

# MODERN AGE

A QUARTERLY REVIEW



## *Chesterton, Madmen, and Madhouses*

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NO MAN of his time defended more passionately the cause of sanity and "centricity" than did G. K. Chesterton—despite his aversion to watches and his uncalculated picturesqueness of dress. Yet no imaginative writer touched more often than did Chesterton upon lunacy, real or alleged: a prospect of his age with the madhouse for its background.

"It is, indeed, an absurd exaggeration to say that we are all mad," Chesterton writes in *Lunacy and Letters*,

just as it is true that we are none of us perfectly healthy. If there were to appear in the world a perfectly sane man, he would certainly be locked up. The terrible simplicity with which he would walk over our minor morbidities, or sulky vanities and malicious self-righteousness; the elephantine innocence with which he would ignore our fictions or civilization—these would make him a thing more desolating and inscrutable than a

thunderbolt or a beast or prey. It may be that the great prophets who appeared to mankind as mad were in reality raving with an impotent sanity.

What Burke called "metaphysical madness," the delusion of the ideologue and the neoterist, was the modern affliction against which Chesterton contended. The Library of the British Museum, Chesterton remarks, "discharges a great many of the functions of a private madhouse." Against the sort of lunacy encountered in libraries, and the sort encountered in public affairs, Chesterton took his stand. Madhouses, public or private, loom large in seven of his fantastic romances; madmen pop up in high places. In our era, his argument runs, some of the wisest and best men may find themselves in Bedlam: for the madman and the rogue manipulating madmen are in power.

Since Chesterton wrote, madhouses have multiplied; but seldom do they display the outward amenities of that asylum (designed by Lucifer) in which the zealot and

the atheist of *The Ball and the Cross* end their flight from the police. Once, pursuing Scottish historical researches, I strolled by accident into a private madhouse to be proud of: a sixteenth century mansion, once a manse, all flowers and lawns within its high stone dykes. The typical "mental institution" of our twentieth century, however, is more hygienic, more scientific, more grim, and more voracious: no one could mistake it for a parsonage.

As we slide away from the normality that Chesterton upheld, we fall into a kind of rationalistic insanity. Starving the moral imagination (which must be nurtured early by myth, fable, allegory, and parable), we find ourselves upon the alienist's couch. Chesterton chose fantasy as his weapon for defending common sense, knowing that defecated rationality—private judgment carried to its extreme—is the enemy of the higher reason.

"Every healthy person at some time must feed on fiction as well as fact," Chesterton puts it in his essay "Fiction as Food,"

because fact is a thing which the world gives to him, whereas fiction is a thing he gives to the world. It has nothing to do with a man being able to write; or even with his being able to read. Perhaps its best period is that of childhood, and what is called playing or pretending. But it is still true when the child begins to read or sometimes (heaven help him) to write. Anybody who remembers a favorite fairy-story will have a strong sense of its original solidity and richness and even definite detail; and will be surprised, if he rereads it in later life, to find how few and bald were the words which his own imagination made not only vivid but varied. And even the errand-boy who read hundreds of penny-dreadfuls, or the lady who read hundreds of novels from the circulating library, were living an imaginative life which did not come wholly from without.

By imagination, high or low, the world is ruled; and not by little tracts and pamphlets. So, though a tractarian polemicist of the first rank, Chesterton set out to reinvigorate the moral imagination through fable: by "supposal," creating a fiction to impart a moral. "It is only in our exhausted and agnostic age," he wrote late in life, "that the idea has been started that if one is moral one must not be melodramatic." The Greeks, the medieval scholars, the Protestant moralists, and the eighteenth century rationalistic moralists all knew better. *Fantastic melodrama*—from the shape-shifting of the gigantic being called Sunday (Nature incarnate) to the purposeful groping of Father Brown—was Chesterton's instrument for the recovery of moral order. And of melodramatic subjects, none is more compelling than the madman and the madhouse.

