



The *DEFENDANT*

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'I have found that humanity is not incidentally engaged, but eternally and systematically engaged, in throwing gold into the gutter and diamonds into the sea. . . ; therefore I have imagined that the main business of man, however humble, is defence. I have conceived that a defendant is chiefly required when worldlings despise the world - that a counsel for the defence would not have been out of place in the terrible day when the sun was darkened over Calvary and Man was rejected of men.'

G.K Chesterton, 'Introduction', *The Defendant* (1901)

Chesterton in Prison

by Joseph Pearce



Joseph Pearce (pictured) has written extensively on Chesterton, including his acclaimed biography, *Wisdom and Innocence: A Life of G.K. Chesterton (1996)*, all of which have given fresh impetus to an appreciation of Chesterton in our time. He recently offered a striking perspective on his introduction to Chesterton – and the impact of Chesterton's thought in the unlikely circumstances of a prison. This article from the online journal, *The Imaginative Conservative*, is reprinted with his kind permission.

I have G.K. Chesterton to blame for making my second prison sentence a much harder experience than it might have been; or actually, with the wisdom of hindsight, I should say that I have Chesterton to thank for making my second prison sentence so miserable.

Perhaps I should explain.

As an angry young man who was heavily involved with white supremacist politics back in my homeland of England, I was sentenced to prison on two separate occasions. My crime was the editing of a magazine that was considered "likely to

incite racial hatred," an offence under the UK's Race Relations Act.

On the first occasion, in January 1982, I was sentenced to six months in prison; on the second occasion, in December 1985, the sentence was twelve months.

Although I was sentenced for the same crime on both occasions, my attitude to the crime had changed a great deal in the four years that separated the two sentences.

Upon receiving the first prison sentence, I had screamed at the judge that he was a traitor to the British people and that he

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2021 Chesterton Conference Rearranged

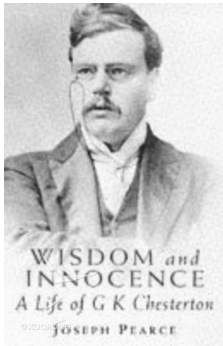
Chesterton and Woman: Romance and Reality

The continuing COVID restrictions have prompted a rethinking of this year's Chesterton conference, which was scheduled for Saturday, October 23, at Campion College.

The event cannot realistically take place in the midst of lockdowns and border closures and a constant atmosphere of uncertainty. Rather than postpone it again - it was originally to have been held in October 2020 - the conference will now be replaced in two ways: firstly, by the publication of the papers that are being prepared, and secondly, by making available, on the Chesterton Society website, video recordings of the presentations.

Speakers will address the theme of womanhood in the light of Chesterton's clarifying insights, addressing such topics as chivalry, Shakespeare's heroines and the high school movement, the Culture Project, as well as the fatherhood of Chesterton, and Sigrid Undset's classic Catholic novel, *Kristin Lavransdatter*.

An announcement of the availability of the papers and video presentations will be made in the next issue of *The Defendant*.



would soon face his own judgment. I needed to be dragged from the courtroom as I unleashed my venomous invective against the one who had condemned me.

I considered myself a political prisoner, as did the IRA sympathizer in the next cell who had been imprisoned for slashing a painting of Princess Diana. I was not like the common criminals who surrounded me. I was a martyr for the cause of white supremacy and national liberation. I had forsaken my freedom for my nation's freedom. I was not only a political prisoner but a political soldier who used my time in prison to get myself in physical shape so that I could be a better fighter for the cause upon my release.

Armed with such feelings of self-justification and self-righteousness, I cruised through the first sentence, counting down the days until my release so that I could return to the fray and let myself loose once more upon the multiracial society that I despised.

A different person – no longer hero or martyr

It was a very different person who sat alone in his cell at the beginning of the second sentence, a person who looked with gloom and despondency at the twelve-month chasm that stretched out before him in a seemingly interminable distance of endlessly protracted days.

I was that person: a person who would have been unrecognizable to his earlier self, a person who was no longer certain of the cause for which he had been condemned, a person who doubted himself as he doubted the ideology that had sustained him.

I no longer felt like a hero or a martyr. Instead, I saw myself as a pathetic wretch who had been going through the motions, playing a part, faking it, playing to the gallery. I was one who was stuck in the rut I had dug for myself, a rut that was itself a prison because I hadn't the courage to climb out of it.

