



Universitat de Lleida

Modalities of Contemporary Thought and Behaviour in the Edwardian Fiction of Hilaire Belloc

Lambert Escorihuela Pujol

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DOCTORAL THESIS

Modalities of Contemporary Thought and Behaviour in the Edwardian Fiction of Hilaire Belloc

Lambert Escorihuela-Pujol

Thesis presented for the obtainment of the degree of Doctor of the
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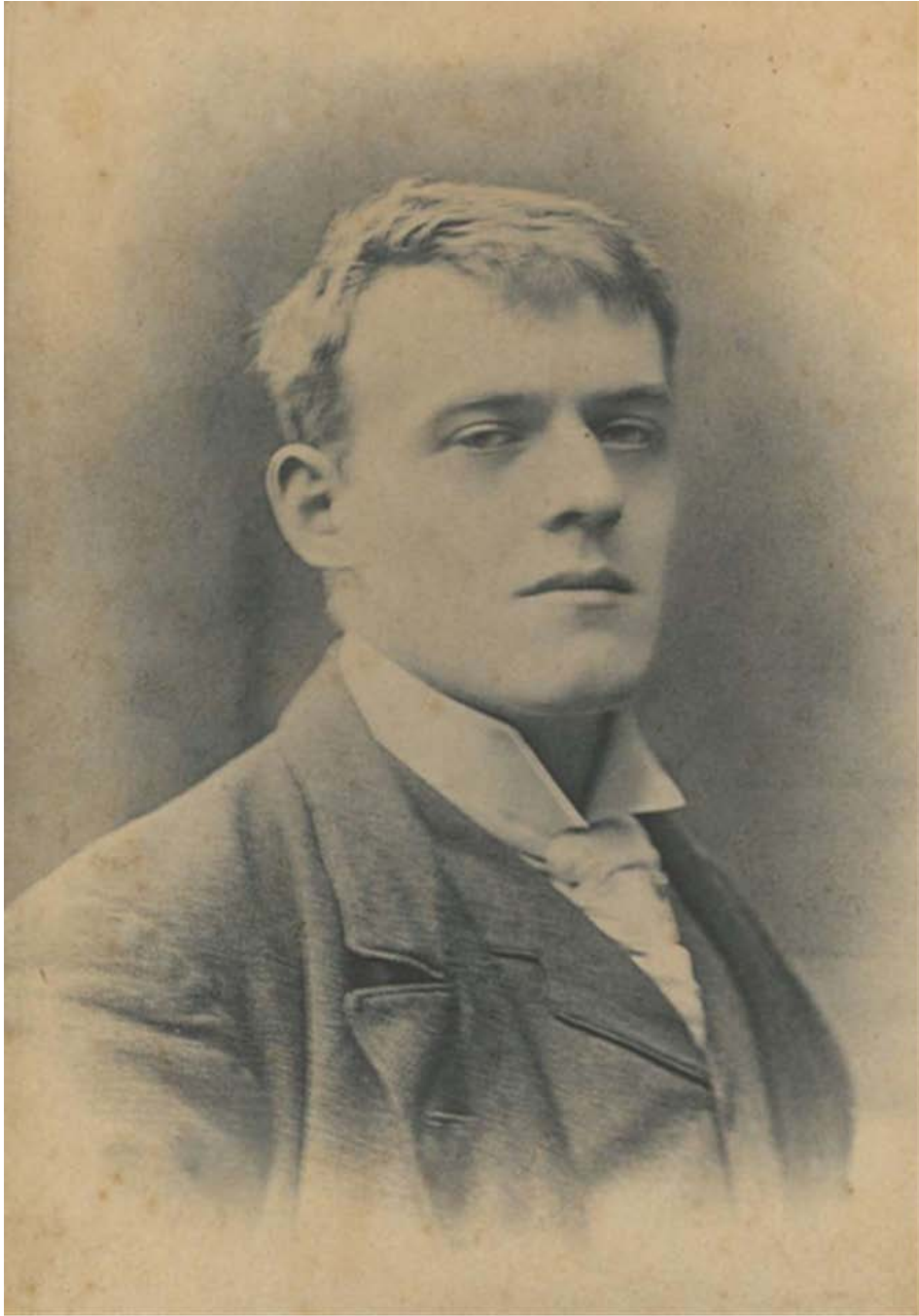


Fig. 1. Hilaire Belloc, as a young man.

Summaries (English, Catalan, Spanish)

Summary of thesis

Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953) wrote fourteen novels that reflect the set of habits, customs and beliefs of the Edwardian period. Even though he was well known for his poetry and essays his novels deserve closer attention, as they convey Belloc's ideological load through weird, amusing stories that were originally considered escapist fiction, but that constitute a more specific expression of ideas than other more formal documents.

From his trenchant Roman Catholic point of view, Belloc refers to the English Reformation and the subsequent emerging plutocracy, the interference of continental culture into English institutions, the Whig interpretation of history, and the ordinary people's urgency to climb up socially and their inherent frustrations. With his peculiar sense of humour and satirical outlook, Belloc dissects our pecuniary attitudes. He analyses how we earn money, what we invest it in, and what our economic priorities are. He is perceptive enough to glimpse the growing role of women and how they achieve top positions, although he often goes on using stereotypical female representations.

In the thesis, historical accounts of the life, politics and religious principles of Belloc function as extensions of the introduction and frame the discussion that follows about the approach to Belloc's novels through the lens of economics. His Distributist tenets contribute to set out his reflection on wealth and property ownership, thus emphasizing the principle of common good as the main step towards a fairer, future society, constituted by free men and women who become the true masters of their fate, because they must not bear the burden of wage-slavery, and they can shun the siren calls of social protection in exchange for the taxing policies of the welfare state system categories. Current issues are contemplated in the light of Belloc's economic concerns so as to illustrate the relevance of his literary work in contemporary society.

