

THE SEVEN MOODS OF GILBERT:  
CONVERSION NARRATIVE IN *THE FLYING INN*

Dorian Wimpole has a change of heart.

As merely a secondary character in *The Flying Inn*, G. K. Chesterton's exuberant 1914 novel, Dorian's message is easily overlooked. Despite his "singular entrance and exit" in relation to the parlours of the aristocracy, his quiet actions are eclipsed by the woodland adventures of Dalroy and Pump, the parliamentary intrigues of Lord Ivywood, and the religious antics of Misysra Ammon, Prophet of the Moon.<sup>1</sup> With a tongue-in-cheek reproach against such Chestertonian peeves as teetotalism, Impressionism, and corrupt government, *The Flying Inn* offers social and political commentary on Edwardian England, written as it was on the eve of the First World War when American Prohibition and the Temperance movement threatened the existence of British pubs. It was received in its time as "a light diversion" emphasizing "the importance of sheer fun."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the drinking songs from this book (printed in a separate volume as *Wine, Water and Song*) became a part of Chesterton's own popular culture, finding their way even into meetings of the Fabian society.<sup>3</sup> But more serious criticism followed the early analysis of its puzzling array of themes, plot twists, and emblematic characters; for example, John Coates (who dubs *The Flying Inn* Chesterton's "most underrated novel") finds it to be a coherent political, social, philosophical, and religious statement.<sup>4</sup> Yet he demurs from "explaining" the novel, as does Chesterton himself who describes *The Flying Inn* as "a

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<sup>1</sup> G. K. Chesterton, "The Flying Inn," in *A G. K. Chesterton Omnibus* (London: Methuen and Co., 1947), 608.

<sup>2</sup> John Coates, "Malaise at the Heart of *The Flying Inn*," *Seven: An Anglo-American Review* 8 (1987): 25.

<sup>3</sup> As noted by Christopher Hollis, *The Mind of Chesterton* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1970), 145.

<sup>4</sup> John Coates, "The Philosophy and Religious Background of *The Flying Inn*," *The Chesterton Review* 12, no. 3 (1986): 326; see also John Coates, "Symbol and Structure in *The Flying Inn*," *The Chesterton Review* 4, no. 2 (1978): 246-259.

harlequinade” at which he failed, “an extremely promising subject—for somebody else.”<sup>5</sup>

Despite critical appreciation for the richness of the work and Chesterton’s own humble disclaimer, the novel’s abundance might be interpreted through the eyes of the forgotten character, Dorian, whose story summarizes perhaps the foremost theme of the book. *The Flying Inn* is a narrative of conversion in which the subplot of Dorian Wimpole stands as an encapsulating example, bearing similarity to Chesterton’s own spiritual journey.

Let us briefly review *The Flying Inn*. Lord Philip Ivywood, a diplomatic Member of Parliament and a Nietzschean fatalist of “faultless and hueless face” who misunderstands “the animal side of man,” has used his influence to shut down the inns of England, reserving for only the upper classes the right to imbibe spirits.<sup>6</sup> The Turkish Misysra Ammon promotes a syncretistic interpretation of Islam, making his way from a dwindling audience on the beach, via the middle-class Society of Simple Souls, into the elite of England through the patronage of Ivywood. He preaches a restrictive message of alcoholic abstention and vegetarianism in the drawing rooms of the inebriated and gluttonous, who are no longer “oppressed by the passing superstitions of the Galilaeans.”<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, the common man, who has been unwillingly delivered from the “curse of wine” by the closing of the public houses, cheers on two hero rebels: Captain Patrick Dalroy is an Irish-born revolutionary sworn to uphold the British people’s personal liberty and right of choice; he enlists dispossessed pub owner Humphrey Pump whose domestic mind is “a rich soil of subconscious memories and traditions.”<sup>8</sup> Dalroy and Pump uproot the cross-emblazoned, wooden signpost of The Old Ship Inn and flee with a cask of rum

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<sup>5</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Autobiography*, ed. David Dooley, in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 16 (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 276.

<sup>6</sup> *The Flying Inn*, 562, 540.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 440.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 430, 434.

and a wheel of cheese that they freely dispense almost sacramentally, relying on a legal loophole guaranteeing liquor may be served anywhere an inn sign is planted.

Several other characters affect the story line. The sceptical and bored Lady Joan Brett is in love with Captain Dalroy but being wooed into Lord Ivywood's harem—an institution now legalized out of English respect for the Moslem family.<sup>9</sup> The relativistic journalist, Hibbs However, is a higher critic whose subjective interpretation of the news has “scattered the brains of all men.”<sup>10</sup> Dorian Wimpole is an aristocrat who begins in the camp of the elite and is drawn away from his academic inactivity toward the revolutionary zeal of the fugitives. For each character, the choice is the same: to passively follow the vague, wandering, and intrusive eastern teachings (which end in the monomaniacal solipsism of Ivywood who believes himself to be God), or to join the deliberate forest journey of the loyal Christian British forces beneath the mobilized sign of the inn (which promotes spiritual self-determinism and leads to reclamation of democracy).

The fictional characters of *The Flying Inn* reflect aspects of Chesterton's own life and disposition, as seen in his more overtly autobiographical writings. Like Ivywood, for example, Chesterton as a young man was caught in a nightmare, in danger of becoming “a monomaniac about a notion” merely because it was his own.<sup>11</sup> The ethics and theology of Chesterton's late-Victorian society were “wearing thin,” producing a religious hunger in him resembling the curiosity of the “simple souls” of *The Flying Inn*'s England.<sup>12</sup> Like Lady Joan, Chesterton attended a “strange club where somebody was lecturing on Nietzsche” in a fashion replayed by his character Misysra; Chesterton's introduction there to the Dalroy-like curate, Conrad Noel,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 426-428.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 510.

<sup>11</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 328.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 36.

caused “dreadful seeds of doubt” to be sown in his mind concerning his own anti-clerical attitude and spiritual beliefs.<sup>13</sup> As Dorian begins to question the view of the vegetarians because of Dalroy’s lusty test of truth and commonsense applied to the current philosophies, so Chesterton began a “serious consideration of the theory of a Church” because of the humorous, idealistic, and eccentric Reverend Noel.<sup>14</sup> Chesterton, then, identified himself almost schizophrenically with many of his *Flying Inn* characters. It is not surprising to see such a variety of limited metaphors to his real-life experiences in a single piece of his fictional writing, for (as Dorothy Sayers comments on the relationship between a creative work and its creator) no author is completely revealed in a single work or character.<sup>15</sup> Only a synthesis of all Chesterton’s writing would prove that his outlook on life was unified—a redundant task.<sup>16</sup> We must be more specific. Our purpose in focusing on the elected character of Dorian Wimpole in *The Flying Inn* is to seek analogical and autobiographical reflections of Chesterton’s own conversion.

To say that Chesterton intended a religious and didactic reading of Dorian’s fictional transformation is almost tautological. Hillaire Belloc, for example, early on noted his friend’s active teaching through parallelism, simile, and metaphor.<sup>17</sup> More recently, Ian Boyd has called all Chesterton’s novels powerful allegory meant to teach and persuade, meant to “interpret the many signs of a sacramental universe through which God speaks to man.”<sup>18</sup> While Chesterton’s socio-political motives through fiction have been discussed, many scholars also support a vigorously theological interpretation of his journalism and his fiction. Lynette Hunter, for

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 155-159.

<sup>15</sup> Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1968), 55.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Alzina Stone Dale, *The Outline of Sanity: A Biography of G. K. Chesterton* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 130-131.

<sup>17</sup> Hillaire Belloc, *On the Place of Gilbert Chesterton in English Letters* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1940), 15, 39.