In his *Autobiography*, Chesterton describes himself as a young lunatic at the time there was taking shape in his mind his first romance, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. This madness of his, he writes, "was more and more moving in the direction of some vague and visionary revolt against the prosaic flatness of a nineteenth century city and civilization . . ." Only the humorist is sane, Auberon Quin declares in that novel (published in 1904). Quin gets up a comic scheme for restoring to the districts of London a medieval picturesqueness and a medieval autonomy. An heroic fanatic, Adam Wayne, takes Quin literally; loving Notting Hill, the little platoon he belongs to, he defends—with swords and halberds—Pump Street against all the forces of progress; and for twenty years he succeeds, though pulled down at last.

"This man Wayne," says Buck, one of Wayne's enemies, "would be shut up by any doctors in England." But is Buck himself less crazy than the Napoleon of Notting Hill? "Buck is mad," Quin observes, "be-

cause he cares for money, as mad as a man who lives on opium.’”

The satirist and the fanatic, Quin and Wayne, come to understand at the end that the two of them are mad—but only because they are two lobes of a brain that has been riven in two.

When dark and dreary days come, you and I are necessary, the pure fanatic, the pure satirist. We have between us remedied a great wrong. We have lifted the modern cities into that poetry which everyone who knows mankind knows to be immeasurably more common than the commonplace.

This high hope for reuniting the halves of the riven modern mind runs through the second of Chesterton's romances, too. "A Nightmare" is the subtitle of *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908); but though the characters of that romance are sufficiently melodramatic, they are not mad. The one genuine anarchist among those seven conspirators is as rational as George Bernard Shaw. From the money-grubbing opportunist and the death-intoxicated anarchist, the time may be redeemed by common sense, poetic insights, and a touch of wit.

Yet by 1910, when he published *What's Wrong with the World* (a tract now almost forgotten), Chesterton began to suspect that the social order was sinking into insanity; it was becoming a tremendous madhouse, with scoundrels as the keepers. So it is that lunacy, and good men falsely accused of madness, peer out of his fantasies from *The Ball and the Cross* (1910) down to *Four Faultless Felons* (1930). In 1910, too, he wrote in his *Alarms and Discursions* that he was a sculptor of gargoyles:

These monsters are meant for the gargoyles of a definite cathedral. I have to carve the gargoyles, because I can carve nothing else; I leave to others the angels and the arches and the spires.

But I am very sure of the style of the architecture and of the consecration of the church.

St. Paul's is the cathedral of *The Ball and the Cross*. In this madhouse fable, two of the gargoyles are MacIvan, Jacobite and Papist; and Turnbull, militant atheist. The unreasonable cross surmounting St. Paul's is in danger of being overthrown by Professor Lucifer. Ours being an age of masks and conventions merely, this time is ripe for the Prince of This World; while belief endures only in a surviving saint, the monk Michael, and in these two honest opposed zealots, who cross swords literally as they flee from the indignant police.

That long pursuit terminates in a vast country-house lunatic-asylum, to which Lucifer—with the assistance of the civil authorities—has confined Michael, MacIvan, Turnbull, and all casual witnesses of the combats between Highland Catholic and London atheist. Those two men scandalously believe that religion is worth fighting about; and so long as they remain at liberty, Lucifer's consummate rationalism cannot triumph. The very memory of burning faith must be immured in the deepest cells of the asylum.

Nevertheless the madhouse, a complex machine, suffers from any machine's ineluctable imperfections. Hopeful still, MacIvan and Turnbull escape from the depths. Michael, the seeming imbecile (who has touches of the saint of Assisi), is unassailable in his wisdom, though members of parliament and magistrates are deluded by Lucifer. The asylum takes fire; Michael walks scatheless through the flames; and the asylum's master, Lucifer, hastens away in his flying-machine, casting overboard the doctors who were his tools.

