Detective Fiction Reinvention and Didacticism in G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown

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Abstract

In the Father Brown stories, G. K. Chesterton reengineers the classic detective story so that it can be a vehicle for didactic messages. Through a rethinking of mysteries, a repurposing of secondary characters, and a subversion of Holmsean-type detectives, Chesterton is able to insert philosophic ideas into his stories while still entertaining readers. Differing from earlier detective stories, the Father Brown mysteries showcase an acceptance of the spiritual and a natural empathy for all characters whether criminal or no. In my research, I show how, through these stories, Chesterton posits messages that are new to the mystery genre and how he is able to leave an indelible mark on the most basic assumptions of detective fiction.

Chapter 1: Introduction

G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown detective stories stand above all other detective stories because they purport to come from beneath them. One of the great paradoxes of Chesterton's literary career, fifty-two short stories about a Roman Catholic priest detective, written between 1909 and 1936, found hidden purpose and meaning in a genre that otherwise might have remained mere entertainment and of little literary value. When Chesterton began writing his Father Brown stories, the genre was still young but already grounded in its own tradition, Edgar Allan Poe having inaugurated it in 1841 with his first C. Auguste Dupin story and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle having brought it to an early climax with Sherlock Holmes's first appearance in 1887. The genre was prominent into and past the early 1900s, serving as a form of popular literary entertainment, spread by the rise of journalism and periodicals which gave the short stories a medium that could reach large audiences. To be enticing to a large audience and to fit into newspapers and magazines, detective fiction stories had to be able to be read quickly and to deliver a satisfying ending; their plots were entertaining and often forgotten quickly. Considering the expansion of the genre and the excitement surrounding Doyle's much-loved Holmes, the genre seemed to be a wild success. But at the same time that the stories were convenient, most were not memorable. The stories that were easily accessible often had no themes of lasting consequence that made them worth accessing for reasons besides entertainment. The genre served largely to divert, but did little else interesting or helpful, a fact acknowledged by scholars' common assent to its unworthiness of serious study.

Detective stories' common lack of serious themes stems from its typically black-and-white view of morality and justice. Amid what sometimes amounts to a host of stock characters, criminals pose seemingly insolvable puzzles to the heroes and readers, and then, when the

detective or the police defeat the criminal, they dutifully expel the criminal from society, whether through hanging, prison, or exile—leaving civilization once more safe from disruption. The reader is expected to assume that the government, police force, and detective are trustworthy and should not be questioned. The criminal is always in the wrong and must be discovered and defeated by the detective and reader. Non-villainous stock characters serve as suspects, victims, antagonistic innocents, or accomplices; their purpose often is to act as hindrances to society's self-protecting justice, serving as distractions from the criminal's true identity. Once that identity is found out, based on the evidence, and the criminal is caught, society can maintain its just and moral equilibrium. The detective, by using the physical materials afforded him logically deduces the identity of his prey and saves the day. The traditional detective story is a vehicle for one very simply philosophical meaning; as Chene Heady says in "The Many Identities of GKC," "It is the perfect narrative expression of a scientism which assumes that only the material sciences can ascribe meaning to our lives or unlock reality as a whole . . ." (n. pag.). In much of detective fiction, reality is relegated to being a mere puzzle. If the detective can understand the pieces of the mystery, he or she can understand its whole. There is nothing mystical, spiritual, or unnatural about how the world works. Everything can be explained. Detective fiction serves as a vehicle for materialistic themes because it stresses dependence on the tangible to understand the true.

And because there is always only one way to understand a case, detective fiction initially was a very specific, narrow genre—few good ways to write it existed and every story in the genre had to have the same satisfying denouement of a solved puzzle. Describing this formula, Ellery Queen, a detective fiction writer, claims, "[A] pure detective story must have a detective who detects, who is the story's protagonist, and who triumphs over the criminal" (qtd. in Ashley, Robert P. 48). The emphasis here is on detection—compiling clues—and defeating the criminal

to restore peace to a society that is temporarily under attack from within. If someone bought and read a detective story, they could depend on these characteristics. While Chesterton's Father Brown stories do fit these standards, Chesterton seems to have cared far less for genre standards than detective fiction writers before him, writing stories and creating a character that denies one basic, traditional assumption of the genre: the material world is all that exists. Once his readers let go of this premise, Chesterton opens the genre to a host of story and theme possibilities. For instance, where Holmes solves paradoxical crimes by denying false clues, Father Brown uses a spiritual understanding of paradox to solve crimes. Where formerly one-dimensional secondary characters abound, Chesterton gives them didactic purpose by using them to spread philosophical or theological messages. And in a genre that treats criminals as problems to be solved and enemies to be outwitted, Chesterton urges that criminals be understood personally and empathetically, treated as equals—understood and not simply defeated. Changes like these—ways that Chesterton openly challenges the genre or repurposes it—show the Father Brown stories to be an experimental and innovative play on the detective fiction short story form. Chesterton is successful in this interpretation because while he enhances the genre with the addition of didactic themes, he still manages to keep his stories entertaining. He follows the rules of detective fiction enough that he can accomplish these two things: he entertains while he teaches, elevating the literary possibilities of detective fiction.

Historical and Autobiographical Context

Because Chesterton's life and writings are often surveys of ideas, he is naturally able to use historical and personal context to write about philosophical and cultural themes for his Father Brown stories. As with any work, Chesterton's intentions in his Father Brown stories are better understood within their historical and autobiographical context. In this case, his context was an

Edwardian world coming into its own after Queen Victoria's death and preparing to enter the dangerous modern era that World War I would usher in. He writes in *The Victorian Age in Literature*, "I also was born a Victorian; and sympathise not a little with the serious Victorian spirit" (11). Though Chesterton is primarily Edwardian, he also understood and was influenced by the Victorian time period (which ended in 1901 with Queen Victoria's death). Most important of his inheritances, Chesterton continues a Victorian tradition of didacticism in art. Where some writers may be afraid of marrying heavy-handed moralism with stories or painting, Chesterton tends to embrace the opportunity to educate and to argue. In addition, he takes influences for the Father Brown stories from the late-Victorian struggle between anarchists and socialists. Chesterton writes, "Thus the anarchists and socialists fought a battle over the death-bed of Victorian Industrialism; in which the Socialists (that is, those who stood for increasing instead of diminishing the power of Government) won a complete victory and have almost exterminated their enemy" (234). While Chesterton, as a distributionist, was far more inclined to be a socialist, as he calls himself in his *Autobiography* (114), both sides of this argument appear often in his writing. Anarchist philosophy (which he encountered as a young man and eventually refused entirely) is the subject of his book *The Man Who Was Thursday*, and fighting anarchy is an implicit theme in any of his detective stories as well. While anarchism eventually died out, Socialists continued to be a considerable power during the Edwardian period, and caricatures of them often appear in his Father Brown stories—sometimes at the receiving end of one of Chesterton's didactic points.

During the Edwardian era, which centers on and is named for the reign of Edward VII (1901-1910),[1] Chesterton published his first and perhaps most characteristic twelve Father

[1] Samuel Hynes, in *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, allocates Edwardian England to the time from the 1890's to August 1914 when Great Britain declared war on Germany (*vii*).

Brown stories. The first story "The Blue Cross" was published in 1909 and *The Innocence of Father Brown,* his first Father Brown collection, was published in 1911. Studying Father Brown in light of this Edwardian culture is difficult because compared to other time periods, Edwardianism's dates are vague, and its ideas are not always homogenous. Jonathan Rose, in *The Edwardian Temperament,* writes that "[s]ome scholars have concluded that there was no such thing [as an unifying Edwardian culture], only a mix of contradictory movements and ideas" (*xi*). The most common of these contradictions is what Samuel Hynes, in *The Edwardian Turn of Mind,* calls an "Edwardian conflict of old and new" (*vii*). According to him the fight was between old and new ideas that would meet on an Edwardian battleground—a battle between the remaining forces and proponents of Victorian England and the rising tendencies and ideas of what would become Modern England (*vii*). Indeed, this particular dichotomy appears often in Father Brown with innovative socialists arguing with traditional capitalists and enlightened spiritualists arguing with conservative materialists.

Central to the theme of Chesterton's Father Brown stories, the Edwardians were caught in a slow shift from a traditional Victorian religious society to a materialistic modern society. Initiating this tendency, many artists and laborers of the late 1800s and early 1900s quit going to church even though it had been a normal way of life during the Victorian era; this faith had been replaced by an interest in explaining the supernatural with science, sometimes through psychical research. Influential at this time, rationalism and modern science were promoting a worldview that supposedly could interpret everything with observation and logic—ideas already present several years before in the Sherlock Holmes stories. In *A Study in Scarlet,* Holmes says, "From a drop of water . . . a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other" (23). Parts of the British population were slowly beginning to

abandon a religious perspective of the world and to accept the idea that everything could be explained with evidence and intellectual ability. The Edwardians began to believe that they could completely abandon traditional religion, an idea that Chesterton would react against directly in his Father Brown stories.

An Edwardian event that made widespread detective fiction and the Father Brown stories popular was the rise of journalism. Chesterton is known for thousands of essays and articles that he published in magazines and newspapers, but journalism was only becoming popular when he began writing. Rose writes, "Between 1881 and 1911 the newspaper-reading public increased fourfold . . . The [increased] demand called into existence a flock of Edwardian wits," an apt description of Chesterton (166). The rise in newspaper consumption made Chesterton's career as a public thinker possible and also gave him and other detective fiction writers more publishing venues; Chesterton's first Father Brown story was published in *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1910 when, as Ian Ker writes in *G. K. Chesterton: A Biography*, "Chesterton . . . unable to find a detective story he had not read, decided to write one himself" (282). Chesterton continued to publish subsequent Father Brown stories in *The Story-Teller* as well as in *The Saturday Evening Post*, the rise in journalism enabling not only his non-fictional endeavors but also his fictional ones.

Another unique aspect of Edwardian England time period that Chesterton can be accused not only of using but also of pioneering in his Father Brown stories is the Edwardian joke—the combination of something serious with something funny. Of the Edwardian "gospel of fun," Rose says it "erased the distinction between work and play and, as well, the boundary separating humor and seriousness" (174). This Edwardian synthesis led to a flippant style of writing that dealt with serious issues jokingly. In *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis,* John D.

Coates writes that Chesterton "chose the roles of a journalist and performer deliberately, because he felt that ideas were more important than art, that communication was more vital and timely than the perfectionism of the isolated artist or cloistered academic" (235). Writers like Chesterton were unique for their abilities to tell jokes while writing argumentative essays, making serious discussion more easily entertaining to a popular audience. Rose recounts Chesterton's own defense of the joke: "Chesterton argues that humor expresses frustrated human desires; once some 'madman' treats a joke seriously, he is capable of transforming society" (190). While the other Edwardians may have had varying reasons for writing in such a manner, Chesterton was strongly motivated by his desire to convince audiences—combining his message with humor to encourage his readers to engage the ideas he was presenting. With this cultural aspect that made his writing contextually appropriate, Chesterton was well prepared to entertain and teach his audience with his Father Brown stories

Detective Fiction's Development

Detective fiction has existed as a genre since Poe published the first C. Auguste Dupin story, "The Murderer in the Rue Morgue," in 1841 in *Graham's Magazine*. Early stories were inspired by true stories of real criminals and criminals-turned-detective, and the genre has its deepest philosophical roots in a search for justice supported by rational empiricism and a desire for truth. Chesterton published his first Father Brown story sixty-seven years after the first detective story and twenty-one years after the genre's defining moments, the publication of the first Sherlock Holmes story. In his book *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel*, Julian Symons highlights the initial simplicity of the genre: "Since logical deduction was the heart of the detective story, it followed that there was little room for any depth of characterization or any fourths of style" (13). But Symons later adds that the "detective story

pure and complex, the book that has no interest whatever except the solution of a puzzle, does not exist, and if it did exist would be unreadable" (15). This was the necessary balancing act for detective authors—the puzzle was and remains the center of the detective story but can never fully replace the story. Chesterton agrees with this idea when he writes in his essay "How to Write a Detective Story," "For the detective story is only a game; and in that game the reader is not really wrestling with the criminal but with the author" (n. pag.). The detective story—written as an opportunity to outrace the detective—remains, at its simplest, a puzzle or a challenge to the reader from the author centering around the actions of the detective's investigations.

But as detective fiction became more popular, critics, readers, and writers became more interested in defining it further; they began to make rules for how detective fiction should be written, defining what is and is not "cheating" on the author's part. Two good examples of this are Father Ronald Knox's "Ten Commandments of Detection" and the Detection Club. For example, Symons recounts that the former, written in 1928, "insisted that the criminal should be mentioned early on, ruled out the supernatural, [and] said that the detective must not himself commit the crime . . ." (*Bloody Murder* 13). Chesterton was the first president of the latter from1930 to 1936. Symons says, "So also the Detection Club in Britain, shortly after its foundation in 1930, asked its members to swear an oath promising that their detectives would 'well and truly detect the crimes presented to them' without reliance on 'Divine Revelation, Feminine Intuition, Mumbo-Jumbo, Jiggery-Pokery, Coincidence or the Act of God'" (13). Authors were expected to make the crime solvable by the reader but they still attempted to surprise their readers. These rules helped to keep the detective fiction genre believable and entertaining.

Of course, Chesterton had many of his own opinions on detective fiction and was not

only influenced by previous detective writers but also was ready to rebel against "set" standards. As Symons mentions in *The Detective Story in Britain,* "Chesterton is not a model for any other writer to copy, and the later logicians of the detective story, who drew up the 'fair play' rules, complained bitterly that Chesterton outraged them all, that he would not tell you whether all the windows were fastened or whether a shot in the gun-room could be heard in the butler's pantry" (20). But Symons explains that "the genius of Chesterton lay in his ability to ignore all that, to leave out everything extraneous to the single theme he wanted to develop, and yet to provide us with a clue that is blindingly obvious once we have accepted the premises of the story" (20). Chesterton was not concerned with simply proposing a puzzle for the reader and (as bitterly noticed by some critics) was certainly not concerned with proposing a cohesive one. While other critics will defend his stories as sufficiently following the rules, keeping them within the genre's limits, Chesterton, despite even what he claims, writes his stories to not just revolve around being a puzzle but to explore ideas. He wishes to give readers recommendations as to which ideas and beliefs are better, making his stories something more than entertainment—a claim to which many detective fiction writers cannot make, representing a lack of depth in the genre that sometimes leaves scholars unsatisfied with detective fiction as a whole.

The journey to a genre that Chesterton could rebel against began with Poe's C. Auguste Dupin who, though he is a detective like Sherlock Holmes, bequeaths to Father Brown more than simply the genre and deduction-and-evidence-focused archetype to rebel against. After "The Murderer in the Rue Morgue," Poe wrote two more detective stories about Dupin—"The Mystery of Marie Roget" and "The Purloined-Letter"—from the three of which stem most structures of detective fiction. As Poe writes in "The Murderer in the Rue Morgue," Dupin himself is a "young gentleman . . . of an excellent—indeed of an illustrious family, but, by a

variety of untoward events, [has] been reduced to such poverty that the energy of his character [has] succumbed beneath it, and he [has] ceased to bestir himself in the world, or to care for the retrieval of his fortunes" (242). Dupin spends most of his time reading and is brilliant enough, without speaking, to reconstruct the thought trail of the narrator over the course of fifteen minutes. This is the first of his feats of intellectual prowess and he proves several more over the course of the three stories including solving a mystery almost entirely from reading newspaper articles. As John Gruesser summarizes in "Never Bet the Detective (or His Creator) Your Head: Character Rivalry, Authorial Sleight of Hand, and Generic Fluidity in Detective Fiction," the first story is a "whatwuzit," the second is a "whodunit," and the third is a "whereisit" (17). He claims that in these three story types, "Poe . . . invented and then reinvented modern detective fiction" (5). Considering that Poe wrote the first detective stories and that most detective stories can be traced to one of these three archetypes, this claim is not difficult to make. With Dupin, Poe influences the detective genre and creates an ideally logical detective—one reliant on intellectual power and observational skills.

Of course, with as much influence on the genre as Poe had, Chesterton was certainly affected by him; the creator of Father Brown, though, is able to find aspects in Poe's writing both to copy and to subvert. Concerning the former, Chesterton in "Sherlock Holmes" argues that Dupin is the best original detective because, unlike Holmes, because Poe "carefully states that Dupin not only admired and trusted poetry, but was himself a poet" (n. pag.). In saying this, Chesterton is also referring to one of the cardinal virtues of Father Brown—the fact that his detection is not only based upon details and deductions but on a philosopher's understanding of people and a poet's perception of situations, abilities which he applies in most of his investigations. In "The Blue Cross," Father Brown discovers Flambeau as a fraudulent priest

because he has bad theology, and in “The Wrong Shape” detects the murder because a piece of paper seems to be the wrong shape, suggesting Dupin’s intellectual influence on Chesterton’s detective. Another way that Poe influences the detective genre and consequently Chesterton happens through characters’ sub-conflicts other than the conflict over the solving of the case, a major aspect of Chesterton’s detective fiction. Gruesser mentions Poe’s characters’ oppositions to each other when he says, “First, and on the most basic level, Poe stages a series of contests between characters . . .” (5). Poe’s conflict is usually a matter of different characters racing to come to a solution for the mystery or an understanding of the ultimate truth to be discerned through the lesser truths, something that many detective writers have copied, notably Sherlock Holmes when he outthinks the official police force. Chesterton copies and subverts this in his writing; his characters often do fight against each other but instead of over a truth about the case (there is rarely a moment of victory in which Father Brown defeats another detective in analytical ability), the contested fact is often philosophical or religious. A clear example of this exists in the major subplot of “The Secret Garden” in which Valentin and Brayne argue over religion. Poe’s invention set a precedent for Chesterton to later harness the conflict inherent in character relationships to serve his own didactic purposes

Contrarily, Poe presents several ideas that Chesterton rejects in his own stories; Poe’s detective is the archetypal rationalist; he maintains a slow-witted narrator, and fixates on solving the case as an expression of defeating his opponent. In his article, “The Chevalier and the Priest; Deductive Method in Poe, Chesterton, and Borges,” Christopher Routledge writes that for Dupin the world “is a closed system, containing all the clues for solving its mysteries. Chesterton’s and Father Brown’s view differs from this in that although the rational method could in theory provide all the answers to the mysteries of the universe, it may not because only a limited

amount of information is available" (8). Thus, Dupin being a rationalist looks to clues and evidence to understand the villain and the mystery. Dupin believes that logic is the key to a true understanding of the world while Father Brown often chooses to rely on intuition to solve a case.

