaggerated picture of Wilde's Nineties' ('Max' 104) that he paints, while Sewell argues that Chesterton 'prefers a chimera of his own inventing' to the reality, and then 'blames Wilde for it' ('Giant' 572). While these charges initially seem plausible in the light of the mental distress that Chesterton was experiencing in the mid-1890s, it is also important to note that the suicidal conceits of decadence were not mere rhetorical abstractions, extrapolated with a feverish literalism by Chesterton, but the artistic expression of an urgent existential reality. A disproportionately large number of decadent writers suffered mental breakdowns and/or committed suicide, including Hankin, in 1909, and Chesterton must have been seriously concerned that Bentley might follow the same course—indeed, the pair's discussion of a 'suicide controversy' (BL MS Add.73191 ff.33) in the press formed the immediate context of Chesterton's epistolary attempt to rally Bentley's spirits. Although Schopenhauer considered his espousal of pristine artistic detachment to be a more subversive and philosophically cogent 'denial of the will to life' (*Will* 250-51) than suicide, he contended, nonetheless, that suicide was a perfectly rational response to the conditions of existence (see *Essays* 78-79), a view that informs Chesterton's bitterly ironical remark that at the *fin de siècle* 'an argument arose whether it was not a very nice thing to murder one's self' (*Orthodoxy* 64).

Bentley also expressed concern over forces that he perceived to potentially militate against the successful regeneration of society, albeit from a reverse perspective, when musing upon the '[v]ery earnest' Bloggs, in his diary of 1897: 'In fact, I merely believe they are—what shall I say?—the least little bit neurotic. […] My own belief is that if society were all Bloggs society would come to an abrupt conclusion' (28 Mar. 1897; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.866). If, as I argued in the previous chapter, Chesterton came to view untrammelled earnestness and untrammelled irony as equally unbalancing extremes, his enduring recourse to nonsense techniques in his maturity suggests an understanding that monologic earnestness may ultimately be as culturally un-regenerative as the miasmic ironies of decadence, and may be a personal harbinger of mental disarray—a madman who believes himself to be God in *The Ball and the Cross* wears a look of 'horrible earnestness' (*CW* 7: 184). In this spirit of moderation, Chesterton's own brand of nonsense sets up a conversation with the strictures of Bentley's preferred

approach, by emphasising a judgemental reengagement with objective reality, while retaining his friend's playful manipulations of disproportion and incongruity.

This amalgamation is particularly perceptible in *Greybeards*, in Chesterton's nonsense-critique of decadence, 'On the Disastrous Spread of Aestheticism in All Classes', which displays an apocalyptically couched anxiety over the pessimistic detachment and sceptical derangement that he discerned in decadent philosophy:

> The sea had nothing but a mood
> Of "vague ironic gloom,"
> With which t'explain its presence in
> My upstairs drawing-room.
>
> The sun had read a little book
> That struck it with a notion:
> He drowned himself and all his fires
> Deep in the hissing ocean.
>
> Then all was dark, lawless, and lost:
> I heard great devilish wings:
> I knew that Art had won, and snapt
> The Covenant of Things (*Collected Nonsense* 16).

Here Chesterton turns academic nonsense against itself. Malcolm argues that for centuries 'one of the standard building-blocks of nonsense literature' has been the 'category-mistake' (11), and identifies this as a particularly prominent feature of the academic strain of nonsense, citing the example, '"to take Tobacco in Ramus Method"' (11), as an absurd conflation of the physical and intellectual planes. In the case at hand, Chesterton manipulates disproportion—the sea entering a drawing room—and the category-mistake—the material world conversing and studying literature—in order to bolster his critique of the deranging drive of decadence, which finally breaks the 'Covenant of Things' when the sun, Chesterton's symbol of the shared objective framework that enables dialogue, is annihilated by Art.

A comparable manipulation is discernible in Chesterton's approach to the clerihew. Although Bentley later claimed that his invention was predicated upon a programmatic dismantling of biographical relation, and that a clerihew containing 'nothing with which the dry-as-dust historiographer could possibly quarrel' should be considered 'fatally defective' (*Those* 155), the form is equally amenable to satirical manipulation, in the sense that nothing in its structure technically precludes the insertion of a genuine value judgement upon the subject, based upon authentic facts of his/her biography. By choosing to focus on the clerihew's satirical potential, Chesterton exposes Bentley's invention to an enforced dialogue with other interpretations, retaining the form of his friend's verse while altering the content to suit his own agenda. This approach is exemplified by Chesterton's clerihew on Thomas Carlyle, which is illustrated only with the gavel in the original collection:

> Thomas Carlyle
> Has been forgotten all this while.
> He wrote "Sartor Resartus,"
> But that shan't part us (*CW* 10.2 343-44).

This verse smuggles value into Bentley's form, in a manner that inscribes difference while guarding against schism, by emphasising the parodic principle of a dialogic relation which 'shan't part us'. To this end, Chesterton's second couplet engages in an implicit value judgement, hinging upon a qualifying 'but', which raises the implication that despite Carlyle's infraction in producing *Sartor Resartus* (1836), the judge is willing to give the accused the benefit of the doubt. Thus, Chesterton's verse exemplifies the dual action of distancing and amelioration at the heart of parody, as well as its tendency toward tacit aggression and professed magnanimity, while the assertion that Carlyle has been 'forgotten all this while' also implies that in the very act of demurral Chesterton is disinterestedly reintroducing an unjustly neglected name into the cultural conversation. Again, this results in a text that is both 'absurd and significant'.

Chesterton's choice of Carlyle as a subject is also instructive in relation to the poles of parody. In *The Victorian Age in Literature*, Chesterton recurs once more to a distinction between wit and humour in assessing Carlyle, noting that he

'had humour; he had it in his very style; but it never got into his philosophy', which consisted of a 'heavy Teutonic idealism, absurdly unaware of the complexity of things' (*CW* 15: 443). However, in this sense, *Sartor Resartus*— which Chesterton considered an 'admirable fantasia' (*CW* 15: 444)—is also a worshipper's half-holiday on Carlyle's part, since it is a metafictional parody of Hegelian idealism, in which the musings of an earnest philosopher are subjected to critical demurral and textual reorganisation by a sceptical editor. This parodic premise situates *Sartor Resartus* within the Menippean satirical lineage of Swift and Sterne, and in this context it is little wonder that Carlyle's composition 'shan't part' the judge and the accused—in fact it represents the principal site of their sympathetic alignment. One begins to suspect a hidden emphasis in Chesterton's final line—'[b]ut *that* shan't part us'—which leads the detecting reader to investigate other possible areas of schism between the satirist and his subject. Elsewhere, Chesterton hints at the more genuine cause of his departure, when he argues that Carlyle's most egregious character flaw was that he 'failed in belief in other people' (*Twelve* 122). This assessment again inscribes a tacit identification within its criticism, by gesturing back to Chesterton's own youthful traumas, from which he now claims to have emerged, departing explicitly from Carlyle and implicitly from Bentley in the act of constructing a satirically engaged clerihew.

While this example is demonstrative of a *philosophical* divergence, another way in which Chesterton expressed his increasingly judicial temper at the turn of the century was through the gesture of commitment bound up with choosing *political* sides. In the *Autobiography*, he recalls an incident at the height of the Boer War which exemplifies the 'communal and combative' approach to controversy that he admired in Belloc. Through an improvisational collaboration with a friend—tentatively identified as Belloc by Stapleton (*CDN* 8: 6)— Chesterton initiated an agonistic game of satirical public parody, which set him at odds with a 'mob' of his fellow citizens, effectively inciting a riot:

> I remember waiting with a Pro-Boer friend in the midst of a Jingo mob outside the
> celebrated Queens Hall Meeting which ended in a free fight. My friend and I adopted a
> method of patriotic parody or *reductio ad absurdum*. We first proposed three cheers for
> Chamberlain, then three cheers for Rhodes, and then by degrees for more and more
> dubious and demi-naturalised patriots. We actually did get an innocent cheer for Beit

[…] But when it came to our impulsive appeal to the universal popularity of [George] Albu, the irony of our intention was discovered; and the fight began (*Autobiography* 110-11).[23]

This account turns upon a pedagogic filtration of friends and enemies, drawing the crowd's attention to the status of figures such as Alfred Beit—the German financier whose wealth was accumulated in South Africa—as moral, if not literal, 'enem[ies] of England' ('The Rich Man.' *DN* 21 July 1906; *CDN* 4: 12). Consider, in this light, Bentley's clerihew on Beit, which was illustrated by Chesterton in a manner that imposes a meaning not necessarily implied by the verse itself. Bentley's rhyme combines a loss of bodily volition with inscrutability over the cause:

> Mr. Alfred Beit
> Screamed suddenly in the night.
> When they asked him why
> He made no reply (*Complete* 8).

These lines retain a fundamental ambiguity regarding the cause of Beit's nightmare, implying an obscure, existential form of terror, while borrowing from Lear's limericks in the invocation of an oppressive 'they' clamouring to demand an explanation. The effect is comparable to the moment of *aporia* that Carroll implants within *The Hunting of the Snark* (1874):

> To the horror of all those who were present that day,
> He uprose in full evening dress,
> And with senseless grimaces endeavoured to say
> What his tongue could no longer express (*Works* 752).

In the clerihew at hand, in contrast to Bentley's ambiguous verse, Chesterton's accompanying illustration of Beit in bed surrounded by bags of money and

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[23] Chesterton details the same incident in 'The Fountain of Honour' (*DN* 13 Jan. 1912). Here, he notes that he 'caught the cue of my friend's sarcasm' (*CDN* 8: 5) when he cried three cheers for Rhodes, and proceeded to join in with the cry of Beit. George Albu (1857-1935) was a German-born magnate, whose fortune was made in the diamond and gold mines of South Africa.

German insignias encourages the specific inference that his underhand activities in South Africa are disturbing his conscience:

> Mr. Alfred Beit
> Screamed suddenly in the night.
> When they asked him why
> He made no reply.

Chesterton's inability to detach himself from a moral judgement leads him to reply on Beit's behalf here, so as to police the reader's reception of the verse.[24] As he argues elsewhere, '[p]rint is at best a temptation; a picture is an assault' ('Truth and Lies in Popular Histories.' *ILN* 9 Nov. 1907; *CW* 27: 587). In particular, Beit's screaming mouth offers Chesterton the opportunity to link the name to the personality, with the massed ranks of teeth in the trap-like mouth suggesting his association of the financier with material rapacity: the bite of Beit. The monitory motivation of Chesterton's illustration is corroborated by his

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[24] Gavin Ewart also notes the disparity between text and illustration: 'Bentley probably thought that Beit was a villain, but he doesn't say so. The illustration is far more outspoken' (*Complete* xiii).

explanation, in 'A Defence of Nonsense', of the specific stylistic distinction between the exaggerative action of satire and the deranging drive of nonsense:

> There is all the difference in the world between the instinct of satire, which, seeing in the Kaiser's moustaches something typical of him, draws them continually larger and larger; and the instinct of nonsense which, for no good reason whatever, imagines what those moustaches would look like on the present Archbishop of Canterbury if he grew them in a fit of absence of mind (*Defendant* 64-65).

From this we may conclude that when the subject is particularly morally disagreeable to Chesterton he is incapable of allowing ambiguity to stand, instead satirically emphasising what he finds 'characteristic' in the figure, so as to inscribe a stable distinction between himself and the anathematised other, rather than propagating referential incongruities 'for no good reason whatever', as Bentley does in the Davy clerihew, or emphasising an ameliorative absence of schism, as Chesterton does in the Carlyle clerihew. Chesterton's terms also offer a further illustration of the interrelated moral and psychological danger that he perceived to derive from humour entirely divested of wit. The phrase, 'a fit of absence of mind', conflates the episodic 'fits' upon which Carroll's *Snark* is structured, with a loss of bodily volition caused by an 'absence' of intellection, recalling the 'absent-minded scream' which Chesterton ascribes to Bentley in the *Greybeards* preface, as well as 'the shrieks of Schopenhauer' to which he refers in *Orthodoxy* (64). Here we again perceive Chesterton's refusal of ambiguity to derive not only from cogent political and philosophical principles—opposition to the Boer War, insistence upon preserving a link to external realities so as to safeguard communication and discrimination—but also from a more obscure psychological fear of the spectre of mental instability invoked by impenetrable irrationality, as emblematised by the nightmare which causes Beit to scream.

In Auden's account of the preservative quality of caricature, he not only argues that we 'enjoy caricatures of our friends because we do not want to think of their […] dying', but also that 'we enjoy caricatures of our enemies because we do not want to consider the possibility of their having a change of heart so that we would have to forgive them' ('Notes' 383). Chesterton's *Autobiography* corroborates both points. His evocation of Lear to illustrate his unchanging

opposition to the war—'I thought so then and I think so still'—demonstrates that he is as far from forgiving Beit as ever, while his account of Bentley's character evinces a comparable anxiety to stress that his friend has never changed, precisely because he has never ceased being flippant. As Chesterton explains, the juvenile writing of 'my first and in every sense original friend […] was by far the most mature' of that produced by the J.D.C., 'perhaps for the very reason that it largely confined itself to being critical or flippant […] of all men I have known, he is the man whose mind has least changed' (*Autobiography* 67). Here Chesterton essays another weighing of 'praise and abuse', which serves to suspend Bentley indefinitely in the detached, 'unmoral' role discussed in the letter of 1894—a document which Chesterton compulsively covered in caricatures of Bentley. In this way, Bentley comes to stand in the same dialogic relation to Chesterton as that in which Turnbull stands to MacIan—he is his simultaneous 'friend and enemy', fixed forever in the 'agreement between agreement and disagreement'.

In addition to the 'catastrophic' political event of the Boer War, it is conventionally understood that the catalytic philosophical impact of the populist doctrine of Walt Whitman played a critical role in aiding Chesterton's recovery from pessimism and solipsism. Oddie goes so far as to argue that Chesterton's exposure to the work of Whitman in the early 1890s effectively 'pre-empted' the danger of any serious 'collapse' through the prior infusion of 'more positive influences' (90) than those supplied by exponents of decadence, such as Wilde. However, Chesterton's continuing struggle to break through the barrier of solipsistic disorientation, as evidenced by Bentley's diaries, shows that a course of Whitman had not fully inoculated the patient. At first glance, it seems a singular irony that Kipling's response to reading *The Wild Knight* was to suggest that a '"severe course of Walt Whitman"' (qtd. in Oddie 6) was needed to cure the young poet's demonstrable pessimism, given that Chesterton's friends already considered him a veritable disciple of the American poet at this time (see Ward, *Gilbert* 49). As the following account will demonstrate, this irony arises from the fact that both Wilde and Whitman embodied extremes which contributed in more subtly positive and negative ways to Chesterton's neuroses than the conventional biographical line would suggest.

The Importance of not being Oscar

In the first decade of Chesterton's career in public life, he evinced a consistent drive to publically position himself as the anti-Wilde, which reached its apogee in two texts of 1908—his most fully realised work of Christian apologetics, *Orthodoxy*, and his most fully realised novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday*. In the former, he arrives at a formula for expressing a transactional engagement with one's debt of gratitude to existence: 'we can pay for sunsets. We can pay for them by not being Oscar Wilde' (50). Meanwhile, in the verse preface to *Thursday*, which forms his second dedication to Bentley, Chesterton posits himself as the anti-Wilde in a cultural, rather than existential sense. The verse begins by projecting a neat binary between himself and Bentley on one hand, and the forces of the 'Green Carnation' (CW 6: 473) on the other, while employing carnivalesque imagery of merry buffoonery to emphasise the distinction:

> Science announced nonentity and art admired decay;
> The world was old and ended: but you and I were gay;
> […]
> Fools as we were in motley, all jangling and absurd,
> When all church bells were silent our cap and bells were heard (*CW* 6: 472).

Chesterton's phrase, 'jangling and absurd', punningly connects the pair's nonsense-escapades to the discordance (again, in the literal sense of the absurd) that he wishes to project between the 'fools' and the age, much as Bentley's reference, in his diary, to *Napoleon* as an 'absurd' tale serves both to imply its burlesque basis and to emphasise its consequent discordance with the refined literary milieu into which it was to be thrust. However, there is a comparable discordance between Chesterton's joyous imagery and the progress of the dedication, in which the pair's 'fears' (*CW* 6: 473) increasingly encroach upon the narrative. These fears are more frankly invoked in the earlier *Greybeards* dedication, which employs slightly different terms to suggest that the pessimistic mood came as much from within:

> Far, far behind are morbid hours,
>
> And lonely hearts that bleed.
>
> Far, far behind us are the days,
>
> When we were old indeed (*Collected Nonsense* 4).

As with the 'emotional' element that Chesterton praised in Lear's nonsense, which he contrasted favourably with the 'purely intellectual' nonsense of 'Carroll's Wonderland' (*Defendant* 66), the humour of the *Greybeards* dedication enables him to be more open—here it is 'we' who are old, rather than 'the world', while the personal, microcosmic temporality of 'morbid hours' localises Chesterton's usual broad-brush account of the morbidity of the age. Consequently, if we consider Gillian Cross's perceptive observation that 'the differences between [Chesterton's] work and that of the major Decadents are those not of a complete lack of relations but of a conscious and determined opposition' (1), we begin to suspect that Chesterton is protesting rather too much in his more polemical outings. As Cross elaborates, '[c]onscious opposition is […] just as much a relationship as fervent imitation' (1). Canovan's brief account of Chesterton's relationship to Wilde suggests that his projection of difference was structurally parodic, rather than purely satirical, since it was based upon repetition with deviation:

> [Chesterton learned the] mode of paradoxical witticism from Oscar Wilde. Significantly, however, he used this style to put forward not the exotic viewpoint of the Decadents, but what he took to be the outlook of the ordinary man. […] he deliberately used […] the paradoxical style of the intellectual elite, in order to defend against that elite the common sense of the common man (21).

In view of this parodic adaptation of Wilde's rhetorical stratagems, it is striking that Chesterton's early desire to emulate Bentley led him to draw his friend's literary influences into his own orbit, and these influences included Wilde. In a letter composed in 1892, Chesterton refers to his father 'reading *your friend* Oscar Wilde's book on Lying, bound up with some other equally amusing and equally paradoxical discourses.' Later in the same letter the possessive note is modified: 'I am developing a power of reasoning out nonsense quite after the heart of *our friend* Oscar' (BL MS Add.73191 ff.21; my emphases). In a further

complication of the neat binaries of the *Thursday* preface, it seems that both Chesterton and Bentley 'admired decay' in their youth, in the shape of their 'friend', Wilde's essay, 'The Decay of Lying' (1889).

In his autobiography, Chesterton demonstrates a renewed willingness to address the ambivalence of his relationship to Wilde, in the chapter, 'How to be a Lunatic'. Here *Thursday* is frankly acknowledged to have been the invention of a 'young half-pessimist of the '90s', and the dedication is explained as a note to a friend 'who had been through the same period and problems' (*Autobiography* 102). Chesterton explains that although his morbidity 'may have been due to the atmosphere of the Decadents, and their perpetual hints of the luxurious horrors of paganism […] I am not disposed to dwell much on that defence; I suspect I manufactured most of my morbidities for myself' (92-93). This readmission of similarity is emphasised by his alterations to the manuscript copy of the *Autobiography*. Having distinguished the nature of his own 'madness' from Wilde's homosexuality by asserting that he never felt 'the faintest temptation to the particular madness of Wilde', Chesterton crosses out the subsequent line— 'but I could at this time have imagined many disproportioned' passions—and replaces it with 'I could at this time imagine the worst & wildest disproportions' (BL MS Add.73268A ff.98). Having initially projected difference, Chesterton's revision re-inscribes identity by punningly conferring upon himself the 'wildest disproportions'.

One particular disproportion that afflicted Chesterton was his apprehension of the cultural *size* of Wilde at the *fin de siècle*—he 'filled up more room, both in mind and body, than anybody else on that stage' (*CW* 18: 75), much as the body of the father-figure, Sunday, is figured as occupying an unmanageable quantity of space in the nightmare section of *Thursday* (see *CW* 6: 620). Ultimately, two attributes enabled Chesterton to attain a critical distance through which to re-establish a sense of proportion in his attitude to Wilde, the first conveying similarity in aesthetic philosophy, the second difference. The first was the lesson in 'reasoning out nonsense' that Chesterton had learned from Wilde himself, through 'The Decay of Lying'. Of all the points raised in Wilde's essay, it is his famous account of life imitating art that would seem to have most usefully assisted Chesterton in this procedure. Specifically, Wilde's avatar, Vivian, explains that 'Schopenhauer has analysed the pessimism that characterises modern

thought, but Hamlet invented it. The world has become sad because a puppet was once melancholy' (*Intentions* 32). In pursuing this line of argument, Vivian identifies a further example of the 'imitative instinct' in 'silly boys who, after reading the adventures of Jack Sheppard or Dick Turpin, pillage the stalls of unfortunate applewomen, break into sweet shops at night, and alarm old gentlemen who are returning home from the city by leaping out on them in suburban lanes, with black masks and unloaded revolvers' (*Intentions* 32). As Chesterton later concluded of Wilde, in turn, he 'sometimes pretended that he was more important than morality, but that was mere play acting' (*CDN* 6: 98).

The second restorative attribute was Chesterton's capacity to identify unintentional self-parody in Wilde's work, ironically turning Wilde's earnestness against him via a skirl of critical laughter which he claims to have evaded the unknowing *ur* artist. In *The Victorian Age in Literature,* Chesterton argues that '[i]n Wilde's poetry we have particularly a perpetually toppling possibility of the absurd; a sense of just falling too short or just going too far. [… One feels] that Wilde is poised on the edge of a precipice of bathos' (*CW* 15: 518). To illustrate his point, Chesterton cites the lines, 'These Christs that die upon the barricades / God knows that I am with them—in some ways', before going on to conjure an irreverent image of 'Wilde lolling like an elegant leviathan on a sofa', while complacently composing his paean to self-endangering political agitation 'between the whiffs of a scented cigarette' (*CW* 15: 518). Elsewhere, he notes of the aestheticism of Maeterlinck: 'Once shift your sympathy by an inch, and "Pelleas and Melisande" becomes a roaring farce' ('The Failure of the Aesthetes.' *ILN* 25 Dec. 1909; *CW* 28: 450). In the example of Wilde's lines, Chesterton specifically identifies this shift of sympathy as one that draws the critic into line with the position of the populace at large—a sense of the poet's absurdity will inevitably arise if 'the reader [should only] move his standpoint one inch nearer the popular standpoint' (*CW* 15: 518).

Chesterton's capacity to position himself 'nearer the popular standpoint' was first fostered by the influence of Whitman. If Wilde is the villain of the *Thursday* dedication, then Whitman is unquestionably the hero—the textual helpmeet to the Chesterbentley, whose *Leaves of Grass* (1855) first sent out a 'cry of cleaner things' from Whitman's home in 'fish-shaped Paumanok' (*CW* 6: 472). Chesterton later termed Whitman 'the greatest man of the nineteenth century'

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('Conventions and the Hero.' *DN* 15 Oct. 1904; *CDN* 2: 313), and projected his sense of identification with his hero in the binary terms of a battle-line: 'I used to think at one time that between the pessimists and the praisers of God, between Schopenhauer and Whitman, there must be a war without any truce till the stars fall' ('Lines by a Noble Lord.' *DN* 16 Dec. 1904; *CDN* 2: 344-45). Chesterton considered Whitman's most valuable lesson to have been that 'comradeship [… is] the permanent foundation of democracy' ('Summer Festivals and Ceremonies.' *ILN* 19 May 1906; *CW* 27: 190), and this utopian conjunction was decisive in shaping Chesterton's later 'mystic passion' for democracy. His argument, in correspondence with Bentley, that friendship is the antidote to pessimism, also demonstrates that the 'new city of Friends' (*Leaves* 105) of which Whitman wrote in visionary terms was a key inspiration in Chesterton's revolt against decadence. Cecil Chesterton recalled that his brother ecstatically embraced Whitman's vision of '"the redemption of the world by comradeship"', and many years later, Chesterton described how his youth '"was filled, as with a sunrise, with the sanguine glow of Walt Whitman […] Whitman was brotherhood in broad daylight"' (each qtd. in Oddie 135).

In another of the fragmentary creative experiments of the early 1890s in which Chesterton implants Bentley (titled 'E.C. Bentley would a-wooing go' by Denis Conlon in *CW* 14: 439), he implies that the pair's advocacy of differing theorists of friendship represented a further, subtle fault-line in their relationship. The text initially offers another illustration of Chesterton's capacity for hero-worship, figuring Bentley as the virile hero who goes out courting girls, while the narrator—a thinly veiled Chesterton—sits at home reading *Leaves of Grass* (see *CW* 14: 441). However, Bentley's amorous adventures quickly become subordinated to an account of the relationship between the two friends. Upon Bentley's return, the reference to Whitman's paean to brotherhood is complemented by Bentley's hesitant introduction of the work of John Addington Symonds, the classical theorist of male friendship, to the narrator, who responds, dismissively, '"I hate your neo-pagan dilettanti"' (*CW* 14: 442). Although Bentley's enthusiasm finally leads the narrator to speculate that a '"good essay on friendship would interest us, I should think, more than anything"' (*CW* 14: 443), the account remains inconclusive, and most clearly functions to signal the

discordance between Chesterton's preference for Whitman's populist, democratic vision of friendship, and Bentley's advocacy of a more classical, ideal model.[25]

In Chesterton's youthful writing, his extreme sense of identification with Whitman initially manifested itself in pastiche. In a letter written to Bentley from Milan over Easter 1894, Chesterton hints at his taste for pastiching ego ideals, listing Whitman among a number of admired forebears who 'I happen to affect' (BL MS Add.73191 ff.44), a phrase which punningly connotes both affection and affectation. The utopian spirit of brotherhood that Whitman's philosophy inspired in Chesterton is conveyed by an adolescent free-verse parody of a dinner invitation, in which Chesterton inverts the process of selection conventionally attendant to the format: 'My great ambition is to give a party at which everybody should meet everybody else and like them very much.

AN INVITATION

Mr. Gilbert Chesterton
requests the pleasure
of humanity's company
to tea on Dec. 25th, 1896.
Humanity Esq., The Earth, Cosmos E' (qtd. in Ward, *Gilbert* 58).

However, despite the idealistic tenor of this conceit, when Blissett jokes that Chesterton 'omitted the RSVP' ('Max' 102), he inadvertently makes a telling point about Chesterton's tacit wariness in regard to the alluring creed of communality. There is a contradiction at the heart of the utopian view of friendship to which Chesterton was drawn, since friendship is invariably bolstered by a sense of opposition to some 'other', sought to bolster group definition. It is based upon both likeness (to the friend) and opposition (to the other), and is consequently rooted in an adversarial structure which precludes a truly utopian progress toward a 'brotherhood of man'. A similar tension is discernible in Bentley's response to Chesterton's utopian nonsense-invention of 'the human club', which the latter first began conceptualising in early 1895, explaining that

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[25] Nonetheless, there is a singular irony here: Symonds and Whitman were friends, and the former wrote an admiring critical biography of the latter—*Walt Whitman. A Study* (1893)—in the same period in which Chesterton's fragment was composed. It is also notable that Wilde was a great admirer of Whitman.

the club was to be composed of 'young gentlemen' who possessed 'too keen a sense of humour not to get it mixed up with their seriousness, and thus produce a certain dash of burlesque in everything from the name of their club downwards' (*CW* 14: 670). Discussing the concept in their correspondence, Bentley suggests that the club's rituals should include the conferral of the academic distinction 'O.U', or 'one of us' (BL MS Add.73191 ff.79), an idea which introduces both hierarchy and selectivity into a society that was ostensibly all-embracing.

A comparable kernel of ambivalence is discernible in Whitman's utopia. He establishes 'a city invincible to the attacks of the whole of the rest of the earth' (Whitman 105), a gathering of forces to slough off a worldly opponent, rather than a truly utopian unification of humanity, just as Chesterton (again positing a dubious binary) recalls, in the *Thursday* dedication, that he and Bentley 'held the fort, our tiny flags unfurled' (*CW* 6: 472) against the tide of decadence. The nature of the forces against which Whitman particularly sought to position himself is illustrated by his comically hyperbolic rejection of a world that is '"rich, hefted, lousy, reeking, with delicacy, refinement, elegance, prettiness, propriety, criticism, analysis"' (qtd. in Trilling 397). As Sewell observes, 'lists have been a recognised Nonsense procedure from Rabelais onwards' (*Field* 76), and there is an unmistakable note of Rabelaisian relish in Whitman's exorbitant expression of distaste at all forms of refinement.

As with the critical method established by Chesterton in *The Defendant*, one of the chief characteristics of Whitman's verse is its 'enumerative method of assembling high and low materials precisely in order "to enlarge" the literary empire's "limits"' (Johnston 65). In this mission it was inevitable that Whitman should find himself at odds with those who embodied the opposing principle of discrimination and refinement, and, ironically enough, this caused Whitman to inject a certain discriminatory exclusivity into his own rhetoric. For example, he asserts, with a self-checking equivocation, that '"I accept the world—most of the world—but somehow draw the line somewhere on [the] great army of critics, parlour apostles"' (qtd. in Trilling 397). Whitman's ire inevitably came to focus on the quintessential parlour apostle, Arnold. When it was suggested that his latest volume should be bound in vellum, Whitman responded with a reversal of his usual attenuated lists of laudable phenomena, to produce a self-parody which is peculiarly hard to assess as either intentional or inadvertent: '"Vellum? […]

pshaw! Hangings, curtains, finger-bowls, chinaware, Matthew Arnold!'" (qtd. in Trilling 397).[26] Arnold is denied access to Whitman's friendship group, in an action that implies a drawing back from the subjectivity-undermining implications of indiscriminate fraternity.

Although Whitman's de-selection of Arnold would appear to present a further area of affinity with Chesterton, the disinclination towards 'refinement […] criticism [and] analysis' which inspires Whitman's rejection also reveals an aspect of his philosophy that Chesterton would have found more disquieting. In contrast to the examples cited above, Whitman's rhetoric more commonly tends to imply a neutralisation of value and a confusion of identity—'what I assume you shall assume' (Whitman 24)—which derives from his excessive optimism. Denis Donoghue argues that 'the defining "figure" of Whitman's mind is the equals sign […] If he found two things traditionally considered enemies, he would declare their identity, or at least make them friends in a larger community' (25). This principle closely recalls the hybridising drive that Chesterton found so valuable in the existential grotesque, while the final phrase recalls the analogic strategy of 'Variations on an Air', through which Chesterton brings together a diverse poetic community in dialogue. However, when Donoghue goes on to note that, for Whitman, 'in the flow of energy *A* equals *B*' (25), a rather more disruptive vision of identity confusion comes to light, veering off into the more disruptive reaches of the grotesque. In this respect, Whitman's valorisation of energy comes to seem curiously comparable to the evanescent philosophy of fluidity which informs Schopenhauer's pessimism. A sense arises that Whitman's programmatic embrace of all phenomena is the mirror-image of Schopenhauer's equally programmatic rejection, and that such unchecked profusion is dangerously equivalent, in psychological terms, to the category-defying receptive influx of schizophrenia.

Consequently, Chesterton's exorbitant sense of identification with Whitman soon became mediated by an increasing vacillation between adherence and departure, essayed as a means of retaining distance and discrimination. As with my account of the unstable rebounding between self-assertion and self-denial that informs the dynamic of friendship, the cause of this vacillation can again be linked to the disorientating effect of subsuming one's own subjectivity within

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[26] Each of the remarks cited by Trilling is draw from Horace Traubel's memoir, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (1906).

hero-worship of another. Chesterton later discussed the motivations of youthful pastiche as a curious combination of self-effacement and self-aggrandisement: in 'early youth we wish not only to do our own work as well as it can be done, but everybody else's work a great deal better than they do it. We have a pride in being more Whitmanic than Whitman, more sumptuously Keatsy than Keats. The only poet whom the young poet refuses to be influenced by is himself' ('The Philosophy of Robert Buchanan.' *DN* 28 Oct. 1901; *CDN* 1: 246). Ironically, Chesterton learned how to be influenced by himself partially through the instructive example of the influence of Bentley, whose deliberately bathetic parodies of Swinburne while at St. Paul's formed an educative contrast to Chesterton's ardent execution of embarrassingly 'bad imitations of Swinburne' (Chesterton, *Autobiography* 65).

In the case of Whitman, while Chesterton's early impersonations often resemble a comparably naïve form of pastiche—simple youthful exercises in stylistic imitation, lacking the critical distance appropriate to parody—even these pieces retain a subtly equivocal, parodic dimension. For example, a notebook entry begins by discussing Chesterton's various friends via a typically Whitman-esque use of repetitious listing and purposeful self-contradiction, to promote the sense of an overwhelming profusion which defeats the logic of hierarchical organisation:

> I have a friend, very strong and good. He is the best friend in the world.
> I know another friend, subtle and sensitive. He is certainly the best friend on earth…

However, this accurate replication of the Whitman mode is slightly modified by the brusque penultimate line:

> I know another, who is young and very quick, he is the most beloved of all friends.
> I know a lot more and they are all like that.
> Amen (qtd. in Ward, *Gilbert* 46).

The abrupt conclusion is expressive of a desire to circumscribe the number of friends in order to avoid loss of group-definition. Similarly, as with the deflation of sublime rhetoric enacted by the movement from 'hope' and 'toil' to a single 'pair of boots' in the *Greybeards* dedication, the penultimate line implants a

deliberate note of bathos within the piece, employing rhetorical travesty to evoke a child rushing to conclude his prayers, so as to initiate the most tentative of half-holidays for the literal worshipper of both the imitated literary hero and the friends.

Chesterton's later parody of Whitman, in 'Variations on an Air', constitutes a more sophisticated impersonation. His Whitmanian reading of 'Old King Cole' is conveyed with an irreverence that progresses beyond imitative pastiche to a more clearly distanced, parodic mode:

> …I salute your three violinists, endlessly making vibrations,
> Rigid, relentless, capable of going on for ever;
> They play my accompaniment; but I shall take no notice of any accompaniment;
> I myself am a complete orchestra.
> So long (*Collected Nonsense* 43).

Here the phrases 'capable of going on for ever' and 'so long' again implant a note of subtle bathos, the latter phrase employing a pun to evoke exhaustion at Whitman's prolixity, which simultaneously occasions the parodist's verbal expression of departure: 'so long'. This encodes a more sardonic note of playfulness to that of Chesterton's earlier pastiche, though in each case the admiration ends on a note of equivocation based upon discomfort at the potential lack of boundaries in Whitman's rhetoric.

Whitman's philosophy of unchecked reception recalls the imaginative terror experienced by Chesterton in his youth, which resolved itself, paradoxically, in the sense of solipsistic detachment which he experienced, and which finds an echo in the parodist's disregard of 'any accompaniment'. This suggests that internalising 'a complete orchestra'—a variation on Whitman's famous line, 'I am large, I contain multitudes' (73)—rather than acting as a single player in a collective unit, is likely to resolve itself in a disorientating internal dis-integrity, unless one learns to drill the mob through a process of selection and refinement, so as to harmonise what would otherwise be a cacophony. The psychological dangers posed by Whitman's indiscriminate philosophy help to explain why Chesterton demurred, in a later explanatory note concerning *Thursday*, that 'in resisting the heresy of pessimism' he had not succumbed to 'the equally morbid

and diseased insanity of optimism' (*CW* 6: 470). Instead, as so often, he sought to establish a moderating middle-ground between the two extremes. Notably, Chesterton's critique of artistic inaccessibility to laughter is one into which he later drew Whitman, who 'has this as his only defect, that he never does see the fun of himself' ('The Great Simplicity.' *DN* 27 July 1907; *CDN* 4: 269). In highlighting the '[r]igid, relentless' quality of Whitman's dogmatic earnestness, Chesterton's 'Old King Cole' parody looks askance at monological extremism, in a further example of the mutually informing dynamic of the parodic act, which reins in the fanaticism of others while simultaneously seeking to preserve the parodist's own mental equilibrium.

The comparably 'rigid', if temperamentally opposed, 'flippancy' that Chesterton discerned in Bentley was a trait shared by Beerbohm, the final figure who must be added to any account of Chesterton's formative wrestling with influence. Beerbohm is the anti-Whitman, the detached academic parodist *par excellence*, who possessed, for Chesterton, 'every merit except democracy' ('Popular Jokes and Vulgarity.' *ILN* 21 Mar. 1908; *CW* 28: 66). Writing of Beerbohm in relation to Chesterton, the latter's brother, Cecil, sought to complicate the question of who had influenced whom, in a humorous account which takes inspiration from Wilde's precept, in 'The Decay of Lying', that life imitates art: 'I am prepared to uphold that Nature, in an hour of terrible joy, fashioned Mr Beerbohm after taking note of what was written in a tattered exercise-book of Mr Chesterton's school days' (92-93). If this is the case, Nature had cribbed Chesterton's papers as a means of exacting a curiously apposite revenge upon Wilde, rather as the sea takes revenge upon Byron through the medium of Wordsworth's pen in Chesterton's parody, since, as Caesar notes, 'a good part of [Beerbohm's] early career was spent hoaxing, parodying, and generally making fun of [Wilde]' ('Betrayal' 24).

In the 1890s, Beerbohm used his talents chiefly to cut decadence down to size, ironically through such methods as drawing ever-more gigantesque, burlesque caricatures of Wilde, in which the latter's would-be sublime Hellenism is reimagined as a ridiculous clash between the will to artifice and the exigencies of nature. To return to Chesterton's dictum, '[i]f you are the Court Jester you must be the Court Fool', Wilde projected himself as a detached jester in the court of Victorian culture, while Beerbohm installed himself as the jester to the jester,

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tirelessly making it his business to impress Wilde's comparable foolishness upon him. As Chesterton argues in 'A Defence of Farce', decadence 'contented itself with the fool's cap without the bells' (*Defendant* 127), the bells perhaps being rung here to advertise awareness of the joke, much as Beerbohm employed consistent self-deprecation in order to counter any misapprehension that he perceived his own position to be uniquely dignified. In this way, Chesterton learned equally from Beerbohm's parodic and *self*-parodic methods. As Michael Asquith later recalled, such was Chesterton's 'willingness to make himself ridiculous in public', that he seemed 'so far the reverse of pompous that you might almost say he was always standing on his *in*dignity' (120).

Chesterton's youthful debt to Beerbohm is evident in his first major journalistic success, the collected *Defendant* series, which not only operates as a parody of the sublime perorations of Sidney and Shelley, and a sympathetic adaptation of the cultural precepts of Whitman, but also as a pastiche of the essay that provided Beerbohm's entrée to the literary world, 'A Defence of Cosmetics' (1894). As with Beerbohm's deliberate '"hoax"' (Beerbohm qtd. in Felstiner 15) on conventional essayistic practice, which took the form of a 'mock-encomium' (Felstiner 11), Chesterton's conceit of discussing apparently trivial subjects in the loftiest of mock-*belles-lettristic* tones exploits a comic mode of rhetorical reverse-travesty that he openly acknowledged when introducing a later essay collection: 'If anyone says that these are very small affairs talked about in very big language, I can only gracefully compliment him upon seeing the joke' (*Tremendous* 6). Nonetheless, while Chesterton's essays borrow Beerbohm's playful parodic style, and echo his method of defending 'low' subject-matter through recourse to the authority of the ages over contemporary fashion, Chesterton's 'defence' articles are tonally quite distinct, insofar as they shy away from the inveterate flippancy and programmatically non-committal character that links Beerbohm to Bentley. In contrast, Chesterton explicitly states that his defence essays are 'ethically sincere' (*Defendant* 8) in their promotion of the subjects under discussion, an assertion which once more infuses an act of imitative repetition with a simultaneous gesture of deviation.

Thus, Beerbohm takes his place amongst the cacophony of voices that Chesterton marshalled into an internal forum within which to argue his way out of the crisis of the *fin de siècle*. This process suggests that finding one's own voice is

finally a matter of finding the right balance between a multitude of mutually correcting influences. If so, it is telling that the cast of characters who have passed through this chapter consistently come together in dialogue within Chesterton's early fiction. While *Napoleon* sets Whitman's earnestness and Beerbohm's irony in dialogic confrontation in the persons of Adam Wayne and Auberon Quin, Chesterton engages in more subtle dialogues with Bentley, Carroll, and Wilde in his fictional fantasia on decadence, *The Man Who Was Thursday*. The latter text also constructs his most comprehensive exposition of the correspondence between nonsense, parody, and friendship. As the following analysis will demonstrate, while the novel allegorises Chesterton's escape from solipsism into affinitive relation on the level of plot, his nonsensical title also inducts a series of intertextual games through which to promote a complementary spirit of dialogic interaction with his fictional precursors.

The Man Who Was Thursday and the Community of Authorship

> All my life I have loved frames and limits […] I also have a pretty taste in abysses and bottomless chasms[.]
>
> Chesterton, *Autobiography* (32-33)

In 'Both Sides of the Looking-Glass' (*Listener* 29 Nov. 1933), Chesterton posits a distinction between popular and academic versions of the fairy-tale, comparable to that drawn by Malcolm in his account of the parallel seams that permeate the cultural history of nonsense. In expressing his preference for the fairy-tales of Hans Christian Anderson over those of Lewis Carroll, Chesterton explains that Anderson 'remained in touch with the enormous tradition of the earth in the matter of mystery and glamour—he did not have to make a new and rather artificial sort of fairy-tale out of triangles and syllogisms' (*Spice* 69). This account corroborates Sewell's argument that Chesterton's populism constituted an 'attempt […] to move from Nonsense, with its isolation, to Fairy tale with its identification' ('Giant' 571). However, it is vital to note that in the case at hand, having appraised the relative merits of each approach, he prefers to retain both: 'I only know that if you try to deprive me of either of them, there will be a row' (*Spice* 70).

One reason for Chesterton's retention of affiliation with Carroll is his sense that the latter's brand of nonsense was not only a symptom, but also a potential cure of the intellectual maladies that I have discussed in this chapter: 'the very best of Lewis Carroll was not written by a man for children, but by a don for dons. […] it may be questioned whether the little girls he wrote for were tortured by relativist scepticism' (*Spice* 68). Chesterton argues that Carroll's knack of giving 'mathematics a holiday' (*CW* 15: 487) is salutary in enabling the intellectual to look at ontological scepticism from a comic perspective—he was 'teaching dons to stand on their heads' (*Spice* 68), much as the *Greybeards* draft figures Bentley's act of standing on his head as a means of making him 'seem himself' once more. As this suggests, Chesterton approbates the holiday from reason offered by nonsense, so long as it *is* merely a brief respite, and not a permanent vacation. As he explains, 'a good man ought to love nonsense; but he ought also to see nonsense—that is, to see that it is not sense' ('Nonsense and Sense.' *ILN* 15 May 1909; *CW* 28: 324).

Thursday exemplifies Chesterton's desire to retain the best of both worlds, by grafting the disturbingly untethered irrationalism of academic nonsense to the democratic emphasis upon the 'enormous tradition of the earth' found in popular folk and fairy-tale nonsense. As the narrator notes of the 'huge masquerade' at the novel's conclusion, 'it was, somehow, as absurd as Alice in Wonderland, yet as grave and kind as a love story' (*CW* 6: 630). In the bulk of the narrative that leads up to this benign denouement, Chesterton's protagonist is unable to tell nonsense from sense, while the reader apprehends an array of physically improbable characters through the prism of Syme's disorientated gaze, as he attempts to comprehend the nature of the anarchist cell that he has infiltrated. For example, in a terrifying vision of the *corps morcele*, Syme perceives the anarchist dubbed 'Friday', Professor de Worms, to be 'in the last dissolution of senile decay', a state which 'did not express decrepitude merely, but corruption', so that 'Syme's quivering mind […] could not help thinking that whenever the man moved a leg or arm might fall off' (*CW* 6: 523). When rational explanations for these nightmarish visions are revealed, the secondary characters' assumption of more reassuring dimensions is repeatedly described in terms of the fairy-tale 'transformation scene' (*CW* 6: 560/578), and the disturbing rhetoric of bodily corruption is replaced with the joyously burlesque imagery of 'the Marquis,

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recklessly throwing various parts of himself right and left about the field' (*CW* 6: 756), as he strips off his disguise.

As Chesterton goes to pains to point out in the mock-pedagogic 'How to be a Lunatic' chapter of the *Autobiography*, the novel is very deliberately subtitled 'A Nightmare'. The purpose of the text is to establish a path out of Chesterton's own nightmare of existential dislocation through a process of engagement with the phenomenal world, here symbolised by a return to popular cultural forms after a sojourn in the realms of academic nonsense. The invocations of Carroll are not only salient to the young Chesterton's philosophical grappling with scepticism, but also to his psychological traumas, insofar as a further variant of derealisation is a clinical condition that has come to be known as 'Alice in Wonderland syndrome' (Magalini 28). While Alice's bemused spectatorship of her own failures of volition corresponds to Bentley's experiences of depersonalisation, the sufferer from derealisation often experiences Alice's sense of sudden physical diminution and gigantism, a sensation caused by perceptual distortions in the size or shape of objects (Johnson 232). The sufferer from 'Alice in Wonderland syndrome' often experiences familiar locations as alien or surreal, with features of the landscape going through a dolly zoom effect which causes a disorientating enlargement ('macropsia') and/or shrinking ('micropsia') of objective phenomena. This syndrome is particularly common among migraine sufferers (Magalini 28), and it is perhaps telling that Chesterton later recalled experiencing severe headaches in his late adolescence (see Ward, *Gilbert* 45).

These traumatic experiences inform much of the imagery of Chesterton's fiction. As his contemporary, Dixon Scott, noted of the early *Father Brown* stories, 'dreadful is the way some peaceful secondary thing—a group of trees, or a distant passer-by, or a quiet country church—will suddenly writhe out of its place and rush into the foreground, waxing horribly, like a face in a fever, as though struggling to express something too monstrous for speech' (Dixon Scott, *Critical* 267). Recall the 'senseless grimaces' of Carroll's mute gentleman in *Snark*. A comparable waxing of the object world is evoked in *Thursday*, in Syme's account of his initial conception of Sunday as a terrifyingly enormous figure: 'the face was so big, that one couldn't focus it or make it a face at all. The eye was so far away from the nose that it wasn't an eye' (*CW* 6: 620). Nonetheless, this disorientating nonsense-vision is again scrupulously balanced with imagery that Chesterton

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associated with more benign forms of nonsense. For example, elsewhere Sunday is portrayed in Rabelaisian terms, as a comically gluttonous Gargantua: 'he ate like twenty men; he ate incredibly, with a frightful freshness of appetite', so that before long 'he had swallowed a dozen crumpets [and] drunk a quart of coffee' (*CW* 6: 527).

In *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton explains the appeal of the traditional fairy-tale in comparable terms to my account of the counterbalancing dynamic of parody: 'I have not found any modern type so sanely radical or so sanely conservative' (50). Lecercle argues that this dualism is also a defining quality of more modern forms of nonsense: 'nonsense is on the whole a conservative-revolutionary genre' since in linguistic terms it is 'structured by the contradiction […] between over-structuring and de-structuring, subversion and support' (2-3). This sympathetic relation helps to account for the consistent way in which Chesterton's fiction 'muddles fairy tale and nonsense' ('Giant' 567), in an attempt 'to fuse the two into some fuller form of art' ('Giant' 573), as Sewell puts it. Although Sewell does not refer to *Thursday* in her account, both modes are made to co-exist in the novel, in a manner which draws equally upon their radical and conservative poles in order to set up a condition of such disarray that the eventual emergence into coherence is rendered all the more vivid.

