



The DEFENDANT

Quarterly of the Australian Chesterton Society

Vol. 30 No.1

Summer 2023

Issue No. 116

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

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

The Power of a Hidden Tradition - A Chesterton Poem

by Karl Schmude

Chesterton's narrative poem, *The Ballad of the White Horse*, has long occupied a place of inspirational importance in his works. Published in 1911, it honoured the Christian King Alfred's victory in 9th century England over the pagan Danish invaders.

While the poem is the story of an historic victory, it has a deeper and long-term significance, which is found in the imaginative energy it gave to the story of England. It evoked the historical character of Chesterton's own country, as this was shown again and again in its overcoming of darkness and defeat.

During World War I, *The Ballad* was a favourite of many soldiers desperate for hope in the mud and misery of the trenches. In World War II, it was sufficiently well-known to be cited, at critical moments in the six-year conflict, in the editorials of the *London Times*.

In May 1941, for example, two of the poem's most memorable stanzas, beginning "I tell you naught for your comfort", were used

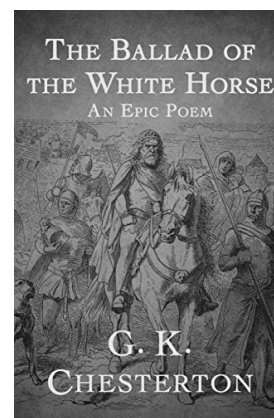
by *The Times* after the Allies faced the disastrous loss of the island of Crete.

In November 1942, the phrase, "The high tide and the turn", was cited in an editorial celebrating the first British victory of the war in El Alamein.

In the 9th century, England was a land that could have been lost. It faced a similar fate more than once in the 20th century. *The Ballad of the White Horse* was Chesterton's poetic answer to defeat – and the expression of a legend never to be forgotten.

The White Horse – historic and eternal

Great significance attached to the title of the poem. The symbol of a "white horse" had enlivened Chesterton's imagination ever since childhood. In the poem he picked, for the scene of King Alfred's victory, the valley of Berkshire in southern England



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Congratulations to a Chesterton Centenarian

The Australian Chesterton Society is delighted to join in the celebration of the 100th birthday of Aidan Mackay, an English Chesterton scholar and collector par excellence. A teacher by profession, as well as a bookseller and writer on Chesterton, he has made an extraordinary contribution to the modern revival of interest in Chesterton's life and works.

Aidan has been notably supportive of international efforts to promote Chesterton, including the Australian Chesterton Society. We salute him at this time for his unrivalled devotion to the worldwide cause of Chesterton studies.



Aidan Mackay (right) with the President of The Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Dale Ahlquist, at the Oxford Oratory on October 1, 2022, to celebrate Aidan's 100th birthday.

for its historic value (and not far, as it happened, from the town of Beaconsfield where he lived).

But Chesterton was also conscious of its prehistoric importance. Since ancient times, a huge white horse had been inscribed on the side of a valley in Berkshire – symbolising, as the late Fr Ian Ker noted, an eternal England.

The image of a white horse also had a special association for Chesterton's wife, Frances. Their honeymoon began in the English town of Ipswich, under the sign of the hotel, the Great White Horse. It was an experience Chesterton described as "a trip to fairyland".

Frances closely watched the development of *The Ballad* over many years – and he dedicated it to her in the opening verses. As Fr John O'Connor, the model for Chesterton's character of Father Brown, recalled, "she was more in love with it than with anything else he had in hand."

In a creative burst he completed the poem in two weeks. She gathered the sheets as they dropped from his desk. She found it remarkable that he scarcely made a single correction when she read the work in its final form.

In a recent article on *The Ballad* (London *Church Times*, September 2, 2022), the English poet and singer-songwriter, Malcolm Guite, suggested that the dedicatory verses to Frances were of crucial importance – both in illustrating Chesterton's understanding of the value of legends in capturing a cultural tradition, and of finding a way to convey it to new generations.