In addition, Father Brown's stories, though often involving the humiliation of some prideful character that jumps to conclusions about the villain's identity, are not intended to laud Father Brown's intellectual superiority. In Symons's *Bloody Murder,* he writes that Poe "established the convention by which the brilliant intelligence of the detective is made to shine more brightly through the comparative obtuseness of his friend who tells the story" (38). While Poe makes Dupin seem more intelligent through the surprised exclamations and wonderings of the narrator, Father Brown's impersonal narrator is much less biased and allows the priest's activities to exist independently of interpretation through a less immediate and more detached tone. In addition, Father Brown does not seek to defeat his opponent as Dupin does. Gruesser mentions in his article "a moment of total victory" in which Dupin can savor his superiority over his opponents (12). In "The Murderer of the Rue Morgue," he outwits the police prefect and in "The Purloined Letter" he bests the highly intelligent criminal he has been asked to defeat. In each of these two stories, there comes a moment when Dupin has displayed his intellect and the reader realizes that the other man has been proved inferior. While Father Brown does best criminals and police officers, he never intends to compete, and Chesterton never allows him to accept the attention. When in "The Blue Cross," Valentin and Flambeau bow to Father Brown's superior intellect, Father Brown merely "[blinks] about for his umbrella" (16), seemingly ignorant of his own victory. Even when Father Brown seemingly rises from the dead in "The Resurrection of Father Brown" elevating his own reputation to unfathomable heights, he abhors the attention and proves that it is a hoax someone has imposed upon him (353-357). Father

Brown's goal is to prevent the crime and to help the victim and the criminal. Thus, while all of these aspects of Poe's writing serve to exalt Dupin prowess in a battle of wits, Chesterton's stories provide for exploration of far different themes.

Though Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins are not necessarily part of the cannon of detective fiction, they do serve as a bridge from Poe to Doyle. Though Poe and Doyle are the two most influential figures in detective fiction, Chesterton was influenced by the writings of the other two who contributed somewhat to the genre. Not only was Chesterton an avid reader and critic of Dickens's work, but Dickens may have influenced the creation of Father Brown with his own character, Inspector Bucket. Bucket, from *Bleak House*, published in serial from 1852-1853, is famous for being one of the first fictional detectives in literary history. Symons describes him in *Bloody Murder*:

> [H]e is on familiar terms with lawbreakers, has an encyclopedic knowledge of their habits, and is greatly respected by them . . . He is sympathetic to the poor, and capable of genially offering to fit a second pair of handcuffs on to an arrested man's wrists in case the first pair is uncomfortable. Bucket engages in no spectacular feats of detection, but is shown as a shrewd and sympathetic man. (47)

Inspector Bucket is different from Father Brown—one is a detective primarily and one is a priest primarily—but much of the description in the above paragraph matches Father Brown closely. In fact, the two detectives serve similar purposes of showing empathy to the suffering; in Inspector Bucket's first appearance in *Bleak House,* Dickens uses him to showcase the plight of a poor woman who regrets her son being alive because it means he will have to grow up in poverty and with an alcoholic, abusive father (279-280). Chesterton, likewise, highlights the plight of the

lower classes several times in the Father Brown stories, notably in “The Queer Feet” when he explores the relationship between gentlemen and waiters. In addition, Dickens is also known for writing one of the earliest detective stories in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood,* which he left unfinished at his death in 1879. This novel likely influenced Chesterton as it was he who wrote the introduction for an edition published in 1915 and who, in 1914, served as the judge for a mock trial for one of the characters in an attempt to discover the ending of the book. While Inspector Bucket may or may not have influenced Father Brown’s character directly, the two certainly have characteristics in common and through being avidly read and studied, Dickens influences Chesterton on many other levels at least.

Collins likely did not influence Chesterton’s creation of Father Brown heavily but Chesterton did read Collins’s work and inherited the detective fiction writer legacy from Collins through Doyle. Chesterton in *The Victorian Age in Literature* says of Collins’s *The Moonstone* writes that it “is probably the best detective tale in the world” (132). Collins wrote detective fiction (or sensation novels as they were called then) from 1854-1880 and was close friends with Dickens, but while the latter only dabbled in detective fiction, Collins was the premiere detective storywriter between Poe and Doyle’s times. Ashley describes Collins’s contributions to detective fiction:

> Collins was not trying to write detective fiction; he was not aware that such a genre existed and certainly did not realize that he was pioneering in the field. He was merely writing standard mid-Victorian melodrama and in his attempts to mystify and thrill his readers happened to employ many situations and devices which have since become the detective story writer's stock in trade. (60)

While he was inspired by Poe’s detective fiction, a deduction in Ashley’s article based on

similarities between particular stories of theirs (49, 53), Collins seems to have influenced the detective fiction genre without direct intent to do so. Indeed, his record of accomplishments exceeds that of many of his more intentional peers: according to Ashley, Collins's pioneering "firsts" in detective fiction include "the first dog detective, the first lady detective, the first application of epistolary narrative to detective fiction, the first humorous detective story, the first *British* detective story, and the first full-length detective novel in English" (60), suggesting what writers who later used these ideas owe him.

Wilkie Collins likely influenced Chesterton's work; in fact, Collins's Sergeant Cuff does share some important characteristics with Father Brown. As for Chesterton's knowledge of Collins's detective stories, not only does he praise *The Moonstone* but Father Brown also mentions him in "The Honour of Israel Gow," in inviting another character to "invent what Wilkie Collins' tragedy you like" after looking at what may be a crime scene (77). While Father Brown's reference may not be complimentary, it points further to Chesterton's familiarity with Collins's work. Of course, Sergeant Cuff may have directly influenced Father Brown in that both are eccentric and combine sympathy with astute reasoning powers. Supporting this idea, Sergeant Cuff—the detective of the story—is almost a secondary character in literary history's first detective novel similar to the way that Father Brown often shows up late to his own stories or is treated as a minor character for parts of his stories. Collins's influence, indirect though it is, is evident in the Father Brown stories.

Of all detective fiction writers, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is the most successful and the most important to a proper understanding of the history of the genre, providing a well-established model for Chesterton to rebel against. Chesterton says, "[T]he fact remains that Mr. Conan Doyle's hero is probably the only literary creation since the creations of Dickens which

has really passed into the life and language of the people, and become a being like John Bull or Father Christmas" ("Sherlock Holmes"). Not only has Sherlock Holmes flourished as a character on the page, but he has had several strong representations in television, including *Sherlock Holmes,* starting in 1984 with Jeremy Brett, and contemporary shows like *Sherlock* and *Elementary.* Most impressive perhaps is his name's passage into common slang: Busted Hyman, a user on *Urban Dictionary,* a website dedicated to allowing users to affirm or deny proposed definitions of popular slang words, gives for "Sherlock" the possible (and well-acclaimed by website viewers) definition, "A derogatory name . . . given to someone who makes a revelation or discovery which he thinks is a big deal, but which is common knowledge or very obvious" (n. pag.). Holmes's emergence in popular slang is a clue to his literary importance. In addition, Holmes's popular and chronological precedence over Father Brown necessitate that Holmes be studied when considering how Father Brown rethinks the detective genre. Emphasizing the importance of considering Holmes in conjunction with Father Brown, Gregory Dowling says in "G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown Stories: the Debt to Sherlock Holmes" that "[n]o fictional detective provides a more obvious contrast to the figure of Sherlock Holmes than G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown" (81). Some of the personal appearances that Dowling is referring to symbolize this difference: Holmes's thinness, aquiline face, and height are in stark contrast to Father Brown's fatness, soft face, and shortness. Father Brown's predecessor Sherlock Holmes provides a well-defined detective model to rebel against.

Sherlock Holmes showed readers and writers the possibilities for detective fiction and certainly influenced Chesterton, though much of what influenced Chesterton led him to rebel against the archetype Holmes had copied and strengthened. Holmes serves as an ideal detective who much of detective fiction has attempted to imitate—cold, calculating, fiercely intelligent,

and extremely observant, in the same vein as Poe's Dupin. Watson explains Holmes in "A Scandal in Bohemia": "[a]ll emotions, and [romantic love] particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen . . ." (161). For Holmes, reason and logic are all that can exist if he is to make sense of the world in which he struggles against crime. At the beginning of *A Study in Scarlet,* Watson's friend Stamford attempts to describe Holmes and in doing so sums up his eccentricities well: "Holmes is a little too scientific for my tastes—it approaches to cold-bloodedness . . . He appears to have a passion for definite and exact knowledge" (17). In fact, Stamford understates the extent of Holmes's mania. Within minutes of having met Watson, Holmes has deduced Watson's recent time in Afghanistan as a soldier, pronounced his own discovery of a blood-discovering chemical, and given a monologue on criminal cases (18). These three examples may well be the best summation of the defining traits Sherlock Holmes's lent to detective fiction—a proclivity for detection, a keen intelligence, and a passion for defeating evil (all three characteristics that Father Brown inherits).

Sherlock Holmes's style and personality derive heavily from Poe's Dupin as both detectives follow the same fictional archetype. Concerning Holmes's relationship to Dupin, in *The Detective, the Doctor, and Arthur Conan Doyle,* Martin Booth describes their similarities:

> Both . . . have admiring sidekicks who narrate the stories, both are composed, self-centered eccentrics with private incomes freeing them from workaday labours and cares, and both live almost hermit-like solitary lives. They each have the ability to divine the thoughts of others and solve crimes by applying their not inconsiderable intellects and powers of logical deduction and observation. (105)

In creating Holmes, Doyle perpetuated Poe's ratiocinative and evidence-based model of

detection, affirming the influence that Poe had had on him. By virtue of Dupin's originality and Holmes's popularity, the model for what a literary detective should be was largely set. Poe initiated the genre and character-type, and Doyle refined it several years later.

Of course, what Sherlock Holmes adds to the detective genre is far more considerable than what he owes the preexisting standards in Poe or any other early writer in the genre, and Chesterton certainly takes advantage of much of what Holmes gives or improves. Chesterton's statement that Sherlock Holmes has "passed into the life and language of the people" ("Sherlock Holmes") best attests Holmes's achievement that Dupin never accomplished. But Booth lists the difference between the two more precisely: "[A]s a literary character, Dupin does not evolve but Sherlock Holmes does. Fictional he may be, but Sherlock Holmes is a living, almost tangible, character with real failings and definable traits with well-developed self-assurance and a mien of infallibility that is not only captivating but also realistically likeable" (105). Because Sherlock Holmes became so popular, traits of a fictional detective that Doyle either borrowed or invented became commonplace throughout all of detective fiction. Holmes has his Dr. Watson just as Agatha Christie's Poirot has his Hastings and Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey has his Bunter. Poirot is logical and deductive as Holmes is and Lord Peter is definably observant as Holmes. And not even Father Brown can escape from the influence of Sherlock Holmes: he too has a Watson at times in Flambeau, and he too is logical, deductive, and observant. The differences between the Sherlock Holmes and Father Brown stories, however, still are great. So typical of detective fiction in genre are the Sherlock Holmes stories that those differences can often serve to exemplify exactly how Chesterton is revolting against accepted detective fiction with his Father Brown stories.

Chesterton, Detective Fiction, and Father Brown

Whenever Chesterton writes, he nearly always does so with an ideological agenda in mind, always endeavoring to teach or convince his audience of something; because of its popularity and undiscovered potential, detective fiction provided a strong opportunity for him to do so while still speaking to a broad audience. Concerning his opinions of the form of the genre, Chesterton's known essays (from 1901-1930) on the topic of detective fiction range from broad principles to specific advice for detective writers. And throughout his essays, one notes his constant advocacy of detective fiction as a legitimate art form deserving serious attention for its popularity and the nature of its form. In "A Defence of Detective Stories," he says, "Not only is a detective story a perfectly legitimate form of art, but it has a certain definite and real advantages as an agent of the public weal" (n. pag.). Then, in "Detectives and Detective Fiction," he writes, "Such a story [as a detective story] slips easily on and off the mind; it has no projecting sticks or straws of intelligence to catch anywhere on the memory. Hence, as I say, it becomes a thing of beauty and a joy for ever" (52). According to Chesterton, readers love detective fiction because it is easy to read and easy to re-read. It is entertainment, an entertainment that he could experiment with and attach lessons to without interfering with the central element of fun.

In his essays that discuss and explore what makes good detective stories and as demonstrated in the Father Brown stories, Chesterton argues that an important principle of good detective fiction is that, as the story progresses, the mystery should become less and the readers should become enlightened—that the moment of enlightenment is the climax of the story. In 1920, Chesterton would write in "Errors about Detective Stories" that "[t]he true object of an intelligent detective story is not to baffle the reader, but to enlighten the reader; but to enlighten him in such a manner that each successive portion of the truth comes as a surprise" (n. pag.). Compounding mystery upon mystery was unacceptable for Chesterton; in his Father Brown

stories rarely, if ever, does the detective priest do anything but solve the mystery at hand. Father Brown may indulge in confusing paradox at times or the reader may be distracted by something he says off-handedly but the climactic moment of the Father Brown stories are the solutions—not the problems. According to Chesterton's study of and writing of successful detective stories, the point of the stories is not to revel in secrecy or rejoice in problems but to bring about the moment of illumination—to solve the mystery.

A second principle that Chesterton espouses in his essays on detective fiction is the idea that the story should revolve around a simple fact and should end with a simple explanation easy for readers to grasp. In "How to Write a Detective Story," Chesterton claims that the "second great principle is that the soul of detective fiction is not complexity but simplicity. The secret may appear complex, but it must be simple . . . The writer is there to explain the mystery; but he ought not to be needed to explain the explanation" (n. pag.). For Chesterton, the solution to a good story revolves around a simple answer. Thus, in Father Brown's adventure of "The Invisible Man," the solution is procured when Father Brown realizes that when people say, "No one has passed here," they do not count postmen as "someone." In "The Queer Feet," Father Brown solves the crime by realizing that waiters and gentlemen walk differently. In both cases, the simplicity of the case is in that to understand the mystery one must realize only a small part of human nature. Chesterton's mysteries generally do revolve around simple solutions like these; once Father Brown explains the riddle, the reader realizes that discovering it could not have been simpler.

Thirdly, Chesterton uses detective fiction because of its supernatural and philosophical implications: in his essays, he writes of detective fiction as a romance of modern cities and traditional morality. In "A Defence of Detective Stories," he writes that detective fiction is

valuable because in it is expressed “some sense of the poetry of modern life.” He compares the detective to “a prince in a tale of elfland” and claims that each brick in the cityscape has a message because it has been intentionally placed by human hands (n. pag.). Thus, just as fairytales bring readers to new truths or morals, one can see detective fiction as that same search for truth but with a new background, the villain always hampering the cause of justice. The detective leads readers in the daring search for justice, with the very environment attempting to help or hamper this goal by means of revealing or distracting clues. Chesterton notices and celebrates this possibility in detective fiction, taking advantage of its metaphysical possibilities in his Father Brown stories.

In addition to this romance, Chesterton brings up one of his most important themes in his discussion of detective fiction: the idea of law and order as a rebellion against the chaos, which the world naturally slips into. Chesterton writes in “A Defence of Detective Stories,” “While it is the constant tendency of the Old Adam to rebel against so universal and automatic a thing as civilization, to preach departure and rebellion, the romance of police activity keeps in some sense before the mind the fact that civilization itself is the most sensational of departures and the most romantic of rebellions” (n. pag.). For Chesterton, the detective story is a tribute to man’s struggle for order in the world—a struggle to make meaning out of chaos and to discover the truth. As a detective, Father Brown (or any detective) accepts this restoring virtue into his own nature by explaining mysterious crimes that others cannot understand. This theme of the romanticizing of civilization and order appears often both literally and implicitly in his Father Brown stories but with the added complexity that Father Brown does not operate for the sake of enforcing human law but for the sake of reforming criminals. Like other detectives, Father Brown understands the chaos in the world but unlike those other characters he leaves enforcement to either the regular

police force or to God.

Chesterton realized that something—some aspect, some idea, or some truth—was absent from the detectives that preceded him and attempted to rectify this in his Father Brown. In his *Autobiography,* he describes Father Brown as "a Suffolk dumping from East Anglia" for whom "I did take some of his inner intellectual qualities from my friend, Father John O'Connor of Bradford" (319). Chesterton explains the significance of this by relating a story about how Father O'Connor had been telling him about certain unique evils in the world, leaving Chesterton much impressed by the priest's knowledge of evil. Later, when they both were talking with two Cambridge undergraduates about other topics, Father O'Connor left the room for a moment, only for the boys to suggest that Father O'Connor was sheltered and should be less afraid of knowledge of the real world (322-323). This situation was one of Chesterton's principle inspirations for Father Brown who would be unique for bring a priest who knew more about crime than most criminals. Chesterton published his first Father Brown story in 1910 as "Valentin Follows a Curious Trail" in *The Saturday Evening Post.* Its British publication followed in the same year in *The Story-Teller* magazine as "The Blue Cross" which name it retains. Flowing easily from Chesterton's enthusiastic pen, his first Father Brown collection *The Innocence of Father Brown* was published in 1911.

Two basic premises of Father Brown's character are found in Chesterton's emphases on the importance of believability and philosophy. In "Detectives and Detective Fiction," Chesterton writes about his disagreement with the basic assumptions inherent in Sherlock Holmes:

> Sherlock Holmes could only exist in fiction; he is too logical for real life. In real life he would have *guessed* half his facts a long time before he had deduced them

> . . . It cannot be too constantly or too emphatically stated that the whole of practical human life, the whole of business, in its most sharp and severe sense, is run on spiritual atmospheres and nameless, impalpable emotions. (54)

Chesterton here would approve of characters who operate more believably and realistically. To counter general detective fiction, Chesterton has Father Brown rely far more heavily on intuition than Sherlock Holmes does. Father Brown sometimes starts by looking at hard evidence in his attempt to find the villain but more often begins with a vague feeling that something is wrong about a person or place and proceeds with his investigation from there. And often this bad feeling that Father Brown gets about other characters stems from their bad philosophy or theology. In "The Blue Cross," Father Brown unmasks a thief disguised as a priest, explaining his discovery by saying, "You attacked reason . . . It's bad theology" (15); Father Brown's experience as a priest is what so often enables him to see the truth and catch the villain. In addition, anywhere that Chesterton can, he seems ready to give passionate miniature essays through Father Brown, making philosophy, for the priest, a tool not only for detection but also for his readers' education. However, while intuition and philosophy summarize immediate changes to the genre's central character, Chesterton's revolution against detective fiction norms merely begins with those.