In such a broken state, and in such a frame of mind, the second prison sentence was much more difficult. And it was largely the fault of a certain Gilbert Keith Chesterton.

Once again, I should explain.

I had started to read Chesterton several years earlier, even though I despised his Catholicism. I was almost rabidly anti-Catholic, being a member of a quasi-masonic, anti-Catholic secret society called the Orange Order. Nothing

would get me to read a Christian book of any sort and a Catholic book least of all.

So why had I started reading Chesterton? I had been persuaded to read his essay on economics, a subject that interested me greatly, and had subsequently read his book on economics, *The Outline of Sanity*. His political and economic creed, which he and his friend Hilaire Belloc called Distributism, had a radical impact on my understanding of the world, offering a healthy and viable alternative to the twin evils of communism and capitalism, both of which I despised.

Chesterton as a friend

Furthermore, I began to like Chesterton as a friend, even if I still disagreed with his religious beliefs. It was as though he leapt out of the page when I read him. He was a real personality and not merely a conveyor of ideas.

My experience was similar to that described by C.S. Lewis when he had first read Chesterton. Lewis could not understand why Chesterton had made such an "immediate conquest" of him.

"It might have been expected that my pessimism, my atheism, and my hatred of sentiment would have made him to me the least congenial of authors." Thus wrote Lewis and thus might I have written also. Lewis and I were both prejudiced against Catholicism and yet we couldn't help liking Chesterton.

Lewis likened it to the bringing of two minds together and even to "falling in love." He liked Chesterton's rambunctious sense of humour, as did I, and Chesterton's "goodness"—"which had nothing to do with any attempt to be good myself."

Like Lewis, I was attracted to the goodness in Chesterton, even though I had no real desire to emulate his life of virtue. The attraction that Lewis and I felt towards Chesterton was the attraction that people feel towards the saints, even though they are themselves miserable sinners.

"In reading Chesterton," Lewis wrote, "I did not know what I was letting myself in for. A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading."

As with Lewis, I recognize Chesterton as a guide who led me from the doldrums of disbelief into the glorious light of the Gospel. Unbeknownst to me, the gloom in my prison cell was the gloaming of a new day in which the Son would rise, Easter-like, in my soul.

It is for this great gift that I thank Chesterton for making me so miserable in those first days of my second prison sentence. The debt I owe to him is unpayable. ■

Executive of the Australian Chesterton Society

PRESIDENT and EDITOR of 'The Defendant'

Mr Karl Schmude, 177 Erskine Street, Armidale NSW 2350
Phone: 0407 721 458 Email: kgschmude@gmail.com

SECRETARY / TREASURER: Mr Gary Furnell,

6/68 Short Street, Forster NSW 2428
Phone: 0419 421 346 Email: garyfurnell@yahoo.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Mr Symeon Thompson c/- Editor of 'The Defendant'

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The House of Mourning: the Value of Liturgy

by Gary Furnell

Gary Furnell's article, "Chesterton and the Tragic Mystery of Suicide", in the Autumn 2021 *Defendant* sparked wide interest and was reprinted in various online journals. His further reflection is on the changing nature of modern funeral events. What meaning and purpose do they convey? Do they benefit from a structured liturgy and an established pattern of mourning?

Working as a funeral assistant, I attend a lot of funerals.

The settings vary - beach and sports' clubs, churches, cemeteries, and small chapels. I work with many different celebrants, religious and civil. I meet hundreds of grieving people. Qoheleth in the Old Testament observed three thousand years ago that there's more to learn in the house of mourning than in the house of feasting, so I've tried to gain insight from my experiences, as well as earn a living among the dead and their mourners.

I quickly learned that an increasing number of people prefer to arrange a non-religious funeral with a civil celebrant officiating. The benefit is that family or friends can arrange the event according to their perception of the life and values of the deceased.

But this freedom can have negative consequences too. When there's no funeral liturgy to guide proceedings, then sentimentality, imprudence and verbosity can dominate proceedings.

Liturgies limit this domination. Liturgies have been developed in response to human needs, strengths and weaknesses over hundreds of years. The words they use are balanced and thought-filled. The rituals they prescribe are meaningful; the gestures of the liturgy have been developed over hundreds of years, and meet—or help meet—deep human needs.