The latter quality also informs the story's structuring as a detective story, a facet particularly highlighted by Chesterton's setting up of his radically de-structuring nonsense-title as a riddle which requires detective work on the part of both Syme and the reader to correctly decode, as the narrative progresses through a process of conservative re-structuring towards its harmonious conclusion. To this end, the word 'Thursday' comes to play a decisive role in the novel. Elsewhere in *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton notes that 'the moon is the mother of lunatics' (21), and it is allegorically significant that Thursday is the fourth day of creation, on which God created the moon—a context which suggests that the title might be considered a particularly circuitous way of reframing the statement, 'The Man Who Was a Lunatic'. Of course, the title is initially made to logically cohere through Syme's accession to the anarchist council, an organisation in which each conspirator is named after a day of the week. However, Chesterton deliberately sets the council up as a nonsense-construct which baffles Syme's sense of discrete subjectivity, initially compounding his lunacy. As Sunday explains, '[t]his branch

has always had the honour of electing Thursdays for the Central European Council. We have elected many and splendid Thursdays' (*CW* 6: 497).

By accepting this role, Syme submits to a voluntary abnegation of subjecthood, thus initiating the disorientating central section of the novel, in which Chesterton offers a comprehensive survey of the 'horrible fairy tale of a man constantly changing into other men', which he considered 'the soul of decadence': a 'world where men took off their beards and their spectacles and their noses, and turned into other people' (*CW* 6: 583). However, it is also essential to recognise that Syme's madness is finally dispersed by an allegorical reorientation of his personification of Thursday during the culminating 'carnival' (*CW* 6: 629), in which he is literally dressed as the fourth day of creation. This conceit serves to adapt his internalised lunacy into an externalised emblem of the act of creation, a movement of transfiguration which re-establishes coherent individuality: Syme 'seemed to be for the first time himself and no-one else' (*CW* 6: 628). Importantly, this progression from disarray to order also constitutes a movement of dyadic counterpoint between differing modes of the grotesque, from the Romantic to the carnivalesque, a distinction which can be understood as comparable to that which I have identified as pertaining between metaphysical and moral satire, as manifestations—respectively—of the deranging and discriminating, or detached and engaged, temperament.

As Bakhtin explains, while carnivalesque forms of the grotesque are 'directly related to folk culture [...] the Romantic genre acquired a private "chamber" character [...] marked by a vivid sense of isolation. The carnival spirit was transposed into a subjective, idealistic philosophy' (*Rabelais* 37). Consequently, for Bakhtin, 'the world of the Romantic grotesque is [...] a terrifying world' in which 'that which was habitual and secure [...] suddenly becomes meaningless, dubious and hostile' (*Rabelais* 39). One of the principal fault-lines in this transition is a movement from the material to the intellectual, as emblematised by 'Hegel's view that reality is ultimately thought' (Habib 133), in opposition to which, as Medcalf notes, Chesterton's apprehension of the 'unreliability of consciousness [led him] to draw attention, even with violence, to the external world' (90). Insofar as Bakhtin figures this fault-line in the grotesque as historical, with the carnivalesque mode representing a pre-enlightenment standard, and the Romantic grotesque being explained as a product of post-

Enlightenment culture, it is significant that the movement of *Thursday* reverses this historical process, to reinstate the immersive materiality of the 'folk' grotesque in the form of the culminating carnival, and that Chesterton facilitates this transition by drawing his novel into dialogue with other textual entities in a manner that challenges post-enlightenment norms of discrete authorship.

As Sewell notes, '[i]n logic and nightmare, the mind is operating on itself and is therefore of necessity isolated. When the mind moves into the centre of operations, the field of language, it comes back to a point where communication and a sense of the reality of the natural world are possible' (*Field* 51-52). In a comparable action, Syme's plot-level escape from solipsism is mirrored by a series of subtle intertextual games based around the word, 'Thursday', which function to subvert the isolation of the text itself, in a prefiguration of the overt intertextual connection that Chesterton would later encode within the title of *The Return of Don Quixote*. Lechte identifies this subversion as inhering to Genette's theory of 'hypertextuality', in which 'Text B could not exist without text A, but it does not speak of it' (*Fifty* 61). This sets up a form of covert conversation, which leads to a questioning of 'whether any text really is the singularity it is often presented as being by literary history' (Lechte, *Fifty* 61). Similarly, Chesterton's enthusiasm for subverting notions of textual singularity as a means of confounding his fear of psychological seclusion leads him into an antithetical position in relation to post-Enlightenment expectations of immaculate authorial conception. As Hurley argues, Chesterton's primary means of eluding solipsism is to ensure that 'his subjectivity services more than a secular enlightenment sense of self' (*Chesterton* 98). Elsewhere, Chesterton corroborates this intimation of a recourse to pre-Enlightenment cultural standards as a guard against isolation, when he writes that 'our modern artistic claim to absolute originality is really a claim to absolute unsociability; a claim to absolute loneliness' (*CW* 15: 262).

The distinction that Chesterton postulates between the fairy-tale forms of Hans Christian Anderson and Lewis Carroll implies that in choosing to borrow from the cultural tradition that Malcolm terms 'folk nonsense' as a means of working through and overcoming the disruptive tropes of 'literary nonsense' (*Origins* 115), Chesterton's text simultaneously gestures toward a pre-Enlightenment conception of the communality of authorship, in opposition to the post-Enlightenment preoccupation with textual *author*ity which finds expression

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in the trope with which parody so irreverently toys—that of the splendid isolation of the man of genius. As Chesterton summarises the distinction, 'it is always argued that the poem that somebody made is vastly superior to the ballad that everybody made'. Conversely, 'I think there is one thing more important than the man of genius—and that is the genius of man' ('Stories Spoilt by Great Authors.' *ILN* 9 Apr. 1910; *CW* 28: 507). Appropriately enough, the first of Chesterton's intertextual games promotes a dialogue between the parallel seams of orally communicated folk nonsense and modern literary nonsense, here through an allusion to the nursery rhyme, 'The Man of Thessaly':

> There was a man of Thessaly,
> And he was wond'rous wise;
> He jump'd into a quickset hedge,
> And scratch'd out both his eyes.
>
> But when he saw his eyes were out,
> With all his might and main
> He jump'd into another hedge,
> And scratch'd 'em in again (Lang 133).

This rhyme is collected in Andrew Lang's anthology of children's songs, *The Nursery Rhyme Book* (1897), a text with which Chesterton would almost certainly have been conversant, since he repeatedly attested to an admiration of Lang's pioneering excavations of folk traditions, not least in *Orthodoxy* (47), the final text of which was composed at the same time as that of *Thursday*. In elaborating Chesterton's imaginative connection of the nursery rhyme to the novel it is useful to begin by reading Chesterton's semantically disruptive title in the context of the semiotic principle of allotopy, a theory of humour based upon purposeful disarrangement of reference, in which the presence of incompatible or contradictory semes within a single utterance renders the meaning absurd. In *Precis de Semiotique Generale* (1997), Jean-Marie Klinkenberg employs 'I drink concrete' ('"*Je bois du beton*"' 118) as an archetypal allotopic sentence. As this example suggests, allotopy is directly related to the nonsense convention of the category-mistake, of which the notion of a 'man' being 'Thursday' offers a further exemplary model. Chesterton particularly emphasises the allotopic quality of his

title in the *Autobiography*, when he has fun exploring some variations on an air, by free-associatively juggling referents: '"The Woman Who was Half-past Eight," or "The Cow Who was Tomorrow Evening"' (102).

As a contrast to the allotopic construct, Klinkenberg uses the phrase, 'I drink some water' ('*je bois de l'eau*'; Edeline, Klinkenberg, and Minguet 263) as an example of an uncomplicatedly comprehensible, or isotopic, sentence. Again, this illustrative model is curiously prefigured by Chesterton's autobiographical account of *Thursday*, in which he jokingly claims that some critics, alive to the author's bibulous reputation, misread his title as '*The Man Who Was Thirsty*' (*Autobiography* 101). In these instances, 'drink' and 'water', and 'man' and 'thirsty', are logically compatible semes—Chesterton's presumably apocryphal readers have altered the title to render the stand-alone phrase intelligible. This account presents two suggestive links to 'The Man of Thessaly'. First, Chesterton's discussion of the readers who misread 'Thursday' as 'Thirsty' is complemented by the resemblance of his own title to a mishearing of 'Thessaly'; second, his free-associative play between 'Thursday'—with its symbolic connection to the moon—and 'Cow', implies the status of his novel as a highly elaborate form of nursery rhyme.

Elsewhere, Chesterton employs a characteristically parodic conflation of 'low' and 'high' literature to argue that in 'hey-diddle-diddle', 'the incident of the cow [has] something of the moonstruck ecstasy of Endymion' ('The Romance of Rhyme', collected in *Fancies* 1). This juxtaposition hints at the comparable complication of notions of 'low' and 'high' culture that informs Chesterton's translation of the forty-seven word nursery rhyme of 'Thessaly' into a fifty-seven-thousand word literary novel, a parodic methodology which inverts Bret Harte's celebrated technique of condensing interminably lengthy novels into comically breakneck summaries. This vision of *Thursday* as a gigantesque rendition of the rhyme is corroborated by the marked thematic and formal resemblance of the texts. In thematic terms, the ostensible nonsense of the man's eyes being scratched out, only to be scratched back in again, functions as a burlesque, corporeal rendition of an allegorical truism: 'I was blind but now I see'. This is precisely the revelatory message of Chesterton's novel, in which the intellectual monomania ('he was wond'rous wise') of the protagonist causes him to lose sight of the reality of his environment, a condition manifested in his mistaken belief that he is

surrounded by dangerous anarchists. When events demonstrate that the population has actually been fighting in unison to uphold order, Syme recognises that 'his eyes were out', as the rhyme states; or, as Syme puts it in the text, he and his fellow policemen have inadvertently been '"playing blind man's buff […] in a field"' (*CW* 6: 580).[27]

To complete the thematic correspondence between the two texts, the penultimate chapter of the novel contains a disproportionately large number of references to hedges—eight in total. The chapter begins with the detectives trailing raggedly 'through blooming hedges' (*CW* 6: 617) in pursuit of Sunday, while Syme later jumps through 'a gap in the hedge, which let in suddenly the light of a white road' (*CW* 6: 624) immediately prior to the final dispersal of the plot-mystery. This threshold moment recalls Alice's emergence from the rabbit-hole, which also happens to be placed 'under [a] hedge' (Carroll, *Annotated* 26). As the narrator explains—in another example of the Arnoldian 'grand style', in which the orator employs collapsed repetition to draw attention to the special significance of a single facet of his/her discourse—these 'hedges were ordinary hedges […] yet [Syme] felt like a man entrapped in fairy-land' (*CW* 6: 623). This liminal conceit is illustrative of Chesterton's belief that the healthy individual possesses 'one foot in earth and the other in fairy land' (*Orthodoxy* 20). Syme's recovery is based upon a comparable achievement of balance, which not only relates to the 'sanely radical […] sanely conservative' nature of the traditional fairy-tale, but also to the coexistent antitheses of moral policeman and merry relativist that Chesterton identifies within the single entity, Dodgson/Carroll, who possessed 'one life in which he would have thundered morally against any one who walked on the wrong plot of grass, and another life in which he would cheerfully call the sun green and the moon blue' (*Defendant* 66).

The second area of correspondence between 'The Man of Thessaly' and Chesterton's novel lies in the self-contained formal balance essayed by both texts. The second quatrain of 'Thessaly' operates as a pristine rewind of the first, returning to the point of departure, and consequently offers a means of defeating the threat of open-ended derangement, or unmanageable infinitude, which Sewell identifies as a component of nightmares, in which the mind typically 'tries to run

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[27] In 'The Mistake of the Machine' (*Pall Mall Magazine* Oct. 1913), a character refers to runners 'scratch[ing] their eyes out in bramble hedges' (*FB* 233).

everything into one' (*Field* 51), rather in the manner of Hegelian idealism. Conversely, the 'Nonsense universe must be the sum of its parts and nothing more. There must be no fusion or synthesis' (*Field* 98). Chesterton considered a disinclination to submit to boundaries to be a further characteristic of the decadent sceptic. In 'The Extraordinary Cabman', he again invokes the credo of 'art for art's sake' in his account of the sceptic's mind, 'opening for opening's sake, opening infinitely for ever' (*CDN* 3: 337). The hedge is again symbolic here, since Chesterton argues elsewhere that the 'finest thing about a free meadow is the hedge at the end of it. The moment the hedge is abolished it is no longer a meadow, but a waste' (*CW* 28: 508).

Thursday corresponds directly to 'Thessaly' in its deliberate promotion of containment through formal inversion. Chesterton achieves this closure through a comparable two-part structure, in which the six anarchists are first lined up before the reader, and then revealed, one by one, to be fellow policemen. This produces a counting game in reverse, in which seven progresses sequentially to zero, and the conspiracy finally evaporates into thin air. Stewart notes that a similar containment strategy pertains to nonsense games in which the seven days of the week are used to create a 'closed field' of 'arbitrary and sequential' order— 'Monday for health, Tuesday for wealth', etc. (191)—with the fixed number of days delimiting the length of the game, or, in the case at hand, the novel. Significantly, this counting game operates as the means through which Syme breaks out of the oppressive 'circle of days' (*CW* 6: 520) of the organisation into which he implicates himself. As Stewart explains, although circles are a common feature of children's play, they represent a distinct danger to the game-player: 'To form the circle is to be implicated in it, to be caught up in it. The problem is to get in or out, on or off. The problem is one of mastery, of stopping infinity arbitrarily' (130). In *Thursday*, Syme is aided in re-establishing psychological self-mastery by the sequential emergence of fellow players who possess an equal investment in 'stopping infinity arbitrarily', by breaking the circle. Once all the players have left the circle, the novel ends where it began, with Syme and Gregory in dialogue, with the important distinction that the pair are now 'walking like old friends, and […] in the middle of a conversation' (*CW* 6: 635), in a neat internalisation of the parodic dynamic of formal repetition with thematic deviation.

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The novel's formal retracing of its steps complements the implicit historical reversal discussed earlier, through which the cultural misadventure, as Chesterton perceived it, of post-Enlightenment Romanticism, is cancelled out by a reverse movement which turns the clock back to a medieval mode of carnivalesque, folk grotesque. In a further example of repetition with deviation, Bakhtin notes that these historical strands are distinguished by their contrary deployment of an identical symbol—the mask—a trope which is also key to a proper understanding of *Thursday*. For Bakhtin, the mask 'reveals the essence of the grotesque' in both its 'folk carnival' and 'Romantic' manifestations (*Rabelais* 40), but with a crucial distinction—the former 'is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation […] with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity' (*Rabelais* 39), while the latter 'loses almost entirely its regenerating and renewing element and acquires a sombre hue. A terrible vacuum, a nothingness lurks behind it' (*Rabelais* 40).

At the height of Syme's disarray, this 'vacuum' is evoked when the thought occurs to him, '[w]as he wearing a mask? Was any one wearing a mask? Was any one anything?' (*CW* 6: 583). The climactic pageant replaces this vision with the benign spectacle of the *dramatis personae* clad in vibrant carnivalesque disguises, which emblematise the 'inexhaustible and many-colored life' that Bakhtin finds 'behind the mask of folk grotesque' (*Rabelais* 40). As the narrator of *Thursday* notes, 'these disguises did not disguise, but reveal' (*CW* 6: 627); a phrase almost exactly echoed in Lechte's analysis of Bakhtin's account of the carnivalesque mask as a symbol 'which does not hide but reveals' (*Fifty* 9). Of course, this image is also very close to the dictum famously coined in Wilde's essay, 'The Critic as Artist' (1890), in which, by curious coincidence, a character named Gilbert asserts that a man 'will tell you the truth' if given 'a mask' (*Complete* 1045). This correlation is particularly suggestive, since the novel's historical footstep-retracing conceit accrues a microcosmic corollary in a subtle symbolic allusion which rewinds the biographical progress of Wilde. In *The Victorian Age in Literature*, Chesterton contends that the

> movement of those called Aesthetes (as satirised in *Patience*) and the movement of those afterwards called Decadents (satirised in […] *Autobiography of a Boy*) had the same captain; or at any rate the same bandmaster. Oscar Wilde walked in front of the

first procession wearing a sunflower, and in front of the second procession wearing a green carnation (*CW* 15: 516).

While it is notable that Chesterton compulsively inserts superfluous references to satires of each movement into this account, almost as an incantatory psychological *aide-mémoire*, it is surely significant that the pageant leader bearing a metaphorical sunflower in Chesterton's novel is *Sun*day, whose name combines Christian and Apollonian connotations, and who begins the novel as a dreaded father-figure who seems to augur annihilation. If Bakhtin's account of the decay of the regenerative element of the mask in post-Enlightenment Romanticism correlates to the chronology of Wilde's swapping of the sunflower for the green carnation, *Thursday* sets Wilde's biography on a process of reverse-Becoming, catapulting him back to the unworldly, lower-case romanticism of his earliest theorising, in a gesture of utopian reconciliation. Appropriately enough, this reconciliation is inspired by the reassuring lessons of Wilde's texts. Chesterton later explained the novel's parodic relationship to the conventional agon of detective fiction in terms that closely recall both the revelatory connotation of the mask in 'The Critic as Artist' and the image of innocent children's games that Wilde elaborates in 'The Decay of Lying': '[i]n an ordinary detective tale the investigator discovers that some amiable-looking fellow who subscribes to all the charities […] has murdered his grandmother […] I thought it would be fun to make the tearing away of menacing masks reveal benevolence' (qtd. in Ward, *Gilbert* 168).

While an appropriation of Wilde's texts enables Chesterton to overcome his fear of their creator, the text of *Thursday* also employs a confusion of life and art to reason out the nonsense of Chesterton's perception of Bentley, the friend who first introduced Chesterton to this traumatic influence. This is achieved through another of *Thursday*'s enforced collaborations, in which Bentley appears as a character within the narrative. If Syme can be considered an avatar of the young Chesterton, it is significant that among the anarchists who he initially conceives himself to be battling, the most vividly nightmarish is Professor de Worms, whose name conflates academia with decay—here the title of Professor Dewar undergoes a literal process of corruption—and whose features bear a marked resemblance to Bentley. The narrator notes that de Worms' scholarly spectacles jar incongruously

with his spritely body: 'the head upon that bounding body was still pale, grave and professional, like the head of a lecturer upon the body of a harlequin' (*CW* 6: 540). This is almost precisely how Chesterton describes Bentley in the *Autobiography*: 'I used to say that he had the head of a professor on the body of a harlequin' (61).[28]

Consequently, it is particularly telling that de Worms is a 'German Nihilist philosopher' (*CW* 6: 549), most probably intended to connote Schopenhauer, since the latter's theory of the primacy of the will is evoked in an irreverent explanation of de Worms' philosophy: '"Energy, he said, was the All. He was lame, short-sighted, and partially paralytic"' (*CW* 6: 549). Crucially, Syme eventually discovers that the apparent anarchist before him is actually a fellow policeman, who has been physically parodying the original de Worms. As the policeman explains, in a burlesque personification of the central conceit of *Dorian Gray*, '"I am a portrait of the celebrated Professor"' (*CW* 6: 549). This impersonation has proved so convincing that the real philosopher is now trapped in a nightmare in which he is perpetually assumed to be the copyist, much as Wilde argued that Schopenhauer had merely been a real-life impersonator of Hamlet. Upon moving between rooms in the outfit, the policeman is warned that '"an impertinent fellow had dressed himself up as a preposterous parody of myself"' (*CW* 6: 550). This curiously horrifying revenge upon the philosopher, in which 'he is [now] received everywhere in Europe as a delightful imposter' whose 'apparent earnestness and anger […] make him all the more entertaining' (*CW* 6: 551), conveys a psychological cruelty which goes blithely unremarked by the narrator, a detail which again draws attention to the singular virulence of Chesterton's reaction against Schopenhauer.

The policeman's drawing of the professor into enforced collaboration in a burlesque double-act constitutes a feat of audacious boldness which contrasts sharply with Chesterton's view of Schopenhauer's philosophy as 'a mere *nightmare* induced by lack of nerve' (*CDN* 1: 95; my emphasis). It would seem that Chesterton now considered himself to have mistaken the teenage Bentley for a *bona fide* sceptic, when the latter had simply been putting on a particularly

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[28] An echo of this image is also discernible, in a more negative light, in the Bentleyan Pym's 'dress and gestures' in *Manalive*, which are 'bright enough for a boy's; it was only when you looked at the fish-bone face that you beheld something acrid and old' (32).

accomplished performance. As with his description of Yeats's poetic amendments, Chesterton had seen 'a friend's face horribly deformed in a nightmare', but had since concluded that the miasmic impenetrability of his friend's persona was merely a consequence of acting a perilous part which ironically conveyed his animus toward the figures whose 'replica' he seemed to resemble. As the policeman counter-intuitively explains to Syme, in an account that recalls the motivation underpinning the most adversarial forms of parody, 'I disliked [de Worms] so much that I resolved to imitate him' (*CW* 6: 549).

Chesterton's dedication of *Thursday* to Bentley ends on an optimistic, re-integrative note, which pre-empts the conclusion of the novel itself: 'We have found common things at last and marriage and a creed' (*CW* 6: 474). The reference to a common creed, with its connotations for Chesterton of satirical grounding and dialogic *comm*unication, most probably refers to a political, rather than theological, affinity, since Bentley never shared Chesterton's religious faith.[29] Instead, Chesterton and Bentley were bonded by a common, lifelong adherence to the political creeds of Liberalism and anti-imperialism, which somewhat belies Chesterton's account of Bentley's enduringly 'detached and ironic' persona. The latter's opposition to the Boer War was as principled as that of Belloc, if less 'conspicuous'. In his diary of 5 March 1900, Bentley notes 'how bitterly I am feeling the foolish and ruinous war that is still raging. I never have been so much affected by any public matter yet' (Bod MS Eng.misc.e.869), and nearly half a century later his indignation at Kipling's propagandizing of the conflict is expressed in equally strong terms: 'Kipling's enormous literary power' misled the British public into thinking that 'we were dealing out righteous punishment to a "lesser breed"' (*Those* 184).

Bentley's complaint is instructive in the context of the second intertextual game in which *Thursday* engages, which functions precisely to highlight the moral degeneration of Kipling's gifts, while emphasising, by way of contrast, the utopian theme of 'marriage' which the dedication asserts Chesterton and Bentley to have 'found'. Again, a distinction between folk conventions and decadence frames this departure. While Chesterton strongly approved of Kipling's principled advocacy of popular culture, he was bitterly opposed to the imperialist worldview

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[29] In reference to the dedication, Bentley told Christopher Hollis that Chesterton had 'ascribed to him a far more definite creed than any he in fact possessed' (Hollis 62).

which Kipling employed popular forms to promote, and explicitly identified Kipling's imperialism as a corollary of decadence. Much as Chesterton's broader attacks on imperialism turn upon imagery of corporeal and moral decay, his critical work repeatedly employs imperialism as a synonym of cultural decadence—in *Charles Dickens* he refers to 'decadent jingoism' (95), elsewhere he discusses 'imperial, and therefore decadent, passions' (*CDN* 1: 419), while in *What's Wrong with the World* he terms Kipling 'a man of real though decadent genius' (*CW* 4: 90).

The specific titular context of Chesterton's engagement with Kipling in *Thursday* is the latter's short story, 'The Man Who Was'. Although first published in 1890, Kipling's story was adapted to the stage in 1907, the same year in which Chesterton was composing the final draft of his novel. Earlier in his career, Chesterton had discussed 'The Man Who Was' in his article, 'Who Killed Rudyard Kipling?' (*DN* 15 Oct. 1902), the title of which frames Kipling's artistic decline in the terms of a detective story. Here Chesterton unfavourably compares Kipling's most recent publication, 'The Comprehension of Private Copper' (1902), with 'The Man Who Was', which he considers 'one of the stories of [Kipling's] great literary period' (*CDN* 1: 418). Chesterton employs the earlier story as an exemplary model against which to attack Kipling's new story as 'without form', expressive merely of 'a great indignation against Boers' (*CDN* 1: 419) which displays an inglorious 'hatred of the conquered' (*CDN* 1: 421).

The context of the Boer war returns us to the definitive political crisis moment of Chesterton's *fin de siècle*, as well as the recourse to the irreverent running order of Greek drama through which the staff of *The Speaker* expressed their dissent against the conflict. Three years before Chesterton's article in *The Daily News*, Kipling's 'hatred of the conquered' had been highlighted by an anonymous contributor to *The Speaker*, who supplied the parodic afterword to the serious leaders in the first edition of the 'new' *Speaker*, following its takeover by a group of Oxford graduates assembled by J.L. Hammond. This insubordinate gang of ex-*Isis* contributors included Belloc and Bentley, as well as non-Oxonian fellow-travellers such as Chesterton, and it was almost certainly one of these three who composed the skit in question—a parody of a journalistic interview with Kipling, which attacks the philosophical complacency that led culturally-

influential figures to support unjust imperial policies. The piece is adorned with verses allegedly declaimed by the poet:

> I'm sorry for Mister Naboth
> I'm sorry to make him squeak
> But the Lord above made me strong
> In order to pummel the weak (*Speaker* 7 Oct. 1899; British Newspaper Library holdings).

It has generally been assumed that Chesterton made no contribution to the first edition of the 'new' *Speaker* because, bizarrely, the literary editor, F.Y. Eccles, refused to publish his work on the grounds that his handwriting looked Jewish (see Ward, *Gilbert* 113; Ffinch 66; Oddie 176). Nonetheless, when Chesterton wrote to Frances on the subject, he framed his hopes of publication in the context of current affairs, rather than the literary pages: the edition 'may contain something of mine though I cannot be quite sure. A rush of the Boers on Natal […] is expected by politicians' (qtd. in Ward, *Gilbert* 105). Despite the biographical tenacity of the handwriting anecdote, it is based only on the hearsay report of Chesterton's friend, Lucien Oldershaw (see Ward, *Gilbert* 113), the internal logic of which both Ffinch (67) and Oddie (176) find somewhat baffling, and there is no material evidence to prove that Chesterton was successfully prevented from contributing anonymously to the first edition. Indeed, if Chesterton's peers would have considered Eccles's objection as offensive as Oddie claims, this would presumably have made the irreverent contributors all the more eager to sneak in a piece by their friend.[30]

The supposition that the Kipling skit was composed by Chesterton is not only supported by the correspondence between the contributor's mockery of Kipling's contempt for 'the weak' and Chesterton's subsequent deprecation of Kipling's 'hatred of the conquered', but also, more strikingly, by the fact that the quatrain quoted above is a parody of the final lines of 'The Man Who Was', in which a Hussar sings a popular burlesque tune, as a gesture of defiant opposition to military malpractice on the part of an amoral aggressor:

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[30] The rhyme is also quoted in Coates, *Controversialist* (50), as an example of the satirical tone of *The Speaker*. 'Naboth' is presumably an amalgam of Louis Botha (1862-1919), the figurehead of the Boer insurrection, and the biblical figure, Naboth, who symbolises victimhood in the face of injustice.

> I'm sorry for Mister Bluebeard,
>
> I'm sorry to cause him pain;
>
> But a terrible spree there's sure to be
>
> When he comes back again (Kipling 101).

Whether it was indeed Chesterton, or one of his friends, who composed the parody in *The Speaker*, the satirical amendment clearly reflects the sense shared by Chesterton's circle that Kipling had sold out his former ideals to an amorally nationalistic imperialist agenda.[31] Chesterton derided the latter position, in 'A Defence of Patriotism', as the attitude of '"My country, right or wrong"', before debunking the superficial patriotism of this premise through the Carrollean trick of close parody, in which alternative referents are substituted in order to confound the moral authority of the *ur* statement: 'It is like saying, "My mother, drunk or sober"' (*Defendant* 166).

As Chesterton concludes in 'Who Killed Rudyard Kipling?', in the years following 'The Man Who Was', 'Mr. Kipling has been caught in the net of a merely temporary political faddism', which explains why he now produces 'nothing eternal or essential, even symbolically' (*CDN* 1: 419). By the time of the publication of *Thursday,* Chesterton had come to consider Kipling 'largely repulsive' ('Shakspere and Zola.' *ILN* 18 Apr. 1908; *CW* 28: 84).[32] Chesterton's critique of the 'faddism' and absence of anything 'eternal' in Kipling is particularly interesting, given that *Thursday* ultimately derives an existentially grotesque, utopian allegory from a story which begins as a local satire of the nationalistic paranoia over a 'yellow peril' that accompanied the Boxer uprising (1899-1900)—an event which inclines Syme to misapprehend his own situation as one of 'huge and pitiless peril, like a Chinese invasion' (*CW* 6: 505). Kipling has also been caught in the net of Chesterton's novel here, and consequently the presumptuous step of finishing off Kipling's earlier title should be understood as

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[31] Insofar as Kipling is depicted as a 'somewhat unpleasant schoolboy' (Coates, *Controversialist* 50) in the *Speaker* article, it is perhaps notable that Bentley imagines 'the juvenile Kipling' to have been the 'sort of boy that many schoolmasters cannot bear, and do their best to harry and humble' (*Those* 53). On 18 Dec. 1899, Bentley refers to having had a 'humorous little middle' (Bod MS Eng.misc.e.869) piece published in an earlier issue of *The Speaker*, though he does not specify the edition.

[32] In this respect, Chesterton again drew close to Beerbohm, whose 'lifelong rejection of Kipling amounted almost to a vendetta' (Blissett 120).

an expression of parodic distance, in contrast to the sympathetic pastiche that is encoded within the allusion to 'Thessaly'.

In addition to the implied political critique, Chesterton's dispute with Kipling is again framed by the former's sympathy with the traditions of folk storytelling over literary tendencies that he perceived to be decadent. This context is illuminated by a later essay, 'The Three Fools' (*DN* 3 Apr. 1909), in which Chesterton employs a folk tale as an exemplary model against which to judge more contemporary literary forms. He discusses the work of Kipling and Maeterlinck as embodying a flaw in modern narrative whereby the tale is made to end prematurely at a stage of irresolution, thus eliminating the 'splendid explosion of common sense at the end [which] is like [the] sudden smashing of a coloured window, letting in fresh air' (*CDN* 5: 295). Chesterton illustrates this point by relating the plot of a folk tale in which the pessimistic fears of the family of a potential bride are challenged by the suitor, who finally marries the girl after having exposed and cured the family's folly. Chesterton speculates that Kipling would have ended the story at the moment of schism, in which the bride's fear of engagement (in every sense) has temporarily alienated her from the suitor: 'in Mr. Kipling's story the young man would have ridden away from his betrothed and never come back at all' (*CDN* 5: 295). This account portrays modern narrative as undergoing a literal process of decadence, in which its essential constituent parts have begun falling off, like the limbs of Professor de Worms in Syme's feverish vision.

In the light of Chesterton's view that contemporary storytellers had abandoned the traditional folk tale's formal stress upon marriage, it is instructive to compare Kipling to Hankin, whose plays programmatically 'rejected conventional "happy endings"' (Phillips 45). As Phillips explains, *The Charity That Began at Home* posits the final 'disengagement' of a couple as a salutary event: 'In contrast to a long tradition in comedy, at least as old as Aristophanes, Hankin always refused to end his comedies with marriages' (59). In a characteristically cynical conceit, Hankin claimed that his discordant conclusions were actually examples of positive resolution, and collected a portion of his corpus under the heading, *Three Plays with Happy Endings* (1907) a year before the publication of *Thursday*. Chesterton's later novel, *The Flying Inn*, operates as an instructive companion-text to *Thursday* in this sense, insofar as it also enters

into dialogue with the endings preferred by Hankin et al, by subverting the valorisation of schismatic disengagement which these writers introduced into the conventional marriage resolution.

At the novel's conclusion, the villain of the piece, Lord Ivywood, attains a state of pristine isolation by attempting to embody the evolutionary principle of the Nietzschean Superman—a speculative figure who Chesterton winningly terms, elsewhere, 'that preposterous pre-natal bore' ('The Bottom Dog and the Superman.' *ILN* 19 Dec. 1908; *CW* 28: 235)—after which Ivywood goes mad and is committed. Here it is the would-be innovatory madman who is, in a terrible sense, certain to live 'happily ever after', while Chesterton posits the prosaic marriages of the other characters as the more truly audacious punt on an unstable future. As he argues in an essay on Dickens's Christmas stories, happiness possesses a 'dramatic quality', since it 'is not a state; it is a crisis' (*CW* 15: 313)—in other words, it is a threshold moment, leading to another state, the nature of which is uncertain. Consequently, Chesterton implies that the apparently subversive conceits of contemporary storytellers actually constitute a timorous escape from the complexities of *engagement* with quotidian reality into the un-regenerative cul-de-sac of existential divorce. Tellingly, Ivywood articulates his obsession with establishing a state of pure intellection via a metaphor that directly inverts the picaresque bordering motif employed in *Thursday* to defeat solipsism: 'my adventures shall not be in the hedges […] but in the borders of the ever-advancing brain' (*Flying* 228).

The temperamental quirk symbolised by the open-ended title of Kipling's 'The Man Who Was' recalls Chesterton's account of the sceptic's mind 'opening infinitely for ever', through a deliberate installation of indeterminacy which corresponds formally to the ambivalence 'at the root' that Barthes praises in the Flaubertian multivalent text. Chesterton's titular amendment suggests that he has irreverently taken Kipling's withholding of the final referent to be the pretext for a game, in which the challenge is to finish the sentence. This game corresponds, in morphological terms, to a challenge to complete the narrative. Although there is no clear thematic correspondence between the plot of *Thursday* and Kipling's tale of a Hussar's return to his regiment after torture in Siberia, beyond a loose interplay between themes of isolation and comradeship, the texts possess a more subtle correspondence, or rather distinction, on the level of narrative morphology.

Specifically, Chesterton resolves the alienation of the middle-section of *Thursday* with an integrative climax, in contrast to the agonistic note upon which Kipling's vignette concludes, in which the Hussar speculates that the return of the fairy-tale villain, 'Mister Bluebeard', will be the occasion for a 'terrible spree' of violence, rather than the final reinstallation of harmonious cohesion which characterises conventional festive comedy.

Not only does Chesterton's title parodically build upon Kipling's phrase, but in narrative terms, his text also 'caps' the forebear's work, in a similar manner to the conversational mode that Chesterton favourably contrasted with the decadent approach of cutting 'short another man's idea, not, as in the great conversations [seeking] to extend and perfect it'. It might be argued that a certain irony attends to this dialogic gesture, insofar as Chesterton's progressive step from the alienation stage of the conventional folk tale to the final community marriage would seem to imply a sense of completion, so that in moving the conversation forward, Chesterton is also closing it in a manner which gives him the final word. However, even in essaying a formal resolution, Chesterton inscribes a thematic element of cyclical regeneration, by basing the final carnival on the Biblical account of Genesis, and having the novel end with '[d]awn […] breaking' (*CW VI* 635) at the very instant at which the narrator intimates that Syme will ultimately marry the sister of his erstwhile enemy, Gregory, thus instigating a new threshold moment of 'crisis'. The story is 'to be continued', and not necessarily by Chesterton, but by anyone who might conceive the notion to 'build another idea on top of it'. As Chesterton later observed, the themes of his novels typically offered 'a very promising subject—for somebody else' (*Autobiography* 288).

Following the publication of *Thursday*, Bentley took Chesterton up on this challenge, by composing his own parody of detective fiction, finally published as *Trent's Last Case* in 1913. Bentley's belated willingness to join in with one of Chesterton's dialogic games is implied by the dedication that he affixed to his novel, which highlights the reciprocal nature of the pair's literary output: 'I owe you a book in return for "The Man Who Was Thursday"' (*Trent's*).[33] If Bentley read Chesterton's text as the first move in a turn-taking game of parodic one-

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[33] The dedication of this edition is not paginated.

upmanship to establish who could most thoroughly debunk Doyle's generic archetype, it is notable that his hero, Trent, is made to share Syme's playful disposition. Bentley later explained that what 'troubled me was the extreme seriousness of Holmes, and the equal seriousness of his imitators' (*Those* 251). As Chris Baldick has observed, the refusal of Bentley's hero 'to take himself seriously distance[d] him from the awe-inspiring gravity of Holmes', to construct a 'parodic challenge to the mystique of literary sleuths' (*Modern* 275). Bentley's novel also replicates Chesterton's taste for implanting a satirical creed and a matrimonial dimension within the conventional detection plot. In reviewing the novel, Chesterton particularly approved of the murder of an amoral financier: 'the man murdered [is] a man one would like to have murdered' ('The Merry Log-Roller.' *New Witness* 6 Mar. 1913; British Newspaper Library holdings). This crime eventually leads to a prosaic rendition of *Thursday*'s allegorical emphasis upon marriage over schism, when Bentley contravenes generic orthodoxy by having his detective fall in love with the principal female character, the financier's widow.

Although Bentley's novel was not published until 1913, he later recalled that it was '[s]ome time in the year 1910' (*Those* 249) that he first conceived its basic premise, and that soon after, 'when my wife and I met the Chestertons by chance in Paris, I sketched the by-then completed plot to him in a hotel lounge' (*Those* 254). This dating is significant, since it suggests that a further cross-pollination of ideas occurred between Bentley and Chesterton when the latter was conceptualising his own most audacious attempt to enact a comic regeneration of the detection genre: *Father Brown*. If Bentley's novel reads as a sympathetic pastiche of elements of *Thursday*, his more pointedly satirical debunking of the Holmesian method added a new dimension to Chesterton's parodic formula, an approach which Chesterton then sympathetically pastiched, in turn, with the serio-comic framework of *Father Brown*, the premises of which carry considerably more satirical bite than is found in *Thursday*.

In a microcosm of the macro-parody in which both *Trent's Last Case* and *Father Brown* generically engage, the writers' protagonists also share a predilection for executing off-the-cuff, verbal parodies. For example, Trent improvises a materially themed burlesque of the sublime lyricism of Scott: 'Why sit'st thou by that ruined breakfast?' (*Trent's* 19), while Father Brown parodies

Herbert with 'idiotic cheerfulness' (*FB* 279), in 'The Perishing of the Pendragons' (*Pall Mall Magazine* June 1914).[34] In a later story ('The Curse of the Golden Cross.' *Nash's Magazine* May 1925), Brown employs a near-verbatim quotation from 'The Decay of Lying'—'"I can believe the impossible, but not the improbable"' (*FB* 452)—as a means of challenging Holmes' famous contention, in *The Sign of Four* (1890), that '"[w]hen you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth"' (Doyle, *Sherlock* 111). In doing so, the priest invests Wilde's *apercu* with an implicit investigative and theological moral, formally repeating Wilde's words in order to disprove Doyle, while thematically deviating from their intended meaning in order to subvert Wilde. As my next chapter will demonstrate, the precepts of Wilde's essay also vitally inform the earliest *Father Brown* stories, which explore the complex political and philosophical benefits and dangers of life imitating art, while employing various parodic techniques to debunk the improbable investigative framework of *Sherlock Holmes*.

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[34] '"Who sweeps an admiral's garden in Cornwall as for Thy laws makes that and the action fine"' (*FB* 279).

Chapter Three

Serious Things in Holiday Time London:

Father Brown as Carnival

[P]rogress should be something else besides a continual parricide[.]

<div align="right">Chesterton, introduction to The Defendant (16)</div>

In this chapter, I turn to a detailed analysis of Chesterton's first three *Father Brown* stories, in which his carnivalesque aesthetic method finds most comprehensive expression. The major themes discussed in the preceding chapters are brought together in complex interrelation within this analysis, including Chesterton's scrupulous balancing of the poles of parody, his intertwined political and philosophical critique of domestic culture and imperial policy, and his manipulation of disruptive nonsense techniques to pedagogic purpose. I begin with an exposition of 'The Blue Cross' as a parodic challenge to Chesterton's generic forebears, Poe and Doyle, in which an imaginative recreation of the archetypes of detective fiction is combined with an imaginative recreation of the conditions of the modern metropolis. This dual purpose stems from the intimate literary and social correlation of Chesterton's views on progress and parricide. Chesterton employs the reconstructive action of parody to militate against generic parricide, inscribing a simultaneous homage to, and departure from, his forefathers in the act of unveiling his own Father-figure. He then complements this conceit thematically with a satirical riposte to the wider cultural parricide contemplated by urban reformers, whose calls for a radical architectural and social restructuring of the city he viewed as a pernicious attempt to divorce progress from observance of tradition. As Chesterton enjoins the reader in 'Serious Things in Holiday Time London', the first of his 1,535 contributions to *The Illustrated London News*, 'do not destroy London. It is a sacred ruin' (*CW* 27: 39).

In 'The Blue Cross', Chesterton posits an alternative, retroactive model of reform, employing a process of urban detection as the means of re-inscribing medieval London within the modern cityscape. The analogical possibilities of the pun again come to the fore here, since this act of urban and generic recreation

centres upon an exposition of the restorative benefits of recreational play. By reconfiguring the cityscape as a giant anti-rational playground, Chesterton develops an alternative investigative framework to the rationalist methodology of both Holmesian detection and the urban reform movement. In the process, he enacts a particularly complex and literal rendering of the worshipper's half-holiday, in which an act of generic irreverence is bound up with a proto-Bakhtinian account of a carnivalesque holiday from social norms, masterminded by a disruptive priest. This enables Chesterton to elaborate a new, benign form of detection-game, which builds upon the utopian subversion of the agon of Holmesian detective fiction first essayed in *Thursday*.

I go on to discuss the ways in which Chesterton's follow-up story, 'The Secret Garden', complicates this utopianism, operating in tandem with 'The Blue Cross' to produce an example of what Morson terms 'metaparody', in which the parodist progresses beyond a centrifugal critique of outside discourses to a centripetal engagement with the implications of his/her own parody. Finally, I analyse the formal and thematic means through which Chesterton expands the parameters of his generic parody and social satire in 'The Queer Feet', to produce a thoroughgoing assault upon the camaraderie deficit fostered by the class system of early-twentieth-century Britain. Here Chesterton satirically challenges cultural segregation on two distinct narratorial levels—the story is related via heavily stylised *skaz* narration which subjects the reader to a carnivalesque implication within the action, while the plot skews the conventional feast motif of festive comedy to portray a bathetic travesty of popular carnival.

Some Urgent Reforms

Chesterton first articulates his sense of the reciprocity of urban investigation and literary detection in 'The Value of Detective Stories' (*Speaker* 22 June 1901), in a discussion of the collective, inter-generational enterprise that is manifested in the tiniest minutia of the city: 'The narrowest street possesses, in every crook and twist of its intention, the soul of the man who built it, perhaps long in his grave. Every brick has a human hieroglyph as if it were a graven brick of Babylon'

(*Defendant* 159).[1] Chesterton goes on to argue that Doyle's generic archetype is particularly effective in impressing this vision upon the reader, since 'the fantastic form of the minutiae of Sherlock Holmes [tends] to assert this romance in the detail in civilization, to emphasize this unfathomably human character in flints and tiles' (*Defendant* 159-60). However, while Doyle's copious attentiveness to the significance of the built environment is of revelatory value in this sense, his prioritisation of the collation of material data over psychological insight also reflects the essential flaw of his hero—Holmes's chronic empathy deficit.

Chesterton addresses this inverse side of the coin in a complementary article on 'The Danger of Detective Stories' (*Speaker* 13 July 1901) three weeks later. Here he argues that the ascendant generic model is most 'likely to do […] the harm of spreading that worship of the intellect which now makes the educated classes so foolish a spectacle' (BL MS Add.73381 ff.57). He notes that in much post-Holmesian detective fiction, the absence of sympathy projects outward from the text to pollute the reader in turn: '[i]t is strangely difficult to sympathise with any figure in the scene. The criminal seems as cold as the law, the law seems as bestial as the criminal.' For Chesterton, the resulting 'arid' atmosphere derives partially from the genre's structural predication upon perpetual contest, which makes it 'bound to attach [too] much importance to that somewhat trifling incident of human life which is called success'. This structural quirk is then compounded by the thematic interposition of 'an uneducated and almost innocent materialism […] which has not studied the long chronicle of the vanity and fall of kings, which has not learned from history that there is nothing that fails like success' (BL MS Add.73381 ff.57).[2]

A prioritisation of intellectual victory was first encoded within the genre by Poe, when he prefaced the first Dupin mystery, 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' (1841), with an exposition of whist and chess as analytic battlegrounds in which 'mind struggles with mind' in pursuit of 'perfection in the game' (119). This analogy introduced a more agonistic element to the capricious leisure games of Poe's earlier urban detective story, 'The Man of the Crowd' (1940), in which a convalescent *flâneur* sets out in disinterested pursuit of an intriguing figure through the streets of London. Between them, Poe's two stories formed the

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[1] Collected in *The Defendant* as 'A Defence of Detective Stories'.
[2] See above, Ch.1, fn.3.

template for Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* series, in which the modern metropolis operates as the site of play wherein Holmes relentlessly pursues victory over the elusive Moriarty in a never-ending logical battle of wills, the perpetuity of which recalls Schopenhauer's Sisyphean vision of the struggle of existence. Poe's choice of chess as an analogic model also corresponds to the nonsense conceits of Bentley and Carroll—particularly Bentley's reference to chess as 'a spiritualized fight'—thus backing up Sewell's account of the logic-puzzle form of detective fiction as a 'nonsense-detective world' ('Giant' 574). As Syme observes to Gregory in *Thursday*, shortly before Chesterton begins deconstructing the agonistic premises of conventional detection, '"[d]on't you see we've checkmated each other? […] it's a lonely, intellectual duel, my head against yours"' (*CW* 6: 495).

While this further hint of Chesterton's fear of intellectual alienation again draws attention to the psychological grounds of *Thursday*'s subversion of textual isolation through intertextual dialogue, in the case of *Father Brown*, Chesterton's questioning of the generic orthodoxy of detective fiction extends beyond this psychological base, to find sophisticated political and philosophical expression in a challenge to the literary propagation of wider social fallacies. An example of the latter phenomenon is presented by the rhetoric of the late-nineteenth-century Social Darwinist, Herbert Spencer, who echoed the imagery of Poe in his claim that '"[n]o matter what the game, the satisfaction is in achieving victory—in getting the better of the antagonist. This love of conquest, so dominant in all creatures because it is the correlative of success in the struggle for existence, gets gratification from a victory at chess in the absence of ruder victories' (qtd. in Blake, K. 37). This traffic of influence perhaps informed Chesterton's suspicion that social thinkers were 'probably really influenced, mad as it may seem, by contemporary detective fiction' ('Detectives and Detective Fictions.' *ILN* 4 Nov. 1905; *CW* 27: 53). In turn, Spencer's adaptation of evolutionary theory to the social realm went on to influence Doyle, as reflected by Holmes's baleful assertion, in 'The Final Problem' (1893), that Moriarty's criminality stems from 'hereditary tendencies of the most diabolical kind' (470-71).

If Chesterton's reflections on influence appear to contradict his earlier dismissal of the 'magisterial theory' that popular literature might form a source of moral infection, it is telling that in this instance Chesterton is charging the

intellectual with polluting the healthy literature of the masses. For Chesterton, Poe and Doyle gratuitously imposed a pseudo-scientific intellectualism upon a genre which derives structurally from folk literature—its blocking/unblocking schema corresponds closely to that of the fairy-tale and festive comedy—which then went on to exert a pernicious influence upon the credulous intellectual in a position of social authority, to the detriment of the masses. Consequently, Chesterton mounts his critique of detective fiction from a position of diametric cultural opposition to that of the majority of later critical commentators, who have more commonly figured detective fiction as a dangerous threat to intellectual standards emerging from popular culture. Much as Leavis evinced discomfort over the capacity of parody to traverse ostensibly distinct areas of culture, Baldick refers to Q.D. Leavis's fear of 'the infection of intellectuals through the detective craze by the values and tastes of the common mob' (274)—an infection that Chesterton would consider to be of great restorative benefit to the intellectual.