In restructuring the genre, Chesterton's first important, large-scale subversion of detective fiction is found in how simply solving impossible problems is not good enough for him and Father Brown: often for Chesterton's stories to be successful, Father Brown has to not only conquer the impossible, but he has to understand the impossible to defeat his criminals. In contrast to Father Brown, in *The Hound of the Baskervilles,* Holmes is confronted with a ghostly hellhound terrorizing Baskerville Hall. Though, at first, the beast seems to be a supernatural

apparition or curse—a seeming impossible paradox to readers, Holmes, and Doyle himself—Holmes is eventually able to solve the case by revealing the creature to be a purely natural dog whose hell-like glow is accomplished with phosphorous. Thus, Holmes is able to reduce an impossible event to a purely logical explanation. Father Brown, too, is often confronted by similarly impossible events but, unlike Holmes, he often accepts the paradoxes and answers them with other paradoxes. In "The Invisible Man," Father Brown is faced with a host of witnesses swearing that no one has passed by them when in fact someone must have done so to have committed the murder. Father Brown accepts that they are telling the truth as best they can but still believes that someone has passed. He claims a passing postman to be the solution to his investigation by saying, "Nobody ever notices postmen somehow . . . yet they have passions like other men" (73). Through the seeming impossibility of a man being "invisible," Father Brown solves the earlier "impossible" problem. Thus, Father Brown, unlike Holmes and other detectives, catches his man, not by reducing paradox to a negation of an earlier term, but by embracing the concept of paradox. Father Brown's solution is a paradox—that naturally visible men can be invisible—while Holmes's solution is not—that a villain is attempting to deceive the detective and other characters (a very ordinary thing for villains to attempt). Unlike Sherlock Holmes, Father Brown solves paradoxes by understanding paradoxes.

Secondly, detective fiction's characters often-repetitive secondary characters borrowed from past stories become with Chesterton a means for making social, philosophical, or theological arguments to his audience. In "Murder and Manners: The Formal Detective Novel," George Grella discusses typical stock secondary characters in detective stories about upper class characters, saying that "[w]ithin a limited range they comprise an English microcosm" (39). While Chesterton's stories do not explicitly follow Grella's pattern, he does utilize some of the

same stock characters such as a "representative of the squirearchy, one professional man—commonly a doctor, but sometimes a lawyer, professor, or schoolmaster—a cleancut young sporting type, and a military man (never below the rank of major), usually a veteran of colonial service" (39). Grella goes on to explain how these characters are often viewed as "merely stereotyped, cardboard constructions, serving the contrivances of a highly artificial method" (40). Detective authors often allow these characters exist as a necessity. They fail to take full advantage of their potential for giving meaningful messages to readers.

However, Chesterton effects a method for making these characters into useful communicants of ideas and philosophical proposals. From under-used secondary characters, he creates ideologically contrasted characters that confront each other in heated conflicts, which often only Father Brown's balanced Christianity is able to understand and bring to resolution. For example, in "The Secret Garden," Aristide Valentin, a scientific rationalist, argues with and eventually murders Julius Brayne, a spiritualist millionaire who habitually experiments with mystical religions. These two argue; Valentin is angry that Brayne may donate money to the Catholic church, and he eventually murders Brayne. When the other characters cannot understand what has happened between these two, the rationalist and the spiritualist, Father Brown must solve the mystery. Through his solving it, Chesterton creates a sub-narrative in which stock characters are symbolic of philosophies and have a more didactic purpose. The fighting characters are symbolic of the ideologies they adhere to, and between these warring factions, Chesterton often inserts a balanced arbiter—Father Brown representing the Catholic Church—who, blending rational abilities and spiritual faith, is able to resolve the mystery and restore justice and equilibrium. Chesterton uses this story to argue that only the Christian faith brings balance to the argument between spiritualism and rationalism, and he uses stock

characters in other stories to represent and comment on other arguments that he saw in his Edwardian society. Using binary relationships and his own unique array of ideological stock characters, Chesterton explores the detective genre's underdeveloped potential for introducing popular readers to cultural and intellectual conflicts.

Finally and most importantly, Father Brown is unique to his genre because he views criminals differently than most detectives do. To him, criminals are fellow human beings who must be understood; when Father Brown understands the criminals, not only can he defeat them but he can also help them. Father Brown was the first detective ever also to be a priest, which helps him to see crimes and criminals far differently than Doyle's Holmes or Poe's Dupin. Where the two others see crimes and criminals as puzzles and puzzlers to be solved and outwitted, encouraging the reader to do likewise, Father Brown sees criminals sympathetically—begetting a new brand of intuitive empathetic detective fiction. His methods allow him to look inside criminals and to think like them. In "The Secret of Father Brown," Father Brown explains his methods: "[I]t was I who killed all those people." When his listener does not understand his meaning, Father Brown continues his explanation, "I had thought out exactly how a thing like that could be done, and in what style or state of mind a man could really do it. And when I was quite sure that I felt exactly like the murderer myself, of course I knew who he was." He continues later, "I mean that I thought and thought about how a man might come to be like that, until I realised that I really *was* like that, in everything except actual final consent to the action" (497). Father Brown always "gets his man" but he often does it by "becoming" that man, realizing that he is like the criminal and then working backwards from there to understand how that person committed the crime. Chesterton's empathetic intuitive detective makes defeating the criminal secondary and thus, while fulfilling all of the required forms of the detective story,

Chesterton is able to challenge it on the most basic level by transforming it into an example of forgiveness and mercy instead of society's strict justice. He has a detective and he has a criminal, but he argues that they are not as unlike as the reader suspects; this gives him opportunities for new and previously unknown themes in the detective fiction genre.

A study of the Father Brown stories is merited because Chesterton, in rebelling against established forms of detective fiction, is arguing against a more popularly supported, but perhaps less well thought through argument. Traditional detective fiction is based on ratiocinative detectives who understand the world and criminals through a materialist lens. Father Brown, though, accepts the presence of the spiritual in his investigations. Apart from their differing physical appearances (Holmes's aquiline leanness and Father Brown's short fatness), there is ample reason for Dowling to say, "No fictional detective provides a more obvious contrast to the figure of Sherlock Holmes than G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown" (81): no fictional detective is more inherently opposed to what Sherlock Holmes stands for. Holmes believes in no spiritual world, or, at least, does not accept consideration of it into his investigations; he sees only evidence and hears only witnesses. Father Brown, on the other hand, also has exceptional skills, counted as one of the "supermen detectives" by Symons in *Bloody Murder* (77), but he looks first for the spiritual and the human in his cases. Father Brown, while still following in Sherlock Holmes's tradition, is integrally different. In his essay "Chesterton and Father Brown: Demystification and Deconstruction," Thomas Woodman agrees, saying that "Sherlock Holmes is both the prototype of Father Brown and the great antitype . . ." (233). While Father Brown follows Holmes's tradition of employing logic to act as a detective, he goes beyond Holmes's evidence-based rationalism to incorporate the spiritual into his detection.

Chesterton's innovations within the detective fiction genre not only expand the limits of

the genre, but they also make use of resources that the rest of the genre ignores so that Chesterton can be openly didactic with Christian messages while still being entertaining. His use of paradox enables him to see other characters' spiritual assumptions and to understand cases in a larger context; while Father Brown does not always present a simple answer, sometimes his simple answers represent much deeper meaning. In addition, Chesterton's character dichotomies enable him to use his knowledge of the spiritual realm to engage in theological and philosophical arguments while still allowing him to tell interesting stories. And finally, the rebellious Father Brown changes the very meaning of detective fiction. Not only does Father Brown identify criminals, but, based on a spiritual Christian philosophy, he identifies *with* them. Father Brown helps to redeem criminals into being seen as humans again—people who need to be understood and not simply expelled. Using these challenges against accepted detective fiction mores, Chesterton is able to teach and to entertain, making Father Brown a methodical attack on traditional detective fiction.

Chapter 2: Paradox as a Mode of Meaning

Of all forms of literature, detective fiction deals most closely with the concept of paradox, a Chesterton trademark. In these stories, the reader experiences impossible situations in which a murder, theft, or other crime has been committed but no one could have committed it or in which a villain appears to have vanished into thin air. These conundrums are always explained by the end of the story, but, while they last, they are self-contradictory—full of seemingly irreconcilable ideas. In *Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians,* Alison Milbank describes paradox as something that "puts contradictions together" and that "leads to a moment of recognition beyond the contradictions in which a truth becomes manifest" (88). As she suggests, the original confusion is not the desired result of paradox or of the detective story; what readers, writers, and fictional detectives look for is the solution—the peaceful resolution of the seeming problem. Chesterton writes in "Errors about Detective Stories," "The true object of an intelligent detective story is not to baffle the reader, but to enlighten the reader; but to enlighten him in such a manner that each successive portion of the truth comes as a surprise" (n. pag.). The very nature of the paradox is that of a surprise, a surprise that becomes manifest when the truth is revealed and the apparently opposing statements are explained and harmonized. Chesterton stresses the importance of this experience in another of his essays, "How to Write a Detective Story": "The first and fundamental principle is that the aim of a mystery story, as of every other story and every other mystery, is not darkness but light. The story is written for the moment when the reader does understand, not merely for the many preliminary moments when he does not understand" (n. pag.). Indeed, the paradox is essential to many detective stories—the idea that a crime has been committed and that no one could have done it—but its power is most keenly felt when the detective finds the answer and catches the criminal.

Chesterton, as many of his readers either acclaim or complain, keenly knows the beauty and practicality of paradox as a literary device; for him, the concept is an important idea not only as a way to present meaning but also as a novel expression of the structure of the universe. In *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis,* John Coates refers to Chesterton's literary style "as an attempt to make the reader sit up, to see the familiar afresh" (30). And in "G. K. Chesterton's 'Father Brown' Stories," W. W. Robson claims that Chesterton was obsessed with a paradox (n. pag.), an opinion that has become a byword in Chesterton discussions. The device is often a primary aspect of whatever he writes, appearing throughout his poems, short stories, novels, essays, and more. In surveying his purposes for paradox, Milbank suggests that Chesterton uses it out of a desire to "disturb perception" (57). In his detective stories, he wants to shock his audience out of their tired complacency—to see old truth in a new way. But, beyond that, he also is willing to use seeming-contradiction because he sees it as a consistent pattern in his religious understanding of the world. In his *Autobiography*, he writes about how he observes paradoxes in the universe and attempts to explain them: "I began to examine more exactly the general Christian theology which many execrated and few examined. I soon found that it did in fact correspond to many of these experience of life; that even its paradoxes corresponded to the paradoxes of life" (329). He describes this discovery and lists many examples of this more thoroughly in *Orthodoxy.* Examples of them are the ideas that "[m]ysticism keeps men sane" (23) or that "[r]eason itself is a matter of faith" (28). On a surface level, neither of these ideas seems to actually make sense. However, within his Christian worldview, Chesterton finds truth in them, and they are only two examples of the many paradoxes that he uses in his writing to understand the Christian faith.

And more than any other early detective fiction writer, Chesterton utilizes paradox in his

Father Brown stories as a device to create meaning for his readers. Chesterton says that "it is not only necessary to hide a secret, it is also necessary to have a secret; and to have a secret worth hiding" ("How to Write a Detective Story"), and in detective fiction this having, hiding, and revealing of a good secret is especially important—the entire plot of each story depends on the successful execution of these functions. But Chesterton's use of this device in his detective stories expands to accomplish more than simply being a mystery the detective must solve; it progresses the meanings of entire stories, often Christian meanings. Thomas Woodman, in "Chesterton and Father Brown: Demystification and Deconstruction," writes, "Of course Chesterton is notorious for his addiction to paradox. Yet the paradoxes described here go far deeper than the purely verbal level. What is most distinctive about these stories is the way that Chesterton uses, expands, tests and breaks the genre to demonstrate explicit radical paradoxes about crime, sin, forgiveness and redemption" (236). Because he is able to see paradox not as a way to add confusion, but as a means to deeper meaning, Chesterton is able to use it to expose truth. In his Father Brown stories, he challenges traditional detective fiction standards by repurposing this device to reveal truth rather than to conceal it; to this effect, he uses it as a way to solve mysteries, as a rhetorical device that progresses the plot, and as a revealer of metaphysical truth.

Solution Revealing Paradox

In "The Invisible Man" and "The Wrong Shape," Chesterton challenges paradox-solving detection styles by adhering to and perfecting Edgar Allan Poe's original method of using a contradictory notion as a means to understand other inconsistencies in detective stories. Julian Symons, in *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel: A History,* mentions that in writing "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Poe creates the first locked-room mystery—

the classic detective fiction paradox (36). In this story, two characters have been murdered in a room no one else could have entered. The case is solved when the reader and C. Auguste Dupin, the detective, expand their ideas to realize that “no one” does not refer to animals—in this case, an orangutan. But “The Purloined Letter” is even more innovative on Poe’s part and more influential for Chesterton. In it, Poe has Dupin solve a seemingly impossible case by his knowledge of a paradox. Symons writes that “The Purloined Letter” “was the prototype of detective novels and short stories based on the idea that the most apparently unlikely solution is the correct one . . .” (37). Chesterton will use and reuse this model for detection many times in his Father Brown stories, most notably in “The Invisible Man” in his first collection. In this story, he shows the influence that Poe had on him while also showing how he has exceeded his teacher in making that paradox serve his own didactic purpose.

Poe, in “The Purloined Letter,” sets an example of how a detective story’s central paradox can be solved by another paradox. In this story, the Minister D— has stolen a document that could lead to someone else’s future being compromised. The Paris police confirm that “[t]he present peculiar condition of affairs at court, and especially of those intrigues in which D— is known to be involved, would render the instant availability of the document—its susceptibility of being produced at a moment's notice—a point of nearly equal importance with its possession” (370-371). Thus, the document must either be on D—’s person or at his home. However, the police have looked for it extremely thoroughly, even waylaying D—, and cannot find it. When Dupin attempts to solve the case for “Monsieur G—, the Prefect of the Parisian police” (368), he finds the document by looking for letters that least look like the described papers. He explains his search by describing how he concluded which letter happened to be the one that he was looking for:

> But, then, the *radicalness* of these differences, which was excessive; the dirt; the soiled and torn condition of the paper, so inconsistent with the true methodical habits of D—, and so suggestive of a design to delude the beholder into an idea of the worthlessness of the document; these things, together with the hyperobtrusive situation of this document, full in the view of every visiter, and thus exactly in accordance with the conclusions to which I had previously arrived; these things, I say, were strongly corroborative of suspicion, in one who came with the intention to suspect. (380)

Having firmly decided on the least likely option, Dupin steals the letter, finding it to be the one he was searching for. John Gruesser, in "Never Bet the Detective (or His Creator) Your Head: Character Rivalry, Authorial Sleight of Hand, and Generic Fluidity in Detective Fiction," explains, "Poe, too, comes out victorious, not only successfully manipulating readers but topping himself in the concluding installment of the series. He devises one of his most remarkable stratagems: hiding the solution out in the open" (16). The first paradox in this story is the fact that the letter the police are looking for must be hidden at D--'s home, but it is not there. The letter has to exist, but seems to not exist where it must be in this dimension at all—an illogicality. Dupin's solution is a confirmation of both statements but a contradiction itself. The letter does exist and cannot be found in the ordinary way of searching; only someone who is not looking for the letter can find it.

Chesterton's "The Invisible Man" is the best example of a Father Brown story analogous to "The Purloined Letter," in that it too solves a paradox with a paradox, though even more explicitly. In "The Invisible Man," a supposedly invisible person, despite strong surveillance, escapes after leaving death threats for another character and then killing him. In the story, John

Turnbull Angus charges four men to guard Isidore Smythe's house from the murderer, but despite their assurances that no one has passed by them, Smythe is shortly thereafter killed (69-70). Father Brown solves the murder by agreeing with others that the murderer is actually invisible: "When those four quite honest men said that no man had gone into the Mansions, they did not really mean that *no man* had gone into them. They meant no man whom they could suspect of being your man. A man did go into the house, and did come out of it, but they never noticed him" (72). He responds to the original scientifically paradoxical idea of an invisible murderer with the more psychological paradox of what he calls a "mentally invisible man"—someone that people do not notice or necessarily care about, a postman (72). Milbank observes that "[t]he paradox of the invisible man is solved appropriately by a priest, whose role is to mediate between humanity and God" (92) and Walter Reinsdorf in "The Perception of Father Brown," says that "Father Brown's transcendental vision permits him to associate things into a context of meaning" (272). Father Brown's role as a priest helps him to see the invisible man when others cannot. Because Father Brown is a Christian, he is able to understand the importance of postmen alongside the importance of anyone else. And because he understands how other people think, he is able to simultaneously understand that others are not seeing the postman while he is able to see the postman himself. Reinsdorf explains Father Brown's function as a mystic: "A mystic does not evade, or obscure reality; a mystic reveals physical reality, itself frequently deceptive, because he or she sees more, not less of it" (268). Because Father Brown has the connection to the spiritual, he better sees the physical, making him an even more effective detective when he must find the least likely solutions.

Drawing on "The Purloined Letter" as a model or archetype, Chesterton demonstrates the centrality of paradox in his Catholic understanding of the universe. By having Father Brown

demonstrate his wisdom by his knowledge of paradox, Chesterton is arguing that seeming incongruity is central to the world's operations. And because Father Brown is a Catholic priest, the argument easily expands to apply to a Christian understanding of the world. Reinsdorf says, "Father Brown's solutions depend on a supernatural context which enables him to see more, not less. The facts of the crime are similar to the dissociated facts of material reality, floating around until anchored in a context" (268). Because Father Brown can place observable facts in that "supernatural context," he can better understand the crime. When one of the crimes he solves seems unsolvable or paradoxical, Father Brown considers the case in light of his faith and is more likely to be able to come to a conclusion.