We may then ask - can these legends and stories still possess power in the 21st century?

Historical images and the understanding of time

Guite quotes Chesterton's reference in his poem to "seven sunken Englands/ Lie buried one by one," and he compares Chesterton's overlaying of historical images with the Welsh poet David Jones's conception of time.

Guite recalls an insight of the former Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, who believed that Jones saw time, not as "a succession of streaming moments each carrying everything away irrevocably into the past," but as "a series of layers richly accumulating over the same patch of ground, the same city or valley or hamlet. . . . All these layers of history and legend are still there, ready to be woken and evoked by the poet, ready to be made present again, and to give us a much fuller and more nuanced sense of who and where we are."

"The England of that dawn remains," as Chesterton affirmed of Alfred's victory. The layers of the past were not lost, but rather, buried - and recoverable.

Entering the past imaginatively

At a time when cultural amnesia has banished our sense of a living continuity with the past – and, as a result, our sense of grounded meaning and historical identity - Malcolm Guite's comments are enlightening.



A famous figure of the 'White Horse' in the English countryside, formed more than 3,000 years ago from trenches filled with white chalk

He argues that *The Ballad* can open our eyes to the power of a tradition, despite the cultural changes that have swept it out of sight. What is required is that we try to enter imaginatively into the world of our forebears, and rediscover the spiritual belief, entwined in cultural memory, that they so deeply cherished.

If we can see the world, as Guite points out, "in the light of the cross and resurrection, then we can, indeed, see as they saw."

In a closing stanza of his dedicatory verse, Chesterton looks at the pendant cross Frances is wearing. Only by the light it projects – the light of Christ's sacrifice that gave promise of resurrection and redemption – that we have any basis of hope:

"Lady, by one light only
We look from Alfred's eyes,
We know he saw athwart the wreck
The sign that hangs about your neck,
Where One more than Melchizadek
Is dead and never dies."

The Ballad of the White Horse continues to exert an impact at two levels. Firstly, it shows how a legend can capture the meaning of an historical event story and hold a truth to fortify a culture.

Secondly, it makes clear that the greatest stories are about a spiritual battle.

In the case of Chesterton's King Alfred epic, it was a battle to preserve a Christian civilisation, not as a quaint memory, but as a continuing carrier of faith - and to spur a new generation to fight for its preservation as well.

The Ballad of the White Horse reveals the power of a tradition when it is not confined to historical events but is a reminder of another world – and speaks of eternal things. ■

Executive of the Australian Chesterton Society

PRESIDENT and EDITOR of 'The Defendant'

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

SECRETARY / TREASURER: Mr Gary Furnell,
6/68 Short Street, Forster NSW 2428

Phone: 0419 421 346 Email: garyfurnell@yahoo.com

Layout of 'The Defendant' designed by Jenna Fulop

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The Women Behind the Men

by John Young

The Melbourne-based philosopher, **John Young**, highlights the crucial influence of three women in the lives of their better known husbands.

A number of eminent Catholic authors might have remained unknown were it not for the influence and support of their wives. Jacques Maritain, Frank Sheed and Chesterton are examples.

Jacques and Raissa

Maritain met Raissa Oumansoff when they were undergraduates at the Sorbonne in Paris, both searching for a worthwhile philosophy of life at the beginning of the 20th century, and appalled at the hopeless materialism surrounding them, yet which they feared was the best that life could offer. They contemplated suicide unless they could find a philosophy worth living for.



It was through their mutual support that they succeeded, first through discovering Catholic spirituality and then the richness of Catholic philosophy. But it was Raissa who first read St Thomas's *Summa* and then introduced her husband to that great work. He was to become one of the very best philosophers of the 20th century.

In her *Adventures in Grace* Raissa describes her first reading of St Thomas' *Summa*: "So great a light kept flowing into both my heart and mind that I was carried away as if by a joy of Paradise".