Belloc was a man of his time and, by inclination and temperament, also accustomed to think in absolutes. His ideological positions, along with his continuous stark statements, brought in numerous enemies and wholehearted friends alike. Professor G.G. Coulton and social critic and novelist H.G. Wells were some of Belloc's opponents; other novelists like G.K. Chesterton and Maurice Baring were some of his unconditional friends. All in all, George Bernard Shaw was the sympathetic observer of Belloc, whom he considered an advocate of lost causes. In today's perception, sometimes Belloc appears to be inconsistent occasionally, since the thread of his reasoning does not always meet the needs of present-day troubles. On the whole, however, Belloc is an accomplished and controversial writer whose sincere struggle to improve human life conditions deserves a hearing.

This thesis analyses significant hidden layers of meaning in Belloc's comic fiction and their application to present day modalities of thought and behaviour. As a novelist, Belloc makes an effort to describe human passions and casts light on our follies. Even though his fiction books span from 1904 to 1932, the views he applied to his contemporaries are also in force for current society, since essential human nature does not change; neither does human greed and the desire to dominate others.

Resum de la tesi

Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953) va escriure catorze novel·les que reflecteixen el conjunt de costums i creences del període eduardià. Tot i que ell era reconegut per la seva poesia i assajos, cal repassar les seves novel·les atentament de bell nou, ja que són l'instrument que utilitza per explicar les seves idees mitjançant narracions, sovint estranyes i divertides alhora, que d'antuvi foren considerades literatura d'evasió, però que expliquen el seu pensament més clarament que en altres possibles exposicions teòriques.

Des del seu punt de vista catòlic punyent Belloc fa referència a la Reforma anglicana i la consegüent plutocràcia emergent, la intromissió de la cultura europea en les institucions angleses, la historiografia Whig (la interpretació que en fan els progressistes liberals), el desig del ciutadà mitjà per ascendir socialment i la frustració que sol acompanyar l'intent. Belloc analitza la nostra relació amb els diners: com els guanyem, en què els invertim i quines són les nostres prioritats econòmiques. És sagaç i albira el paper emergent de la dona i com s'ho fa per arribar als primers llocs de poder, encara que Belloc sovint presenta imatges estereotipades de les dones.

En el cos de la tesi, els relats històrics de la vida de Belloc i dels seus principis religiosos amplien les informacions presentades en el capítol introductori, i emmarquen l'estudi subsegüent de les seves novel·les, fet sota el punt de vista de l'economia. Els principis del distributisme guien la seva reflexió sobre la riquesa i la possessió de la propietat. El principi del bé comú es transforma en el primer pas vers una societat futura més justa, formada per homes i dones que esdevenen els veritables amos del seu destí, perquè ja no han de suportar la càrrega feixuga de l'esclavatge del sou i, ensems, poden defugir els cants de sirena de la protecció social a canvi de la política d'impostos que l'estat del benestar propugna. Els fets actuals es contemplen a la llum de les preocupacions econòmiques de Belloc a fi i efecte de posar de relleu el seu treball literari en el món contemporani.

Belloc fou un home del seu temps que, per formació i temperament, solia pensar en absoluts. Les seves posicions ideològiques i afirmacions contundents van aportar-li nombrosos enemics i també amics incondicionals. El catedràtic d'història G.G. Coulton i el reformador social i novel·lista H.G. Wells eren alguns dels seus enemics; altres

novel·listes con G.K. Chesterton i Maurice Baring sempre li feren costat. Per la seva banda, George Bernard Shaw se'l mirava amb benvolença i considerava Belloc advocat de causes perdudes. Des de la perspectiva actual, de vegades Belloc sembla una mica incoherent, ja que alguns dels seus raonaments no poden aportar solucions duradores als problemes d'avui dia. Tot plegat, Belloc és un escriptor reeixit i polèmic alhora. Però la seva lluita sincera per millorar les condicions humanes mereix ser observada atentament.

La tesi descobreix les capes ocultes, plenament significatives, que rauen en les novel·les humorístiques d'en Belloc i les relacions amb formes actuals de pensament i conducta. En la seva tasca de novel·lista Belloc s'esforça per descriure les passions humanes i la nostra follia. Malgrat que les seves novel·les foren escrites des del 1904 al 1932, les opinions sobre els seus contemporanis són vigents avui dia, perquè la naturalesa humana és la mateixa que aleshores i mai no canvia, com tampoc ho fa la nostra ambició i afany de domini.

Resumen de la tesis

Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953) escribió catorce novelas que reflejan el conjunto de costumbres y creencias de la época eduardiana. Si bien es conocido sobre todo por su poesía y ensayos, sus novelas merecen ser revisadas atentamente puesto que expresan la densidad ideológica de Belloc a través de narraciones divertidas, incluso extrañas, a las que inicialmente se etiquetó como literatura de evasión. Sin embargo, estas novelas contribuyen a expresar su esfera de pensamiento de forma más clara que en otros teóricamente posibles tratados académicos.

Desde su punto de vista inequívocamente católico Belloc introduce temas como la Reforma anglicana y la plutocracia que inmediatamente se originó como nueva clase emergente, la influencia de la cultura europea en las instituciones inglesas, la interpretación Whig de la historia (historiografía ‘oficial’ que elaboran los liberales a partir del siglo XVIII) y el deseo irrefrenable del ciudadano de a pie por ascender en la escala social, con la frustración que suele acompañarlo. Con su característica vena humorística y mirada satírica, Belloc va analizando nuestras obsesiones pecuniarias: cómo ganamos dinero, en qué lo invertimos y cuáles son nuestras prioridades económicas. Su sagacidad le lleva a vislumbrar el papel de la mujer, cada día más preponderante, y de qué manera accede a los mayores puestos de decisión, si bien a menudo ofrece imágenes femeninas estereotipadas.

En la tesis, los detalles históricos de la vida de Belloc, sus principios políticos y religiosos funcionan como extensiones del capítulo introductorio y encuadran el planteamiento que luego sigue acerca del estudio de las novelas de Belloc a través de la óptica económica. Los principios distributistas rubricados por Belloc conforman la reflexión que él ofrece sobre la riqueza y la propiedad. Belloc destaca el principio del bien común como paso inicial hacia una sociedad futura más justa, cuyos integrantes se convierten en auténticos dueños de su destino porque ya no han de soportar el dogal de la esclavitud del salario y pueden evadirse de los cantos de sirena de la protección social que se les promete si aceptan las políticas de impuestos inherentes al estado de bienestar. La tesis contempla temas actuales a la luz de las observaciones económicas

que Belloc realiza y de este modo resalta la importancia de sus obras literarias en nuestros días.