Perhaps most disturbingly for Chesterton, Poe's chess analogy posits literary detection as an exercise in detached rationalism. As I argued in my opening chapter, Chesterton's philosophical anti-rationalism derived from his distrust of 'the chains of syllogism'. This not only led him to oppose Hegelian dialectics, but also the application of normative syllogisms which characterises Holmesian detection, as exemplified by Holmes's confident 'inferences' (Doyle 246) in 'The Blue Carbuncle' (1892) that an 'unbrushed hat's owner has a wife; all loving wives brush their husband's hats; therefore [the owner's] wife is not loving' (Priestman 91). The fallacious assumptions to which this methodology is likely to lead are lampooned throughout *Father Brown*. For example, in 'The Absence of Mr. Glass' (1913), Holmes's hat syllogism is specifically parodied, with Brown revealing the supposed owner of a '*systematically* brushed and burnished' (*FB* 183; my emphasis) hat to have been the figment of a logician-detective's imagination. Here Holmes's method is philosophically deconstructed via a literal *reductio ad absurdum*, while the 'chains of syllogism' are lent a burlesque physical correlative in the form of the ropes with which the true owner of the hat—an amateur magician—has voluntarily bound himself. When the magician is finally ungagged, the story closes with him emitting an open-mouthed guffaw at the expense of the detective, who has previously been depicted with a 'sneer' (*FB* 187), in a further example of Chesterton's corporeal manner of

distinguishing between open and closed modes of humour.

In 'A Defence of Nonsense', Chesterton argues that 'to draw out the soul of things with a syllogism is as impossible as to draw out Leviathan with a hook' (*Defendant* 70), a principle that he illustrates in the 'Brett Harte' essay, by emphasising the irreducible singularity of his subject via an off-the-cuff anti-syllogism. Chesterton contends 'first, that [Harte] was a genuine American; second, that he was a genuine humourist; and, third, that he was not an American Humourist' (*Varied* 179). This precise reversal of the structure of Aristotelian formal logic illustrates the way in which parody—and even discussion of parodists—problematizes the model upon which both Hegelian dialectics and Holmesian deduction are structurally founded, instead placing an existentially grotesque emphasis upon the 'intractability of being', in Kenner's phrase. As with Chesterton's distinction between the 'ordinary' man who can accept contradiction and the 'morbid' systematising of the logician, the locus of this fault-line lies in the individual's relative willingness to submit to the irony of events. Kathleen Blake's account of the purity of the Carrollean nonsense game is peculiarly apposite to the Holmesian method in this regard: 'an objection based on experience or consequences bears very little weight. It is outside the game and must simply be left outside' (70).

For Chesterton, the influence of Holmes's espousal of extremes of idealist and materialist philosophy was most perniciously demonstrated on the philosophical battlefield of the streets of London, in the tendency of contemporary social reformers to apply a detached rationalism to the social and architectural conceptualisation of the city, and to associate worldly achievement with moral rectitude. As Knight argues, while Chesterton embraced the city as a chaos of conscious forces, 'Doyle's detective is perpetually trying to map the city and assimilate cultural difference' ('Signs' 131). The same was true of urban reformers such as Beatrice Webb (*née* Potter), who was heavily influenced in her youth by Herbert Spencer (see Inwood 50), and began mapping the city in the 1890s, before going on to join Chesterton's ideological nemesis, George Bernard Shaw, as a leading figure in the Fabian movement, alongside her husband, Sidney Webb. Characteristically, Chesterton identified the root of his controversy with the Fabians as a confluence of similarity and difference. As he explained, while everyone agreed that the living conditions of the urban poor were a blight that

must be addressed, '[i]t is when we begin to imagine alternative and reform […] that we begin to differ. The school of Mr. Sidney Webb would cure the evil by a re-planning of London on scientific, bureaucratic principles' ('The Sacred Street.' *DN* 4 June 1904; *CDN* 2: 239).

Chesterton's editor at *The Daily News*, Alfred George Gardiner, chose the issue of urban reform as the context through which to explain the essential distinction between Chesterton and Shaw to his readers. In 'A Character Study' (*DN* 18 July 1908), Gardiner notes that Shaw would prefer to 'raze the whole fabric to the ground, and build all anew upon an ordered and symmetrical plan. Mr Chesterton has none of this impatience with the external garment of society. He enjoys disorder and loves the haphazard' (*CDN* 5: 104-05). As these accounts begin to suggest, Chesterton was writing at a pivotal moment in the history of the capital, in which the overwhelmingly 'arbitrary and unplanned' (Jones 159) cycle of construction and demolition that had hitherto characterised urban development was yielding to the dogma of rationalist interventionism, which eventually achieved schematic realisation in the modernist architectural putsch of the mid-twentieth century. In many ways, the pioneer of this movement was Charles Booth, the conservative businessman-cum-philanthropic sociologist whose spatial survey of the class-breakdown of the city found pictorial representation in the colour-coded 'poverty maps' (Booth, *Portrait* xxxi) which accompanied his ambitious attempt to socially map the city, *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1892–97).

Booth's innovative plan to 'formalize a method of impersonal inquiry' (xi), as Raymond Williams puts it, was borne of a desire to establish a rigorous empiricism to clear the 'fog of fear, sensationalism and guesswork' (Inwood 48) surrounding the conditions of the urban poor, which sensationalist crime fiction perpetuated. Nonetheless, it is a curious irony that his pretence to pristine impersonality so closely echoes the methods of Holmes and Dupin. Despite his philanthropic intentions, Booth's rationalistic premises ultimately resulted in a failure to sympathise with either the landscape or its inhabitants. Of the landscape, he complained '[l]et anyone now design a place of residence for our four or five million inhabitants, and how greatly it would differ in plan and structure from London' (*Physical* 123). Booth's maps offered the blueprint for a new plan conducted along strictly rationalistic and paternalistic lines. By literally

illustrating the neighbouring coexistence of poverty and relative wealth, and thus producing a disorganised chaos of colours, Booth's survey implied that this situation was both morally unsanitary and philosophically irrational, encouraging the inference of later planners that a segregation enabled by radical architectural redesign might result in a more orderly, logical colour scheme.

Booth's scheme to achieve a radical spatial re-organisation of the city was simultaneously a plan to tidy up its inhabitants. To this end, he proposed the expulsion of an entire section of the populace, in line with his belief that the 'deserving poor must be separated from the idle loafers' (43), as Canovan puts it. While Booth denied that a considerable percentage of the urban poor belonged to what he termed 'Class A'—'"the vicious and semi-criminal"'—he contended that the 'deserving poor' were being demoralized by a second distinct underclass: 'Class B' (Booth qtd. in Jones 320). As Gareth Stedman Jones explains, for Booth this class 'was not so much vicious as feckless. These were the failures in the industrial race' (321). Booth's rhetoric is more forthright: these people 'degrade whatever they touch, and as individuals are perhaps incapable of improvement', because—much like Moriarty—their condition is apparently 'hereditary' (*Portrait* 11-12). Booth argues that '[e]very other class takes care of itself, or could do so if Class B were out of the way. These unfortunate people form a sort of quagmire underlying the social structure' (*Physical* 30).

This Spencerian vision of society as an agonistic game—'"the competition of the very poor"'—underpins Booth's argument for the '"entire removal"' (Booth qtd. in Jones 307) of this section of society from the field of play. In *The Ball and the Cross*, Chesterton employs a malign syllogism to crystallise the rationale of such solutions: '"Dr. Hertz has convinced everybody […] that nothing can really be done with the real slums. His celebrated maxim has been quite adopted. I mean the three celebrated sentences: 'No man should be unemployed. Employ the employables. Destroy the unemployables'"' (CW 7: 213). As Jones's account indicates, Booth's own solution was only marginally less extreme: 'a policy of relentless "dispersion" for class "A" and the provision of labour colonies for class "B"' (321). Fried and Elman summarise the latter plan thus: 'if the poor failed in their special camps, they would be sent to poorhouses and their children taken from them. If they succeeded, they would be allowed to re-enter

civilization' (xxix). As Chesterton surmised, '[a]pparently, progress means being moved on – by the police' (*CW* 4: 209).

In view of Chesterton's belief that detective fiction played a significant role in encouraging social materialism, it is no coincidence that his earliest fictional critique of the structural changes wrought upon the city by social reformers occurs in his first collection of satires of Holmesian detection, *The Club of Queer Trades.* The second story in the collection, 'The Painful Fall of a Great Reputation', relates a bus journey through the new working-class housing developments that increasingly populated the 'vast blank space of North London' (*CW* 6: 83). As the narrator explains, the panoptic view from the top deck gave 'a sense of [the scheme's] immensity and its meanness. […] In a narrow street, in a den of vice, you do not expect civilisation, you do not expect order. But the horror of this was the fact that there was civilisation, that there was order, but that civilisation only showed its morbidity, and order only its monotony' (*CW* 6: 83). In attempting to account for the architectural poverty of the new projects, the narrator concludes that the philanthropist possesses 'contempt for the people' (*CW* 6: 83). Chesterton's loathing of philanthropists was not only inspired by the cold functionalism of these architectural schemes, but also the assumption that the worldly success of the rich constituted a qualification to interfere in the lives of others—to move people around the city like pieces on a giant chessboard.

The authoritarian rationalism underpinning Booth's philanthropic endeavours is illustrated by the context that seems to have brought his work to Chesterton's attention—his influence upon the social theories of leading Fabians, including Beatrice Webb, who was Booth's wife's cousin, and an assistant in the early stages of his project.[3] In a series of journalistic essays, published in the same year as his articles on detective fiction, Chesterton deconstructs the presumptions of this new wave of social reformers via a series of parodies of social pamphleteering—'Some Urgent Reforms'—in which he develops various apparently fantastical conceits in order to turn the urge for reform back upon the reformer. The final article in the series, 'Missions to the Cultivated' (*Speaker* 7 Dec. 1901), sets out to overturn the complacent notion that the philanthropist carries *de facto* authority to carry out missionary work: 'The real problem of the

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[3] In 'Mr. Shaw's Escape' (*DN* 20 July 1907), Chesterton quotes Shaw's discussion of Booth's work amongst other reformist tracts (*CDN* 4: 263).

present day is the problem of the educated classes. [… The] suburban pessimist [is] a type far lower than the hooligan […] And any attempt on their part to teach and preach to the poor is as sensational a piece of impudence as a thief in Holloway Gaol preaching piety to the chaplain' (BL MS Add.73381 ff.78).

The first article in the series, 'The Human Circulating Library' (*Speaker* 2 Nov. 1901), advances a possible solution to this 'problem of the educated classes'. In a corollary of his journalistic advocacy of placing apparently incongruous articles in diversely targeted periodicals, Chesterton proposes that adapting the model of the lending library to human interaction might operate as a means of encouraging the mingling of different social sectors, so as to inculcate in the 'vast herds of suburban citizens living perpetually among people like themselves' (BL MS Add.73381 ff.75) a salutary understanding of the diversity of human experience. The second of his proposals, 'Playgrounds for Adults' (*Speaker* 16 Nov. 1901), builds upon this motif of engagement. In a burlesque parallel of Booth's projected labour colonies, Chesterton advances the concept of nurseries for the intelligentsia, arguing that such a policy might serve to reconnect the educated classes to their cultural heritage: 'What is needed is nurseries for the adult, nurseries in which stockbrokers can be instructed in "Puss in the Corner", and those who have a more grave and aesthetic order of intellect in the more solemn ritual of bells and fruit which is called "Oranges and Lemons"' (BL MS Add.73381 ff.76).

The communal ethos of Chesterton's reforms is particularly salient in view of Booth's assumption of detached impersonality in his investigations, a position which arises in part from his failure to recognize his activities as a form of recreational play. Booth's project effectively began as a hobby, arising from his habit of taking urban constitutionals as a means of ameliorating the periodic breakdowns to which he was prone (see Booth, *Physical* 10). In this sense, he was engaged in a personal leisure activity masquerading as public work, much as Holmes's detection hobby offers relief from the ennui that manifests itself in his drug addiction. As Auden observes, in an account that might be seamlessly applied to Booth, Holmes's 'motive for being a detective is, positively, a love of the neutral truth […] and negatively, a need to escape from his own feelings of melancholy. His attitude towards people and his technique of observation and deduction are those of the chemist or physicist' ('Guilty' 155). This concatenation

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of fictive and real-life phenomena also extends to Booth's exercises in social classification, which closely recall the complacent speculations of the narrator of Poe's 'The Man of the Crowd', who categorises passers-by from the isolation of his café table. Although Booth's preferred mode of play involved circulating among different classes, he never thought to lend himself out, in the manner of Chesterton's human library, but would instead take up a solitary position in public houses in order to make notes on the people surrounding him (see Booth, *Portrait* 224). As Fried and Elman argue, Booth's lack of engagement arises from the fact that he 'truly believed that between himself and the poor there was an unbridgeable gap of class and culture' (xxvii).

In a later essay, 'The Anti-Liberal' (*DN* 7 Sept. 1912), Chesterton employs the rhetoric of detection to challenge such assumptions of benevolent distance, refiguring the philanthropist as one of a number of potentially villainous detective story characters: 'There is a great deal in my plumber's or my cab man's life that I do not know; and, stranger still, I think there ought to be. I am not ambitious to possess that particular sort of knowledge of domestic life which is possessed by spies, informers, blackmailers, and philanthropists' (*CDN* 8: 152). This gesture of implication proves salient in the light of Booth's less-guarded observations on his activities, in which he comes to resemble the wide-eyed reader of a sensational detective novel. In one notable instance, he describes his fascination with the 'clash of contest, man against man, and men against fate—the absorbing interest of a battle-field [...] this excitement of life which can accept murder as a dramatic incident, and drunkenness as the buffoonery of the stage … looked it in this way, what a drama it is!' (Booth, *Portrait* xx).

If Booth's theatrical conception of city life as a detection 'drama' unfolding before his eyes superficially resembles the play-reconfiguration of Chesterton's 'Playgrounds for Adults', it also possesses the vital distinction that Booth considers himself uncomplicatedly shielded by the footlights. In contrast, the communal element of Chesterton's vision of play is particularly evoked by a sequel to the 'Playgrounds for Adults' piece, which he composed a fortnight later ('Some Urgent Reforms: Playgrounds for Adults II' *Speaker* 30 Nov. 1901). Here he develops a distinction between the benign games conducted by children, and the more agonistic adult version of play, which corresponds to the 'clash of contest' invoked both in Booth's rhetoric and in Holmesian detection: 'Games as

ordinarily understood do not constitute play, they constitute sport. In a game, as the adult understands a game, the essential is competition, and the aim victory' (BL MS Add.73381 ff.77). By way of contrast, Chesterton advances 'the great and Royal game of "Hide and Seek", the noblest of all earthly games', the particular beauty of which is its taking of

> the whole earth for its chess-board. Every object of the landscape, tree or hole or hedge, has, like a huge chess-man, its own peculiar powers and functions in the game. [. . .] The game includes planning, thinking, remembering, inventing, running, climbing, jumping, seeing, hearing, and waiting. The player has the emotions of all the outlaws since the world began (BL MS Add.73381 ff.77).

Here Chesterton figures hide and seek as a real-life version of detective fiction, in which the intellectual combat of Poe's chess analogy, and Booth's detached observation of the 'battle-field', are transmuted into a liberating physical engagement with topography and an emotional engagement with human history, in which the player becomes a self-determining piece in the game, rather than the omnipotent hand guiding play. The location of Chesterton's panegyric to hide and seek within his series of 'urgent reforms' reflects his sense that in order to counter the reformer's dubious combination of rigid rationalism and solipsistic tourism, a direct challenge to the literary archetype of detection would also be necessary. The form that this challenge would ultimately take is first hinted at in 'Missions to the Cultivated', in which Chesterton's conviction that '[t]he great need of the age is philanthropy to the rich' inspires him to produce a brilliant parody of the language of the reformist tract:

> It is not enough for the person of limited means merely to think charitably of millionaires at Christmas, to bestow a word on them now and then, to support institutions designed for their improvement. The real philanthropist must go down and live among these people. He must take the rough-and-tumble of their gloomy, cynical, and lawless life. He must not be put off by the exhibition of many grossnesses and vulgarities [. . .] I do not think it is any good merely to preach and prose to these people. A little merriment and geniality, a little sympathy with their amusements, would go much further towards converting the millionaires and really attaching them to us by ties of affection (BL MS Add.73381 ff.78).

This is where Father Brown steps in.

Recreating the Carnivalesque City in 'The Blue Cross'

> Turnbull and MacIan were sitting on one of the barren sweeps behind Hampstead,
> they could see the whole of London [… as] the splendid monstrosity that it is. Its
> bewildering squares and parallelograms were compact and perfect as a Chinese
> puzzle; an enormous hieroglyph which man must decipher or die.
>
> Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross* (*CW* 7: 77)

In 'The Fear of the Past' (*DN* 7 Dec. 1907), Chesterton argues that 'Man is like Perseus, he cannot look at the Gorgon of the future except in the mirror of the past' (*CDN* 4: 368). It seems significant that Chesterton turns to the mythic city-builder, Perseus, to crystallise this vision. Again we are reminded of his contention that the 'man building up an intellectual system has to build like Nehemiah, with the sword in one hand and the trowel in the other. The imagination, the constructive quality, is the trowel, and argument is the sword'. Nehemiah was another city builder, who employed his sword and trowel in the task of rebuilding Jerusalem—an appropriate context given that Chesterton's project, like Blake's before him, was to restore his personal vision of Jerusalem to England. To this end, the opening *Father Brown* story, 'The Blue Cross', takes up the trowel to enact an imaginative excavation of the hidden London, while employing satire—Chesterton's 'sword of the spirit'—to deconstruct the truth-claims of rivalling approaches to urban reform.

On a generic level, 'The Blue Cross' directly challenges Doyle's agonistic model in its portrayal of the Holmesian investigator, Aristide Valentin, possessor of 'one of the most powerful intellects in Europe' (*FB* 3), who is discovered wandering alone through the city in pursuit of the criminal mastermind, Flambeau, only to be taken in hand by the childlike Father Brown, and given a lesson in the more benign recreational possibilities of the city.[4] Simultaneously, the putative remove of the social reformer is challenged by Brown's carnivalesque *modus operandi*, which marshals the submerged festive spirit of the city to draw the intellectual into an enforced communality, designed to recover a capacity for empathetic engagement. Meanwhile, the various acts of urban disruption that

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[4] Brown's childlike qualities are repeatedly emphasised in the series, as in the narrator's account of his 'high and almost childish voice' (*FB* 14).

Brown perpetrates in order to achieve this resolution illustrate his identification with the 'undeserving' poor who Booth sought to expel from the city, while simultaneously teaching the systematising intellectual a lesson in the positive applications of urban disorder.

On the surface, 'The Blue Cross' is the story of Valentin's attempt to apprehend Flambeau before he can steal a valuable item of ecclesiastical paraphernalia, which is being carried across London to a religious conference by Father Brown. From their entry to the capital at Liverpool Street station to the end of the pursuit on Hampstead Heath it appears that Flambeau has been leading Father Brown out of town in order to rob him in an isolated spot. A series of bizarre disturbances along the way confuse Valentin as to Flambeau's strategy, while providing the trail which enables him to maintain his pursuit. On the Heath it transpires that Brown has been orchestrating these disturbances himself in order to help Valentin along, and that he has, as it were, double-crossed Flambeau *en route*, by swapping the package containing the cross and posting it to its destination.

In this way, Chesterton employs various structurally disruptive motifs to toy with both the fixity of the characters' roles and the reader's epistemological bearings. For example, the narrator's introductory assertion that Valentin is 'the most famous investigator of the world' (*FB* 3) encourages the inference that an infallible detective hero, modelled upon the Holmes archetype, has been introduced, a conception gradually undermined throughout the following action, in which Valentin fumbles his way to the conclusion, increasingly exasperated by the apparently irrational nature of events. Since the reader is compelled to follow Valentin as the focus of narrative perplexity, both occupy a 'naked state of nescience' (*FB* 6) which enables Chesterton to induct a new approach to detection, on the principle that the detective must attempt to empathise with the mind of the criminal in order to successfully second-guess the next move in the game.

The criminal minds that Valentin and the reader must attempt to comprehend are those of Father Brown and Chesterton, since, as Priestman notes, Brown occupies 'the structural space that would belong to the criminal in a normal detective story' (126). This structural displacement enables Brown to overturn Valentin's complacent segregation of the detective and the criminal, as

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illustrated at the outset by his reflection that the "'criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic'" (*FB* 7), as he sits, like Poe's ruminative *flâneur*, alone in a café. Valentin's categorical epigram is immediately challenged by the first of the practical jokes that punctuate the story, in which the 'sour smile' that accompanies the bon mot—which closely recalls the 'sneer' that Chesterton attributed to Doyle's handling of Poe, and operates as a symbol of the unconstructive nature of Valentin's inward-facing, superior sense of humour at the outset—is parodied by the surprise absence of sweetness in his coffee: 'He had put salt in it' (*FB* 7), because the condiments have been swapped by Brown.

The priest's joke echoes Chesterton's advocacy of a grotesque democracy that would subvert 'the modern notion that a clever man can make a joke without taking part in it', engendering an enforced communality that initiates Valentin into the disorientating conditions of the game. As Stewart explains, 'in children's games, the formation of a boundary is intrinsic to getting in or out of the game. The way to form such a boundary is to make a play gesture, a movement that sends the message "this is play" and marks off the particularly space and time that will characterize the game. This movement may take the form of a mock attack or stunt' (91). In each of the opening three *Father Brown* stories Chesterton employs the term 'borderland' (*FB* 15, 33, 38) in one context or another, and a common preoccupation of the stories is the construction of liminal spaces which open up sites of carnivalesque disturbance. In this instance, the swapping of the salt and sugar is the stunt that signals the beginning of a game of hide and seek, through which Chesterton achieves a fictional realization of his vision of the city as a 'playground for adults'.

Brown's strategic promotion of a topsy-turvy game atmosphere highlights the carnivalesque basis of the story, in which the priest's anarchic actions parody the conventional intellectual riddles of modern mystery writing. As Bakhtin explains, in medieval Europe a 'carnival atmosphere reigned on days when mysteries and *soties* [broad satires] were produced' (*Rabelais* 5), while in carnival itself 'the images of games, prophecies (as parodies), and riddles [were] combined with folk elements to form an organic whole' (*Rabelais* 236–37). Brown's subversion of Valentin's private joke not only delivers the first riddle to be solved, but also corroborates Bakhtin's assertion that carnival laughter 'is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants […]

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he who is laughing also belongs to it'. This principle corresponds to the communal ethos of Chesterton's 'reforms' articles, as exemplified by his account of the resemblance of children's play to the origins of theatre: 'the theatre was originally what children's play is, a festival, a strictly ceremonial rejoicing. Children merely reproduce the theatre in a more human, direct, and powerful manner, by being themselvs [sic] both the spectators and the actors' (BL MS Add.73381 ff.77). Again, Bakhtin's view of carnival is strikingly comparable: it is 'life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play. In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators' (*Rabelais* 7).

Bakhtin explains that the 'common denominator' of carnival is the establishment of a period of 'gay time' (*Rabelais* 237), which he terms a '"hiatus between two moments of biographical time […] a pure digression from the normal course of life"' (qtd. in Clark and Holquist 281). The central section of 'The Blue Cross', which begins with Brown's first practical joke, operates as just such a demonstration of 'gay time', book-ended by the introductory biographical description of the protagonists and the closing explanation of events on the Heath. Stewart's account of the realm of play is again relevant: 'Once the world of everyday life and realism is cut off from the fiction, there is a concurrent movement toward play time' (118). Significantly, this results in 'the removal of hierarchical order and privileged signification' (Stewart 118), an action which divests Valentin of the worldly prestige of his investigator status and opens up a carnivalesque space, which temporarily privileges the unofficial figure, the '"wise fool"' (Bakhtin, *Problems* 150), Father Brown.[5]

Simultaneously, 'The Blue Cross' enacts an eccentric pastiche of the medieval mystery play—the form that Chesterton considered '"far bolder in its burlesque" and […] more "democratic" in its "satire"' than any modern theatrical spectacle—as we pursue a follower of Christ, temporarily reimagined as a carnivalesque 'Abbot of Unreason' (Rozik, *Comedy* 160), who carries a miniature cross on a mad dash across the city. The last detail is significant, since the symbolism of the cross is central to the story's principle of urban recreation. Chesterton finds a physical correlative of his vision of the cross as 'a signpost for

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[5] The grocer in 'The Blue Cross' refers to Brown as a 'fool' (*FB* 9).

free travellers' (*Orthodoxy* 21) in the streets that link each block of housing, civic square and area of public parkland in the form of a crossroads. As Gabrielle Dean has noted, in Chesterton's essay on the value of detective fiction '[t]he city is [...] rather remarkably described by Chesterton as the incarnation of the visual-textual grid' (328). However, Dean does not account for the subversive intent of this apparently rationalistic vision, which is located in Chesterton's reorganisation of the city on the principle of a game-board, configured, like the children's game of hide and seek, in 1:1 scale. In the crossroads that link every square of the urban game-board, Chesterton discovers a connective design which encourages 'free-travel' to a vast grid of new playgrounds.[6]

As Hayes and Tololyan have noted, the progress of the protagonists in 'The Blue Cross' also sketches a cross upon the city, since the pursuit follows an axis 'east to west, and south to north, Liverpool Street Station to Scotland Yard and on to Victoria Station, then north to Camden Town and Hampstead Heath' (398). Thus, Brown compels his fellow players to follow a route which enacts a benediction of the city; an appropriate image, since the pedagogic play that Brown engages in along the way is intended to safeguard the city's structure, by exposing the investigator to a process of festive re-education. This motif of benediction is prefigured in 'The Painful Fall of a Great Reputation', in which the narrator contrasts the enervated landscape of the new projects with the 'crooked entries, to those really mean streets, to those genuine slums which lie round the Thames and the City, in which nevertheless a real possibility remains that at any chance corner the great cross of the great cathedral of Wren may strike down the street like a thunderbolt' (*CW* 6: 83-84). It is almost as though the city's very structure proceeds organically from the focal nexus of St Paul's, with the thunderbolts projected from the dome blasting crossroads into the landscape at every turning.

This image of the church as a benevolent guardian of vibrant disorder is complemented by Chesterton's account, in *London* (1914), of the iconoclasm of the city's inhabitants, a trait that he directly associates with the capital's happenstance structure: 'A rather surly love of liberty (or rather of independence) *is written in the straggling map of London, and proclaimed in its patchwork*

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[6] Another example of Chesterton refiguring the landscape as a board game is found in 'The Ballade of a Strange Town' (*DN* 2 May 1908). Discussing a trip to Flanders, Chesterton writes of 'a cross-roads', beyond which lay 'only the infinite flat chess-board of the little fields' (*CDN* 5: 63).

architecture. There is in it something that every Englishman feels in himself […]; something of the amateur; something of the eccentric. The nearest phrase is the negative one of "unofficial"' (*London* 12; my emphasis). Chesterton's invocation of an 'unofficial' spirit again recalls Bakhtin's account of the destabilisation of official life that took place during the medieval carnival, within which the church would temporarily collaborate in subverting the very authority that it conventionally embodied. Chesterton's connection of this anti-authoritarian ethos to the city's 'patchwork architecture' also helps to explain his use of the squares of London as the locus of much of the action in 'The Blue Cross'. The narrator refers to the 'patchwork' (*FB* 5) quality of the city's layout, while building a chiming refrain upon the word 'square', in a manner that recalls the insistent repetition of 'hedge' in *Thursday*: Valentin 'was walking in the streets and squares beyond Victoria, he paused suddenly and stood. It was a quaint and quiet square, very typical of London, full of an accidental stillness [… with a] square of shrubbery in the centre' (*FB* 5). When Valentin begins his active pursuit, Chesterton again employs collapsed repetition to draw attention to the significance of the symbol:

> 'Which way did these parsons go?' asked Valentin.
> 'Up that second road on the left-hand side, and then across the square', said the other promptly.
> 'Thanks', said Valentin, and vanished like a fairy. On the other side of the second square he found a policeman (*FB* 9).

Heissenbuttel has argued that in the conventional detective story 'the reconstruction of the trace of the unnarrated […] does not happen in a merely psychological, sociological, or even ethnological humanization; it happens, remarkably enough, topographically' (85). Still more remarkably, in 'The Blue Cross' Chesterton's 'reconstruction' is principally concerned with detecting the hidden narrative of the topography itself, the original purposes of which he seeks to excavate, as a means of renovating the past to perpetually revitalise the present. To this end, the square refrain not only evokes the concept of a 1:1 board-game, but also a proto-Bakhtinian recovery of the communal public market square as a festive space. As Bakhtin explains, '[p]eople who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival

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square' (*Problems* 123), and consequently '[t]he main arena for carnival acts was the square and the streets adjoining it' (*Problems* 128). Therefore, in 'carnivalized literature the square, as a setting for the action of the plot, becomes two-levelled and ambivalent' (*Problems* 128). Correspondingly, Valentin passes through streets which 'seemed built out of the blank backs of everything and everywhere' (*FB* 11-12), a vision of spatial/temporal heterogeneity which accords with the 'heterogeneous architectural sources' (McKellar 193) of the typical post-1660 London square.

The almost hallucinatory imagery of Valentin's passage through the city evokes a sense of the old city shining through the new, a conceit comparable to the visual trick which the Edwardian pantomime borrowed from a convention of the fairy-tale: 'the Transformation Scene when the front scene is still there, but the back scene begins to glow through it' ('The Peasant.' *DN* 8 July 1911; *CDN* 7: 163). As Chesterton observes in his essay on London, it 'is a mediaeval town […] but its soul has been sunk deeper under other things than any other town that remembers mediaevalism at all. It is very hard indeed to find London in London' (*London* 10). This rhetoric of detection posits the submersion of the true city not so much as structural, but rather conceptual—the overground landscape of London invites the possibilities of play, yet the scales of convention cause these possibilities to remain concealed in plain sight, like Poe's purloined letter. In *London*, Chesterton illustrates this conceptual submersion through a discussion of the original meanings of the names of various tube stations, particularly focusing upon Blackfriars (8). In view of this example, if we adopt L. P. Hartley's adage that the past is a foreign country, the disruptive presence of '"foreign parsons […] running about"' (*FB* 11) in the guise of Brown and Flambeau, each dressed as Catholic priests, begins to look peculiarly like a return of the culturally repressed in poltergeist form.

The disorderly conduct of Chesterton's avatars of carnivalesque tradition is also significant in view of the recurrent occlusion, by representatives of urban officialdom, of the purpose of the city square as a site of play. For example, in the early eighteenth century a reformation of open squares such as Lincoln's Inn Fields was urged on the grounds that in these spaces 'disorderly Persons have frequented and met together therein, using unlawful Sports and Games, and drawing in and enticing young persons into Gaming, Idleness and other vicious

Courses' (act of 1735, cited in McKellar 204–05). This account prefigures Brown's enticement of Valentin into his unlawful games, a motif of disruption that forms a point of intersection between Chesterton's critique of architectural rationalization and social authoritarianism. As McKellar explains, such pleas for reform operated as the pretext for these spaces to become 'more regularized and privatized. It was this trend which led towards the enclosing and railing in of squares resulting in the more contained and socially segregated spaces of the 1720s onwards' (205).

Knight is correct to argue that 'Chesterton's reading of culture is committed to the importance of public space' ('Signs' 134), a commitment that leads Chesterton to perceive the diminution of free public land as a psychologically demoralising act of repression upon the populace. In response, his first urgent reform, 'The Human Circulating Library', is calculated to overturn the status of the modern city as the site of the 'last and darkest of Cosmic jests, whereby a desert can be made of houses' (BL MS Add.73381 ff.75). Similarly, Bakhtin's valorisation of the public square partially operates as a critique of early twentieth-century capitalist society's figuring of the domestic space as a safe-haven, ostensibly offering protection from a forbidding world lying beyond the door, while actually screening the individual from a politically empowering connection with his/her cultural heritage. As Hirschkop notes, in Bakhtin 'the marvelously open expanses of the public square are not only literally but metaphorically spacious, allowing history a room for movement which it is denied in the bourgeois parlour or home' (249).

In a comparable spirit, Chesterton's fiction not only emphasizes the psychological benefits of communal urban spaces, but also their political facility. This is perhaps best illustrated by *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, which details the revolt of the citizens of Notting Hill against city planners who intend to build a large arterial road through their district. The streets and squares of Campden Hill form the stronghold of the dissenters (see *CW* 6: 339), a significant detail since McKellar describes the public square itself as arising 'out of a long history of open land in towns [which] formed part of a struggle to maintain common land against private interests' (198). Life began to imitate art once more shortly after the novel's publication, as Chesterton later recalled in 'The Break' (*DN* 13 July 1912), in an account which again turns upon a compulsive repetition of 'square':

'I wrote it in a small square in Kensington [...] and when I had left this square to live in more barbaric places, the inhabitants of that very square did in fact barricade themselves in it against similar capitalistic improvements—and, I am happy to say, won' (*CDN* 8: 121).[7]

This event occurred in May 1910, and would have been fresh in Chesterton's memory when he composed 'The Blue Cross' a month later. It seems likely that this revelation of the political efficacy of urban disruption, which presented a practical example of the more positive connotations of the symbiotic traffic of influence between fiction and reality, informed the conceptualisation of Chesterton's new story. In 'The Blue Cross', he again depicts the public square as a space in which ideological schemes can be disrupted, although on this occasion his attention turns from subverting the utilitarian spatial demands of commercial interests to the utilitarian social demands of the philanthropic reformer.

Father Brown and 'Class B'

In June 1910, Chesterton not only published 'The Blue Cross', but also *What's Wrong with the World*, a social polemic which contains his most sustained satirical critique of contemporary urban reform. The centrepiece of the text is the 'History of Hudge and Gudge', a sardonic account of the machinations of two social reformers of ostensibly polarised political persuasions. This conceit embodies Chesterton's belief that the apparently contrary motivations of the capitalist free-marketer and the philanthropic socialist are ultimately allied in their impatiently authoritarian attitude toward the poor, whose lives obdurately stand in the way of 'progress'. As Chesterton explains, he has a dark 'suspicion that Hudge and Gudge are secretly in partnership. That the quarrel they keep up in public is very much of a put-up job' (*CW* 4: 214). Chesterton's projection of a convergence in opposition between these Tweedledum and Tweedledee figures was perhaps inspired by the solitary example of Booth, whose combination of commercial pragmatism and social paternalism renders him a pristine amalgam of Hudge and Gudge. This convergence is illustrated with particular clarity by

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[7] See Hobhouse, ch.17, for an account of this event.

Booth's somewhat perverse skewing of socialist ideology:

> Our Individualism fails because our Socialism is incomplete. In taking charge of the lives of the incapable, State Socialism finds its proper work […] interference on the part of the State with the lives of a small fraction of the population would make it possible, ultimately, to dispense with any socialistic interference in the lives of the rest (*Physical* 31).

In November 1910, Chesterton published another significant non-fictional text, his critical study, *William Blake*. Here he identifies 'one figure [… who is] quite monotonously recurrent' in Blake's art, an entity with a comparably dualistic bearing to that of Hudge and Gudge, though here rendered benign: 'the Ancient of Days; the thing which is old with all the awfulness of its past, but young with all the energies of the future' (17). In *Father Brown*, this temporally Janus-faced being is split into the persons of Father Brown and Flambeau. As Walter Raubicheck notes, Brown symbolises the wisdom of the ages in his between-time status as 'an Aquinas transferred from thirteenth-century France and Italy to twentieth-century England, alienated from the spirit of his time' (45). In a complementary conceit, Flambeau's *nom de plume* symbolises elemental, regenerative energy, while also hinting at his mythic status as an innocently disruptive folk-devil. As Chesterton notes in a later essay on 'William Blake and Inspiration' (*ILN* 1929, collected in *Handful*), in Blake 'devils stood for the divine principle of energy and angels for the divine principle of wisdom' (*Handful* 79).

In view of Chesterton's elaboration of the conflicting dyads of Hudge and Gudge and the Ancient of Days in his non-fictional work of 1910, it is notable that in 'The Blue Cross' Father Brown and Flambeau are structurally aligned as the pairing who lead Valentin—a 'humanitarian' whose 'mercy [was] even colder than justice' (*FB* 19)—on an urban expedition designed to pedagogically convert the misguided rationalist. In this way, Chesterton sets up a thematic conflict between 'a quite temporary social atmosphere [and] the eternal sanity' ('Education by Fairy Tales.' *ILN* 2 Dec. 1905; *CW* 27: 73), in which his mythic representatives of the existential grotesque satirically interact with, and ultimately overcome, the fallacious 'doxas' of the contemporary world. In pursuing this agenda, Chesterton particularly sets out to challenge the contemporary view that urban disruption represented an expression of degeneracy that must be purged

from the city. In *London*, Chesterton expands his account of the city's rebellious spirit to conjure an anthropomorphic vision of the city as an uncooperative suspect, evading utilitarian demands to justify its conduct, thus positing the whole metropolis as a metaphor for the anti-utilitarian class anathematized by Booth: 'there is something shy about London: it is full of secrets and anomalies; and it does not like to be asked what it is for' (13). It has been 'a sort of half-rebel through […] many centuries. Hence it is a city of side streets that only lead into side streets; a city of short-cuts that take a long time' (13).

The acute existential urgency that Chesterton attached to the question of social utility can be explained, in part, by the fact that he identified so readily with the 'class' of people who the reformer sought to expel. Booth's complaint that 'Class B' 'cannot stand the regularity and dulness of civilized existence, and find the excitement they need in the life of the streets' (Booth, *Portrait* 14) could be seamlessly applied to Chesterton—and, oddly enough, to Booth himself—and Chesterton was acutely aware that only the accident of his birth into the middle-class rendered the vagaries of his character socially acceptable. For example, in a later essay, 'The Witch-Smellers' (*DN* 20 July 1912), Chesterton employs another self-reflexive reference to his famous absent-mindedness to elaborate a social moral: '[i]f any tramp were as vague as I am about what happened last Tuesday he would be segregated before you could say Saleeby' (*CDN* 8: 127). At this time, the Fabian movement remained tentatively sympathetic to the theories promulgated by Caleb Saleeby's 'Eugenics Education Society', and this receptivity informs Stapleton's speculation that Herbert Spencer and Beatrice Webb may have been the models for the proud parents in Chesterton's burlesque parody of investigative journalism, 'How I found the Superman' (*DN* 5 Dec. 1908). Here Chesterton derides the notion that social engineering might further the cause of human progress towards a higher evolutionary state, instead rendering the concept of the Superman gruesomely corporeal in his satirical account of uncovering an abject nonsense-creature 'not of any human shape', who possesses feathers in place of hair, though '"[n]ot feathers, as we understand feathers"', as the father explains 'in an awful voice' (*CDN* 5: 224).

In this climate, Chesterton's sense of affinity with obdurately anti-utilitarian members of society also derived from his status as a creative artist, a constituency which Valentin associates with '[t]he criminal' in his initial epigram. As Shaw

later recalled, despite his close association with the Fabians, he considered himself 'highly obnoxious to Beatrice [Webb] for the technical reason that I could not be classified'; Webb 'had no use for […] the complications introduced by artists, Irishmen and […] eccentric and anarchic individuals' (*My* 11). In this light, a satirical dimension pertains to the communicative methodology employed by Chesterton's abbot of unreason, in which the spirit of the creative artist is conflated with that of the occupants of 'Class B', who Booth considered '*du trop*' (Booth, *Portrait* 293), a term that translates as both 'unwelcome' ('de trop' Thompson, D. 391), and 'unreasonably excessive' ('de trop' *Wiktionary*). In attempting to understand the actions of his apparent adversaries, Valentin 'coldly and carefully followed the train of the *unreasonable* […] he systematically went to the wrong places' (*FB* 6; my emphasis), and his success in pursuing this policy ultimately serves to challenge Booth's conception of the degeneracy of aimless itinerancy.

In his autobiography, Chesterton expresses delight at a correspondent's description of Brown as a '"loafer"' (*Autobiography* 328), a term that identifies the priest with the 'loafers and semi-criminals' (Booth qtd. in Inwood 54) of Booth's underclass, and which Chesterton considers an 'appropriate compliment' (*Autobiography* 328) for his hero. When Valentin first encounters Brown he considers him 'helpless' (*FB* 5)—precisely the term used by Booth to characterise 'Class B', when he bemoans the 'shiftlessness, helplessness, [and] idleness' (*Portrait* 14) of that group. Given the apparent shiftlessness attendant to Brown's traversal of the capital, he succeeds in embodying the full trinity of Booth's negative traits within a single story, a detail which serves to promote a sense of Brown's correspondence with increasingly maligned social groups. Indeed, Brown is not only depicted as an aimless loafer, but also as a semi-criminal vandal. In addition to throwing a cup of soup against a café wall, and, somewhat metaphorically, upsetting an apple cart in a greengrocers, his penchant for public disorder is encapsulated by the account of his actions in a pub, in which he smashes a window with his umbrella. The latter act identifies him with 'Class A' in Booth's terms: 'the worst class of corner men who hang round the doors of public-houses [… and supply] the ready materials for disorder when occasion serves' (*Portrait* 11).

While Brown's disorderly behaviour is undertaken to assist Valentin in his pursuit of Flambeau, it also functions in a deeper pedagogic context, the satirical purpose of which is directly related to the notion that the occupants of 'Class B' possess the capacity to demoralise those around them. In a precise inversion, the purpose of Brown's vandalism is to re-moralise his companions. First, the priest's actions introduce Flambeau to a new perspective on the creative possibilities of detection, which eventually convinces him to terminate his criminal activities, effecting the regeneration of a representative of 'Class A'—the 'semi-criminal'—who Booth considered so far beyond redemption that they should simply be 'gradually harried out of existence' (*Portrait* 299). Simultaneously, Brown attempts to re-moralise Valentin, as a member of the investigating class, via a lesson in the importance of imaginative empathy, a pedagogic aim that he achieves by replacing the rationalistic materialism of the conventional Holmesian clue with the empathetic lateral thinking of the joke.

The structural joke of 'The Blue Cross' is that which Chesterton describes, in an unrelated context, in 'Modern and Medieval Monsters' (*ILN* 5 Sept. 1908): 'the elf capturing the constable' (*CW* 28: 174). This conceit adds a further pedagogic dimension to the folkloric fairy-tale motif that also runs through *Thursday*, since Brown commits a series of Puckish, physically disruptive acts, while being defined throughout by an elusive physical absence, in a manner which renders Moriarty's ominous evanescence benignly effervescent. Shaw recalled that Beatrice Webb finally reconciled herself to him when she 'discovered a classification for me. I was a Sprite; and in that category I became happily domesticated at holiday times' (*My* 11). This is also how Valentin ultimately engages with Brown, and the latter's elfish machinations finally produce a positive metamorphosis on Valentin's part, in turn—upon leaving the greengrocer's, the investigator 'vanished like a fairy' (*FB* 9).

The thoroughgoing success of Brown's strategy is demonstrated when Valentin successfully reaches his destination, and promptly suspends his authority upon discovering the truth of the mystery. The *dramatis personae* are put in such good humour by the carnivalesque game-plot that Valentin forgets to bother arresting Flambeau, and Flambeau forgets to run away, they merely stand applauding Brown's ingenuity, while exchanging expressions of respect and friendship—Flambeau sweeps 'Valentin a great bow', and Valentin terms his

erstwhile foe, '*mon ami*' (*FB* 18). The story's denouement solves the puzzle of Brown's purpose in leading Valentin on his bracing cross-city jaunt, as well as Chesterton's purpose in constructing this play-reorientation of the detection genre. As he explains in *Orthodoxy*, 'if you or I were dealing with a mind that was growing morbid, we should be chiefly concerned not so much to give it arguments as to give it air, to convince it that there was something cleaner and cooler outside the suffocation of a single argument' (12).

In this way, the priest achieves a utopian reconfiguration of Booth's agonistic precepts, persuading the misguided to change their minds through a combination of reasoned argument (in dialogue with Flambeau at the conclusion) and unreasoned play (in the preceding chase with Valentin), rather than eliminating unlike minds through forcible expulsion. Here Chesterton's psychological concerns can again be understood to inform his philosophy, both in the sense that Brown's mediating position between the two men enables him to counterbalance the former's relativism (as expounded on the Heath) and the latter's dogmatism (as expounded in the café), and insofar as his tempering of this extremism convinces both men to effect a personal change of outlook, in an echo of the ministrations of the monitory parodist, discussed in chapter one.

The last of Chesterton's four proofs of sanity states that 'most sane men believe, and all sane men in practice assume, that they have a power of choice and responsibility for action' (*CDN* 4: 242). The conversion narrative of 'The Blue Cross' not only exemplifies Chesterton's belief in the capacity of individuals to engage autonomously in positive change, rather than being bound by the deterministic chains of heredity, but also constitutes the formula for the construction of a brotherhood of man. Chesterton's utopian conclusion produces an existentially grotesque reconciliation of the binaries of the detective, Valentin, and the criminal, Flambeau—binaries which are also internally hybridised through the structural location of Father Brown as a detective-criminal. This grotesque premise is then lent satirical grounding by its challenge both to generic monologism and to the 'monotony' of urban planning and social classification, to produce a sophisticated counterweighting of the poles of parody.

In view of the role of the excavated play-spirit of the city in abetting Father Brown's raucous constitutional, it is appropriate that the game should finally be brought to an end when the urban landscape melts into the 'Vale of Health' (*FB*

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13) that leads on to the communal leisure space of Hampstead Heath, a protected area of common land described, in a contemporary poster, as 'London's Playground' ('London's Playground'), and populated, in the story at hand, with 'holiday makers' (*FB* 13). This final touch brings Chesterton's re-creation of the city as a playground for adults to an appropriately literal resolution, in a context that again suggests a critique of social segregation. Seven years earlier, in 'The Gate of Town and Country' (*DN* 8 Aug. 1903), Chesterton had written in praise of the success of a movement to prevent Eton College building upon the Heath. In summarizing the importance of this victory, Chesterton explains that 'Hampstead Heath is beautiful, but it is something more than beautiful [. . .] It is a real playground of the poor' (*CDN* 2: 110).

The interplay of urban satire and urban grotesque in 'The Blue Cross' suggests that Chesterton's critical ruminations on William Blake at this time spilled over into his creative work. The titles of the first *Father Brown* collections—*The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911), and *The Wisdom of Father Brown* (1914)—borrow Blake's *Innocence* and *Experience* schema, representing Brown as a hybrid of the purity of childhood and the judgement of age, while the imagery of Blake's 'London' finds an echo in Brown's attempts to divest Valentin of his 'mind-forged manacles' by refiguring the utilitarian cityscape of the 'chartered streets' (Blake, W; Plate 46) as a game-board. Chesterton later identified the particular appeal of Blake to lie in the incongruous quality of his urban imagination: 'the great golden lions of Blake roared and roamed in a small court off the Strand' (*Autobiography* 140). Similarly, Flambeau's elemental *nom de plume* evokes the 'furnace' in which the 'Tyger, burning bright' (*Songs* Plate 42) is wrought, while anthropomorphising and relocating the image to the streets of London. At the denouement, Flambeau is poised 'to leap like a tiger' (*FB* 17), only to be restrained by the curiosity that Brown's unclassifiable behaviour engenders, before finally achieving utopian reconciliation with the priestly representative of the meek 'lamb' (Blake, W; Plate 42), an allusive framework which lends the local social context a universal theological dimension.

In Chesterton's pedagogically disruptive urban vision, incongruity is celebrated for the same qualities which the Victorian parodist, H.D. Traill, considered the word to encapsulate: 'the unfit, the unsuitable, the discordant, the imperfect […] the unsymmetrical, the disorderly, in one word, the *wrong*' (qtd. in

Martin 23). As well as embodying all those elements which are 'left over, by every rationalistic system of life' in Chesterton's view, incongruity literally means 'disagreement' (inverting the Latin, *congruere*, or 'agree'; Barnhart 207). If the story at hand sets up an incongruity, or disagreement, with Holmesian detection, in order to celebrate 'the wrong', or excluded, in a social sense, it is also notable that Colebrook discerns a further dimension of disagreement, or wrongness, in Blake's myriad-minded vocabulary. In discussing the democratically grotesque immanence of 'London', Colebrook argues that Blake's text 'both manages to express its lament and suggests that this lament is part of the problem' (58).