Plot Progressing Paradox

True to his general use of rhetorical paradox in his other writings, Chesterton progresses the plots of his Father Brown stories by embedding contradictory statements into Father Brown's conversations with other characters. This allows Father to emphasize key moments of revelation by accentuating them with seemingly incongruent statements that cause characters and readers to pause to discover the meaning of the statement. Often a character will believe a mistaken idea (often as a solution to a case), and Father Brown will use a paradox to explain that the idea is wrong. This gives meaning to both the error and the solution—showing the wrongness and rightness in contrast while helping to show what greater truth they reveal. This method is easily analogous to Chesterton's use of paradoxes in *Orthodoxy* where he says things like, "The modern world is not evil; in some ways the modern world is far too good. It is full of wild and wasted virtues" (25). In *Orthodoxy* and his other non-fiction works, Chesterton punctuates his arguments and ideas with absurd statements that are calculated to shock his audience into awareness of truth until they can understand and resolve the tension in such a statement.

Milbank, in a passage comparing paradox to the grotesque, explains that the former "allows us to understand what we thought was straightforward . . . as complex or different from what we originally assumed, and yet illumined . . ." (88). The paradoxes that Father Brown quietly responds with often help to move the plot forward—not necessarily because characters understand them—but because those characters raise questions about what Father Brown means, often involving those characters' propelling the explanation by asking him to explain and putting him in the position of a teacher, from which he can explain the crime to his audience. In *Paradox in Chesterton,* Hugh Kenner explains how Chesterton uses paradox not only in the Father Brown stories, but also in all of his literature:

> The special rhetorical purpose of Chesterton is to overcome the mental inertia of human beings, which mental inertia is constantly landing them in the strange predicament of both seeing a thing and not seeing it. When people's perceptions are in this condition, they must, in the strictest sense of the words, be made to renew their acquaintance with things. Now a man's acquaintance with truth is likely to be renewed by the violent shock of being told a thundering and obvious lie. (43)

In the same way that Chesterton's oxymora in works like *Orthodoxy* are meant to directly shock his audience, Father Brown too must awaken his audience to the idea that the truth may be different or more profound than it thinks.

Chesterton uses paradox in *The Innocence of Father Brown* as an especially strong accent in the story "The Three Tools of Death." In this story, Chesterton makes use of an especially confusing situation to use impossibilities to progress the character's investigation of and discussion of the death of Sir Aaron Armstrong. Near the beginning of the story, Chesterton

claims that Sir Aaron's "wide white beard, cherubic face, and sparkling spectacles" make it "hard to believe" that he "had ever been anything so morbid as either a dram-drinker or a Calvinist" (157). Chesterton is joking here, and part of it is the paradox that dram drinking is not often or easily associated with morbidity; it is much more easily associated with festivity or with carousing. In addition, calling Calvinism morbid may be less paradoxical, but perhaps not for a Calvinist. In using this contradiction to propel his description, Chesterton is attempting to draw his audience into considering in what way these two things could be considered "morbid" in the character of Sir Aaron, foreshadowing what will happen eventually. Later, Father Brown claims, "If ever I murdered somebody . . . I dare say it might be an Optimist" (160). Here, Chesterton attempts to overcome natural repulsion at the idea of killing someone who is happy. Of course, Father Brown finds later that Sir Aaron was not quite as happy as he lets on, but, in the meantime, claiming a desire to kill an optimist helps the audience to understand that there may be reasons to want to do so. Father Brown also deepens the deductive discussion about how Sir Aaron was killed by guessing that "[p]erhaps the weapon was too big to be noticed . . ." (161). Because the characters at that moment could only conceive of what would normally be called weapons—rope, knives, or guns or example—Father Brown's use of a startling paradox helps them to widen their perceived possibilities and helps the reader to understand that Sir Aaron may have fallen to his death. Once the characters have found several different "normal" weapons at the scene of Sir Aaron's death, Father Brown claims, "At the beginning you said we'd found no weapon. But now we're finding too many; there's the knife to stab, and the rope to strangle, and the pistol to shoot; and after all he broke his neck by falling out of a window! It won't do. It's not economical" (165). Father Brown is claiming a situational inconsistency that makes no sense. He assumes that murders are usually committed a certain way, with a certain number of weapons,

and that these four are too many. But, in a final flourish, Chesterton has Father Brown solve the case by realizing the paradox that the weapons "were not used to kill Sir Aaron, but to save him" (166). According to what the reader and other characters have been assuming, the weapons have been instruments of death. Into this world of narrow possibilities, Father Brown paradoxically claims that the weapons could have been used in an attempt to save Sir Aaron from suicide. Over the course of this short story, Chesterton and Father Brown propel the story and encourage the unraveling of the plot (both literarily and in the story) through a use of rhetorical paradoxes that prompt the reader to broaden his or her ideas of what could have happened to cause Sir Aaron's death.

The chief purpose of Chesterton's rhetorical paradox in the Father Brown stories is to overcome the audience and Father Brown's fellow characters' inadequate assumptions. Kenner agrees, saying, "The object of verbal paradox, then, is persuasion . . ." (17). Characters and readers must be forced to expand their minds so that they can accept solutions that they may not have considered or thought possible. Kenner says, "By thus constantly enlarging our concepts to give contradictions elbow-room, we conform the order of our minds with that of things . . ." (20). Following Father Brown's example, once Chesterton's characters can be like Father Brown by being willing to accept ideas that seem logically contradictory, they are more quickly able to understand the nature of the crime. In the end, as Kenner says, "The verbal paradox is simply a weapon for overcoming mental laziness" (56). Chesterton uses this device as a stimulator that helps to move along characters, the plot, and the discovery of the crime in the Father Brown stories.

Truth Revealing Paradox

Finally, in the way that he uses situational paradoxes to understand mysteries and

rhetorical paradoxes to progress story plots, Chesterton uses metaphysical paradoxes in his Father Brown stories to progress an implied, didactic, and spiritual sub-conversation. Some of the greatest strengths of any work by Chesterton are his paradoxes, and an important part of what he writes are his didactic messages. It is appropriate that in his best-remembered work, the Father Brown stories, he thoroughly combines the two. In *The Ball and the Cross,* after dismissing superficial and decadent paradoxes of his time, Chesterton narrates a defense and explanation of the use of graver paradoxes:

> Those who look at the matter a little more deeply or delicately see that paradox is a thing which especially belongs to all religions. Paradox of this kind is to be found in such a saying as 'The meek shall inherit the earth.' But those who see and feel the fundamental fact of the matter know that paradox is a thing that belongs not to religion only, but to all vivid and violent practical crises of human living. (9)

The paradoxes Chesterton refers to here are not necessarily situational or rhetorical; they tend to be more philosophical or theological. These metaphysical incongruities can be found throughout the Father Brown stories, whether in characters who embody a particular paradox or in direct comments that Father Brown makes in church-inspired judgment of other philosophies, religions, or characters.

The most obvious character paradoxes in Chesterton's collections of Father Brown stories are the title character and the reformed outlaw Flambeau. Not only is Father Brown a priest and a detective simultaneously, but he also knows more about crime than most criminals. Though a priest, Father Brown, in "The Blue Cross," proves to be better at detection than the greatest detective alive and better at crime than an infamous criminal. This is incongruous

because, in being a good priest, he is both a good detective and a good criminal. Over the course of the short story, Father Brown leads the detective Aristide Valentin on a chase throughout London which ends in Valentin acknowledging Father Brown as his "master" in detection (16). To accomplish this, Father Brown must also be able to outwit Flambeau in criminal activities, an activity which climaxes with him wondering that Flambeau has not heard of criminal strategies that Father Brown knows (15). The first time that someone hears of a priest who is a detective but can think like a criminal, his status of having such different roles seem paradoxical. Woodman states of Chesterton that "[i]f he believes that God lies behind all legitimate systems of the human order that detective fiction privileges he also highlights various paradoxes of crime and guilt and in particular the disjunction between human and divine justice" (231). Because Father Brown has so many perspectives on crime, he is able to understand it better than anyone else. His solution is to understand it as sin instead of just as an offense against society—expanding his audience's preconceived notions to include the supernatural realm. But this only continues the inconsistency as Andre P. Gushurst-Moore, in "Reality, Illusion and Art in *The Father Brown Stories,*" explains: "The paradox is that one who is so unworldly should understand human nature so well, and so much better than others who from scientific, rationalist materialist, realistic perspectives make false and often, ironically, superstitious presumptions" (324). In Chesterton's stories, Father Brown uses his own Christian worldview to understand the physical world better than those, like Holmes, who profess to study only what is materially present. Father Brown is paradoxical as a character because he imbibes the same self-contradiction that the incarnate Christ represents: his detective method is both fully spiritual and fully natural.

Flambeau, on the other hand, begins as a paradox that Milbank calls the "honest outlaw"

(326) or that Woodman calls Chesterton's "traditional paradox of the good thief" (238); in addition, he eventually switches from being a criminal to being a private detective, causing an audience to ask how a past criminal can be a detective. In this case, Christian repentance, a supernatural factor again, is what helps this idea to make sense. Milbank refers to the "penitent thief" as "a paradoxical duality conceived of in the Christian scriptures themselves" (93). The thief on the cross in the book of Luke repents of his sin, and Jesus tells him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23.43). In the same way, Flambeau repents of or desists in his crime in "The Queer Feet" and "The Flying Stars," and, by "The Invisible Man," has reversed direction so much that he now detects crime with Father Brown. For both Father Brown and Flambeau, the paradoxes in their personal stories serve as examples of character-based paradoxes that Chesterton uses to demonstrate a Christian view of the possibilities for how people can understand the world or their own sinfulness.

Unlike Doyle or Poe's tactics which shy away from moralism, Chesterton's most direct uses of paradox as a didactic tactic are in lessons given by Father Brown as off-handed commentary on other characters and the religions or philosophies that they ascribe to. In "The Wrong Shape," Father Brown comments on the supposed suicide note of a writer of oriental romances: "It's the wrong shape in the abstract. Don't you ever feel that about Eastern art? The colours are intoxicatingly lovely; but the shapes are mean and bad—deliberately mean and bad. I have seen wicked things in a Turkey carpet" (89). Later in the same story, Father Brown comments, "The Christian is more modest [than the mystic oriental]. . . he wants something" (91). In "The Three Tools of Death," Father Brown claims that the "Religion of Cheerfulness" "is a cruel religion" because it leads Sir Aaron to suicide (166). And then claims in "The Hammer of God" that "[h]umility is the mother of giants" (127). While each of these paradoxes

seem incongruent or absurd upon first reading, when one considers Father Brown's religious viewpoint, they begin to make sense: Christianity encourages its adherents to desire many things, excessive cheerfulness can demand someone upkeep a tiring façade, and pride brings people low while humility allows them to really be great. Each of these ideas makes sense in light of Father Brown's faith and spiritual intuition, which must be used to explain them if the reader is to understand. Because Father Brown, a priest, utters them, they make sense in the flow of the story without seeming too moralistic, though they tend to be the most direct dogma in the Father Brown stories.

But these paradoxes do not just teach about a Christian worldview; they often help to advance the story or are entertaining as well. Rarely do they not meet at least two of these standards, which helps to cement Chesterton's reputation as, at the least, an entertaining teacher and an effective didactic. In talking about Chesterton's ability to "disturb perception," Milbank explains that "Chesterton makes the object strange to us so that it may be reconnected by participation in a divine world" (57) connecting the physical to the spiritual. In describing paradox specifically, she later says, "Indeed, the reader of a paradox is presented with the difference between two things, and seeks for that which unites them—their relation. This relation takes him or her back beyond the two contrasted things to their cause, which is God" (91). In the Father Brown stories, the physical is connected to the spiritual in a way that seems discordant at first, but that Father Brown uses to reveal truth about his faith and God. Flannery O'Connor, another Catholic writer says, "When fiction is made according to its nature, it should reinforce our sense of the supernatural by grounding it in concrete observable reality" (148). Not only does Chesterton do this in his writing of the Father Brown stories, but Father Brown does this by seeing the supernatural in his physical environment. Reinsdorf says, "Father Brown's

acute observations do not exclude the mystical. Perhaps illogically, one reinforces the other. Somehow, characters and critics assume that this priest, removed from the common life, must be magical, mysterious and foreign" (266). When Father Brown observes the physical, he connects it to the spiritual in a way that, to audiences who are not prepared for a spiritual moral, may seem contradictory, which further helps to suggest Father Brown's "mystical" intelligence or knowledge. Because Father Brown has this reputation and because the philosophical paradoxes in Chesterton's stories often serve a double purpose as rhetorical paradoxes that explain a crime, messages that would otherwise appear outright "preachy" seem natural in Chesterton's detective fiction.

Chesterton's situational, rhetorical, and metaphysical paradoxes in his Father Brown stories allow him be entertaining and educational at the same time. Not only does the fact that the semi-mystical figure of a priest utters them help to make them seem normal in the context of a detective story, but the fact that they typically meld seamlessly into the progress of the stories keeps them from seeming too moralistic. Chesterton, in *Orthodoxy*, says, "[W]henever we feel there is something odd in Christian theology, we shall generally find that there is something odd in the truth" (78). In the Father Brown stories, Chesterton argues that where Christianity seems paradoxical the truth itself may be paradoxical. Erik Routley, in "The Fairy Tale and the Secret," says, "I know of a few unsafe paradoxes in Chesterton's more exuberant essays: I can find none in Father Brown. He represents not paradox but plain dissent. He firmly rejects what is bogus in humanistic and materialistic thought, representing Catholic doctrines as, precisely, common sense" (n. pag.). In saying this, Erik responds to those who disapprove of Chesterton's enthusiastic use of paradox as excessive and empty, reproaches that Chesterton responds to himself: "Critics were almost entirely complimentary to what they were pleased to call my

brilliant paradoxes; until they discovered that I really meant what I said" (*Autobiography* ###). And in his Father Brown stories, Chesterton really does seem to mean what he says. The fact that Father Brown's paradoxical conception of the universe allows him to successfully solve crimes is the most immediate affirmation of the relevancy of both the Christian faith and the paradox that Chesterton claims is married to Christianity. In *Orthodoxy*, he explains his desire for the Christian faith as a desire for the impossible:

> The idea was that which I had outlined touching the optimist and the pessimist; that we want not an amalgam or compromise, but both things at the top of their energy; love and wrath both burning. Here I shall only trace it in relation to ethics. But I need not remind the reader that the idea of this combination is indeed central in orthodox theology. For orthodox theology has specially insisted that Christ was not a being apart from god and man, like an elf, nor yet a being half human and half not, like a centaur, but both things at once and both things thoroughly, very man and very God. (88)

The fact that Chesterton makes contradiction the very center of the solutions, of the dialogue, of the characters, and of the themes of his Father Brown stories shows just how closely the concept of seeming contradiction is related to his Christian understanding of the world. Chesterton has taken a facet of detective fiction—the paradox—which is usually manifested as something that needs to be deconstructed, to argue that the contradictory terms are not necessarily impossible but actually very possible once the reader looks at the case in the light of a Christian worldview. Because Chesterton does not actively claim this but has Father Brown play it out, his stories are able to stand as an entertaining but also an educational Christian way of understanding the universe—this dual function being perhaps the deepest and most underlying paradox of the entire

collection of the Father Brown stories.

Chapter 3: Opposition in Character and Ideology

Just as in detective stories, where the villain is hidden in the background of the narrative until the detective discovers him, so in a study of the detective fiction genre, secondary and stock characters generally remain hidden until someone else points them out. In reading detective stories, the reader usually focuses on the detective and his sidekick. The stock characters—the separated lovers, the old codgers, and the insufferable crones—appear in story after story but are forgotten quickly each time. In "Murder and Manners: The Formal Detective Novel," George Grella identifies a few common stock characters from Chesterton's era and later including at least "one representative of the squirearchy," "one professional man," "a cleancut young sporting type," "a military man," an "English vicar" (39), "the obsessed philosopher" (40), young lovers kept apart by suspicion of murder (41), and several others. Authors often use these characters as simple substitutes for character development; with just a few words in each story, readers are trained to understand who these characters are and how they will act. Chesterton mentions this phenomenon of stock characters in "Errors about Detective Stories"; he says, "Then there is the common error of making all the human characters sticks, or stock figures – not so much because the novelist is not intelligent enough to describe real characters as because he really thinks real characterization wasted on an unreal type of literature" (n. pag.). Because detective fiction is often written for the purpose of quick entertainment, authors sometimes take little time to develop the secondary characters—a missed opportunity that Chesterton notices and rectifies.

Perhaps the reason Chesterton's redemption of secondary characters was so successful when Father Brown was first published is that the time period during which Chesterton was writing—the Edwardian era—was perfect for didactic fiction. In *The Edwardian Temperament,* Jonathan Rose describes the Edwardian "gospel of fun":

> It erased the distinction between work and play and . . . the boundary separating humor and seriousness . . . Edwardian humorists could be funny and perfectly earnest at the same time. They created jokes to illuminate eternal truths . . . The Edwardian impulse to unify the sacred and the profane could lead directly to the conclusion that jokes are deeply serious things—perhaps even expressions of religion, as G. K. Chesterton argued. (174)

Chesterton's comedic Father Brown stories fit this description perfectly: Chesterton uses them as jokes that express important lessons for his audience. For instance, Chesterton's "The Honour of Israel Gow" is a joke because no real crime has been committed, but it also a lesson that teaches the importance of perception. In addition to this Edwardian need for simultaneous fun and learning as "part of that broader Edwardian effort to reconcile opposites" (174), their thinkers responded to developments in philosophy "by reconciling faith and reason in a synthesis" (2). The entire Edwardian worldview was characterized by a growing desire to reconcile seeming philosophical antitheses. Says Rose, "Self-division was the psychological product of the great intellectual conflicts of the Victorian age: the clash of science and religion, reason and emotion, morality and desire, society and individuality" (199); older Edwardians had lived through the latter part of Victorianism but not all had resolved the arguments of that era. However, after World War I, the Edwardians realized that complete synthesis was impossible (33). Though Chesterton suffered depression, loss of family, and illness as a result of World War I, in the case of the Father Brown stories, he was ideologically in line with what it taught the Edwardians: not every argument can be resolved; sometimes only one side can be right.