<sup>18</sup> See Ian Boyd, *Novels of G. K. Chesterton: A Study in Art and Propaganda* (London: Paul Elek, 1975), preface, xi; Ian Boyd, “In Search of the Essential Chesterton,” *Seven: An Anglo-American Review* 1 (1980): 44.

example, finds in *The Flying Inn* a contrast between the creeds of perfectionistic fatalism and catholic Christianity.<sup>19</sup> Ian Crowther maintains that Chesterton stated and re-stated a Christian world view, even in his fiction.<sup>20</sup> Chesterton has been dubbed a “metaphysical moralist,”<sup>21</sup> and Marshall McLuhan encourages Chesterton’s readers to abandon a purely literary and journalistic appraisal in favour of seeking his contemporary moral relevance through his use of analogy.<sup>22</sup> The critics are convincing in their appraisal of Chesterton’s works as primarily religious.

Not only scholarly testimony but also his own attestations indicate that Chesterton himself intended a religious reading of every detail for, as he says, a writer “cannot be thankful for grass and wild flowers without connecting it with theology.”<sup>23</sup> He declares all art to be religious.<sup>24</sup> Chesterton doubts “whether any of our actions is really anything but an allegory . . . whether any truth can be told except in a parable.”<sup>25</sup> He employs religious images (familiar from other works) which demand our symbolic interpretation: compare the use of wine in this novel to Father Brown’s recurring sacramental metaphor of the wine-washed world.<sup>26</sup> Again, an early scene in *The Flying Inn* pits freedom against tyranny when the hero (angry over the destruction of the vineyards) uproots an olive tree at a diplomatic conference promoting peace at all costs; in the same way, the hero of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* uproots a great tree when faced with

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<sup>19</sup> Lynette Hunter, *G. K. Chesterton: Explorations in Allegory* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), 109.

<sup>20</sup> See Ian Crowther, *G. K. Chesterton, Thinkers of our Time* (London: The Claridge Press, 1991), 49-50.

<sup>21</sup> Hugh Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1947), xxi.

<sup>22</sup> See H. Marshall McLuhan, “Where Chesterton Comes In,” in *G. K. Chesterton: A Half Century of Views*, ed. D. J. Conlon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 77.

<sup>23</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 325. “Consider the lilies” of Luke 12:27.

<sup>24</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Come To Think Of It*, Essay Index Reprint Series (Freeport, N. Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1931), 72-3. Cf. Matthew 7:16, 20 in which the heart of a person is known, as is a tree, by its fruits.

<sup>25</sup> As spoken by his fictional character, Gabriel Gale, in G. K. Chesterton, *The Poet and the Lunatics: Episodes in the Life of Gabriel Gale* (London: Cassell and Company, 1929), 130. In Matthew 13:34, Jesus spoke to the multitudes, “and without a parable spake he not unto them.”

<sup>26</sup> See Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 464; cf. “The Secret of Father Brown” in G. K. Chesterton, *The Complete Father Brown* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 1981), 466. Cf. Matthew 26:28, where Jesus says of the wine, “This is my blood,” and Colossians 1:20, in which Christ’s blood reconciles “all things” heavenly and earthly to Himself.

similar military and spiritual battle.<sup>27</sup> *The Flying Inn* repeatedly pictures the moon as a symbol for fatalism, a detached intellectualism that Chesterton describes elsewhere as “light without heat . . . secondary light, reflected from a dead world.”<sup>28</sup> The creeping syncretism of “Chrislam” (Ivywood’s new religion of progress) blends together the symbols of cross and crescent to form the new “Croscent,” reminding the reader of Chesterton’s earlier synthesis of shapes in *The Ball and the Cross*, which symbolized as well the battle between rationalism and Christianity.<sup>29</sup> The illustration of sunset and daybreak as spiritual death and re-awakening can be seen also in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, which opens at dusk in the “disastrous twilight” of anarchy and closes at the hopeful sunrise.<sup>30</sup> The wind of free will blowing through *The Flying Inn* likewise animates the traveller in *Manalive* who was on a journey seeking his spiritual home, for “Man has always lost his way. He has been a tramp ever since Eden.”<sup>31</sup> Others have noticed this emphasis by Chesterton on “the constant journey, the wandering search,” and the *via crucis* is an expedition Chesterton elsewhere sets in a fictional forest.<sup>32</sup> These reiterated images of wine and tree and

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<sup>27</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 428-431; cf. G. K. Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (Ware, GB: Wordsworth Editions, 1996), 122-124. See also the uprooting of nations and personal hope in Jeremiah 45:4 and Job 19:10; for salvific imagery see Genesis 2:9, 17 for the tree of knowledge, Genesis 1:2 and Revelation 2:7, 22:2 for the tree of life, and Galatians 3:13 for the tree of the cross. See further Deb Elkind, “Roots and Branches: The Symbol of the Tree in the Imagination of G. K. Chesterton” (M. A. Thesis, Briercrest Biblical Seminary, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 519, 524, 720; see also G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, ed. David Dooley, in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 231-232. Cf. Job 25:5 on the dullness of the moon and the depravity of man.

<sup>29</sup> See Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 530, 447; G. K. Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross* (Dover Publications: New York, 1995), 4-5. Cf. G. K. Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Dumb Ox* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 84. See also Ephesians 2:11-22 for reconciliation and triumph through the cross.

<sup>30</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare*, ed. Stephen Medcalf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 43. Cf. Romans 13:11-12 for a picture of the works of darkness and the dawn of salvation, John 3:21 for Christ’s symbolic figuring of conversion as moving from darkness to light.

<sup>31</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Manalive*, G. K. Chesterton Reprint Series (Beaconsfield: Darwen Finlayson, 1962), 9-10, 155-156. Cf. John 3:8 for the wind of the Spirit. See also G. K. Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World* (London: Cassell and Company, 1912), 65.

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., Peter R. Hunt, “Dickens’s Influence on Chesterton’s Imaginative Writing,” *Chesterton Review* 7, no. 1 (1981): 39. See further “The Tower of Treason” in G. K. Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton: The Return of Don Quixote, Tales of the Long Bow, The Man Who Knew Too Much*, ed. George J. Marlin and Richard P. Rabatin, vol. 8 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 713-714. For the Old Testament journey theme, see T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Main*

cross, of moon, sun, wind, and the journey home convince us that Chesterton has religious motives in *The Flying Inn*. Moreover, even the fictional and antagonistic higher critics of Dorian's day describe the mystery of the vanishing pub sign as "a curious parallel to the Gospel narrative."<sup>33</sup> It is not surprising, then, to find in this novel a chapter entitled "The Seven Moods of Dorian" (in which the character undergoes a "very considerable and rather valuable change") offering a step-by-step guide through the silver fairylands which are the Dantesque wood of personal reformation in Dorian's own dark night of the soul.<sup>34</sup>

The evidence endorsing a religious reading of Chesterton's novel does not, however, mandate an autobiographical interpretation. That is, just because Chesterton's fiction is theologically informed does not prove he intended it to describe his own affective conversion. However, others have read his fiction as autobiographical.<sup>35</sup> David Leigh, for example, finds that Chesterton's use of allegorical fiction reveals intense convictions about his personal transformation, and that his allegory, apologetical essay, and autobiography all express his conversion to Christianity.<sup>36</sup> If we can demonstrate that Dorian's sojourn in the wood and resulting rejection of Ivywood's principles constitute a type of conversion, and note some similarities to Chesterton's own phases of spiritual enlightenment, we make a case for the thesis that Dorian's philosophical change is Chesterton's spiritual conversion. Before considering the

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*Themes of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995). Cf. Genesis 2:9, 3:22-24, Revelation 21:1-22:5 for the return to Eden, and Hebrews 4:1-11 regarding spiritual journeyers entering rest.