One may note here similarities to C. S. Lewis' *That Hideous Strength*; both Chesterton and Lewis were influenced early by George Macdonald's fantasies. And there

occurs a foretaste of Orwell—despite Orwell's lack of affection for Chesterton—in the final bland address of the Master to his captives:

We investigated, on scientific principles, the story of MacIan's challenge, and we are happy to be able to inform you that the whole story of the attempted duel is a fable. There never was any challenge. There never was any man named MacIan. It is a melodramatic myth, like Calvary. . . . The whole story of the MacIan challenge has been found to originate in the obsessions of a few pathological types, who are now all fortunately in our care.

Yet patients sometimes set asylums afire; and in the ashes of this madhouse, there are found the swords of the two men of belief, "fallen haphazard in the pattern of a cross." The Ball and the Cross are not cast down.

From the dome of St. Paul's, Chesterton descended to the lodging-house of *Manalive* (1911). Innocent Smith, a towering humorist with a knack for reminding people of the joy of life—if need be, at pistol point—comes under the observation of two doctors who think that he ought to be committed to an asylum. But in the mock trial of Smith, it is revealed that "his eccentricities sprang from a static fact of faith, in itself mystical, and even childlike and Christian." He is alive; while the doctors who would lock him up are dry sticks. Smith makes playful war upon defecated rationality.

"At certain strange epochs," Smith tells a curate,

it is necessary to have another kind of priests, called poets, actually to remind men that they are not dead yet. The intellectuals among whom I moved were not even alive enough to fear death. They hadn't blood enough in them to be

cowards. Until a pistol barrel was poked under their very noses they never even knew they had been born. For ages looking up an eternal perspective it might be true that life is a learning to die. But for these little white rats it was just as true that death was their only chance of learning to live.

In *The Flying Inn* (1914), the regenerating poets are an adventurer and an innkeeper, Captain Dalroy and Humphrey Pump, who had rather see England drunk and free than sober and servile. This is perhaps the cleverest of Chesterton's moral melodramas, an assault upon prohibitionists, vegetarians, and all enemies of custom and common sense. Its rationalistic madman is Lord Ivywood—who, except for his manners, is Hitler, foreseen a generation early. Ivywood's fanatical pleasure in the breaking of bottles and the smashing of casks—"the pleasure which his strange, cold, courageous nature could not get from food or wine or woman"—leads to apostasy, a harem, and treason.

"I have gone where God has never dared to go," says Ivywood, at the moment of his ruin.

I am above the silly Supermen as they are above mere men. Where I walk in the heavens, no man has walked before me; and I am alone in the garden. All this passing about me is like the lonely plucking of garden flowers. I will have this blossom; I will have that . . .

By this fault fell the angels. The lust to reign in solitude, usurping the throne of God: this is the consummate madness, to cry "I am, and none else before me." The solipsist is the maddest, and most terrifying, of lunatics—and necessarily the worst enemy of both flesh and spirit. This illusion is "The Mirror of Madmen" in Chesterton's first book of serious poems, *The Wild Knight* (1900):

I dreamed a dream of heaven, white as frost,  
The splendid stillness of a living host;  
Vast choirs of upturned faces, line o'er line.  
Then my blood froze, for every face was mine.

For the decade following *The Flying Inn*, the image of the madhouse was absent from Chesterton's writing. Those were the years of the War (from which Chesterton's spirits never wholly recovered), of the War's dreary aftermath, and of his conversion to Catholicism. Also they were years in which his Distributism struggled vainly against unprincipled consolidation and against socialist ideology.