Chesterton's Father Brown stories can be interpreted as modern day parables or fables concerning those issues that Edwardians wrestled with. Some of Chesterton's critics do not

accept this fact happily. Thomas Woodman, in "Chesterton's 'The Secret Garden,'" says that "[t]hese stories have often, for example, been viewed primarily as religious and political propaganda" (n. pag.). This charge, not completely wrong, highlights the heavy moral lessons that Chesterton levies at his audience (albeit still observing the Edwardian tendency to fun). Ian Boyd, in "Parables of Father Brown," explains the presence of this material in the Father Brown canon:

> These, the most well-known stories Chesterton ever wrote, are best understood as parables. They present truths found in discursive works such as Orthodoxy and The Everlasting Man, but present them in a fresher and therefore more persuasive way, precisely because they are truths embodied in fiction. Although the primary aim of such writing is to delight, that is not its only aim. (421)

Boyd is here, perhaps, making reference to when Horace in *The Art of Poetry,* praises the poet who "delights his reader at the same time as he instructs him" (108), a description that fits Chesterton's Father Brown stories well. To accomplish this, Chesterton adds a new type of character to his short stories, divesting the ranks of the stock characters to supply his own purposes. While a stock character may have only been valued for his or her ability to confuse, Chesterton adds an ability to teach to his secondary and stock characters' resume. Chesterton invests his repurposed stock characters with symbolic philosophies that he has observed in his life and then has those characters operate within the story according to that philosophy—often making his stories a microcosm of the Edwardian era's disputes. Thus, in his stories, atheist characters will be confused by what may seem supernatural, and spiritualist characters may attribute murders to ghosts. In addition, Chesterton enhances this development of detective fiction by drawing on his life-long love of debate. In order to better define these secondary

characters and to help the reader to understand the philosophies presented, he organizes the characters into dichotomous, opposing relationships. He often puts two or three of these philosophies into a story and lets them murder, investigate, or argue with each other in order to make a point to his readers. While this tactic may be didactic, detective fiction's propensity for truth seeking and its abundant supply of underappreciated stock characters gives Chesterton the perfect opportunity to enlighten while entertaining. In the Father Brown stories, Chesterton utilizes these dichotomous character relationships to understand truth about the mystery and the world in an entertaining way that allows him employ the strengths of detective fiction so as to be didactic without being overbearing for a casual audience.

Symbolic Characters

Chesterton's parable-like stories are able to teach because Chesterton takes care to make sure audiences can identify his characters with the philosophies that he intends them to represent. Thus, the ideas the characters represent can be fairly easy to ascertain through a quick summary of some of a character's dialogue, a social group he or she belongs to, or his or her most distinguishing quality. In fact, Chesterton even has several character types that consistently reappear in his Father Brown stories, usually representing the same idea. Scientists and doctors often represent rationalism. The rich represent aristocracy or capitalism, and the poor are often socialists. Americans often represent materialism. People not from Britain or America often represent eastern or pagan religion. Together, all of these characters represent worldviews. Perhaps aware of this function while studying another of Chesterton's highly symbolic pieces, in her book *G. K. Chesterton: Explorations in Allegory* Lynnette Hunter affirms the fact of Chesterton's use of emblems in his fiction and provides direct definition of what they are in his writing: "Emblem, unlike metaphor, does not replace the thing that it expresses, but 'stands for'

it, stands consciously outside that object or event inviting comparison with its similarities but not identification" (32-33). Chesterton uses these emblematic characters to make points about the philosophies they represent; he argues by "inviting comparison" between the character's actions and the philosophy's results. Chesterton assigns important characters to represent specific philosophies so that he can teach his audience about those philosophies through the characters' interactions with each other and through their functions in the story

To set up these relationships, Chesterton uses several different methods to describe these emblematic characters, which exist in nearly every Father Brown story that he writes. If Father Brown is counted, then there is at least one emblematic character in every single one. For example, he makes it clear in "The Queer Feet," that The Twelve True Fishermen represent a wealthy upper class or "modern plutocrats" who can "not bear a poor man near to them, either as a slave or as a friend" (41). These characters collectively represent a wealthy class that is unable to communicate casually with the lower classes, a fact that Chesterton does not hesitate to ridicule or to use to place them in opposition to those lower classes. In "The Eye of Apollo," Chesterton introduces the reader to Kalon, a priest of Apollo, who represents pagan religion. Kalon is closely tied to the sun; he stares at it, prays to it, and teaches others to do the same. He is strong, seems noble to others, and has impressive powers of oratory that he uses to argue his innocence. In this story, Chesterton directly aligns his character with pagan or mystic philosophy through detailed description:

> The man who called himself Kalon was a magnificent creature, worthy, in a physical sense, to be the pontiff of Apollo. He was nearly as tall even as Flambeau, and very much better looking, with a golden bear, strong blue eyes, and a mane flung back like a lion's. In structure he was the blonde beast of

> Nietzsche, but all this animal beauty was heightened, brightened and softened by genuine intellect and spirituality. If he looked like one of the great Saxon kings, he looked like one of the kings that were also saints. (133)

The imagery that Chesterton uses to describe him suggests an ancient, animalistic, and mystical type of person—all popular elements that Chesterton tends to stereotype as earthily pagan in his stories. Later, though, Chesterton also blatantly solidifies Kalon as a pagan when Father Brown actually refers to the man as one of "these new pagans" (141) and one of "[t]hese pagan stoics" (142), placing him in opposition to Father Brown himself. With both the Fishermen and Kalon, Chesterton, in two distinct stories, has personified two distinct philosophies so that once his reader understands what they represent, Chesterton can use them as debaters in his metaphysical detective stories.

Chesterton's most iconic emblematic characters revolve around a right understanding of the world and religion; his most ardent philosophy characters in the Father Brown stories defend the Christian faith against wrong understandings of the world, and the strongest manifestation of this argument in *The Innocence of Father Brown* appears in "The Secret Garden." In this story, the detective Aristide Valentin invites Father Brown along with several other guests to a party at his house in France. Halfway through the party, a body with missing head appears in the garden, which is inaccessible by anyone but the guests. When Father Brown and Valentin (who later is revealed to be the murderer) begin solving the case, Chesterton uses their efforts to demonstrate which of three character-represented philosophies in that story is the most truthful.

Valentin is Chesterton's premiere humanistic, rationalistic atheist in *The Innocence of Father Brown*; he represents this philosophy through his French ancestry (something Chesterton often associates with common sense in his stories) and his adherence to logic in understanding

crime. He is placed in opposition to the millionaire spiritualist Julius K. Brayne, though Father Brown representative of Catholicism will soon join the argument. Valentin's character hearkens back to the French enlightenment and the preponderance of pure reason over sentimentality or spiritualism. In "The Blue Cross," Chesterton describes Valentin's detective process: "All his wonderful successes, that looked like conjuring, had been gained by plodding logic, by clear and commonplace French thought" (4). In "The Secret Garden," Valentin is "one of the great humanitarian French freethinkers . . ." (17) and Woodman calls him "the epitome of French free-thinking rationalism" ("Chesterton and Father Brown: Demystification and Deconstruction" 233). Making a connection to Poe and original detective fiction, Christopher Routledge, in "The Chevalier and the Priest," says, "The chief of police represents the kind of 'reasoning machine' Dupin seems to be, and, incidentally, himself becomes a murderer in the story 'The Secret Garden'" (6). Chesterton's intentions concerning this parallel are not explicit, but a connection does seem to exist between Valentin and the early prototype of fictional detectives. He and detectives like Holmes and Dupin operate on pure reason and observation, believing that the world can be understood through observation and logic. This suggests that at the very least, Chesterton, while proposing a unique detective in Father Brown, is also trying to satirize the older type. Valentin failed to solve the thievery in "The Blue Cross" and he cannot solve the murder in "The Secret Garden"; in fact, his rationalistic worldview has led him to be the villain. In addition, according to Woodman, Valentin's "secret garden" thus represents "a false Eden created by rationalism and a secular establishment" ("Chesterton's 'The Secret Garden'"). The environment in which the murder takes place is owned by Valentin, essentially acting as a "home court" for rationalism and making this philosophy the primary target in "The Secret Garden," a philosophy represented by Valentin "one of the most powerful intellects in Europe" ("The Blue

Cross" 1). However, Valentin eventually will be exposed and when he is, based on his position in his relationship to spiritual characters, Chesterton will make clear his own opinion of pure rationalism.

Julius K. Brayne is Chesterton's very first spiritualist in the Father Brown stories, representing a philosophy for all who fail to attain true spirituality by not realizing the truth of Chesterton's Christian faith—a philosophy of spiritualism in direct opposition to Valentin's rationalism. To develop this emblematic character, Chesterton explains in "The Secret Garden," "Nobody could quite make out whether Mr. Brayne was an atheist or a Mormon or a Christian Scientist; but he was ready to pour money into any intellectual vessel, so long as it was an untried vessel" (19). More succinctly, Chesterton describes him later on as "the hoary Yankee who believed in all religions" (19). In academic texts, there is less interest in Brayne than Valentin, likely because Valentin is present in two stories and Brayne is alive for only half of one, and so Chesterton does not have as much time to develop Brayne as he has to develop Valentin. But from what Chesterton does show, Brayne may either be an ardent spiritualist or an everyman caught between spiritualism and rationalism but with a strong proclivity for the supernatural. By the end of the story, the reader discovers that he was coming close to accepting the Catholic faith. However, due to Valentin's murderous activity, Brayne dies as a representative of spiritualists at the hands of Valentin's rationalism.

Finally, Chesterton's most important emblematic character is Father Brown himself, who represents a rational and sympathetic Catholic faith. Unlike Valentin and Brayne, Father Brown is not initially part of the dichotomous relationship; he enters into it later when his Catholic rationalism is needed to solve the case. Boyd writes, "[H]e is unmistakably a Roman Catholic priest. He is in fact a symbol of the Catholic Church" (422). Father Brown, as a Christian and

Catholic, is Chesterton's ultimate symbol and the one that, eventually, all other symbolized viewpoints will prove inferior to, a fact that scholars sometimes use to accuse Chesterton of excessive preaching. But as Boyd explains, Chesterton does not take advantage of every opportunity to levy the didacticism possible with a priest as a character: "[T]he stories never become exercises in religious propaganda. Father Brown has in fact little to say about the specificities of the Catholic faith"; in fact, Boyd goes on to explain that "[i]n the best tradition of puzzle detective story, the ways in which he reaches solutions to problems he faces are always rational. Father Brown is in truth a spokesman for reason" (424). Father Brown is a Christian but he is a reasonable Christian. This Christian reason is exactly how Chesterton sets Father Brown apart from other detectives like Valentin, Dupin, or Holmes. Christian reason is not purely materialistic; it accepts the presence of God and the presence of sin, helping Father Brown to understand criminals in a way that Chesterton argues Valentin and Holmes never will. And, thus between Valentin and Brayne, Father Brown is set not only as a mediator in the story—one who can discover the truth—but also as a religious mediator, one who can tell who is right and who is wrong.

Direct Binaries

Once Chesterton establishes his emblematic characters, he arranges them against each other in direct antagonistic relationships so that he can explore the represented philosophies by contrasting them to each other. Scientists argue with pagan stoics, western characters suspect eastern characters of murder, and capitalists accuse socialists of theft. The depth of possibilities here is almost too rich for anyone but a highly theoretical mind like Chesterton to be able to handle. The characters must be displayed and arrayed against each other so that they conform to the ideologies of their philosophy, and they must interact with each other in a way that allows

Chesterton the opportunity to manipulate them successfully to produce a moral. Because detective fiction is often a contest both between author and reader (as Chesterton posits in "How to Write a Detective Story") and between different characters, a precedent exists for this competition for survival or dominance. Routledge says, "Indeed, detective fiction is full of doubles [or opposites]: the innocent who turns out to be guilty, the detective and the narrating companion, the detective and the criminal, for example" (5). In "Never Bet the Detective (or His Creator) Your Head: Character Rivalry, Authorial Sleight of Hand, and Generic Fluidity in Detective Fiction," John Gruesser says, "First, and on the most basic level, Poe stages a series of contests between characters: Dupin versus the narrator and the police prefect in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,' Dupin versus various newspapermen in 'The Mystery of Marie Roget,' and Dupin versus the master criminal D_____ in 'The Purloined Letter'" (5). Chesterton is not simply remaking the detective fiction genre; he is repurposing an existing element—the element of contest. However, in the Father Brown stories, these direct binaries are relationships between two characters that have opposing views on the philosophical, economic, religious, etc. The characters interact with each other in a parable of how their philosophies interact, and Chesterton often comes to a conclusion on which idea is right, a conclusion supported by those characters' dialogue or actions.

Chesterton's binaries are strongly present in nearly half of the stories in *The Innocence of Father Brown*. In "The Queer Feet," the waiters of the restaurant represent the lower class and provide a contrast against The Twelve True Fishermen. Their relationship, while not openly antagonistic, is jarring and awkward for readers because of the ridiculous light wealth is placed in and the sympathetic light the serving class is placed in. Based on this, Chesterton delivers a monologue to his audience about the right relationships between rich and poor. He mentions "a

strange shame which is wholly the product of our time. It is the combination of modern humanitarianism with the horrible modern abyss between the souls of the rich and poor" (41). This emphasizes a social class-sized difference between the elements in this relationship. In addition, in "The Eye of Apollo," Chesterton showcases Kalon's paganism and Father Brown's Catholic reason to reveal who the false priest actually is. When Father Brown asks Kalon about his religion, Kalon says, "We meet at last Caiaphas . . . Your church and mine are the only realities on this earth. I adore the sun, and you the darkening of the sun; you are the priest of the dying and I of the living God. Your present work of suspicion and slander is worthy of your coat and creed" (136). Here, Kalon reveals Chesterton's developing binary: Father Brown represents Christian religion and Kalon represents pagan religion, one who "adore[s] the sun" (136). When Father Brown eventually does catch Kalon in hypocrisy and when he reveals Kalon to be guilty by using Kalon's own words against him, Chesterton is demonstrating the church's superiority over pagan religion. Father Brown evaluates Kalon's religion: "Oh, if these new pagans would only be old pagans, they would be a little wiser! The old pagans knew that mere naked Nature-worship must have a cruel side. They knew that the eye of Apollo can blast and blind" (141). Kalon is defeated and paganism is shown to be inferior to Christianity. "The Queer Feet" and "The Eye of Apollo" not only showcase two of Chesterton's favorite debates—one between different economic theories and one between different forms of religion—but they also represent two different types of direct binaries—ones in which Father Brown is or is not involved as one of the direct combatants.

Perhaps the strongest statement of an antagonistic relationship in *Innocence* is in "The Secret Garden," in which the symbolic characters argue directly against each other about their opposing philosophies, leading to one of them actually going so far as to kill the other. The

occasion for a direct binary in “The Secret Garden” is that Brayne begins to develop sympathy towards Catholicism and may endow the French Catholic church with his “crazy millions” (32), his spiritualism possibly leading him where Chesterton believes he belongs. But as Woodman writes, “Chesterton clearly intends this story to be set in the very particular French cultural context of the fight between a beleaguered nationalist Church and a freethinking and anti-clerical party” (“Chesterton’s ‘The Secret Garden’”). He continues this idea later in his essay by saying, “Chesterton imbues it with considerable ideological significance. The propaganda element is clear. The anti-clerical party is prepared to resort to murder in order to prevent the millionaire's money coming to the Church, and Brayne's conversion is portrayed as only one of a whole wave of ‘scatter-brained sceptics’ who are ‘drifting to us’” (n. pag.). The philosophical microcosmic battle in “The Secret Garden,” then, is one between rationalist philosophy and a spiritualist possible converting to Christianity.

In “The Secret Garden,” Chesterton, through the actions of the characters, especially focuses on an argument against a purely rationalist understanding of the universe; Valentin is his representation of that rationalism. As Knedlik says, Valentin “is portrayed as the epitome of French free-thinking rationalism, and it is no accident that he is also revealed as the murderer” (233). Chesterton is very intentional by showing Valentin as willing to murder to argue his point. As Father Brown says, “Valentin is an honest man, if being mad for an arguable cause is honesty” (32). The language here is appropriate for three reasons, reasons that summarize the point Chesterton is making about Valentin’s rationalism. Chesterton uses the word “honest” to suggest that Valentin really does earnestly believe what he is killing Brayne for. He is passionate about his understanding of the world and willing to break the law he has upheld in order to protect his rationalistic atheism. Chesterton uses “arguable” well because not only is it a

rationalistic keyword—argument is the medium of discussion when one is being rational—but because Valentin's earlier actions support this description. Before killing Brayne, Valentin does try to reason with him in a heated argument. However, when that fails, he has already "resolved to destroy the millionaire" (32). And this is where Chesterton's use of "mad" becomes so appropriate. Valentin has ceased to see boundaries in his attempts to stop Brayne. To support this, Chesterton has Father Brown say, "He would do anything, *anything,* to break what he calls the superstition of the Cross. He has fought for it and starved for it, and now he has murdered for it" (32). But Valentin goes much farther for this cause. He refuses conviction by his own rational laws and, instead, commits suicide, removing himself from the jurisdiction of the law, taking his argument to what Chesterton must have seen as the logical and incorrect conclusion.

Chesterton's evaluations of Brayne's actions in this contest are far simpler and are mostly implied through comparisons to Valentin and descriptions of Brayne, descriptions in less abundance than those of Valentin because Brayne does not survive through the first four pages of the story. In comparison to Valentin, because no one can really understand what religion Brayne adheres to, Brayne appears weaker and less serious than Valentin who is willing to pursue a single idea to his own death. Chesterton summarizes their dichotomous relationship as "Brayne, the hoary Yankee who believed in all religions, and Valentin, the grizzled Frenchman who believed in none" (19). Brayne cannot decide about religion, and at the time of his death was only "drifting" towards the Christian faith (32). Brayne does argue with Valentin, but the argument results in mior revelation of Brayne's character. Brayne thinks Valentin to be "progressive," which Chesterton says does Valentin "a grave injustice," but this does little for saving his life from Valentin, who Chesterton implies is actually far more conservative than the reader could guess at the beginning of the story (19). Brayne cannot understand the type of

madness that would lead Valentin to kill him and, thus, Chesterton portrays untethered spiritualism as an insecure base—one that leaves the adherent open to attack and with no solid understanding of the world. In fact, Father Brown later describes Brayne as a "scatter-brained sceptic," (32) someone who, by believing in all religions, really believes in none of them exclusively. If a specific religion precludes all others, then one cannot believe in two simultaneously, an idea that Brayne does not seem to understand and that Chesterton heavily implies.

Using his method of arraying characters against each, Chesterton's binary in "The Secret Garden" reflects his beliefs about the absence of the Christian faith in a character's worldview. He believes that neither rationalism nor undiscerning spiritualism will suffice for a complete worldview. The relationship between Valentin's natural mind and Brayne's supernatural ideas here reveal this to the reader. Through the deaths of both of these characters and through the uselessness of both of their efforts in arguing with each other, Chesterton argues for the insufficiency of both philosophies, making it an important point in the theme of his story.