<sup>33</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 510.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 594, 580. The occurrence of Dante's dark wood of choice seen in other of Chesterton's work has been noted elsewhere; see Dominic Manganiello, "'Where in Hell Are We?': Chesterton on Dante," *The Chesterton Review* 20, no. 1 (1994): 65-81.

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., Hollis, *The Mind of Chesterton*, 59-60; see also Ian Boyd, "The Legendary Chesterton," in *G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis: The Riddle of Joy*, ed. Michael H. Macdonald and Andrew A. Tadie (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 58.

<sup>36</sup> David Leigh, "The Psychology of Conversion in Chesterton's and Lewis's Autobiographies," in *G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis: The Riddle of Joy*, ed. Michael H. Macdonald and Andrew A. Tadie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 292.

parallels between Dorian's fictional moods and Chesterton's spiritual course, it would be helpful to consider the definition of conversion and its literary genre, the conversion narrative.

### **Definition of Conversion**

In understanding Dorian's tale as a fictional conversion narrative, we are not entering the denominational discussion so thoroughly undertaken by others regarding Chesterton's 1922 reception into the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>37</sup> Certainly Chesterton regarded himself as a Christian before he was a Roman Catholic.<sup>38</sup> Neither are we seeking to articulate the doctrines of Islam, even as Chesterton laid them out in *The Flying Inn*, tempting as this subject may be in our times of political and religious turmoil. Rather, we are centering on the dynamic of the soul change itself, and the stages of turning away from personal error and toward the Person of Christ (however allegorical and symbolic the Christocentric goal in this novel). That is, we are holding to the orthodoxy Chesterton himself had achieved by 1908 which, six years before his writing of *The Flying Inn*, he described as "the central Christian theology (sufficiently summarized in the Apostles' Creed) . . . the best root of energy and sound ethics."<sup>39</sup> This theology for Chesterton revolved around the doctrines of Creation, the Fall into sin, Redemption, and the New Creation. In its essence and for our discussion, Christian conversion can be defined as a mysterious act initiated by the Creator whereby an individual turns from sin and toward God through faith in Jesus Christ, as first described in Scripture and subsequently repeated innumerable times in countless hearts.

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<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., Joseph Pearce, *Literary Converts: Spiritual Inspiration in an Age of Unbelief* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000); Douglas Cock, "A Protestant View of Chesterton," *The Chesterton Review* 17, no. 1 (1991): 25-31; Dale, *Outline of Sanity*, 203-233; Cyril Clemens, *Chesterton As Seen by His Contemporaries* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1969), 69; Crowther, *G.K. Chesterton*, 50-55, 124.

<sup>38</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 85.

<sup>39</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 215.

Scripture uses various metaphors in speaking of conversion. While the Old Testament sees conversion as God's turning back to Israel or turning His people back towards Himself, an overview of the New Testament renders a clearer pattern to this process of the spiritual pilgrimage.<sup>40</sup> The synoptic gospels call for radical obedience to a life of faith in the face of danger, where forgiveness and healing, joy and peace are to be found vertically in reconciliation between God and the human, and horizontally in communion among people. In the book of Acts, blindness turns to sight as Jew and Gentile alike are called into fellowship. The Gospel of John is radiant with the theme of cosmic light and darkness in the confrontation between good and evil, and shows that active faith results in ethical obedience. Paul's writings emphasize the newness of life in Christ, picturing creation recreated and revealing the doctrine of justification by faith whereby resultant works spring forth in the convert's life. The Christian Scriptures, then, do not suggest one stereotypical conversion experience for, as Richard Baxter concluded, "God breaketh not all men's hearts alike."<sup>41</sup> Yet, the New Testament uses the words *metanoia* (a change of mind) and *epistrophe* (turning) to convey this central idea of spiritual change as turning from sin and toward God.<sup>42</sup> *The Flying Inn* is saturated with these biblical themes, proving Chesterton's familiarity with the biblical definition of conversion. We see the reluctant pilgrim, Dorian, as he faces danger in the darkness and discovers enlightening, revivifying wonder in his reconciliation with creation and re-energizing fellowship with man.

The findings of current scholarship on the topic of biblical conversion apply, as well, to Dorian's story. In his comprehensive critique of the cultural and social factors of the religious

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<sup>40</sup> For three samples of conversion, see Deut. 13:17, Ezekiel 14:6, Acts 9.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Autobiography of Richard Baxter* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton, 1931); quoted in Hugh T. Kerr and John M. Mulder, *Famous Conversions* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 29.

<sup>42</sup> Acts 3:19 (NIV) sums up the consistent New Testament command, "Repent [*metanoeo*], then, and turn [*epistrophe*] to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

phenomenon, for example, Lewis Rambo sees genuine conversion as a total metamorphosis, radical in nature, “striking to the root of the human predicament.”<sup>43</sup> Ronald D. Witherup’s biblical study emphasizes the holistic aspect of the transformation, which is not limited to feelings of remorse or a passionless intellectualism but engages the whole person (intellect, emotion and volition) and involves a factual and positive recognition of the truth that is personally appropriated.<sup>44</sup> For his part, Alan Tippett recognizes several stages in the spiritual route that include God’s preparation in the life of the pre-convert, a Christocentric message, recognition of personal sin, a heart response, and a changed life.<sup>45</sup> Dorian’s conversion is a compendium; his alteration is radical (in keeping with Rambo), holistic (as Witherup insists), and allegorically reflective of each of Tippett’s stages. Dorian is prepared by his abandonment in the forest to receive a sacramentally coded message of salvation which brings him into an awareness of his own shortcomings and evokes a joyful metaphysical response resulting in an altered lifestyle.

### **Conversion Narrative as a Genre**

One consequence of conversions within the Christian tradition is the production of stories or testimonies which stimulate others to convert, and which act as paradigms of conversion for the next generation.<sup>46</sup> Early conversion tales in the form of fictional literature include such works as Dante’s *Vita Nuova* (an allegory of reformation from carnal love to spiritual), Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (these last two specifically mentioned in Dorian’s

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<sup>43</sup> Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), xii.

<sup>44</sup> Ronald D. Witherup, *Conversion in the New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994).

<sup>45</sup> Alan R. Tippett, “Conversion as a Dynamic Process in Christian Mission,” *Missiology* 2 (1977): 203-221.

<sup>46</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, p. 158.

quest).<sup>47</sup> Dickens's writings, so formative upon Chesterton's own, include *Little Dorrit* (with its metaphors of birth and rebirth) as well as *A Christmas Carol* (showing the conversion of Scrooge, with the images of the "ghosts of time" taking the place of the Holy Ghost in conviction, and spiritual rebirth allegorized by Scrooge's new spirit of kindness).<sup>48</sup> Chesterton read the Puritans' fiction as well: John Bunyan's allegorical *Pilgrim's Progress* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (in which the shipwrecked sailor comes to faith in God after finding and reading a Bible) and George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin* (one of the legends preceding and stimulating Chesterton's "more orthodox Christianity").<sup>49</sup> The Protestant emphasis on conversion accounts produced a fictional literature in keeping with the U-shaped narrative structure of conversion seen in Scripture, and not surprisingly reproduced in Chesterton's fiction.<sup>50</sup>

Not limited to allegory, Christian conversion sparked the writing also of autobiography, which is a blend of historically recordable truth and literary artistry.<sup>51</sup> Its post-canonical expression was introduced by Augustine's *Confessions*, which greatly influenced subsequent Christian confessional literature from the writings of Loyola to Luther, from Pascal to Kierkegaard. But it was the seventeenth century—close upon the heels of the Reformation—which saw, according to Bruce Hindmarsh, the "autobiographical moment in the history of

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<sup>47</sup> See Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 601.

<sup>48</sup> See "Conversion" in David Lyle Jeffrey, ed. *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 159-162.