A similar quality of internalised disagreement is discernible in Sewell's account of the 'curious doubleness of vision […] apparent' ('Giant' 559) in Chesterton's symbolic landscape, which is manifested in his use of identical images to represent both good and evil in differing contexts and essays. While Sewell sees this as evidence of psychological disarray, Chesterton's follow-up to 'The Blue Cross', 'The Secret Garden', discloses a comparable 'doubleness of vision' being put to work in a deliberate act of collapsed self-dialogising, which implies that Chesterton was conscious that the philosophical limitations of monologic utopianism were also 'part of the problem'. In consequence, to echo Chesterton's account of the temporary nature of happiness, the utopian conclusion of 'The Blue Cross' is 'not a state; it is a crisis', which is immediately followed by a gesture of self-reflexive contradiction. As the following analysis will demonstrate, this causes the opening dyad of *Father Brown* stories to rebound inconclusively between *aporic* irresolution and a thoroughly anti-utopian form of narrative closure.

Metaparody, and the Limits of Utopian Brotherhood

> [W]here were these extravagant amputations going to stop? First one head was hacked off, and then another; in this case ([O'Brien] told himself bitterly) it was not true that two heads were better than one.
>
> Chesterton, 'The Secret Garden' (29)

> There is a mystical, even a monstrous truth, in the statement that two heads are better than one. But they ought both to grow on the same body.
>
> Chesterton, *Manalive* (52)

In the opening line of 'The Blue Cross', Chesterton teases the reader by withholding the specifics of Valentin's identity, merely noting that 'the man we must follow was by no means conspicuous—nor wished to be' (*FB* 3), a phrase that could equally apply to a detective or a criminal. This initial hint of the ambiguously interchangeable nature of ostensibly binary roles is fully realised in the stories that follow, in which Valentin becomes a criminal, and Flambeau later becomes a detective. Valentin's negative conversion occurs in 'The Secret Garden', when the investigator returns to his official working life in Paris, and once more mislays his sense of humour, to such an extent that he gruesomely murders Julius K. Brayne, a philanthropic benefactor to nonconformist religions, before killing himself in turn. This plotline directly inverts the crimeless utopia of the previous story, much as Chesterton immediately followed up his critical essay on the 'value' of detective fiction with a complementary essay on its 'danger'. In 'The Secret Garden', Chesterton constructs the antithesis to the thesis of 'The Blue Cross', mocking the naivety of his own idealism in an act of collapsed self-parody.

Internalisation of adversarial dialogue was an everyday feature of Chesterton's life—as Wills notes, he would walk up and down in his garden '"heckling himself" for hours with ideas and arguments and symbolic duels' (*Man* 209). As I demonstrated in my opening chapter, this self-critical quality also found its way into Chesterton's creative work, in his monitory representation of MacIan in *The Ball and the Cross* and Herne in *The Return of Don Quixote*. Boyd observes that the latter text ultimately conveys the message that the 'restoration of pageantry and colour to political life which delights Herne and his followers is

also a means of deceiving them. It might be argued that the Distributist criticism of State Socialism and Capitalism is now turned against Distributism itself' (192-93). When the opening *Father Brown* stories are read together in the context of their parodic relationship to *Sherlock Holmes*, the result is a comparable act of self-questioning, which produces an example of what Morson terms 'metaparody'.

Morson argues that conventional parody establishes a position 'of open disagreement' with an *ur* text, in which the 'second utterance represents the first in order to discredit it, and so introduce a "semantic direction" which subverts that of the original' ('Parody' 66). As I have demonstrated, 'The Blue Cross' conforms to this principle by discrediting the perpetual schism of Doyle's play-world, and introducing the alternative semantic direction necessary to produce a contrastive state of utopian brotherhood. In this way, 'the second voice clearly [claims to represent] a higher "semantic authority" than the first', so that the 'audience of the conflict knows for sure with whom it is expected to agree' (Morson, 'Parody' 66-67). Morson argues that metaparody constitutes a further dialogic step beyond this combative stage, 'by first parodying an original, then parodying the parody of the original', with the effect that '[r]eaders of metaparody […] comprehend the work not as the compromise between book and counterbook, but as their ultimately inconclusive dialogue' ('Parody' 81).

'The Secret Garden' conforms to this principle, by thematically re-establishing a Holmesian model of agonistic alienation, even as it enacts the structural extermination of the logician detective, while drawing both the reader and the parodist into the sphere of criticism by disclosing the dangers of credulity before the claims of romance—whether those of the Holmesian rationalist or the Chestertonian demagogue. Significantly, Morson identifies 'meta-utopia' as a characteristically 'metaparodic genre. A type of threshold literature, meta-utopias are designed to be interpreted as dialogues between utopia and the parody of utopia' ('Parody' 85). In the case at hand, by having Valentin commit the two most serious crimes in Christian doctrine, Chesterton showcases the fragility of the utopian brotherhood constructed by 'The Blue Cross', which is parodied in a dystopian exposition of monomaniacal derangement and violence. If 'The Blue Cross' constitutes an apparently self-contained and convincing realisation of Chesterton's critical and creative aims, it seems that he is drawn, nonetheless, to exposing any narrative that his own thesis might have 'left over', even if this

means disturbing the unity of his original vision, in order to expose the artificial limitations that this unity imposes. As Bakhtin argues, '[a]ll of European utopianism' has been 'built on [the] monologic principle' (*Problems* 82), and the anti-utopia of 'The Secret Garden' acknowledges the comparable danger of single-mindedness in the drift of Chesterton's own thought.

By arresting Aristide's dramatic presence in a manner which serves to deselect the representative of officialdom from his circle of friends, Chesterton also hints at the tension between his Whitmanian ethical ideal of the 'new city of friends' and his equally strong urge to maintain subjective definition through opposition. In one sense, Chesterton's metaparodic sequel operates in another subtly utopian context, as an attempt to overcome the agonism of the game of parody between one author and another, in which a fight for discursive authority is staged, by implying that Chesterton's crimeless utopias 'may be no more authoritative' as a generic model than the paranoiac fantasias of Doyle's imaginative landscape. However, in another sense the story represents Chesterton's final, unequivocal assertion that there is no place for the Holmesian logician within his vision of the genre, and the unresolved dialogic tension between these incompatible positions informs the imagery and plot development of 'The Secret Garden' in a number of subtle ways.

In view of my earlier account of Chesterton's symbolic association of the cross and the sword with the poles of the grotesque and the satiric, it is telling that the cross, which operates as the abiding symbol of free play in the 'The Blue Cross', is conspicuously absent from 'The Secret Garden', and is replaced by the sword as the object around which the crime centres. Since a sword is the weapon with which Valentin brutally dispatches Brayne—he hated 'his foe so fiendishly that he stood sabring his body in the moonlight' (*FB* 29)—this operates as a symbol of the dogmatic certainties that inform Valentin's dry wit, unalloyed by the confession of internal contradiction which Chesterton ascribes to humour. On the other hand, the metaparodic status of the text in relation to the previous story corresponds to Chesterton's account of the symbolic meaning of the cross, as discussed in chapter one, insofar as it is enacts 'the conflict of two hostile lines, of irreconcilable direction'.

The implicit interrelation of the opening stories covertly smuggles the grotesque principle of the cross into a narrative which thematically critiques monomania by expelling that symbol on the action level, and replacing it with the satirical symbol of the sword, which I discussed in the previous section as the weapon taken up by Chesterton himself, after Nehemiah, in order to dogmatically refute the validity of the Holmesian model of detection. Consequently, metaparody can be understood to operate as a creative expression of the capacity for self-contradictory internal dialogue that Chesterton claims to be the augur of the healthy self-doubt which governs 'humour'. Ironically, when this element is injected into 'The Secret Garden', the effect is to celebrate the author's capacity to consider himself wrong, in a manner which subtly encodes a further implied criticism of the monologic certainties of Doyle's fictional world, so that the very confession of internal contradiction subtly reinstates a sense of the author's more fundamental rectitude.

In the 'Humour' essay, Chesterton describes fictional self-parody as an innovation of Cervantes, in *Don Quixote*: 'with the great Cervantes [comes] an element new in its explicit expression; that grand and very Christian quality of the man who laughs at himself. Cervantes was himself more chivalrous than most men when he began to mock at chivalry' (*Spice* 28). Similarly, Chesterton's scrupulously chivalrous approach to debunking the romances of Doyle is reinforced by his capacity to laugh at his own utopian ambitions. As Dentith argues, in Cervantes' novel, 'it is not the falseness of parodied genres that makes them subject to attack, but their one-sided seriousness' (*Parody* 76). In an earlier article, which figures *Don Quixote* as 'The Divine Parody' (*DN* 3 Sept. 1901), Chesterton claims that Cervantes' text is also wholesomely anti-Hegelian in its purposeful irresolution, thus hinting at the status of dialogism as a freezing of the dialectical process at the inconclusive stage of antithetic relation: it 'will always remain and give a great deal of trouble to any persons who wish to tie us up finally in any political constitution or synthetic philosophy' (*CDN* 1: 178). In the same article, Chesterton conjures a gravely visionary, yet tangibly utopian vision of the novel's dialogic message, which figures *Don Quixote* as an archetype of the existential grotesque, or 'an irony that is older than the world':

> Deep underneath all the superficial wit and palpable gaiety of [*Don Quixote*] there
> runs a far deeper kind of irony—an irony that is older than the world. It is the irony
> that tells us that we live in a maddening and perplexing world, in which we are all
> right; and that the battle of existence has always been like King Arthur's last battle in
> the mist, one in which "friend slew friend, not knowing whom he slew" (*CDN* 1:
> 177).

This is also the message that Chesterton attempts to encode within the metaparodic structure of 'The Secret Garden', mitigating his attack upon Doyle with the implication that perhaps, generically, 'we are all right', in a story that depicts, by way of negative example, Valentin slaying a figure who he takes to be an implacable existential enemy, in the red mist of his irrational, 'monomaniac' (*FB* 29) rationalism. Much as 'The Secret Garden' operates in unresolved dialogue with 'The Blue Cross', the story thematically welds together two discordant narratives within itself —one utopian, the other anti-utopian. The first sets up a conventional romance, in which Chesterton faithfully employs the tropes of festive comedy in depicting the trials of Commandant O'Brien, an 'Irish-Algerian n'er-do-weel' (*FB* 22), who is initially barred from marrying the story's bridal figure, Lady Margaret Graham, by a suspicion of guilt in connection to the murder. The second, interlinked narrative is a satire of the modern romance of detection, in which the secondary characters are impugned for their credulity, and the figure conventionally relied upon to secure the folkloric unblocking action, the detective, is revealed to have placed the blockage in O'Brien's path, by committing the murder which he briefly attempts to pass off as O'Brien's crime.

In developing this plot-strand, Chesterton also implants a more politically pointed satirical subtext within the conventional rendering of a festive comic narrative. Much as the unofficial spirit of London triumphs over the modern professional investigator in 'The Blue Cross', O'Brien's membership of the Foreign Legion renders him an unofficial figure, who triumphs over the establishment archetypes surrounding him, such as Lord Graham, who despises him for his unorthodox military status—blustering, '"[w]here's his confounded cavalry"' (*FB* 26)—by winning the affection of Graham's daughter, who insubordinately terms her father an 'old fool' (*FB* 26) when he questions O'Brien's innocence. When the narrator refers to the Foreign Legion as a grotesquely hybridised troupe of 'victorious failures' (*FB* 20), O'Brien's success

in winning the girl structurally inverts the dictum which informed the anti-materialist premise of 'The Blue Cross'—Chesterton's monitory moral that 'nothing fails like success'. The wider geopolitical context implied by O'Brien's dual-nationality also enables Chesterton to implicitly expand his domestic critique to the imperial arena. In 1910, Algeria was subjugated by the French state, as represented in the story at hand by the official figure of Valentin, while Chesterton argued in a near-contemporaneous article ('The Kind of Man.' *DN* 26 Aug. 1911) that Britain occupied an equally ignominious position: the 'police in Ireland are practically an army of occupation', and consequently 'the whole civilised world sees Ireland [...] as a typical oppressed nation' (*CDN* 7: 191).[8]

The readiness of the guests to believe in O'Brien's guilt merges the satire of political conformity with a satire of generic conventionality, through which the characters are critiqued as excessively credulous in the face of romantic cliché, a motif which suggests a further correspondence to *Don Quixote*. Morson cites Cervantes' novel as a prototypical metaparodic text (see 'Parody' 81), and it is notable that the parodic movement of the opening *Father Brown* stories approximately corresponds to that of the two books of *Don Quixote*. As with Cervantes' dyadic text, Chesterton's opening stories gradually re-orientate the site of satirical attack from an initial criticism of the producers of devalued literature—as represented by the narrator's mockery of Futrelle's 'thinking machine' in 'The Blue Cross'—to a criticism of the uncritical consumers in 'The Secret Garden'. In 'The Divine Parody', Chesterton notes that Cervantes' second book is lacking in the '"farcical episode, in [the] burlesque force, and in the most obvious effects of humour"' (*CDN* 1: 177) possessed by the first. These effects are also those employed by 'The Blue Cross', and singularly lacking in 'The Secret Garden'. In the latter story, these ebullient qualities are replaced with a more sombre critique of the negative influence of sensational literature—including, potentially, Chesterton's own—upon the complacent reader, which corresponds to that which Cervantes encodes within his complexly self-parodic second book. As Morson elaborates, '[r]eaders of the *Quixote* [...] may be reasonably sure that the first book is a parody directed at naïve readers of romances and tales of knight errantry. But they may be less sure about the second

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[8] In *William Blake*, published contemporaneously with 'The Secret Garden', Chesterton appeals for Ireland to be made 'free, like any other Christian nation, to create her own institutions' (4).

book, which seems to be directed at readers of the first book as well ('Parody' 81).

When O'Brien stands accused of the murder, the narrator mockingly depicts the guests 'tingling at the touch of those satanic tragedies that have been between lovers before now. [… Tales] of murdered husbands and poisonous paramours' (*FB* 27). In this way, romance is employed to debunk romance, with the secondary characters, and implicitly the reader beyond them, being figured as credulous romantics who must be taught a lesson in prosaic reality, a comic conceit which stands in a parodic lineage stretching from *Don Quixote* to *Northanger Abbey* (see Dentith, *Parody* 64). In contrast, Valentin's servant, Ivan, is represented as a meta-textually self-aware respondent to the conventions of the mystery story. The narrator notes that Ivan seems to irreverently enjoy 'the glow of the domestic detective story' (*FB* 24), while his forbidding bearing and 'scarred face' (*FB* 27), operate as deliberately clichéd evocations of detective fiction archetypes on the part of the narrator. Father Brown shares Ivan's air of arch detachment, interrupting the pseudo-fictional reverie of the guests with the nonsensical imputation that Brayne must have been smoking a vastly elongated cigar to have been absent for so long. Ivan then complements Brown's interposition of a burlesque sanity upon morbid reveries, by contributing a rhetorical travesty of the situation, announcing that Brayne has '"Gone. Scooted. Evaporated"' (*FB* 27), and later referring to '"that old buffer you found on the lawn" […] without pretence of reverence' (*FB* 31).

Chesterton's debunking of the conventions of romance is not only reflected in the status of 'The Secret Garden' as a sympathetic pastiche of Cervantes, but also in the tale's extension of Chesterton's critical parodying of Poe. While 'The Blue Cross' parodically recontextualises the mutual alienation of the urban *flâneurs* of 'The Man of the Crowd' in order to enact a utopian resolution, 'The Secret Garden' satirises the alternative path of detection that Poe instigated with his introduction of the rationalist detective, Dupin, in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'. Valentin, whose French nationality links him as much to Dupin as to Holmes, asserts that the killer '"must have been as strong as a gorilla"' (*FB* 23), thus planting a seed of doubt in the other characters' minds by conflating the case at hand with a well-known story based on brute physical force rather than diseased intellect, in which the mystery derives from a locked-room puzzle, as here a locked-garden: '"the garden was sealed up like an air-tight chamber"' (*FB* 33).

This topographical vacuum operates as a travesty of the bucolic space of Hampstead Heath in 'The Blue Cross', directly inverting Chesterton's account of giving 'air' to the diseased mind, in the manner of Brown's urban constitutional, so that the garden becomes a metaphor for the claustrophobic restrictions of Valentin's monologic mind-set.

As Knight observes of the comparable metaphorical significance of the asylum in *The Ball and the Cross*, by 'dissolving the existence of the external world, the house creates a labyrinth reality that imprisons its inhabitants in the world of the grotesque' (*Evil* 82). This version of the grotesque is again the intellectually isolated, 'Romantic' variety that Bakhtin contrasts with the benign 'folk' grotesque of the carnivalesque. Poe originally planned his inaugural Dupin mystery to be published as one of his *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840), and, as Kayser notes, Poe 'uses the word grotesque […] to describe a situation in which chaos prevails' (79), much as O'Brien apprehends 'an insane universe crashing about his ears' (*FB* 30) in 'The Secret Garden'. As with the dyadic structure of *Thursday*, Chesterton's opening suite of *Father Brown* stories essays a movement between distinct forms of the grotesque, though in this instance the movement is, significantly, reversed—the fairy-tale, carnivalesque world of 'The Blue Cross' dissolves into the fractured, nonsensical nightmare of 'The Secret Garden'.

The nature of the distinction is neatly encapsulated by the imaginative leap from Valentin's carnivalesque bodily incongruity in 'The Blue Cross', which is located in the 'contrast between the holiday gaiety of his clothes and the official gravity of his face' (*FB* 3), to the grisly manner in which he transplants a criminal's head onto Brayne's decapitated body in 'The Secret Garden'. Bakhtin notes that the Romantic grotesque is a 'nocturnal' form, whereas 'folk grotesque' is a festival of 'morning' (*Rabelais* 41). The opening stories progress from 'the silver ribbon of morning' (*FB* 3) with which 'The Blue Cross' opens, to the nocturnal realm of 'The Secret Garden', which is presided over by the moon, Chesterton's circular symbol of 'reason and madness', which is invoked on nine separate occasions in the text. While Bakhtin's argument that in 'folk grotesque, madness is a gay parody of official reason' corresponds to the festive unreason of 'The Blue Cross', he notes that the theme of madness in the Romantic grotesque 'acquires a somber, tragic aspect of individual isolation' (*Rabelais* 39). The

atmosphere of dread promoted by Valentin's crime finally causes another liminal space to emerge, this time within O'Brien's imagination, to produce an evocative image of mental disarray: 'The borderland of the brain, where all the monsters are made, moved horribly in the Gaelic O'Brien. He felt the *chaotic* presence of all the horse-men and fish-women that man's unnatural fancy has begotten' (*FB* 33; my emphasis).

If the respective locations of Chesterton's opening stories—London and Paris—hark back, with arch generic self-reference, to Poe's progress from the London streets of 'The Man of the Crowd' to the Parisian locked-room of 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', these sites also contribute to the projection of complementary opposites. Chesterton's freewheeling, carnivalesque depiction of London, in which urban disorder serves as the means of inducting a more subtly harmonious social order, gives way to the diseased romanticism of O'Brien's vision of Paris: 'He saw the whole city as one ugly energy, from the sanguinary sketch lying on Valentin's table up to where, above a mountain and forest of gargoyles, the great devil grins on Notre Dame' (*FB* 30). The implication that this 'ugly energy' projects from a 'great devil' associated with Notre Dame not only inverts Chesterton's benign conception of St. Paul's as the topographical nucleus of London, but also inverts the positive, Blakean schema of Flambeau's carnivalesque devilry. Correspondingly, in 'The Secret Garden', Valentin becomes a Miltonic Romantic Satan, who ultimately refuses to 'bow to [his] master' (*FB* 18), Father Brown. When the investigator rises up in rebellion against the authority of the church, Brown asserts that '"the fanatic took flame"' (*FB* 34). As Bakhtin explains, the 'Romantic treatment of the devil is […] completely different from that of popular grotesque', with the formerly 'gay ambivalent figure' becoming 'terrifying, melancholy, and tragic' (*Rabelais* 40-41).

Valentin's progress operates as a further example of the extremes of relativism and dogmatism converging in Chesterton's imaginative landscape—the 'sour smile' of the inscrutable ironist of the 'The Blue Cross' runs full circle to translate seamlessly into the 'blasting sneer' of the 'fanatic' (*FB* 31). Again, this symbolism anticipates Bakhtin's account of the distinction between the two modes of grotesque. In the Romantic form, 'laughter [was] cut down to cold humour, irony, sarcasm [...] Its positive regenerating power was reduced to a minimum' (*Rabelais* 38). When Valentin finally commits suicide, the narrator

identifies the 'pride of Cato' (*FB* 35) in his expression. This image finds a later echo in Chesterton's parody of Poe's 'The Raven' (1845), in his mock-pedagogic 'School English Composition': 'with a heart as cold as Cato's, or the pallid bust of Plato's / That I keep with canned tomatoes just above my chamber door' (*Collected Nonsense* 55). The allusion to Cato the Younger in 'The Secret Garden' signals a return to the Holmesian realm of intractable agonism, insofar as Cato's conflict with Julius Caesar (recall that the murdered philanthropist is named Julius) ended with Cato killing himself, in a definitive gesture of refusal to share the world with an antipathetic mind. In the context of a metaparodic text which attempts to grapple with its own relation to the antipathetic minds of Poe and Doyle, the circumstances of Valentin's death are particularly ironic, since Chesterton considered suicide the ultimate refusal to enter into dialogue—the most distressingly final of conversation killers: 'The man who kills himself, kills all men; as far as he is concerned he wipes out the world' (*Orthodoxy* 65).

Paradoxically, Chesterton's sloughing off of the investigator appears to signal his own ultimate inability to accommodate the antithetical visions of his precursors within his imaginative world. In a further example of the carefully wrought complementarity of the opening stories, while Valentin is led to Hampstead Heath in 'The Blue Cross' as the benevolently conceived scapegoat in a generic fertility ritual, 'The Secret Garden' concludes with the assembled guests driving 'the unhappy Brown before them like a hostage or a sacrifice' (*FB* 35) to the room in which Valentin's body is discovered, a conceit lent further irony by the fact that Valentin's suicide represents Chesterton's final, ineluctable scapegoating of the rationalist archetype. In a later account of the popularity of parodies of *Sherlock Holmes* ('The World of Sherlock Holmes.' *ILN* 15 Jan. 1927), Chesterton argues that 'even the satire against him is a sort of sacrifice to him. He has been parodied, but he has always been imitated' (*CW* 34: 237). A sacrifice is, of course, offered in the hope of regeneration, and Bakhtin ultimately claims cultural regeneration to be the mystical purpose of carnival, which 'celebrates the destruction of the old and the birth of the new world' (*Rabelais* 410).

In the case at hand, the satire against Holmes is accompanied by a sacrifice *of* him, a context which adds an interesting dimension to the frequent critical complaint that Bakhtin's account of carnival is excessively utopian, a complaint

that might equally be directed at Chesterton's earlier deployment of carnivalesque motifs, in *Thursday* and 'The Blue Cross'. Valentin's death is the first and last of any major character in Chesterton's fiction, and this example of the expulsion of an undesirable 'other' to foster community cohesion offers an insight into the less benign dimensions of the carnivalesque, implying that the carnival's energies retain an essentially agonistic, as well as affirmative, edge, as we have also seen to be the case with the utopian, yet oppositional construct of the 'new city of friends'. In Docker's analysis of Bakhtin's utopianism, he cites Goethe's recollection of witnessing strangers being compelled 'to resign themselves to being made fun of' in the carnival of Rome, and notes that Bakhtin's account of carnival 'plays down any opposing presence of ethnocentrism and hostility to foreigners or those conceived as outsiders' (191). Nonetheless, in the case at hand it is essential to understand Chesterton's expulsion of Valentin as philosophical, rather than nationalistic, since Flambeau also constitutes a foreign body, and is very deliberately brought back into Britain in the third story, 'The Queer Feet', in the wake of Valentin's permanent removal.

Chesterton's parodic generic intervention with *Father Brown* conforms to Boris Eichenbaum's analysis of 'the evolution of each genre [in which] there are times when its use for entirely serious or elevated objectives degenerates and produces a comic or parodic form [...] And thus is produced the regeneration of the genre' (qtd. in Bradbury, 'Age' 53). In 'The Secret Garden', this regeneration is effected through the efficacy of the dual plot, in which Valentin's death directly coincides with the festive-comic triumph of O'Brien. As Morson explains, the co-presence of utopia and anti-utopia within the same text is also a characteristic of metaparody: 'there exist two classes of text that enter into dialogic relation with utopias, namely anti-utopias, which parody utopias, and meta-utopias, in which utopia and anti-utopia themselves enter into an ultimately inconclusive dialogue' ('Parody' 68).

In a discussion of Dickens's decision to follow up the picaresque romp of *The Pickwick Papers* (1836) with the sinister fever dream of *Oliver Twist* (1838), Chesterton argues that there 'is nothing odd in the fact that the same man who conceived the humane hospitalities of Pickwick should also have imagined the inhuman laughter of Fagin's den [...] the whole human tradition has tied up together in a strange knot these strands of festivity and fear' (*CW* 15: 264). In a

comparable spirit, Chesterton subtly intertwines the parallel narrative threads of 'The Secret Garden'—which embody festivity and fear—with the benign imagery of his preceding story. For example, the Romantic grotesque trope of the gruesome murder and the festive comic trope of O'Brien's romantic betrothal both take place in Valentin's 'blue-and-silver garden' (*FB* 22), hybridising death and renewal within a space symbolically linked to the blue and silver of Father Brown's cross. When O'Brien's triumph is followed, in 'The Queer Feet', with the return of the carnivalesque dyad of Father Brown and Flambeau, and the rebirth of the series as festive-comic satire, Chesterton finds a means of investing a further gesture towards utopianism with a still-more pugnacious satirical broadside against generic and social conventionality, in a text suffused with uproarious imagery of death and renewal.

'The Queer Feet' as Carnivalesque Social Satire

> The English statesman [...] is born with a silver spoon in his mouth, so that he may never afterwards be found with the silver spoons in his pocket[.]
>
> Chesterton, *What's Wrong With the World* (*CW* 4: 61)

'The Queer Feet' finds Father Brown entangled in the annual dinner celebrations of a private gentleman's club, 'The Twelve True Fishermen', because one of their waiters, a Roman Catholic, has inconveniently died on the eve of the event. As Brown notes down the details of the waiter's confession in an ante-room, he is disturbed by a series of unusual footsteps in the hall, which, it transpires, are those of Flambeau, who has been adapting his gait halfway along the corridor from the leisurely step of a club member to the hurried step of a waiter. In this way, Flambeau successfully steals the club's cutlery merely by altering his demeanour as he moves between the table and the kitchen, physically parodying the gentlemen with silver spoons in their mouths, in order to pocket those same spoons. Upon guessing this explanation, Brown confronts Flambeau in the cloakroom, persuades him to hand back the cutlery, and then lets him go, before explaining to the guests what has taken place. With both his official and unofficial work complete, Brown leaves the guests to resume their meal, and the story ends.

Such are the specific action-level events of the story. However, this synopsis is not accurately representative of the narrative bulk of the story, which is substantially composed of extended authorial discursions concerning the inhabitants of the club—digressions which bear little relevance to the mystery at hand, beyond conveying the conditions of mental torpor which make the crime possible, a necessity incommensurate to their tone and frequency. As this implies, perhaps more than any other *Father Brown* story, 'The Queer Feet' subjugates the mystery element to the satirical component, with the conveyance of the latter becoming the overwhelming purpose of the narrative. Indeed, because so little of the account is temporally propulsive, but rather composed of a series of extra-temporal digressions, the exposition of the execution and explanation of the crime takes up only around half of the text. In this way, the 'progression/digression dichotomy' ('Backward' 330) which Porter identifies as a key trope of the genre is parodically exaggerated in a manner suggestive of the perambulations of the criminal—dallying for a time, before suddenly shooting forward—so as to hint archly at a complicity between the narrator and Flambeau in the construction of the plot, much as the narrator and Father Brown conspire to draw Valentin and Flambeau into the benign trap of 'The Blue Cross'. However, while in the earlier instance the enforced collaboration is enacted on the plot level, in 'The Queer Feet' the role of scapegoat is imposed upon the reader.

In a further correspondence, 'The Queer Feet' establishes another scenario which creates a period of 'gay time'. As Huizinga notes, 'the relationship between feast and play is very close. Both proclaim a standstill to ordinary life' (41). By opening up another carnivalesque space at the heart of London—though crucially now in a confined, rather than topographically open scenario—through the theme of the feast, Chesterton employs Flambeau's status as a prankster-thief to encourage an interrogation of the propriety of property. To this end, Chesterton exploits the license opened up by the liminal space of carnival to exonerate Flambeau for committing the cutlery theft, while impugning the reader for aiding and abetting a more serious criminal act—the annexation of property from common access. As Chesterton succinctly summarised the issue a year earlier, in an augury of the intertwined satirical subtexts of 'The Queer Feet' and 'The Blue Cross', the wealthy man 'will not (as a rule) steal spoons; but he will steal common land' ('The Very Decayed Gentleman.' *DN* 6 Nov. 1909; *CDN* 6: 124).

In elaborating this point in 'The Queer Feet', Chesterton splits the story into two sections, each beginning with a lengthy, temporally neutral, scene-setting discursion on the part of the narrator, before moving on to an account of the events that take place, so that the preliminary exposition of the inner workings of the society becomes intimately wedded to the secondary exposition of the crime, with the society being revealed to have participated in its own undoing. In the first section these events are *heard* from Father Brown's disempowered perspective as he sits in a darkened, cell-like room; in the second they are *seen* from the empowered viewpoint of the diners, whose greater topographical and sensory liberty only serves to emphasise their cognitive inadequacy. Brown's imprisonment in a closed-off locale initially serves to symbolise his disempowerment in the social structure at hand, while also constituting a generically self-referential inversion of the Poe-derived 'locked room' schema, in which the archetype is for the crime to be perpetrated within the hermetically-sealed room, rather than beyond it. This parodic conceit is developed by Brown's subsequent explanation of Flambeau's method, which draws a third allusion to Poe's detective fiction into the opening stories, since it implies that a reading of 'The Purloined Letter' (1844) has influenced the criminal. Just as Poe's letter was left exposed on a table for all to see, Brown admiringly observes that Flambeau '"did not go and hide in dim corners where suspicion might have searched for him"' (*FB* 49).

Again, the parody of detection archetypes is employed to enable social satire, since the latter remark signals Father Brown's sympathetic alignment with the criminal rather than the society. As Brown explains to the colonel at the story's conclusion, in another approving remark, once Flambeau had conceived his criminal method '"[a]ll the rest was acting, and thunderously good acting too"' (*FB* 49). The net effect is to establish a complex air of complicity between the storyteller and his protagonists, with each of the three figures parodying the other in various ways. For example, Brown employs physical mimicry of Flambeau as a deductive method, copying the curious footsteps 'with his finger on the edge of the table, like a man trying to learn a tune on the piano' (*FB* 39). Meanwhile, Flambeau's dual-role of waiter and guest operates as a satirically motivated *embodiment* of the existentially grotesque principle of parody practiced by his creator—in acting 'two parts at once' (*FB* 48), Flambeau splits himself into a

hybridised binary of the two poles of the club. At the denouement, Father Brown complements this relativizing of class conventions of low and high, with a gesture of comparable equivalence on the aesthetic plane, when he implicitly praises the narrator by comparing the construction of the plot to that of *Hamlet* (*FB* 49).

In a characteristically Chestertonian development, Brown's apparent disempowerment ultimately contributes to his success in solving the mystery, since the dark of the cloakroom annex initially heightens the acuteness of his aural perception, and later serves to 'cloak' him from Flambeau's gaze, while the latter is illuminated by the light of the corridor. In an allusion to the disempowerment of the actor before the spectator, the lighting 'threw little illumination on Father Brown himself, who seemed a mere dark outline against the dim sunset window behind him. But it threw an almost theatrical light on the man who stood outside the cloakroom in the corridor' (*FB* 41). It is appropriate, then, that it is a misstep in Flambeau's acting that gives him away, and that this arises from his use of a rhetorical pun, which operates as a verbal echo of the physical pun presented by his dual-identity. Brown intuits the nature of the crime when Flambeau jokingly leaves a tip: 'the strange gentleman who had been feeling in his waistcoat pocket, said, laughing, "I haven't got any silver; you can keep this." And he threw down half a sovereign', to which Brown replies: '"I think, sir […] that you have some silver in your pocket"' (*FB* 42). As with the emphasis upon the destabilising communicative power of the joke in 'The Blue Cross', here Brown enacts the subversion of another would-be private joke at his expense, by successfully decoding the irony.

Brown's confounding of the private joke on the action level corresponds to the narrator's refusal to allow the reader to enjoy the joke of the story without becoming implicated within it in turn. To this end, 'The Queer Feet' draws on a carnivalesque strategy that suffuses Chesterton's journalism, in which the reader is insistently drawn into the frame, in a manner that breaks down the sense of distinction between speaker and auditor. For Chesterton, this frequently serves a self-defensive function as a means of advertising self-awareness, via an anticipatory reflex which treads an ambiguous line between ironical acerbity and obsequious flattery. In a particularly curious example ('What You Propose.' *DN* 24 Oct. 1908), Chesterton observes that 'I have become heartily sick of the word "I" in these articles. You will reply (with your old rapidity in repartee) that you

were sick of it a long time before I was' (*CDN* 5: 195). The solution that he posits as a means of varying this monotony is one that draws the reader into enforced identification with the essayist, aggressively confounding the status of the two participants in the reception process. Henceforth, 'I will not say of an adventure that I actually went through it. I will say that you actually went through it. My articles shall not be any longer a mere autobiography; they shall be the official biography of yourself' (*CDN* 5: 195).

While this confusion of 'I' and 'you' again hints at the parodist's urge to engage in a disorientating disruption of the boundaries of subjectivity, it also indicates a desire to promote in the reader a sense of empathetic relation. Chesterton's engagement with the reader is a dialogic act intended to break down mutual detachment, guarding against solipsism while promoting consciousness on both sides: the writer becomes more acutely aware of his or herself through consciousness of the presence of the audience, while the audience is made more self-conscious by being made aware of its ethical relation to the writer. In a rather Barthesian eulogy to the reader as active agent, Chesterton notes that 'there is a great deal of difference between an eager man who wants to read a book and a tired man who wants a book to read' (*Charles* 51), and his finger-jabbing at the sedate reader can be understood as a carnivalesque means of forcibly promoting this sense of active participation. As an anonymous contemporary reviewer noted, 'Mr. Chesterton never leaves one in a mood of dull acquiescence' ('The Man' 144). In a similar action, the withering satirical remarks of the narrator of 'The Queer Feet' are consistently aimed at both the club *and* the reader. The structure of this conceit corresponds on the narrative level to the way in which Flambeau vaults the cloakroom divide into Brown's 'off-stage' area when he is found out. The narrator challenges the reader's comparable empowerment to contemplate the 'golden gallery' (*FB* 38) of the club from behind the two-way-mirror of the text, by pointing his finger out from the page in a direct 'from me to you' address:

> If you meet a member of that select club, 'The Twelve True Fishermen,' entering the
> Vernon Hotel for the annual club dinner, you will observe, as he takes off his overcoat,
> that his evening coat is green and not black. If (supposing that you have the star-
> defying audacity to address such a being) you ask him why, he will probably answer
> that he does it to avoid being mistaken for a waiter. You will then retire crushed. […]
> But since it is immeasurably unlikely that you will ever rise high enough in the social

world to find 'The Twelve True Fishermen,' or that you will ever sink low enough
among slums and criminals to find Father Brown, I fear that you will never hear the
story at all unless you hear it from me (*FB* 36).

The phrases, '[y]ou will then retire crushed' and 'it is immeasurably
unlikely', both employ the assertive present tense 'will' and 'is' to convey a sense
of proximity to the reader and inevitability of outcome in the social interaction.
Meanwhile, the phrase, 'star-defying', in the extraneous parenthesis explicitly
addresses the specious, fatalistic sense of fixity surrounding class distinctions in
early-twentieth-century Britain—this 'phantasmal and yet fixed society' (*FB* 43),
as Chesterton refers to the club, and, beyond it, the class system of his day, later in
the story. These parenthetic asides initiate the double-narrative quality of the
story, in which a conventional exposition is, time and again, butted into
obtrusively by the narrator, in a manner suggestive of an oral reading in which the
speaker, indignant at the circumstances he is being asked to recount, continually
adds his own sardonic, improvisatory gloss upon the events. The reader, like
Brown, is figured as a listener, with the jarring notes in the narration forming a
further corollary of the sudden alterations in Flambeau's step, here serving to
maintain the listener's attention and jolt his/her projected passivity. This
interactive methodology produces a striking correspondence with Chesterton's
article of the same year, 'The Flat Freak', in which he again adopts an intimate,
insinuating narrative tone in an exposition of the dismal banality of the upper-
class fancy-dress party, rhetorically pondering why it is 'that *you and I* feel that
we would (on the whole) rather spend the evening with two or three stable boys in
a pot-house than take part in that pallid and Arctic joke?' (*CDN* 6: 177; my
emphasis).

In 'The Queer Feet', the narrator's introductory address to the reader leads
into an extended passage of scene-setting (albeit one still couched in the curious
mode of direct author/reader second-person dialogue) for a further two
uninterrupted pages, before abruptly repeating the jarring parenthetical tactic:
'When you enter (as you never will) the Vernon Hotel, you pass down a short
passage' (*FB* 38). This delayed repetition of the extraneous aside, with its
declarative, finger-pointing assertion—'you never will'—acts as an
incontrovertible interdiction, immediately counteracting the opposing linguistic

liberties extended to the reader by the phrase '*when* you enter' and the collapsed repetition of 'pass', with its suggestive connotations ('please, pass', 'I have a pass'), removing the fourth wall only to brutally clamp it down again. We can view such impositions as effecting the most extreme mode of defamiliarisation possible without the fictional form turning into pure journalism, since the refusal to allow the reader to suspend his/her disbelief contradicts the first presupposition of the author's intent in fiction. Chesterton's disinclination to allow the reader to wallow in the romantic conventions of the form recalls Huizinga's explanation of the ethical purpose of subverting the rules of a game: the 'player who trespasses into the rules or ignores them is a "spoil-sport" […] the spoil-sport shatters the play-world itself. By withdrawing from the game he reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world in which he had temporarily shut himself with others. He robs play of its *illusion*' (30).

Porter asserts this illusion to be particularly essential to the genre at hand: 'the success of a given work with a reader depends in the first place on the reader's willingness not only to suspend disbelief but also to play the reading game according to the rules of the genre' (*Pursuit* 85). In contrast, here the narrator actively intercedes to disenable such an action—it is as though the entertaining, storytelling dinner guest has temporarily forgotten himself (or remembered himself) and is threatening to alienate the company with his contentious social views. If the genre's 'reading game' *is* exploited, it is in the sense that Chesterton here tests the absolute limits of his thesis that the mystery reader is 'only happy if he feels a fool' ('The Ideal Detective Story.' *ILN* 25 Oct. 1930). The latter principle corresponds to the argument outlined in my opening chapter, that the success of the surprise element in a detective story is dependent upon the reader bringing to the text various preconceptions, informed by societal conventions, which are then overturned, while also hinting at Chesterton's belief that true democracy can only come in to being when 'we make fools of ourselves'. In the present instance, the satirical efficacy of the story is dependent upon the likelihood that the reader will be in 'the habit of respecting a gentleman', a propensity which Chesterton considered 'a great national sin' ('Some Policemen and a Moral.' *DN* 16 Apr. 1904; *CDN* 2: 218). In other words, Chesterton's story frankly presupposes the reader's subscription to a bias that the author considers idiotic, and even shameful, constructing an antagonist relationship toward the

reader which adapts the critique of romantic credulity built into 'The Secret Garden', to directly impugn the reader, rather than doing so obliquely via the story's characters.

The impudent narrative tone of 'The Queer Feet', which echoes the 'impudence' ascribed to Brown and Flambeau on the action-level (see above, 68), also links Chesterton's prose style to the salient tropes of Menippean satire. Bakhtin explains that this genre specialises in '[t]he "inappropriate word"— inappropriate because of its cynical frankness, or because it profanely unmasks a holy thing, or because it crudely violates etiquette' (*Problems* 118). In discussing the differing tonal shades operative in Menippean discourse, Weinbrot notes that '[t]he Menippean satirist in his darker mood is more the isolated cynic than […] a sedately seated narrator' (7). The effect in 'The Queer Feet' is that of the mask of the 'amiable humorist' (Tave viii) slipping to reveal the unmediated polemicist. As T.S. Eliot argued in his obituary of Chesterton, '[b]ehind the Johnsonian fancy-dress, so reassuring to the British public, he concealed the most serious and revolutionary designs' (*Critical* 531). Again, a correspondence arises between narrator and criminal here. Eliot's remarks echo Chesterton's account of his trademark brigand outfit, which 'disguised me' with a 'cloak' (*Autobiography* 164). In this light, the fancy-dress travesties—in the etymological sense of *travesti*, 'dressed in disguise' (Barnhart 1162)—of his fictional prankster-criminal can be seen to derive directly from Chesterton's own methods of sartorial subversion.

Chesterton's outfit also included 'a walking stick which concealed a sword' (Gardner 52 fn.8), an accessory that connotes violent intent masked by a projection of harmless infirmity. This sheds an interesting light on the recollections of Father O'Connor: 'Let me point out his terrible power of invective, not generally understood, because he seldom used it. And let us be thankful for the fine charity which kept that weapon sheathed' (*Father* 13). In the story at hand, the very impropriety of the narrator's interpositions forms a kind of textual sheath, a mediating comic effect, through which the speaker is figured as an amusingly opinionated great-uncle who is laughed at in turn, so that the argument is again costumed in a way that charms the reader into receptivity towards otherwise unpalatable sentiments. In this respect, the narrative conceit of 'The Queer Feet' echoes Flambeau's Poe-inspired *modus operandi*. Just as the

thief makes himself an object hidden in full view, Chesterton's communication of his social principles involves 'concealing them by exposure' (*Critical* 531), as Eliot puts it.

As a corollary of the narrator's conversational approach, the action-level depiction of 'table talk' (or lack thereof) promoted by the banqueting motif of the story becomes parodied on the narrative level through the narrator's provision of a stimulating account, producing a double-effect in which a failed party is parodied and its failure is amplified by the entertaining form in which it is recounted, with the narrator infusing a wit into the tale that is lacking in the majority of the protagonists. This technique contributes to the reader's sense that an evening with the subversive narrator will be significantly more *engaging* than an unmediated evening in the rarefied company of the social elite he is describing. While Chesterton wisely avoids investing his narrative voice with heavy-handed idiomatic signifiers of the 'lower' class, the implicit class-differentiation between the narrator and the club-members corresponds to Bakhtin's account of *skaz* storytelling, which stresses a distinction between the 'storyteller' and the 'literary person', while figuring skaz as a disguise which the author adopts in order to advance his/her own message:

> in most cases skaz is introduced precisely for the sake of someone else's voice, a voice socially distinct, carrying with it precisely those points of view and evaluations necessary to the author. What is introduced here, in fact, is a storyteller, and a storyteller, after all, is not a literary person; he belongs in most cases to the lower social strata, to the common people (precisely this is important to the author)—and he brings with him oral speech (*Problems* 192).

In *Father Brown*, this method proceeds organically from Chesterton's preference for dictating his work to secretaries, a form of improvisational performance which inevitably foregrounds verbal intimacy and encourages colloquial asides, and which helps to explain why his short stories and journalistic articles often bear such marked stylistic similarities (the latter were composed in the same manner). Ker records that when dictating his detective stories to one secretary Chesterton 'enjoyed teasing her by pretending to stop "at the exciting moment"' (539), a quirk which adds to the element of propulsion and digression identified earlier in the story at hand. Chesterton verbally improvised almost all of

the *Father Brown* stories from brief notes made on the back of envelopes and other ephemera, a habit which is often adduced by commentators to be evidence of their literary worthlessness.[9] Quite the contrary—this derivation is the very locus of their value. As Chesterton wrote of his treasured fairy-tale writing forebear, George Macdonald, he was 'not a born writer; he was a born maker of spontaneous texts' ('George MacDonald.' *DN* 23 Sept. 1905; *CDN* 3: 197). In establishing this distinction, Chesterton identifies Macdonald, and, by extension, himself, within a tradition of oral storytelling which again stands in 'unofficial' relation to post-Enlightenment norms of 'high' literature and rationalist discourse.

Throughout the series, the extemporising quality of Chesterton's oral narration enables stratified layers of self-referential parody to be conjoined with the action, while interspersing serious social points concerning 'the horrible modern abyss between the souls of the rich and the poor' (*FB* 45) with comically irascible complaints about characters possessing 'irritating beards' (*FB* 206). This narrative method is again suggestive of the formal approach of the Menippea, which combines a 'deliberately […] multi-toned narration, the mixing of high and low, serious and comic; [with] a mixing of prosaic and poetic speech' (*Problems* 108). Similarly, Chesterton establishes a disorientating, multi-layered *skaz* technique that conforms to his explanation of the stratified levels of narrative in the detective story, which encompass 'the crime, the detection, the description of the detection, and the description of the description' ('How to Write a Detective Story' *G.K.'s Weekly* 17 Oct. 1925; collected in *Chesterton Review* 10: 2 112). Such techniques empower the narrator to speak conversationally to the reader without mediation, at a slight remove from the narrative proper, while also enabling Chesterton to make the reader more-than-usually aware of what is being withheld. In 'The Queer Feet', the reader is made to feel further disempowered by the narrator's refusal of access to the separate, secret narrative produced by Brown in tandem with the narrator's own account: 'The story which Father Brown was writing down was very likely a much better story than this one, only it will never be known' (*FB* 39). In another example of complicity between the narrator and his protagonists, Brown later applies the same interdiction to the colonel, in his explanation of the crime of Flambeau, the *ersatz* waiter:

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[9] Most recently, Christopher Hitchens advanced this interpretation in his final published article, on Chesterton, 'The Reactionary' (*Atlantic* 6 Feb. 2012).

'What did he tell you?'

'I beg your pardon,' said the priest immovably, 'that is where the story ends.'

'And the interesting story begins,' muttered Pound (*FB* 50-51).

This interdiction constitutes a direct contravention of a critical view of detective fiction that derives from Foucaultian theory—in this case, Franco Moretti's totalising assertion that 'detective fiction treats every element of individual behaviour that desires secrecy as an offence, even if there is no trace of crime' (qtd. in Knight, 'Signs' 128). In a more subtle action, Chesterton sets up a distinction between different forms of secrecy—the secrets of the powerful society are exposed and satirically debunked, while the personal secrets of the powerless individual remain sacrosanct. While this emphasis upon the significance of the hidden hints at the broader function of *skaz* in the mystery story as a form of 'conjuror's patter' ('How' 117), as Chesterton puts it, or the attempt of a criminal to distract a witness with improvisational banter, it also suggests a goading of the reader into action through repeated assertions of disempowerment. This narrative effect returns us to the immersive principles of carnival. As Bakhtin explains, carnival invariably seeks to collapse the boundaries of spectatorship, and forcibly rouse the spectator into action: 'the basic carnival nucleus of [medieval festive] culture […] belongs to the borderline between art and life. […] carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators' (*Rabelais* 7).

The parodic practice of insulting the audience is one that extends back to antiquity. For example, as Chesterton notes in the 'Humour' essay, in Aristophanes 'Dionysus asks to see the wicked in hell and is answered by a gesture pointing at the audience' (*Spice* 26). Specifically, Aristophanes has his characters criminalise the audience by referring to them as a dangerous gang of 'murderers and perjurers' (Rose, *Ancient* 19). This conceit was revived on the Elizabethan stage, within which the stage-fool conventionally evinced a 'familiarity with the spectators' (Welsford, *Fool* 288). As with Father Brown's practical jokes at Valentin's expense in 'The Blue Cross', here the reader is being subjected to an enforced communality with the 'fool'—in this instance, the buffoonish narrator rather than the abbot of unreason. To this end, Chesterton manipulates the famously heightened interactivity of the detection genre with its

audience, in which, as George N. Dove notes, the role of 'the reader [is] an involved observer' (32), to suggest that the reader has implicated his- or herself in the world described through the 'act' of reading, yet simultaneously remains subtly disempowered by his/her adoption of a passive role in the reception process.

