

Wells, Chesterton, and A Theology of Semidetached Reading

Mark Knight

Lancaster University

H. G. Wells's "The Plattner Story" (1896) tells the story of a teacher of modern languages who has an out-of-body experience following a chemistry experiment at his school. Although Gottfried Plattner remains able to glimpse the dimension he comes from, it becomes increasingly indistinct to his eyes, and he is no longer visible to the inhabitants of that world. Consumed by a "longing to return to the earthly life that was so near and yet so remote" (208), Plattner finds that his vision in the "Other-World" is mediated, at least in part, through the disembodied "Watchers of the Living" that dwell there. These "Watchers of the Living" remain inexplicable—as we can see in the collective description of them as a "cloud of watchers" (210)—but Plattner does register the perceptible effect they have on him, remarking how their eyes leave him feeling "overcome with a strange sense of responsibility" (207). Plattner's visit to this other world lasts just nine days. When he does finally return to the actual world, his experience of the other realm has left a physical mark: the organs on the left side of Plattner's body, including his heart, have swapped places with those on the right.

The tale of a man who moves between realms and is changed by the experience is wonderfully suggestive. Read analogically, it might be taken to describe the effect of being absorbed in a world of fiction while remaining attached to the actual world. This is how John Plotz theorizes the phenomenon in *Semi-Detached: The Aesthetics of Virtual Experience since Dickens* (2018) when he looks at a range of works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in

which “the crux of an aesthetic experience is imagined, or depicted, or understood as residing neither in complete absorption in an artwork, nor in critical detachment from it, but in the odd fact of both states existing simultaneously” (1). Plotz describes this phenomenon as semi-detachment, and by the time he gets to his chapter on Wells, Plotz is keen to emphasize the ways in which the experience draws on the techniques of realism: “Like many of Wells’s protagonists, Plattner has departed from his ordinary world without quite managing to leave it behind: all that is uncanny about his experience follows from his partial adhesion to the everyday realm” (175). If the late-nineteenth-century fabulist writing of Wells is indebted to Victorian realists, as Plotz suggests, then we can start to trace a more continuous trajectory from Victorian to Modernist writers as they experiment with the capacity of fiction to represent our strange experience of the world. And by showing us how realism is adapted to “make sense of extreme experiences from distinctly skewed vantage points” (184), Plotz offers a focal point for thinking about the contribution of fantasy to larger debates about fictionality—the reasons we turn to literature in the first place, the extent to which we suspend belief when we read fiction, and the way in which we understand the relation between the world we read and the world we inhabit. With the help of Plotz, we are invited to think further about the significance of a heart that changes place and the capacity for our sympathies to be transformed through partial immersion in another realm.

Although Plotz’s attention to semi-detachment offers a rich way of reading “The Plattner Story,” what is missing is any discussion of how different types of religious belief fit into this experience of being in the world but not of it. The omission is not altogether surprising. Works of scholarship can only ever cover so much ground, and even without any reference to religion, Plotz’s discussion is distinguished by its engagement with a vast range of theoretical and textual material. Moreover, Wells is well known for his criticisms of the Christian faith. The chapter that

Plotz writes is concerned with Wells's contribution to a tradition of speculative fiction that is not usually thought about in theological terms.¹ Yet it is worth pausing on the lack of attention to religion, in part because Plotz is far from being the only scholar to leave religion out of his reading of late nineteenth and early twentieth century literature. It is this gap in scholarship that has encouraged special issues like the one my essay is part of here, in which critics draw on the resources of a larger theoretical turn to religion to reinvigorate their reading of a period in which religion did not simply disappear in the way that clumsier versions of secularization in literary studies have sometimes implied. As the other contributions to this journal issue make clear, the turn *to* religion is worth thinking about in its own right, for it has to grapple with the interconnections between (or, as Charles Taylor puts it, "the cross-pressures" of) religion and secularity in our modern age. The existence of these interconnections is one of the many reasons why Plotz's book is so interesting: although he does not address the subject of religion, his talk of semi-detachment provides a suggestive conceptual language for thinking about the interplay between religious and secular reading in modernity.