Yet Chesterton did not despair. In 1925, he published *The Everlasting Man*; in the same year, *Tales of the Long Bow*. That romance of a hard fight against the political and commercial despoilers of England (a winning fight, unlike Chesterton's own real struggle) contains a passage describing the forces that Chesterton detested. Owen Hood sees his favorite reach of the rural Thames made hideous by a factory, and the river polluted by chemical wastes:

This was the beginning of what was for Owen Hood a crawling nightmare. The change advanced slowly, by a process covering years, but it seemed to him all the time that he was helpless and paralyzed in its presence, precisely as a man is paralyzed in an actual nightmare. He laughed with an almost horrible laughter to think that a man in a modern society is supposed to be master of his fate and free to pursue his pleasures; when he has not power to prevent the daylight he looks on from being darkened, or the air he breathes from being turned to poison, or the silence that is his full possession from being shaken with the cacophony of hell.

At once mover and toady in this devasta-

tion, Dr. Horace Hunter—presently knighted—is ready to certify as mad those who deviate from the dogmas of scientism. Professor Green delivers an impassioned and very odd address to a congress of astronomers; the trouble with Professor Green is that he has fallen in love. As a newspaper reports—

No less a person than Sir Horace Hunter, who, although best known as a psycho-physiologist, has taken all knowledge for his province, and was present to show his interest in astronomical progress, was able to certify on the spot that the unfortunate Green was clearly suffering from dementia, which was immediately corroborated by a local doctor, so that the unhappy man might be removed without further scandal.

Professor Green is forcibly rescued by an aviator, who spirits him away to the sanctuary and stronghold of the rebels against utilitarian and profiteering oligarchy. The League of the Long Bow, which in the end overcomes the despoilers (as much by mirth as by force), is led by lovers; while the politicians and industrialists are men of appetite only.

In the real England of those years, the Distributists enjoyed no successes like those of the League of the Long Bow. In 1927, with unemployment growing and the Depression settling upon the face of Britain, Chesterton published *The Return of Don Quixote*. Herne, librarian at a country house, is obsessed by medieval studies, and is made King at Arms in a new order; for there is something of the prophet in him, and he is fearless. Sick at heart in his hour of victory, however, he casts off his own aristocratic supporters and comes to wander the roads after the fashion of Quixote, because he cannot ignore the injustice done to Dr. Hendry, the inventor of Hendry's Illumination Colors, by the monopolists of the paint-market.

Hendry very nearly is thrust into a madhouse by a new commission empowered to commit inefficient folk to protective custody. For Hendry expounds a curious theory of color-blindness, to account for his ruin at the hands of the monopolists; and such foolishness is anathema to Dr. Gambrel, an agent of the commission. (Gambrel rejoices in his own peculiar theory of *Spinal Repulsion*, tracing "brain trouble in all those who sat on the edges of chairs, as Hendry did.") Gambrel drags Hendry to a magistrate of the Lunacy Commission:

Dr. Gambrel had the power of the modern state, which is perhaps greater than that of any state, at least so far as the departments over which it ranges are concerned. He had the power to invade this house and break up this family and do what he liked with this member of it . . .

The examination of Hendry is conducted in a private house.

For the policy of all recent legislations and customs had been in the direction of conducting public affairs in private. The official was all the more omnipotent because he was always in plain clothes. It was possible to take people to and from such a place without any particular show of violence; merely because everybody knew that violence would be useless. The doctor had grown quite accustomed to taking his mad patients casually in a cab; and they seldom made any difficulty about it. They were not so mad as that.

Through the contrivance of a waggish knight-errant, the magistrate is misled to take Hendry for the alienist and Gambrel for the madman; Hendry goes free. For "Monkey" Murrel, Hendry's rescuer,

the real story lay rather in front of him than behind him; as if the unexpected liberation of the poor old crank, with the color-blind monomania, were but a sym-

bol of the liberation of many things and the opening of a brighter world. Something had snapped; if it was only a bit of red tape; and he did not know yet how much had been set free.

Chesterton's own ride as Quixote was of small avail against the red tape of bureaucracy and oligopoly, during the 'Twenties. But he smote hard. In her biography of Chesterton, Maisie Ward does not mention *The Poet and the Lunatics* (1929). Yet I rate that series of fantastic tales high in Chesterton's fiction.