Reconciled Binaries

In direct binaries in which both sides are wrong, Chesterton compounds his lesson by using Father Brown to show how the Catholic Church is able to decide which philosophy is correct; these sides cannot be reconciled until a Christian perspective clarifies the argument, a scenario which played out in Chesterton's life as well. In a biographic summary of Chesterton in Hunter's *G. K. Chesterton: Explorations in Allegory*, or even in his own *Orthodoxy*, one can trace a recurring pattern in Chesterton's developing philosophical struggles. He decides that he must choose between two options, becomes frustrated because neither choice is acceptable, and then realizes that the church holds the answer he is seeking. For example, Hunter explains how,

before 1900, Chesterton attempted to decide between a Wildean impressionism and a Shavian materialistic rationalism (6-8)—he tried to decide whether art should be relative to human perspective or whether there was an absolute measure for what art should be and be about. Hunter explains Chesterton's final conclusion:

> Both impressionist and rationalist create assuming that their art is justified in itself and that that art alone is absolute because it alone is not connected with the vagueness of the external world; and both deny the role of ultimate authority to God. Working from this conclusion Chesterton increasingly realises that formal religion may provide a resolution to the conflicts within both his vision of life and his moral ideas. (13).

Thus, because his stories often contain hazy, ethereal fairy tale imagery, and nearly all of them try to make a specific point to the reader, much of Chesterton's own work can be seen as an argument between impressionism and didacticism, though didacticism under the mantle of the Catholic Church often wins. The result is that Chesterton has reconciled opposites, a model story that often plays out in his Father Brown stories.

In many of the Father Brown tales, the opposing philosophical relationships are reconciled, but in some of the stories, binaries are not able to reach complete resolution because Father Brown is one of the original elements in the relationship. In "The Queer Feet," Father Brown stands over the dichotomy between rich and poor through his actions; he saves the silver of the fishermen by understanding the difference between the ways that poor and rich men walk. He stands outside of the debate, looking down on it with sympathetic reason. But not only does Father Brown defeat Flambeau's criminal attempted thievery from the fishermen, he also rebukes the aristocrats: "Odd, isn't it . . . 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?" (44). In "'An Invisible Line': Forms of Truth and the Lie in G. K. Chesterton's *The Innocence of Father Brown*," William C. Zehringer notices that Chesterton is careful to present a distinction between "the blithe gentlemen" and the criminal and Father Brown (n. pag.). Though the direct relationship is between different social classes, Chesterton shows the error of the richer class by comparing its members to Father Brown's all-encompassing acceptance, an acceptance demonstrated through his understanding of them. He understands waiters, and he accepts both the victims and the criminal—an ultimate dichotomous debate in all detective stories. Of course, "The Eye of Apollo" does not contain a reconciled binary because in that story Father Brown is an involved member of the direct binary. The problem is an antagonism between him and Kalon because the question is between him and Kalon only. There is no need to ascribe to a higher power because, for Chesterton, the highest power—the representative of Christian reason—is already present and able to defeat its opponent. These two Father Brown stories, then, are both philosophical arguments, but differ in whether Father Brown's struggle against a false philosophy is directly important or ancillary to the story's main conflict.

"The Secret Garden," however, is a supreme example of a reconciled binary because, in it, Father Brown gains the victory—solves the case—by understanding the world both spiritually and logically, from both characters' perspectives. He is able to bring reconciliation to the case because he represents the Church—Chesterton's entity and the fount of his philosophy above all others. In much the same way that in *Orthodoxy* Chesterton resolves irreconcilable arguments, so in "The Secret Garden," Father Brown brings conclusion to the dispute between Valentin and Brayne. Woodman says in "Chesterton and Father Brown: Demystification and Deconstruction," "Going deeper we might surmise that Chesterton attempts to ground detective fiction on a

metaphysical basis by reminding us that the human justice and society that we find affirmed in this fiction must have its roots and ultimate meaning in God" (229-30). This point is especially obvious in "The Secret Garden": Chesterton wants his readers to ground their own philosophy in a Christian understanding of the world.

To accomplish this, Chesterton explains his worldview by explicitly showing Father Brown's Christian faith to be superior to the other philosophies represented by both Valentin and Brayne. Father Brown is proved superior to Valentin's logic because not only has Valentin admitted this in "The Blue Cross" (16), but Chesterton also demonstrates it in "The Secret Garden" by having Father Brown unravel Valentin's own crime. They both adhere to logic, but Father Brown's logical abilities prove to be superior because he finds what Valentin tries to keep secret. Here, too, Chesterton is making very clear his point that Father Brown's activities as a detective are superior to Valentin's. Routledge affirms Valentin as similar to the archetypal "reasoning machine" detective (6), and here Father Brown's logic is better, proving Catholic reason's superiority over humanistic rationalism, the difference between the two being their respective belief and disbelief in God and original sin. Knedlik reminds her readers, "This is one claim that Chesterton indeed makes with an almost tiresome insistence, the affirmation that Catholicism is the most genuine friend of reason" (231). While Father Brown may affirm reason, he does not do it as the expense of his own faith; Chesterton argues that faith is a reasonable thing but has Father Brown operate as a priest primarily. Another way that Father Brown defeats Valentin can be found in "The Blue Cross"; in this story, Valentin says, "The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic" (5). He has spent his life defeating criminals, while Father Brown has spent his life understanding and redeeming criminals; but in "The Secret Garden" Father Brown's skills as a critic prove to be superior to Valentin's skills as the artist,

serving as a parable that argues the superiority of Christian reason over rationalism.

Concerning Brayne, Chesterton shows Father Brown's faith to be a superior way of understanding the world to spiritualism in two very obvious ways. Not only does Father Brown have a theological foundation of understanding to be able to interpret the actions of those around him, but, more specifically, he understands Valentin in a way that Brayne does not. Brayne does not understand the maddening passion that Valentin holds, but Father Brown does, enabling him to understand it and defend against it. By enabling Father Brown to interpret these actions and to understand the case, the Catholic Church shows its own philosophy to be superior to misguided spiritualism. Second, Chesterton shows Brayne admitting this himself by "drifting" to the Catholic Church (32) and giving up his own wild search for truth. Through Father Brown, Chesterton shows Christian religion specifically to be superior to other forms of religion.

In "The Secret Garden," Chesterton represents Father Brown's dual approach to solving cases: he uses both his own mental powers and prayer. At the point of climax, when the case seems hopeless and Father Brown is trying to understand exactly what has happened, he mixes a plea for intelligence with a plea for divine intervention, making it impossible to separate the two: "Will God give me strength? Will my brain make the one jump and see all? Heaven help me! I used to be fairly good at thinking. I could paraphrase any page in Aquinas once" (29). Father Brown depends on the rational ability that Valentin relies on, as well as on the God that Brayne is presumably searching for. If the way in which Father Brown defeats and understands Valentin's logic with a Catholic worldview that Brayne has not achieved is confusing, this particular instance of Father Brown's combining these two methods of understanding the world is a representative example of how he solves his cases. Father Brown sympathetically understands material worldviews, metaphysical worldviews, and many others, enabling him to

stand above the binaries in “The Secret Garden” and other stories.

In using character binaries, Chesterton has found an effective and entertaining method to be didactic without being “preachy.” He takes a genre of fiction and converts it into a means to engage his audience in a philosophical debate, a debate carried out with guns and swords and poison, and discovered with clues and interrogations and hunches. In “Chesterton, Poe, and Others,” Muriel Smith summarizes an aspect of original detective fiction that Chesterton adapts here: “There is here a common pattern, the new generation going back to the last but one, and picking up what the intermediate generation discarded: in Chesterton's case, the idea that you can put into a detective story not only art, but serious philosophy” (489). Because Chesterton uses his characters as heavy-laden symbols, he is able to, on a surface level, carry on a fictional story, while, on a metaphysical level, carry on a debate about the deeper meanings in life.

The most important symbol of all is, of course, his title character, Father Brown. Father Brown is a representation of Chesterton’s Christian common sense, the very reason Chesterton is able to synthesize binaries. Hunter says, “The oddly thin impression of the character of Father Brown, is due to a presentation of his reasoning rather than his personality. He is viewed mainly as an allegory for the function of the church not as a person” (144). In Chesterton’s allegorical writing, Father Brown has a didactic function: Christian understanding of the world and of the mystery. He understands the character relationships that Chesterton poses and helps the reader to navigate these so that they can understand what Chesterton is arguing is best. Hunter explains it well:

> What Father Brown becomes is Chesterton’s idea of the function of Christian reason in life and the role of the Christian mystic artist. The use of Christian reason reduces the possibility of self-centered acts. It prevents madness and stops

> evil. The Christian mystic artist has a responsibility to show how Christian reason may be employed, to teach those without it. If they cannot themselves interpret and create he must do it for them. (156-157)

For characters that cannot understand a Godless world, Father Brown steps in as the church and exposes bad philosophies to be false and shows that the actual question is between truth and lies; then, whether in direct or reconciled binary, he shows that the church is the truth that the characters and the reader can rely on.

While some may mistakenly consider Chesterton's method to be harshly didactic, he has actually found an effective method of making arguments clear to his audience while still being entertaining. Julian K. Symons points out in *The Detective Story in Britain* that because Father Brown is a priest, the reader must be ready for him, in character, to produce some moral from the proceedings (20). While this is what would be expected of didactic writing, in *The Innocence of Father Brown,* Chesterton instead often avoids this and instead lets character embody the message. Woodman says, "Nevertheless Chesterton follows the logic of the detective genre in providing a fully rational explanation for the apparently mysterious events that occur. He always presents this traditional function of detective fiction as linked with Christianity's role of liberating human beings from the fear and superstition of false mysteries and false religions" ("Chesterton's 'The Secret Garden'"). Father Brown understands binaries and, from them, liberates characters and readers alike. He is able to work with emblematic characters in a search of higher truth and lead them to that truth. In the Father Brown stories, stock characters further the implied metaphysical search for truth by taking part in a literary debate moderated by Chesterton, the prize of which is solving the crime and understanding the universe.

Chapter 4: Reimagining the Ratiocinative Detective

Father Brown's greatest uniqueness is found in his direct contrast to the important figures of early detective fiction like Sherlock Holmes and C. Auguste Dupin, who together represent a literary detective whose presence and characteristics are still ingrained in detective fiction. In Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*, one character describes Holmes as "a little too scientific for my tastes—it approaches to cold-bloodedness" (17), a logical and calculating approach that he uses to solve crimes. Another rationalistic fictional detective, Aristide Valentin, in Chesterton's "The Blue Cross," rephrases this same idea: "The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic" (5). As the critic judges by the laws of taste or art, the rationalistic detective judges by the laws of logic and experiment; they both observe and analyze their subject as a means to understanding. And since, according to George Grella's article "Murder and Manners: The Formal Detective Novel," the Holmes-Dupin type is the heritage of all fictional detectives (n. pag.), the influence that Holmes's ratiocinative methods have had on literary detectives is significant. This ratiocinative detective appears and reappears in detective fiction as a bastion of a logic-based humanism—a person who can protect the good of human society by his mental ability to defeat crimes defined by the laws of that society. This detective type, which Edgar Allan Poe created in the 1860s and that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle brought to perfection a few decades later, is a decisive, intelligent, and logical defender of society's peace and order, punishing wrongdoers and warning others away from offending against the law. This type, however, does not fit Chesterton's vision of an ideal detective and, in his Father Brown stories, he attempts to satirize the old type while creating his own archetypal detective.

While Valentin is not the central character in the Father Brown stories, Chesterton does have the detective adhere to these ratiocinative methods so that he can serve to illustrate

Chesterton's opinion of the archetypal detectives: that their methods can only lead them to materialistic atheism. Like the Holmesian archetype, Chesterton's Valentin also relies on logic and experience to catch his criminals. In fact, Valentin seems placed in the Father Brown stories by Chesterton principally as an opportunity for direct satire of the archetype. He appears in and is defeated twice in the first two stories of *The Innocence of Father Brown*; this portrayal and dismissal of the archetype suggests that Chesterton is preparing the reader to accept Father Brown's "unorthodox" methods. Concerning the Holmes stories, Chene Heady in "The Many Identities of GKC" describes them as "the perfect narrative expression of a scientism which assumes that only the material sciences can ascribe meaning to our lives or unlock reality as a whole . . ." (n. pag.). Chesterton expresses this same kind of philosophy in his depictions of Valentin. While not claiming for him the sheer brilliance or mental ability of Holmes, he establishes him as a law-enforcing and rational detective: in "The Secret Garden," he explains that Valentin is the "Chief of the Paris Police" and "one of the great humanitarian French freethinkers" (17). He later mentions Valentin's "scientific nature" (18), and that Valentin "would do anything, *anything*, to break what he calls the superstition of the Cross" (32). Valentin's atheism is, ultimately, how Chesterton aligns him with the Holmesian type. But Chesterton takes Valentin's story to what he thinks is the logical conclusion: his passionate materialism betrays him into murdering someone and committing suicide. Thomas Woodman in "Chesterton and Father Brown: Demystification and Deconstruction" explains, "The great detective Valentin who appears in the first two stories is portrayed as the epitome of French free-thinking rationalism, and it is no accident that he is also revealed as the murderer at the end of the brilliant story 'The Secret Garden'" (233). Chesterton uses this story to draw connections from detectives who understand the truth of a case solely through a materialistic understanding

of evidence, not allowing for the interference of the supernatural either in his investigations or his beliefs, to a philosophy that is materialistic and atheist. Using Valentin as a philosophical proxy, Chesterton allows Holmes to make an appearance in his own stories so that he can illuminate the risks of operating as a ratiocinative detective, and also so that Chesterton can compare Father Brown to the model that he is subverting.

In direct opposition to this type of detective, in the character Father Brown, Chesterton creates a character that understands the world, evidence, and criminals in a completely different manner from either Holmes or Valentin. This difference in character is perhaps best represented by a difference in appearance: Chesterton writes in his *Autobiography* that "[i]n Father Brown, it was the chief feature to be featureless" (319). On the other hand, Doyle describes Holmes as very thin, with a "hawk-like nose," which "gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision." He continues to say, "His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination" (*A Study in Scarlet* 20). Chesterton's description of Father Brown as "featureless" and the way that it differs from Holmes's more aggressive appearance suggest that Father Brown also will be different from Holmes in other ways. In "The Rationalism of Father Brown," Timothy Burns uses Chesterton's "The Absence of Mr. Glass" to compare the "homey, crumpled, helpless Father Brown" to the character of Orion Hood, a man defined by "rational tidiness, respectability and rigid perfection." Burns concludes that "[b]ecause Hood is rather unmistakably a stand-in for that most famous of detectives, Sherlock Holmes, we may say that Brown is the antithesis of Sherlock Holmes" (38). To establish this difference from the archetypal detective that Burns comments on, Chesterton allows Father Brown not only to catch Flambeau before Valentin in "The Blue Cross," exposing the ratiocinative method's shortcomings, but also to expose Valentin as a murderer in "The Secret Garden," exposing the

materialistic philosophy's shortcomings (according to a Catholic view of sin). In several of his stories, Chesterton shows that Father Brown differs from the original detective archetype because Father Brown acts as a Catholic priest informed by Christian reason, as an empathetic and intuitive philosopher psychologist, and as a redeemer of criminals rather than as a protector of society.

The Detective As Priest

Chesterton's most obvious subversion of the detective type, and perhaps his most iconic, is his creation of his detective as a Catholic priest who adheres strongly to a rational Christian understanding of the universe—a view that acknowledges God as originator of the universe and that asserts logic at the core of his creation. This understanding not only shapes Father Brown's methods, giving him practical advantages as a detective, but also informs his philosophical understanding of what good, evil, and crime are, helping him to connect his investigations to Christian reason and worldview. This priesthood is in sharp contrast to the roles of the other fictional detectives that precede him: Dupin and Holmes do not rely on a Christian understanding of the universe. Instead, they adhere to a rationalistic worldview, one that observes logic and physical observation as the only means to knowledge. According to Mark Knight in "Signs Taken for Wonders: Adverts and Sacraments in Chesterton's London," "Holmes represents the ultimate modern professional, a figure who eschews religion and brings a relentless scientific method to bear on every problem" (127). This worldview lends itself to traditional detective's propensity to detect crime through an interpretation of physical evidence only. In *The Edwardian Temperament,* Jonathan Rose explains that in *A Study in Scarlet,* Holmes "based his methods of detection on the principle of universal connectedness . . . Thus, given an isolated scrap of evidence, Holmes is able to deduce his way along the great chain of being until he has pieced

together a solution to the crime" (10). For example, in "A Case of Identity," by studying the details of letters written by a particular typewriter, Holmes finds a missing person. He interprets the materially available language of the environment to find the answer to his case. Detectives like Holmes and Dupin must rely on what they can observe of the material world, as well as on the skills they have learned, which also have their roots in that world.

Chesterton, however, seems to believe that this worldview limits Holmes and detectives like him. Without a proper appreciation for Christianity, they fail to understand all evidence or, like Valentin, become the criminal they seek to destroy. As Lynnette Hunter says in *G. K. Chesterton: Explorations in Allegory*, Father Brown "is viewed mainly as an allegory for the function of the church not as a person" (144), which brings a spiritual perspective to a genre known for its emphasis on observation of the physical universe. Woodman explains that "we might surmise that Chesterton attempts to ground detective fiction on a metaphysical basis by reminding us that the human justice and society that we find affirmed in this fiction must have its roots and ultimate meaning in God" (229-230). He continues, "The allegorical import of Chesterton's choice of a priest as his detective would thus seem to be that human justice and civilization needs the Church as its ultimate support" (230). Taking detective fiction itself as a search for metaphysical truth and by making Father Brown a successful detective-priest, Chesterton proves that the church, rather than a philosophy that only considers the physically evident, is much better at understanding the world. Apart from practical help that priesthood provides, Father Brown's priesthood is symbolic of what most sets him apart from other detectives—his Christian faith, a faith that Chesterton believes serves as an answer to questions posed in detective fiction.