Ciertamente Belloc fue un hombre de su tiempo. Solía pensar en absolutos a causa de su formación y temperamento. Sus posiciones ideológicas, además de sus afirmaciones taxativas, le ocasionaron simultáneamente múltiples enemigos y amigos incondicionales. El catedrático de historia, G.G. Coulton, y el crítico social y novelista H.G. Wells fueron algunos de sus decididos adversarios; otros autores como G.K. Chesterton y Maurice Baring fueron algunos de sus fieles amigos. Curiosamente, George Bernard Shaw fue observador benevolente del trabajo de Belloc, al que consideraba defensor de causas perdidas. Visto desde ahora, Belloc a veces se muestra incoherente, puesto que su pensamiento no siempre aporta soluciones definitivas a los problemas actuales. Belloc sigue siendo, sin embargo, un autor notable, aunque controvertido, cuyas originales propuestas para mejorar las condiciones de vida de sus conciudadanos merecen ser estudiadas con detalle.

La tesis intenta desentrañar las capas de significación ocultas en las novelas humorísticas de Belloc y extrapolarlas al pensamiento y conducta contemporáneos. Con su habitual perspicacia Belloc se esfuerza en describir las pasiones humanas. Pone el espejo frente a nuestra insensatez. Aunque sus obras de ficción abarcan el período que va de 1904 a 1932, las observaciones que realiza sobre sus coetáneos siguen vigentes en la sociedad actual, puesto que la naturaleza humana no cambia básicamente, ni tampoco nuestra ambición y afán de dominio.



Fig. 2. Joseph Hilaire Pierre René Belloc (27th July 1870 – 16th July 1953)

Introduction

Hilaire Belloc, MP, orator,¹ Roman Catholic, lived in England in the Edwardian period. This thesis sets out to demonstrate that this subject matter and the meanings of the novels reflect aspects of the Edwardian society in which he found himself. I deal with Belloc's novels by guessing at or identifying what Belloc tries to say, what is the theme of each novel – usually implied rather than stated explicitly – and tracing back, insofar as it is possible, some biographical details which influence the drafting of the text and what his personal situation was when he put pen to paper to write a particular novel. On some occasions, his novels have several themes which deal with ethical questions or cross-cultural, recognizable ideas. The topic of each chapter in this thesis is analysed in some specific novels which are mentioned in its heading. I try to analyse why and how Belloc is looking at the world from his Catholic point-of-view and ethics. His fiction was non-judgemental, although he was making fun of other people's behaviour from his Catholic perspective. He actually mocked them through his shrewd stories, and humour sparkles.

The sense of being an 'Edwardian'

In the thesis, 'Edwardian' refers to a specific people within a period of time. Yet it also refers to such people's mood in the peculiar demeanour we encounter through their set of habits and beliefs. The political aspect is also central, in the sense that, during the Edwardian Period, the British Empire was still a stable institution. Edwardian ladies and gentlemen were frequently idle and unaware of social problems around them, because they considered these kinds of trouble alien to them and irrelevant. They did it on purpose, as they preferred to ignore squalor and to simply entertain themselves in outings, elitist sports, hunting parties, and generally socializing with their equals. They

¹ Apart from his political activity and ability in oratory, Belloc excelled as an historiographer, journalist, guest lecturer, poet, essayist, novelist, and draughtsman.

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lived with their backs turned on social unrest, as they felt protected, thinking of themselves as being wrapped in cotton wool.

Belloc portrays the heirs of the final stages of the Victorian period; he describes members of the upper-middle-class who feel satisfied with their status and have learned conceitedly how to feel the centre of attention in varied environments. It is usually the well-to-do who are presented in his fictionalisations; proletarians are purely anecdotal. Belloc also introduces those who pretend to be rich, and those who try to enter that exclusive circle by means of some swindle or other.

‘Edwardian’ also refers to squires and members of the gentry, the rural nobility. Belloc reveres them provided that their behaviour matches their social class but despises them when they are entangled in bad company, bankrupt because of gambling debts, or trying to get richer overnight through some illicit business, which is the kind of Edwardian characters at the core of many of his novels. Incidentally, Belloc would have liked to be a squire, since he recognised so – in a tone of self-parody – in an interview when he was seventy-six:

Pearson: What profession would you have liked to follow?

Belloc: I was called to the Bar. But what I wanted to be was a private gentleman. Lazing about doing nothing. Farm as a hobby, perhaps. Keep someone to run it.²

‘Edwardian’ also refers to the historical period that began at the start of the reign of Edward VII in 1901 and ended in 1920, approximately the year when the aftermath of the First World War (1914-1918) began to be felt. This period of turmoil, economic change, and upheaval in social relationships brought with it increasing taxation on rural property, and the blurring of the strict social-class divisions, so that, by the 1930s, servants were no longer available and there was growing social unrest, especially on the continent. In Belloc’s novels, Edwardian people live in a kind of haven which means living in opulence and self-complacency. Belloc likes to call “builders of the Empire”

² Hesketh Pearson, and Hugh Kingsmill. *Talking of Dick Whittington*. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1947): 209-213.

those hardworking merchants who succeeded in business, even though Belloc's satiric nuance is inbred in the epithet because he is anti-imperialist.

The first two decades of the twentieth century represent Belloc's acme as a man of letters, as in those years he published his most important works. He published more novels until 1932 but, even though the plots present events and scenarios that correspond with a period forty years later, the characters are 'Edwardians' and the stories are based on Edwardian contexts. The flair of his last novels continues to be the same, Belloc's scathing satire perhaps intensifying.