Gabriel Gale, its intuitive hero, has a talent for mollifying madmen and moderating their excesses. The whole book is about lunacy and its subtle causes in this century.

"Genius oughtn't to be eccentric!" Gale exclaims.

Genius ought to be centric. It ought to be the core of the cosmos, not on the revolving edges. People seem to think it a compliment to accuse one of being an outsider, and to talk about the eccentricities of genius. What would they think, if I said I only wish to God I had the centricities of genius?

The maddest of all maniacs is the man of business, as Gale discovers from a considerable acquaintance among madmen. Also there is the Russian psychologist who believes in emancipation, expansion, the elimination of limits: he begins by liberating a caged bird (to its destruction), next frees goldfish from their bowl, and ends by blowing up himself and the house where he has been a guest.

"What exactly is liberty?" Gale inquires, just before the explosion.

First and foremost, surely, it is the power of a thing to be itself. In some ways the yellow bird was free in the cage. . . . We are limited by our brains and bodies; and if we break out, we cease to be ourselves, and, perhaps, to be anything. . . .

The lunatic is he who loses his way and cannot return. Now, almost before my eyes, this man had made a great stride from liberty to lunacy. The man who opened the bird-cage loved freedom; possibly too much; certainly very much. But the man who broke the bowl merely because he thought it a prison for the fish, when it was their only possible house of life—that man was already outside the world of reason, raging with a desire to be outside of everything.

The Russian psychologist could not endure the “round prison” of the overarching sky; but his alternative was annihilation, and he chose it.

In these stories, one encounters the scientific maniac, purged of conscience, ready to kill for the sake of a museum’s endowment; the artistic maniac, murderous when disabused of his pet fallacy; the anti-superstition maniac, more fanatical than any witch-doctor. One encounters, again, the solipsist who begins to fancy that he is God, and who can be saved only through intense pain:

There is no cure for that nightmare of omnipotence except pain; because that is the thing a man *knows* he would not tolerate if he could really control it. A man must be in some place from which he would certainly escape if he could, if he is really to realize that all things do not come from within. I doubt whether any of our action is really anything but an allegory. I doubt whether any truth can be told except in a parable.

Therefore Gale pinned a poor self-intoxicated curate to a tree during a fierce storm, until the man recognized his own puniness, and that he was not sitting in the sky, and that he had no angelic servants going “to and fro in colored garments of cloud and flame and the pageant of the seasons.”

Lacking forcible parables, we are swallowed up by the monstrous ego.

Because he ridiculed certain powerful interests, Gale himself escapes being committed to a madhouse only through liberation by an armed genuine lunatic. The corrupt and treacherous psychologists who would put Gale behind walls tell him that he is a megalomaniac, expressing himself in exaggeration. He has painted huge sardonic caricatures; and so—

“You cannot see a large blank wall without having an uncontrollable appetite for covering it with large pictures,” the malicious Dr. Wolfe tells Gale.

You cannot see a swing hung in the air without thinking of flying ships careering through the air. I will venture to guess that you never see a cat without thinking of a tiger or a lizard without thinking of a dragon.

True enough, Gale replies; but the trouble with his captors is that they cannot perceive essences:

“Psychology is certainly valuable,” Gale says to them.

It seems to teach us how to see into each other’s minds. You, for instance, have a mind which is very interesting; you have reached a condition which I think I recognize. You are in that particular attitude in which the subject, when he thinks of anything, never thinks of the centre of anything. You see only edges eaten away. Your malady is the opposite to mine, to which you call making a tiger out of a cat, or what some call making a mountain out of a molehill. You do not go on and make the cat more of a cat; you are always trying to work back and prove that it is less than a cat; that it is a defective cat or a mentally deficient cat. But a cat is a cat; that is the supreme sanity which is so thickly clouded in your mind. After all, a molehill is a hill and a mountain is a hill. But

you have got into the state of the mad queen, who said she knew hills compared with which this was a valley. You can't grasp the thing called a thing. Nothing for you has a central stalk of sanity. There is no core to your cosmos. Your trouble begins with being an atheist. . . .