As a priest, Father Brown has access to practical resources that Holmes, Dupin, Valentin,

and others cannot claim: confessions, experience doing charitable work among the criminal classes, and a reliance on divine intervention in detective activities. Father Brown mentions the first two of these three in "The Blue Cross" in a conversation with Flambeau, the famous criminal who, ironically, has just called him a "little celibate simpleton" (14). Flambeau is surprised to find that Father Brown is aware of criminal techniques, and, when asked where he has heard of one of them, Father Brown explains, "Well, I mustn't tell you, of course . . . He was a penitent, you know. He had lived prosperously for about twenty years entirely on duplicate brown paper parcels. And so, you see, when I began to suspect you, I thought of this poor chap's way of doing it at once" (14). When Flambeau is astonished that Father Brown has recognized Flambeau's spiked bracelet (a criminal symbol), Father Brown explains, "Oh, one's little flock, you know! . . . When I was a curate in Hartlepool, there were three of them with spiked bracelets . . . We can't help being priests. People come and tell us these things" (14). Later, he goes on to say, "Lord bless you, we have to know twenty such things when we work among the criminal classes" and then begins to wonder at how Flambeau is so naïve in the ways of crime (15), completely reversing a situation that had begun with Flambeau exulting in his dominance over the priest. Father Brown summarizes his abilities in this area by asking Flambeau, "Has it never struck you that a man who does next to nothing but hear men's real sins is not likely be wholly unaware of human evil?" (15). Chesterton summarizes this irony of the Father Brown stories by describing them as "a comedy in which a priest should appear to know nothing and in fact know more about crime than the criminals" (*Autobiography* 323). Chesterton has devised a detective whose training and experience as a priest enable him to stop criminals in a way unique among all previous detectives.

In another and even more unusual way (in light of ratiocinative detective methods),

Father Brown relies directly on spiritual power to solve his cases. Julian Symons in *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel: a History* says, "It may seem odd to class a man among the Supermen of detection who has difficulty in rolling his umbrella and does not know the right end of his return ticket, but Father Brown belongs among them through the knowledge given to him by God" (77). Symons may be referring to how Chesterton causes Father Brown's Christianity to allow him to understand a God-created world or even may be referring to Father Brown directly depending on God to understand crimes. As noted before, in "The Secret Garden," Father Brown prays, "Will God give me strength? Will my brain make the one jump and see all? Heaven help me!" (29). Of course, while an atheistic worldview may claim this as cheating, Chesterton's Christianity would allow him to rather the sacramental relationship between the natural and supernatural as normal and consistent with Father Brown's method of applying the supernatural to the natural. Because of this application, Symons places Father Brown among the supermen detectives—detectives like Holmes—who stand above others in their extraordinary abilities that they use to discover crime. Whether Father Brown is a superman detective or not, he has unique abilities and opportunities for solving crime because of his Christianity and his priesthood, two facts that set him apart from previous detectives.

In a far more theoretical way, Father Brown's faith helps his detection rise above that of Holmes or Valentin because it informs his use of reason. When one begins with faulty premises, coming to true conclusions is difficult. According to Chesterton, Father Brown's religious premises are more accurate than those of the ratiocinative detectives, who see only half of what exists: the purely natural. Rose explains, "Brown insists that Roman Catholic theology is entirely consistent with worldly reason and can therefore be used to 'connect' clues in logical sequence. Thus he uncovers 'the real explanation of the [crime] and the universe,' solving a mystery that

'has but one solution'" (10-11). Father Brown's knowledge of theology informs not only his reasoning abilities, but also makes his detective stories into an allegory for a Christian search for truth, enabling Chesterton's didactic tendencies even further. In "Detections: Borges and Father Brown," Robert Gillepsie says, "The natural environment, initially used to deepen the obscurity, functions for a time as an impediment to the solution, getting in the way of mind until in a bold turn Father Brown is able to pierce the mysteries of the non-logical in environment and prove the superiority of mind and faith to nature and matter" (223). If the Father Brown stories are an allegory for a search for metaphysical truth, and if Father Brown is a representative not only of the Catholic Church but also of an attempt to lambast the materialistic detective, then the environment that holds the clues can either lead to a greater understanding of that truth or can be responsible for obscuring the search. But either way, the environment is subservient to the supernatural ideas in the story. However, because Father Brown accesses that supernatural realm directly, Chesterton is able to posit him as a stronger detective than either of the original archetypes.

Chesterton's belief in a supernaturally created universe informs Father Brown's belief that reason itself is supernatural; knowing this, Father Brown is able to use both logical reasoning and a knowledge of the supernatural to make himself an exceptionally "complete" detective who can understand all aspects of a case. In "The Honour of Israel Gow," Flambeau and Inspector Craven from Scotland Yard attempt to explain piles of precious stones, loose snuff, clockwork, and wax candles, piles which may be clues leading to the whereabouts of the master of Glengyle Castle. The inspector responds to these by saying, "By no stretch of fancy can the human mind connect together snuff and diamonds and wax and loose clockwork" (77). However, Father Brown explains all of the piles three different ways, all romantically chilling and logically

sound. When he admits that he has made up each story, he begins his real investigation, one characterized by a spiritual questioning of the philosophies behind what has *really* happened. Christopher Routledge, in "The Chevalier and the Priest: Deductive Method in Poe, Chesterton, and Borges," suggests that in "The Honour of Israel Gow," Chesterton "represents a reaction against the certainties and omniscient knowledge on which the plot of Poe's story ["The Murderers in the Rue Morgue"] depends" (1). In Poe's story, Dupin discovers material details that lead him to his conclusion that the murderer is an orangutan: a broken nail, a lightning rod close to the point of entry for the murdered person's room, and the lack of actual words in the sounds overheard by bystanders. Drawing physical details together, Dupin concludes that only an orangutan could have committed the crime, setting a precedent for all ratiocinative detectives that were to follow him: seemingly isolated details can lead to a full understanding of a crime. In "The Honour of Israel Gow," Chesterton does accept logical processes (primarily because of their spiritual origins), but he disagrees with the feasibility of a purely material process that allows for neither the supernatural as the source of logic or for the consideration of the supernatural as relevant to a case. He points out the obvious through Father Brown, while making another theological point of his own: "Ten false philosophies will fit the universe; ten false theories will fit Glengyle Castle. But we want the real explanation of the castle and universe" (79), emphasizing the role that philosophy and the supernatural have to play in the detective's logical process. When he finds that the name of God has been cut from "missals and little Catholic pictures," Father Brown grows concerned and believes he may have found an actual (and, to him, very evil) possibility for solving the case (79). Because this material evidence provokes a spiritual reaction in Father Brown, he begins to make progress in the case, his awareness of the supernatural fueling his detective energies. And all through this process, he

utilizes logic as he incorporates it with what he knows of the supernatural world. His reaction is based on a realization that the supernatural and natural are intertwined—both can work together to inform the detection process. The missing name of God and the "spiritual atmosphere" it provokes are enough to prompt Father Brown to the next step in the case. The use of God-given logic and knowledge of the supernatural is what leads Father Brown to solving the case, helping to make him unique among early fictional detectives.

Ultimately, what Father Brown's faith does for his detection is that it combines the extraordinary with the ordinary. Looking for evidence of the supernatural in the natural, he gives each of them importance and makes it easier for him to solve his cases. Walter Reinsdorf, in "The Perception of Father Brown," says, "The central symbol of Christianity does not divide immaterial and material; it unites them. Christ does not symbolically hover at the edge of things occasionally caught in some emotional fit. United with matter, He is, in that sense, matter itself. That truth finally makes more of matter, not less" (274). Interestingly, Chesterton's detective stories also are an allegory for Christ's incarnation. Christ came to earth, perfectly God and man, just as Father Brown's detective method sees fully spiritual meanings in fully material circumstances. By assimilating material evidence into a Christian worldview, Father Brown is able to solve crimes and understand the circumstances that lead to them. For him to be able to compete with other detectives then, he must not only be intelligent and observant, but his priesthood qualifies him to understand the symbolic meaning of what he sees. For example, in "The Blue Cross," he finds that Flambeau is not a priest but a disguised criminal because Flambeau argues against the trustworthiness of reason (12-14). In "The Eye of Apollo," Father Brown guesses the priest of Apollo to be guilty because Father Brown observes him not moving upon hearing the scream of a dying woman. This superiority of Father Brown's methods over

ones that require material evidence suggests a moral on Chesterton's part: reliance on the supernatural is better than reliance on the natural. Father Brown adheres to Christianity, which holds that a man is both natural and supernatural. Thus, material evidence is valued for the supernatural conclusions it allows the interpreter to come to—making understanding of the supernatural the desired result. These conclusions can then be applied back to the physical universe, serving as the practical results for the detective.

The Detective as Philosopher-Psychologist

Chesterton's change to the genre that is most conspicuously opposed to the traditionally scientific detective method is his depiction of Father Brown as an empathetic, intuitive philosopher who attempts to understand suspects and other characters psychologically. To Father Brown, the world is a tangle of philosophies and ideas that complement or oppose each other. If he can discover which philosophy another character adheres to, he can better understand the crime. This development is in direct opposition to the way that Dupin and Holmes work; these two detectives try to understand cases from the outside. They understand criminals based on their own adherence to empirical rationalism; evidence, not philosophy, convicts their villains. In Chesterton's "The Secret of Father Brown," Grandison Chace, an American, observes to Father Brown that "there is in many ways, a marked difference between your own method of approach and that of these other thinkers [Dupin, Holmes, and others]" (495). The difference is Father Brown's marked interest in what people believe and the philosophies by which they operate. Julian K. Symons, in *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel: A History*, explains Poe's Dupin by saying, "A reasoning machine would not be interested in the motives and psychology of people, but only in making correct deductions about their actions" (20). And Chesterton himself says, "But the greatest error of the Sherlock Holmes conception remains to be

remarked: I mean the error which represented the detective as indifferent to philosophy and poetry, and which seemed to imply that philosophy and poetry would not be good for a detective" ("Sherlock Holmes"). Considering these opinions to be concerning the same archetype, Father Brown seems an improvement on both of them. Reinsdorf says, "Father Brown's solutions depend on a supernatural context which enables him to see more, not less. The facts of the crime are similar to the dissociated facts of material reality, floating around until anchored in a context" (272). Acting as a psychologist and philosopher, Father Brown uses observable evidence to anchor his perceptions of other characters in the context of a philosophically Christian worldview, enabling him to improve on the older model of detection.

For Father Brown to carry out his characteristic processes, he begins as an empathetic psychologist, attempting in each story to understand suspects, victims, and peripheral characters. He explains his entire method in *The Secret of Father Brown*, and even though it was published in 1927, sixteen years after *The Innocence of Father Brown*, the methods described within it accurately reflect the methods depicted in the earlier volume. Father Brown explains how he contorts his own mental processes into resembling those of someone who could have committed the crime: "I thought and thought about how a man might come to be like that, until I realised that I really *was* like that, in everything except actual final consent to the action" (407). Then, in direct refutation of a Holmesian detection style, Father Brown explains what a scientific criminology means: "They mean getting *outside* a man and studying him as if he were a gigantic insect: in what they would call a dry impartial light, in what I should call a dead and dehumanised light . . . So far from being knowledge, it's actually suppression of what we know. It's treating a friend as a stranger, and pretending that something familiar is really remote and mysterious" (497). Father Brown finds the killer by waiting until "I know I am inside a murderer,

thinking his thoughts, wrestling with his passions; till I have bent myself into the posture of his hunched and peering hatred . . . Till I am really a murderer" (497-498). The word that best describes this style of detection is certainly "empathy." Father Brown emphasizes with all characters and with the supposed criminal, using his knowledge of his own sin to enable him to understand what the killer must have been thinking.

There are several examples of this particular process in *The Innocence of Father Brown*, the clearest perhaps being "The Hammer of God." In this story, Reverend Bohun murders his own brother by dropping a hammer on his head from the balcony of a Gothic church. Father Brown discerns what has happened and confronts him: "I think there is something rather dangerous about standing on these high places even to pray . . . Heights were made to be looked at, not to be looked from" (127). Father Brown then goes on to explain to Bohun the entire story of what has happened, even explaining what Bohun was thinking and why he was thinking it, even down to the detail of guessing that the Reverend thought his brother's hat made him look like a poisonous "green beetle" (128-129). Father Brown tells Bohun that because he had begun to look at the world from above—had grown proud—"[h]e thought it was given to *him* to judge the world and strike down the sinner. He would never have had such a thought if he had been kneeling with other men upon a floor" (128). When Bohun asks Father Brown how he knows all of this, Father Brown answers, "I am a man . . . and therefore have all devils in my heart . . . I know what you did—at least, I can guess the great part of it" (128), directly aligning his method with that laid down in "The Secret of Father Brown." Having met Bohun and having, from the outside, seen the balcony on the Gothic church next to where the crime was committed, Father Brown is able to accurately reconstruct Bohun's frame of mind because Father Brown himself empathizes with the Reverend. Because Father Brown believes his own self to be capable of such

a crime, he is able to understand what would motivate someone else to be able to do such a thing as well.

As is implied in “The Hammer of God,” the essential part to Father Brown’s study of criminals is how he contextualizes their ideas and philosophies within a Christian worldview. Whether this means assessing the pride of Reverend Bohun or the rationalism of Valentin, Father Brown endeavors to see whether that person is capable of having committed murder, and he often does this on a philosophical level. Woodman calls this a “psychological knowledge gained by experience, moral knowledge” (234). Certainly Father Brown’s methods incorporate this idea, but to do them full justice, one must note the importance of particular philosophies to certain culprits. For example, Dr. Harris in “The Wrong Shape” is a materialistic atheist and Kalon in “The Eye of Apollo” is a pagan. The ways that the culprits think allow Father Brown to understand them. Once he has emphasized with them and used material evidence to assess what they believe, he compares it to his own Christian faith and judges whether they are guilty or not. Reinsdorf explains that “Father Brown's transcendental vision permits him to associate things into a context of meaning” (272). His heavenly vision allows him to see who people really are, whether they are in the right or the wrong.

“The Three Tools of Death” exemplifies Father Brown’s ability to solve a case based almost completely on knowledge of characters’ philosophies or personalities dictated by those philosophies. Here, Sir Aaron Armstrong is a cheerful philanthropist who deals “with the darker side of our society” and prides “himself on dealing with in the brightest possible style.” He spreads gaiety wherever he goes while preaching against alcohol and Calvinism, and is one of “the most seriously merry of all the sons of men” (157). However, when Father Brown’s train is stopped, he learns that Armstrong is dead. Explanations are posited and one person even admits

to the murder, but Father Brown ignores these and instead questions the benefits and reality of the man's happiness: "Yes . . . *he* was cheerful. But did he communicate his cheerfulness? Frankly, was anyone else in the house cheerful but he?" The answer is revealed to be "no" (159), and Father Brown concludes, "I'm not sure that the Armstrong cheerfulness is so very cheerful—for other people"; he continues, "People like frequent laughter . . . but I don't think they like a permanent smile. Cheerfulness without humour is a very trying thing" (160). At this point, Father Brown's thoughts seem to be leading to the answer that one of his family members has killed him. While no family member killed Armstrong, it is important that Father Brown has begun understanding the case from a philosophical and intuitive point-of-view. He sees the victim as a person, but also as a person who adheres to and represents a philosophy that dictates his life. With a little bit more investigation—some of it philosophical, some observational—Father Brown concludes that Armstrong "was a suicidal maniac." Father Brown declaims the "Religion of Cheerfulness" as "a cruel religion," and he explains, "His plans stiffened, his views grew cold; behind that merry mask was the empty mind of the atheist. At last . . . he fell back on that dram-drinking he had abandoned long ago. But there is this horror about alcoholism in a sincere teetotaler: that he pictures and expects that psychological inferno from which he has warned others" (166). While physical evidence serves a strong part in uncovering the truth, Father Brown explains and understands the crime through a psychological knowledge that leads to a philosophical knowledge of the crime. Thus, Father Brown's stories often work opposite to the way they do in most of detective fiction: in the end, the clues are explained by Father Brown's intuitions—they themselves do not always explain the crime.

With Father Brown, Chesterton has created a completely new detective type—the empathetic-intuitive psychologist-philosopher detective. Father Brown can understand his

suspects by imagining himself to be them and can measure their personal philosophies against his Christian faith enabling him to understand the situation effectively. Burns explains "Brown's critique of modern rationalism": "The modern scientist who looks at human beings from the outside is incapable of understanding crimes, because his science requires him to bracket or suppress his knowledge of the uniquely human concern for praise and blame, glory and ignominy, worth or desert—that is, his knowledge of the whole moral life of man" (40). Informed by the Catholic faith, Father Brown understands "the whole moral life of man"—he sees humans as who they are because he can see what they believe. Heady goes further in connecting Father Brown's priesthood to his role as a psychologist-philosopher:

> We can make best sense of the world not by isolating its material data but by understanding the people who live in it. The Catholic priest, a theoretical and practical expert in the vagaries of human nature, is then a credible detective. Thus we get Father Brown, a detective who identifies the material clues that prove a crime usually only after he has psychologically deduced which of the characters must have committed it. (n. pag.)

Father Brown's strengths as a detective is enhanced by his ability to understand others and to understand how those characters' philosophies impact their actions. Whereas Holmes, Dupin, or Valentin may look only for material evidence—for clues that led them to answer principle questions of "who?" "how?" or "when?"—Father Brown's detection leads him to ask much deeper questions.

The Detective as Reformer

Chesterton's most important subversion of the detective archetype is his renovation of his detective's purpose in solving crimes; Father Brown is not motivated to protect society from

crime, but rather to understand and redeem the criminal for the Catholic Church—to protect the criminal from crime as with Flambeau. To the extent that this is true, he often finds himself at odds with police procedure, not to mention at odds with the police. In "The Queer Feet," he catches Flambeau in the act of thieving but only convicts him and hears his confession. When asked whether he has caught the man, Father Brown answers, "Yes . . . I caught him, with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread" (44). Instead of bringing Flambeau to prison, Father Brown brings him to God, an acceptable action for a priest, but a questionable one for a detective. In "The Hammer of God," Father Brown tells the murderous Reverend Bohun, "I say I know all this; but no one else shall know it. The next step is for you; I shall take no more steps; I will seal this with the seal of confession" (127). Again Father Brown has found his man, but instead of handing him over to the authorities, he imposes "the seal of confession" on himself and allows Bohun to turn himself in, perhaps as a way for the man to begin the redemption process. Now, Father Brown is a good priest and a good detective, but by changing the mode of how fictional detectives are supposed to act, he brings the entire genre into question. Not only does the genre change in meaning, but the responsibility of this detective, the definition of evil, and the roles of other characters all change.