Distributist theory – definition and application

The distributist theory is much used in this dissertation so some brief definition of it is required at this point. Distributism is for allocating property to as many citizens worldwide as possible so that each family has its own plot of land. Cooperativism is its closest equivalent in the industrial field, for the workers are the owners of the enterprise and responsible for its sound financial management. The main consequence of distributism is that those citizens realise they are free and protagonist in their destiny. They are independent of a master, either the employer or the state, and try to put into practice Eli Hamshire's saying, "Three acres and a cow." Belloc and G.K. Chesterton considered William Cobbett was one of their antecedents when they dealt on rural reform.

Belloc presented the alternative to the *proprietary* state, which meant the widespread distribution of property among the majority of families; in this way, when property is so widely distributed, ownership is the norm. The character of such a new society should reflect that fact. This concept does not imply the compulsory seizure and redistribution of property, but the state must promote ownership by favourable laws, taxation, or allowances, and it ought to protect existing small property-owners against take-over, and the several existing forms of amalgamation, for example, trusts and cartels. Distributism is for subsidiarity, in the sense that the state must look for the legal and economic balance that encourages common good, that must prevail over personal benefit, provided that legitimate individual rights are respected. In addition to this, the

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state must not intervene when smaller groups are able to solve their problems within their own fields.

Some considered distributism sheer utopia or a return to the medieval guilds. Distributism proposed freedom and property based on honest money and just prices; it enhanced faith and homeland. It was not a diluted form of capitalism nor a tame form of socialism, as it proposed an alternative way.

Belloc explained that distributist practices had a historic pedigree and described the various stages that happened in Roman Civilization and the successive phases until reaching feudalism. Belloc argued that distributism was the natural economic condition of man, a step forward primitive communism.³ Distributism claimed to be the application to social life of the historic philosophy engendered by Catholic Christianity. He partially applied the contents of Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (of the New Things) of 1891. Cardinal Manning had been one of its key drafters behind the scenes. Belloc consciously devoted his entire life to publicize most of the inner reflections that his encounters with Cardinal Manning had left in his soul.

Belloc's anti-semitic reputation

Belloc's opinions on the Jews were the result of his observation skills, but also of his prejudices. Even if he had excellent personal relationships with many Jewish people and considered most of them were poor, he boldly described the Jews as a group of people that caused distrust within Western societies. Belloc, in his old age, quite irrationally was still considering Alfred Dreyfus guilty, even though Dreyfus had been declared innocent and partially reinstated in the army in 1906. In general, Belloc stubbornly maintained what he considered to be true and The Dreyfus Affair was no exception. Strangely enough, his rationalistic abilities were not applied to his perception of these problems. Until midway through the twentieth century some Roman Catholics blamed

³ The distributist tenets were disseminated by modest papers. *The New Witness* was edited by Cecil Chesterton. When Cecil died, his brother Gilbert took it over, and renamed it *G.K.'s Weekly*. When Gilbert died, Belloc was the new editor, and changed its name to *The Weekly Review*. Belloc published two essays about 'distributism': *The Servile State* (1912) and its sequel, *An Essay on the Restoration of Property* (1936).

the Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Belloc was one of them. Despite this historical fact, current Roman Catholic theology has neglected the literal interpretation of the Gospel accounts.⁴

During his travels to the United States, Belloc realised that Roman Catholics were described as a ‘pressure group.’ In *The Contrast* (1923), Belloc claimed the Jews were the other strongly organized minority in the United States. Belloc knew for certain that this issue was uppermost in his mind and, for several reasons, it was also his chronic concern. Instead of devoting himself to writing bestsellers and redirecting his energy to earning money as fast as possible, he continued to be obsessed with that thorny subject. Belloc reinterpreted English history since the Protestant Reformation. His was a daring but lucid endeavour against the Whig interpretation of history. One of Belloc’s tenets was that the protestant monarchy, especially after 1689, agreed with plutocracy, the new rising social class. That group was formed by numerous Jewish bankers, particularly in the London area. Belloc was unwise enough to air what everybody knew: how many Jewish dynasties managed banking businesses in England and how they invested in colonial ventures. Belloc persistently used the phrase ‘the Anglo-Judaic plutocracy’⁵ to refer to what he considered to be a sly partnership. However, in his novels, Jewish characters are scarce and benign.

His book *The Jews* (1922) was unveiling Western hypocrisy by explaining that the ruling classes tried to convince themselves that there was no Jewish problem whatsoever, because civilised societies had the Jews completely integrated. Yet many of the statements of the book constitute a gloomy self-fulfilling prophecy. In a letter, Belloc wrote some years before:

The Jewish nation ought to be recognized as a nation in some way or another, with all the advantages and disadvantages that follow from the recognition of any truth. (...) The simple solution of absorption neither has nor can succeed.

⁴ Not only Roman Catholics, but most Christian churches do confess Jesus Christ died for our sins, while disregarding historical coincidences. Believers know Jesus Christ would be crucified again if any of us (the Gentiles included) had been there, at Golgotha.

⁵ See page 523 of this thesis.

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There is some fate against it. After every great period of financial power in the hands of a few Jews (the mass of the nation is absurdly poor) that power wanes and then there is no check upon the bad passions which the friction between the races allows. Not any educated man in a hundred has any appreciation of the past history of all this and that is why it is so difficult to give an effective warning. Most to blame in my opinion are those, especially in England and France, who say the vilest things about the Jews behind their backs, never make a real friend of a Jew, gloat over their misfortunes, and yet accept their hospitality and pretend to mix with them as though there were no racial or cultural problem at all.⁶

This contradicts the fact that many Jews have been fully assimilated into the society in which they live. “Belloc did not see how easily his arguments could be turned against the Catholics.”⁷ Belloc submitted the proofs of *The Jews* (1922) to a Jewish adviser who declared the book to be unjust and told Belloc that his own people would refuse to read or sell it. This saddened Belloc, for he had put the case as justly as he could. He had many Jewish friends; and his desire was constant – ‘that Israel may have peace.’⁸ For his part, A.N. Wilson comments:

Perhaps the persecution of the European Jews could not have been avoided. Belloc’s was one of the few voices which dared to speak about it, and which dared to offer a solution. But that solution – the recognition of Jews as Jews, whatever their nationality – shocked the consciences of those who wished to pretend that ‘the Jewish problem’ did not exist. When Hitler rose to power and insisted on all the Jewish houses being daubed with yellow stars, Belloc was accused of having proposed a similar scheme in his book. Only a reading of the book would determine whether it was fair to bracket Belloc with the Nazis.⁹

⁶ Letter to Maurice Baring, 25th November 1913.