Again, there is a direct link here between the narrative and the action of 'The Queer Feet', insofar as the figuring of Brown and Flambeau as both actor and spectator at the liminal footlight boundary of the cloakroom becomes suggestive of an extra-diegetic prompt to the reader to become an 'actor' themselves. When recounting the story to the colonel, Brown mirrors Flambeau's earlier transgression by hopping 'over the barrier' (*FB* 48) from the audience onto the stage. From this perspective, it is suggestive that following the narrator's assertion to the reader, 'you never will', Chesterton's use of the second-person continues in an account of the interior of the hotel. In an echo of the methodological wink that Poe's story, 'The Purloined Letter', offers Flambeau, this account is delivered in the manner of someone offering directions, or a tip-off, with the 'you never will' operating as the wink that the informant tips to the burglar, as in 'you *could* do this but of course you and I know that you *won't*': 'you pass down a short passage […] which opens on your right into passages leading to the public rooms, and on your left to a similar passage pointing to the kitchens and offices…' (*FB* 38). It is particularly characteristic of the broader thematic ambivalence operative in Chesterton's detective stories that his use of *skaz* should simultaneously suggest a criminal distracting a witness and an informant tipping off a burglar.

Although this reading initially suggests the uncomplicatedly liberating notion of the narrator 'inviting' the bourgeois reader into the narrative world along the 'passage' of the text, and providing access to snoop around, in the introductory passage quoted earlier the narrator explicitly asserts that, as things stand, the bourgeois reader is the only member of society currently disempowered to do so in reality. While the Fishermen enter 'legitimately' from above, Father Brown is asserted to have transgressed the boundary from below, through his association with 'slums and criminals' (*FB* 36). Conversely, the bourgeois reader is trapped in the middle, due to an implied failure to aspire equally to the bottom and to the top in his/her social manoeuvrings—the narrator notes, again in

parenthesis, that it is a 'vein of improbable conjecture' that the reader might have met 'a mild, hard-working little priest, named Father Brown' (*FB* 36), since the priest's principal work is conducted amongst the lower-classes. As Chesterton bluntly appraises his middle-class contemporaries in the *Autobiography*: 'we may say, with all graceful apologies, that this class has split up into the two great sections of the Snobs and the Prigs. The first are those who want to get into society; the second are those who want to get out of society, and into societies' (16). While the snobs aspire to integrate with the higher echelons, the prigs aspire to assist the lower classes without the unpleasantness of integrating with them.[10]

Through such effects, Chesterton directly contradicts John Cawelti's claim that the detection genre enacts 'the fantasy projection of guilt away from the reader' (106-07). Instead, Chesterton's narrative method enacts a particularly queer feat. As with the slang meaning of 'queer'—to 'spoil, ruin […] trick, swindle, cheat' (Barnhart 874)—Chesterton queers the pitch of the conventional detective story, by interposing a discomfiting tonal pitch, in which he implicitly echoes Aristophanes in figuring the reader as a potential criminal, while simultaneously criminalising himself as a textual swindler, cheating the reader out of the expected narratorial transaction, in the cause of provoking the reader into a deeper 'querying' of his/her cultural presuppositions. Hurley has argued that 'queerness' is central to Chesterton's entire aesthetic and philosophical project, since this is the 'wider context for his perception of incongruity' (*Chesterton* 10). Intriguingly, Hurley also notes in passing that '*quer*' means 'cross' (*Chesterton* 10). In this sense, since Valentin twice asserts in 'The Blue Cross' that he is on the look-out for a 'queer thing' (*FB* 10), Father Brown, as the carrier of the cross, becomes the exemplary locus of revelatory queerness in Chesterton's fiction.

Indeed, the narrator of 'The Queer Feet' posits Brown's profession as another of Chesterton's 'queer trades': 'There is in this world a very aged rioter and demagogue who breaks into the most refined retreats with the dreadful information that all men are brothers, and wherever this leveller went on his pale horse it was Father Brown's *trade* to follow' (*FB* 38; my emphasis). This pedagogic explanation brings a further insult to the projected reader, whose failure

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[10] Hurley notes that the '"horrible modern abyss between the souls of the rich and poor" […] makes the theft possible in the first place', while pointing out that there is 'a sense that [Brown] approves of the crime in ethical terms' (*Chesterton* 24).

to engage with the lower classes is implicitly linked to his/her assumed ignorance of Christian doctrine and lack of religious observance, thus reversing the attributes that enable Brown to gain entry, if not to gain respect. The theological context of Brown's arrival as a father-confessor is lent further irony by the fact that the feast of the 'Twelve True Fishermen' is a parody of The Last Supper—'they could occupy the terrace in the most luxurious style of all, being ranged along the inner side of the table, with no one opposite' (*FB* 43)—in which the only religious figure present has been locked away in a cloakroom.

Of course, the narrator's reference to the leveller on a pale horse is an allusion to Death. Small wonder, then, that when Brown enters the building he is hidden away from the guests by the proprietor, since 'a mere glimpse of him afar off might precipitate a crisis in the club' (*FB* 38). Death is depicted here as the archetypal boundary-crosser, breaking into closed societies with the 'dreadful information' of the brotherhood of man, this last phrase a terrifically economical way of impressing factuality: 'information', rather than 'assertion' or 'suggestion', again lending the narrator's words an air of absolute irrefutability. The account of Death as a 'leveller' also illustrates the specifically carnivalesque nature of the story's social satire. Since Brown is—initially unconsciously—following Flambeau, the latter also becomes constituted as a levelling figure, a Harlequin-esque 'rioter and demagogue', whose unusual perambulations are later referred to as a '"dance of death"' (*FB* 48) by Brown. In a later story, 'The Mirror and the Magistrate' (*Cassell's Magazine* Apr. 1925), Brown is, himself, described as looking like '"some old black woodcut at the end of a Dance of Death"' (*FB* 528), and this association of both characters with the *Danse Macabre* implies that Flambeau's actions, in combination with Brown's judgement, are serving notice upon the club members in the story at hand.

In 'The Secret Society of Mankind', the title of which gestures back to 'The Human Club', Chesterton figures death as both a levelling and unifying phenomenon: 'We are all in a boat which will certainly drown us all, and drown us equally […] we sail to the land of an ogre, *edax rerum*, who devours all without distinction' (*Fancies* 120). This image of death as an insatiable feaster, into whose jaws all descend, is offset with apposite incongruity by the parlous nature of the feast into which Chesterton rides his pale horse in 'The Queer Feet'. Nonetheless, while Brown and Flambeau disrupt the 'crisis of tedium' (*FB* 21)

that grips the institution in a manner which does indeed 'precipitate a crisis in the club', this should again be understood in the positive, festive comic sense which led Chesterton to interpret crisis as a potentially regenerative principle.[11]

A Crisis of Tedium: Ontological Vacuity and the Official Feast

> [F]ear of the waiter is the beginning of dining[.]
>
> Chesterton, *Charles Dickens* (134)

Chesterton was by no means dogmatically opposed to the concept of parodying the Last Supper—the twelve original members of the J.D.C. held a particularly boisterous and 'burlesque' commemorative club banquet in 1900 (Ward, *Gilbert* 106-07)—his only condition was that the absurd parody should retain the sublime element of genuine festivity, and this is where the Twelve True Fishermen particularly miss the mark. In a further textual duality, while Chesterton's use of *skaz* produces a spectatorship-vexing evocation of the principles of the 'unofficial' carnival on the narrative-level, the action-level story of the banquet describes the quintessential official feast, commemorating what Bakhtin terms the ontologically vacuous 'triumph of a truth already established, the predominant truth that was put forward as eternal and indisputable' (*Rabelais* 9). Bakhtin's account is closely echoed in 'The Queer Feet', in terms redolent of ontological abstraction: the 'society had a vast number of ceremonies and observances, but it had no history and no object; that was where it was so very aristocratic. You did not have to be anything in order to be one of the Twelve Fishers' (*FB* 37). Here, the phrase, '[y]ou did not have to be anything'—rather than 'anyone'—not only suggests a divorce of social function from status, but a literal divorce from existence, a further implication that the apparently ineluctable edifice is a phantasm that would disperse with the merest close observation. As the narrator notes, in a further parenthetical aside, 'nobody in this place ever appeared in person if he could help it' (*FB* 38).

In a parallel of the distrust that Chesterton and Bentley expressed toward the monologic seriousness of Holmesian detection, Bakhtin argues that the official feast's inherent abstraction of purpose explains why its tone 'was monolithically

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[11] The phrase, 'a crisis of tedium', derives from 'The Secret Garden'.

serious and why the element of laughter was alien to it. The true nature of human festivity was betrayed and distorted' (*Rabelais* 9). In 'The Flat Freak', Chesterton expands upon the schismatic failure of humour that occurs when the upper-classes attempt to stage a comic event, here the 'Freak Dinner', a high-society fancy-dress party on a grand scale. Chesterton explains that what is to be deplored 'is the abyss of inanity in such feasts—it may be literally called a yawning abyss […] What can be more abject than the union of elaborate and recherché arrangements with an old and obvious point?' (*CDN* 6: 179). In contrast, Chesterton's elaborate textual joke at the expense of the Fishermen exploits their recherché arrangements in order to make a new, surprising generic and social point. As Simon Critchley observes, '[t]he anti-rite of the joke shows the sheer contingency or arbitrariness of the social rites in which we engage. By producing a consciousness of contingency, humour can change the situation in which we find ourselves, and can even have a *critical* function with respect to society' (10). In a comparable manner, Chesterton's emphasis upon comic contingency in 'The Queer Feet', as represented by the disruptive appearance of the mythic dyad, Brown and Flambeau, calls the 'eternal' truth of the event into question.

Chesterton's criticisms are focused primarily upon the oral functions of the figures depicted, in the forms of verbal production and digestive consumption. In presenting the official feast as an etiolated travesty of the popular carnival, in which an ontological abstraction causes it merely to ape the actions of the truly joyous feast while subtracting the spirit, both Bakhtin and Chesterton argue that its fundamental inanity is betrayed by its modes of expression. In 'The Queer Feet', the discrepancy between Brown's entertaining, possibly ribald untold narrative, the narrator's attempts to jolly up the narrative proper, and the paucity of material offered by the inane chatter of the Fishermen serves to emphasise the vital dual-meaning of the *quality* of the talk in the popular festival, which Bakhtin identifies thus:

> The themes of table talk are always 'sublime', filled with 'profound wisdom', but these themes are uncrowned and renewed on the material bodily level. The grotesque symposium does not have to respect hierarchical distinctions; it freely blends the profane and the sacred, the lower and the higher, the spiritual and the material (*Rabelais* 285-86).

The absence of either 'profound wisdom' or boisterous repartee in the conversation of the Fishermen demonstrates their absolute dislocation from the principles of the popular feast, the emptiness of their talk echoing the emptiness of the event: 'The talk was that strange, slight talk which governs the British Empire, which governs it in secret, and yet would scarcely enlighten an ordinary Englishman even if he could overhear it' (*FB* 42-43). This inadequacy is further emphasised by the narrator's descriptions of the contents of the banquet itself at the outset of the second part of the story, in which Chesterton again prefaces the action with a heavily accentuated, intemperate authorial intervention, tonally indistinguishable from his journalism: 'I do not possess a copy of the menu; and if I did it would not convey anything to anybody [… The hors d'oeuvres] were taken seriously because they were avowedly useless extras, like the whole dinner and the whole club' (*FB* 42). Again, the collapsed-repetition of 'any'—'anything to anybody'—evokes an air of negative presence, located, in this instance, in the extreme codification of the fare on offer, as an allegory of the exclusivity-*ad-absurdum* of the club itself.

While a certain potential ambivalence might be thought to pertain to the narrator's remark concerning the *hors d'oeuvres*, since the abundance of 'avowedly useless extras' is the intrinsic point of a carnival feast—a celebration of excess, with 'no utilitarian connotation' (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 276)—it is essential that this aspect should *contrast* with the company itself. There should be a joyous dichotomy between the practicality of the company and their festive excess, whereas here every guest at the table is a comparably 'useless extra', both in terms of his contribution to the event, either in the guise of conversationalist or producer of goods, and, in Chesterton's outlook, to society in general. All forms of heavily coded discourse are critiqued as epistemologically vacuous in 'The Queer Feet', from the menu's description of what the Fishermen consume, to the vapid secret-talk of empire—'"Splendid work young Moocher's doing in Burma"' (*FB* 45)—which they emit. Chesterton's account, in 'A Defence of Slang', of the language of the 'man of fashion' as 'a mere string of set phrases, as lifeless as a string of dead fish', finds a corporeal counterpart in the 'sacred fish course' which forms the centrepiece of the Fishermen's banquet, and 'consisted (to the eyes of the vulgar) in a sort of monstrous pudding' (*FB* 44). Here the ostentation of the food tips over from the sublime to the ridiculous in a material rendition of bathos,

while the further parenthetic interjection echoes Chesterton's irreverent account of Wilde's verse, in which the bathos is disclosed by the spectator's capacity to see through 'the eyes of the vulgar'.

The fact that the objects stolen from the guests are the items of cutlery which enable them to eat with dignity is also significant from a Bakhtinian perspective. As he explains, 'If food is separated from work and conceived as part of a private way of life, then nothing remains of the old images […] Nothing is left but a series of artificial, meaningless metaphors' (*Rabelais* 282). Consequently, a further bathetic travesty of carnival is implied by the fact that the inert cutlery, which places the diner at one remove from the food, is more highly prized than the regenerative food itself, while the disappearance of the cutlery renders the continuation of the meal impossible, a finger buffet being most certainly beyond contemplation. The evanescent cutlery therefore operates as a metaphor for the club's alienation from the material world, since, as Bakhtin asserts of the principle of imminence at stake in festive imagery, '[t]he encounter of man with the world […] takes place inside the open, biting, rending, chewing mouth' (*Rabelais* 281). Here we again see how every detail of the mystery is selected for, and subordinated to, its capacity to support the social message, rather than vice versa, just as the satirical premise of the club's exclusivity enables Chesterton to establish the conditions of a locked-room mystery.

In the *Autobiography*, Chesterton discusses his literal distaste at the fine-dining of his day: 'those who really prefer eating good cutlets and omelets to living on gilt plaster and pantomime footmen had already found their way to delightful little dens off Leicester Square' (116). While it is significant that Chesterton again finds maximum enjoyment in the least exclusive of locales, the reference to 'pantomime footmen' intriguingly hints back to the roles of Flambeau and Father Brown in the story at hand. As O'Brien explains, in the traditional pantomime the casting of the '"grotesque" characters like Harlequin and the Clown […] as servants […] flipped the usual format of mainpiece comedy, bringing what was typically a subplot involving servants to the foreground' (11). The harlequinade conventionally occupies a structural position in relation to serious drama comparable to the status of Aristophanean burlesque as a ribald postscript in the Greek drama, a model which I also discussed earlier as the template for the journalistic methodology of *The Speaker*. While Chesterton

explicitly figures Flambeau as 'the harlequin' (*FB* 59) in 'The Flying Stars' (*Cassell's Magazine* June 1911), the parallel is implicit in 'The Blue Cross', when the narrator discusses his 'outbursts of athletic humour' (*FB* 3), and is developed further in the role of mischievously insubordinate servant into which he is cast in 'The Queer Feet'.

Flambeau's nonverbal physical parody of the guests also operates as a mime, a comic form which Kiremidjian identifies as a progenitor of the *Commedia dell'Arte*: in classical tradition 'the mimes […] parodied the life of the lower and upper class alike, were sympathetic with the cause or grievance of the common people and represented a form of mediation between lowest peasant and highest aristocrat' (*Study* 99). Chesterton's deployment of Father Brown in 'The Queer Feet' is also informed by the festive-comic schema of pantomime, since, in structural terms, the priest represents the clown to Flambeau's Harlequin. When the pair infiltrate the club in the guises of elemental trickster and wise fool, the unofficial carnival is implanted within the official construct, sowing, respectively, disorder and the questioning of 'eternal' truths of social caste. Brown's role adheres to the tradition 'at English feasts to have "some iestyng feloe, that maye scoff and iest upon the gestes as they sitten at the table"' (Welsford, *Fool* 24). The clown at the medieval dining table was traditionally considered a '[p]arasite' (Welsford, *Fool* 8) who must sing for his supper—*parasitos*, another derivation from the prefix, 'para', translates literally as 'beside food' (*para-sitos*), so that the original meaning of the social parasite was one 'who eats at the table of another, earning meals by flattery' (Barnhart 756). In the case at hand Chesterton produces a pristine reversal, in which the auspicious guests are figured as social parasites, who are justly derided by Chesterton's wise-fool.

Brown's critique focuses upon the comedy of manners *in extremis* in which the Fishermen engage, which prevents the community marriage that festive comedy seeks to promulgate, thus situating the diners as the occupants of the blocking role which conventionally belongs to the villain in both festive comedy and detective fiction. When Brown delivers his final summary of events, the fact that Flambeau has long since handed back the stolen cutlery frees the priest to discuss the thief with a sympathy absent from the withering disdain that he shows for the institution itself: '"Odd, isn't it," he said, "that a thief and a vagabond should repent, when so many who are rich and secure remain hard and frivolous,

and *without fruit* for God or man?"' (*FB* 47-48; my emphasis). In *The Flying Inn*, a text which Chesterton referred to as a 'harlequinade' (*Autobiography* 288), this criticism is echoed in Dalroy's song of 'Mr Mandragon the Millionaire'. Dalroy first indicts the fantastical fairy-tale figure, Mandragon, on the grounds of his enervation—he relies upon a machine to haul him out of bed and wash him—before attacking his infertile isolation, which pertains even in death: 'he lies there fluffy and soft and grey, and certainly quite refined, / When he might have rotted with the flowers and fruit with Adam and all mankind' (*Flying* 161).

This imagery produces a parallel with Bakhtin's account of the resemblance of Dostoevsky's gruesome short story, 'Bobok' (1873), to the mystery play: 'The central figurative idea here is also that of the mystery play […] "contemporary dead men" are as sterile seed, cast on the ground, but capable neither of dying (that is, of being cleansed of themselves, of rising above themselves), nor of being renewed (that is, of bearing fruit)' (*Problems* 147). Again, this motif implies a link to Aristophanes, whose parabasis in *Wasps* (422 BC) involves the chorus leader describing the playwright 'as an artist who is trying to "sow a crop of new ideas", and asks that spectators save up his phrases "like fruit"' (Bevis 10). In a further empathetic correspondence between hero and narrator, the generic parody of 'The Queer Feet' challenges the insistent strain of critical thought that figures the parodist as an enervating parasite on superior artists. In 'The Queer Feet', this conception is both literalised and subverted. In infiltrating the detection genre and eating at its table, Chesterton nourishes the form with arresting new ideas and memorably rich phrases.

The origins of festive comedy lie in the regenerative intent of the fertility rite, a context which helps to explain why Chesterton's trenchant satire is offset with repeated gestures towards rejuvenation through pedagogic mockery, a balancing dynamic which again leads to a tentatively utopian conclusion. The period of carnival not only invites in all those normally 'unwelcome' to engage in the exclusive event, it also liberates the members of the official feast to behave for once like *real people*. The narrator never denies the efficacy of the construct as a socially disenabling space, exclusive in the literal sense: 'it was a thing which paid, not by attracting people, but actually by turning people away' (*FB* 36). However, it is also made clear that the doors of exclusivity close in as well as out—absurdly the hotel's 'very inconveniences were considered as walls

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protecting a particular class' (*FB* 37), so that the members' obsession with class discrimination leads to their own privation.

A similar ambivalence pertains to Father Brown's irreverent explanation of Flambeau's criminal method: "'It was no new thing to [the waiters] that a swell from the dinner party should pace all parts of the house like an animal at the zoo'" (*FB* 50). Here, the anthropomorphic simile again serves to highlight the indignity cast upon such figures by their indecorous representation before the general reader in a detective story, while Brown's choice of the slang-term 'swell' suggests both his verbal identification with the 'waiting' class, and a tacit mockery of the diners' grotesquely bloated stomachs. However, in a more emollient touch, the figuring of the guests as animals 'at the zoo' also suggests a degree of sympathetic regret for the self-imprisoning nature of their exclusivity. Just as the narrator attempts to goad the reader into action, Brown's insults operate as an attempt to chivvy the Fishermen into breaking free of the confines of their mental and physical cages. In 'The Beauty of Noise' (*DN* 18 Aug. 1906), Chesterton argues that a 'wicked refinement […] has in our time separated the social classes more completely, perhaps, than they were ever separated before' (*CDN* 4: 39). Dentith corroborates this account, as well as Chesterton's related deprecation of the increasing topographical segregation that characterised modern urban life, in a discussion of the social conditions that particularly invite parodic literature:

> Strongly stratified societies […] where separate classes live in relative social isolation, are very likely to produce mutual parodic characterisations of the social layers, whose manners of speech and writing are very strongly marked by class. This is very strikingly the case […] in English society, between, roughly, the 1880s and the 1950s. This society was highly socially zoned, and its different groups lived in remarkable ignorance of each other (*Parody* 30-31).

In 'The Queer Feet', the revelation of the theft reinforces the air of schism by exposing the guests' ignorance of the men constantly surrounding them: "'Know the waiter?' answered Mr. Audley indignantly. 'Certainly not!'" (*FB* 45). Chesterton discusses the alienating aspect of the class divide of the age in the *Autobiography*, noting that the upwardly mobile late-Victorian household 'knew far too little of its own servants […] in the class as a whole there was neither the coarse familiarity in work, which belongs to democracies […] nor the remains of

a feudal friendliness such as lingers in the real aristocracy. There was a sort of silence and embarrassment' (13). The motif of 'silence and embarrassment' also vitally informs the action-level events of 'The Queer Feet'. Silence, in the sense of meaningful discourse, is the dominant theme prior to the theft—in a typically economical pun, the main course is eaten in 'devouring silence' (*FB* 44)—while embarrassment reigns in its aftermath. The theme of social embarrassment highlights the singular vehemence of Chesterton's take on the comedy of manners, the club itself being described at the outset as 'an institution such as can only exist in an oligarchical society which has almost gone mad on good manners' (*FB* 36). Again, this dysfunctional restrictiveness is accentuated by the contrastive quality of the narrative voice. As we have seen, the narrator has some difficulty controlling his own manners in his exposition, his explosions of bile liberating him from the conventions of narrative 'good manners' even as they contribute to a highly sophisticated narratorial manner.

When the theft occurs, the confused behaviour of one of the genuine waiters increases the guests' sense of embarrassment and disorientation: 'all those vague and kindly gentlemen were so used to the smoothness of the unseen machinery which surrounded and supported their lives, that a waiter doing anything unexpected was a start and a jar. They felt as you and I would feel if the inanimate world disobeyed—if a chair ran away from us' (*FB* 44). Again, the use of 'you or I' highlights the insinuating tone of the narrative reportage, while the final image recalls Bergson's account of the 'unseen machinery' of human repetition, here in the context of waiters being demeaned to the inanimate level of chairs to be complacently sat upon. Of course, the contingent absence of a chair where one is expected—a service conventionally rendered by the waiter—is also the archetypal practical joke at the expensive of inelasticity, while the vitalisation of the 'inanimate world' is a characteristic motif of nonsense, here once more turned to satirical purpose in order to lend pedagogic grounding to the uncanny, in a manner which subtly gestures back to the social critique of 'The Blue Cross'. Specifically, in *What's Wrong With the World*, Chesterton contrasts the perilous insecurity of the homes of the poor with the situation of the 'rich man [who] knows that his own house moves on vast and soundless wheels of wealth' (*CW* 4: 72). This image closely corresponds to the narrator's account of 'the smoothness of the unseen machinery which surrounded and supported [the] lives' (*FB* 44) of

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the clubmen in 'The Queer Feet', whose extreme discomfort at the revelation of the waiters' humanity leads to an immediate imaginative reification of the mechanistic waiting machine: 'these modern plutocrats could not bear a poor man near to them, either as a slave or as a friend. That something had *gone wrong with the servants* was merely a dull, hot embarrassment' (*FB* 45; my emphasis).

The theme of schismatic alienation not only pertains across the classes, but also implicitly extends to the members' equivalent ignorance of one another—in his capacity as fellow-diner, Flambeau must have been a mysterious presence to the other guests, yet they never question his identity, since their lack of communality ironically renders the Fishermen interchangeable to one another. As with Chesterton's account of Hudge and Gudge, this interchangability also corrupts reassuringly clear-cut political distinctions, to convey an unprincipled travesty of the utopian reconciliation of existential binaries: Mr Audley sometimes 'embarrassed the company by phrases suggesting that there was some difference between a Liberal and a Conservative' (*FB* 43). The relativistic connotations of this conceit evoke Chesterton's combined ethical and psychological fear of the 'starry abyss of nonsense' that is disclosed by a complete absence of wit. In an echo of his intertwined critique of the aloof detachment of decadence and the derangement of nonsense, here the 'yawning […] *abyss* of inanity' in the official feast combines with the 'horrible modern *abyss* between the souls of the rich and the poor' (my emphases), to evoke a thoroughgoing breach of 'the Covenant of Things'.

In order to combat this vertiginous disintegration of meaning, Chesterton reinstates wit in the story at hand, precisely through a satirical manipulation of disturbingly uncanny nonsense imagery. To this end, the narrator not only employs images of reification to characterise the waiters, but also the clubmen, figuring them as lifeless marionettes when the revelation of the missing cutlery dawns upon them: 'none of the company could say anything except the man of wood—Colonel Pound—who seemed galvanised into an unnatural life' (*FB* 45). Here, the reification in wood, followed by the Frankenstein's-monster-like 'galvanisation', emphasises the *unheimlich* quality of the club's inhabitants. Similarly, the phrase 'could say anything', rather than 'could think of anything to say' again conveys a sense of petrifaction caused by extreme torpor—of indolent satiety coalescing with a paradoxical physical absence. Chesterton's imagery

implicitly connects linguistic infelicity—'could say anything'—to physical inanition as comparable examples of degeneration into lifeless automatism, against which his own mode of 'spontaneous' narrative composition again stands in striking opposition. Chesterton's interactive game-playing with his secretaries not only contrasts with the Fishermen's aloof ignorance of the waiters, but also challenges his mental dexterity, by compelling him to improvise complex plotlines in real-time.

Again, Bergsonian theory offers an informative context through which to understand Chesterton's methodology in the story at hand, insofar as the former's description of unreflective habit as 'a mechanism superimposed upon life' (*Laughter* 45) is directly related to the workings of the highly-codified ceremony: 'the stiff and starched formality of any ceremonial suggests to us an image of this kind. For, as we forget the serious object of a solemnity or a ceremony, those taking part in it give us the impression of puppets in motion. Their mobility seems to adopt as a model the immobility of the formula. It becomes automatism' (*Laughter* 45-46). In Bergsonian terms, the inelasticity of the guests invites Flambeau's arch parody: 'we are imitable, says Bergson, when we act mechanically' (Habib 67). However, as with Chesterton's critique of bourgeois domesticity in 'The Human Circulating Library', he departs from Bergson in the specifically historicised satire of contemporary society that he is pursuing. As Habib notes, 'Bergson's critique […] is debilitated by its ahistorical foundation: what are actually tendencies of a specific era of bourgeois predominance—such as mechanisation, exhaustion of individual by group identity, transformation of human into thing—are ascribed by Bergson indiscriminately to "society"' (69). Conversely, while Chesterton frames his action-level account with comparably enduring cultural archetypes to those cited by Bergson—in this instance, the formalised ceremony—his narrative-level exposition also explicitly states that it is the conditions of *this particular* society which promulgate the schism depicted: it is 'wholly the product of our time' (*FB* 44-45).

In 'The Uncanny' (1919), Freud quotes Jentsch's assertion that an atmosphere of the uncanny arises whenever there is '"doubt as to whether an apparently animate object really is alive and, conversely, whether a lifeless object might not perhaps be animate"' (*Uncanny* 135). A comparable uncertainty is promoted by Chesterton's imagery in 'The Monstrosity' (*DN* 11 Mar. 1911),

published five months after 'The Queer Feet', in which he takes his earlier image of imperial Britain as a senile dandy one stage further, employing the corpse as a still-more gruesomely burlesque physical metaphor of the imperial body politic: 'When a dead body is rotting, it does not diminish; it swells. [...] Our own country is really in this state of swollen decay' (*CDN* 7: 88). Since this imagery echoes Father Brown's use of slang in describing the Fishermen as 'swells', Chesterton's choice of 'Moocher' as the title of the Fishermen's colonial associate would seem to convey a further subtle satire of imperial politics, since the word connotes, in British slang, aimless loitering, and in American slang, thievery. While the nomenclatural levelling effect of 'Moocher' echoes Brown's recourse to unrefined slang, forcibly conferring upon the upper-class figure a term which is usually associated with the lower class, the colonial activities of Moocher are parodied by Flambeau, who loiters in the clubmen's indigenous environment with apparently unproductive aimlessness, while surreptitiously appropriating any valuables in the immediate vicinity.

The appearance of Flambeau at the feast constitutes a parodic return of the repressed, which causes the silver accumulated by colonial appropriation to mysteriously dematerialise. In this sense, Flambeau's mischief serves to highlight, through parody, an unspoken crime of the society itself, in line with Freud's argument that the unmasking impetus of travesty '"comes into play when someone has seized dignity and authority by a deception and these have to be taken from him in reality"' (*Jokes* 262). As Father Brown observes, in 'The Red Moon of Meru', '"the West also has its own way of covering theft with sophistry"' (*FB* 630). Elsewhere, Freud explains that one definition of '*heimlich*' is '"to steal secretly away"' (*Uncanny* 129-30), so that 'the term "uncanny" (*unheimlich*) applies to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open' (*Uncanny* 132), a principle which applies here to the exposure of the exclusive club itself, hidden in plain sight in central London, as well as the crime committed against the club by Flambeau, which, in turn, uncovers the colonial thefts that support the club's existence.

While postcolonial criticism has come to associate this revelatory action with 'the response of the colonial margin to the metropolitan centre' (Smith xvii), Chesterton represents an example of a writer at the heart of the metropolitan centre revealing the unpalatable truth to his own society. A further instance of

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Flambeau performing this function occurs in 'The Flying Stars', a story which features a close cousin of the Fishermen—Leopold Fischer, an Anglo-German financier who bears more than a passing resemblance to Alfred Beit—who is the victim of a diamond theft. When Fischer accuses a socialist journalist of committing the crime, Father Brown immediately discounts this accusation: '"men who mean to steal diamonds don't talk socialism. They are more likely," he added demurely, "to denounce it"' (*FB* 60). Since this is precisely what Fischer has been doing, the implication would seem to be that, in colonial terms, it is capitalists like Fischer who evince a greater propensity to steal diamonds. Again, it is Flambeau's crime that enables Father Brown to elaborate this moral.

In view of Chesterton's vision of the imperial body as a decaying corpse, it is perhaps unsurprising that when the Fishermen discover that the presence of death has accounted for the malfunction of the waiting machine their sense of discomfiture becomes particularly acute. At this point 'Mr. Audley felt it necessary to break the silence in the interests of Tact' (*FB* 45), which he achieves by introducing the reference to Moocher's work in the colonies, rather than by acknowledging the crisis occurring in front of him—a powerful allegory of the attitude of his entire class as the overseas empire crumbles and the domestic social fabric threatens to be rent apart. When the Fishermen discover that an impostor has replaced the dead waiter, they become collectively aware that '[f]or a few weird seconds they had really felt as if the fifteenth waiter might be the ghost of the dead man upstairs. They had been dumb under that oppression, for ghosts to them were an embarrassment, like beggars' (*FB* 46). As Bakhtin notes, in a remark that sheds a significant light upon Chesterton's method, traditionally '[d]uring banquets ghosts appear only to usurpers or to the representatives of the old dying world' (*Rabelais* 296). The Fishermen might well find the presence of a ghost embarrassing—it might parody their own condition of living death a little too brutally for comfort.

The revelation of the presence of death causes the narrator to speculate that it 'may be (so supernatural is the word death) that each of these idle men looked for a second at his soul, and saw it as a small dried pea. One of them—the duke, I think—even said with the idiotic kindness of wealth: "Is there anything we can do?"' (*FB* 46). Kindness is combined here with uselessness to devastatingly terse effect. At this late stage in the narrative the duke's question strikes the reader

more as a plaintive entreaty (as would be implied if one were to once more emphasise the 'anything') than a disinterested offer of help. The use of jarring authorial interposition—the parenthetic assertion that death carries supernatural associations, the extraneous, conversational addition of 'I think' and 'idiotic'—serves to authorise the 'dried pea' remark as the narrator's own discursive sentiments, making of the 'it may be' an implicit 'it ought to be'. Finally, the choice of a dried pea as metaphor ties the description ironically to the feast-travesty itself, through the provision of a fittingly parlous link between the diners and the dinner.

This moment of epiphany for the Fishermen coincides with the appearance of Brown in the role of mystery disperser, explaining the burglary that motivated Flambeau's 'dance of death'. With the latter conceit, the poles of satire and the grotesque are skilfully balanced once more. Much as the disorientating vegetative depictions of Brown discussed in my opening chapter are grounded by their satirical opposition to the isolation of what Bakhtin terms 'economic man', Chesterton redeems the unnerving grotesquery of the skeleton by extrapolating a pedagogic lesson from its structure: 'flamboyant prigs should be convinced that one practical joke, at least, would bowl them over, that they would fall into one grinning man-trap, and not rise again' (*Defendant* 47). Nonetheless, his account of the origins of the *Danse Macabre*, in 'Morality and the Clown' (*DN* 28 Dec. 1907), also elucidates the regenerative element of Flambeau's capering: 'It was the dance of death; but it was a dance. Not taking the body seriously it flung the body into fifty frantic attitudes. It had force, and the dance of death led the way to the dance of life' (*CDN* 4: 388).

As this implies, Chesterton turns to the skeleton not only as a satirically destructive symbol, but also as an emblem of parodic regeneration. This balancing principle is also discernible in Flambeau's carnivalesque embodiment of fire, in contrast to the sterile 'flame' of Valentin's fanaticism, a distinction which reveals the philosophical basis of the latter's expulsion to be that of a discriminatory refinement of acceptable archetypes, based upon their relative regenerative efficacy. Bakhtin explains that 'the image of fire in carnival' is '[d]eeply ambivalent […] It is a fire that simultaneously destroys and renews the world. In European carnivals there was almost always a special structure (usually a vehicle adorned with all possible sorts of gaudy carnival trash) called "hell"' (*Problems*

126). In 'The Two Fires' (*DN* 1 July 1911), Chesterton elaborates upon the literal meaning of 'Bonfire' as 'the Good Fire', which burns only the 'bad things' of a culture—Chesterton includes 'reports of the Eugenic Congress' amid the 'rubbish' of his own hypothetical bonfire—while preserving the 'good things' (*CDN* 7: 162).[12] In identifying an analogy of distinct modes of revolution from this image, Chesterton notes that he would like to see 'the sneer […] struck from the face of the well-fed' while nonetheless preserving 'all that wealth of wood that might have made dolls and chairs and tables' (*CDN* 7: 162).

In 'The Queer Feet', the positive regeneration of 'the man of wood', Colonel Pound, is demonstrative of this principle—a reanimation of the dead which Brown and Flambeau assay through their respective employment of mental agility and physical vitality. The eighteenth-century English Harlequinade again provides the folkloric generic template here, insofar as the actor, John Rich (alias Lun), portrayed Harlequin as a character whose 'necromantic powers [provided] an excuse for novel transformation scenes' (Welsford, *Fool* 301-02). Similar imagery attended to the work of 'Grock' (born Charles Adrien Wettach) whose career ran contemporaneously with Chesterton's. In discussing the regenerative connotations attached to Grock's portrayal of the clown, Welsford notes that 'Grock's art is not only amusing, it is vitalizing. When he passes by, unwound clocks begin to tick [...] and queens are driven from the circus to childbed, "so you see that wheresoever Grock enters the stork is never far away"' (314).

As Sheinberg explains, the *Danse Macabre* bears similar connotations, combining 'the skeleton's fearsome traits with an incongruously amused dance', producing a 'blurring of the boundaries between life and death, the animate and inanimate. Through this link the grotesque is also related to puppet-shows […] animate dolls […] and mechanised human beings' (219). While recalling the mechanistic exposition of the Fishermen, this account also brings to mind the image of Father Brown 'kicking his short legs like a little boy on a gate' (*FB* 48), when he explains the circumstances of the theft to Colonel Pound. This image of Brown swinging his legs on a partition produces a correspondence with puppet theatre; in particular, Leatherbarrow's account of the behaviour of the folk-devil, Petrushka, in the Russia puppet theatre, in which the character traditionally

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[12] The reference to the Eugenic congress was an addition to the later, collected version of the essay (see *CDN* 7: 162 fn.160a).

'launches […] into a wordy monologue, often with his legs dangling from the booth in a gesture of familiarity with the crowd' (128). Leatherbarrow argues that '[t]he primary function of Petrushka was to make people laugh, but the kind of laughter it sought to evoke was [...] disruptive laughter, challenging all social and moral conventions [...] In other words, the disruptive carnival mood invited collusion: It passed beyond the puppet booth and infected the audience' (127-28).

The efficacy of Brown's disruptive laughter in promulgating a social conversion narrative that engenders benign collusion is demonstrated when he explains the crime to the colonel, and the latter remarks, sympathetically, '"I don't want to get the fellow jailed; make yourself easy about that"' (*FB* 48), in an echo of Valentin's disinclination to arrest Flambeau at the denouement of 'The Blue Cross'. Chesterton's attempt to inscribe a degree of placatory narratorial ambivalence within his critique by reinstating the humanity of these men is also suggested by his earlier reference to the company as 'vague and kindly gentlemen', a phrase which again emphasises the members' evanescence while granting a concession to their essential decency. Here we perceive the narrator mitigating his attacks with minor concessions, so as to maintain a degree of rhetorical balance which might prove efficacious in drawing readers together across the class and cultural divide which detective fiction comprehensively bridged. While Chesterton defends satirical scurrility in 'England and Caricature' (*DN* 28 Mar. 1908), on the grounds that traditionally '[m]en reminded a man maliciously of his bodily weakness […] if it was set-off against his worldly power' (*CDN* 5: 44), he also acknowledges the drawbacks of excessively destructive satire: 'We do not reconcile by pointing out the balance and distribution of glass eyes and wooden legs in all classes of the community. It produces equality, but hardly fraternity' (*CDN* 5: 45). Chesterton finds the answer to this difficulty in the mediating action of caricature:

> this English literary style, coarse and yet kind, has done more than anything else to create the possibility of a genial grotesque […] The wooden leg is insisted on, but not with contempt, and yet, again, not with commiseration. It is insisted on with gusto, as if the Admiral had grown his wooden leg by the sheer energy of his character (*CDN* 5: 45-46).

The positive revitalisation of the military 'man of wood' in 'The Queer Feet' operates as a microcosmic embodiment of Chesterton's attempt to morally revive the corpse of the imperial body, while prefiguring the central nonsense conceit of *The Flying Inn*, in which the sign of the titular pub represents 'the idea of dead wood walking about' (*Flying* 188). The latter phenomenon pantomimically frustrates the invidious plans of Lord Ivywood, whose name characterises him as a creeping parasite on that same wood: 'Ivywood, Lord Ivywood / He rots the tree as ivy would' (*Flying* 283). Here the tree is a metaphor of England, returned to a consciousness of its traditions, which 'until a little while ago the tree did not know that it knew' (*Flying* 268), much as the parodic actions of Brown and Flambeau reintroduce older cultural traditions into modern society in order to reacquaint Colonel Pound with a benevolent heritage which he did not know that he knew.

In an account that conforms closely to the purpose of Chesterton's earliest *Father Brown* stories, Bakhtin argues that 'Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, *a new mode of interrelationship between individuals*' (*Problems* 123). To this end, Chesterton promotes an atmosphere of festive brotherhood at the conclusion of 'The Queer Feet', in which Brown tells 'the story as easily as if he were telling it to an old friend by a Christmas fire', while Colonel Pound, by now swept up in the ingenious mystery, notes admiringly that '"[h]e must have been a clever fellow"' (*FB* 48). When the colonel adds coyly that '"I think I know a cleverer"' (*FB* 48), the conclusion comes to echo that of 'The Blue Cross', in which a frank, friendly exchange is enabled by the socially disruptive conditions of play, once more breathing fictional life into Chesterton's youthful vision of 'the redemption of the world by comradeship'.

In 'The Uncanny', Freud notes that '*heimlich*' can also connote 'familiar, friendly, confiding', as well as 'a place that is free of ghostly influences' (*Uncanny* 133). Similarly, Brown's confiding in the colonel—in combination with the narrator's unconventionally familiar manner with the reader—successfully disperses the initial sense of alienation conjured by the uncanny atmosphere of the club. In this way, Chesterton's unsettling satirical build-up and reassuring utopian denouement are both achieved through a balancing interplay of the *unheimlich* and the *heimlich*, or the estranging and the engaging (a duality which also

corresponds with striking complementarity to Bakhtin's Romantic and carnivalesque forms of grotesque). My final chapter will analyse the ways in which these mutually informing elements went on to permeate Chesterton's interaction with cultural modernity in the post-Edwardian era, as the aggressive challenge to his cultural authority mounted by figures such as T.S. Eliot drew fresh satirical sallies from Chesterton's pen. Nonetheless, as my earlier reference to Eliot's admiring obituary of Chesterton begins to suggest, this agonistic account is counterbalanced by an exposition of the stages through which Chesterton achieved an eventual reconciliation with Eliot, at the height of the latter's own cultural ascendency.

Chapter Four

Negotiating Modernity: Chesterton and T.S. Eliot

Reading through the Looking Glass

[T]his debate about new forms in art interests me, because my reaction to it is not that of the ordinary reactionary.

Chesterton, 'A New Theory of Novelty' (*ILN* 6 Oct. 1928; *CW* 34: 606)

"Do you know," said Lord Beaumont […] "I can never quite make out which side you are on. Sometimes you seem so liberal and sometimes so reactionary. *Are* you a modern, Basil?"

"No," said Basil, loudly and cheerfully, as he entered the crowded drawing-room.

Chesterton, 'The Painful Fall of a Great Reputation' (*CW* 4: 96)

In this chapter, I explore Chesterton's parodic engagement with literary modernism, with particular emphasis upon his interaction with T.S. Eliot. For Chesterton, the rise of Eliot's often disturbing poetic vision to a position of cultural ascendancy—beginning with the publication of *Prufrock and Other Observations* in 1917—seemed to augur a return to British culture of the twin ontological ogres of scepticism and pessimism. Consequently, his initial antipathy towards Eliot primarily stemmed from his sense that the same malaise that had forged *fin de siècle* decadence was regaining cultural traction. As with my analysis of Chesterton's simultaneous immersion in, and striving to surmount, decadence between 1890 and 1910, parody again forms the means through which Chesterton projects a cheerful dismissal of such threats, much as he approvingly portrays his hero, Basil Grant, bursting obtrusively into the genteel drawing room, a very deliberate bull in a china shop. However, this chapter argues that Chesterton's parodic response to Eliot is 'not that of the ordinary reactionary', but instead involves a considerably more ambivalent engagement with the figure towards whom he expresses dissent. When Chesterton has Lord Beaumont express confusion over Basil Grant's cultural politics, he exposes a kernel of multivalence that Grant shares with his creator, and which often reveals itself

most tellingly in the oppositional rhetoric of Chesterton's most fanatically playful *jeux d'esprit*.

My analysis also demonstrates that the disproportionately visceral antagonism that both Eliot and his associates, Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound, directed towards Chesterton in their early careers stemmed from much more complex private and public concerns than straightforward impatience with the spectacle of an adherent of passé values enjoying a superannuated cultural prominence. In this chapter, many of the parodic themes that informed my earlier chapters come together once more, including the ethical and psychological implications of nonsense, the dialogic basis of friendship, and the efficacy of self-parody as a means of achieving personal and cultural regeneration. Having established the status of 1910 as Chesterton's creative *annus mirabilis* in my previous chapter, I begin this chapter by discussing the same year as a catalytic phase in the burgeoning career of Eliot, in which the philosophical and aesthetic positions that would ultimately lead him into antagonistic dialogue with Chesterton later in the decade first cohered. I go on to analyse a series of parodic public exchanges conducted by the pair between 1917 and 1925, in order to explore the dialogic hall of mirrors in which this agon was played out. Finally, I elaborate the parodic detective work that enabled Chesterton to achieve a *rapprochement* with Eliot, during a new cultural and biographical phase bookended by Eliot's publication of 'The Hollow Men' in 1925 and Chesterton's death in 1936.

What mask *bizarre*! Eliot in 1910

> No man ever preached the impersonality of art so well; no man ever preached the impersonality of art so personally[.]
>
> Chesterton on Whistler, 'The Butterfly Again' (*DN* 25 Mar. 1905; *CDN* 3:66)

In January 1910, while still a student, Eliot published 'Humoresque' in the relatively modest environs of *The Harvard Advocate*. This poem bore the first fruit of his recent discovery of Jules Laforgue, through Arthur Symons' study of the late-nineteenth-century continental avant-garde, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899). Eliot's reading of Laforgue catalysed the inscrutably ironic

approach to poetic discourse that he went on to refine from 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', which he began in 1910 and had completed by July 1911 (Ricks xxxix), to 'The Hollow Men' in 1925. I will ultimately consider the latter poem as a second pivotal moment in Eliot's aesthetic development—both a crystallisation, and a sardonic survey, of his career to date. One aspect of this critical self-review is discernible in the 'deliberate disguises' which the authorial voice of Part II of 'The Hollow Men' hopes to accumulate as a means of avoiding an unwanted 'meeting' (*CPP* 84). 'Humoresque' first inaugurated this concern with protective disguise, appropriating Laforgue's vision of the artist as a detached puppet-master projecting forth poetic avatars, whose capering before the reader operates as a textual 'mask *bizarre!*' (*CPP* 602) raised to the face of the elusive poet.[1]

The narrator of 'Humoresque' expresses regret over the recent demise of one such puppet, a flawed model, 'weak in body as in head', who later makes contact from a new home among the '[h]aranguing spectres' of 'Limbo' (*CPP* 602). As this imagery suggests, the grotesque themes that have permeated my analysis of Chesterton return in strikingly comparable forms in Eliot's early work. In the case of 'Humoresque', Eliot's stress upon the evanescent authorial mask and the uncertainly animate marionette is particularly suggestive of the disorientating world of the Romantic grotesque—appropriately, since the title alludes to a form of nineteenth-century romantic music in which humour is divested of wit (see Randell 309). Bakhtin explains that the 'theme of the marionette plays an important part in […] Romanticism [and] folk culture' alike, though in the former 'the accent is placed on the puppet as the victim of alien inhuman force, which rules over men by turning them into marionettes' (*Rabelais* 40). If this premise recalls the precepts of Schopenhauerian pessimism, it is telling that Eliot later identified Laforgue to be '"the nearest verse equivalent to the philosoph[y] of Schopenhauer"', while explaining the latter's philosophy to be that of '"annihilation"' (qtd. in Habib 64). Similarly, the sub-heading of 'Humoresque'—'After J. Laforgue' (*CPP* 602)—frankly acknowledges the poem's status as a pastiche, an aesthetic mode discussed in chapter one as a correlate of the value-neutral, subjectivity-undermining aspect of the grotesque,

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[1] In the unpublished version, this line reads 'what masque bizarre!' (Eliot, *Inventions* 325), suggesting a wider array of disguises, worn in a textual fancy-dress ball. See Schuchard (70-86) for a more detailed analysis of Eliot's debt to Laforgue.

which informs Chesterton's disturbing vision of 'a man constantly changing into other men that is the soul of decadence'.