<sup>49</sup> Dale, *Outline of Sanity*, 15. For the influence of many writers on his Chesterton's life, see also his brother's biography: [Cecil Chesterton], *G. K. Chesterton: A Criticism*, American ed. (New York: John Lane Company, 1909).

<sup>50</sup> See, e.g., "Myth II: Narrative" in Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1982), 169-198.

<sup>51</sup> See Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 28-48.

conversion.”<sup>52</sup> The “keen sense of introspective conscience and of individual self-determination” of the modern period popularized the self-conscious writing of retrospective spiritual memoirs, resulting in works like Bunyan’s significant *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* as well as such Methodist publications as Wesley’s *Journal*.<sup>53</sup> But Defoe went on to provide a fascinating new hybrid with *Moll Flanders* which dynamically combined criminal biography and spiritual autobiography.<sup>54</sup> Its lesser-known subtitle highlights the intensity with which the genre combined fiction and evangelical conversion in Moll, *Who was Born in Newgate, and during a Life of continu’d Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own Brother), Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transputed Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv’d Honest, and died a Penitent, Written from her own Memorandums*.

As a writer of memoir and fiction, Chesterton inherited this autobiographical religious culture so deeply imbued with the Methodist experience and expression of conversion. We can see the generic, U-shaped pattern of these early conversion stories appearing in his life writings as well as his novels. The typical early Methodist narrative, as described by Hindmarsh, begins with childhood as “a state of relative innocence and spiritual promise,” followed by the rebellion of adolescence in which “a period of hardening of heart as wrong-doing became habitual,” until “the word of God entered the experience . . . and began the process of return.”<sup>55</sup> So, too, Chesterton’s transformation began with a return to his childhood for (as Kevin Morris says) Chesterton saw conversion “as the salvation of the boy Gilbert, as restoration to his infant

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<sup>52</sup> Bruce D. Hindmarsh, “‘My chains fell off, my heart was free’: Early Methodist Conversion Narrative in New England,” *Church History* 68, no. 4 (1999): 913.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 914-915.

<sup>54</sup> According to David Lyle Jeffrey, *People of the Book: Christian Identity and Literary Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company with The Institute for Advanced Christian Studies, 1996), 283.

<sup>55</sup> Hindmarsh, “Early Methodist Conversion,” 922-925.

state.”<sup>56</sup> Chesterton himself referred to the metaphorical landscape of his first days—the little church of his baptism, the waterworks—as standing for “the acted allegory of human existence.”<sup>57</sup> His adolescence—that transition from dunce to lunatic—found him in a “disturbed or even diseased state of brooding and idling” as his dabbling in the occult fed his “moral anarchy within.”<sup>58</sup> Finally, Chesterton reached the age of adulthood, for the riddle of man is “hidden from boys and comes only to men in their maturity,” taking on “more and more the nature of a religious enlightenment” preceding “the splendid attainment of second childhood.”<sup>59</sup> We can see how Chesterton’s creedal, biblical doctrines organized his autobiographical writings detailing his personal Creation, Fall, Redemption, and New Creation. We will see below how the scenario of Dorian Wimpole’s change is similarly structured.

Considering Chesterton’s wide reading of religious writers (and the fact that his own grandfather was a Wesleyan lay-preacher), it is not surprising to see him incorporating the confessional elements popularized in England by the Methodists. Alongside hymnody, the abundance of conversion literature is, as Hindmarsh says, “one of the greatest literary legacies of early Methodism.”<sup>60</sup> After all, this was the genre associated with the time of such writers as the Clapham Sect evangelical Macaulay, whose *Essays* Chesterton devoured.<sup>61</sup> No doubt the genre of conversion literature influenced Chesterton himself. Dorian’s narrative may differ from popular evangelical testimony in its overtly fictional format, but the fact of its mirroring nature makes it a corollary to Chesterton’s more standard works, such as *Autobiography* and *Orthodoxy*.

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<sup>56</sup> Kevin L. Morris, “Chesterton’s Conversion: Hesitation and the Recovery of Infancy,” *The Chesterton Review* 18, no. 3 (1992): 375-376.

<sup>57</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 38

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 89, 96.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>60</sup> Hindmarsh, “Early Methodist Conversion,” 910.

<sup>61</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 9.

In order to more clearly understand the conversion of Dorian Wimpole, it is helpful to examine “The Seven Moods of Dorian.” The title of the chapter itself gives us a hint that Dorian’s conversion is referential, for the number seven carries a biblical symbolism for completeness: consider, for example, the seven sprinklings necessary to complete the Levitical blood sacrifice, or that Jesus made seven “I am” declarations of His identity.<sup>62</sup> Even Dorian gives a nod toward the title’s biblical symbolism when he refers to the blast of the Last (seventh) Trumpet heralding the resurrection of the dead and the return of Christ.<sup>63</sup> Chesterton elsewhere indicates the number’s analogical meaning: the seven-day week as the structure of creation schematizes his early short story, “A Picture of Tuesday” as well as *The Man Who Was Thursday*, and his poetry collection, “The Queen of Seven Swords,” typifies nations as the seven champions of Christendom.<sup>64</sup> Chesterton’s use of the word “moods” in the chapter title is also suspicious, and we note its application in both *Autobiography* and *Orthodoxy* to connote stages of his own conversion.<sup>65</sup> Even though the phases of Chesterton’s metamorphosis are not so obviously partitioned into Dorian’s seven moods, the symbolism stimulates inquiry into a correlation between the experiences of character and creator.

## **The Moods**

At his first appearance, Dorian is a milquetoast. He is a well-connected eccentric and “one of those who always tend to take their own fancies seriously.”<sup>66</sup> His notoriety as “Poet of the Birds”

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<sup>62</sup> Leviticus 16:14, 19; John 6:35-15:1.

<sup>63</sup> See Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 596; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:52, Revelation 11:15.

<sup>64</sup> See “A Picture of Tuesday” in G. K. Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton: Short Stories, Fairy Tales, Mystery Stories, Illustrations*, ed. George J. Marlin, Richard P. Rabatin, and John L. Swan, vol. 14 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 60-63; see also G. K. Chesterton, *The Queen of Seven Swords* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1926), 39-50.

<sup>65</sup> See, e.g., mood of brooding in Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 95-96; mood of reform in Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 310.

<sup>66</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 568.

was earned at the publication of his first book (an ingenious English interpretation of the birdsong of various species), but his creativity has dried up. An austere, academic bore with “too little of the juice of zest,” he resembles in a way his cousin, Lord Ivywood, who “shared the mental weakness of most men who have fed on books”; that is, Dorian ignores the reality in favour of the representation.<sup>67</sup> His senses have been dulled. In promoting the worth of animals over humans, he has forgotten the taste of oysters. He has displaced Chesterton’s “reality of being and its goodness” with a Manichean view of the oyster as an entity to be respected but not eaten.<sup>68</sup> Capitulating to the current trend as Chesterton was for a while “swept along with the prevalent philosophy of his day,” Dorian has entered “the great Ivywood debate on vegetarianism,” a religious philosophy of moral evolution also expressed in the progressive purification of teetotalism.<sup>69</sup> As Misysra says,

It will always be asked by those who hate the very vision of Progress: “Where do I draw the line? May I eat oysters? May I eat eggs? May I drink milk?” You may. You may eat or drink anything essential to your stage of evolution, so long as you are evolving towards a clearer and cleaner ideal of bodily life.<sup>70</sup>

Vegetarianism thus represents wrong thinking and is the antithesis of Chesterton’s theories on food and faith. Marshall McLuhan notes the “sacramental sense of the life of earth and sea and sky, of tillage and growth, and of *food and wine*, which informs his work” (italics mine).<sup>71</sup> The novel deals through fiction with a theme of evolutionary morality, this progressive cyclical nature of Misysra’s philosophy previously discussed in *Orthodoxy*: “Certain of the idealistic vegetarians . . . say that the time has now come for eating no meat; by implication they assume that at one time it was right to eat meat, and they suggest . . . that some day it may be wrong to

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 568, 543.