I know what is at the back of your mind, Dr. Simeon Wolfe; and it's a chaos of exceptions with no rule. You could find anything abnormal, because you have no normal. You could find anybody mad; and as for why you specially want to find me mad—why, that is another disadvantage of being an atheist.

At the end of *The Poet and the Lunatics*, the more criminal of these two mad-doctors has set up a private asylum in Wimbledon, its garden very like the splendid grounds of the madhouse in *The Ball and the Cross*. But the pretended patients are not mad at all: they are professional criminals, Dr. Starkey's agents, feigning insanity to gain immunity from prosecution. Somewhat as Chesterton the journalist found out rascals in high political places, Gale finds out Dr. Starkey and his crew. But Chesterton's flesh-and-blood adversaries did not go to prison; they proceeded to higher honors and emoluments, most of them.

The novelettes of *Four Faultless Felons* (1930) contain Chesterton's last studies in lunacy. "The Moderate Murderer" has a religious maniac for a foil, and a homicidal builder of empire who is madder and more dangerous. Hume, a dominie, averts the assassination of the Governor of Polybia by interrupting the Governor's stroll—his instrument of interruption, in the emergency, being a bullet through the Governor's leg. Had the Governor continued his walk, he would have been killed on the rifle-range by the no-nonsense-with-natives Deputy Governor.

"You once told me you feared for your

family sanity," says the sharpshooting Hume to his sweetheart,

merely because you had bad dreams and brooded over things of your own imagination. Believe me, it's not the imaginative people who become insane. It's not they who are mad, even when they are morbid. They can always be woken up from bad dreams by broader prospects and brighter visions—because they are imaginative. The men who go mad are unimaginative. The stubborn stoical men who had only room for one idea and take it literally. The sort of man who seems to be silent but stuffed to bursting, congested—.

In the same volume, "The Honest Quack," a Dr. Judson, endeavors to commit his friend Walter Windrush to an asylum, that he may save him from a charge of murder. Judson concocts a Theory of Arboreal Ambidexterity, expressly to prove that Windrush (whose life centers round a rare tree he guards in his walled garden) is an anthropoid sport, not responsible for his own actions, because suffering from the rare mental affliction of Duodi-apsychosis.

"The result," went on the doctor,

the really dangerous result, lies in a tendency to separation between the functions. Such ambidexterity is not natural to man in his existing evolutionary stage and may lead to a schism between the lobes of the brain. One part of the mind may become unconscious of what is attempted by the other part. . . . The attempt to render the variation of branches by simultaneous ambidextrous action leads to a dissociation of cerebral unity and continuity, a breach of responsible moral control and co-ordinated consecutive conservation—.

To obtain a colleague for committing Windrush, Dr. Judson successfully butters up that whited sepulchre Dr. Doone, the

high authority on Arboreal Man, who signs the document of committal. After all, though, Windrush is found innocent by the police, and the real murderer takes poison—Dr. Doone himself. Walter Windrush is restored to his guardianship of the unique sprawling tree—under which, unknown to him, a murdered man's bones had lain for many a year. Dr. Judson wonders how Windrush can bear dwelling beside the tree now.

"My dear fellow, and you are the cold and rational man of science," said Windrush lightly.

In what superstitions you wallow! In what medieval darkness you brood all your days! I am only a poor, impracticable, poetic dreamer, but I assure you I am in broad daylight. In fact, I have never been out of it, not even when you put me in that pleasant little sanatorium for a day or two. I was quite happy there, and as for the lunatics, well I came to the conclusion that they were rather saner than my friends outside.