⁷ Speaight 1957: 454.

⁸ Speaight (1957): 453.

⁹ A.N. Wilson. (1984) *Hilaire Belloc: A Biography*. (London: Gibson Square Books, 2003): 267.

One of Belloc's friends, Duff Cooper, after having read the book, shouted him down and found his use of the term 'Yid' intolerable. Bessie, Belloc's mother, disapproved of the book, as she found it intolerable, no matter how accurate or tendentious the paragraphs could be. The book dealt with a problematic issue, and Belloc's reputation was smeared for good. It was a very inopportune essay. His anti-Semitic bias is stated for ever, even by those who had not read it and merely repeat what they have heard. The horrible events in the twentieth century further discredited Belloc:¹⁰

Belloc's reputation as an anti-Semitic hatemonger rests largely upon his book *The Jews* published in 1922. In this work, Belloc warned that there existed in post-First World War Europe a 'Jewish problem' – tension and mistrust between the Jewish minority and the suspicious, predominantly Gentile population – and that to ignore this tension would lead to an anti-Semitic persecution such as the world had never seen. But to acknowledge that such tensions existed was itself considered an act of bigotry, and *The Jews* (1922), then as now, went largely unread, being generally perceived as an anti-Semitic work.¹¹

Existing scholarship on Belloc. Further contribution.

This dissertation is basically concerned with Belloc's fiction. It is not a historical study, even though it contains a lot of historical information, neither is it a biography. It is a reasoned comparison, as the main contention of the thesis is an attempt to extrapolate the underlying principles in Belloc's novels to current modalities of thought and behaviour. Only his first novels were reviewed in magazines or off-prints, some of which are mentioned in the bibliography.¹² The last two novels¹³ of Belloc have not been reviewed in a substantial way though, since Belloc had already begun to concentrate on his historical books and essays by then, while he was considering his

¹⁰ This dissertation further develops this theme on pp. 597-600.

¹¹ See <www.poetryfoundation.org>

¹² For example, "The Mad World of Mr Petre." *Books from The Guardian Archive*. 5th June 1925. <www.theguardian.com>

¹³ *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930) and *The Postmaster-General* (1932).

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fiction a minor chore. Having exhaustive access to any single review of his novels is materially impossible, although some occasional references are contained in the books about Belloc.

Biographical references to Belloc can be followed through newspapers, magazines, with occasional humorous references in *Punch*,¹⁴ and pamphlets, while many of his fierce diatribes with his opponents were published in Roman Catholic periodicals. For example, Professor G.G. Coulton and Belloc mutually attacked each other, sometimes in magazines, until the editors considered their argument had withered and lost interest. Father Ronald Knox challenged G.G. Coulton's assertions in support of Belloc's arguments.¹⁵ In 1937, G.G. Coulton had pamphlets privately printed and distributed among those persons interested in the controversies. As for Belloc himself, another opportunity to debate with his adversaries presented itself when H.G. Wells published *The Outline of History* (1919), a book that to Belloc's mind assailed the Christian orthodoxies. The book's commercial success angered Belloc, who began to answer back against the publication of H.G. Wells's book in instalments with sparse, forthright comments in the Catholic newspaper *The Universe* and, occasionally, in *The Month*. Enraged H.G. Wells published a brief reply entitled *Mr Belloc Objects to The Outline of History*" (1926),¹⁶ while restless, argumentative Belloc wrote his counterblast, *Mr Belloc still objects to Mr Wells' 'Outline of History'* (1926).¹⁷ Another memorable excerpt is Belloc's letter to Dean Inge who had written against some Roman Catholic principles in the *Evening Standard*.¹⁸ In a speech at the Guildhall, Belloc praised publicly Dean's excellent prose. On another occasion, Belloc lauded Dean's Latin poem, inspired by his daughter's death. There are countless references of this kind. However, following meticulously these snippets one by one to elaborate new material for the present work has not been the usual method of work.

¹⁴ For example, in the following editions: 25th July 1906; 31st March 1909; and 15th November 1909.

¹⁵ *The Daily Telegraph*. 30th June 1937.

¹⁶ H.G. Wells. *Mr Belloc Objects to The Outline of History*." London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1926.

¹⁷ Hilaire Belloc. (1926) *Mr Belloc still objects to Mr Wells' 'Outline of History.'* (2nd edition. London: Sheed & Ward, 1928).

¹⁸ <www.superflumina.org/belloc_inge.html>

The fourteen novels of Belloc form the thorough basis for discussion. As a departure point, the present dissertation is also based on these books: C. Creighton Mandell and Edward Shanks. *Hilaire Belloc: The Man and His Work*. (London: Methuen and Co., 1916); Robert Hamilton. *Hilaire Belloc*. (London: Douglas Organ, 1945); Frederick Wilhemsen. *Hilaire Belloc: No Alienated Man. A Study on Christian Integration*. (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1953); J.B. Morton. *Hilaire Belloc: A Memoir*. (London: Hollis and Carter, 1955); Marie Belloc-Lowndes. *The Young Hilaire Belloc*. (New York: Kenedy and Sons, 1956); Eleanor and Reginald Jebb. *Testimony to Hilaire Belloc*. (London: Methuen and Co., 1956); Robert Speaight. *The Life of Hilaire Belloc*. (London: Hollis and Carter, 1957); Robert Speaight. Ed. *Letters from Hilaire Belloc*. (London: Hollis and Carter, 1958); John P. McCarthy. *Hilaire Belloc: Edwardian Radical*. (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1978); A.N. Wilson. *Hilaire Belloc: A Biography*. (London: Gibson Square Books, 2003); A.N. Wilson. "Introduction." Hilaire Belloc. *The Four Men: A Farrago*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Joseph Pearce. *Old Thunder. A Life of Hilaire Belloc*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press; London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002); James V. Schall. *Remembering Belloc*. (South Bend: St Augustine's Press, 2013).