<sup>68</sup> See Christopher Derrick, “Chesterton and the Pursuit of Happiness,” *The Chesterton Review* 6, no. 2 (1980): 232.

<sup>69</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 262; Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 568.

<sup>70</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 532.

<sup>71</sup> H. Marshall McLuhan, “G. K. Chesterton: A Practical Mystic,” in *G. K. Chesterton: A Half Century of Views*, ed. D. J. Conlon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 1.

eat milk and eggs.”<sup>72</sup> Vegetarianism is equated with religious heresy through Chesterton’s fiction as well as his nonfiction.

As “a personality who could not be prevented from being anything he chose, from a revolutionist to a bore,” Dorian chooses—at first—to be a bore.<sup>73</sup> He has, as Chesterton says elsewhere of the modern world in general, “a remarkable capacity for being content with half-truths that are rather hollow,” and is in desperate need of transformation.<sup>74</sup> He sounds like the adolescent Chesterton himself in his lunacy (who possessed “a callousness, a carelessness, a curious combination of random and quite objectless energy with a readiness to accept conventions”) just before he put his head “over the hedge of the elves” to take notice of the natural world, and to observe that rational facts of men were not as true as the imagination of fairyland.<sup>75</sup> But Dorian is not beyond hope. Although he is exhibiting *Orthodoxy’s* “chief mark and element of insanity” which is a blind dependence upon reason, yet because he is a poet, like Chesterton, his shred of retained mysticism will allow him to face the coming twilight with “one foot in earth and the other in fairyland.”<sup>76</sup>

Before the first mood comes upon Dorian, he is riding in his car through the woods on a moonstruck night, full of “a fury of omniscience” as he identifies with every squirrel and bird. Chesterton, too, maniacally plunging toward “spiritual suicide,” suffered Dorian’s God complex. In *Autobiography*, he explains: “It was as if I myself had projected the universe from within, with all its trees and stars; and that is so near the notion of being God that it is manifestly even nearer to going mad.”<sup>77</sup> Dorian is shocked into stopping his chauffeur at the sight of Dalroy and

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<sup>72</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 313.

<sup>73</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 568.

<sup>74</sup> G. K. Chesterton, “On Change as Change,” *G.K.’s Weekly* (November 7, 1935); reprint *The Chesterton Review* 19, no. 1 (February, 1993): 18.

<sup>75</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 61-62; *Chesterton, Orthodoxy*, 254.

<sup>76</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 230.

<sup>77</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 89, 95-96.

Pump loading a donkey-cart with cask, cheese, and signboard.<sup>78</sup> With a “swelling omnipotence [that] went beyond the poetical,” Wimpole demands justice for the animal, which he suspects is also in danger of being ridden.<sup>79</sup> He accuses Dalroy of this equestrian intent.

“No,” answered the Captain innocently. “I never ride on a donkey. I’m afraid of it.”

“Afraid of a donkey!” cried Wimpole incredulously.

“Afraid of an historical comparison,” said Dalroy.<sup>80</sup>

Dorian, however, is not afraid for he, like Chesterton’s maniac, is one of those “men who believe in themselves,” setting forth from the mad-house of sin on an intellectual journey.<sup>81</sup> For Chesterton, a maniac is one who neglects to begin inquiry with the fact of sin.<sup>82</sup> The synonymy between Dorian’s incipient madness and the fact of his sin stands in contrast to the holy picture of Dalroy’s donkey, reminding us of Chesterton’s poem in which another donkey cries, “Fools! / For I also had my hour; / One far fierce hour and sweet: / There was a shout about my ears, / And palms before my feet.”<sup>83</sup> The fictional Dorian meets this donkey as the real Chesterton, too, met Christianity. Dorian’s introduction on the forest drive provokes the first of his emotions, for he is abandoned in the wood by his chauffeur and left in the sole company of the donkey.

“The **First Mood** . . . was one of black and grinding hatred.”<sup>84</sup> Dorian has been ignorant of the plight of his servant in the way the middle class of Chesterton’s day “knew far too little of the working classes.”<sup>85</sup> He has not noticed the common man’s hunger because of the fullness of

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<sup>78</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 571.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 572.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 577.

<sup>81</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 216. For a treatment of Chesterton’s themes of sanity and insanity in *The Ball and the Cross*, see Adam Schwartz, “G. K. C.’s Methodical Madness: Sanity and Social Control in Chesterton,” *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature*, Fall 1996, vol. 49, no. 1, p. 23 (18) [database on-line] (Marquette University Press, 1996, accessed 28 August 2000); available from Infotrac.

<sup>82</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 217.

<sup>83</sup> “The Donkey” in G. K. Chesterton, *The Poems of G. K. Chesterton*, The Works of G. K. Chesterton (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Poetry Library, 1995), 248

<sup>84</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 594.

<sup>85</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 25.

his own stomach; the recent banquet featured him as a speaker on “the tragedy of the oyster,” a “forgotten creature” which some humanitarians shamefully considered as an exception in their otherwise vegetarian diets.<sup>86</sup> His stomach and his mind are full and preoccupied. He himself has forgotten a creature—the chauffeur, the commoner, “the creature whom man has always found it easier to forget, since the hour he forgot God in a garden.”<sup>87</sup> Elsewhere, Chesterton mourns the plight of godless society wherein “every man has forgotten who he is. . . . We are all under the same mental calamity; we have all forgotten our names. We have all forgotten what we really are.”<sup>88</sup> Chesterton’s society of forgetfulness toward humankind is Dorian’s state of mind, as well.

But Dorian is neither foolish nor evil, “only a man made sterile by living in a world of indirectness and insincerity” as Chesterton himself, in his “period of madness” and occultic curiosity before he had defined dogma, was intellectually right yet morally wrong.<sup>89</sup> Though the chauffeur has been a nonentity to Dorian, he now hates the man with a murderous hatred for abandoning him, and in his obsession Dorian kicks the stones and tears up the roadside bracken and beats upon the bark of the trees, for “the whole wood and the whole world had become a kind of omnipresent and pantheistic chauffeur, and he hit at him everywhere.”<sup>90</sup> This change in Dorian is a positive one, an “upward stride in what he would have called the cosmic scale. The next best thing to really loving a fellow-creature is really hating him . . . . The desire to murder him is at least an acknowledgement that he is alive.”<sup>91</sup> Dorian’s phase sounds like Chesterton’s own “mood of unreality and sterile isolation” leading to his “moral anarchy within,” during which time he progressed from a dreamlike state of relative naiveté to imagining the worst of

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<sup>86</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 570.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 579.

<sup>88</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 257.

<sup>89</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 594; Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 86.

<sup>90</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 595.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

crimes.<sup>92</sup> The first stage, in which both Chesterton and Dorian gain awareness of their own limitation, gives way to another mood.

“His rage also did him good merely as a relief; and soon he passed into a **second** and more positive **mood** of meditation.”<sup>93</sup> Dorian discovers that he is rather fond of the donkey. This surprises him because, for all he has been the champion of the forgotten creatures, he has never before felt affection for them. His poems about animals, though sincere, are cold and abstract.