After Raissa and her sister Vera had died, Jacques said: "I have lived with two saints". Raissa had been his great support.



Frank and Maisie

Frank Sheed took a break from his study of law at Sydney University to go overseas, and in England joined the Catholic Evidence Guild and fell in love with one of its leading members, Maisie Ward. They founded the very influential Catholic publishing firm of Sheed and Ward, and Sheed became an outstanding exponent of the Catholic Faith.

Had it not been for Maisie he would probably have returned to Sydney and eventually have become a leading barrister.

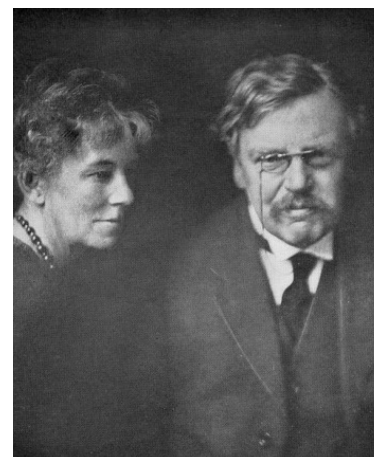
Gilbert and Francis

What would Chesterton have become had he never met Frances Blogg? Of course we don't know, but the outcome may well have been disappointing, or even disastrous. He dedicates his great poem *The Ballad of the White Horse* to Frances, and the dedication includes the words "You who brought the Cross to me".

Certainly he had massive common sense, but he also lived in the midst of conflicting philosophies, even dabbling for a short period in occultism. He gave that up after fearing that he was playing with fire, "and even with hellfire".

He must have been profoundly influenced by Christianity as he saw it in the life and beliefs of Frances, helping him to the deep insights found in his brilliant work *Orthodoxy*, published 14 years before he became a Catholic. Frances was a devout Anglo-Catholic.

Apart from her influence on his religious beliefs he needed her to bring some sort of order into his absent-minded life. As on the occasion when Frances was ill and probably not well enough to supervise him, he called at a neighbour's place on his way to a meeting, and was wearing a shoe on one foot and a slipper on the other!



In their student days Jacques and Raissa had resolved to commit suicide if they were unable to find any meaning in life. Many years later, after Raissa had died, Jacques returned to the site of that resolution, and it was there that the last photograph of him was taken.

Soon after Maisie died I happened to meet Frank Sheed in Sydney, and when he spoke about her it was as though she was still present to him.

In her biography of Frances, *The Woman Who Was Chesterton*, Nancy Carpentier Brown comments that "few voices remained to speak of the woman behind the man who was Chesterton", and she quotes from one of those few: Father John O'Connor (the priest on whom Chesterton's Father Brown was based).

Father O'Connor wrote to Frances, after Gilbert had died, that none of the death notices tells the secret "of how much of him and his best might have been lost to the world only for you." ■

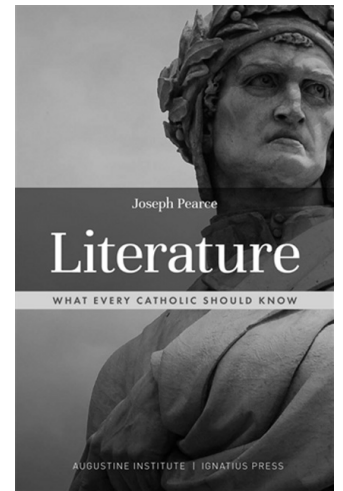


Joseph Pearce

A Literary Canon for Catholics

by Gary Furnell

Joseph Pearce's *conspectus of Catholic literature across the ages*, *Literature: What Every Catholic Should Know* (Ignatius Press and Augustine Institute, 2019) is reviewed by the Australian Chesterton Society's Secretary-Treasurer, **Gary Furnell**.



Every book I review I read twice. This book is easy to read twice because it's short and packed full of helpful information. In addition, it's well written and its perspective is unapologetically orthodox.