As these attributes suggest, Eliot's early imaginative landscape is closely allied to the disturbing realm of academic nonsense elaborated in my second chapter. However, his early work also incorporates other shades of the grotesque. While 'Humoresque' is a quintessentially Romantic-grotesque conceit, 'Suite Clownesque', composed in October 1910, is more closely allied to the physicality of the carnivalesque. In one sense, the poem would appear to be another pastiche of decadence. Its evocation of a simultaneous sense of alienation from, and identification with, the spectacle of oneself as a grotesquely corporeal figure under public scrutiny not only takes inspiration from Eliot's trips to the music hall during his time in Paris in 1910, but also from the decadent poetry of Symons, whose prologue to *London Nights* (1895) develops a comparable interplay between public and private selves:

> My life is like a music-hall,
> Where, in the impotence of rage,
> Chained by enchantment to my stall,
> I see myself upon the stage
> Dance to amuse a music-hall (*Selected* 38).

However, in an important deviation from Symons' traumatised account of a depersonalised spectatorship of the self, rather than the physical person being a painfully compromising factor in 'Suite Clownesque', the power of Eliot's 'comedian' derives from the discrepancy in vitality between his brazen 'belly sparkling and immense' and the enervated gentility of the 'potted palms' and 'terra cotta fawns' (*Inventions* 32) within which he moves. Whereas Eliot's marionette in 'Humoresque' is an ineffectual Pierrot, '[f]eebly contemptuous of nose' (*CPP* 602), the 'comedian' is an invulnerable Harlequin, possessed of an '[i]mpressive, sceptic, scarlet nose' which 'interrogates the audience' (*Inventions* 32). This dynamic, in which the clown not only insinuates himself with the audience, but also insinuates the audience with the abject performers, draws attention to the resemblance of Eliot's technique to that of Chesterton in 'The Queer Feet'. The contrast that Chesterton develops in his story between the enervated denizens of the club and the vibrant pantomime duo who infiltrate it

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along with the irreverent narrator coincides with the imagery of 'Suite Clownesque', in which Eliot's protagonist is a lithe, arch figure who 'gets away with it', invariably turning the tables on his fellow performers, while training his gaze back upon the complacent audience: 'A jellyfish impertinent […] Leaning across the orchestra' (*Inventions* 32).

Nonetheless, two aspects are missing from this insipient correspondence—the pedagogic action of moral satire, and the regenerative drive of the folk grotesque. In chapter two, I discussed Bakhtin's account of the distinct meanings of the mask in differing strains of the grotesque, which Bakhtin conceives to have undergone a degeneration, in post-Enlightenment literature, from its earlier, positive representation as an image of 'change and reincarnation', to its later status as a façade overlying a 'terrible vacuum'. The 'mask *bizarre'* worn by the early Eliot is most comparable to the latter model, with its connotation of the relativistic reaches of the parodic spectrum—an attribute drawn out by I.A. Richards's account of the '"ghostly flavor of irony which hung about [Eliot's] manner as though he were preparing a parody"' (qtd. in Chinitz 178). This view is corroborated by Habib's reading of Eliot's early philosophical position, which emphasises a radical, anti-Hegelian disruption of unified identity: 'Whereas Hegel's dialectic reinstates identity, Eliot sees the potential of irony as infinite, as transcending all closure' (143). In Eliot's early work, this grotesque self-positioning is evidenced by a disorientating pastiche of other identities, accompanied by a deflation of anything that looks too much like an unmediated expression of personal emotional conviction, through a form of programmatic self-parody in which bathos is deliberately engendered to derange the projection of earnestness. For example, the over-straining of the marionette in 'Humoresque' to assert its stylistic originality—it claims to be hawking '"[t]he newest style, on Earth, I swear"' (*CPP* 602)—is perhaps a method of authorial self-policing, a ventriloquistic warning-to-self of the bathetic consequences of affecting pristine novelty, which also serves to tip off the critical reader that the poet is alive to this pitfall.

Eliot's circuitous performance of heightened self-awareness contracts a further debt to Laforgue, since the latter's stress upon the ironic 'playing [of] voices against one another' (Gordon, *Early* 29) represented an attempt to complicate the reader's understanding of the author's position in relation to the

sentiments of the text. This deliberate alienating action militates against an uncomplicated 'meeting' between poet and reader, in a manner comparable to that which Chesterton had earlier complained of in the rise of the cultural 'mystagogue', whose work represents the ultimate smirking private joke: 'we have seen the process of secrecy and aristocracy introduced even into jokes. […A] small school of aesthetes […] have introduced an almost insane individualism into that one form of intercourse which is specially and uproariously communal. They have made even levities into secrets' ('Aristocrats as Mystagogues.' *ILN* 25 Jan. 1908; *CW* 28: 32). This schismatic principle is espoused by the impenetrable ironist, Auberon Quin, in *Napoleon*, following the intonation of a monologue of incomprehensible nonsense-riddling: 'Hitherto it was the ruin of a joke that people did not see it. Now it is the sublime victory of a joke that people do not see it' (*CW* 6: 243).

As I discussed in chapter one, a complete absence of earnestness is inimical to the production of moral satire. In Chesterton's fiction, this absence is epitomised by the figure of Quin, who was recognised 'by the entire reviewing world as Max Beerbohm' (Ward, *Gilbert* 153), and styles his regiment 'the 1st Decadents Green' (*CW* 6: 328) in the battle of Notting Hill. Eliot's resemblance to Beerbohm is an irony in itself, since his attempts to confound stable personality were essayed, in large part, as a defence mechanism to protect himself from the potential blows of parodists such as Beerbohm. As Soldo argues, Eliot's early work possesses 'the nervous humor of an intellectually astute, but emotionally insecure person, intent upon using humor as a protective shield to ward off invasions of his inner sanctum' (144). Much as Prufrock dreads exposure to 'The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase' (*CPP* 14), and carefully prepares a suitable mask to ward off this threat, Eliot hypothesises unmediated encounters with other minds as agonistic, rather than sympathetic scenarios, and in his early verse this apprehension manifests itself in a miasmic vortex of self-parody, conducted as a means of evading capture by the detecting reader. As 'The Hollow Men' has it, 'Between the emotion / And the response / Falls the Shadow' (*CPP* 85), and despite the note of lamentation introduced here, in Eliot's earlier work there is a sense that he prefers it this way.

Eliot later confided to Woolf that '"humiliation"' (qtd. in Ackroyd 84) was his greatest fear. In the post-Edwardian literary arena, the threat of humiliation was most clearly posed by the forensic gaze of parodists such as Beerbohm—haranguing spectres who invade the inner sanctum with mischievous intent, using their textual detective instincts to root out and bring to light any secret, perhaps subconscious, preoccupations that the *ur* author might have failed to efface with sufficient rigour. Indeed, when Beerbohm's parodic symposium, *A Christmas Garland*, was first published, one reviewer contradicted Leavis's later assertion that the 'true effects' of great writers are inaccessible to the parodist, noting that Beerbohm not only caught the 'externals' of his subjects, but also 'unbared their brains and hearts', having apparently obtained 'temporary loans of their very minds' ('A Christmas Garland'). In attempting to evade the threat of satirical exposure augured by this disturbing mental congress, Eliot took up a position at the grotesque extreme of the parodic spectrum—the point at which identity becomes comprehensively confounded by the ungovernable energies of existential irony.

It is a further irony that one of Eliot's primary purposes in assembling his elusive retinue of disguises was to evade the charge of displaying an *earnest* adherence to decadence—a charge invited by his professed sympathy with the etiolated, defunct marionette of 'Humoresque'. Gordon detects a 'wilfully defeatist identity' (*Early* 29) in the work that immediately postdates Eliot's contact with Symons, a poet whose temperamental and stylistic influence upon Eliot's verse has been convincingly mapped by Roger Holdsworth (13-18). While occasionally arresting, Symons' verse frequently indulges in a complacent, sentimental pessimism, which skirts the kind of unintentional self-parody later mocked by Beerbohm in 'Enoch Soames' (1916), his tale of a second-rate decadent poet whose tepid volume of 'Negations' (*Seven* 13) meets with universal indifference.[2] Registering this potential site of attack, Eliot took the precaution of filtering Symons' monologic pessimism through Laforgue's ironic play of voices, sloughing off his *Weltschmerz* onto a lengthy series of ambivalently conceived, abject poetic avatars.

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[2] Felstiner argues that there is a marked similarity between Soames' verse and that of Symons (9).

Insofar as Eliot conceives the dialogic interlocutor as a critical consciousness to be consistently outwitted, the apparently self-deprecatory gesture of the sub-heading of 'Humoresque' can also be read as the first of his many attempts to police the terms of his reception, by pointing the reader towards the appropriate source of influence. Disarmed by the apparent modesty of this concession, the reader is less likely to carry out further investigations. While Kenner claims that Eliot is 'a habitual imitator, but […] a tacit imitator' (*Pound* 438), he is also a singularly indiscreet thief, who hides his purloined letters in plain view, stealing from others while attempting to elude capture himself, by ostentatiously advertising his literary debts in a manner which involves fessing up in advance to a lesser crime. As he famously argued, with a curious admixture of bravado and self-criminalisation, '[i]mmature poets imitate, mature poets steal' ('Philip' 125). For my present purposes, the most important aspect of this dictum is its predication upon absolute self-consciousness. While imitation potentially connotes an unconscious appropriation which would leave the artist open to satirical attack, stealing is an intrinsically deliberate act. This urge to retain a conscious grip on his materials helps to explain why Sewell terms Eliot 'as extensive a parodist as Carroll was' ('Lewis' 67), and particularly why Eliot invokes the inventions of the White Knight in the title of the notebook of his early poems, *Inventions of the March Hare*, as a means of advertising the unlikeliness that he would make a comparably involuntary error to that of Carroll's unconscious pasticheur.

However, Beerbohm's later satirical assessments of Eliot demonstrate the fallibility of these evasive strategies. With characteristic critical acumen, Beerbohm specifically identified both inscrutable irony and anaemic pessimism as the salient features of Eliot's verse, glossing *Prufrock and Other Observations* as an exercise in '"ironically analysing an empty sardine tin"' (qtd. in Riewald 188), while inferring the interrogative moral of *The Waste Land* (1922) to be '[w]ot's the good o' trying to earn a living nowadays?... Wot's the good of *ennyfink*? Why, *nuffink*!' (qtd. in Felstiner 65). In each case, a capacity to commune empathetically with the poet—implied in the first instance by the reattribution of Eliot's anthropomorphic feline imagery to the poet himself, and in the second instance by the allusive gesture towards Eliot's debt to the music hall—acts as the means through which Beerbohm skewers his target all the more effectively. In this

respect, Beerbohm confirms Eliot's fears of being subjected to agonistic assessment by his peers, and his suspicion that an opening up of empathetic lines of communication may not be an uncomplicatedly beneficent scenario.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that Beerbohm is able to identify the comic elements in his target so successfully because the traits that he perceives in Eliot derive equally from within himself. Eliot's Laforgean doubling of perspective is closely comparable to that which Beerbohm had essayed when producing his inscrutably ironical 'Defence of Cosmetics', which, as Felstiner notes, constructs a carefully-wrought stylistic 'mask to project the roles of aesthete and counter-aesthete at once' (6). A comparable prevarication between espousal and debunking of decadence is discernible in the comic protestations of Beerbohm's narrator, in 'Enoch Soames', that the poet's apparently inept verses are 'laden perhaps with meanings as deep as Mallarmé's own' (*Seven* 11). Of course, the humour of this conceit derives from the reader's awareness that the abject text has been projected from within Beerbohm himself, and Beerbohm self-consciously plays upon this irony, by displaying a residual pride in his poetic craftsmanship, even when deliberately presenting the work as bathetic, much as Eliot simultaneously identifies with, and distances himself from, the flaws of his etiolated marionette in 'Humoresque'.

Bentley discusses Beerbohm's strategies of self-defence in his diary, observing of a family dispute that he feels 'compelled to adopt a Max Beerbohm attitude—to be so openly absurd that you disarm criticism' (13 Oct. 1896; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.865). As I discussed in chapter one, Chesterton's acts of intentional self-parody also represent the moment at which self-mockery becomes indistinguishable from self-defence, as a means of advertising a self-consciousness which draws the potential sting of the parodist. In the case of Beerbohm's epigrammatic parodies of Eliot, even if they succeed in striking the target, the achievement is vitiated by the sense that the target got there first, having already learned how to ward off such blows from the example set by Beerbohm himself. This site of correspondence between both Chesterton and Bentley, and Chesterton and Eliot, is of great importance in understanding the confluence of similarity and difference that suffuses the personalities of the three men, which complicated the achievement of mutual sympathy, with more wide-ranging consequences—in the case of Chesterton and Eliot—for their subsequent

reception. The most effective way of locating the crux of this ambivalent relation will be to take a closer look at the third, and most fully realised, of the marionettes conceived by Eliot in 1910, J. Alfred Prufrock.

As Maud Ellmann notes, in 'Prufrock', 'the subject is patrolled at every moment', he 'sees himself being *seen*', yet also 'acts as his own voyeur, pinned and wriggling under his own pitiless eye' (69). Exorbitantly conscious of the potential criticisms of others, he becomes his own self-satirist, while compulsively evincing an urge to parody others in turn. This duality is particularly highlighted by Prufrock's account of the time available for 'visions and revisions' (*CPP* 14), a phrase that directly correlates to the temporal dynamic of parody—in which the visions of the *ur* artist are followed by the revisions of the parodist—while internalising this dynamic to refer to the protagonist's own bathetic self-revisions. Prufrock's double-edged urge to parodically amend is exemplified by the time that it takes for him to wonder '"Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"' (*CPP* 14), since the two occasions on which he does utter this phrase constitute an archetype of formal repetition with deviation, amending the 'overwhelming question' (*CPP* 15), 'Do I dare / Disturb the universe?' (*CPP* 14), to the farcical conundrum, 'Do I dare to eat a peach?' (*CPP* 16), thus rendering an initially sublime vision ridiculous through revision.

Significantly, the first of these questions is also an unattributed quotation from Laforgue (see Kenner, *Invisible* 21). Consequently, the peach adaptation constitutes a burlesque reconfiguration of a phrase of the forebear, even as it self-deprecatingly draws the protagonist's own inconsequentiality into the range of its criticism. In this way, Eliot's parody of his mentor simultaneously enables his avatar to enact a self-conscious self-parody, producing a particularly economical expression of the carnivalesque principle of grotesque, democratic laughter, in which the self is drawn into a universal sphere of mockery, to become parodic spectator and parodied actor at once. When Prufrock's portentous speculation that there will be time 'to murder and create' (*CPP* 14) resolves itself in his prevarication before the peach, the revision transmutes the cerebral into the corporeal in the characteristic action of burlesque, reframing the original disturbance of the universe to connote the act of digestion, to produce a scatological rendition of murder and creation. If we consider the protagonist's sequential questions to operate as an internal dialogue, the revision produces a

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comparable effect to the mocking echo which the court buffoon might offer as a rejoinder to the pompous Prince, while winking at the audience with a 'hark at him' gesticulation.

In Eliot's early work, this carnivalesque element is in continual tension with the timorous drive to establish a more absolute detachment. Again, the latter quality demonstrates a temperamental affinity with Laforgue, who followed Schopenhauer in displaying an urge to split the subject into a dyad of 'mocking commentator and droll sufferer' (Habib 31), with the aim of establishing a 'second, or transcendent, self overlook[ing] in a detached fashion the activities of the first self' (Habib 7). As Eliot explained in a letter to Conrad Aiken (30 Sept. 1914), in an exposition of deliberate depersonalisation, the trick 'is to be able to look at one's life as if it were somebody else's' (*Letters 1* 58). The tensions produced by the ambiguous symbiosis which attends to this attempt to establish a distinct mind-body dualism are most clearly discernible in the '[i]mpersonal theory of poetry' (53) that Eliot famously elaborated in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919). The 'escape from personality' ('Tradition' 58) posited in the essay owes a considerable debt to Schopenhauerian theory and Laforgean practice, while Eliot explicitly cites a 'process of depersonalization' ('Tradition' 53) as the method through which to achieve the desired escape, deliberately establishing the subjectively disorientating condition which Bentley seems to have experienced involuntarily.

Nonetheless, Eliot's celebrated aesthetic theory is paradoxical in the sense that it posits a common identity between the observing artist and the suffering subject, even as it strains to establish a conceptual detachment between two distinct modes of being, thus connoting implication in the morass even as it strives to establish distance.[3] The result is a comic dynamic comparable to Chesterton's 'half-conscious eccentric', caught in the act of humiliating self-contradiction and attempting to brazen it out, rather than a pristinely detached ironic intellect, observing the burlesque misadventures of the body with imperturbable sangfroid. A subtle play on this tension is perhaps encoded within Prufrock's speculation that he should have 'bitten off the matter with a smile' (*CPP* 15). Here the

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[3] Ellmann has given a full and convincing account of the contradictions to which Eliot's theory leads (36-45), though she does not consider the question in the parodic light elaborated in the present thesis.

connection between the pun on eliminating 'matter' and the ironist's closed-off, enigmatic 'smile' weds an anti-material principle to the corporeal image of biting, to reemphasise the intractable intimacy of the mind/body conjunction.

The symbiotic link between would-be dignified intellect and buffoonish body internalises the combination of participation and observation which Kristeva identifies in the Bakhtinian 'carnival participant' who 'is both actor and spectator [… split] into a subject of the spectacle and an object of the game' (*Kristeva* 49). This principle is most completely embodied by Eliot's more virile marionette of 1910—'the comedian' in 'Suite Clownesque'—but it is also a prominent feature of Prufrock, whose confluence of intellectual sensitivity and burlesque physicality renders him a hybridised binary of the self-pitying Pierrot of 'Humoresque' and the brazen Clown of 'Suite Clownesque'. In this spirit, Prufrock's famous invocation of *Hamlet* hybridises the blackly comic prince and the court 'fool' within a single, exorbitantly self-monitory entity, while enacting a further pastiche of Laforgue, whose mock-heroic rewrite of Shakespeare's text, in his ironically titled parody collection, *Moral Tales* (1887), situates Yorick as Hamlet's father.

As with Chesterton's titular conceit in *The Return of Don Quixote*, both Laforgue and Eliot conspicuously draw the reader's attention to the panoply of interpretations of the same story to which they are each contributing their own take. Eliot's version comes 'after J. Laforgue', much as Chesterton and Bentley took turns in offering their own buffoonish variations on Sherlock Holmes, whose ennui, drug addiction, and aestheticized lodgings render him as much a decadent archetype as Hamlet. While Eliot later explicitly parodied Doyle in the anthropomorphic form of 'Macavity: The Mystery Cat' (1939), 'Prufrock' is also a curious riff on the agonistic premises of the Poe/Doyle detection formula, with the protagonist's paranoid urban perambulations recalling the air of schism that suffuses 'The Man of the Crowd', and, as a consequence, also the initial disorientated flight of Valentin through the streets of London in 'The Blue Cross'.[4] Of course, in the latter instance the chase ends in the establishment of a realm of camaraderie on Hampstead Heath, whereas no such re-integrative moment punctuates Prufrock's journey through the 'half-deserted streets' (*CPP* 13) of the capital.

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[4] Ackroyd reports that Eliot 'could quote long passages of Sherlock Holmes from memory (this was one of his party tricks)' (167).

Instead, what Prufrock discovers at the end of each urban outing is an etiolated feast. As this additional context suggests, the interplay of imaginative similarity and difference in the visions pursued by Chesterton and Eliot in 1910 can be elucidated with particular clarity through a comparison of 'Prufrock' with 'The Queer Feet', a detective story which is explicitly figured as a burlesque rendition of *Hamlet*, and which was published in the same period in which Eliot was composing the earliest drafts of Prufrock. The central premise of both texts is the use of nonsense imagery to convey a carnivalesque satire of the vacuity of the high-society dinner party, and the manifold corporeal images and metaphors that permeate Chesterton's narrative also pepper the burlesque world of 'Prufrock', in which, as Sewell notes, the protagonist's Sisyphean ordeal is to attend an 'endless tea party, interminable as the Hatter's' (qtd. in Ricks 8). Similarly, the agonised self-consciousness of Eliot's protagonist is heightened by the extreme formality of the gatherings that he attends, much as Chesterton's text is sardonically suffused with an oppressive 'silence and embarrassment'.

However, while Chesterton extrapolates a pedagogic moral from his tale, which enables him to build the narrative towards a harmonious note of utopian integration, no such denouement pertains in the world of 'Prufrock'. If Father Brown possesses the human voice that wakes Colonel Pound from the nonsense world in which he dwells, the imaginative drift of 'Prufrock' is locked in an apprehension of encroachment upon the private self by the invasive other, in which the awakening from voluntary solitary confinement—a further variant on the conclusion of *Alice*—is figured as the moment at which 'we drown' (*CPP* 17). Chesterton's story is a parodic reconfiguration of tragedy as festive comedy, whereas the isolation of the conclusion of Eliot's poem is as absolute as that of the corpse strewn climax of *Hamlet*. In this sense, while the nonsensical rendering of parlous banquets in Chesterton's story and Eliot's poem demonstrates a marked formal and thematic resemblance, the site of their divergence is located in Eliot's depiction of a terrifyingly incomprehensible, Hankin-like social world of pure nonsense, divested of the combination of moral satire and merry folk grotesque through which Chesterton leavens agonism with a movement towards reconciliation and regeneration.

While the alarming tendency of Prufrock's fellow diners to 'drop a question on your plate' (*CPP* 14) illustrates Eliot's stylistic debt to the disorientating nonsense trope of the category-mistake, Prufrock's parenthetical speculations about what the guests might exclaim behind his back—'[t]hey will say: "How his hair is growing thin!"'; '[t]hey will say: "But how his arms and legs are growing thin"' (*CPP* 14)—invoke the inexplicable brutality of Lear's limerick-world. The use of '[w]e will' in the following piece gives an indication of the way in which Lear's introduction of an amorphous 'they' invariably presages the threatened, or actual, infliction of verbal or physical violence upon the protagonist:

> There was an Old Man of Ibreem,
> Who suddenly threaten'd to scream;
> But they said, "If you do,
> We will thump you quite blue,
> You disgusting old man of Ibreem!" (130).

Although Prufrock possesses too much self-restraint to suddenly threaten to scream, Lear's 'disgusting old man' finds a close echo in the abjection that Prufrock insistently confers upon his own person. A further correspondence with Eliot's carnivalesque 'comedian' is also discernible in Prufrock's mocking jibes at the women who 'come and go / Talking of Michelangelo' (*CPP* 13/14), which convey the sing-song contempt of the stage fool, providing an arch gloss to the audience from a position of slight removal from the action. If it is these effete ladies who are whispering against the protagonist in his paranoid imaginings, his outbursts of misogynistic mockery are explicable as the response of a self-consciously abject figure to the anticipated rejection of the desired other. These bitterly satirical attributes contribute to the text's ultimate failure to establish the reconciling realm of the 'genial grotesque' which Chesterton pursues in 'The Queer Feet'. While Prufrock is just as coercive as Chesterton's narrator in his attempts to draw the reader into partnership against the vacuity of high society, his methodology ultimately engenders 'equality, but hardly fraternity', in Chesterton's phrase.

Although Eliot's early marionettes share certain facets with Chesterton's pantomime heroes, their ultimate discrepancy is not only typological—that between the Romantic and folk grotesque—but also social. Prufrock is

ambiguously implicated within high-society in a way that Chesterton's servant-comedians, Father Brown and Flambeau, are not. In Eliot's poem, this leads to a reversal of social perspective which recalls Chesterton's allegorical association of Brown and Flambeau with Death: 'I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker' (*CPP* 15). If the anticipated mockery of Prufrock's shrinking arms, legs, and hair figures him as evaporating before the spectators' astonished gaze, in a comically fast-forwarded disintegration that recalls Syme's fearful anticipation of the collapse of Professor de Worms, Prufrock's evanescent bearing also implicates him within the ontological vacuity that Chesterton had identified in the official feast. While Chesterton considers a dawning apprehension of the waiter to be the beginning of dining, Prufrock's exorbitant sense of personal abjection finally vitiates his capacity to 'force the moment to its crisis' (*CPP* 15) in the manner that produces a liminal leap of faith into reconciliation in Chesterton's tale of social crisis. Of course, this operates as an implied social indictment in itself in Eliot's text, but it is equally expressive of the pessimistic enervation of the figure who conceives it.

Prufrock's fearful withdrawal from a threatening world also draws attention to the temperamental similarity of Eliot and Bentley, a correspondence which helps to account for the ambivalent play of affinity and opposition that Chesterton later displayed in textual dialogue with Eliot. While the letters from Bentley to Chesterton cited in chapter two often prefigure both Eliot's poetic voice and the characters of Wonderland in their impenetrably ironic verbal games, Bentley's diaries are frequently proto-Prufrockian in their adumbration of a lengthy catalogue of social anxieties. For example, his enduring ambivalence towards the domineering figure of Belloc—his 'successful rival' (25 Oct. 1894; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.862) at Oxford—is epitomised by his account of a dinner party held to celebrate the inauguration of the new *Speaker*. Here Bentley self-critically conflates an abject appearance with an abject inner life: 'Very annoying evening […] I had to go in morning clothes, which made me very angry […] These men are far above me. They can do things I daren't contemplate. […] My mind beside Belloc's, for example, would look a mean and disgusting thing' (15 July 1899; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.869). While Bentley's phrasing—'things I daren't contemplate'—prefigures Prufrock's interminable prevarications, and his inappropriate 'morning clothes' raise the ghost of a snickering footman, the image

of his mind looking a 'disgusting thing' evokes a depersonalised observation of the internal self as a site of abjection, which accords with Eliot's apprehension of critical antagonists distastefully rooting around in his consciousness.

As Tigges argues, for Lear 'nonsense was a method of self-defence, an escape to hide his feelings, his despair, his sense of failure' (43). Similarly, Nicolas Bentley considered his father's failure to secure a first at Oxford a pivotal moment in his life: a 'failure […] of self-confidence rather than of intellect', which was 'probably a fundamental clue to his character, to the hesitancy, the aloofness, as it seemed to some, the withdrawal from any approach to intimacy, which kept him on the sidelines throughout his life' (23). In his diaries, Bentley discusses the 'feeling of black despair and self-contempt' (21 July 1898; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.867) engendered by his self-perceived 'failure as an Oxford man' (4 Nov. 1898; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.869). A month after receiving his classification, he notes that '[t]he world is becoming very real and threatening now' (17 Aug. 1898; MS.Eng.misc.e.867). These accounts suggest that the 'rigid flippancy' that Chesterton ascribed to his friend should be understood as a defence mechanism, the recourse to arch inscrutability characteristic of the individual who feels unequal to the demands of improvisational repartee, and who shrinks from anticipated social failure into pre-emptive withdrawal.

This debilitating outlook also helps to account for the snobbery displayed by both Bentley and Eliot. By 1914, Eliot confessed himself 'a thorough snob' (*Letters 1* 61), and his later portrayal, in *The Waste Land*, of the 'small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare / One of the low on whom assurance sits' (*CPP* 68) is interestingly prefigured in the Booth-like prurience with which Bentley contemplates those who inhabit the 'lowest of the business classes, just where clerkdom begins. […] Imagine their lives among themselves—the psychological dirt of it' (19 Mar. 1900; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.869). While a Nietzschean take on the categorising rhetoric of social reform is suggested by Eliot's vision of London, around 1918, which 'divided human beings into "supermen", "termites" and "wireworms"' (Strachey qtd. in Ackroyd 96), his disdain is reflected in Bentley's remarks on the populace as he gazes out on Hampstead Heath. In an account that lends a further instructive context to Chesterton's positive use of the Heath in 'The Blue Cross', Bentley discusses its infestation 'with swarming heaps of people—the ignorant almost entirely. […] Almost all of them were young

unmarried people, in couples and parties, giving a frightful promise of more swarming heaps of the ignorant to come. It is a sombre thing to watch the People enjoying itself' (16 July 1899; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.869).
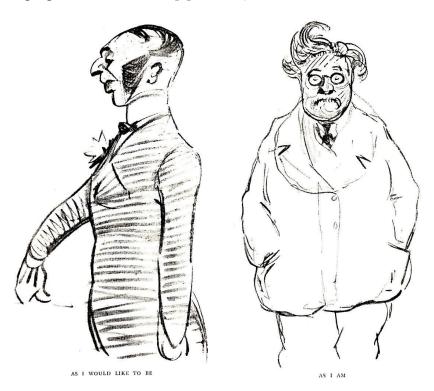
Since Bentley's reflections come a day after the *Speaker* meeting, they can perhaps be understood as an outward projection of his sense of self-disgust in contemplating those 'far above' him, rather as Eliot's distaste at the 'low' is tinged with a tacit envy of the 'bold […] assurance'. In 'The Snob', Chesterton incisively analyses the 'internal insecurity' which motivates the masochistic pleasure indulged in by the snob: 'The snob's delight is to rise high and have all the time the secret joy, the purple ecstacy of feeling low' (*CDN* 5: 49). Chesterton's impatience with such attitudes derives from the painful process through which he overcame his own 'sterile isolation', as he characterised his youthful solipsism, which left him with a sense of the profound importance of striving to establish a state of category-defying, immersive camaraderie. The point is made evocatively in *What's Wrong With the World*, in a passage that is central to a proper understanding of his message in 'The Queer Feet', in which 'a sort of mad modesty' replaces the self-immolating pride of the snob:

> No one has ever begun to understand comradeship who does not accept with it a
> certain hearty eagerness in eating, drinking, or smoking, an uproarious materialism
> […] You may call the thing an orgy or a sacrament; it is certainly an essential. It is at
> root a resistance to the superciliousness of the individual. Nay, its very swaggering and
> howling are humble. In the heart of its rowdiness there is a sort of mad modesty; a
> desire to melt the separate soul into the mass of unpretentious masculinity. It is a
> clamorous confession of the weakness of all flesh […] This sort of equality must be
> bodily and gross and comic. Not only are we all in the same boat, but we are all seasick
> (*CW* 4: 95).

While Chesterton often seems insufficiently aware of the potentially oppressive nature of his hearty adherence of 'uproarious materialism' to exceptionally sensitive individuals, it is essential to recognise that he developed this philosophy as an urgent remedy for his own acute sensitivity, which led him to seek refuge in the comforts of communality. The queasy, subjectivity-undermining terms of his analysis frankly acknowledge the fact that this condition of social immersion is not uncomplicatedly psychologically reassuring, but it is

nonetheless posited as a healthier option than pessimistic withdrawal. Bakhtin argues that 'images of the Romantic grotesque usually express fear of the world' (*Rabelais* 39)—'in short, I was afraid' (*CPP* 15), summarises Prufrock. Conversely, Bakhtin explains that by reconceiving the world as 'one great communal performance', carnival is efficacious in 'liberating one from fear, bringing the world maximally close to a person and bringing one person maximally close to another' (*Problems* 160).

Nicolas Bentley recalled that his father considered Chesterton's conversion to derive from a combination of a 'subservience […] to Hilaire Belloc's will' and a sensitive nature that 'felt the burden of existence too heavy to support without [a] spiritual opiate' (42-43). In an equally trenchant reading, Sewell argues that Chesterton's personality presents an archetype of 'the gifted individual convinced of his own utter worthlessness', who seeks 'to defend and protect the self all the time' ('Giant' 575). While Sewell's tendentious conclusions might seem counterintuitive, certain instances of Chesterton's apparently playful self-deprecation would appear to substantiate this reading. Perhaps the most striking of these is a self-portrait as caricature, in which he rather surprisingly depicts himself '[a]s I would like to be' (*Coloured* 112), with an image that resembles the dandyish Matthew Arnold, 'singular whiskers' and all, in contrast to the shambling figure of Chesterton '[a]s I am' (*Coloured* 113):

AS I WOULD LIKE TO BE   AS I AM

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This caricature again suggests the presence of a tacit self-defence underscoring Chesterton's public projection of opposition to a cultural other, here illustrated by a visual depiction of personal abjection which renders the pared down Arnoldian figure an unobtainable physical ideal, even as Chesterton's rhetoric more commonly figures Arnold's pared down classicism as an undesirable philosophical antithesis. As I discussed in chapters one and two, Chesterton's recourse to an anti-Arnoldian democratic populism formed a bulwark against his own youthful neuroses, and the awakening from intellectual detachment that Chesterton achieved in the 1890s is depicted in the progress of his avatar, Syme, from paranoid cultural policeman to well-adjusted constituent of the benign mob. According to Bentley's testimony, in the early 1890s, Chesterton exclusively read classics and 'did not care […] for lighter reading' (qtd. in Clemens 3), and in this light, Canovan's assessment of Chesterton seems particularly astute: he typifies 'the *reformed* intellectual, whose views about his former vices are often as severe as those of the reformed drunkard' (37).

Chesterton's youthful traumas caused his conception of the locus of internal abjection to become diametrically opposed to that of Eliot. For Chesterton, the sterility of detached intellectualism is to be feared as a harbinger of self-undermining mental disturbance, while in Eliot the burlesque body operates as a disquieting objective corollary of the abject within. The consequent public self-identification of the pair with, respectively, grotesque, democratic physicality, and refined, aloof intellectualism informs Mason's account of the pledge of cultural allegiance that each seemed to demand of his readership: 'a choice between "popular" bowels and "clerkly" head' (14-15). In his important work of critical recalibration, *T.S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (2003), David Chinitz explains that Eliot's critical proponents subsequently sought to efface any attributes of the poet which seemed to compromise his monologic '"seriousness"': textual artefacts 'not easily assimilated into Eliot's elitist reputation, soon evaporated into obscurity' (173).

My account of the interplay of similarity and difference that characterises 'The Queer Feet' and 'Prufrock' begins to demonstrate that the schism conventionally thought to bifurcate the pair—'Chesterton is comical, democratic, and orthodox. Eliot is ironic, aristocratic, and a priest of art' (39), as Oser puts it—is not as clear-cut as it first appears. Indeed, Vivian, in 'The Decay of Lying',

could be speaking of Chesterton and Eliot when he notes that '[i]n Falstaff there is something of Hamlet, in Hamlet there is not a little of Falstaff' (Wilde, *Intentions* 18). It is perhaps unsurprising that the narrative of clear-cut opposition stubbornly persists, since it was so forcefully promulgated by both men at various times, such was its convenience in defining the terms of the cultural propaganda war in which each was publically engaged. As the following account will elaborate, Chesterton's success in projecting the singular persona of unreconstructed Falstaff on the Edwardian public stage served as ammunition for Eliot's satirical attempts to establish a clear partitioning of factions in the years that followed—a project inspired by his discovery of a new sense of camaraderie amidst the clamorous band of avant-gardists who Wyndham Lewis would later dub the 'Men of 1914' (*Blasting* 249).

The Emetic Ecstacy: Chesterton and Eliot in Parodic Dialogue

> It was like some frightful fancy-dress ball to which the two mortal enemies were to go dressed up as each other. Only the fancy-dress ball was to be a dance of death[.]
>
> Chesterton, 'The Dagger with Wings' (*FB* 473)

> "You! Hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!"
>
> T.S. Eliot (after Baudelaire), *The Waste Land* (*CPP* 63)

When Eliot arrived in England in 1914, he wasted little time in getting to know Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound, having already absorbed the orthodoxy of their cultural likes and dislikes through a preparatory surveillance of their activities. The most famous collaboration between Lewis and Pound at this time had been *BLAST 1* (20 June 1914), a self-consciously incendiary journal, in which pride of place is given to Lewis's verbally coruscating manifesto of Vorticism, and accompanying segregation of a retinue of cultural figures and phenomena into the categories of the blasted and the blessed. While Chesterton is not explicitly blasted in Lewis's carnivalesque litany of praise and abuse, he is implicitly de-selected from the Vorticist friendship group by a verse contribution from Pound, 'The New Cake of Soap':

Lo, how it gleams and glistens in the sun

Like the cheek of a Chesterton (*BLAST 1* 49).

Although the most obvious purpose of this stab at imagist satire is to pillory Chesterton's allegedly sanitised wit, or 'cheek', Seaber observes that the indefinite article in the second line more subtly attempts to typify Chesterton as 'the symbol *par excellence* of a commercialized mass-production of "literature" […] Chesterton, the commercializer, the sold-out, is himself transformed into a commodity' ('Meaning' 199). In a contemporaneous article on 'Futurism and the Flesh' (*T.P.'s Weekly* 11 July 1914), Lewis maligns the 'mechanical dribble' (35) of Chesterton's journalistic output, which, he claims, can be satisfactorily 'dismissed as the unavoidable drivelling of an imbecile' (35). Pound ingrains a similar rhetoric of incontinent over-production in his attack, figuring 'a Chesterton' as a factory-line item, suggesting a reification caused by financial dependence upon the press, which results in excessive, mechanistic literary production. Thus, in what looks like a choreographed dual-assault, Lewis and Pound signal Chesterton's cultural obsolescence at the very moment at which he had reached the apex of his ubiquity.

Since Lewis and Pound were first acquainted in late 1908 (O'Keefe 143), their friendship long predated the appearance of Eliot, who first met Pound in September 1914 (Eliot, *Letters 1* 63 fn.1), and was introduced to Lewis by Pound in early 1915 (Meyers 75). Arriving late to an already established group, Eliot displayed a palpable anxiety to fit in to a pre-established pattern of behaviour, employing forms of pastiche to convey sympathy with their aims. Shortly before his introduction to Pound, he sent a letter to Conrad Aiken from Germany, in which he pastiched Lewis's use of the terms 'BLAST' and 'BLESS' (19 July 1914; Eliot, *Letters 1* 40). Having begun to correspond with Pound, Eliot increasingly modified his conventional tone to figure himself as one 'egregious Yankee addressing another' (Ackroyd 235). Peter Ackroyd alludes to the element of pastiche which suffuses these missives: Eliot demonstrated an 'extraordinary ability to mimic Pound's verbal mannerisms, as if he were willingly immersing himself in his personality. He even goes so far as to fabricate his signature in a way similar to Pound's' (236). As with Chesterton's early attempts to please

Bentley by echoing his sentiments and modes of expression, for some time Eliot was keen to say the kind of things that Pound would say.

Eliot's behaviour can be understood partially as a manifestation of the politeness principle—the urge to alter one's tone to more closely approximate that of the sympathetic interlocutor. As Lecercle explains, 'the general form of the politeness maxims, which are all constructed according to the same syntactic pattern, is: let the other speaker's advantage override yours' (103). This pattern extended deep into Eliot's subsequent cultural life. For example, referring to *The Waste Land*, Gordon notes the peculiarly self-effacing nature of 'Eliot's submissiveness to Pound's idea of the poem' (*Early* 116). His comparably diffident dedication of the poem to Pound—'*il miglior fabbro*' ('the better craftsman') (*CPP* 59)—is also significant, since 'dedication' is a key factor in the formation of friendship groups, suggesting as it does the state of being 'devoted to an aim or vocation; having single-minded loyalty or integrity' (Thompson, D. 351). These qualities are emphasised by the allegiance rituals of undergraduate societies, and literalised in the dedications affixed to the works of both Eliot and Chesterton, which constitute public avowals of loyalty to admired friends—though, as I discussed in chapter two in relation to *Greybeards*, often masking considerably more ambivalent private feelings.

If Eliot's deferential approach to Lewis and Pound calls to mind the youthful initiate to a fraternity, his new friends were curiously comparable in temperament to the other key constituents of Chesterton's own collective, Bentley and Belloc, in their respective embodiment of extremes of scepticism and dogmatism. At the time of his earliest public renown, Lewis was wont to expound an ontological scepticism of dizzying proportions. In his first published novel, *Tarr* (1917), the Lewisian protagonist possesses a personality composed of 'a Chinese puzzle of boxes within boxes' (58). The narrator explains that the 'husk [Tarr] held was a painted mummy case. He was a mummy case, too. Only he contained nothing but innumerable other painted cases inside, smaller and smaller ones. The smallest was not [... a] live core, but a painting like the rest. = His kernel was a painting. That was as it should be!' (58-59). Notably, Tarr is 'remembering Schopenhauer' (58) when this vision comes to him.

While Lewis's terms recall Chesterton's account of the 'bottomless sceptics' with whom he consorted, the dogmatic certainties that Pound brought to his sense of cultural mission recall Chesterton's account of the Bellocian wing of his acquaintances—the 'quite uncontrollable believers'. In a private correspondence with the publisher, John Quinn (21 Aug. 1917), in which Pound lobbies for the republication of 'The New Cake of Soap', he expresses a greater sympathy with Belloc (*Letters* 171), while articulating his opposition to Chesterton through a substitution of the rhetoric of sanitisation for that of contamination: Chesterton is 'a vile scum on the pond', because he 'creates an atmosphere in which art is impossible' (*Letters* 171). To return to the antipodal models of chapter one, the rigid implacability of Pound's diatribe anticipates Leavis's contemptuous repelling of Snow, while Lewis's rhetoric situates him as a precursor of the Barthesian view of parody as a discreditable means of stifling multivalence. In the *BLAST* manifesto, Lewis particularly deprecates the conservatism of English humour, as a phenomenon that contributes equally to the impossibility of art: 'conventionalizing like gunshot, freezing supple REAL in ferocious chemistry of laughter' (*BLAST 1* 17). In the alliance of the two friends, the poles of relativism and dogmatism again converge at full circle, with Lewis's espousal of a proto-Barthesian relativistic litheness becoming a complementary adjunct to Pound's proto-Leavisian urge to establish a state of lofty inaccessibility to literary pollution.

Lewis's portrayal of Tarr not only accords with Eliot's early attempts to establish a trapdoor personality connotative of the Romantic grotesque, but also with the more physical grotesquery that Eliot invests his 'comedian' with: Tarr 'needed a grinning, tumultuous mask for the face he had to cover. = The clown was the only role that was ample enough' (29). This concordance between the visions of Eliot and Lewis can be understood to derive from a shared early leaning towards what Lewis termed 'non-moral' (*Men* 103) satire, a phrase that recalls Bentley's discussion of 'unhuman […] unmoral' game-playing, as well as my definition of metaphysical satire as a form that stand in diametric opposition to moral satire. These complementary ontological (unhuman) and ethical (unmoral) components are explicitly highlighted by Lewis—his preferred model is concerned 'with man, and not with manners', since it diagnoses 'a *chronic* ailment' (*Men* 124), and this principle is tied to the 'non-human' element of the

grotesque, which he considers to be 'the same thing' (*Men* 121) as the kind of satire in which he deals.

Like Auberon Quin, Lewis is the 'pure satirist'. This position renders him a kind of hyper-Hankin, whose absolute disbelief in humanity forges an immaculate solipsism which authorises an unscrupulous, gloves-off approach to cultural controversy. As Blissett observes, the '"Men of 1914" took the huge projected image of G.K.C. and shied missiles at it as an Aunt Sally' ('English' 130). This policy shares a commonality with the distancing nonsense strategies adopted by Eliot. Symons argued that '[i]n Laforgue, sentiment is squeezed out of the world before one begins to play at ball with it' (*Symbolist* 112), and these terms are closely paraphrased in Prufrock's reflection that he perhaps ought to have 'squeezed the universe into a ball' (*CPP* 15) before entering into dialogue with others. Much as Bentley's clerihews blithely toy with the biographies of the public figures that happen to fall within his purview, the early strategies of the Eliot, Lewis, and Pound correspond to Sewell's account of the detachment that informs the cruelty of Lear's limerick-world: 'If people are things in the Nonsense game, they must, when they meet, treat one another as such, and this involves detachment from any form of affection or kindliness. Relationships between them will be matter-of-fact but not matter for feeling' (*Field* 141). As Sewell explains, 'a good deal of rough treatment is involved' in this denial of the target's subjectivity (*Field* 138).

Ironically, this election of Chesterton as an emblematic representative of everything to be rejected in the preceding generation is suggestive of Chesterton's own occasionally unfair exaggeration of Arnold's faults when deprecating the latter's influence upon Edwardian culture. Consequently, there is a neat circularity to Pound's situating of his own cultural presence as a cyclical return of Arnoldian values, when he explains to Quinn that 'Chesterton *is* so much the mob, so much the multitude […] a symbol for all the mob's hatred of all art that aspires above mediocrity' (*Letters* 171). As Chesterton's privately expressed wish that he might look just a little more like Arnold suggests, this position results in a certain degree of hypocrisy. Pound goes on to express dark misgivings that he 'should probably like G.K.C. personally if I ever met him', and that this suspicion had actually 'heightened' (*Letters* 171) his reaction against him.

In a similar dynamic, when Eliot joined his colleagues in the public fray in 1917, his deprecation of Chesterton's style came just two years after he had privately recommended the latter's critical works to students who attended his wartime extension lectures (see Schuchard 35-36). If this discrepancy between public condemnation and private commendation seems a tad contradictory, we should bear in mind that at this time Eliot also evinced an affinity with the expediency-driven relativism practiced by Lewis and Pound. In August 1916, he reported to Aiken that he was 'still a relativist' (Eliot, *Letters 1* 145), having previously explained ebulliently to Eleanor Hinkley, in November 1914, that '[o]ne must have theories, but one need not believe in them!' (*Letters 1* 73). The discontents yielded by the artificially segregating approach of the group are discernible in Eliot's criticism of Chesterton towards the end of the war. In 1917, he conjures a portentous vision of cultural apocalypse, alluding to Chesterton's aesthetically conservative, and exceptionally popular *Ballad of the White Horse* (1911), in his pitting of '"the forces of death with Mr. Chesterton at the head upon a white horse"' against his friends in binary opposition: '"Mr. Pound, Mr. Joyce, and Mr. Lewis write living English"' (qtd. in Kirk 184).

In one sense, this account could be said to demonstrate a canny eye for commercial self-positioning within a radical vanguard superseding a passé older generation. 1917 saw the publication of the respective literary debuts of Eliot and Lewis—*Prufrock* and *Tarr*—and in the same period Pound figured Chesterton as a kind of inverted critical barometer when marketing Lewis, with Chesterton's assumed disapprobation of *Tarr* being forwarded to the reader as a proof of its merits (Pound, 'Wyndham' 429). Nonetheless, Eliot's account might also be considered a more serious-minded attempt to police the vitality of form, comparable to that which Chesterton and Bentley had inscribed in their critique of the degeneration of detective fiction into formulaic rigidity. Eliot's panorama of deceased and living litterateurs turns upon a carnivalesque representation of Chesterton as a cultural relic who refuses to die to enable the rebirth of the language, and there is a further apposite circularity in Chesterton finding himself on the receiving end of the same accusation of redundancy that he had levelled against Doyle's pedestrian acolytes less than a decade before.

However, Eliot's terms can also be understood to go beyond these public concerns, to imply a more neurotic apprehension of the antecedent, which suggests that the apocalyptic inflection of Eliot's jibe might be read as an act of bravado subtly motivated by fear of the subject. In Revelation, the rider on a white horse is represented as a warlike figure, '*bent on conquest*' (Morris 101), 'a demonic parody of Christ, evil masquerading as good' (Resseguie 127), while the 'forces of Death' are embodied by the rider on a pale horse who Chesterton had invoked in 'The Queer Feet', a figure who brings pestilence in his wake (see Morris 105), much as Pound depicts the 'scum'-like Chesterton as a pernicious agent of cultural pollution. The pale horse has also been translated as 'yellowish green', due to the ambiguity of the term, '*chlōros*'—green or pale—in the original Koine Greek, which has led some interpreters to consider the horse to possess the 'colour of a corpse' (Morris 104).