Yet, now in the forest, he realizes that

his love of creatures had been turned clean around and was working from the other end. The donkey was a companion, and not a monstrosity. It was dear because it was near, not because it was distant. The oyster had attracted him because it was utterly unlike a man . . . . But in that maddening vigil among the mystic pines he found himself more and more drawn towards the donkey, because it was more like a man than anything else around him.<sup>94</sup>

Chesterton, whose own “groping and guesswork philosophy” typified his real-life period of lunacy and isolation, here formulates a fictional parallel between the donkey and the spiritual side of Dorian Wimpole.<sup>95</sup> The donkey bears the image of man as man bears God’s image, and as God in Christ bore man’s image. This paradoxical similarity/dissimilarity between the person and the animal hints at Chesterton’s view of the Incarnation, which cherished the material world and found the highest value of a person or object in its own identity rather than in an absorption of the individual into some greater unity.<sup>96</sup>

Dorian scratches the donkey’s ears, quoting the oft-spoken words of Jesus (““He that hath ears to hear, let him hear””), which alerts Chesterton’s readers to take note of the underlying truth of the parable as it alerted Jesus’ listeners about the judgement to come upon those who reject

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<sup>92</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 95-96.

<sup>93</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 595.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 596. Note the correlation between Dorian’s experience and the garden vigil of Gabriel Gale, which in its turn links Eden to Gethsemane, links sin’s enslavement to its horrible solution: see Chesterton, *The Poet and the Lunatics*, 131.

<sup>95</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 105.

<sup>96</sup> See Coates, “Philosophy and Religious Background of *The Flying Inn*,” 307.

it.<sup>97</sup> If Dorian is referring to the Mark 7:16 passage, an interesting connection is made between *The Flying Inn*'s vegetarianism and the Pharisees' promotion of certain formalities which neglected the command of God while holding to the traditions of men, for it is what is in the heart (not what goes in through the mouth) that defiles.<sup>98</sup> Thus, Chesterton draws his readers' attention to the necessity of a heart conversion, to the relationship between ingesting foods in religious philosophy and the practice of true religion, to the idea that not external practices but internal realities save. Ivywood's philosophy of food and drink (legalism progressing to nihilism) is pitted against Dalroy's freedom to partake (grace resulting in Christian gratitude) for, as *Orthodoxy* says, "Christianity is the only frame which has preserved the pleasure of Paganism."<sup>99</sup>

After his maniacal mood, like Chesterton Dorian begins to meditate, resisting as Chesterton resisted the "mental ruin . . . wrought by wild reason," to return again as Chesterton returned to the "dangerous boyhood of free thought" and the vigorous health of the free will fostered by exercising the imagination.<sup>100</sup> Dorian contemplates the beauty of creation, not in his former, inertly intellectual sense but now glorying in the experiential particular. He appreciates the donkey and the pine needles as Chesterton discovered the limitations that make creation "something and not just anything."<sup>101</sup> Dorian understands Chesterton's "root phrase for all Christian theism" which is that God the Creator is separate from His creation.<sup>102</sup> Through his new rapport with the donkey, Dorian identifies himself as part of the story and not the Storyteller, as made and not Maker. The "Poet of the Birds" has not listened to birdsong for a long while. Donkeys were *meant* to pull carts, he now remembers; oysters were *meant* to be

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<sup>97</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 596; cf., e.g., Mark 7:16 (KJV only), Mark 4:9, Matthew 13:43, 11:15.

<sup>98</sup> For further substantiation of the biblical principle, see also Peter's vision in Acts 10:9-15 and 1 Timothy 4:3-5.

<sup>99</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 350.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

eaten and not made into something higher, for their worth is intrinsic. Dorian is awakening from the Chestertonian slumber of adolescence to recapture the “implicit but unfolded” idea of repentance and absolution.<sup>103</sup>

“The donkey had reconciled him to the landscape; and in his **third mood** he began to realize how beautiful it was.”<sup>104</sup> Dorian views nature in a new way, feeling suddenly that it is not so inhuman or hostile as first perceived:

Rather he felt that its beauty was at least half human; that the aureole of the sinking moon behind the woods was chiefly lovely because it was like the tender-coloured aureole of an early saint; and that the young trees were after all noble because they held up their heads like virgins. Cloudily there crowded into his mind ideas with which it was imperfectly familiar, especially an idea which he had heard called “The Image of God.”<sup>105</sup>

In this stirring of sacramental awareness, Dorian sees his surroundings as “dignified and sanctified by their partial resemblance to something else. . . as if they were baby drawings; the wild, crude sketches of Nature in her first sketchbooks of stone.”<sup>106</sup> Dorian’s forest seems, as Syme’s in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, to be “stooping and hiding a face”—the face of God.<sup>107</sup> Chesterton writes into Dorian’s story his own view of creation, in which (as Boyd says) “apparently profane realities are really sacramental signs from God.”<sup>108</sup>

In his reverie Dorian is reminded of “the little wood” of Eden, seeing himself as another Adam or what Chesterton describes in *Orthodoxy* as “a statue of God walking about the garden.”<sup>109</sup> Dorian spends pleasurable hours contemplating the creatures with “a new and realistic interest in them which he had not known before.”<sup>110</sup> His sense of appreciation and curiosity reminds us of the point at which Chesterton, with “a mystical minimum of gratitude,”

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<sup>103</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 57.

<sup>104</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 597.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 150.

<sup>108</sup> Boyd, *The Legendary Chesterton*, 64.

<sup>109</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 298.

<sup>110</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 599, 598.

clung “to the remains of religion by one thin thread of thanks.”<sup>111</sup> But Dorian’s aesthetic mood is disrupted by the appearance of a snake, which he chooses to kill as the biblical Adam could have chosen to reject his Edenic serpent. The scene recalls another in which Chesterton (on his moorland walk with Father O’Connor) caught “a sudden glimpse of the pit that is at all our feet” when he came face-to-face with “those morbid but vivid problems of the soul.”<sup>112</sup>

After the long night, sunrise “flung faintly across the broad foliage a wan and pearly light far more mysterious than the lost moonshine.”<sup>113</sup> Although Dorian has written about daybreak “a hundred times” and read about it “a thousand,” he is filled with wonder at his first sentient experience of dawn. Suppositional, scientific knowledge is not the same as the personal experience of daybreak in “the fullness of its shining fate” which allows him to see clearly the reality of the forest, the liveliness of the donkey, and the deadness of the viper.<sup>114</sup> Dorian sees the difference between life and death as Chesterton came to realize that “the Christian Church in its practical relation to my soul is a living teacher, not a dead one.”<sup>115</sup> Something new has awakened in Dorian, an “affectual not merely intellectual response to God’s offer of grace,” as David Jeffrey explains conversion.<sup>116</sup> Dorian makes a choice beneath the trees, his daylight no longer the confusion of “shattered sunlight and shaken shadow” in Syme’s “wood of witchery,” but more like the “open space of sunlight . . . the final return of his own good senses.”<sup>117</sup>

We see the same sensual imagery using light in Chesterton’s poetry, in which the visual is a metaphor of the spiritual.<sup>118</sup> For example, as a “Babe Unborn,” in dark he lies dreaming of

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<sup>111</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 97.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>113</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 600.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 359.

<sup>116</sup> Jeffrey, *Dictionary of Biblical Tradition*, 160.

<sup>117</sup> Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 112, 114.

<sup>118</sup> See further Kevin L. Morris, “Chesterton Sees Red: The Metaphysics of a Colour,” *The Chesterton Review* 21, no. 4 (1995): 505-517.

leaving “the empires of the night. I think that if they gave me leave / Within the world to stand, / I would be good through all the day / I spent in fairyland.”<sup>119</sup> Again, in “Art Colours” he says, “On must we go: we search dead leaves, / We chase the sunset’s saddest flames,” in search of “God of the daybreak.”<sup>120</sup> As Chesterton claims in *Autobiography* of his own experience, confession and forgiveness led to a “strange daylight . . . something more than the light of common day” in which he found that God “remade him into His own image” in “that dawn of his own beginning.”<sup>121</sup> He had been “blundering about” since his birth, looking for a way of “loving the world without trusting it” when he experienced the relief of orthodoxy.<sup>122</sup> His Thomist elevation of the senses in the discovery of God criticized the Augustinian school for “treating the soul as the only necessary treasure, wrapped for a time in a negligible napkin.”<sup>123</sup> As Dorian finds metaphysical meaning through his aesthetic contemplation in the woods, so Chesterton approached spiritual truth through the outer layers of a thing, through the senses working inwards to “reach what was in the inside from what was most conspicuous on the outside.”<sup>124</sup>

“And then the **Fourth Mood** fell upon him like a bolt from the blue, and he strode across and took the donkey’s bridle, as if to lead it along.”<sup>125</sup> Dorian’s return to good sense catapults him into action, into the quest of “the finding and fighting of positive evil,” for “all the wild woodland looked jolly now the snake was killed.”<sup>126</sup> He has “passed out of the mood of Maeterlinck into the mood of Whitman, and out of the mood of Whitman into the mood of Stevenson” (that is, from listlessness through optimism to meaningful action, as Chesterton

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<sup>119</sup> “By the Babe Unborn” in Chesterton, *Poems*, 243.