Joseph Pearce introduces his book by stating his reason to read great literature:

"There is a very good reason for every Catholic to know the great works of literature — and that is because the great works of literature help us to know ourselves. This is the reason that we should learn about the humanities — because the humanities teach us about humanity, both our own humanity and the humanity of our neighbours."

I'd add another reason: when we read the literature of past centuries, we discover that the conditions, the customs and morals of our age are peculiar—whereas we tend to think of them as normal.

For example, when we read Jane Austen's magnificent novels, we discover that courtship was conducted very differently—and a lot more sensibly—than in our age. If we only read contemporary novels we'll miss this and many other similar insights. We'll suffer the indignity of being children of our age, rather than prudent students of every age and thereby able to see our own age with greater clarity.

Pearce differentiates between literature that presents mankind as *homo viator*, a pilgrim traversing earth while heading for eternity, and *homo superbus*, the proud person who mistakenly presumes total autonomy.

The ancient world's literature chronicled the struggle between these two humanities, with deep sympathy for *homo viator*. The literature of Christendom saw the vindication of *homo viator* and the condemnation of *homo superbus*. Our own age has seen the neglect of *homo viator* and the affirmation of *homo superbus*, but it's a troubled affirmation because — while dull in some ways—we can see that assuming autonomy and dismal dysfunction are somehow entwined.

Contrasts explored in the ancient classics

Literature: what every Catholic should know starts with the ancient classics by Homer, Virgil and Sophocles.

Homer's two epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* explore the struggles between honourable heroes and their dishonourable protagonists, with the gods mysteriously active to frustrate the reckless and the arrogant. Virgil's epic *The Aeneid* follows a similar strain. In both Homer's and Virgil's epics, duty is contrasted with selfishness, and rage is contrasted with prudence.

Sophocles' plays continue this contrast. In *Antigone* filial duty is affirmed above political edicts or expediency. His *Oedipus* plays explore notions of guilt, suffering and growth in wisdom. Pearce contrasts the realities presented in Sophocles' two *Oedipus* plays with Sigmund Freud's aberrant reading of the *Oedipus* story. Pearce reminds us that the pre-Christian writers assumed objective moral realities and the potency of truth. They searched with dignity towards the sagacity more fully revealed by Christianity.

Pearce notes that Christianity ratifies story-telling. For a story-writer, it's an immense encouragement to imagine and create:

"What God has done in the telling of his story in history and in the telling of fictional stories in his parables is sanctify story itself. Storytelling is God's chosen method of telling the truth. This being so, we can see how our stories, in their own small way, can also be conveyors of truth, and we can see how the Christian era has breathed new life into literature by sanctifying the role of storytelling."

Along with his discussion of early English stories like *Beowulf*, Joseph Pearce — as he does throughout the book — highlights poems that have been neglected but are of the highest quality. This is one of the real benefits of his book: it's an extension of the familiar to include the forgotten.

Other benefits include the insights attending the literary discussion. For example, a primitive writer is not necessarily a barbaric writer. A primitive writer appreciates prime — important — matters whereas a barbaric writer is not likely to appreciate prime matters, instead focusing on faddish or secondary matters.

Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Cervantes

Dante gets a chapter to himself, as does Chaucer. Both men were religious story-tellers in poetry. Dante's classic poem had a supernatural setting whereas Chaucer's setting was the English countryside. Chaucer's characters are exemplars of *homo viator* — humanity on pilgrimage — but Chaucer shows us that it's the interior pilgrimage that is crucial.

Participating in religious activities is never sufficient by itself for commendation. Pearce observes: "To see as Chaucer sees is not merely to see reality as a late mediaeval Englishman saw it, but to see reality as it is."

Thomas More also gets a chapter to himself but that's partly because he initiated what developed into a great tradition: exploring utopias and dystopias through novels. It's become a staple of movies too. Pearce notes:

"In being shown these cautionary scenarios of the way things *could* be (dystopia), we are inspired to a better understanding of what they should be. It goes without saying that our understanding of what is good determines our understanding of what is a good society. If we have a false and fallacious understanding of the good, our utopian dreams will metamorphose into dystopian nightmares."