The simplest statement of Father Brown's reengineered role as a priest-detective is that he is not responsible to society as other detectives are, but instead answers directly to God. Burns sums up this difference well: "Perhaps most intriguing of all of the passions and aversions of this detective is his amazing disinterest in apprehending criminals . . ." (37). Father Brown as a priest does not feel obligated to catch criminals. While he does stop criminals, it is usually out of a concern for their moral wellbeing. In "The Flying Stars," he catches up to Flambeau as the latter

is trying to escape with stolen diamonds and says, “I want you to give them back, Flambeau, and I want you to give up this life. There is still youth and honour and humour in you; don’t fancy they will last in that trade. Men may keep a sort of level of good, but no man has ever been able to keep on one level of evil” (58). This dialogue that would be completely unexpected from a police officer or a private detective of the Holmesian style sounds familiar and acceptable from a priest. Not only has Father Brown detected the crime, but he convinces Flambeau to give the diamonds back, and in the next story, “The Invisible Man,” Flambeau has quit crime completely and become a private detective. Overall, Father Brown has been successful not only in his trade as a priest—a sinner has been converted—but he has also prevented crime and returned stolen property; he has protected a criminal from his own crime.

Because of Father Brown’s priesthood, his foremost concern is with religious guilt—not legal guilt—and this allows Chesterton’s reengineered detective fiction genre to ask questions about morality that its writers had not considered before. Woodman writes, “The concern with spiritual rather than legal guilt means that the whole emphasis is redemptive rather than retributive. In that the priest is a spiritual detective he both is and is not concerned with criminal guilt” (235). Woodman lists a practical and important example of this: “In another self-conscious twist to the tradition the convention of the criminal being forced to confess to the crime turns into the linked but also very different concept of confessing the sin” (235). Not only has Father reconfigured his role as a detective, but he is also no longer concerned with criminals’ legal guilt. Burns mentions that Father Brown actively uses the police organization to hunt anyone once only (37), and that comes much later in *The Scandal of Father Brown*, in “The Quick One”; however, even that does not involve Father Brown directly bringing someone to justice. The police think he has sent them to hunt a criminal, but, in reality, the man Father Brown is after is only a

witness. Burns explains that "Brown's way of proceeding is similar to an older, pre-modern rationalism in that he begins by viewing a criminal's injustice not as innocent, animal evil but as moral depravity, something that is possible only for free human beings" (40). And in "Reality, Illusion and Art in *The Father Brown* Stories," Andre Gushurst-Moore claims that "the revelation of the moral life of the characters is more important than the revelation of 'who dunnit,' and so the need for penitence is more urgent than satisfaction in punishment" (327). Not only is Father Brown looking for that penitence, but he also sees the crime connected with it in the way that Chesterton sees it: as sin. This conception of the issue is in direct antagonism to a traditional view of the crime. Because a Holmes or a Dupin does not appeal to higher supernatural power, his criminals are only answerable to natural, manmade institutions—those laws of society that govern action. Because Father Brown does not make protecting society his goal, he redefines the detective's role by looking for spiritual sin, not legal guilt.

If guilt is no longer something defined by the state but by God, then more characters than just the villain may be guilty, and perhaps even the guilty are capable of becoming the good; in the Father Brown stories, changing definitions of evil lead to role confusion in detective stories. In describing and defining detective fiction, Symons says, "In a detective story good people and bad people are clearly defined and do not change (except for the bad person who is pretending to be good). Policemen will not beat up suspects, nor will the criminal's state of mind be considered interesting, since the policemen are on the side of light and the criminal on the side of darkness" (20). This dichotomy between a good detective and an evil villain exists in nearly all of early detective fiction. Sherlock Holmes may go against the law in small ways from time-to-time, but there is no question in the reader's mind that Sherlock Holmes is in the right—the villain is evil. But the case in the Father Brown stories is, as Woodman points out, that "[t]he doctrine of

original sin forces a deconstruction of the black-and-white morality" (234). When Father Brown focuses on spiritual guilt, ignoring society's invectives, he brings into question who is really guilty. Of course, according to the law, Sherlock Holmes is in the right; he hunts criminals and delivers them to justice. Father Brown very quietly questions this standard, and he acts on it by aligning himself with criminals, blurring the lines between detective and criminal.

In the Father Brown stories, one of the obvious anomalies is Flambeau—a criminal who is redeemed and becomes a detective himself. In "The Blue Cross," Chesterton describes Flambeau as a "colossus of crime" (1) and, in "The Flying Stars," Father Brown mentions to Flambeau that he is an "honest outlaw, a merry robber of the rich" (58). Of course, Flambeau is exactly the kind of criminal that Chesterton would imagine: boisterous, humorous, and daring. Based on the details of Flambeau's crimes, one even suspects that Chesterton enjoyed committing the crimes vicariously through Flambeau, just as Father Brown vicariously commits them himself for the purpose of bringing Flambeau to justice. But the most interesting part of this tale is that Flambeau is not condemned. His actions are, but he is asked to repent, and he does so. By the time of the next story in the collection, "The Invisible Man," Flambeau has become a private detective himself. Questions immediately arise of whether he served time in jail, how he escaped the punishment for his past crimes, and whether he is still "on the run." Chesterton, however, does not deign to comment on these questions, suggesting that the answers are either not important or that they do not matter in his challenges to the detective genre. Either way, the reader is left with a criminal-turned-detective who now helps Father Brown to solve crimes. The direct implication that Chesterton sends to detective writers is that criminals are as human as detectives—that either can do good—and that one's status as a criminal need not be permanent.

Father Brown's role change is found in his sympathetic understanding of the criminals. As he says in "The Secret of Father Brown," to be able to understand the criminals that he is attempting to redeem, he mentally commits the sin that the criminals have committed. He says, "You see, I had murdered them all myself . . . So, of course, I knew how it was done" (496). As noted before, he goes on to further implicate himself by saying, "I thought and thought about how a man might come to be like that, until I realised that I really *was* like that, in everything except actual final consent to the action" (497). Chesterton creates a detective method in which the detective must *become* the murder—must have committed the crime—for him to really know the truth of what has happened, an action perhaps intentionally analogous, again, to Jesus's becoming human. The difference there is that Jesus does not acknowledge a shared propensity to sin like his fellow humans. Thus, the question Chesterton raises here is one of who actually owns the guilt for murder. Father Brown differentiates between those who have consented to the crime and those who have not, but he knows that, in similar circumstances, he may have done the same. This understanding perhaps is partially what informs Father Brown's unwillingness to deliver criminals to the police. Considering their similar sinful natures, he shares in guilt with the criminal, and he leaves God to judge the criminal and bring him to justice. In contrast to this method is that of Holmes who in "The Red-Headed League" invites an "official police agent" to assist him in apprehending a criminal (186) with whom Holmes claims to "have had one or two little scores of my own to settle" (189). Father Brown does not hold grudges against criminals and he rarely calls the police to assist him; he is not interested in bringing them to prison, and he understands his own sinfulness enough that he is not bitter against the criminals but instead acts as a bridge between them and detectives. The core of Chesterton's innovations in developing his detective character can be found here: his detective is a criminal in all but deed; that is how he is

effective and how he solves crimes.

If, in Father Brown, the justice-embodying detective has changed to that of the empathetic priest, the priest-detective is no longer a protector of society as Holmes or Dupin are. Though he jails most criminals he comes in contact with, in "A Case of Identity," Holmes cannot bring Mr. Windibank to justice because the man—the villain—while having hurt his daughter, has "done nothing actionable." Holmes bemoans that "there never was a man who deserved punishment more" (201). But his motivation is not to reclaim Windibank from an action that God, and not society, damns; Holmes creates and defends his own law. Though he will take no legal action against the man, he threatens to attack Mr. Windibank with a hunting crop, a far cry from Father Brown's tactics, who even when threatened with violence, often responds only with priestly admonitions. In Holmes's action, the reader sees that the detective represents a societal idea of justice and morality. Not only does he respect the law, but, without referring to a God-ordained morality, he appeals to an intuitive judgment of right and wrong for which he establishes his own punishment. Of course, since he has established this law, he will likely not offend against it, and even if he does, since he is the truth-seeking and superhuman detective in his story (whom few have ever defeated), no one else can punish him for that offense. Thus, his materialistic worldview makes society and himself the moral centers of his universe. Father Brown, then, is unique from a detective who symbolizes justice and protection of society. He admits his own guilt and by doing so submits himself and the criminals he finds to a higher power's judgment. His method suggests that detectives cannot be too proud or careful of their status as society's protectors—they are the same as their prey in all but committing the crime itself.

Gregory Dowling is correct in "G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown Stories: the Debt to

Sherlock Holmes" when he claims that "[n]o fictional detective provides a more obvious contrast to the figure of Sherlock Holmes than G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown" (81). Father Brown is a priest who attempts to understand criminals so much so that he becomes like them and raises questions about the morality and evil that the Holmes stories seem to have defined so well. Sherlock Holmes as the first "consulting detective" (*A Study in Scarlet* 24) permanently establishes the archetypal detective in his rational way of understanding criminals from the evidence and clues they leave behind. Father Brown's priesthood informs his reasons for discovering criminals and gives him more personal experiences on which to draw when chasing criminals. And Father Brown's method, too, allows him to understand different philosophies and different people from the premise that Christianity and logic are not incompatible. Chesterton revokes the lonely, aquiline, detail-oriented, and materialistic rationalizer by creating a Christian detective who does not operate on the behalf of society but on the behalf of God. In fact, in addition to being a Christian, Father Brown's detective methods are also influenced by his status as a priest, a philosopher, a psychologist, and a Catholic. Routledge says, "The classical detective story, therefore, reassures its readers that despite its apparent chaos and danger, and their insignificance in it, the universe is knowable and, by implication, controllable" (4), but the classical detective's method is to do this by discovery of truth through material evidence. Gushurst-Moore explains the worldview vital to Father Brown's detective methods:

> The detective is primarily the priest, a fusion which reflects and connects the spiritual and the secular, the supernatural and the quotidian, into an artistic vision of reality which does not recognise duality, only wholeness. Father Brown bears witness to a complete created order which is denied by the partial philosophies that are his essential enemies: Atheism, Scientific Rationalism, Materialism

> (including Communism and Capitalism), all of which represent the material without the spiritual; and Paganism, Spiritualism, New Religions, Orientalism, and Superstition which stand for the spiritual without the presence of reason. It is this vision of completeness which is no small part of the achievement of the Father Brown stories. (327)

The Holmesian archetype adheres to one of those "partial philosophies"; his scientific rationalism that informs his role as a private detective keeps him from seeing the universe as Father Brown sees it. Heady summarizes the vital differences between Father Brown and Sherlock Holmes:

> With Father Brown, Chesterton deliberately set out to create a counter-myth. As many critics have pointed out, detective stories are epistemological in nature; they depict a world in which justice and meaning have been apparently eradicated, and they restore its order and significance by determining how it can be properly interpreted. The detective and the sage are near akin. In replacing the ultra-empirical Sherlock Holmes . . . with the Thomistic Father Brown, Chesterton is making a point about how and by whom the universe can be best understood. (n. pag.)

Chesterton asserts that Father Brown understands crime because he understands and believes Christianity. His faith and priesthood allow him to better know who the criminal is and keep him from setting himself up above the criminals—they are what makes Father Brown so human and so good a detective.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Chesterton writes in his *Autobiography,* "Some time ago, seated at ease upon a summer evening and taking a serene review of an indefensibly fortunate and happy life, I calculated that I must have committed at least fifty-three murders, and been concerned with hiding about half a hundred corpses for the purpose of the concealment of crimes . . ." (317). While Chesterton's detective fiction writing career, full of death and crime, expands far beyond Father Brown to collections like *The Paradoxes of Mr. Pond, The Poet and the Lunatics, The Man Who Knew Too Much,* and more, his most famous detective and the only one still popularly read remains Father Brown. Apart from the sheer number of Father Brown stories written and the contemporary popularity they enjoyed, the reason for their relative popularity seems to reside in popular reader's preference for entertaining literature over philosophical dissertations, a critique often leveled at many of his other detective stories. Of course, the division is not quite perfect; Chesterton's other detective stories often are interesting or funny, and sometimes Father Brown can "wax eloquent" on a point of theology that Chesterton may hold dear, but, for the most part, Father Brown is superior in his ability to entertain explicitly while teaching implicitly.

The entertainment Chesterton's other detective stories provide is often enjoyable, but their morality is much more heavy-handed. In "The Fantastic Friends" *The Poet and the Lunatics,* the hero of the story explains lunacy to another character and concludes with little explanation that "of all the maniacs I have tried to manage, the maddest of all maniacs was the man of business," madder than crazy philosophers, religious fanatics, or zealous political rebels (18). This statement seems to be an attack by Chesterton against a type of person that, throughout his writing, he has a strong vendetta against. An ironically funnier example occurs at the end of "The Moderate Murderer": one character offers a monologue on the definition of Moderatism,

Extremism, madness, and imagination. Finally, after everything necessary to these topics has been said, another character interrupts saying, "I know . . . you needn't say it, because I believe I understand everything now. Let me tell you two things also; they are shorter; but they have to do with it"; she then goes on to very practically give resolution to the plot and finish the story (54-55). While this example is probably not a conscious self-critique, in much of his fiction, Chesterton's characters attempt to steal the plot and take it over by espousing Chesterton's own political and philosophical musings—a distraction recovered from often only by an absolute necessity for the plot to continue. While this progression of Chesterton's views sometimes happens in Father Brown's stories as well, they are far less obvious to the reader because of the interesting methods Chesterton uses to disguise them.

Father Brown rises nearer, then, to the popular level of Sherlock Holmes because, though he is reengineering the profession of fictional detective to purport Chesterton's Christian principles, the Father Brown stories do so while still being primarily entertaining. And with this entertainment, Chesterton brings his insight into the deeper meanings of things to give his stories a literary and philosophical heft that much of detective fiction neither has nor tries to have. Julian Symons explains in *The Detective Story in Britain* Chesterton's balance between adhering to the traditional detective story model and creating literary themes:

> Chesterton is not a model for any other writer to copy, and the later logicians of the detective story, who drew up the 'fair play' rules, complained bitterly that Chesterton outraged them all, that he would not tell you whether all the windows were fastened or whether a shot in the gun-room could be heard in the butler's pantry. But the genius of Chesterton lay in his ability to ignore all that, to leave out everything extraneous to the single theme he wanted to develop, and yet to

> provide us with a clue that is blindingly obvious once we have accepted the premises of the story. (20)

While Chesterton does write detective fiction—his stories have a detective and a solution not impossible for the readers to discover on their own—his stories have more reason for existing than to be mere pleasure reading. A Father Brown story attempts to attack not only the mysterious circumstances of a murder or theft, but also the chaotic metaphysical implications that murder or theft may have. Typically, this chaos is paradoxical—a tangle of opposing statements and ideas that seem irresolvable. Perhaps even, characters in the stories have different ways of approaching these problems or of interacting together within the morass created by these entanglements of logic. But in each case, Father Brown solves the problem and discovers the villain. Making his way through the criminal and philosophical messes in *The Innocence of Father Brown*, Father Brown, representative of the Christian faith, resolves the impossible questions about the cases and the conflicts between characters that represent diametric ideologies.

Father Brown has the ability to do this primarily because he abandons sole adherence to the objective logic of detectives like Sherlock Holmes and C. Auguste Dupin. Those detectives solve cases rationally, focusing only on the material evidence before them, leaving a spiritual and human gap that Father Brown readily fills. Instead of acting as a private detective, he is a priest. Instead of being a pure rationalist, he combines logic with intuition. Instead of relying only on science, he also understands philosophy. Instead of being purely objective, he has empathy for fellow humans. And instead of working and living in a universe that consists only of the material, he heavily employs his faith in his detective methods. This, then, is Chesterton's primary addition to the detective fiction story: he accepts the presence of the spiritual in his

stories, an acceptance symbolized by Father Brown's priesthood. Father Brown, because of his understanding of the spiritual, not only can solve paradoxes by understanding their spiritual context, but he can understand other characters and resolve or pass judgment on their beliefs because of his belief in an overarching spiritual world. Thus, he brings resolution to the crime in each story as well as brings resolution to the philosophical questions that the situations raise.

Chesterton uses the Father Brown stories to teach and delight his audience—making the educational aspects so integral to the entertaining ones that the audience is able to learn without consciously realizing what is being taught. In doing this, he is taking a classical approach to what makes good literature beautiful. Horace, in *The Art of Poetry,* writes, "The man who has managed to blend usefulness with pleasure wins everyone's approbation, for he delights his reader at the same time as he instructs him" (108). Similarly, Sir Philip Sidney, in *A Defence of Poetry*, argues, "Poesy therefore is an art of imitation . . . with this end, to teach and delight" (25). The Father Brown stories accomplish both of the requirements that Horace and Sidney set; he takes a secular genre—detective fiction—and, through his own worldview, makes the stories both enjoyable and reflective of his understanding of the world. He does not over-moralize (though Father Brown does sometimes begin to preach), but the Christian structure and theory of his methods quickly reveal themselves to his audience. Because Chesterton does delight his audience, as proved by Father Brown's popularity, and does teach, as evident in the incorporated morals and in studies of the text, he succeeds in creating beautiful literature.

Chesterton is able to combine entertainment with Christian teaching in his Father Brown stories because he challenges the premises of the traditional detective story. He reassigns detective fiction's energies in affirming rationalistic materialism—a purely physical world—to an attempt to teach truth about a Christian apologetics and a Catholic understanding of the world.

In the end, Father Brown is an argument for Christianity against the claims of atheism. Chesterton shows that because Father Brown can understand paradoxes, solve binaries, and operate as a "full" detective, he is a better detective than Sherlock Holmes, C. Auguste Dupin, or any fictional detective who disregards the presence of the spiritual in cases of human crime and sin.

Father Brown is the complete detective. In a way that is reminiscent of the incarnated Christ, he is a spiritual being within a physical body who communes and empathizes with sinful humans while upholding justice and truth. In a genre that celebrates civilization's fight against chaos and crime, Father Brown suggests that the focus be turned away from the crime and toward a deeper issue—sin. Instead of protecting society from the criminals within it, he contends for the souls of the criminals he meets, protecting them from the sin within their hearts—a condition that he personally understands because he has it too. Chesterton's greatest subversion of the detective fiction genre occurs when Father Brown is the first detective to acknowledges his own share in the spiritual realm and his brotherhood with the criminal realm.

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