Still, the decision to ignore any sort of religious dimension when discussing Wells's late-century experiments seems odd given the extent to which the Christian faith was a crucial part of the fin de siècle landscape.² Plattner is said to be fond of reading "fiction pervaded with a vaguely pious optimism" (195), and the chemical experiment with the green powder takes place when Plattner is supervising four boys who "had been detained after school prayers in order to complete some neglected tasks" (197). More significantly, it is hard to imagine many readers in the 1890s imagining the watchers of the living without some sort of internal reference to angels or a related equivalent from the spiritual realm, especially given the way in the tale is told by a narrator who is determined to leave readers "to surmise who these Watchers of the Living may

be” (208). There are good reasons why, in an essay on how late-nineteenth-century fabulists engaged with the work of Victorian geometry, Deanna Kreisel compares Wells to Charles Hinton, the “most important popularizer of n-dimensional geometries” (492), concluding that the worlds imagined by Wells are “more spiritual” (497). It is this spiritual quality that I want to take up in the rest of this essay as I trace out a theology of semidetached reading.

Wells was not the only writer at the turn of the century to be interested in a spiritual register when writing about the movement between dimensions. We might think of the work of Marie Corelli—starting with her appropriately named novel, *A Romance of Two Worlds* (1886)—or a writer like Arthur Machen, who moves between realms constantly in “The Great God Pan” (1890, 1894), albeit with a less pronounced sense of the distinction between physical and spiritual properties. Neither Corelli nor Machen is mentioned in Plotz’s study. Their absence is part of a wider neglect of authors who draw on religious language to imagine their worlds. One reason for the lack of reference to such writers is Plotz’s determination to stay away from “Tolkien’s notion of secondary worlds” (191). Rejecting Michael Saler’s argument that realism is “an imperfect way station on the path towards fuller immersive art” (Plotz 12), Plotz is reluctant to foreground the secondary worlds that might promise the immersion spoken of by Saler and distract from an argument about semidetachment and its realist lineage. But it is not clear that all religious thought requires the concept of secondary worlds in the manner described by Tolkien, nor is it impossible for religion and realism to combine in other ways. Secondary worlds do not feature heavily in William James’s empirically driven *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), for instance, another text from the period that is conspicuous by its absence in Plotz’s account. And when it comes to fiction, the theological imagination has other possibilities than those imagined by Tolkien. A case in point is George MacDonald, a writer who

influenced the Inklings but had his own theological language for thinking about the fantastic imagination.³ Wells's admiration for MacDonald's *Lilith* (1895) can be seen in a letter written on September 24, 1895:

I have been reading your *Lilith* with exceptional interest. Curiously enough I have been at work on a book based on essentially the same idea, namely that, assuming more than three dimensions, it follows that there must be wonderful worlds nearer to us than breathing and closer than hands and feet. I have wanted to get into such kindred worlds for the purposes of romance for several years, but I've been bothered by the way. Your polarisation and mirror business struck me as neat in the extreme. (qtd. in Greville MacDonald 323-24)

The praise is all the more remarkable given MacDonald's explicit theological interests. These interests permeate the narrative of *Lilith*, without ever being resolved into allegory or a clear break from the actual world. We might recall that MacDonald's degree at the University of Aberdeen was in science, and that he remained interested throughout his life in the relationship between spirit and matter.

While it is tempting to dwell on the reasons why Plotz leaves religion out of his account, the more interesting question is what might be gained from exploring a theology of semidetached reading. Christian believers have an attenuated experience of being absorbed in different worlds. This experience includes the divisions between fiction and actuality described by Plotz, but there is the added disorientation for Christian believers of seeing themselves as part of the actual world and part of the new kingdom Christ is said to inaugurate. Our actions, practices, beliefs and

desires all take on new meaning when they are understood as contributions to different worlds, and those who identify with the Christian faith are often keenly aware of the need to make sense of the various threads of meanings that emerge as one moves back and forth between worlds. One basic contribution of Christian theology to our thinking about semidetached reading is its narration of particular experiences of trying to hold multiple threads of meaning together. This experience is not peculiar to the Christian faith, but narratives of religious experience offer a distinctive contribution to the reading of literary culture, if only we can find a way of noticing them and seeing where they lead rather than rushing to critique their underlying ideology.