Shakespeare and Cervantes are rightly celebrated. Shakespeare wrote many masterpieces, Cervantes only one — *Don Quixote* — but the influence of their works has been profound. *Don Quixote* excites our humour and compassion because we enjoy seeing a man determined to help and act honourably, but in a blundering way.

Shakespeare, in play after play, subtly uncovers the struggle between people — and more importantly the struggle within individual characters — of virtue and mendacity.

Poets are honoured, as you would expect. The English metaphysical poets, followed by Milton and Dryden; and the Romantic poets together with Gerard Manley Hopkins, Francis Thompson, Siegfried Sassoon and T.S. Eliot are highlighted.

I again benefitted from Pearce's insights, including his reminder that many agnostic or troubled writers — like Charles Baudelaire and Oscar Wilde, championed by today's secularists — found refuge in the Church in the later period of their lives.

Other poets are more briefly discussed, including Pushkin, Baudelaire, Paul Claudel and William Blake. I assume space constraints were the only reason why skilful poets with a religious orientation like W.H. Auden, E.E. Cummings or R.S. Thomas are not mentioned.

The novels of Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters and Mary Shelley are examined, with Jane Austen rightly described as a genius. She was a shrewd moral philosopher, and a sublime artist with a bright talent for comedy.

The focus on the great Russian writers is welcome. It's a blessed person who reads Tolstoy, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, Pasternak, Solzhenitsyn and Chekhov when young, and then re-reads them at a more mature age. These writers seem to be in an exalted class of their own. Joseph Pearce introduces some of these writers, but all of them are of the highest quality.

Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons* (to pick just one), and his short story collection *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* are outstanding works of fiction, while Chekhov's best short stories portray the imbrolios we get ourselves into when we have no firm moral ground and we're bored or lazy.

Pasternak's masterpiece *Doctor Zhivago* deserves to be read alongside Solzhenitsyn's books for added insight into the difficulties of living decently when merciless ideologues are in control.

I've somewhat neglected nineteenth century American literature. I haven't read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* but I intend to read it based on Pearce's assessment of its importance. And I was unaware of Mark Twain's book on Joan of Arc until I learned of it here. That's another benefit of this introduction to literature: I know now about lots of books I may have otherwise overlooked.

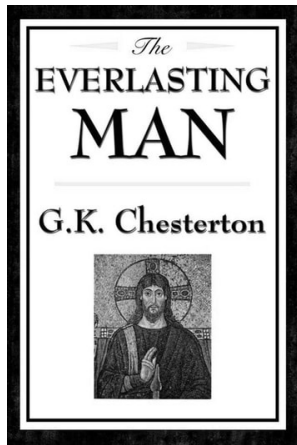
The French and English twentieth century Catholic writers are more familiar. Francois Mauriac, Georges Bernanos, Evelyn Waugh, Belloc, Chesterton, Graham Greene, R.H. Benson and Maurice Baring form a powerful witness to the excellence of Christian artistry. They're among the finest novelists of any age.

One could add Elizabeth Goudge and Barbara Pym to this list. Goudge's novels are brimming with engaging characters, and she writes about children with really brilliant perception. Barbara Pym's gentle comedies never fail to please; she sees our frequent ridiculousness and laughs at it but without misanthropy.

Norwegian novelist Sigrid Undset will be unfamiliar to many. She wrote historical sagas as well as contemporary dramas. She championed individual responsibility and mature judgement; virtues she knew were gained more often through suffering than sheer will-power. Flannery O'Connor, an American Catholic writer, shared a similar perspective, but her stories are shorter and more frequently witty.

C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien conclude the book. Widely popular, their influence on fantasy fiction is unrivalled.