Liturgies, including funeral liturgies, have longevity because they express us better than most of us can express ourselves.

Non-liturgical funerals can have dignity and consolation. Often they are lovely celebrations, but those arranging the funeral must work hard to ensure decorum and good sense prevail over ineloquence and sentimentality. For instance, well-meaning celebrants may wish to provide consolation, but end up in a metaphysical muddle; feel-good notions supplant meditative restraint.

In the absence of carefully defined doctrines we can be offered vague doctrines. It's quite common for civil celebrants to say, at a funeral, something like: "Bob is now enjoying a beer with the friends and family who've gone before him." What occult gifts have they got to pronounce this? By what authority can they know?

This confusion has grown because our culture broadly has rejected Judeo-Christianity's supernatural explanation for everything, but no natural explanation for everything has taken its place.

And then we discover that if we're left to make up our beliefs to suit ourselves, we'll quickly be in a mess of illogic and emotionalism. Nearly one hundred years ago Chesterton

wrote about this sort of confused neo-Paganism:

"Unless all these things are subject to a more centralised and well-balanced conception of the universe, the local god becomes too vivid, we might say too visible, and strikes his worshippers with madness... There is nothing in Paganism to check its own exaggerations; and for that reason the world will probably find again, as it found before, the necessity of a universal moral philosophy supported by an authority that can define." ("A Century of Emancipation," *The Well and the Shallows*, 1935)



Pope Francis sprinkles holy water on the coffin of a French Cardinal, Jean Louis Tauran, in 2018, as a reminder of his baptism and his discipleship of Christ which continues in death

In the absence of liturgical gestures and formulas, words must substitute for gestures. But words are often a poor substitute for ritual gestures. As Chesterton wrote in one of his *Illustrated London News* articles:

"There is no need to explain ritual by remote extravagances, because it does not need any explanation. It explains itself. It explains all sorts of other things much better than definitions or abstractions can explain them. To scatter flowers on a grave is simply a way in which an ordinary person can express in gesture things that only a very great poet can express in words." ("On Funeral Customs and the Brotherhood of Man", in *Collected Works of G.K Chesterton*, Vol.34, 1991)

Human actions are often more articulate than our words. Liturgists understand our embodiment, and they created rituals to allow us broader expression. In civil funerals, new types of rituals are created to allow us this varied expression. For example, mourners might write brief messages on the casket, or release balloons at the conclusion of a graveside service.

Humanity loves rituals. If we abandon one set of rituals, we immediately invent their replacements. But the new rituals suffer this problem: they haven't yet been tried, tested, refined and ratified over time by multiple generations. In other words, they aren't deeply communal rituals, broadly understood and widely enacted.

The new rituals are often left unexplained, but the expressive urge is sensible. As Auden wrote: Only in rites /can we renounce our oddities/ and be truly entired. (*Archaeology*, 1973) ■

Chesterton and Eugenics – Redesigning the Human

by Garry Nieuwkamp

The appeal of eugenics – of adapting human beings to the improvements that science might afford – has not disappeared. It remains an underlying issue of current debates about the progressive elimination of human imperfections. Garry Nieuwkamp, a doctor on the NSW Central Coast, reflects on Chesterton's ideas about this ever-modern debate, encapsulated in Chesterton's remark that "hope for the Superman is another name for despair of man." (Maisie Ward, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, 1944)

It was said of St Catherine of Siena that she had a preternatural ability to smell the stink of sin in the air.

Not even the Pontiff in Avignon could escape her olfactory gifts. Pope Gregory XI did not need to hide the corruption in the papal court from Catherine during her visit to persuade him to return to Rome. She could smell it in the air. She could 'see' behind the masks. Her followers couldn't hide their sins from her.

There are times while reading Chesterton that he appears to have a similar gift. With just one inhalation he seems to be able to smell the stench of social evil. And evil is what he smelt in eugenics.

The "tenth-rate professors" and the "bullying bureaucracy" who had gone to war with the "older culture of Christendom" may have had entirely humane and innocent intentions of breeding better people, but as Chesterton wrote, "Eugenics is a thing no more to be bargained about than poisoning".