A valuable set of tools for paying attention to the numerous threads of meaning that emerge in the reading of Christian believers can be found in Rita Felski's *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (2020). Desiring to explain our attachments to imaginative works, Felski offers her own account of the concept of semidetached reading: "The semidetached house is a residential unit that is linked to its neighbor; sharing a structural wall, it cannot stand alone. By analogy, we can distance ourselves from a few things at a time but never from everything at once" (10).⁴ Pursuing the analogy further, Felski turns to actor network theory to trace the various threads that constitute our attachments. Although she does not address the religious possibilities of her work, I suspect I am not alone in being struck by the way in which so much of her thinking resonates with the experience of Christian believers. To take just one instance: "It is not uncommon, when reading, to have a sense of breaking away from one's everyday life and entering a different kind of reading. And yet, although being caught up in a book may cut readers off from their immediate milieu, it forges other kinds of tie: for example, to real or to imagined persons" (26). Despite the fact that this insight, like Felski's work more generally, is not directed toward

theology, it enables the experience of religious believers to become part of our critical discussions.

Felski's interest in actor network theory is a reminder of the need to think about how different worlds collide and intersect, and here we come to a second contribution of theology to semidetached reading: thinking about how the relationship between different worlds is configured. While there is a long tradition of Christian believers referring to a parallel dimension of the type imagined by Wells, in which spirits, angels and saints operate, the more common theological arrangement of two realms is understood eschatologically: the kingdom in which we live, and the kingdom to come. There is a sequential quality to the arrangement of these two kingdoms, with one seeking to supplant the other. It would be a mistake, though, to think that the sequence can only be understood in terms of one world beginning after the other one ends. The writers of the New Testament are more interested in imagining how the kingdom to come interrupts and reshapes the world in which we currently live, move and have our being: the writer of Revelation, especially, offers "an imaginative vision in which the dominant way of seeing things (both present and future) is fundamentally challenged and an alternative picture painted of the potentialities and possibilities in God's future" (Hart 232). This habit of looking for the emergence of a new spiritual kingdom in the here and now was certainly familiar to mid-Victorian novelists. Perhaps most memorably, Charles Dickens draws on the idea in *Bleak House* (1852-53) when Allan Woodcourt leads Jo in a rendition of the Lord's Prayer just before his death but never makes it to the line "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6: 10).

How, then, might we read the "iterations of Christian apocalyptic ... that inform the 'scientific romances' of H. G. Wells" (Tate 16) and provide what Andrew Tate refers to as a

displaced theology? Although it is reasonable for Axel Stähler to read Wells's "A Vision of Judgment" (1899) as thwarting eschatological expectations, it is wrong to think that the apparent absence of heaven and hell in Well's satire renders irrelevant the resources of theological thinking about eschatology. It is true that "apocalyptic expectation, at least in the Christian tradition, is based on a temporal framework" (Stähler 169), but the temporal quality of that framework turns out to be remarkably complex, with Christians routinely thinking of themselves as existing between and within two worlds: already and not yet. In the late nineteenth century, Christina Rossetti offers an especially noteworthy example of a literary author who conceived of time and theology in ways that go far beyond the schema imagined by Wells. As Emma Mason explains: "Rossetti rejected the idea of the end of time as a schism in which the saved were raptured into another time and space. For her the apocalypse opened creation to a new and expanded way of thinking being driven through the indwelling of God in the whole of creation. She believed the process by which God re-enters the world to initiate it into new life was driven by grace" (160).⁵

Krista Lysack, recognizing that "narratives of the Victorian project to institutionalize time and render it uniform must, then, be tempered by the observation that this period was an era of many time regimes, that temporality could be experienced in different and discontinuous ways," explores the "entanglements of time" (12) in Victorian devotional writing. As her eloquent study makes clear, devotional writing offers a rich source for thinking about "reading moments [that] might include ones of absorption and concentration but might just as easily admit of surface encounters such as browsing, sampling, skimming, and skipping" (Lysack 17-18). We might usefully extend many of Lysack's insights to other theological practices of attending to two worlds, and to works of fiction that explore what it means to read in a state of semi-

detachment. Although Christian believers are likely to insist on intrinsic differences between the kingdom of God and the realm of fiction, there are methodological similarities in the way that these fictional and spiritual worlds are read in conjunction with the actual world. Considering these theological configurations further can shed light on the experience of semidetached reading, in the late nineteenth century and more generally.