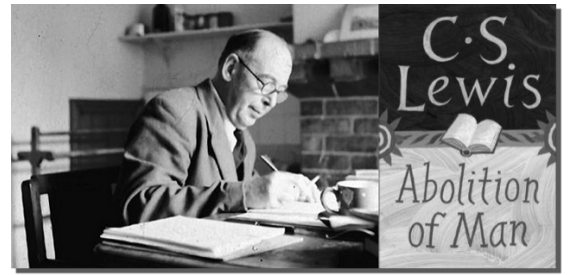
As we enter a strange neo-pagan era, the need for popular Catholic art will be as great as ever. *Literature: What Every Catholic Should Know* champions the gifted artists whose works the next generations of writers will need to study. ■



The Everlasting Man and The Abolition of Man

by Garry Nieuwkamp

Garry Nieuwkamp, a frequent contributor to the pages of *The Defendant*, compares two classic works by Chesterton and C.S. Lewis.



Reading the odd Chesterton book can be the cognitive equivalent of taking one of those rides at Dreamworld with names like 'The Zinger' or 'The Beast', where you get thrown around like a damp cloth in a tumble dryer only to be deposited on your feet at the end, not sure which direction is up.

Oftentimes you want to say, if you could: "Gilbert... slow down a bit, mate!"

The Everlasting Man is one such book. It was written as an antidote to H.G. Wells' *The Outline of History: The Whole Story of Man*. The whole temper of Wells's book is "of a reaction: sulks, perversity, petty criticism". Chesterton has written not only a corrective but battles to keep alive the wonder and mystery of a world that is "stooping and hiding a face".

The Everlasting Man is Chesterton's response to what scientists leave out when they try to explain the world.

At the dawn of humanity, the caveman is already in dialogue with God. The scientist sees smudges on the cave wall and reaches for Darwin. For the scientist, man is just a "trousered ape", to use C.S. Lewis's expression.

In a beautiful juxtaposition, Chesterton sees another cave wall with a caveman, who had "traced strange shapes of creatures, curiously coloured, upon the wall of the world". The pictures he created "had come to life".

The Incarnation makes all the difference to the world. It is a blow that has broken "the very backbone of history".

According to Joseph Pearce in *C. S. Lewis and the Catholic Church*, Lewis encountered Chesterton's writing for the first time while he was recuperating from trench fever during the war. On reading Chesterton, Lewis wrote, "I did not know what I was letting myself in for".

Christian outline of history

When he read *The Everlasting Man* in the 1920s, it had a bewildering influence. He could see that a Christian outline of history made sense, but he still could not see that 'everything was stooping and hiding a face'.

The materialist cry that there is no "in front", there is only the back of the world, was orthodoxy. The scientific and industrial revolutions brought widespread success, but also carnage; enchantment dying somewhere in the Somme "like a devil's sick of sin".

The prevailing view in the academy was that only the sciences give us knowledge. That left all sorts of claims outside of the plausibility structure. That the world might be crazier "and more of it than we think", or "incurably plural", was ruled out on principle.

It was into this intellectual terrain, on September 28, 1931, on the way to Whipsnade Zoo, in the sidecar of his brother Warnie's motorbike, that Lewis's conversion to Christianity took place.

The Abolition of Man was based on the Riddell Memorial lectures Lewis gave in 1943, well after his conversion. Like Chesterton in writing *The Everlasting Man*, Lewis was responding to a book – in his case, *The Control of Language*, written for high school children.

The authors of the book, Alex King and Martin Ketley, subscribed to the theories of A.J. Ayer and I.A. Richards, who were in turn influenced by the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle of the 1920s and 1930s.

Because moral or aesthetic claims could not be subject to the principle of falsifiability (one of the attributes of the scientific method almost elevated to a commandment at the time), moral and aesthetic claims were thought to be meaningless. They could not be verified empirically, so they could be dismissed as not having any foundation in knowledge.