<sup>120</sup> “Art Colours” in Chesterton, *Poems*, 282-283

<sup>121</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 319.

<sup>122</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 282-283.

<sup>123</sup> Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 37.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>125</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 600.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

himself proceeded through “Leaves of Grass” into *Treasure Island*).<sup>127</sup> Dorian’s change of heart propels him into activity: he leaves his erudite passivity for an experiential activism and “swashbuckling comedy”—the symbolic world of Chaucer and Cervantes in which even his travelling companion, the donkey, reminds him of Sancho Panza.<sup>128</sup>

Dorian’s fourth mood reflects Chesterton’s schema of adventure in the defense of liberty and human dignity through that paradoxical Christian belief system which “always forbade wars and always produced wars.”<sup>129</sup> His real-life brooding gave way to action. He says in *Orthodoxy*, “The more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it had established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild.”<sup>130</sup> In discussing the limits necessary to give maximum freedom, Chesterton considers the rejection of limitations by the anarchist who, thinking he is achieving liberty, is simply stepping outside of the protective definition of Christian civilization as described by its literature. Chesterton’s own inward vivification resulted in action as he embraced the lively truths of Christianity, rejecting, for example, Impressionism and its philosophy of limitlessness in favour of biblically analogical fiction.<sup>131</sup> So, as Chesterton embraced liberty within the definition of creedal limitation, Dorian entered into personal, adventurous freedom within the description of literary tradition.

“The **Fifth, or Unexpected Mood**, . . . is called by the vulgar Astonishment.”<sup>132</sup> A policeman and the journalist Hibbs, who are on assignment from Lord Ivywood to hunt down the

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.; see also Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 97.

<sup>128</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 601.

<sup>129</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 291.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>131</sup> See, e.g., Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 110. For the Christian influence of the “penny dreadfuls” Chesterton read, see further Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 288. For his own fictive expression (in a 1919 short story) of a change of heart, resulting in outward action, from defiance to the respectability of orthodoxy, see also G. K. Chesterton, “The Conversion of an Anarchist,” *The Chesterton Review* 8, no. 1 (1982): 1-9.

<sup>132</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 601.

renegade Dalroy and Pump, accost Dorian.<sup>133</sup> Hibbs is confused and hung over from a night of drunkenness that he is desperate to conceal, and with “strange, soft fear and cunning” he employs subjective relativism to defend his mistaken accusation of Dorian as the guilty fugitive.<sup>134</sup> Dorian is astonished over the allegation against him: “Well, of all the mad worlds! A pack of thieves steal my limousine, I save their damned donkey’s life at the risk of my own—and *I’m* run in for stealing!”<sup>135</sup>

Dorian’s astonishment (or “wonder,” as OED proposes and which is in keeping with Chesterton’s doctrine) is like Chesterton’s amazement at the paradoxes of Christianity wherein “two opposite passions blaze beside each other,” “love and wrath both burning.”<sup>136</sup> Time and eternity, flesh and spirit, rationalism and mysticism find their connection in the justifying work of Christ. The agnostic rationalist, Dorian—who seems like Chesterton to be regaining the childish “elementary wonder” of fairyland over “‘a law’ that he has never seen”—finds his ground of truth while he is being accused of falsehood.<sup>137</sup> So the revelation that “Christianity was accused, at one and the same time, of being too optimistic about the universe and of being too pessimistic about the world” made Chesterton “suddenly stand still.”<sup>138</sup> The inconsistency of the accusations levelled against Christianity by non-Christians puzzled Chesterton in the same way that the innocent Dorian is puzzled by Hibbs’s vague accusations and changing truths. With a new optimistic realism, Chesterton asked: “What again could this astonishing thing be like which people were so anxious to contradict, that in doing so they did not mind contradicting themselves?”<sup>139</sup> Dorian makes a dash for freedom, is apprehended, and locked in a temporary

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 601-602.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 604.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 602.

<sup>136</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 352, 296.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 293.

cell to experience his next mood much as Chesterton, with his own new “wild truth reeling but erect,” enters a mood of determined reform.<sup>140</sup>

Under incarceration, Dorian experiences **Mood Six**, a clamorous and convincing complaining as he is taken for judgement before the magistrate (his aristocratic cousin Philip Ivywood) who “continued to look away as they entered, as if expecting, with Roman calm, the entrance of a recognized enemy.”<sup>141</sup> The similarity to Pilate’s judgement of the innocent Christ is heightened by the conditions of Dorian’s accusers: the foolishness of Hibbs’s lies, the inspector’s blindness to Dorian’s true identity, and Ivywood’s “frigid forgiveness.”<sup>142</sup> He says, “I tell you frankly, Philip, if there really are, as you say, two men who are bent on smashing your schemes and making your life a hell—I am very happy to put my car at their disposal. And now, I’m off.”<sup>143</sup> Forthwith he experiences the **Seventh Mood**—a celebratory feast of oysters—before he throws his lot in with the fugitives.

Dorian’s trial before the authorities might mimic Chesterton’s own pugnacious religious debate with atheist Blatchford, as both contests espoused Chesterton’s doctrines “with adamant gravity.”<sup>144</sup> Recognizing Jesus Christ as the man of the “right shape”—the standard, the Truth against which all other truths must be measured—Chesterton held up his new thought (that is, orthodoxy) against the accusations of the many agnostics and sceptics who presented him with all the contradictions.<sup>145</sup> As Dorian rejected vegetarianism, so Chesterton could no longer view Christianity as “a compromise” that “was merely sensible and stood in the middle.”<sup>146</sup> Brought before his accusers, Chesterton, too, proclaimed himself innocent. Dorian’s

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>141</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 606.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 607.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 173.

<sup>145</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 294-295.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 296.

belief disallowed him to stand in the middle of the road out of temperance, respect, or tolerance toward Ivywood's syncretism. In the same way, Chesterton's understanding of the paradoxical Christian truths so "central in orthodox theology" propelled him, also, into the defense of his faith.<sup>147</sup> Chesterton's condemnation of heretics sounds like Dorian's condemnation of Hibbs and Ivywood as he proclaims his own allegiance to the fugitives, Dalroy and Pump. Chesterton said that an atheist "cannot think atheism to be false and continue to be an atheist."<sup>148</sup> In the same way, Dorian's rejection of Ivywood's philosophy disallows his continuing vegetarianism and condones his oyster supper in a Chestertonian celebration of "the glorious gift of the senses."<sup>149</sup> Dorian throws his caution to the wind and joins Dalroy, in the spirit of Chesterton's impulsive purchase of rail tickets to go "wherever the next train goes."<sup>150</sup> The reformation of Dorian is Chesterton's own "walking toward the New Jerusalem"; no longer does Dorian protect the prevalent, seductive philosophical vision of Ivywood and Misysra, but he begins like Chesterton to "change the world to suit the vision" as he joins the community of idealists, Dalroy and Pump, beneath the wooden sign of the Old Ship Inn.<sup>151</sup> The bore becomes a revolutionary. As Chesterton reminds us, "For the orthodox there can always be a revolution; for a revolution is a restoration."<sup>152</sup>

### **Conversion Accomplished**

"The Seven Moods of Dorian" finds its denouement throughout the rest of the novel, which now foregrounds the symbolism of the cross. Dorian's conversion experience in the forest

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 330-331.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>151</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 310.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 315.