Privately, Windrush really believes that the garden of his Tree is the Garden of Eden; and he is not wrong. The skeptical Judson and his love Enid Windrush discover it for themselves:

On top of the once accursed tree a small bird burst into song, and at the same moment a great morning wind from the south rushed upon the garden, bending all its shrubs and bushes and seeming, as does the air when it passes over sunlit foliage, to drive the sunshine before it in mighty waves. And it seemed to both of them that something had been broken or been loosened, a last bond with chaos and the night, a last strand of the net of some resisting Nothing that obstructs Creation, and God had made a new garden and they stood alive on the first foundations of the world.

Gardens are what men make of them.

Maclan and Turnbull, entrapped, found themselves in the apocalyptic garden of Professor Lucifer's madhouse; Judson and Enid found themselves the new Adam and Eve, in the first of all gardens. And Chesterton, like Owen Hood, was resolved that some private gardens must endure. Wrath against the sophisters of lunacy—those pairs of cunning doctors committing sane men to Bedlam—runs through these stories: wrath against the devastators of gardens.

I do not suppose that Chesterton entertained any special animosity against doctors generally; rather, the mad-doctors of his parables stand for defecated intellectuality in our time—for the cult of Rationalism leagued with the selfish and domineering appetites of men emancipated from old obligations and loyalties. To his literary opponents, notably Wells and Shaw, Chesterton was polite and even kindly when he met them—being mindful, perhaps, of Augustine's injunction to hate the sin but to love the sinner. His dealings with alienists were similar; indeed, he found at least one admirer among their number.

One of the few people who ever apprehended *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Chesterton tells us in his *Autobiography*, was a French psychoanalyst.

He made my hair stand on end by saying that he had found my very juvenile story useful as a corrective among his morbid patients; especially the process by which each of the diabolical anarchists turns out to be a good citizen in disguise. "I know a number of men who nearly went mad," he said quite gravely, "but were saved because they had really understood *The Man Who Was Thursday*."

The world is not evil; most men, of whatever profession, mean no mischief; delusion, rather than malice, is the curse of our time, ordinarily. Yet behind the arrogance

of twentieth century intellectuality, Chesterton believed, there works a corrupting power that is not human merely. That same power employs the consuming selfishness of the monopolist, the strutting *libido domi-nandi* of the unprincipled politician, the gnawing envy of the ideologue. Detesting sanity, this power whispers to men that they may be as gods—and draws them within the walls of the madhouse.

Every private garden—the gardens of the spirit, the gardens of the peasant—would be scorched to death by this power. And when this power cannot delude, it operates through human pride and injustice and violence to overwhelm those sane men who continue to resist. Such is the power described in the king's vision of *The Ballad of the White Horse*:

The wise men know what wicked things  
Are written on the sky,  
They trim sad lamps, they touch sad  
strings,  
Hearing the heavy purple wings,  
Where the forgotten seraph kings  
Still plot how God shall die.

Those melancholy wise men are of the East; but the Christian, whatever his strength of reason, knows that he cannot know whether he will fail or win; he goes gaily in the dark, unsure of the end. Night is thrice night over him, in this time as in King Alfred's: the enemies of nature are grown subtle and ruthless. Anarchist and tyrant, positivist and technologist, fraudulent psychologist and avaricious oligopolist, undertake his ruin.

Unreason and Devastation are the stony idols of these enemies, and before them the modern crowd bows down. Unreason may seem fashionably clever, and Devastation has its charms for the bored and the hopeless. Huddled in a corner of his scientific cell, often the lunatic detests the light—and would shriek, were he thrust into the sunny garden. It is not Dr. Dryasdust who

can rescue the madman and nurture the gardens of this world; prosy literalness, however well intentioned, cannot redeem the time; in the phrase of Disraeli, "Even Mormon counts more votaries than Bentham." If we are to be redeemed at all, we must be saved by the moral imagination, rising out of the historical consciousness (the work of *The Everlasting Man*) and out of the transcendent truths of allegory.