This dissertation approaches Belloc's fiction on a perceptual basis, trying to grasp the inherent ideological load that shapes characters, plots, and denouements. This endeavour is close to the literary biography, inasmuch as the texts of the novels are sometimes illuminated by Belloc's biographical details and the contents of his essays and historical books. The approach merges historical facts with the conventions of the narrative, while it implies making an effort to contrast the present flow of thought and events with Belloc's insightful outlook. Sometimes too long and complex exemplification hinders rapid, easy reading.

Meaningful elements in Belloc's novels

I would like to state what my intention is when trying to look at the distinctive features from Belloc's fiction, or rather, what is the nature of my analysis of his novels. This thesis tries to ascertain the connection between Belloc's fiction and his inner perception

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of people and facts, as he enjoys describing the frequent stratagems that convey post-truth interactions¹⁹ between Edwardian men, between men and women, and between women and women. He acts like a sociologist who classifies models of human interaction in a similar way to Herbert Blumer's well-known statement that all interactions are symbolic, therefore all interactions are meaningful because symbols carry meaning.²⁰ Belloc predicts a post-truth world in the way he depicts the characters in his fiction, characters who enjoy setting traps in order to obtain favourable decisions and know for certain secrecy can be on their side. Belloc fictionalises models of human interaction, like a sociologist.

My task here is discovering which interactions are meaningful, even if they underly witty, funny stories, and ascertaining the subliminal meanings on human behaviour. I try to identify that truth, present in Belloc's novels, and say what it means for us today. This literary transposition is not hampered by historical distance, because his works of fiction constitute rich material for analysing the aspects of human behaviour that govern human interaction in the Edwardian period and, given that human nature does not change much over the decades or even the centuries, in our times too.

I also try to identify what is the specific meaning of each novel, how it contributes to Belloc's general discourse, which attitude is the critical one in each novel, in spite of the subtle manner Belloc uses to tell how people generally behave. Belloc puts his observations into fiction because what he observes in human behaviour is too subtle and multifarious to put in any other form. The meaning of the novels is analysed by paying attention to three complementary facets: sociological, psychological, and anthropological.

¹⁹ The concept 'post-truth' is used here in its deceptive sense, since Belloc likes to present all sorts of tricks that Edwardian people use to create a favourable impression about themselves, or just to deceive others. "Post-truth" is a fashionable resource to describe those techniques of biased information whose objective is to appeal to emotions rather than to convey true objective facts.

All of us live in a world of neologisms which are frequently based on the placing of the prefix "post-" before nouns and adjectives to describe shocking concepts which, at first, sound attractive, but which can convey blurred ideas and require later clarification.

²⁰ Herbert G. Blumer (1900-1987) used symbolic interactionism methods in sociology. Blumer emphasized the idea that human thought is shaped by social interaction, and that each individual constructs his or her repository of meanings subjectively, as meanings are related to his or her social experience.

This thesis selects which part of Belloc's Catholic thought is applicable today and which part is just a declaration of principles in connection with a utopian good will social programme. Belloc considered Christianity to be at the base of Europe and its very essence, to such a degree that Europe would become disintegrated if it renounced to its Christian roots. This thesis applies Belloc's statements to current economic and social European events. Catholic faith was central in Belloc's life and work and it became the chief purpose of his writing from 1920s onwards.

Nevertheless, secular societies usually reject apologist writers because the laicism thinks any religious link is harmful to man's freedom. Religious beliefs, particularly Catholicism and other Christian groups, have been easily sorted out into the notoriously biased file of "unique thought." The rhetorical use of this turn of phrase, the unique thought, suggests such epithet is frequently associated with the tyrannical exclusion of open dialogue. This was not the case with Belloc, as he was a brilliant debater who felt perfectly at ease when he argued about any matter with a serious opponent who dared to confront his views with him. Far from feeling his faith could shackle his free spirit, Belloc was convinced that man's self-fulfilment lay in sincere Christian belief. Therefore, my job is also to analyse the relevance of Belloc's Catholic outlook.

Theoretical framework

This dissertation uses some elements from the various approaches to cope with the analysis of the significance of literary texts, so it cannot be reduced to just one single school of thought out of the many methods of literary analysis that historically have paved the ground for a conscious reading of prose fiction. In general terms, this dissertation is eclectically planned and based on the extrapolation of the facts that Belloc recounts in his novels, because it analyses his anecdotes and innuendoes until describing many present-day situations that are foretold by Belloc. This comparison is made in an easy way, fleeing from stilted arguments. This thesis is grounded within the theoretical framework of New Historicism, although some annotations on the divergences of this literary theory can be made, as there are remarks that belong to other

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literary theories, broadly speaking. New Historicism and cultural studies contend that literature is closely linked to its historical moment, as this circumstance determines the complex system of knowledge, beliefs and social behaviours that compose culture. Culture is shaped by a distinctive set of significant systems.²¹ History is not the sequence of events filed in an objective way by historians, but a textual construct that is not the mere product of a timeless linguistic system. As a consequence, we do not access the past directly, but through the account supplied by historians. Such account is a text which requires an interpretative procedure, like any other text. The present essay explores the social and political context of the text and agrees that its approach is historically conditioned. This is the general endeavour of this thesis, even though some preliminary considerations must be made.

The trace of French culture is evident in Belloc, since he usually transferred many recollections of French landscape, villages, and history to his novels. Some snippets are also reminiscent of American culture, as Belloc visited the United States of America several times and liked that country, even if he sometimes enjoys distorting his American characters for dramatic effect.²² He also enjoyed condensing normal French people's mannerisms into literary characters for his novels. In this respect, the key concepts of the positivist critical theory, *race*, *milieu* and *moment* should be taken into account,²³ or rather, the external circumstances that did influence his literary creation. However, the social determinist trait which the positivism ascribed to race, milieu, and moment is not accepted here. Throughout the thesis, there are remarks about how Belloc's novels claim to achieve the ultimate perceptibility, aesthetic enjoyment and surprise the reader. There are scattered considerations on the style and structure of the

²¹ Clifford Geertz. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture." *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. (New York: Basic Books, 1973): 3-30. [Quoted by Marta Miquel-Baldellou (2015): 29]

²² G. Quinlan Smith is an important American banker in *Pongo and The Bull* (1910); Isabeau Hellup, 'Bo,' is a resourceful, resolute young American girl in *The Haunted House* (1927), and Joan Papworthy is an attractive Canadian who succeeds in marrying a wealthy old man in *The Postmaster-General* (1932).