(when he comes “back to earth like a man fallen from the moon”) is followed by his failure in the House of Commons (in a picture of “backsliding”) and his final disgust with Lord Ivywood’s solipsistic philosophy that would “deny that any limit is set upon living things.”<sup>153</sup> Dorian then makes good on his threat of mood six to join Dalroy and Pump, completing their trinity in a portrait of Christian fellowship for, as Chesterton maintained, “Boys . . . wander in threes . . . the symbolic number for comradeship” because “to us Trinitarians . . . God Himself is a society.”<sup>154</sup> With “something like a shout of laughter,” Chesterton plunged into the next episode of his life which, like Dorian’s, was one of “helping certain friends and reformers to fix the terrible truth called Responsibility, not on tramps or drunkards, but on the rulers of the State and the richest men in the Empire.”<sup>155</sup> On their way to recapturing the country from the heretical invaders, the fictional rebels share a celestial experience in a huge tree “near to heaven” in which Dorian eats some of the “holy” cheese that itself has been on a “pilgrimage.”<sup>156</sup> An illustration of the Kingdom of God, the branches of the tree in which Dorian finds rest spread out “to the four quarters of heaven” like “a bird brooding over its nest.”<sup>157</sup>

Dorian is no longer coldly academic. In the “profound intellectual revolt of the poet against the politician,” he sings a new and emotional song.<sup>158</sup> Dorian finds “his artist’s love of beauty fulfilled as it never had been before,” as Chesterton’s own conversion incorporated a strong aesthetic element of imagination.<sup>159</sup> Dorian secures comfort in this tree at the sign of the

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<sup>153</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 618, 615-624, 659.

<sup>154</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 63; Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 340. Note the contrast to the Miltonian anti-trinity of Ivywood, Misysra, and Hibbs. The fellowship of Chesterton’s Christian marriage also sustained his faith, and he described his wife, Francis, as the one “who brought the Cross to me.” See Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1944), 76.

<sup>155</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 175.

<sup>156</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 671-672. His reference is to the inexhaustible milk of the legendary Dun cow.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 670-671; cf. Psalm 91:4, Matthew 13:31-33.

<sup>158</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 656.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 673-675; see also Leigh, “Psychology of Conversion.”

inn as Chesterton (having searched “the land of void and vision”) also found a temporary home in this world, the fallen garden of Eden.<sup>160</sup> This picture in fiction of the branching tree “as a friend with arms open for the man”<sup>161</sup> sounds like Chesterton’s depiction elsewhere of the posture of the crucified Saviour, with

outstretched arms . . . truly opened wide, and opening most gloriously the gates of all the worlds; they were arms pointing to the east and to the west, to the ends of the earth and the very extremes of existence. They were truly spread out with a gesture of omnipotent generosity; the Creator himself offering Creation itself.<sup>162</sup>

The symbol of the cross becomes Dorian’s fixed goal—that sign of the inn which Captain Dalroy has “brandished in the air like a banner” against the corruption of “Babylon.”<sup>163</sup> The signpost is metaphorical of the cross in its silhouette, its message of national religion, its composition of wood, and its function as a tree to be climbed and a weight to be borne.<sup>164</sup> Dorian follows the sign of the Old Ship Inn as it flies across the landscape calling the people to the exercise of their free will. He joins Dalroy’s military “marching crowd” through the streets of London to retake Parliament and, “far off, at the head of the procession, he could see the sign with the ship and the cross going before them like an ensign.”<sup>165</sup> As Chesterton once “saw suddenly the meaning of the shape of the cross,” calling it “a blazon, a boast,” so Dorian now recognizes his standard.<sup>166</sup> “The cross is the crux of the whole matter,” Chesterton said.<sup>167</sup> The Old Ship Inn sign is the main image of Chesterton’s novel as the cross is the symbol of Chesterton’s own conversion:

The cross, though it has at its heart a collision and a contradiction, can extend its four arms for ever without altering its shape. Because it has a paradox in its centre it can grow

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<sup>160</sup> See Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 670-671; cf. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 215, 359.

<sup>161</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 725.

<sup>162</sup> Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 135.

<sup>163</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 475.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 689, 417-418, 694, 561, 696-698.

<sup>165</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 694.

<sup>166</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 359; Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 229.

<sup>167</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 134.

without changing. . . . The Cross opens its arms to the four winds; it is a signpost for free travellers.<sup>168</sup>

Dorian has found his “second youth” as Chesterton gained his rejuvenating “second childhood” of spiritual birth.<sup>169</sup> The uprising of the commoners in *The Flying Inn* finally halts the evolution of England into an Islamic state; this plot action parallels Dorian’s volitional application of his own inward beliefs: “I will not be evolved. I will not be evolved into something that is not me,” he resolves.<sup>170</sup>

But Dorian has changed. His allegorical revivification—and Chesterton’s own cycle of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and New Creation—are complete. Dorian’s first mood of emotional deadness followed by obsessive hatred for the chauffeur sounds like Chesterton’s sense of unreality or isolation from the Creator and his teenage diabolical “madness.” The forest meditation of nature stimulated by the donkey reminds us of Chesterton’s spiritual interest as he was drawn to metaphysical questions through his readings and acquaintances. The fictional man’s recognition of beauty imitates Chesterton’s own awakening aesthetics as he gratefully discovers the sacramental traces of God and His image in humankind. The optimistic sense of adventure Chesterton developed upon grasping Christianity parallels Dorian’s taking to the road, and Dorian’s astonishment over the subjective charges by Hibbs reflects the wonder Chesterton felt at Christianity’s paradoxes. Dorian’s complaints before the authorities can be likened to Chesterton’s apologetic discourses. The seventh mood of celebrating with an oyster feast portrays Chesterton’s jubilation over the freedom of grace received, the relief of orthodoxy, and the reclamation of his own joyous childhood. Dorian’s former disinterest in the common man becomes an ardent communion as Chesterton, too, discovers Christian fellowship. Both stories

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<sup>168</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 231.

<sup>169</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 696; Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 234; see also Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 363.

<sup>170</sup> Chesterton, *The Flying Inn*, 718.

are consistent with the biblical description of conversion: both characters have had a change of mind involving the intellect, emotion, and volition, and both have turned toward the central image of the cross resulting in a changed life.

Previously we defined conversion as a mysterious act initiated by the Creator whereby an individual turns from sin and toward God through faith in Jesus Christ. Dorian's conversion can be redefined as that mysterious act (initiated by his creator, Chesterton) whereby he turns from the madness of blindly following a foreign, syncretistic philosophy toward the commonsense freedom of western Christianity through faith in his redeemer, Captain Dalroy. "All Christianity concentrates on the man at the crossroads," Chesterton declares. "Will a man take this road or that?"<sup>171</sup> Dorian is the man at the crossroads looking for adventure in a land of authority for, as Chesterton says, "One can find no meanings in a jungle of scepticism; but the man will find more and more meanings who walks through a forest of doctrine and design."<sup>172</sup> Dorian's woodland journey is a fictional parallel to the spiritual quest of G. K. Chesterton; his rejection of the philosophy of vegetarianism is an allegory for Chesterton's rejection of the current, false philosophies in favour of Christian orthodoxy personally appropriated. Dorian Wimpole has Gilbert Chesterton's change of heart.

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<sup>171</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 341.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 362-263.

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