One crucial aspect of the way in which different worlds are configured theologically is the experience of thinking about how these worlds sometimes conflict. This leads me to a third claim about the contribution of theology to semidetached reading, namely the resources theology possesses for thinking about the conflict that arises as we see worlds differently. To explore this further, I turn to the writing of G. K. Chesterton, another theologically minded contemporary of Wells who is omitted from Plotz's account. Wells and Chesterton had considerable differences when it came to matters of faith, but they remained good friends and appreciative of what they could learn from each other. In a letter to Chesterton dated December 10, 1933, Wells joked: "If after all my Atheology turns out wrong and your Theology right, I feel I shall always be able to pass into Heaven (if I want to) as a friend of G. K. C.'s" (qtd. in Ward 513). Chesterton responded in a similarly warm tone: "If I turn out to be right, you will triumph, not by being a friend of mine but by being a friend of Man, by having done a thousand things for men like me every way from imagination to criticism" (qtd. in Ward 513). Convivial exchanges of this sort were a key feature of their friendship, though this did not stop them from articulating criticisms of each other's position. Many of these criticisms, from Chesterton particularly, concern the topic of perception.⁶ Writing in *Heretics* (1905), Chesterton accuses Wells of failing to appreciate a universal quality to existence that, for Chesterton, underwrites our subjective perception of the world and makes philosophy possible: "It is quite true that we see a dim light

which, compared with a darker thing, is light, but which, compared with a stronger light, is darkness. But the quality of light remains the same thing, or else we should not call it a stronger light or recognize it as such” (76-77). And when Chesterton introduces his response to Wells’s *The Outline of History* (1920), at the start of *The Everlasting Man* (1925), he returns to a similar idea, explicating the rationale for his own work by complaining about Wells’s lack of self-awareness regarding his own vantage point: “The point of this book, in other words, is that the next best thing to being really inside Christendom is to be really outside it. And a particular point of it is that the popular critics of Christianity are not really outside it. They are on a debatable ground, in every sense of the term” (*The Everlasting Man* 9).

Chesterton’s suggestion that people are ever fully inside or outside a system of thought seems questionable, but his interest in attending to the position from which one views the world is illuminating. For a start, we might note how Chesterton’s preference for reading from the inside puts him at odds with the way in which the majority of literary scholars have approached reading in recent decades. A representative figure here is Amanda Anderson and her influential work, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (2001). Assessing the nineteenth-century’s growing interest in critical detachment, and the way it is mediated through various forms, Anderson acknowledges the limits of detachment but continues to argue for its merit as a way of perceiving the world. Although Anderson has comparatively little to say about faith, her argument struggles with those expressions of religious belief that favor more personal forms of engagement with the world. The issue is one that I have discussed previously, when writing about Samuel Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) in the final chapter of my book, *Good Words: Evangelicalism and the Victorian Novel* (2019). In that chapter I make the case for proximity as a way of perceiving the world. As Felski has written more recently:

“Distance is not always better than closeness: the bird’s-eye view will miss crucial details and telling anomalies; it may result in knowing less rather than more” (10-11). Like Felski, I do not think that a criticism of the powers of distance involves rejecting those powers altogether, nor do I mean to suggest that our interpretative choice is only ever between proximity and distance. There are different types of proximity and different types of distance, and, in many ways, the most interesting aspect of Chesterton’s contribution to these questions lies in the way that he explores a realist style of fabulist writing that allows him to move *between* proximity and distance.

A preoccupation with perception is a major feature of Chesterton’s novel, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* (1908). In the prefatory poem to this work, Chesterton introduces the notion of writing about one perception of the world from the vantage point of another—“This is a tale of those old fears, even of those emptied hells”—and the story goes on narrate a series of quasi-dimensional shifts as Gabriel Syme becomes an undercover policeman, infiltrates an anarchist group, and discovers that his new compatriots are, like him, double agents. The dimensional shifts are not defined as strongly as they are in “The Plattner Story,” but the dislocation is striking and bound up with perception. Having had his view of the world transformed throughout the novel, Syme’s perspective is changed once again when he and the other members of the group catch up with their leader, Sunday, in the novel’s surreal and symbolically laden finale. Arriving at the house of Sunday, Syme “entered a splendid suite of apartments that seemed to be designed specially for him. He walked up to a long mirror ... and there saw the frightful figure that he was ... At once the whole enigma sprang up, simply as the question of how he had got there, and how we was to get out again” (149). As the device of the

mirror confirms, it becomes increasingly difficult for Syme, and the reader, to distinguish between the spaces described and Syme's increasingly paranoid perception of the world.