From our vantage point, it is difficult to imagine that there was a time when eugenics was almost universally supported and accepted. Presidents, professors, authors, academics, newspaper proprietors, politicians - all could see the benefits of clearing out what they believed to be a declining gene pool. No corner of the globe was exempted from this enthusiasm.

Nothing ever sounds more convincing than a half-baked scientific theory in its adolescent phase. The promiscuous mix of poorly understood Mendelian inheritance with the new chat about finch beaks in the Galapagos ensured that theory (such as it was) could only ever translate into dodgy practice.

Armed with a copy of Darwin's new thesis under the arm, the eugenicists set about cleaning up "defective humans" and regulating the national stock of "germplasma". The "feeble-minded" had no say in the matter.

Chesterton was having none of it either. For him, "the founding of a family is the personal adventure of a free man", and ought be outside the frontiers of the State. Scientists and politicians were reaching far beyond their role.

Although commenced earlier, Chesterton's *Eugenics and other Evils* was published in 1922, the same year as *Ulysses*,

the more famous book by Joyce. Clearly society was on the move.

Efforts were made during the 1920s to legislate "defective germplasm" out of existence. Experts in animal husbandry simply applied their expertise to human husbandry.

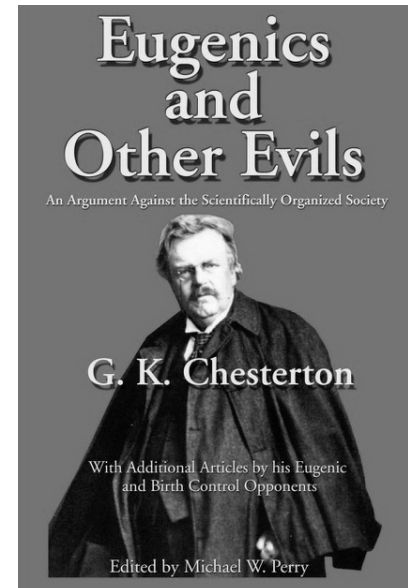
Yet here's a problem - "the decline of the national stock", as noted by Adam Cohen in his book *Imbeciles* (1916). Who is causing the problem? Well, "defective" people. And who are they exactly? Well, those whom the experts diagnose as imbecilic, feeble-minded, epileptics, inebriates, criminalistics, and other degenerate persons.

Throw into that mix southern European immigrants, and one gets an idea of how vast the "problem" was conceived to be. And how might they be stopped from breeding? Well, one could lock them up during their reproductive years. That would work, and it did, but it's expensive. How about sterilising them? Even better! Not only would it be cheaper, everyone could feel they were acting in the victim's best interest. After all they wouldn't have to be held for all of those years. They could be free. Sterile but free! They'd be doing the victim a favour.

Chesterton, of course, saw a problem here. How exactly do you diagnose an imbecile? As it turns out, not very exactly!

A Red Cross nurse had been encouraged to diagnose Vivian Buck at six months of age as "a little odd". And so sandwiched between two generations of "imbeciles" - her mother and her daughter Vivian - Carrie Buck, only a teenager but with an illegitimate child, became the focus of the Supreme Court of America in *Buck v Bell* in 1927.

She herself had been diagnosed as a middle-grade moron, by a test that was designed to identify children who needed extra help in class. It wasn't developed as a



diagnostic tool. In any case, contrary evidence that she functioned well at school was conveniently overlooked.

Also overlooked was the fact that when the test was applied on a large scale to US army enlistees, as noted by Adam Cohen, “fully 47.3 percent of the white test takers were feeble-minded”, which ought to have caused a group rethink by those applying the test.

By the logic of the test, their country was being defended by a “nation of morons”. Carrie Buck might have expected the highest court in the land to protect her from those with an interest in her reproductive abilities, but one of the greatest minds in the history of the Supreme Court of America, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr, was having none of it.

“Three generations of imbeciles are enough,” he argued. And so Carrie Buck underwent what was euphemistically called the “Mississippi appendectomy”, with the imprimatur of the Supreme Court. “The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the fallopian tubes,” Holmes argued. She apparently “consented” to being sterilized, believing that those who represented her had her interests at heart. That the test which led to her mutilation was next to useless, is evidenced by the fact that in labelling Carrie Buck an imbecile, the Court had dropped her down a diagnostic category from moron to imbecile, and by doing so substituted their judicial gowns for the diagnostician’s lab coat!