²³ These three elements were considered essential by Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893), the epitome of Positivism. Positivism, was imbued with social determinism, since it affirmed that Positivist literary studies considered history was just the background to place a literary work, although they neglected structure, form and style.

narration.²⁴ Frequently, this dissertation trails the special emotion which may have caused any original use of language, and ascertains the individual process of artistic creation, so as to discover the peculiar spirit of a particular novel of Belloc. For this purpose, intuition is used to spot linguistic details that give Belloc's emotions away.²⁵ Without being pretentious, the present author tries to follow Samuel Johnson's remark when he says that the function of literary criticism is transforming opinion into knowledge.²⁶ This thesis is a speculative activity that follows suitable rules to turn opinion into knowledge too.

There is also the possibility to access the literary text objectively through analysing its intrinsic qualities while disregarding all biographical and historical considerations. This was the *only the words on the page* technique, a procedure that was applied basically to the short poem in which the critic analyses the balance between opposite meanings.²⁷ This was called the *close reading* attitude that pays extreme attention to each word, image, and symbol so as to grasp the subtlest nuances of

²⁴ These observations belong to the contents that Russian formalism proposed as the main body of his critical theory. This movement was formed by a group of young scholars who pretended to find the specific difference which separates literary texts from ordinary language. According to them, the literary text uses complex and sophisticated forms in order to reverse ironically (*dis-automate*) everyday ordinary language. To do so they studied style, metric and the structure of the narration. The Soviets accused them of bourgeois escapism because of the formalists' aestheticism and rejection of seeing any social problem.

Structuralism resembles Russian formalism, because it considers the text a self-contained verbal artefact. Although this approach was the outcome of the Prague Linguistic Circle, Structuralism reached Paris in the 1960s. These critics decided not to study the specific qualities of a text, but the overall structure which binds together all the objects of the same kind. Accordingly, they tried to set up a universal grammar of the narrative in order to inquire the underlying principle of poetic texts. They analysed the weaving of codes that regulate the system, but they rejected any reference values. In the 1970s Structuralism was criticised because it did not pay attention to the communicative aspects of literature, and considered the text as a *code without message*, an entity without connections with reality.

²⁵ Such attempt characteristically belongs to the *theories of style* or *stylistics*, that contended that the style of each text is what makes it unique and unmistakable. These literary approaches considered that intuition was a big tool to reach this goal. Charles Bally (1865-1947) and Karl Vossler (1872-1949), among others, were its main representatives. This current was in force until the first quarter of the twentieth century, even though rival colleagues emphasized that its major drawback was that its analysis might be too subjective.

²⁶ Winston Manrique-Sabogal. "Canonizador." Entrevista: En portada. [Interview with Harold Bloom]. *El País*. 26th November 2011. Quoted by Harold Bloom in the interview.

²⁷ New Criticism was prevailing in the American academic world in the 1940s and 1950s, although this approach was accused of being too dogmatic, conservative and reductionist in the 1960s. These critics believed that the poem is like an organism with many elements in which you cannot separate form and content. New Criticism was linked to Russian formalism that proposed that a literary work is an independent entity from any historical consideration that could be associated to the construction of the text.

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meaning. The more you know about Belloc's biographical details, the more difficult it is to put this approach into practice, for the words in the text usually supply obvious points of contact with real situations from which he obtained material for his fiction. Furthermore, Marxist criticism considers literature as the product of conflicting historical forces. Literary texts reproduce the material conditions of the society in which they have originated, its economic and power structures as well as the class struggle. The text is a means, so the critic has to expose the ideology which the texts encourage or try to conceal, because his or her function is to study the influence of power and institutions on literature. Without trying to adhere to this school of thought as the only valid approach to Belloc's fiction, the fact is that many observations in this thesis are a serious attempt to relate Belloc's stories to the real influence and institutions of power in the Edwardian society.

When you read a literary text, you cannot avoid wondering about what is the indisputable measure of its worth. Ours is a time in which we receive a continuous avalanche of enticing messages, and the stunned reader tries to discern carefully the priorities in the alleged quality of literature confined in a book, particularly in a presumably best-seller. Many undergraduates wonder about what is the ultimate test for literary merit, although they very rarely obtain any satisfactory answer to this quest for value. Thoughtful readers look for books that say something.²⁸ Such aspiration is frustrated by the critical method of deconstruction, which is the outermost consequence of Structuralism.²⁹ Deconstruction eliminates the scientific aspirations of Structuralism because deconstruction contends that there is not any transcending meaning beyond the systems and structures defined by Structuralism. Claiming that there exists a centre beyond language is a metaphysical illusion. Deconstruction reminds us that language is

²⁸ Eduardo Lago. "Seguiré leyendo mientras me quede un soplo de vida." Entrevista: Harold Bloom. *El País*. 4th September 2011.

²⁹ Deconstruction is not only another literary approach, but a general philosophical hypothesis that is applicable to many fields of humanities, and it is a broad reconsideration of all of them. The first principle of Saussure's linguistics is the arbitrariness of linguistic sign and its relational meaning within the structure, but deconstruction resumes this postulate precisely to problematise it. In Structuralism, words and phonemes have sense through the relations among themselves, not because there is a natural connection with the outer world.

an infinite chain in which the ultimate meaning is perpetually deferred,³⁰ and it contends that there is not any possible reference out of sheer textuality.³¹ Accordingly, any reading is a bad reading, for any text has an undecidable meaning, so its sense is unlimited. Although nearly everybody recognised the self-awareness and mental clarity of deconstruction, the thoughtful reader may contend that deconstruction is nihilistic and devoid of ethical commitment. That is especially true in a writer like Belloc, who was very concerned with values and frequently used mythical elements to convey his stories. Mythical criticism describes collective unconscious as a sediment of ancestral experiences that are common to every culture. Such approach traces the underlying presence of archetypes and myths such as the hero, the mother, the way, the old sage, whereby the cultural unconscious is revealed.³² On analysing *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911) mythical criticism appears logically around the corner, as myths are supplied by Belloc himself in this novel and the reader is easily carried away by the flow. The very classification of characters in the novel, Myself, Grizzlebeard, the Poet, and the Sailor, as well as the concept of a philosophical wandering through Sussex, which condenses the idea of the way, the path of life, supply mythical overtones.