For many of those who have written on the novel, me included, the focus has often been on explaining how Chesterton seeks a solution to the problems he associated with radical subjectivity. His novel displays a great deal of anxiety about the threat of delusion and the fear that things will turn out to be different than they initially appear. Chesterton wrote about related anxieties on several occasions, as he linked the events of the novel to his personal struggles in the early 1890s with an Impressionism he thought of as dangerously solipsistic. And yet, for readers of *The Man who was Thursday*, the greater danger lies in blindly following Syme's pursuit of an ultimate meaning in the events that take place. Despite his best efforts, Syme fails to comprehend who Sunday is. As Lucas Harriman remarks, "Here, Syme echoes the epistemological desire of the careful reader who has pursued through the maze of the novel's many twists and turns and can see that there only two thin pages left in which to encounter it. We want to know what *Thursday* and Chesterton mean so that we can at least agree or disagree, at least decide whether Chesterton is friend or fiend" (46-47). Rather than treating *The Man who was Thursday* as a work of detection with a clear solution, Harriman encourages us to ponder the novel's constant betrayals of meanings. In doing so, he picks up helpfully on the novel's own language of betrayal—"an act of disloyalty, to be sure, but also a revelatory translation of the unknown, a boundary-crossing 'handing over' from one sphere to another" (Harriman 44)—and suggests that we may be better off staying with the novel's interest in perception rather than rushing to explain it away.⁷

However much the "creed" that Chesterton refers to in his prefatory poem offered important answers to his personal worries about radical subjectivity, the ability to see the world

differently remains integral to the world imagined in *The Man who was Thursday*. The penultimate paragraph may describe Syme being “in possession of some impossible good news” (158), but there is a tentative quality to this epiphany. We are only ever told that Syme “felt” in possession of this news, and the revelation that accompanies it continues the novel’s earlier fascination with perception. Syme’s new perspective at the close of the novel is sharper and more vivid than it has sometimes seemed previously, but in other ways it is not fundamentally different. However much we are urged to see that a transformation has taken place by the final paragraph—“Dawn was breaking over everything in colours at once clear and timid; as if Nature made a first attempt at yellow and a first attempt at rose” (158)—the scene recalls the language used at the start of the novel. There, the narrator introduces the suburb of Saffron Park and tells us how it “lay on the sunset side of London, as red and ragged as a cloud of sunset. It was built of a bright brick throughout; its skyline was fantastic, and even its ground plan was wild” (1). From start to finish, the novel maintains its appreciation of those colored lands that Chesterton celebrated and wrote about throughout his life.⁸

There are obvious parallels between the ways in which *The Man who was Thursday* and “The Plattner Story” interrogate one’s perception of the world. Given the authors’ mutual admiration for one another, it does not seem too much of a stretch to find a connection between Wells’s interest in “seven more honest-seeming witnesses” (193) and Chesterton’s inclusion in *The Man who was Thursday* of seven members of the Central Council of Anarchists, named after the days of the week. There are differences, though. For the narrator of “The Plattner Story,” the seven witnesses are not really an object of interest in their own right. Their role in the narrative is to attest to the veracity of the story that is told, and the only one of them spoken about in any detail is Mr. Lidgitt. By contrast, the witnesses in Chesterton’s tale fascinate Syme,

and their initial effect on him is to disorient his perception further and cause him to doubt the reliability of his senses. But as Syme comes to believe that the fellow members of the Anarchist Council are friends rather than foes, he comes to appreciate the unifying witness that their different accounts of Sunday offer. “‘Have you noticed an odd thing,’ he said, ‘about all your descriptions? Each man of you finds Sunday quite different, yet each man of you can only find one thing to compare him to—the universe itself’” (144). In this moment, at least, Wells and Chesterton share an interest in how a group of witnesses—a mechanism of realist writing—might lend credence to an individual perception of things that presses beyond the limits of the possible.