Both Chesterton and Lewis could see that the very idea was not only self-defeating, but any potentially "monstrous" outcomes as a consequence of unlimited enthusiasm for scientific advancement would, by definition, be a meaningless assessment.

Lewis argued for the universality of objective moral values. In the second lecture he titled "The Way", he wrote: "the human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of imagining a new primary colour". He argued, not

from the specific vantage point of a Christian apologist, but endeavoured to ground values in a universal natural law he calls the Tao, based on what might be called a “brotherhood of all religions”.

Chesterton, too, could see where the absence of objective moral values would lead. Scientific technology could be applied to any end.

Eugenics and the Nazi death camps

The animus behind the eugenics movement, for example, galvanized by the language of efficiency, utility and utopian perfectionism, would quickly run to seed, as it did in countless furnaces in camps like Dachau and Auschwitz. Chesterton could see that this animus followed logically from the idea that human beings were just another species of animal, and that the “God in the Cave” was just another person, as H. G. Wells had implied.

But “This world is not Conclusion”, wrote Emily Dickinson, “A Species stands beyond”. The world has meaning; the watchmaker is “a raging mirth”, inscrutable maybe, but not blind.

The Incarnation is the great adventure story. It is an adventure story of the Man who made the world, visiting His creation in a cellar under the floor of the world. Or, as Les Murray wrote, God is “being in the world as poetry is in the poem”.

The Everlasting Man and *The Abolition of Man* are both important works in the Christian apologetic tradition. But Lewis grounds his critique of *The Control of Language* in the common values of the “brotherhood of all religions”, as though congruity guarantees truth. Chesterton grounds his critique of Wells in “The Strangest Story in the World”.

And in an odd sort of way, **The Everlasting Man** ends up being a corrective for both. ■

Chesterton and Dickens

by Karl Schmude

Reviewing a recent book by an Australian scholar on Charles Dickens, the Swiss-American scholar, Michael Aeschliman, awarded high praise to Chesterton as “the greatest Dickens commentator”.

In his review published as “Dickens, Providence, and Us” (*National Review*, June 23, 2022), Aeschliman compares Chesterton’s judgment to that of the literary scholar, Jennifer Gribble, whose book, *Dickens and the Bible* (2020), focuses on Dickens’ understanding of Providence and the “meaning of life”.

Aeschliman describes the modern intellectual atmosphere in which this book will be read – conditioned by the perspectives of a postmodernist culture which exalts individual fulfilment and complacency. He points out that, like Chesterton, “Gribble sees Dickens not as any kind of smug, confident, philistine, masculinist Victorian, nor as a merely superficial, sentimental, dated entertainer, but precisely as the most thorough and wise critic of these self-interested and self-flattering perspectives — and thus, here and now, as an imaginative resource for self-knowledge and the future.”

Aeschliman acknowledges that Gribble’s book does not make easy reading. But he admires its readiness to take in the larger picture, and reflect on its implications and directions.

Noting Chesterton’s influence, Aeschliman comments:

“High-modernist writers and literary critics in the wake of Dickens often resented and ridiculed his influence, sometimes enviously. Against this resentment, Chesterton’s 1906 and 1911 books (the latter consisting of his introductions to the Everyman editions of Dickens’s novels) were a lonely, salutary challenge, defending the popularity that Dickens had and has never lost with ‘common readers’ throughout the English-speaking world.”

Aeschliman notes Gribble’s emphasis on Dickens’ deep knowledge of the Bible. “The New Testament,” she states, “was the heart of his moral imagination.” But, as Aeschliman comments, “she is aware of ‘post-modernism’s repression of the Bible’ . . . and of the secularizing machinery of public culture and institutions,” so that it is blind, not only to the Bible itself but to its fruits in Dante and Milton, and its expressions in primers and hymns, which have been the main means by which literacy became universal in the West.

As Aeschliman concludes:

“In what the French polymath Jacques Ellul calls “the humiliation of the Word,” our ideal seems to be literacy without ethics, functional rationality without morality, knowledge without conscience. The Bible, Shakespeare, and Dickens are our great antidotes and ripostes to this cultural amnesia.”