The consequences of this judicial imprimatur of forced sterilisation was to have unforeseen consequences. They always do. Again Chesterton recognised the danger.

Those who wish to implement eugenic legislation as “an honest attempt” to deal with a great evil, he writes, ought to make an honest attempt at knowing what they are doing. No one has a bird’s eye view; so a bit of legislative humility might have been appropriate, considering the risks.

In any case, for Chesterton, they are solving the wrong problem. He would almost certainly have been aware of Dr Halliday Sutherland’s battle to unmask Dr Marie Stopes’ eugenic agenda in the UK. The solution to poverty, according to Stopes and her many famous supporters, was to breed the poor out of existence by contraception. Prevention is better than cure, as the homespun wisdom

would have us believe. But is it? Prevention, Chesterton argued, amounts to “treating all people who are well as if they were ill”.

Besides, health is simply Nature and by that is meant God’s “mystical and multitudinous balance of all things”. “There cannot be such a thing as a health advisor of the community, because there cannot be such a thing as one who specialises in the universe”.

Unlike health however, Capitalism is a human invention. The best that can be said for it is that it is ‘a corrupt prison’. Solve that problem, and you’ll solve the problem of poverty and hence the need for eugenic solutions. Chesterton’s arguments against Capitalism will not be convincing to everyone, but he is most certainly right about the animus that motivates the eugenicists. “They cannot define who is to control whom; they cannot say by what authority they do these things. They cannot see the exception is different from the rule - even when it is a misrule, even when it is an unruly rule”. If you can’t define the rule and the exception, you can’t diagnose the patient. “The sickness or soundness of a consumptive may be a clear and calculable matter”, he writes, “but their happiness is not calculable at all”.

There is something about human dignity that can’t be got at by a measuring rule. Chesterton could almost have been thinking of Blessed Margaret of Castillo, who was effectively canonised by Pope Francis very recently. Born in 1287, blind and with curvature of the spine, she was abandoned by her parents who initially imprisoned her for years as a kind of embarrassment to their dignity. Eventually, adopted by the Dominicans, she led a life of holiness caring for the sick and dying, her disability being a source of great strength. Her parents had the eugenicist’s animus, but thankfully not their technology.

We may have left forced sterilisations behind, at least in the West in recent years, but we haven’t given up the eugenics project.

Today’s neo-eugenicists clutch at the same old fears, but they have at their disposal greatly enhanced technology. Our dire predicament, according to Ingmar Persson and Julian Savulescu, has created a need for “moral bioenhancement”. In their minds, we are all Carrie Bucks!

But as Chesterton would have asked, who made them the specialists of the universe? ■

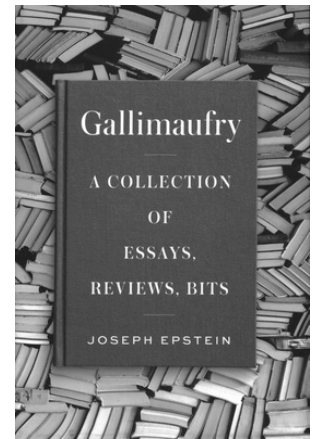
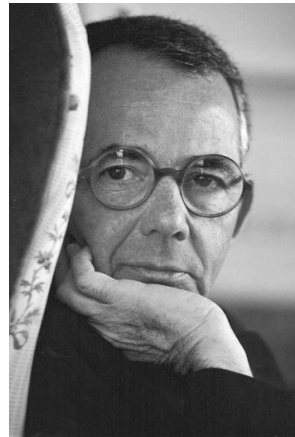
Chesterton and Belloc books available

A noted author on Distributism, Dr Race Mathews, is downsizing his library and has various books available – ca.20 Chesterton titles (covering fiction, history, biography, and literary criticism) and several Belloc books, including *The Path to Rome*. A full list can be obtained from the Editor - kgschmude@gmail.com

A Chesterton Dose of Common Sense

by Trevor Bailey

The American essayist Joseph Epstein (pictured) has been previously highlighted in *The Defendant* (Winter 2020) as a writer of common sense – at a time, as Chesterton thought, when it is ceasing to be common. **Trevor Bailey**, who serves as a jury court official in the Riverina and publishes occasional verse in *Quadrant* and other magazines, reviews Epstein's latest book of essays.