If all of our actions are allegories, men may apprehend reality only through parables. Of possible parables, Chesterton—he being sane and free—was haunted by the parable of the confining madhouse, and by the opposed parable of the garden. The madhouse is sterile, the prison of the solip-sist; the garden, proliferating, expresses an immortal continuity and community, realized in time and place. If we burst out of the garden, we burst into the madhouse.

Innocent Smith, in *Manalive*, makes his way afoot quite round the world, that he may come afresh to wife and children and house and garden. "But don't you see," he shouts at a Russian station-master,

that all these real leaps and destructions and escapes are only attempts to get back to Eden—to something we have had, to something at least we have heard of? Don't you see one only breaks the fence or shoots the moon in order to get home?

His Russian host doesn't see; and that blindness, Innocent retorts, is why the Russian Revolution has failed.

"I mean that if there be a house for me in heaven," Innocent Smith declares later in his travels,

it will either have a green lamp-post and a hedge, or something quite as positive and personal as a green lamp-post and a hedge. I mean that God bade me love one spot and serve it, and do all things however wild in praise of it, so that this

one spot might be a witness against all the infinities and the sophistries; that Paradise is somewhere and not anywhere, is something and not anything. And I would not be so very much surprised if the house in heaven had a real green lamp-post after all.

The real world, the world of sanity, the realm of centricity and common sense, is made known to us through parable; yet once known, it is a most substantial world, filled with small precious things infinitely dear to the sane man. Men deprived of their own lamp-posts may find other uses for lamp-posts; men whose hedges have been grubbed up may be cribbed, cabined, confined. The alternative to the little garden

is the vast madhouse. G. K. Chesterton, decidedly a man alive, strove in parable to defend the hedges of that one spot which is Eden. If those hedges should be swept away, we would not find ourselves rejoiced by the elimination of limits. Instead, we should find ourselves bounded by the walls of that one spot, forever parched, which is Hell.\*

\*"Chesterton, Madmen, and Madhouses" will be published in a collection of essays on Christian doctrine in modern fantasy, edited by Dr. John Warwick Montgomery: *Mansoul Revisited*. The essays in this volume originally were lectures in a series at De Paul University, arranged by Dr. Montgomery.

# *The Commitments of Political Education*

GERHART NIEMEYER

A FOURTEEN YEAR OLD aborigine Australian undergoes his tribe's initiation ceremonies. He passes through a number of symbolic acts signifying death and regeneration, the beginning of a new life, but they also include instruction. The boy learns the names of the gods, the stories of creation, the ceremonies proper to an ordered life. "From initiation one learns the true theophany, the myth of tribal genealogy, the corpus of laws, moral and social, in a word, man's place in the cosmos." (M. Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion*, 1963, p. 56.) Here we have a prime example of political education, consisting in ritual and also the communication of "knowledge, the global understanding of the world, the interpretation of the unity of nature, the revelation of the final causes underlying existence," all this aimed not so much at "satisfying the neophyte's thirst for knowledge, but primarily at consolidating his existence as a whole, promoting continuity of life and prosperity and assuring a happier life after death."

Let us now imagine an Athenian youth in the late fifth century B.C. His father, being able to afford the not inconsiderable tuition, has sent him to school with the famous Sophist Hippias. The boy is being instructed in mathematics, astronomy, music, as well as in grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic. Hippias makes him memorize copious facts and subjects him to severe drill in useful skills. There is no question here of "consolidating the neophyte's existence as a whole," since such questions as the order of being and the moral quality of man's entire life are slighted. Hippias has undertaken to sharpen the young man's wit and tongue, to furnish him with intellectual tools that would enable him, step by step, to climb the ladder of prestige, public office, power, and wealth, all the while making shrewd use of Athens' political institutions.

One day, however, the youth encounters Socrates who has come to Hippias' house to involve the famous Sophist in profound argument. The depths which Socrates' dis-

Handwritten note: "Socrates' dis-"