In considering certain similarities between the two texts, I do not want to elide their differences. And I do not want to play down the consequence of seeing things from different points of view, for this is a crucial feature of *The Man who was Thursday*. One of the means by which Chesterton maintains narrative interest for his readers is by moving constantly between different vantage points. Syme finds common ground with the other members of the Council when he allies himself with them later on, but equally memorable are those earlier moments, such as when Syme joins the anarchists for breakfast on a balcony overlooking Leicester Square. Afraid that they might realize who he is, Syme can only think of himself as an outsider and this vantage point shapes his outlook. It also affects his view of Leicester Square: “It will never be known, I suppose, why this square itself should look so alien And this effect increased in Syme the sensation, which in many shapes he had through the whole adventure, the eerie sensation of having strayed into a new world” (41). His sight of a new world continues a process begun a few pages earlier, when Syme is elected to the position of Thursday on the Anarchist Council. Stepping “out on to the steam tug he had a singular sensation of stepping out into

something entirely new; not merely into the landscape of a new land, but even into the landscape of a new planet” (36). This new world has a disturbing aspect to it, but it is also exciting, part of what Chesterton refers to in his *Autobiography* (1936) as “the glorious gift of the senses; and the sensational experience of sensation” (355). For Chesterton, the excitement is not the result of discovering that everything is one; by contrast, it results from learning to value difference, seeing it as part of God’s gift in creation and enjoying the exchanges it led to with writers such as Wells.

To insist, as Chesterton often did, that Christianity was the golden key that “can unlock all doors” (*Autobiography* 354) does not tell the whole theological story of what is going on in *The Man who was Thursday*. The novel may glimpse the good news of faith in its final moments, but the power of the text owes more to the way in which its central protagonist moves between realms and entertains very different views of the world. In this respect, the doors opened by the key prove to be at least as interesting as the key itself. Chesterton was not the only writer at the turn of the century to explore the experience of moving between worlds, but his acute awareness of how much was at stake as one saw the world from different vantage points was informed by his theological understanding. Because Christians are encouraged to think of themselves as split between two worlds, they can become more sensitive to the experience of crossing worlds and learn how to construct and navigate points of connection and difference. I realize that there are many other worldviews and experiences that could be said to offer something similar, and I have no wish to claim that a theological outlook enables one to bridge worlds more effectively than anyone else. But the risk of claiming too much should not stop us from claiming too little, and there is a value in entertaining the idea that theology might contribute to our thinking about semidetached reading. As I have suggested in this essay, this contribution includes articulating

distinct narratives about the experience of crossing worlds, imagining how these worlds might be configured, and learning to value the conflicts that can result as we move between realms and see things differently.

A further reason for thinking about a theology of semidetached reading is that it confronts the fear in our own time of religious fanatics who can only see the world in one way. These fears are not entirely without justification, but the object of such fears frequently has more to do with fanaticism than it does with any and every type of theological thinking. It is instructive to remember that unlike Joseph Conrad's novel *A Secret Agent* (1907), there is no terrorist atrocity in *The Man who was Thursday*. And it is worth remembering, too, that Syme's infiltration of the Anarchist Council is motivated by his desire to stop the violent anarchy proposed by the secular-minded Lucian Gregory. We may only be dealing with a fictional expression of theology, a literary experiment rather than lived experience, but paying closer attention to this material can help us imagine an alternative to religious fanaticism as we think about the role of theological thought in literary studies. Recent critical interest in semidetached reading proves useful in this respect, not least because the concept conceives of a space for religion and the secular that does not have to subordinate one to the other or tolerate only diluted versions of belief.⁹ Semidetached reading is the lived experience of those who remain skeptical about the Christian faith as well as those who count themselves as Christian believers. But the religious dimensions of the stories by Wells and Chesterton help bring theological understandings of semidetached reading into view for those who find it easier to identify with Plattner (a teacher of languages) and Syme (a poet) than they do with explicitly religious characters or non-literary works of doctrine. And in writing about characters that move between worlds, Wells and Chesterton are able to highlight the

strange mix of secular and religious experience that remains so important for those who want to think about religion in the modern world.

¹ Although Wells was critical of Christianity for most of his life, he did go through a more religious phase during and immediately after the first world war, albeit it one that he later described as a “detour” that never “made any concessions to doctrinal Christianity” (*Experiment in Autobiography Vol II*, 677, 674).

² For a useful overview of the Christian landscape at the end of the nineteenth century, see Frances Knight, *Victorian Christianity at the Fin de Siècle* (2015).