To say that Joseph Epstein sits between G.K Chesterton and Simon Leys is to make a statement that anyone acquainted with my bookshelves would affirm.

But the essays of each author makes clear that a triangular rather than linear relationship best addresses the complementary qualities of these great stylists.

Chesterton, the Briton, was pious, punning, paradoxical, and prolific. Simon Leys (Pierre Ryckmans), the Belgian-Australian, was pious too, but his meditative style reflected his calling as a sinologist: elegant, subtle, ironic, timeless – calligraphy in prose.

Joseph Epstein is an American, a fact pleasantly reflected in his genial 'chinos and loafers' literary style which is also quintessentially Jewish, marked throughout by the self-effacing irony of a people whose historical output is almost equal to its history of having been put-upon.

A 'pious agnostic', Epstein, like Chesterton and Ryckmans, is dedicated to the search for higher truths in our all-too-brief-existence. He is alive to the suffocating power of cant and its handmaidens, shallow thinking and fashion.

His latest book is called *Gallimaufry: A Collection of Essays, Reviews, Bits* – the word 'gallimaufry' meaning in French a jumble or hotchpotch. It is dedicated to those who know, in Chesterton's words in *Tremendous Trifles*, that '[t]he world will never starve for want of wonders; but only for want of wonder'. So I am reflecting here on Epstein's ability as an essayist. Here is his definition of the essay (in "Essayism"):

"Randall Jarrell once defined the novel as 'a long prose fiction with something wrong with it. So might one declare the essay a short prose nonfiction with something occasionally delightful about it? Need more be said about this literary form whose aim is never definitude and whose speciality is specificity?"

In Epstein's piece "Evelyn Waugh", there is rich ground for comparing essayists. He concludes that, "after his conversion to Catholicism, Evelyn Waugh found a theme: the emptiness of life without faith."

Countering the author's critics, such as Isaiah Berlin, Noël Coward and Edmund Wilson, Epstein says: "... I find

Waugh's delving into questions of faith elevated his fiction. One doesn't have to be Catholic, or consider conversion to Catholicism, to be interested in the theme of faith – understanding it, finding it, retaining it under difficult conditions." He goes on to describe "the drama of faith" as going "against the grain of a secular age", and so transforming Waugh "the brilliant humourist" into "a major writer".

And here Epstein recognises in Waugh traits taken up by Chesterton generally, and Ryckmans in particular. Writing about Waugh, in "Evelyn Waugh: The Terror of Babel", Ryckmans argued that the elegant craftsman employed his precision with language, together with the bedrock of his faith, as protection against the chaos wrought by the Modern Age.

Similarly, in "The Menace of Political Correctness", Epstein examines "the aroma of goose-cooking" in its modern form. The soft totalitarian nature of this fashionable oppression was something Ryckmans was alive to before he died in 2014. He had left the ANU in Canberra in 1993 when he sensed way back then the closing of the academic mind.

Chesterton, a "beer-and-beef" journalist, and a champion of common sense as opposed to the tenured thinker, realised a century ago - according to Dale Ahlquist - the looming tyranny:

"Nobody sees the largest danger of our age: it is too simple. It is simply that the rich are slowly enslaving the poor, partly by industrial despotism, partly by scientific benevolence, partly by State officialism."

Epstein brings to his essay on this particular curse a flavour of the greatly demented state of the West, with its self-loathing and embrace of illiberalism to an extent that Chesterton had forewarned, and which Ryckmans had experienced in its nascent ferocity.

And here we are, Epstein concludes: "... in the world of the politically correct, where human nature is judged incapable of change, humour is not allowed, any sense of proportion is precluded, and virtue invariably resides with the accuser."

Gloomy? Fear not; *Gallimaufry* has throughout its "essays, reviews, bits" more than its share of Chestertonian delights - candid, wise and funny as it is. ■

Rewatching Films – the Art of Rediscovery

by *Symeon Thompson*

As film critic for News Weekly, **Symeon Thompson** not only reviews new releases but also reflects at times on the role of film. This article appeared in the May 1, 2021 issue of News Weekly, and is reprinted - slightly edited for space reasons - with the kind permission of Symeon and the journal's Editor, Peter Kelleher.