When Eliot and Pound first met, the latter was fond of quoting Apollinaire's dictum, '"you cannot carry your father's corpse along with you wherever you go"' (qtd. in Butler 231). Fear of sympathetic contagion from rejected representatives of an older generation is also a marked feature of Chesterton's accounts of decadence, and informs the comparably black and white distinction between the decadents on one side, and himself and Bentley on the other, that he attempts to establish in the *Thursday* dedication. In *George Bernard Shaw*, Chesterton returns to the imaginative landscape that summoned up Professor de Worms, when he argues that in the 1890s, '[t]he decay of society was praised by artists as the decay of a corpse is praised by worms. The aesthete was all receptiveness, like the flea' (*CW* 11: 401). Meanwhile, in 'Milton and Merry England', Chesterton goes so far as to describe his revolt against decadent abjection as the very birth moment of his literary career: 'My first impulse to write' arose from 'a revolt of disgust with the Decadents', who seemed to augur 'the end of the world' (*Fads* 220).

Chesterton's image of the decadent artist as a parasite upon a dead cultural body is echoed in Eliot's vision of Chesterton drawing a pestilent corpse in his wake, while Eliot's hints of a fear of contamination accord with Chesterton's reference to the flea, an archetypal symbol of infection. As I elaborated in chapter two, Chesterton succeeded in overcoming his apprehension of the arch-representative of decadence, Wilde, by manipulating the latter's taste for paradox

to his own ends, and it is striking that Eliot pursues precisely the same strategy in a further sally against Chesterton in the following year. In 'Henry James' (1918), Eliot coins the famous witticism that James possessed 'a mind so fine that no idea could violate it' (151). This counterintuitive compliment is immediately followed by a criticism of Chesterton by comparison, again expressed in terms of ostensible paradox: 'Mr. Chesterton's brain swarms with ideas; I see no evidence that it thinks' (152). As Philip Furbank has noted, this was 'a most unfair, and rather Chestertonian, remark' (20). In other words, in an exemplary parodic gesture, Eliot invokes Chesterton's rhetorical voice in order to criticise it.

Eliot's barb also discloses a comingling of nonsense with parody in his response to Chesterton. As I discussed earlier, the *Alice* books inspired the title of Eliot's early notebook, *Inventions of the March Hare*, which not only associates the author with a mad Wonderland character, but also a symbol of regenerative vitality, much as Pound liked to compare himself to the wily trickster, Brer Rabbit. In *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice remarks of 'Jabberwocky': '"it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don't exactly know what they are!"' (*Annotated* 197). Immediately after this episode, she encounters the disdainful Rose: '"It's *my* opinion that you never think *at all*," the Rose said, in a rather severe tone' (*Annotated* 203). In this light, it would seem that Eliot is figuring himself as a fantastic Wonderland creature in the James essay, while Chesterton is depicted as Alice, a comparison that holds water if we consider that in his more stolid, bluff pronouncements, Chesterton often resembles Anthony Burgess's description of Carroll's heroine as 'a very pert "Fiddlesticks!" Victorian miss who will stand no nonsense' ('Nonsense' 20). In contrast, Eliot sets himself up as a baffling trickster figure, bamboozling his victim with disorientating wordplay, so as to convey a sense that Chesterton is too staid to comprehend the radical aesthetic gymnastics of the artists occupying the modernist Wonderland of Imagism, Vorticism, Futurism, etc.

However, the terms of Eliot's attack also carry the germ of an urge to surmount agonism, an aspect which is drawn out by a further textual correspondence to his phrase, 'I see no evidence that it thinks'. If we consider that four years later, Eliot's accusation of mental intractability would be echoed by the female interlocutor in *The Waste Land*, who is conventionally understood to represent Vivien Eliot addressing her husband, a sense of Eliot's subconscious

identification with Chesterton, as well as the edge of hysteria underlying his apparently urbane criticism, comes to the fore:

> What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
> I never know what you are thinking. Think *(CPP* 65).

Coates has argued that in the James essay, 'Eliot meant think ideologically, pulling no punches, accepting no qualifications, checks or balances and no humour, in the statement of an intellectual position' (*Edwardian* 243). However, in the context of the wider argument of the essay it seems much more plausible that the opposite is true—that he is regretting the alleged absence of a Jamesian capacity for psychological subtlety, or nuanced private-life in Chesterton, as opposed to the factory-like churning out of public 'ideas' like so many new cakes of soap. As he argues elsewhere in the James essay, in a nonsense exposition which makes its point through a deliberate category-mistake, '[i]n England, ideas run wild and pasture on the emotions; instead of thinking with our feelings (a very different thing) we corrupt our feelings with ideas' (152). When paired with its echo in *The Waste Land*, Eliot's witticism, delivered in a ventriloquistic rendition of Chesterton's rhetorical voice, comes to read as a frustrated call for personal sympathy, by a writer increasingly stifled by the polarised terms of the public argument that he had belatedly joined. Note that Eliot includes himself in the critique—it is 'we' who 'corrupt our feelings with ideas'.

Much as Eliot's marionette, in 'Humoresque', possesses a '[h]alf bullying, half imploring air' *(CPP* 602), these twin textual correspondences to *Alice* and *The Waste Land* reveal an apparently contradictory bipolarity of subconscious motivation—the first inscribing distance, due to an urge to establish distinction; the second identification, due to a tacit desire for sympathy. Again, this illustrates the fundamental ambivalence embedded within the dynamic of parody itself, which makes it a particularly disruptive force in cultural disputes, due to its simultaneous inscription of similarity and difference. As Dentith observes, 'parody has always been liable to oscillate into and out of the critical attitude' (*Parody* 185). Even Eliot's apparently clear-cut, polarising image of Chesterton at the head of the forces of death is embedded with a subtle get-out clause, since the rider on a white horse is also the only horseman who is not uncomplicatedly

associated with destruction, being variously interpreted as either wicked or righteous, and even as a Christ-like figure (see Morris 101). Thus, Eliot situates his antagonist as the embodiment of a hybridised binary of heaven and hell comparable to that which Chesterton had borrowed from Blake in his depiction of the heroes of *Father Brown*. Of course, as I discussed earlier, Flambeau's excursion through the banquet of the Fishermen on his Pale Horse conveys the moral that 'the dance of death [leads] the way to the dance of life'.

In these inscriptions of subtle duality we discover Eliot selecting terms that explicitly project an opposition that satisfies the need to express public allegiance with the position of his friends, while implicitly retaining a loophole that satisfies a personal need to retain a productive ambiguity.[5] If this equivocation again figures Eliot as dextrously evading capture, it is not in the nihilistic sense conveyed by the false bottoms of the Romantic grotesque, but in the more positive sense of retaining a dynamic capacity to traverse the parodic poles of adherence and departure (or imitative pastiche and adversarial satire in textual terms), rather than subscribing inflexibly to an extremist position, in the manner of his associates. In understanding the grounds of this tendency towards polarisation, it is important to highlight the considerable influence of T.E. Hulme's essay, 'Romanticism and Classicism' (1911), upon all three men. Hulme's essay advanced a neat division between the two titular modes, rejecting 'the infamous attitude of the person with catholic tastes who says he likes both' (Hulme), while proposing that the allegedly monologic romanticism of the nineteenth century should be superseded by an equally monologic classicism.

This attitude succeeded in persuading three writers of innately romantic temperament that they, and the culture from which they emerged (as presided over by figures such as Chesterton), needed to be 'disciplined by order' (Hulme). Although Eliot later acknowledged that he had been '"enormously influenced"' (qtd. in Habib 66) by Hulme, his enduring reluctance to corrupt his feelings with ideas led to a suspicion of the neatness of this dialectical movement of transcendence. In this light, Eliot's tacit inscription of identification within ostensibly oppositional sallies is rendered explicable by his anti-Hegelian view

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[5] As Ackroyd observes of the kernel of ambivalence that consistently underpins Eliot's apparently ingratiating gestures, 'the instinct to conform and the instinct to stand apart merged in a subtle, almost ironic, imitation of those around him' (88-89).

that one should be suspicious of any attempt "'to take the delicate and evasive truths of historical and literary criticism […] and dragoon them into the goose-step of dialectic'" (qtd. in Perl 79).

While Chesterton might have been forgiven if he did not dwell excessively on the nuances of Eliot's allusive phraseology under the barrage of criticism that he received from his trio of antagonists during this period, a comparable oscillation 'into and out of the critical attitude' is evident in his belated response, a loose parody of the themes and stylistics of *Prufrock and Other Observations*, entitled 'To a Modern Poet' (*G.K.'s Weekly* 31 May 1925). This piece offers a particularly valuable illustration of Chesterton's argument, in 'Bret Harte', that 'reverence and sympathy [are of] supreme importance to humour' (*Varied* 182). Reverence derives etymologically from the Latin, '*vereri*', or 'fear' (Barnhart 923), while sympathy, in the eighteenth-century understanding of the term, combines affection with distance, thus mediating anxiety over the subjectivity-undermining connotations of identification through a recognition of the other *as* other, set against the self in dynamic relation. As Sewell articulates the dynamic, parody 'relies on close emotional kinship (a kinship that itself involves a compelling pull toward sameness and a death of subjectivity) before ultimate self-assertion (a pull toward difference)' (*Field* 276-77).

'To a Modern Poet' offers a practical exposition of this principle in action, combining combative nonsense rhetoric, motivated by tacit fear, with emollient gestures, connotative of subtle sympathy. The bulk of the parody is concerned with establishing the presence of a confluence of ontological pessimism and scepticism in Eliot's early handling of the world of objects. The parodist discovers these traits in the unorthodox similes to which Eliot turns, which the more stolid respondent finds somewhat bemusing:

> […] I am very unobservant.
> I cannot say
> I ever noticed that the pillar-box
> was like a baby
> skinned alive and screaming.

I have not

a Poet's

Eye

Which can see Beauty

everywhere.

Now you mention it,

Of course, the sky

is like a large mouth

shown to a dentist,

and I never noticed

a little thing

like that.

But I can't help wishing

You got more fun out of it;

you seem to have taken

quite a dislike

to things (*Collected Nonsense 50-51*).

Here Chesterton associates Eliot's unorthodox vocabulary with an apparently cultivated posture of aversion to the material world, a 'dislike' of 'things' that renders the poet an unlikely locus of regenerative energies. This criticism is particularly evident in the lines 'Of course, the sky / is like a large mouth / shown to a dentist', which comically skew the terms of Eliot's bravura simile of introduction to the poetic world, in which 'the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table' (*CPP* 13), to evoke the deprecatory tenor of the original image. Eliot's wan observations stand in marked contrast to the 'passionate sense of the *value* of things' (qtd. in Ward, *Gilbert* 101) that Chesterton avowed in his correspondence with Frances in 1899, which he expressed through a comparable derangement of categorisation in reference to the evening sky: 'If there was such a thing as *blue*-hot iron, it would describe the sky tonight' (qtd. in Ward, *Gilbert* 98). If the 'Love Song' of Eliot's title conveys a trapdoor irony comparable to that of Wilde's mock-paean to being earnest, Chesterton's declarations constitute an uncomplicated love song to existence. As he complains in the *Autobiography*, in another anthropomorphic nonsense-image, which perhaps alludes to Eliot's image of vocal vegetation, the 'dry grass singing' (*CPP* 73), 'I have read modern poems obviously meant to make grass seem

something merely scrubby and prickly and repugnant, like an unshaven chin'
(338).

In 'Prufrock', Eliot's authorial stance—that of the urbane Laforguean man
of the world, who serenely observes 'the essential mediocrity of life […] from a
lunar perspective' (Habib 35)—is expressed through a combination of the
temperamental detachment and textual derangement that Chesterton associated
with decadence, an artistic movement which 'outraged sanity' without 'attain[ing]
exuberance' (*Defendant* 45).[6] Chesterton's parody sets out to expose the decadent
worldview that he perceives to exert a tacit influence upon the apparently
innovative 'observations' of the poet, archly confessing himself to be 'very
unobservant', even as he forensically pinpoints the effaced origins of Eliot's
apparent originality. In this sense, Chesterton's skit corroborates Genette's choice
of the title, *Palimpsests* (1982), for his encyclopaedic conspectus of parodic
practice, since 'To a Modern Poet' not only carries the ghost of Eliot's text within
it, but also exposes the *ur* text as a palimpsest of decadence, constructing a kind of
intertextual geological survey, comparable to Stewart's account of the White
Knight's song, in *Alice*, as a 'language event […] caught in a historical regress.
What the song "really is" becomes only one of its possible aspects through its
history of use' (116-17). This further correspondence with Carroll situates the
Chestertonian Alice in a rather more masterful context than that into which Eliot's
allusion to the encounter with the Rose had placed him: '"the tune *isn't* his own
invention," she said to herself' (307), as the White Knight's declaims his song of a
somewhat absurd 'aged man' (*Annotated* 307).[7]

The urge of Eliot's friendship group to attain to the classicist precepts of
Hulme makes this exposure particularly damaging, since it draws Eliot's romantic
discontents to light. In later years, when Lewis no longer held such a commercial
stake in projecting group unanimity, he took to mimicking Chesterton's unveiling
of hidden narratives, situating Eliot as 'the last of [the] line of romantics' (*Men*
81) stretching from Baudelaire to Wilde, and arguing that the relative level of
disparity between author and avatar was not so vexed as Eliot sought to suggest:

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[6] As Hurley notes in his brief discussion of the poem, for Chesterton '[w]hat is most distressing is
the failure to take joy even in [...] perversity' (*Chesterton* 45). Hurley does not specify the target of
the poem, and so does not discuss the context of Chesterton's relationship to Eliot.
[7] One of the White Knight's unpromising inventions is a device to prevent hair '*falling* off'
(Carroll, *Annotated* 299), a contraption that Prufrock would have much appreciated.

the poet 'was a very attractive young Prufrock indeed […] *moqueur* to the marrow […] But still a Prufrock!' (*Blasting* 283). In *Time and Western Man* (1927), Lewis also refers darkly to Pound's 'romantic tendencies' (55), and he later implied that a sort of repentant romantics' support group had been established between the collaborative pair—Pound's 'very powerful influence' upon the young Eliot was responsible for lifting him 'out of his lunar alley-ways and *fin de siècle* nocturnes' (*Blasting* 285). This process of classical re-education is conveyed by the Chestertonian parodist's apprehension of the sky as a 'large mouth', which situates the artist as dentist, correcting the unwieldy profusion of nature, in a manner that corresponds to an austere editing down of the existential grotesque to the elegant restrictions of the classical. At the same time, by employing a quintessentially grotesque image to convey the point, Chesterton suggests that a tension between temperamental inclination and theoretical conviction imbues the cultural project with a personal urgency.

If the increasingly spare verse of Eliot and Pound came to stand as an aesthetic corollary of their espousal of classicist philosophy, Chesterton's text not only represents a return of the repressed, reflecting his consistent drive to expose all that is left spare 'by every rationalistic system of life', but also serves to subvert the commercial game-plan that the principle of sparseness satisfied. As I have shown, Chesterton's own 'large mouth', in the form of the 'mechanical dribble' of his literary output, was the particular focus of his antagonists' critical fire. Highlighting Chesterton's ostensible surplus production served as a means of advertising a binary divide between the enigmatic brevity of the new school and an old guard characterised by exhausting verbosity. In a letter sent by Pound to Eliot's father in 1915, he avers that '"man succeeds either by the scarceness or the abundance of copy"' (28 June 1915; Eliot, *Letters 1,* 103). Taking note, Eliot wrote to a former teacher that 'I write very little, and I should not become more powerful by increasing my output. […] the only thing that matters is that [the poems] should be perfect in their kind, so that each should be an event' (21 Apr. 1919; *Letters 1* 285).

As I discussed in my introduction, George Eliot's deprecation of parody centred upon its capacity to debase currency. This phenomenon occurs when scarcity is reduced, so that the commercial value of any item becomes defined to a large extent by the limitation of its availability. By producing a burlesque

addendum to T.S. Eliot's slender oeuvre, Chesterton threatens to debase his currency through an act of literal appreciation. His amassing of new similes in a travesty of the poet's voice divests Eliot of the agency to prevent surplus production, exacting an apposite revenge upon the persecutors of his alleged prolixity by imaginatively ransacking the mouth of the celebrated poet and claiming to find a hinterland of tooth decay behind the scrupulously brushed exterior. The economic analogy also draws attention once more to the prescience of Chesterton's analysis in 'The Queer Feet'. Eliot's cultural position does not so much recall that of the complacent gentlemen or the harried underlings of the story, but rather the ambiguous between-role occupied by the proprietor of the club, Mr Lever, whose club 'paid, not by attracting people, but actually by turning people away'. Lever's commercial strategy curiously prefigures the way in which modernist artists fostered their success by setting up a textual 'difficulty' to be overcome by the leisured literary consumer. As Chesterton explains in the story, '[i]n the heart of a plutocracy tradesmen become cunning enough to be more fastidious than their customers. They positively create difficulties so that their wealthy and weary clients may spend money and diplomacy in overcoming them' (*FB* 36).

This account offers a foretaste of the exceptionally 'fastidious' persona later adopted by Eliot, and the succession of riddles that he purposefully set before the reader, not least the miasmic 'wild goose chase' of 'bogus scholarship' ('Frontiers' 109-10) that he later acknowledged the notes to *The Waste Land* to represent. While the notes came to be viewed by Eliot's interpreters as the microcosmic exemplar of his scholastic austerity, Eliot's subsequent debunking of their authority suggests that they should also be understood as further proof of his debt to the alienating academic strain of nonsense discussed in chapter two. In one sense, the notes might be thought to exemplify the pedagogic aspect of parodic allusion as an empowering invitation to the reader to become a cultural detective. However, when Eliot refers the reader to a chapter of *The Golden Bough* in which Frazer describes 'the Sibylline Books as "that convenient farrago of nonsense"' (Habib 233) it seems evident that we are also dealing with the nonsense device of the 'explanatory note [that is] only mock-explanatory' (16). This conceit, which Malcolm identifies as a part of 'the tradition of academic self-parody' (Malcolm

21), also informs the deliberately unhelpful index of Bentley's clerihew collection *Biography for Beginners*.[8]

Chesterton's account of the cultural 'mystagogue', who 'succeeds because he gets himself misunderstood' (*CW* 28: 31-32) suggests that a counterintuitive commercial expedient underpins the mystagogue's alienating strategies, which manipulate the cultural insecurities of a snobbish audience. The narrator of 'Enoch Soames' corroborates the point, when he records his diverse responses to the poet's verse: 'suppose Enoch Soames was a fool! Up cropped a rival hypothesis: suppose *I* was!' (*Seven* 10). In the particular case of Eliot, his fear of ridicule comingles with a stratagem for achieving commercial success through bafflement, to produce an apparently intractable closed circuit of mutual alienation. As Malcolm explains, 'the self-parodic routines of nonsense poetry are characteristic products of enclosed, self-conscious institutions such as clubs' (22), while the mock-explanatory notes of Hoskyns' seventeenth-century nonsense-writing took the form of 'pretending that he was performing an even more elaborate formal exercise' (16) than initially appeared to be the case. In a comparable action, Eliot successfully bluffs the reader into a conviction that the poet is in charge of a highly exclusive club, into which all but the most erudite of initiates are denied membership, while covering his back by subtly informing still-more erudite readers that he has only been playing an elaborate practical joke all along, a dynamic which enacts a multi-layered dog-whistle approach to reception management.

This strategy was particularly alarming to Chesterton, given his fear of nonsense as a harbinger of alienation, a fear that derived from a combined apprehension of the aloof social detachment espoused by the decadents and the barriers to mutual comprehension deliberately established by the estranging action of academic nonsense. When these attributes of Eliot's commercial and aesthetic practice are combined with the expressions of animosity that he projected towards Chesterton, it becomes unsurprising that Eliot's cultural ascendency should have triggered substantial psychological unease in the older writer. Again, the psychological challenge at stake brings us back to Carroll's Alice, specifically Lecercle's account of the threats that she confronts in her dealings with the

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[8] Immediately after having first met Pound, Eliot passed the academic year at Merton College, Oxford, the alma mater of Bentley and Beerbohm.

aggressively inscrutable inhabitants of Wonderland, who construct 'the framework for a linguistic nightmare. Tweedledum and Tweedledee are trying to make Alice as mad as they are' (84).

As with the imaginative landscape of 'The Queer Feet', in which a Romantic grotesque atmosphere of estrangement is dispersed by a combination of the detective action of parody and the burlesque materiality of the carnivalesque, Chesterton's means of mediating the threat of Eliot's nonsense is through a parodic exploration of imagery of verbal production and digestive consumption. Specifically, Chesterton joins in with the derangement of language that Eliot's verbal games enact, while exploring burlesque variations on his ontologically destabilising visions of digestive consumption. For example, the orally focused mockery of Chesterton's 'large mouth' gambit not only alludes to the anthropomorphism of the opening of Prufrock, but also to Eliot's more gruesome vision of a '[d]ead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit' (*CPP* 72), in *The Waste Land*, in which disturbingly abject phraseology—dead, carious, teeth, spit—is applied to an image of the landscape as an enormous mouth. Again, one is reminded of Dixon Scott's account of the object-world of *Father Brown*, 'waxing horribly, like a face in a fever', while 'struggling to express something too monstrous for speech'.

Disproportionately enlarged mouths and inexplicable screams are a repeated feature of Chesterton's writing on the *fin de siècle*. In 'A Nightmare', a sketch from 1907, a Schopenhauerian character named Professor Pyffer expresses his creed eloquently by merely yawning. As an acolyte of the Professor glosses the moral at hand, '"[i]n that yawn […] he has swallowed all the stars"' (*CW* 14: 89). Chesterton's account of the 'shrieks of Schopenhauer' that had so unnerved him in his youth is echoed in the image of the baby 'skinned alive and screaming' in 'To a Modern Poet'—a considerably more disturbing image than anything found in Eliot's oeuvre, which turns upon the depiction of a visceral removal of physical defences against external threats. Bakhtin explains that the image of the exaggerated mouth operates as a way of managing fear of death through comic mediation: 'exaggeration of the mouth is the fundamental traditional method of rendering external comic features', though the 'gaping mouth is related to the image of swallowing, this most ancient symbol of death and destruction' (*Rabelais* 325).

Again, the phrase, 'a large mouth / shown to a dentist', proves salient, here
as an expression of the relationship between the parodist and the parodied artist.
Removing teeth connotes the neutralisation of the threat 'of being bitten'
(*Abjection* 39) which Kristeva identifies as a common anxiety of the neurotic
patient, a fear also underpinning such whimsical flights as Chesterton's
illustration of Alfred Beit's trap-like, screaming mouth. By performing selective
surgery upon the mouth of the 'Modern Poet', Chesterton is able to uncover the
potential bathos in Eliot's disorientating worldview, which then provides
ammunition to counter the psychological challenge which that worldview
presents, much as his approach to Wilde took the form of a detective hunt for
bathos that would enable him to step back from the cultural other and reinstate a
sense of proportionality in his response. If Chesterton conceived the ontology of
modernism to present the danger of linguistic derangement as psychic pollutant,
Eliot seemed happy to encourage this conception during the period in which he
was straining to identify himself as a member of an aesthetically revolutionary
gang. It is perhaps no coincidence that Aiken nicknamed Eliot, 'Tsetse' (Ackroyd
46)—a fly that bites to pass on infection. Aiken meant this as an allusion to the
acerbity of Eliot's wit, but it might equally connote the infective influence of his
derangement of language. In this sense, by pulling Eliot's leg, Chesterton is also
pulling his teeth.

Chesterton's highlighting of Eliot's anthropomorphised mouth as a site of
grotesque abjection is also lent a satirical bite of its own by the concluding lines
of the parody, in which he archly acknowledges Eliot's status as the spearhead of
'the New Movement / The Emetic Ecstacy' (*Collected Nonsense* 51), a sardonic
pay-off which demonstrates that his cheek was not always so entirely scrubbed
free of Rabelaisian toilet humour as Pound had implied. While the pun on
'movement' conveys a typically parodic transference of the abstractly intellectual
to the indecorously corporeal, it also demonstrates a genuine critical insight into
its subject, since Eliot wrote to Aiken of his enjoyment of any literature that
possessed the capacity to 'provoke [a] strong nausea with life' (21 Aug. 1916;
Letters 1 145-46). Kristeva argues that the urge to vomit is the quintessential
expression of abjection, because in the very act of revolt against abject matter, the
subject simultaneously projects abject matter from within (*Abjection* 3). In tying
this visceral gesture to a state of 'ecstacy', Chesterton implies that Eliot derives a

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curiously masochistic pleasure from the very act of vomiting out his own abjection, much as the snob derives a 'purple ecstacy' from the sensation of 'feeling low'.

As we have seen, Chesterton strives to counter snobbery through his vision of the 'seasick' camaraderie of the carnivalesque, which boldly embraces a foreknowledge of the subject's inexorable journey into another large mouth—that of the fairy-tale 'ogre, *edax rerum*, who devours all without distinction'. As with Beerbohm's parodies of Eliot, Chesterton hits the target in 'To a Modern Poet' because he knows that of which he speaks: Eliot's attempts to come to terms with a threatening universe are also his own. In view of the shared preoccupation of Chesterton and Eliot with imaginatively negotiating the distancing and immersive extremes of the Romantic and folk grotesque, it is instructive to return to the binary established by Mason to define Chesterton's distinction from Eliot: the 'popular bowels and clerkly head'. Bakhtin argues that the head and bowels— though ostensibly polarised regions—directly correlate as sites of admittance which undermine immaculate subjectivity, an element that helps to explain why the vulnerability of the open mouth disturbs both men, and why Prufrock daydreams of the capacity to bite off matter with a closed smile. As Parsons explains, Bakhtin considers the status of the 'genital and excremental' organs as loci of the body's permeability to be mirrored in the sensory organs of the head: 'the genital regions are not the only regions that interact with, and affect, the world. The senses (perception) […] may also be construed as points of intersection' (94).

While the bowels operate as a symbol of the 'process of man's disintegration and degeneration' (*Rabelais* 126) in the realm of the Romantic grotesque, in old medicine the bowels were associated with sympathy (see Parsons 98), and, as a consequence, were considered a site of 'secret affection' (Evans 143). A comparable counterbalancing of sympathy with fear is demonstrated in several subtle ways in 'To a Modern Poet'. While Chesterton's parodic build-up of nonsense imagery ostensibly operates as a means to the end of pedagogic satirical instruction, it also presents him with a temporary license to practice a form that he deems personally *verboten*, opening up a half-holiday from the strictures of his own dogma. His *appreciation* of Eliot, discussed earlier in terms of mischievous surplus production, also functions to rebound upon the parodist in a similar

manner to Eliot's production of Chestertonian witticisms, revealing similarity even as it strains to inscribe difference. The parodist might claim to be exposing and debunking the fallacious assumptions of the *ur* text, but it is just as valid to say that, divested of the author's putative satirical intent—or what Chesterton terms the 'pompous moral dicta which he fondly imagines to be his opinions'— what the parodist has produced is a sympathetic appreciation of the terms of the original, reframed in a comic modality.

In an echo of Father Brown's pedagogic smashing of the pub window to educate Valentin, Chesterton seems to enjoy the act a little more than is strictly necessary—here there is a sense that he is ebulliently joining in with a game in which the challenge is to juggle the referents and produce different kinds of nonsense based on the same set of structural rules. This demonstrates what Phiddian terms 'the potential volatility of parodic language' ('Parody' 684), in complicating the satirist's attempt to achieve a straightforwardly adversarial or instructional effect. A closely comparable forerunner of this dynamic is discernible in John Taylor's parodies of the verbal excesses of Christopher Marlowe. Malcolm explains that Taylor's mockery possessed a symbiotic relationship to Marlowe's innovation, which had 'made possible a radical destabilizing of poetic diction', and 'of that resulting instability, Taylor's nonsense poetry was both a parody and an even more radical expression' (41). This is evocative of Freud's account of the 'emotional ambivalence' (*Totem* 18) of taboo, in which 'the obsessional act' of the neurotic is 'ostensibly a protection against the prohibited act; but *actually* [...] a repetition of it' (*Totem* 50). As with Ellmann's analysis of *The Waste Land*, Chesterton's parody 'surreptitiously repeats the horror that it tries to expiate' (95), and in this paradox reveals a further element of sympathetic correspondence with the preoccupations of its subject.

The latent sympathy potentially drawn out by the ricocheting action of parody is also implied by the 'but' that bisects Chesterton's parody, which echoes the emollient 'but' of Chesterton's clerihew on Thomas Carlyle, which enables him to stress that the controversial text under consideration 'shan't part us'. While 'To a Modern Poet' begins with a phrase that implies both an unimpressed shrug and an invitation to fight—'Well, / What / about it?' (*Collected Nonsense* 50)— the eventual 'But I can't help wishing / You got more fun out of it' signals that the parodist has talked himself down, his equivocation allowing the curious

concession that if Eliot could take pleasure in the concept of a pillar-box resembling an excoriated baby, the literary offence might not be so great. As this demonstrates, for Chesterton, ontological scepticism is a venial sin, when compared to a pessimistic rejection of the value of existence. The writer who locates the opening of 'The Blue Cross' '[b]etween the silver ribbon of morning and the green glittering ribbon of sea' is clearly not averse to producing the occasional category-mistake for aesthetic effect. Likewise, when the narrator of *The Flying Inn* asserts that '[w]hite morning lay about the grey stony streets like spilt milk' (167), this is not a barbed parody, but a sympathetic anticipation of the semantically deranging feline imagery which invests Eliot's early work with such linguistic vitality, and blurs the borders that are conventionally thought to partition 'nonsense' literature and 'serious' literary invention.

Chesterton's parodic ventriloquism in 'To a Modern Poet' closely resembles the technique that Eliot claims to characterise successful criticism: 'the reason why some criticism is good […] is that the critic assumes, in a way, the personality of the author whom he criticises, and through this personality is able to speak with his own voice' ('Matthew' 112). Medcalfe identifies a comparable facility in Chesterton:

> Chesterton was much embarrassed by the disjunction between his public self and his real person: but the disjunction is presumably connected with his ability to impersonate. And it is this ability to impersonate, modified by his awareness of a strong system of values to judge what he is impersonating, that makes his literary criticism […] so good (85).

Medcalfe's connection of this critical facility to a discrepancy between public and private selves also hints at the ethical tensions felt by Eliot in subscribing unreservedly to the public line of his friendship group—tensions that also informed Chesterton's complaint about the 'sundering' quality of Belloc's disputes. Douglas Woodruff recalled that Chesterton considered that 'the modern world […] should be approached in a spirit of intellectual ferocity and personal amiability' (qtd. in Ward, *Gilbert* 473), and while 'To a Modern Poet' embodies Jerome Hamilton Buckley's assertion that in parody '"laughter prod[s] eccentric genius into an awareness of common reality"' (qtd. in Caesar, '"I Quite"' 798), its ambivalently imitative action also draws the parodist himself away from an

excessively conservative position, to produce a dynamic of mutual convergence. In a discussion of Arnold's apparently implacable hostility to Heine, Eliot neatly summarises the dynamic at hand: 'We can sometimes arrive at a very satisfactory intimacy with our anti-masks' ('Matthew' 112).

When Habib contends that '"Prufrock" might be approached from a perspective which has suffered relative neglect at the hands of Eliot scholarship: the comic' (70), we also begin to perceive the comic modulation of Chesterton's parody to demonstrate a more subtle sympathy with the original than is found in the work of Eliot's more stolidly earnest pasticheurs in the same period. In an article on 'Robert Browning' (*DN* 7 May, 1912), Chesterton pursues an argument about the poet's reception that closely prefigures Chinitz's account of the violence subsequently done to the richness of Eliot's corpus by the embalmment procedures of his later critical adherents. Chesterton argues that the Browningites do their damage 'by turning a poem into a puzzle', with the result that 'Browning's legacy is not even Browningesque; it is not a dilution of his wine; it is a sort of deadly antidote' (*CDN* 8: 72). As Chesterton explains, the 'whole fate of Browning in letters depends upon the battle which is still going on between Browning and the Browningites. If he conquers he will live; if his admirers conquer he will certainly die' (*CDN* 8: 72). Eliot's dawning awareness of the applicability of this dilemma to his own cultural position forms the subject of my next section.

'The Hollow Men' as Carnivalesque Social Satire

> From one point of view, the poet aspires to the condition of the music-hall comedian.
>
> T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (32)

> "I am going to hold a pistol to the head of Modern Man. But I shall not use it to kill him—only to bring him to life. I begin to see a new meaning in being the skeleton at the feast".
>
> Innocent Smith, in Chesterton's *Manalive* (58)

If, as Kristeva argues, an archetype of the abject is 'a friend who stabs you' (*Abjection* 4), abjection would seem to have been the prevailing

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characteristic of Eliot's friendship group in 1925. In January, he suddenly contracted the animus of Lewis, following his failure (due to illness) to provide a prompt reference on Lewis's behalf to a house agent. This oversight coincided with Eliot's publication, in *The Criterion,* of a piece of art criticism by one of Lewis's numerous enemies, Clive Bell, a concatenation of events which drove Lewis to the extravagant conclusion that Eliot was engaging in acts of personal 'treachery' (Lewis, *Letters* 149) against him. In the same month, a more public accusation of treachery was levelled against Eliot by Pound, with the publication of *A Draft of XVI Cantos*.[9] At the conclusion of Canto XIV, the first of Pound's scurrilous, carnivalesque travesties of Dante—the 'Hell Cantos'—he launches an attack upon Eliot that carries none of the emollient concessions of Chesterton's parody. Pound situates Eliot amongst the 'unamiable liars' (*Cantos* 63)—a phrase that conflates a withholding of camaraderie with an act of deception—while Eliot's direct appearance in the text is prefaced by an extremely unamiable parody of the lines from *The Waste Land* that run, 'If there were rock / And also water / And water' (*CPP* 72):

> Bog of stupidities,
> malevolent stupidities, and stupidities,
> the soil living pus, full of vermin,
> dead maggots begetting live maggots,
> […]
> the air without refuge of silence,
> the drift of lice, teething,
> and above it the mouthing of orators,
> the arse-belching of preachers (*Cantos* 63).

Somewhat ironically, the free-associative quality of Pound's lines, which lends them a certain protean force, recalls Eliot's own method of automatic writing when constructing 'What the Thunder Said', while the echoes of Eliot's 'dead mountain mouth of carious teeth' and 'not even silence in the mountains' (*CPP* 72) render Pound's satiric vision of Hell parasitical upon Eliot's own vision. If there seems a further irony in Pound traitorously impugning a text that he

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[9] The 'Hell Cantos' were conceptualised by July 1922, though Pound continued to revise them until their publication in January 1925 (see Bush, *Genesis* 244).

helped to bring into existence, particularly by furnishing amendments to a textual body that he had originally pared-down, this ambivalent dynamic is rendered explicable by the appearance of Eliot at the head of the preachers, as '…..m Episcopus, waving a condom full of black-beetles' (*Cantos* 63).[10] Eliot's appearance in the text follows directly on from that of Chesterton, rather as Death follows the Rider on a White Horse in Revelation. Again using terms that denote treachery, Pound locates Chesterton amongst the 'betrayers of language', 'the press gang […] who had lied for hire' (*Cantos* 61).

In this light, the reference to Eliot as '[Possu]m Episcopus'—the dots are intended to imply corruption—suggests that Eliot's burgeoning religious conviction, first confessed to an incredulous Pound in 1923 (Gordon, *Imperfect* 210), was viewed by the latter as an act of infidelity, betraying the premises upon which the friendship group was initially founded, in a manner which drew Eliot ideologically closer to the interdicted figure of Chesterton.[11] By drawing together an array of images of pestilence and sterility to implicate Eliot as the source of the malaise that he documents, Pound's Canto not only revisits Eliot's association of Chesterton with the 'forces of death', but also returns to the imagery of incontinence and contagion that Pound and Lewis had previously employed when stigmatising Chesterton as dribbling and scum-like. Similarly, the juxtaposition of the physical 'teething' of lice with the verbal 'mouthing of orators' calls to mind the orally-focused element of fear that I have identified in Chesterton's apprehensive negotiation of Eliot's poetic voice.

It is perhaps notable that Pound's petulantly insistent revision of 'water' to 'stupidities' serves to cancel out the yearning for fluids articulated by the voice of 'What the Thunder Said', since Hulme had identified the 'properly classical poem' as 'dry and hard' (Hulme). In previous centuries, porousness was understood as a point of distinction between humour and wit, since the former '"derives its name from the prevailing quality of *moisture* in the bodily

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[10] Matthew Hofer has argued convincingly that this is a reference to Eliot, and that Eliot was aware of this, in 'Modernist Polemic: Ezra Pound v. "the perverters of language"' (*Modernism/Modernity* 9, 3, September 2002, pp. 463-489).

[11] Pound identifies Eliot's religious faith with that of Chesterton in a letter to A.R. Orage, 24 Feb. 1934 (*Economic* 90). A fortnight later, Pound published a negative review of Eliot's rather Chestertonian social treatise, *After Strange Gods* (1934) ('Mr. Eliot's Mare's Nest.' *New English Weekly* 8 Mar. 1934). See Harding (186-87) for an account of this later dispute between Eliot and Pound.

temperament"' (Hunt qtd. in Martin 30). Consequently, humour has conventionally been considered to 'bond' individuals through '"the earnestness of affection"', whereas wit 'laughs at others' (T*riumph* 30). As I discussed in chapter one, Chesterton considered unalloyed wit to be a product of pure intellection, whereas humour's capacity to 'confess its inconsistency' imaginatively aligns it with immersion in the material.

In *BLAST 1*, Lewis explains that the aim of the Vorticist is to cultivate the 'separating […] solitude of LAUGHTER' as a 'hysterical WALL built round the EGO' (26). This attempt to establish pristine distance from the rejected target of the laughter is echoed in Pound's letter to Quinn, in which he asserts that '[t]he multitude of [Chesterton's] mumblings cannot be killed by multitude but only by a sharp thrust' (*Letters* 171). With this image, Pound inadvertently evokes Chesterton's view of the sword as a symbol of oppositional satire, while dispensing with the balancing, existentially grotesque element of internal contradiction that Chesterton finds symbolised in the cross. In this light, Pound's intemperate broadside against Eliot can perhaps be understood to result from unease at the latter's exercising of a permeability of humour inimical to the pure satire espoused by Lewis and Pound, a faculty that led Eliot to traverse the reassuring cultural barriers that Pound had sought to establish.

Given the strength of Pound's attack in Canto XIV, it is particularly ironic that by 1925 Pound and Eliot had become associated in the public consciousness as a double act—'seeming to join two persons, elusively, as one' (241), as Anne Stillman puts it. If this image calls to mind Shaw's 'pantomime elephant', the Chesterbelloc, the comparably politic foundation of the Eliot/Pound hybrid rendered it just as unwieldy a public contrivance. Chesterton's approach to controversy always remained close to the six maxims of the politeness principle— 'tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy' (Lecercle 102)—in marked contrast to the 'partisan viciousness' (131) that Wells deprecated in Belloc, and a comparable temperamental divide characterises Eliot and Pound. Eliot's willingness to modify his cultural position represents an example of the 'political crime' (Lynch 103) that Derrida sees as a danger to friendship. Hofer argues that the presence of a disparity between personal and political relations 'helps to explain how Eliot could remain Pound's collaborator and friend in one sense, and become a rival and enemy in another' (478). Indeed, following Eliot's

first stirrings of religious conviction, he assumed a relation to Pound comparable to that of MacIan and Turnbull in *The Ball and the Cross*—his simultaneous 'friend and enemy'.

In view of Pound's consignment of Eliot to Hell, one wonders if Lewis is tauntingly referring to their friend's public attack in his truculent correspondence with Eliot in March 1925, when he claims that 'the devil has you by the heel', and notes that if his suspicions over Eliot's conduct are correct he need not 'tell you where to go for you will be there already' (Lewis, *Letters* 154). Lewis's paranoia had now brought the pair's relationship to breaking point, with Eliot exasperatedly denying any involvement in an 'intrigue' or 'plot' against Lewis, and appealing to him, in an echo of Chesterton's youthful advice to Bentley, to be 'convinced by your own senses' (23 Mar. 1925; *Letters 2* 612) on the matter. The pair continued to quarrel intermittently throughout the rest of the year, and Lewis later succeeded in clashing with Pound, in turn, in June 1925. In the same period, Lewis was composing *Time and Western Man*, which includes a traitorous attack on Pound, accusing the latter, in turn, of hypocrisy, by highlighting the artistic 'discrepancy between what Pound said [...] and what he did' (55). In a cycle of paradoxically estranging imitation, each man accuses the other of harbouring hidden, heretical narratives that must be unearthed, a pattern that builds up to a pathology of classicist neurosis.

This degeneration of the old fraternity into a vicious circle of private mistrust and public recrimination would have been particularly prominent in Eliot's mind at the time in which he was completing work on the final version of 'The Hollow Men', in the autumn of 1925. While Lewis and Pound must have seemed exciting manifestations of Eliot's vibrant 'comedian' made flesh in 1914, by 1925 they more closely resembled the 'haranguing spectres' that torment the vulnerable marionette of 'Humoresque'. Pound's barbed satire, which presents such a marked contrast with the emollient strategies of Chesterton's parody, would have been particularly wounding, since Eliot had willingly admitted Pound into unusually close proximity. It is appropriate, then, that when Eliot cryptically takes leave of his erstwhile comrades in 'The Hollow Men', he does so by reintroducing his old puppets, the 'weak' marionette and the mocking 'comedian', in order to parody the cultural endeavour upon which their friendship was founded, while drawing both himself and his audience into the range of the

criticism, employing the democratic grotesque framework of the carnivalesque to set the poem up in ambiguous, metaparodic relation to his earlier work.

This is not to suggest that the influences conventionally attributed to 'The Hollow Men'—Dante, Conrad, Frazer—are a false trail. Rather, these overt, 'official' influences, which Eliot drew to the reader's attention as a means of investing his corpus with a ready-made mythos, are made to coexist with a simultaneously carnivalesque, 'unofficial' subtext, which playfully subverts that same mythos. This hitherto underexplored element of the poem comes to light when its free verse sections are read in ironic conjunction with the two parodies of the nursery rhyme, 'Here we go round the mulberry bush', which bookend the final section. These pieces were the last to be added to the poem, thus postdating Eliot's quarrel with Lewis, the publication of Pound's 'Hell Cantos', and Chesterton's unorthodox letter of introduction, 'To a Modern Poet'. In the first rhyme, Eliot replaces the bush with a cactus:

> *Here we go round the prickly pear*
> *Prickly pear prickly pear*
> *Here we go round the prickly pear*
> *At five o'clock in the morning* (*CPP* 85).

The timing of this dance, which is traditionally understood to be the hour of Christ's resurrection, juxtaposes Eliot's newly discovered faith, and his consequent sense of personal regeneration, with a bathetic rendition of the cultural regeneration that he had previously thought latent within the 'living English' of his prickly pair of associates. The 'mulberry bush' rhyme originally derived from fertility ritual, and Eliot's recourse to the children's rhyme has often been discussed as an allusion to his broader sense of the enervation of his epoch. Chinitz argues that the poem represents the 'culmination of a recurring theme' in Eliot's work: 'The impossibility of resurrecting a defunct ritual' (87), which would merely represent 'an exotic confection for the delighted palates of literary faddists' (86). While this assessment of Eliot's intent seems accurate, my previous section particularly identified the danger of his own work becoming just such a parlous dish, offered up to a literary culture that resembles the club of the Twelve True Fishermen writ large.

Kenner argues that a slow drift towards ossification seemed to grip Eliot as he became increasingly assimilated into the mainstream of literary culture: 'the vitality dwindle[s] in his prose as he grows, between *The Egoist* and the *TLS*, more and more like the thing he was pretending to be' (*Invisible* 179). The danger of coming to embody the very enervation that he had sought to satirise in 'Prufrock' would have become increasingly clear to Eliot as his visions began to be reflected back to him in the revisions of others, not only in the fairground mirror of Chestertonian parody, but also in the inadvertently bathetic surplus production undertaken by the acolytes that he increasingly accrued. As Ackroyd relates, in the course of the 1920s a 'cult of "The Waste Landers" developed […] The poem was widely imitated by young or aspiring poets […] "It became such a plague that the moment the eye encountered, in a newly arrived poem, the words 'stone', 'dust' or 'dry' one reached for the waste paper basket"' (Howard qtd. in Ackroyd 128).

Chesterton highlights an example of this phenomenon in an article on 'The New Poetry' (*ILN* 30 Jan. 1926), in which he discusses the poetry of an apparent pasticheur of Eliot, 'Mr Walsh', whose verse Chesterton is baffled to find 'bound up in the same volume with works by Mr. James Joyce and Mr. Ezra Pound, whose notions we may regard as quite false or unphilosophical, but who are men of thought and reading, who generally mean something by what they say' (*CW* 34: 36). Conversely, Chesterton is nonplussed by Walsh's account of his acts of 'worship' before 'stone images' (*CW* 34: 33) which are apparently filled with blood. As with his later tinkering with the referents of *Thursday*, Chesterton has fun drawing out the nonsense possibilities of this conceit, listing a series of comparable category-mistakes: 'the ink in icebergs, or the beer in bicycles, or the champagne in Bradshaw's railway guide' (*CW* 34: 35-36).

In a follow-up essay ('More about Modern Poets.' *ILN* 6 Feb. 1926), Chesterton argues that this 'sort of stone image is avowedly an Aunt Sally. Nobody could help laughing at it, unless he were morbidly careful only to laugh when he was told to by Mr. Ezra Pound' (*CW* 34: 38). Since Eliot asserted that he felt compelled to 'keep an attitude of discipleship' (qtd. in Chace 221) towards Pound, his publically recognised allegiance to the high-priest of the new movement can be understood to situate him in disquieting proximity to these less-than flattering bedfellows. This context is particularly highlighted by Jaffe's

account of the ambiguous connotations of the term, *Eliotic*. As Jaffe explains, with increasing fame, Eliot became regarded more as a type than an individual: an 'ominous cultural signifier, a symptom of the general state of cultural affairs' (72). This identity confusion was compounded by the fact that the adjectives *Poundian* and *Eliotic* operate in an analogic manner, *identifying* the style of the author with the pastiche of his acolytes. Citing a negative review of Pound, Jaffe argues that by 'adding the suffix –*ian*, the reviewer, in effect, uses *Pound* to diminish Pound's own work […] With somewhat invidious effect, the adjective Poundian insinuates that Pound's work suffers because it derives from him' (59). While this imputation recalls the implicit charge conventionally levelled by the parodist—as illustrated in a particularly visceral manner by the Hell Cantos—the criticism becomes still more damaging when conflated with the complementary sense of the adjective—'*Poundian*, in this case a substantive, *an admirer or disciple of Ezra Pound*' (Jaffe 60)—which intimately associates the author with the failings of his acolytes.

Pound explained that his nickname for Eliot, 'Old Possum', was intended to evoke the latter's ability to '"appear dead while … still alive"' (qtd. in Hofer 480), and argued that his friend's physical bearing increasingly operated as an objective corollary of his critical standing in this regard—his success in establishing cultural authority rested upon '"disguising himself as a corpse"' (qtd. in Chace 221). This suggests that Pound's terms in Canto XIV can also be understood as a Bergsonian, monitory warning to Eliot of the dangers of lapsing into 'a certain rigidity of body, mind and character', a warning that Eliot ironically heeds at Pound's expense in 'The Hollow Men'. Eliot's initial employment of 'we' in the poem should be understood to convey a double-edged allusion to both the Men of 1914 and their subsequent copyists, which anticipates the charges of enervation and sloughs them off in a complexly rebounding gesture of immersion and evasion—an act of 'emetic ecstacy' that seeks to propel Eliot beyond an abject former self, to produce a Bergsonian 'creative evolution':

> We are the hollow men
> We are the stuffed men
> Leaning together
> Headpiece filled with straw. Alas! (*CPP* 83).