³ See, for instance, MacDonald, “The Imagination: its Functions and its Culture” (1867).

⁴ Felski explains that she came to the term independently from Plotz.

⁵ Looking beyond Rossetti, one can find more on the complexities of Christian eschatology in the late nineteenth century in Kevin Mills, *Approaching Apocalypse: Unveiling Revelation in Victorian Writing* (2007), and Judith Wolffe’s chapter, “Eschatology” (2017).

⁶ I have touched on the literary connection between Wells and Chesterton previously, when writing about the treatment of Impressionism in *The Invisible Man* (1897) and *The Man who was Thursday*. See Knight, *Chesterton and Evil*, 94-99.

⁷ See, for instance, Michael Shallcross’s helpful account of how the voices in the novel are taken up in Bakhtinian dialogism and carnivalesque.

⁸ See G. K. Chesterton, *The Coloured Lands* (1938).

⁹ Craig Woelfel makes an important contribution to our thinking in this area when he writes: “Just because someone can hold two different fundamental epistemological positions simultaneously ... does not mean that such positions have achieved, or should achieve, some kind of ‘accommodation,’ some happy and whole stable relationship. To suggest such a viewpoint ignores the fragmentation of the subject and of the relationship between belief and knowledge that characterizes secularization and modernization at large—and certainly, has carried forward into what some argue is our postsecular present” (171).

Works Cited

- Anderson, Amanda. *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001.
- Chesterton, G. K. *Autobiography*. Kent: Fisher Press, 1992.
- . *The Coloured Lands*. Ed. Maisie Ward. London: Sheed & Ward, 1938.
- . *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*. Ed. Matthew Beaumont. London: Penguin, 2011.
- Felski, Rita. *Hooked: Art and Attachment*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2020.
- Harriman, Lucas H. "The Russian Betrayal of G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*." *Comparative Literature* 62.1 (2010): 41-54.
- Hart, Trevor. *Between the Image and the Word: Theological Engagements with Imagination, Language and Literature*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013.
- Knight, Frances. *Victorian Christianity at the Fin de Siècle: The Culture of English Religion in a Decadent Age*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2015.
- Knight, Mark. *Chesterton and Evil*. New York: Fordham UP, 2004.
- . *Good Words: Evangelicalism and the Victorian Novel*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State UP, 2019.
- Kreisel, Deanna K. "The Discreet Charm of Abstraction: Hyperspace Worlds and Victorian Geometry." *Victorian Studies* 56.3 (2014): 398-410.
- Lysack, Krista. *Chronometres: Devotional Literature, Duration and Victorian Reading*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2019.
- MacDonald, George. "The Imagination: its Functions and its Culture." *The British Quarterly Review* (July 1867): 45-70.

- . *Lilith*. Lion Publishing, 1982.
- MacDonald, Greville. *Reminiscences of a Specialist*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932.
- Mason, Emma. *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology, Faith*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018.
- Mills, Kevin. *Approaching Apocalypse: Unveiling Revelation in Victorian Writing*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 2007.
- Plotz, John. *Semi-Detached: The Aesthetics of Virtual Experience since Dickens*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2018.
- Shallcross, Michael. "G. K. Chesterton's Assimilation of *Fin-de-Siècle* Voices in *The Man who Was Thursday*: The Dialogic Sensibility." *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 59.3 (2016): 320-43.
- Stähler, Axel. "Apocalyptic Visions and Utopian Spaces in Late Victorian and Edwardian Prophecy Fiction." *Utopian Studies* 23.1 (2012): 162-211.
- Tate, Andrew. *Apocalyptic Fiction*. London: Bloomsbury Academic P, 2017.
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007.
- Ward, Masie. *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1944.
- Wells, H. G. *Experiment in Autobiography*. 2 Vols. London: Faber & Faber, 1984.
- . "The Plattner Story." *Selected Short Stories*. New York: Penguin Books, 1958. 193-211.
- Woelfel, Craig Bradshaw. *Varieties of Aesthetic Experience: Literary Modernism and the Dissociation of Belief*. Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 2018.
- Wolffe, Judith. "Eschatology." *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought*. Ed. Joel Rasmussen, Judith E. Wolfe, and Johannes Zachhuber. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017. 676-92.