As a film critic, I watch many films and write about some of them. While many of the films are new releases, I still spend much time rewatching films. This was even more common over the last year when new releases were less available.

I like to see a film I'm reviewing a few times to get to grips with it. I also watch or rewatch those films connected to what I'm reviewing. Rewatching is common to life. We rewatch what we enjoy and affects us, and we rewatch to introduce others to that experience.

Through rewatching we re-enter the experience of the film and re-immerses ourselves in its universe. It's the same with re-reading, or studying – we explore more deeply through re-experiencing. In a liturgical context we re-read the same texts, reinforcing their message by re-enacting the dramas they re-present.

All this re-reading, all this re-watching, is a constant repetition which we're told is boring and unimaginative, but our lives are built on it. The only way to gain mastery is through practice, and practice requires repetition. As Chesterton's friend, Maurice Baring, noted in one of his novels: "The French put things so well – so clearly. They are not afraid of platitude." (*Cat's Cradle*, 1926)

Familiarity may breed contempt in certain contexts, but without familiarity there can be no expertise. It may be better said that familiarity breeds contempt where there is friction or stagnation, rather than harmony or growth.

Seeing the familiar for the first time

This is how re-watching, or re-experiencing, is possible. Fascination exists through experiencing affection or affinity, or through effort. It is in the why and how we pay attention to the same old, that we see what is new. In re-watching we re-experience with the benefit of new knowledge and new feelings. We start seeing things we missed, aspects we glossed over. We see the film anew. As Chesterton remarks:

"There is a law written in the darkest of the Books of Life, and it is this: If you look at a thing nine hundred and ninety-nine times, you are perfectly safe; if you look at it the thousandth time, you are in frightful danger of seeing it for the first time." (*The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, 1904)

Criticism has as much to do with the politics and personalities of the critic, as it does with the critical subject. We are

automatically the centre of our universe. The problem is, we are not the centre of THE universe, which causes us friction.

How we attend to art, how we pay attention to it, drives how we experience it. If we automatically dismiss things for one reason or another, then we do not see what's there. This is why I'm never convinced by claims of cliché. It's lazy criticism – even if entirely appropriate when providing feedback to an artist who's creating.

As the Thomist philosopher, A.G. Sertillanges OP argued in *The Intellectual Life* (1946), and Frederick Wilhelmsen in his scathing critique, *Great Books: Enemies of Wisdom?* (1987), the point of intellectual and artistic endeavours is not to rehash, but to reinvigorate an intellectual charity that sees, and integrates, the transcendent between the new and what already exists. Likewise, the idea of deep reading, the French approach of *explication des textes*, is to dig deeper into something to express what is unexpressed.

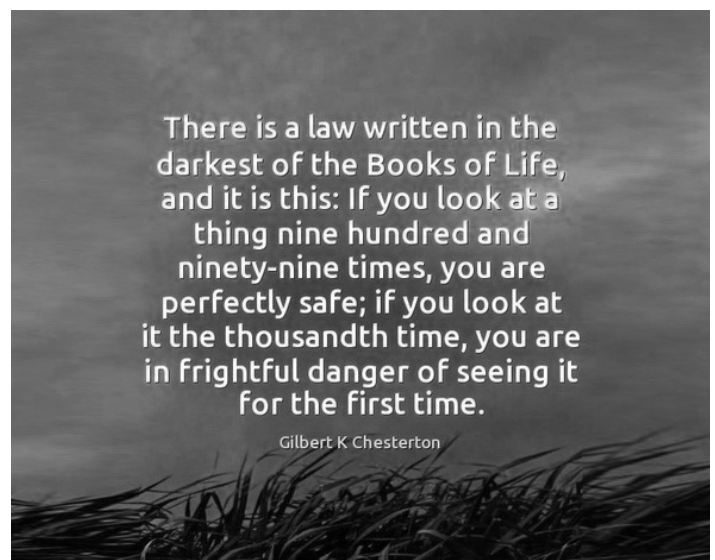
You see this with Shakespearean productions. They channel the world that makes them. Some directors, like Kenneth Branagh, strive to dig deeper into the text, while others like Julie Taymor seek to do something different with it. The audience then sees the production with their own eyes and prejudices, and judges it accordingly.