The Humanising Power of Music

by David Daintree

In his online newsletter on November 15, 2022, **David Daintree**, Director of the Christopher Dawson Centre for Cultural Studies in Hobart, reflected on the merits of the Australian movie, *Paradise Road*. His review is reprinted here with his kind permission.



I recently watched the 1997 Bruce Beresford film *Paradise Road* at home on DVD. As the standard of free-to-air TV continues to plummet gutterwards, I find the urge to fossick through our old disc collections grows all the stronger!

Paradise Road is a triumph of the Australian film industry. It focuses on the horrors of prison life in Sumatra under Japanese occupation during the Second World War, but without confining its attention narrowly to the Australian victims only: one of the leads is our own Cate Blanchett, but other main roles are taken by Glenn Close (American) and Pauline Collins (English).

I think it's one of the characteristics of good Australian movies (and Beresford's are up there with the very best) that they are patriotic without being nationalistic: we are right to be proud of our people bravely enduring the most appalling sufferings, but we're citizens of the world and so must equally recognise greatness in others.

Glenn Close's performance wins the palm in my view. She plays the part of the real-life Norah Chambers, a professional musician who established a sort of choral orchestra in the camp.

The prisoners are forbidden to have musical instruments, but under her direction they hum their music, raise their own spirits - and occasionally even entrance their guards.

Close's performance is an awesome and incomparable piece of acting, I think, but the co-founder of the orchestra, the missionary Margaret Dryburgh (played by Pauline Collins), won my heart. She wrote a poem called *The Captives' Hymn* which is featured in the film, most movingly at the funeral of one of that majority of poor POWs who lost their lives through sickness

and ill treatment. Here are a few lines:

"Father, in captivity,
We would lift our prayers to Thee,
Keep us ever in Thy love,
Grant that daily we may prove
Those who place their trust in Thee
More than conquerors may be.

"May the day of freedom dawn,
Peace and justice be reborn,
Grant that nations loving Thee
O'er the world may brothers be,
Cleansed by suffering, know rebirth,
See Thy kingdom come on earth."

It is impossible for those of us living in Australia today to come close to imagining the privations endured by prisoners of a cruel regime, during a war that must have seemed never-ending, not knowing if lost loved ones were alive or dead. They must have hated their captors for their pitiless cruelty, yet so many of them probed beyond hatred to sympathy and eventually love: "grant that nations loving Thee o'er the world may brothers be."

This is such a generous movie. It doesn't leave us hating the Japanese, though so many of the things they did to the most vulnerable people were indeed hateful.

Instead, Beresford allows us a glimpse of the humanity of the defeated enemy: the rare smile between soldier and prisoner; the occasional look of shame in the eyes of men implicated in horrible things; their final disgrace in the face of defeat.

We know that Japan treated its soldiers cruelly too. Theirs was a world where few knew the Gospel, where might alone conferred rights. ■

In the early months of World War I, Chesterton uttered one of his most memorable statements, recorded by his secretary at the time, Mrs Meredith. His response to the news of the horrible carnage on the Western Front might well have foreshadowed the plight of the captive women in Paradise Road, and their drawing hope from the depths of despair.

"... Then came August 4th and the beginning of another kind of tragedy. As the weeks dragged on the strain became greater and greater, but there had come also a lifting of the heart in Gilbert that responded to the heroism around him. Mrs. Meredith remembers keenly a November afternoon in the little study at 'Overroads' [his house in Beaconsfield]. Gilbert was dictating and a newsboy was crying bad news underneath the window and announcing the death and the wounds of many young Englishmen. Gilbert paused in the detective story he was writing and after the pause he went on in a new voice:

"If seeds in the black earth can turn into such beautiful roses, what might not the heart of man become in its long journey towards the stars?" (Maisie Ward, *Return to Chesterton*)