Since Ackroyd notes that '*The Waste Land* was sung and chanted by undergraduates' (119) in the years immediately following its publication, Eliot's opening lines can be read as an arch invitation to his undergraduate chorus to join in with a rather unflattering new air. Nonetheless, when understood in the context of Eliot's increasing sense of distance from his original friendship group, this marching song for an ineffectual generation not only conveys an exasperated throwing up of the hands at the dull-wittedness of his acolytes, but also a retrospective sense of the futility of the machinations of the Men of 1914 themselves. The almost instantaneous decay of the chorus prefigures Chesterton's observation that in the modern age, '[p]oetry has become more than normally individualistic. The individualist can write a song; but not a song with a chorus' (*CW* 21: 606). Similarly, the contemporaneous breakdown of Eliot's own circle into paranoid whisperings is discernible in the clanging repetition of the collective noun, ironically juxtaposed with the simultaneously comradely, conspiratorial and enervated phrase, 'Leaning together'.

The sense that Eliot's criticism is directed closer to home becomes still clearer when the mulberry bush rhyme's travesty of fertility ritual is read in conjunction with the subtly deprecatory allusions to both Lewis and Pound that can be discerned in the sections which precede it. When the narrator discusses his anxiety to avoid a meeting in Part II of the poem, his account of the strategies necessary to achieve the required detachment not only includes adopting the 'deliberate disguises' that Eliot had cultivated in his earliest work, but also '[b]ehaving as the wind behaves' (*CPP* 84). In *Finnegans Wake* (1939), which was first part-published as 'Work in Progress' in April 1924, Joyce peppers the text with the term, 'wind', as an allusive means of deprecating Lewis, by establishing a pun on Wyndham and his 'blast' of hot air (Glasheen 166-68).[12] In adopting Joyce's trick, Eliot sets up a dialogue between the former self who had spent the previous era appropriating many of Lewis's methods, and the present Eliot who is beginning to apprehend their sterility.

The position of Lewis and Pound interestingly echoes Chesterton's criticism of Arnold, particularly his combined inability to engage with the 'comic' in his physical self, and his oppositional critique of Victorian culture, which Chesterton

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[12] Lewis went on to implant a satirical parody of Joyce's increasingly unorthodox stylistics in his allegorical fantasia, *The Childermass* (1928).

considered to have 'suffered [... from] consenting merely to correct', and therefore presenting only a 'half-truth' (*Matthew* x). Lewis later explained that *BLAST* had been 'destructive in intention' (*Time* 55), a phrase that accords with my discussion, in chapter one, of the unproductively destructive nature of intellectual satire when unleavened by the constructive energies of the physical grotesque. In his first volume of autobiography, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937), Lewis acknowledges that the 'Men of 1914' were '*the first men of a Future that has not materialized*' (*Blasting* 256), seemingly failing to recognise this failure as an inevitable consequence of a programmatic eschewal of the *material*. While Hulme praised Lewis's art as boldly transcending the '"transience of the organic"' (qtd. in Butler 227), Eliot's repeated recourse to 'stone images' (*CPP* 84) in 'The Hollow Men' hints at the un-regenerative endgame encoded within these precepts. Specifically, the phallic travesty of the prickly pear set up by Eliot's nursery rhyme gestures back ironically to the self-confident Vorticist era in which Gaudier Brzeska had sculpted his phallic 'hierarchic head' of Pound—an object that Lewis recalled viewing from Pound's apartment when he was first introduced to Eliot (see *Blasting* 285):

> This is the dead land
> This is cactus land
> Here the stone images
> Are raised, here they receive
> The supplication of a dead man's hand
> Under the twinkle of a fading star (*CPP* 84).

When read in combination with the first parody of the nursery rhyme, the link to Gaudier Brzeska's raising of stone images conjures the somewhat burlesque image of the Men of 1914 dancing around the un-regenerative stone effigy of Pound's phallus, while a dead man's hand, presumably that of 'Old Possum' himself, offers a grotesque parody of youthful supplication. If there is a curious irony in Pound's parodic revision, in the 'Hell Cantos', of the very text which his skilful excisions helped to bring to life, there is a singularly apt riposte in Eliot's reintroduction of much of the abject material expunged from *The Waste Land* into 'The Hollow Men', 'transmuted' (Kenner, *Invisible* 32) into a framework that mocks Pound's aesthetic revolution. Importantly, Eliot's desire to

inscribe a reconstructive element within the culturally oppositional, 'destructive' project of Lewis and Pound finds expression in 'The Hollow Men' through the setting up of a contrast between the nocturnal, Romantic grotesque landscape of the free-verse sections, and the folk grotesque of the nursery rhymes, set at dawn. The regenerative intent of this movement, which closely recalls the dyadic methodology of Chesterton's fiction, is perhaps most clearly revealed by the return to the nursery rhyme at the poem's conclusion, which parodies the refrain with which the verse conventionally continues—'this is the way we clap our hands':

> *This is the way the world ends*
> *This is the way the world ends*
> *This is the way the world ends*
> *Not with a bang but a whimper* (*CPP* 86).

This nursery rhyme interposition can be understood as a final, ironic return of the voices of Eliot's earliest marionettes to the stage, a revision of his earlier visions which transmutes the figures from dead-eyed Romantic grotesque effigies to vibrantly energised carnivalesque embodiments of festive comic practice. By transposing the martial rhythm of the poem's opening into the burlesque song-form of the nursery rhyme, the quatrain encourages us to re-imagine the poem as a pantomime skit, in which the iconoclastic Clown bursts in at the moment of crisis, delivering his warped nursery-rhyme as a sardonic gloss, before throwing one leg forward with a clap of the hands as the curtain falls. Eliot's audio performance of the poem further heightens this effect, conveying a serio-comic hybridised binary which brings to mind Chesterton's account of Bentley's knack of saying 'amusing things with the air of one reading the burial service' (*CW* 14: 440). The passage of linguistic *aporia* which precedes the final quatrain is intoned in ever-more deflated fashion, suggestive of a sagging Jack-in-the-box—'A jumping-jack has such a frame' (*CPP* 602), notes the narrator of 'Humoresque'—only for the Jack to spring unnervingly back to life with gritted teeth and popping eyes for the manic finale. The return of the 'comedian' to the stage is also implied by a subtle textual connection between 'Suite Clownesque' and Part V of 'The Hollow Men'. In the former, Eliot writes:

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> […] through the painted colonnades
> There *falls a shadow* dense, immense
> It's the comedian again
> Explodes in laughter, spreads his toes
> (the most expressive, real of men)
> Concentred into vest and nose (*Inventions* 38; my emphasis).

This herald of the shadow that falls between the emotion and the response in 'The Hollow Men' interpolates the 'comedian' into the space between Eliot's emotion and the reader's response. At the conclusion of *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, Eliot expands upon the meaning of his parodic emendation of Walter Pater—'the poet aspires to the condition of the music-hall comedian'—explaining that '[e]very poet would like, I fancy, to be able to think that he had some direct social utility […] He would like to be something of a popular entertainer, and be able to think his own thoughts behind a tragic or a comic mask' ('Conclusion' 154). Eliot explains that this urge demonstrates a desire to have 'a part to play in society as worthy as that of the music-hall comedian' ('Conclusion' 154). In this light, the progress of Part V of 'The Hollow Men' should perhaps be understood as a carnivalesque turning topsy-turvy of the tragic mask, essayed with the aim of achieving a 'social utility'.

Read in this way, the poem ends with the abortive 'bang' of a comedy pistol, a weapon that Eliot ranges against himself, his erstwhile friends, and his solemnly respectful audience in an all-embracing skirl of carnivalesque critical laughter. While Habib considers the 'ultimate level of irony' in Prufrock to reside in its 'laughing at the increasingly puzzled reader' (78), this private joke is translated, in 'The Hollow Men', into a pedagogically antagonistic relationship with the audience, chivvying the reader to become active, in a comparable manner to that essayed by Chesterton in 'The Queer Feet'. Cavendish-Jones's view that the final rhyme's repetitive framework 'hectors the reader into accepting [Eliot's] conclusion' (*Modernity* 198) is only partially correct: for 'accepting', read 'daring to refute'. It should be read as a shaking of the reader's shoulders, much as Chesterton's Innocent Smith holds a gun to the head of 'Modern Man' in his capacity as 'skeleton at the feast'. As Smith explains, 'the *memento mori* […] isn't only meant to remind us of a future life, but to remind us of a present life too' (*Manalive* 58).

Again, this suggests a cross-pollination of the practices of Laforgue and Chesterton on Eliot's part. As Hannoosh notes, Laforgue's Hamlet 'constantly breaks his narrative with parenthetical asides [and] direct commentary […] the narrator's intervention, so frequent in parody, allegedly distances him from the text but, by allying us with him, it actually incorporates us into the narrative' (*Parody* 27-28). As I discussed in chapter three, this is also a characteristically carnivalesque strategy, embodied by Chesterton's narratorial clowning in 'The Queer Feet'. While it has often been noted that Eliot's attendance of Stravinsky's *Petrushka* in Paris in 1911 influenced the puppet conceit of the 'hollow men' (see Mester 122), this inspiration should also be understood as an appropriation of the uncanny puppet image to carnivalesque purpose, comparable to that which Chesterton encoded in Father Brown's familiar swinging of his legs on the textual partition in 'The Queer Feet'. Recall Leatherbarrow's explanation that the purpose of Petrushka in Russian folk myth was to provoke 'disruptive laughter, challenging all social and moral conventions', by deliberately generating a 'disruptive carnival mood [which] invited collusion: It passed beyond the puppet booth and infected the audience'.

As with 'The Queer Feet', the ultimate purpose of this gesture of engagement is community marriage, conducted via a deliberate appropriation of the practices of Aristophanean festive comedy on Eliot's part. The word, 'mulberry', derives from the Greek, *moros*, meaning 'a fool' (Evans 736), and Eliot's nursery rhyme conceit situates the poet imminently within the text, putting into effect the rather Father Brown-like personal characteristics that Aiken identified in Eliot: a '"clown"', who '"[f]or all his liturgical appearance [was] capable of real buffoonery"' (qtd. in Gordon 32). In this instance, Eliot is the high-priest in a carnivalesque marriage rite. The sardonic marching song with which the poem begins is lent a regenerative dimension by its resemblance to the 'processional nature of the *komos*' (Brody 67) in ancient fertility ritual, a framework composed of 'a procession to the place of sacrifice, the sacrifice itself, and the […] *komos* song addressed to Phales', which was performed by drunken revellers as a prelude to 'the Sacred Marriage' (Brody 67).

F.M. Cornford, whose text, *The Origins of Attic Comedy* (1922) Eliot read in the period immediately preceding his construction of 'The Hollow Men' (Matthews 117-18), notes that in the tradition of English mummery which derives

from Attic comedy, the players frequently 'ran forward and satirised persons' (qtd. in Brody 69) in the crowd, much as the opening chant satirises Eliot's audience. Conventionally, at the 'end of the action […] the clown goes out first [as] the leader of the procession' (Brody 68) to effect the conclusion, while in the mummers' play of Greatham, the clowns acted as 'leaders of the choral section' (Brody 99). While this element accords with Eliot's engagement with the reader, his bathetic rendering of Pound's stone phallus is also salient, since the Phallic Song of the *komos* possessed the 'two elements of invective and invocation', and incorporated 'abusive caricatures of contemporary and local figures' (Brody 70-71).

Cornford asserted that in 'ancient ritual […] it is the fertility god himself who is the victim' (qtd. in Brody 110). Similarly, Eliot sacrifices his textual body in the cause of personal and community resurrection, deriving a self-immolating moral from his materials which invests the conclusion with a double-edged pedagogic dimension. The final version of 'The Hollow Men' appeared in *Poems 1909—1925*, published in November 1925, an event which Eliot described to Leonard Woolf, in characteristically abject terms, as an 'ejection' (17 Dec. 1925; *Letters 2* 802).[13] In this light, the final lines of the poem can be read as the burlesque afterword to the collection, capping this monument to his aesthetic success with a comically condensed Aristophanean gloss of the tragedies that precede it. As Gaster explains, the '*komos* provides an appropriate finale for any comedy or farce, but in the case of the folk play it also' serves to bring together the 'itinerant troupe that makes the rounds, like carol singers […] a means of rounding up the company at the end of the performance and of marshaling them in procession before they move on' (qtd. in Brody 67-68). In the present instance, Eliot's '"company of actors inside one suit"' (Pritchett qtd. in Ackroyd 118) is brought together for one last song before the poet moves on to a new phase of his cultural activities.

In surveying his career in this way, Eliot also second-guesses how his ominous musings might be parodied, and gets in the first blow, so as to cunningly render parody superfluous. 'The Hollow Men' is an *aporic* crisis moment within Eliot's oeuvre, a *reductio ad absurdum* of his work to date, invoking a moment of

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[13] Several fragments of the poem had been published in different forms between November 1924 and March 1925.

artistic *impasse* in its self-parodic language. It is also both his most complete realisation of the vortex of Laforgean irony that his career began by pastiching, and his simultaneous gesture of escape from the same influence. The inscription of stratified layers of irony, through which Eliot produces a series of supremely pessimistic statements that carry the seed of their own negation encoded within the manner of their conveyance, caused a further shadow to fall between Eliot's intent and the interpretations of his critical readers. If taken at face value, the poem might easily by misread as a complacent, superannuated exercise in decadent anaemia, rehashing the characteristic imagery of *The Waste Land* (rats, broken items, moisture-less locales) to diminishing returns. For example, Bernard Bergonzi describes 'The Hollow Men' as 'a literally hopeless poem, though stylish in its despair' (104), while Kenner expresses bafflement over the way in which, when compared to the monologically serious 'East Coker' (1940), 'even *The Hollow Men* seems to an imponderable degree satiric, the circuit around the prickly pear positively facetious' (*Invisible* 266).

Although Kenner's analysis tentatively hints at some of the elements that my own reading has highlighted, his 'even' demonstrates an interpretive confusion, implying as it does that a text as self-evidently morose as 'The Hollow Men' is surely an inapt repository for facetiousness. This is a particularly ironic misreading, since Kenner originated an important theory of modernist practice in his analysis of the way in which the relative degree of authorial irony ascribed to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914) defines whether we view Joyce's protagonist either as an archetype of the literary genius or a bathetic parody of the same. Jaffe considers Kenner's interpretation to bear the implication that readers 'who recognize Joyce's irony about Stephen as interpretive necessity pass something akin to a modernist intelligence test' (35). My reading of Eliot's poem as an ironic attempt to establish critical distance not only from his associates and acolytes, but also from his own former *Weltschmerz*, ironically via a hyperbolic over-production of its signifiers, posits the successful decoding of the poem's self-parody as a similar test of both readerly intelligence and meaningful identification with the author, which requires us to engage in what Colebrook terms the 'process of ironic re-reading, where we dare to imagine a text as somehow meaning something other than what it explicitly says' (*Irony* 5).

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The interpretive tension purposefully inscribed by Eliot is strikingly demonstrated by Arthur Waugh's inadvertently perspicacious assessment of Eliot's verse, which he intended as a satirical blow: 'It was a classic custom in the family hall, when a feast was at its height, to display a drunken slave among the sons of the household, to the end that they, being ashamed at the ignominious folly of his gesticulations, might determine never to be tempted into such a pitiable condition themselves' (qtd. in Waugh, E. *Little* 78). As my analysis of the influence of the harlequinade upon the structure of 'The Queer Feet' demonstrated, the casting of the clown as a servant and the narrator as buffoon in more recent forms of comic ritual is undertaken with precisely this pedagogic purpose in mind. In view of this imaginative correspondence between the aesthetic practice of Chesterton and Eliot, it is perhaps unsurprising that the former proved singularly well-equipped to correctly interpret 'The Hollow Men' in the years that followed, when the textual bucket of cold water thrown at the reader by Eliot's final rhyme roused Chesterton into critical action.

Eliot's juxtaposition of disparate genres of the grotesque recalls Chesterton's account of the value of Dickens's stylistic practice, which effects an '[a]udacious reconciliation' (*CW* 15: 284), comparable to the juggling of 'skulls and motley' (*CW* 15: 284) in Shakespeare. As Chesterton explains, '[t]he more widely different the types talked of, the more serious and universal must be the philosophy which talks of them' (*CW* 15: 284-85). As my final section will illustrate, this sympathetic understanding was efficacious in nurturing the equally audacious reconciliation of Chesterton and Eliot in the decade that followed.

Audacious Reconciliation

It cannot be too often repeated that if we are to love our enemies we must fight them.

Chesterton, 'On Mrs. Eddy and a New Creed' (*DN* 11 Apr. 1908; *CDN* 5: 52)

It is curiously serendipitous that John Dickson Carr's most famous mystery story should concern a detective conceived as an affectionate parody of Chesterton, investigating the problem of *The Hollow Man* (1935), since Chesterton's attempts to decode the mystery of Eliot initially took the literal form

of detective work. In 1925, he not only composed 'To a Modern Poet', but also published two *Father Brown* stories in which the priest is made to exercise his deductive judgement in relation to figures who closely resemble Eliot. In 'The Arrow of Heaven' (*Nash's Magazine* July 1925), an American character whose 'conversation seemed to consist of stratified layers of irony' (*FB* 379-80) is described as 'dressed to the nines—up to that point, indeed, where there begins to be too fine a distinction between the dandy and the dummy outside a tailor's shop' (*FB* 389). In 'The Mirror and the Magistrate', published in April 1925, the finger of guilt temporarily falls upon an artist described as '"one of the new poets, and pretty steep to read, I believe"' (*FB* 525), whose philosophy is later described as 'pessimistic [and] anarchial' (*FB* 649).

In both cases, the suspect's ultimate innocence is established by Father Brown's capacity to sympathetically identify with the figure under scrutiny—in the latter instance, 'I set myself consciously down to *be* a revolutionary poet' (*FB* 649). Hunter argues that Father Brown's method constitutes 'a ritual act of total surrender of personal identity to the object he wishes to understand' (153)—in other words, a willed impersonality, somewhat reminiscent of Eliot's poetic method. In the two expositional narratives on Brown's methodology with which Chesterton bookended the collection—*The Secret of Father Brown* (1927)—in which 'The Mirror and the Magistrate' appears, the priest's deductive technique is described in comparable terms to the 'sympathetic and analytical' (*Varied* 181) approach that Chesterton lauded in Bret Harte's parodic writing. It is an act of sympathetic mimicry, conceived in direct opposition to the scientific impersonality practiced by Holmes, which Brown claims to involve 'treating a friend as a stranger' (*FB* 522).

The reverse process of sympathetic convergence, which enables Brown to conceive of strangers as friends, was also that engaged in by Chesterton in coming to terms with Eliot in the decade that followed. In 1927, Chesterton not only published *The Secret of Father Brown*, but also *Robert Louis Stevenson*, a critical study in which Eliot makes a further implicit appearance, in an analysis which suggests Chesterton's success in sympathetically communing with his subject. Eliot reviewed the study shortly after its publication, rehearsing his old urge to obscure the accuracy of Chesterton's criticism, by casting doubt upon the latter's ability to correctly deduce the meaning of modernism. Eliot claims that

Chesterton runs aground upon the misapprehension that 'we are […] still very much interested in the 'Nineties, and somewhat like them, only worse' ('There' 445). This further attempt at public obfuscation is crowned with the assertion that Chesterton seems unfamiliar with any modern literature beside the pedestrian offerings of Michael Arlen ('There' 445), despite the fact that in *Stevenson* he explicitly discusses Aldous Huxley, Dorothy Richardson, and Edith Sitwell; and ends the study with an implicit assessment of Eliot, Lewis, and Pound.

The nature of these analyses is particularly instructive, since Chesterton draws persuasively on the Victorian nonsense-world of Carroll as a means of achieving sympathetic engagement with the figures under discussion. He begins by offering a reading of Edith Sitwell, which argues that her apparently innovative stylistics derive largely from Stevenson's nursery rhyme nonsense. In making his case, Chesterton borrows Carroll's formal method of close parody, to render Stevenson's verse in the style of Sitwell: 'The best poetry of Miss Sitwell is after all a sort of parody of *A Children's Garden of Verses*, decked with slightly altered adjectives that would mildly surprise a child' (*CW* 18: 146). As he explains, while Stevenson discussed '"the shining dew on every buttercup"' and wrote that '"Whenever Aunty moves around, her dresses make a curious sound"', in 'Miss Sitwell's version they would make a still more curious sound, the nature of which I have not the courage to conjecture. The shining dew might become the shrieking dew, or on a more moderate estimate the sniggering dew; but it would still be a long-lost child who stood bewildered' (*CW* 18: 146). Again, Chesterton's amendments compulsively return to the nonsense imagery of an object-world screaming and indulging in private jokes to make the point—'the shrieking dew', 'the sniggering dew'—while offering a concessionary thematic allusion to Carroll, which situates Sitwell as a guileless Alice, investigating a mysterious landscape with apprehensive wonder.

Having parodically identified Sitwell's debt to nursery rhyme nonsense, Chesterton goes on to offer an incisive account of the machinations of Eliot, Lewis, and Pound, which again draws on the themes of childhood and nonsense, in an account by turns irritated and sympathetic:

> There is already a group, we might say a family group, of poets who consider
> themselves, and are generally considered, the last word in experiment […] and who
> are not without real qualities of deep atmosphere and suggestion. Yet all that is
> really deep in the best of their work comes out of those depths of garden perspective
> and large rooms as seen by little children […] Many have complained, and perhaps
> justly, of the almost American modernity of the artistic ambition of these artists.
> They announce their message through a megaphone; they shout it through
> pantomime masks; they hustle and push and pick quarrels; but there is something in
> them, for all their efforts to advertise—or to hide it. […] what they are really after is
> still the same [as in Stevenson]: those lost children who are themselves; lost in the
> deep gardens at dusk (*CW* 18: 146).

While Chesterton's reference to the poets' 'efforts to advertise—or to hide' the true derivation of their methods again suggests his self-appointed, adversarial role as exposer of misleading commercial-aesthetic self-positioning, the image of Eliot and co. shouting their messages through pantomime masks accurately interprets the 'unhuman' grotesque strategies of their early propagandising, while also corresponding to my reading of Eliot's strategy at the conclusion of 'The Hollow Men'. Meanwhile, his evocation of a sense of disquiet at wandering lost in a childhood garden more sympathetically recalls the imaginative world of his own Carrollean fairy-tale, *Thursday*. In this way, Chesterton's analysis hints at the status of his own novel as a prescient anticipation of the themes of later modernist practice, while refiguring the modernists' projection of adolescent aggression as harmless pre-pubescent hijinks, much as the threat posed by the decadents had been reconceived in *Thursday* as the innocent roleplaying of frightened children navigating a threatening world with boyish bluff. This exposure of mutual resemblance rebounds inconclusively between agonistic and sympathetic registers, disclosing the effaced narrative of his aesthetic identification with, and anticipation of, the same figures who had so aggressively projected him as their rejected cultural antipode 'through a megaphone'.

Eliot's review of *Stevenson* takes up the megaphone once more to denounce his interpreter, in a sustained exercise in critical *froideur* that implies an enduring reluctance to commit to a movement towards reconciliation. Having begun the review with the complaint that 'I have always found Mr. Chesterton's style exasperating to the last point of endurance' ('There' 444), Eliot goes on to damn the text with the faintest conceivable praise—it is a 'not at all stupid book'

('There' 445)—before ending with a further example of Chestertonian paradox being turned against its subject: Stevenson is 'an author well enough established to survive Mr. Chesterton's approval' ('There' 446). Chesterton mentally filed Eliot's jibes and responded in kind, in the following year, with an essay appropriately titled 'An Apology for Buffoons' (*London Mercury* June 1928). Here Chesterton notes that he is not, himself, in sympathy with the 'severe and classic' (*CW* 3: 343) stylistic method articulated in the line from Eliot's 'Preludes' (1917) in which he refers to the 'smell of steaks in passageways' (*CPP* 22). Nonetheless this temperamental antipathy 'is not a subject for these extreme controversial passions. If I were to say that the style of the line maddened me to the point of unendurance, I should be greatly exaggerating its effect on the emotions' (*CW* 3: 343).

While Chesterton's selection from Eliot's verse again serves to expose a certain discrepancy between his 'severe and classic' critical precepts and his somewhat burlesque poetic practice, Chesterton's final remarks convey an impudent suavity that parodies Eliot's rhetorical tone, while drawing attention to the unintentional paradox encoded within Eliot's terms, via which a stylistic critique that strains to convey disinterest is expressed in such intemperate terms as to intimate hysteria. In an echo of Eliot's appropriation of Chestertonian paradox-mongering to frame his attacks, Chesterton's riposte mimics Eliot's voice in order to discredit it. Despite the precision of this counterblow, Chesterton was not always such a poised critic himself. When discussing Wilde's literal handling of the world of objects in *The Victorian Age in Literature*, he uses precisely the same intemperate terms as Eliot, in a context that evokes an alarming confusion between the inert and the animate: 'I for one cannot *endure* […] his sensual way of speaking of dead substances, satin or marble or velvet, as if he were stroking a lot of dogs and cats' (*CW* 15: 519; my emphasis). In both cases, an engagement with the apprehended cultural father-figure results in an inadvertent lapse of critical distance, disclosed precisely in the haughty phraseology selected.

Eliot responded to Chesterton's article with a private missive, peevishly complaining of the latter's slight misquotation of the 'steak' line from 'Preludes', 'as a humble versifier […] I prefer my verse to be quoted correctly, if at all' (2

July 1928; BL MS Add.73195 ff.59).[14] If Eliot's imputation that Chesterton is guilty of the heresy of paraphrase seems a little over the top under the circumstances, one wonders whether the more wilful misquotations of the parodist, as exemplified by 'To a Modern Poet', may also inform the intemperance of Eliot's response, especially in view of Chesterton's further exposure of 'nineties' influence in the study of Stevenson. Nonetheless, the extraordinary speed with which the pair's correspondence moved from abuse to praise from this point onwards suggests that Eliot had tacitly registered a critical insight into his youthful fears in Chesterton's essentially sympathetic portrait in *Stevenson*, a revelation of the benign possibilities of critical engagement which was accompanied by a rapid thawing of relations.

If this was the case, the process was considerably assisted by Chesterton's immediate reply to Eliot's bad-tempered missive, which is a master-class in mollification, centred upon a self-deprecatory portrayal of himself as a clapped-out member of the old guard, indulging in his own brand of nonsense: 'I am so very sorry if my nonsense in the Mercury had any general air of hostility […] I meant it to be quite amiable; like the tremulous badinage of the Oldest Inhabitant in the bar parlour, when he has been guyed by the brighter lads of the village' (4 July 1928; BL MS Add.73195 ff.60). Again, Chesterton protests that his satirical swordstick is merely the harmless cane of an infirm greybeard at play, to which Eliot responds in terms that emphasise a sense of identification, self-deprecatingly sympathising with Chesterton's famous incapacity to render quotations accurately: 'I had made twelve distinct mistakes in well-known passages of Shakespeare' (6 July 1928; BL MS Add.73195 ff.61).

In the following year, Eliot writes that 'I have much sympathy with your political and social views' (8 May 1929; BL MS Add.73195 ff.67), and ends another letter with a compliment to Chesterton's perspicacity as a reader, which particularly draws attention to his ability to correctly interpret Eliot's intentions where others would erroneously infer unflattering connotations: 'I was

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[14] Again, Eliot's terms echo a Wonderland creature, this time the Caterpillar, who criticises Alice's tendency to commit inadvertent parodies:

> "That is not said right," said the Caterpillar.
> "Not quite right, I'm afraid," said Alice timidly: "some of the words have got altered."
> "It is wrong from beginning to end," said the Caterpillar; and there was silence for some minutes (*Annotated* 72).

particularly pleased by your noticing that footnote: I wonder how many readers thought it more than an attempt at smartness' (Whit Monday, 1929; BL MS Add.73195 ff.68). From hopelessly muddled-headed antagonist, Chesterton comes full circle, to become incisive, sympathetic reader. When Eliot explains that his original, hostile correspondence had merely been 'a pretext' (21 Oct. 1928; BL MS Add.73195 ff.63) to establish communication, an interpersonal dynamic similar to that articulated by Chesterton in *The Ball and the Cross* emerges:

> "I must kill you now," said the fanatic, "because…"
> "Well, because," said Turnbull, patiently.
> "Because I have begun to like you" (*CW* 6: 429).

Once having established a sympathetic private relationship through their correspondence in 1928-29, Chesterton's later assessments of Eliot consistently employ parody to demonstrate his newfound sympathy with the poet, though—in a further correlation with Eliot's own method—not always in a manner that rendered the precise nature of the message pellucid to his audience. Appropriately enough, confusion over Chesterton's attitude towards Eliot has been particularly propagated by his parody of the final quatrain of 'The Hollow Men', which he delivered in a radio broadcast on 'The Spice of Life' (15 Mar. 1936; published in *Listener* 18 Mar. 1936), just three months before his death:

> Some sneer, some snigger, some simper;
> In the youth where we laughed, and sang.
> And *they* may end with a whimper
> But *we* will end with a bang (*Spice* 167).

In view of my reading of 'The Hollow Men' as a transitional text that led Eliot on a path of divergence from Pound, towards a greater sympathy with Chesterton, it is particularly telling that both Pound and Chesterton felt compelled to respond parodically to Eliot's final epigram. In Canto LXXIV, Pound's demurral at the finale of 'The Hollow Men' is conveyed through precisely the same inversion essayed by Chesterton: 'yet say this to the Possum: a bang, not a whimper, with a bang not with whimper' (*Cantos* 425). As Stillman notes, in discussing this later, more sorrowful parody of Eliot on Pound's part, a 'complex

ventriloquism [was] mutually cultivated' between the pair, which 'goes beyond any basic opposition' (244). The same is true of Chesterton and Eliot. The tendency of anthologists to reproduce Chesterton's parodic take on 'The Hollow Men' in isolation from its original context has encouraged the inference that he remained implacably opposed to Eliot throughout his career, and that he expressed this opposition through a critically dull-witted belligerence. However, the full text of the broadcast, when read in combination with the tenor of his other pronouncements on Eliot from the same period, demonstrates that Chesterton had successfully interpreted the ironic double-voicing of Eliot's poem in a manner that often evaded the latter's more earnest adherents.

Confusion over the meaning of Chesterton's parody derives from its echoing of the clear-cut battle-lines that he sought to establish in the *Thursday* dedication between his own merry band on one side and their pessimistic cultural antitheses on the other, a drive which is accompanied here by a renewed recourse to the philosophical authority of Whitman, via an allusion to the lines from *Leaves of Grass*, 'I see, dance, laugh, sing' (26). Again, Chesterton also employs a division between the open 'laugh' and the closed 'sneer' as a metaphor for the distinct positive and negative existential positions under consideration. Since the presence of a division is beyond dispute, Chesterton's attitude towards Eliot's text must be determined by which side of the dividing lines he places the poet—either holding the fort with the '*we*', or threatening its barriers as a constituent of a new band of Lear-esque '*they*' figures—a distinction made particularly tricky by the ambivalent context of Eliot's own use of 'we' in the opening lines of his poem.

In a contemporaneous essay on 'The Reaction of the Intellectuals' (collected in *The Well and the Shallows*, 1935), Chesterton clarifies his position, while identifying the very ontological scepticism that he had lamented in 'To a Modern Poet' as the engine of a change in Eliot's cultural allegiance: 'Mr. Eliot [has] the sense to see that the half-truths of the sceptic are not only edged tools, but double-edged tools. […] in the last resort they can inoculate the mind with doubts about doubt itself' (*CW* 3: 407). Chesterton goes on to imply that he has successfully identified the distance operative in Eliot's poem, alluding to the conceit of the marching song when he notes that it is the 'bold and enquiring spirits, who were always said to be in advance of the age, who are now most doubtful about the desirability of advancing' (*CW* 3: 403). Chesterton speculates

that this quality has eluded Eliot's acolytes—'[a]s soon as the quite brainless mob of Bright Young Things discovers that it is really being *despised*, as a mob of dull old things […] there will be a panic' (*CW* 3: 407). In view of his jocular accompanying reference to his alarm at discovering himself '*on the side of* the cultivated and the clever' (*CW* 3: 406; my emphasis), his parody should be read not as a hostile satire, but as a sympathetic pastiche, reframing Eliot's message in slightly differing terms, which again serve to identify a correspondence between Eliot's vision and his own conception of *Thursday*.

In a near-contemporaneous essay on 'The New Bigotry' (*G.K.'s Weekly* 13 Sept. 1934), Chesterton explores the principle of schism between the poet and his followers further, combining an exuberant parody of the excesses of Eliot's early stylistics with a mocking appraisal of the bafflement of the poet's acolytes at their hero's vault-face:

> A young idealistic poet, full of the new visions of beauty, writes verses
> appropriate to such a vision; as, for instance:
>
> > Bug-house underbogies belch daybreak back-firing.
> > Daylight's a void-vomit; steadying legs to stump.
>
> And all the young critics know he is all right (*Common* 227).

As with Pound's hostile parody in the 'Hell Cantos', there is an air of automatic writing about this parody which ironically complements Eliot's own technique in constructing the final part of *The Waste Land*. Again, the references to belching and vomit invoke abject physical evacuation, while 'bug' forms a punning means of connoting the spread of contagion, and 'underbogies' hints at the subconscious anxiety that drives the parody. However, the fears of the parodist are overcome when Chesterton continues his narrative of the poet's progress:

> a horrid whisper goes round that he was seen outside an Episcopal Church near
> Vermont. The whole horrid truth is soon known. He has admitted to a newspaper
> man that he believes in God. Then the young critics go back gloomily and stare
> at his poetry; and, strangely enough, see for the first time that there was
> something awfully old-fashioned in saying "daylight" when Binx might have
> said "sky-blank" (*Common* 227).

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Chesterton ends by assuring the reader that this 'is a strictly correct biography of a man of genius who has come to us from America—Mr. T.S. Eliot' (*Common* 227). Since Eliot self-identified as an Anglican, while Pound's Canto advanced the notion of his Episcopalian allegiance, the final remarks upon contemporaries who strain bathetically to achieve novelty should perhaps be considered to subtly signal his belief that Eliot has now escaped what Chesterton termed the 'nonsense of the Ezra Pound period' (*CW* 21: 607-08). In the following year, Eliot returned the favour, expressing his admiration for both *Father Brown* and *Thursday*, while essaying a comparable argument to that of Chesterton's, by seeking to distinguish the bathetic misfiring of Chesterton's acolytes from the work of the master: 'No one admires and enjoys […] such delightful fiction as Mr. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, and his Father Brown […] more than I do; I would only remark that when the same effect is aimed at by zealous persons of lesser talent […] the effect is negative' (qtd. in Blissett, 'English' 133).

Chesterton immediately precedes his parody of 'The Hollow Men' in the 'Spice of Life' broadcast with a discussion of Eliot that seeks to establish a balance between identification and detachment: 'I recognize the great realities Mr. Eliot has revealed; but I do not admit that this is the deepest reality […] Mr. Eliot described the desolation he found more than the desolation he felt. But I think that "The Waste Land" was at least a world in which he had wandered […] there was a sense in which, originally, even his inspiration was irritation' (*Spice* 166). While Chesterton hints at an identification with the pedagogic purpose of Eliot's status as an embodied *memento mori*, by figuring himself as a 'skeleton at the feast […] with] a hollow voice from the tomb' (*Spice* 161), he goes on to preface his variation on Eliot's air with a return to a conceit first explored in the title of his publishing debut, *Greybeards at Play*, thirty-six years earlier: 'It is doubtless a grotesque spectacle that the great-grandfathers should still be dancing with indecent gaiety, when the young are so grave and sad; but […] I will defend the spiritual appetite of my own age. I will even be so indecently frivolous as to break into song' (*Spice* 166-67).

The echo of *Greybeards* is particularly significant. In a double-sense, Chesterton's combustive 'end' is his beginning, since, in a singularly appropriate correspondence, Eliot's allusion to 'Here we go round the mulberry bush' had been prefigured by Chesterton in the *Greybeards* preface, as a symbol of his

utopian conception of friendship: 'Behold the simple sum of things, / Where in one splendour spun, / The stars go round the Mulberry Bush, / The Burning Bush, the Sun' (*Collected Nonsense* 4).[15] Recall that Chesterton's view of the impossibility of the '<u>sum of all things</u> being barren' was the message that he sought to convey in his correspondence with Bentley. In Bentley's diary of 1894, he writes, on two consecutive days, 'I am feeling like a stuffed man' and '[h]ow fares it, I wonder, among the dwellers in Kensington. Do they laugh and sing?' (14-15 Nov.; Bod MS Eng.misc.e.862). These rather extraordinary anticipations of both Eliot's poem and Chesterton's parody begin to explicate the urgency with which Chesterton attempted to establish dialogic sympathy with Eliot, as a means of positively resolving a relationship that bore alarming similarities to the friendship which accompanied the traumas of his youth.

Chesterton's first textual reference to the mulberry bush rhyme can be traced to the mid-1890s. In this period he not only began conceptualising *Thursday*, but also composed 'Shipwrecked off Fairyland', a play in verse and prose, or 'a sort of fairy farce' (*CW* 10: 201) as Chesterton terms it. This sketch contains an interlude of 'The Song of the Mulberry Bush', in which 'three old gentlemen' resolve to 'reestablish the sports of their childhood' (*CW* 10: 206), much as Chesterton explains his intent in the 'Spice of Life' broadcast. Extraordinarily, this pursuit finds expression in the men chanting:

> They can snigger, but we can sing—
> Here we go round the Mulberry Bush,
> Three old fools in the staring sun (*CW* 10: 206).

In view of the almost exact correspondence between Chesterton's terms here and those in the parody of Eliot—texts separated by forty years—it seems that Eliot's manipulation of the nursery rhyme must have rekindled Chesterton's memory of the earliest stirrings of his own rebellion against the culture of his age. The adolescent sketch continues, in the vein of a Whitmanian nursery rhyme:

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[15] In his autobiography, published four years before Eliot's 'East Coker', Chesterton notes that 'for me my end is my beginning' (*Autobiography* 342).

Poets, preachers, teachers, tush!
You have made the world grow old too soon.
Here we go round the Mulberry Bush
Under the April Moon (*CW* 10: 207).

At the beginning of his journalistic career, Chesterton returned to the rhyme, this time investing it with a social moral in the second of his articles on 'Playgrounds for Adults' in *The Speaker*, in which he notes that '[o]ne of the most universal and popular forms of play amongst children is that represented by "Here we go round the mulberry-bush," which consists of nothing but running round in a ring. It consists of the circle, the very type of equality and communism, the figure in which all points are equally distant from the centre' (BL MS Add.73381 ff.77). Having established the utopian connotations of the mulberry bush, Chesterton goes on to allude to anthropological studies such as *The Golden Bough* (1890), which famously went on to inform *The Waste Land*, in discussing the curious fact that while

> games [such] as "Here we go round the mulberry-bush" may be said to constitute the first class of children's games, the purely ritualistic [… in] an age when the sense of ritual is supposed to have been revived it is nothing short of scandalous that human beings in the fulness of life and strength have not revived these elementary and beautiful movements (BL MS Add.73381 ff.77).

Chesterton crystallises the point with a parody, in the form of reverse travesty, contending that if this sublime ideal of play could be achieved in the adult world,

> [t]he rude rhymes which are sung to them might blossom, as the ancient legends have blossomed, into elevated poetry. […] The song
>
>> "Here we go round the mulberry-bush
>> On a cold and frosty morning."
>
> might take the form of
>
>> "Though the pale day be paler with snow,
>> Yet round the mulberry laden boughs we go" (BL MS Add.73381 ff.77).

Chesterton's argument recalls the view set forth by Eliot in 1923 that 'an aristocratic art […] is the refinement, not the antithesis, of folk art' (Eliot paraphrased in Kenner, *Invisible* 161), a sentiment equally discernible in the aesthetic appropriation of the mulberry bush rhyme in 'The Hollow Men' and in Chesterton's transmuting of the 'Thessaly' rhyme into the complex edifice of *Thursday*. The importance of this principle to Chesterton's urge to re-establish a community of authorship perhaps explains why he was so anxious to understand Eliot's position in relation to the mulberry bush rhyme. In 'The Meaning of Mock Turkey' (collected in *Fancies versus Fads*), written in 1920 following Chesterton's participation in the 'pageant of Nursery Rhymes' which also yielded his paean to parodic community, 'Variations on an Air', Chesterton contends that '[n]ursery rhymes are a positive network of notions and allusions of which the enlightened disapprove' (*Fancies* 35). He goes on to argue that '[t]he Modern Movements […] cannot create the nursery rhyme [but] will they destroy it? The new poets have already abolished rhyme' (*Fancies* 35). In the essay at hand, this question is left hanging in the air, but the issue of whether the figure who Chesterton considered the archetypal modern poet intended to destroy the nursery rhyme was resolved five years later by Eliot's deliberate revival of Chesterton's most treasured rhyme in 'The Hollow Men', a gesture that demonstrated Eliot's faith in what Patricia Waugh terms the 'communitarian ground for the practices of authorship' (381).

In an appropriately Chestertonian development, this public expression of engagement with a communitarian folk heritage on Eliot's part preceded the more private establishment of friendly relations between Eliot and Chesterton. The psychological urgency of Chesterton's desire to secure existential cohesion through the medium of friendship is evidenced by the reconciliation of Valentin and Flambeau in 'The Blue Cross', perhaps most tellingly via the imagery of tying which bookends the story. As I discussed in chapter three, Chesterton's journalistic conceit of 'Playgrounds for Adults' was later given fiction life in the opening Father Brown story, 'The Blue Cross'. In a much later story, 'The Pursuit of Mr. Blue' (*Storyteller* June 1934), the priest implicitly articulates the moral conveyed by the utopian *denouement* of Chesterton's opening story, discussing his pleasure in games that go 'round and round like the Mulberry-Bush', in

contrast to games 'where runners are rivals and run neck and neck and outstrip each other' (*FB* 731).

In *William Blake*, Chesterton notes that 'the horizon line is not only hard but tight, like a fiddle string', before confessing that 'I have always a nervous fear that the sea-line will snap suddenly' (47). In 'The Blue Cross', this psychological spectre is both raised and reinterred by the estranging, yet integrating semantic misalliance of the opening line: 'Between the silver ribbon of morning and the green glittering ribbon of sea' (*FB* 3). This image ties the constituents of the horizon-line together in a semantically abnormal context that conflates the metaphoric quality of a time of day with that of an elemental phenomenon, through a physical metaphor—a ribbon, which, when tied around a present, as here around a sentence, is suggestive of both completion and imminent unravelling.

In this sense, it is particularly fitting that following the cognitive disarray of the story's middle-section, the image is echoed at the story's conclusion, which ties the narrative ribbon when 'silver' again returns in the context of semantic misalliance, preceded by a brief rhyming couplet which punningly ties the trio of protagonists in a bow of friendship: '"Do not *bow* to me, mon ami," said Valentin, with *silver clearness*. "Let us both *bow* to our master."' (*FB* 18; my emphasis). Here the quotidian achievement of friendship operates as the context which safeguards a more mystical conception of the Covenant of Things, offering a reassuring safeguard against the fear of a schismatic breach in the constitution of the universe that consistently underwrites Chesterton's imaginative world. In this respect, Valentin's use of a rhyming couplet to articulate this new state of affinity is particularly significant. In 'The Romance of Rhyme', Chesterton argues that 'in the one word identity are involved perhaps the deepest and certainly the dearest human things' (*Fancies* 8), and crystallises the point by discussing rhyme as a textual expression of the principle of identity, since it formally mirrors the analogic operation of parody in its inscription of simultaneous similarity and difference.

The republication of Chesterton's 'Apology for Buffoons' in *The Well and the Shallows* (1935) presented the occasion for another tying of hitherto antagonistic figures in friendship, when Chesterton introduced the volume with a more earnest apology for the misquotation that had first prompted the

correspondence with Eliot, and crowned the pair's subsequent *rapprochement* by dedicating the volume to him. That this expression of amended allegiance should have arisen in part from the need to apologise for a textual misattribution comes as an apt conclusion to the parodic duel that the two men had intermittently conducted over the course of twenty years. Following Chesterton's death, in June 1936, Eliot accepted the role of co-Vice-President of the Distributist league, the political movement founded by Chesterton (see Corrin, *Battle* 195), thus enacting a comparably public declaration of allegiance with his erstwhile adversary. This is not to say that Eliot became unerringly Chestertonian in later years. In fact, he became something of a one-man Chesterbentley, balancing his academic and popular inclinations in dynamic opposition. At meetings of the Christian sociology society, Eliot 'maintained a "detachment"' and once '"lampooned"' everyone present '"with clerihews"' (Ackroyd 222), yet he also developed a rather Chestertonian fondness for the more '"simple [...] kinds of practical joke"' (Eliot qtd. in Ackroyd 234). This included the posting of a genial letter to the London *Times* offering 'his support for Sir John Squire's "manly and spirited defence of Stilton cheese"', and proposing '"the formation of a Society for the Preservation of Ancient Cheeses"' (Eliot qtd. in Chinitz 177).

When Bentley recorded his grief at Chesterton's death, he particularly mourned the termination of a lifelong 'conversation', the conclusion of which had 'put an end to […] much of my pleasure in existence' (*Those* 46). In a similar spirit, Eliot's obituary of Chesterton emphasised the sense of 'isolation' (531) that he experienced upon hearing the news. These responses attest to the success of Chesterton's dialogic methods. As he recognised, the pursuit of friendship suffuses the everyday operation of culture. Perhaps most importantly, the cross-cultural pull of personal affinity productively disrupts the abstract agonistic premises of dialectical conflict, in which schools of writers are pitted against one another on the basis of often arbitrary and superficial markers of cultural difference. As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, the Janus-faced operation of parody also militates against the projection of a clear-cut cyclical march of literary movement and counter-movement, by encoding similarity and difference simultaneously within the expression of controversy, balancing satirical opposition with the existentially grotesque principle of the 'audacious reconciliation' of opposites.

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The personal affinity discovered by Chesterton and Eliot was grounded in their common possession of a temperamental dualism, which found expression in the parodic strategies that they embedded within their literary endeavours. Rather than operating as the figureheads of a time-specific modernist/anti-modernist stand-off, both men should be understood to occupy a position within the diachronic, trans-generic European cultural tradition that I outlined in my introduction—the ancestral line of parodic writers whose textual productions consistently propagandise and problematize simultaneously. Once understood in these terms, a challenge to literary-historical compartmentalisation is complemented by the emergence of a new approach to genre. My account of the close imaginative correspondence of 'The Queer Feet' and 'The Hollow Men' demonstrates that both writers employed festive comic methods to parodically regenerate literary fields that risked ossifying into cliché. By illustrating the more fundamental generic likeness of textual forms that appear outwardly disparate, this reading disrupts conventional perception of the boundaries of genre, which has done so much to propound the reductive notion of a clear distinction between 'high' and 'low', or 'elitist' and 'popular', seams in early-twentieth-century literature.

In 'A Book of the Day: Professor Bradley on Tragedy' (*DN* 22 Dec. 1904), Chesterton expounds his dialogic approach to culture in comically intemperate terms: 'A man who says the last word on a subject ought to be killed. […] The best kind of critic draws attention not to the finality of a thing, but to its infinity. Instead of closing a question, he opens a hundred; he creates his enemies as much as his admirers' (*CDN* 2: 354). While this account presents a salutary warning to the critical reader whose thesis might presume, foolhardily, to say the final word on Chesterton himself, it also offers a useful guide to the accumulative principle that underpins Chesterton's parodic disruption of literary boundaries—his vision of 'renewing the varieties for ever'. Indeed, it might be said that the dialogic process encourages the interlocutor to become a simultaneous enemy and admirer, in a manner that produces an endless forking off of similarity and difference. Eliot explores a comparable principle in his epigrammatic summary of the operation of culture, '[f]rom one point of view we may identify; from another, we must separate' (*Notes* 31), a sentiment that closely resembles Chesterton's dialogic formula: the 'agreement we really want is the agreement between agreement and

disagreement'. It has been the purpose of this thesis to draw out the value of these precepts, not only to the study of Chesterton, but also to exploration of the landscape of early-twentieth-century literature.

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