Affection and affinity

Affection and affinity emerge of their own volition from the audience's experience of the artwork, but the audience can only claim deeper appreciation through effort. This illustrates the problem with the approach claiming that effort alone produces mastery or self-discipline. Effort alone only works up to a certain point, after which it breeds resentment. There must still be affection or affinity for the effort to be sustainable.

If you don't like horror movies, no amount of effort is going to make you appreciate them. Paradoxically, this might mean you're not approaching it in a way suitable to yourself.

As Chesterton was aware, changing our approach, or point of view, changes our experience, potentially transforming it from drudgery to enchantment. Sometimes we must stand on our heads to see things properly. ■



When Absence of Mind is Presence of Mind

by John Young

John Young, a Melbourne-based philosopher who is a frequent contributor to *The Defendant*, reflects on a great Chesterton paradox – inspiring to some, infuriating to others – of absence of mind in one sphere of life being a presence of mind in another.



Chesterton in a 'presence of mind' moment

Many thinkers have been absent-minded. St Thomas Aquinas, in a dinner presided over by the king of France, St Louis IX, had a sudden inspiration and shouted out: "That will settle the Albigenses!" The king, being a saint, was not annoyed, but sent for a scribe to take down St Thomas's idea.

Adam Smith, the father of economic science, was notorious for his absentmindedness. On one occasion he went out of his house on a Sunday morning and absentmindedly started walking. He came to himself when he heard church bells ringing, and found himself in the next village.

Wilfred Sheed, Frank Sheed's son, in his book *Frank and Maisie: A Dialogue with Parents*, mentions his father's absentmindedness (I was rather surprised to read that Sheed was absent-minded), as when he put both socks on the same foot and then went looking for the other sock.

Chesterton was famous for his absentmindedness, even as a boy. On one occasion at school, the boys, as a joke, put snow in his pockets, and when they went into class the snow, as it melted, dripped on the floor. But Chesterton hadn't noticed! The laboratory sink was thought by the teacher to be the source of the water, so he sent Chesterton upstairs to ask that it be fixed. Chesterton did so and came back with water still dripping from his pockets, and he still didn't notice!

One day when he was crossing Fleet Street an idea occurred to him and he stopped in the middle of the road to think about it. And on his wedding day he arrived at the church without a tie.

Chesterton makes an interesting analysis of absent-mindedness, including that of those "whose minds have never been noticeably present". But there is one kind of absence of mind, he says, which is really a presence of mind. That is the kind that Chesterton had, as did the famous thinkers referred to above.

Aquinas was intent on settling the Albigenses, although it unsettled the guests at the King's dinner. Adam Smith was perhaps marvelling on the way that the butcher in

seeking his own benefit is unconsciously benefiting society. Sheed was possibly reflecting on the sanity of theology.

The tendency to talk to oneself is sometimes associated with this kind of absentmindedness. The joke has it that talking to oneself is an early sign of dementia, but Chesterton said that if you don't talk to yourself it is because you're not worth talking to.

Frances Chesterton recalled an occasion, before their marriage, when she was on a holiday with Gilbert and his brother Cecil, and the two brothers spent most of their time arguing amicably. The argument apparently continued into the night: Frances could hear Cecil's voice in his bedroom next door, so she tapped on the wall and said, "Cecil, do let Gilbert get some sleep!" Cecil answered in an embarrassed voice: "There's no one here." Cecil had been arguing with himself.

Surely a serious but overlooked weakness in modern society is the inability of most people to contemplate, which involves talking to oneself. And they compensate for this deficiency with noise, as in so much so-called music. Another distraction is mobile phones. City streets are full of people gazing into their phones as they walk along, as though fascinated by some mystic message.

The basic explanation of the absentmindedness which is really a presence of mind is found, I believe, in our nature as rational animals; that is, beings who have bodies and sense life in common with the lower animals and spiritual souls which give us affinity with the angels.

As Aristotle and St Thomas show, all our knowledge, no matter how sublime, has its beginning in the five senses of touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell. From these the spiritual intellect penetrates into the very nature of things.

The human intellect belongs to the soul alone, not to the compound of soul and body, and the more deeply it penetrates into reality the more detached it is from the mundane details of daily life. The resulting absence of mind is therefore a presence of mind. ■