The contents of this dissertation are not an impressionistic personal reaction, but a perceptual approach to understanding Belloc's ideological core, based on the detailed reading of his fiction, the classification of characters and situations that supplies evidence for a comprehensive study of the modalities of thought and behaviour that were prevalent in the Edwardian period and still applicable, sometimes in full swing nowadays. Belloc's novels are frequently compared with his essays so as to explain the significant ideas that underlie fiction stories when they are enlightened by other non-fiction books fully understood and deeply analysed. Reader-response criticism focus on

³⁰ This is Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance*, the noun related to the French verb *différer*, whose English rendering is: "delay, postpone" (not: "differ"). When we look up a word in the dictionary, the definition of this word is given through other words, and the definition of such words is also given by means of other words; this is an endless process.

³¹ Deconstruction supplies a very sharp analysis, as it spots the contradictions of any writer when he or she uses language, because language is filled with rhetorical trappings that may remain undetected in a cursory glance. deconstruction disappoints the reader when he or she believes that he or she has just grasped the mirage of an unattainable truth.

³² Northrop Frye (1912-1991) was its main representative.

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the reader's active role in the construction of meaning on which any interpretation is based. The literary text is not self-contained, but a virtual proposal of significance that only materializes in the dynamic process of reading. Historical changes modify the horizons of expectation with which a text is received.³³ The gaps in the text supply indeterminacy, as everything that the text leaves unspecified becomes a stimulus so as the reader completes the implicit elements and achieves a satisfactory reading. Readers comprehend literary texts according to their historical moment and the system of beliefs and values characteristic of the interpretation community to which they belong. Belloc's novels were received as funny stories about recognisable public figures, but their humorous tone and skill to introduce a large number of ordinary people allowed his author not to be accused of libel. From today's perspective, Belloc's fiction is not the innocent pastime it seemed to be, since it unveils uncomfortable aspects of his disparaging view of English political systems.

The present essay also bears in mind the sociological procedures used by Erving Goffman,³⁴ who generally collected information from several environments and later analysed the behaviour of those social groups that he had previously classified. He observed a team of performers, within the walls of a social establishment, who cooperated to present a given definition of the situation to an audience. Goffman developed a conceptual framework based on theatrical performance by using some language of the stage: performers and audiences, routines and parts, cues, stage settings, backstage; dramaturgical needs, skills and strategies. Goffman contended that the main factor in the structure of social encounters is the maintenance of a single definition of the situation that has to be expressed in the face of a multitude of potential disruptions.³⁵

³³ Not only do they modify the reception of a text, but they can also bring about new literary perspectives. "Literature after 9/11" is a literary perspective that is caused by an event, maybe a series of interconnected events, and their aftermath. The followers of "Literature after 9/11" approach are concerned with western obsession with security, how the representation of events change as time elapses, the tendency of writers to "look away" from the events of 9/11, and related matters.

³⁴ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971).

³⁵ "Sometimes disruptions occur through unmeant gestures, *faux pas*, and scenes, thus discrediting or contradicting the definition of the situation that is being maintained." Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 231-232.

'Disruptions' in Goffman's terminology are quite similar to 'Freudian slips' or 'faulty actions' in Freudian psychoanalysis.

He considered that when an individual enters the presence of others, he or she wants to discover the facts of the situation, but full information in this respect is rarely available, so the individual uses substitutes such as cues, tests, expressive gestures and status symbols; appearances must be relied on instead of reality. Of course, the observed can influence the observer, as it is always possible to manipulate the impression that the observer uses as a substitute for reality. Goffman conceived human activity in a dramaturgical approach, with a backstage, to prevent outsiders from seeing a performance that is not addressed to them, and a front region where the performance is presented. The actors carefully conceal inadequate feelings by rules of politeness and decorum. Some characters in Belloc's fiction craftily manipulate others to attain their purposes, so Goffman's observations are particularly useful to expose their selfishness.

This approach to Belloc's fiction also pays attention to symbolic interactionism, the micro-sociological current that deals with everyday human interaction³⁶ on a small scale, in other words, the communication face to face. Mind, individual and the world are the elements that interact, that come into existence with each other. Human interaction with objects is determined by the symbolic nature of signs; a sign is the material object that unchains meaning, while a symbol is made up by the meanings that objects and people have for a person. The meaning is the social indicator³⁷ that intervenes in the building of behaviour. The interpretative process an individual carries out in dealing with the things that he or she encounters supplies meanings, and makes it possible to redress them, as modification of meanings and symbols takes place through the interpretation of situations. In Belloc's novel *Mr Petre* (1925), Peter Blagden reconstructs what the real Mr Petre would say and do by interpreting meanings and symbols as he comes across them. In this way Peter Blagden manages to impersonate Mr Petre, the American tycoon whom he does not know really, but whom he has to supplant, forced by circumstances.³⁸ In *Mr Petre* (1925), Belloc built the story precisely

³⁶ 'Interaction' is a kind of buzz word these days. This term appears profusely in books of applied linguistics or just to earn the reputable aspect of scholarly prestige. 'Interaction' simply means 'communication' or 'relationship.'

³⁷ A social indicator is the statistical measure that describes social trends. Such measure shows the statistical preference that allows researchers to locate people regarding the concept that is being analysed.

³⁸ See *Mr Petre* (1925): 20.

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through taking into account the human skill to ascertain signs as the material object that reveal significance. A person regulates his or her behaviour depending on the meaning he or she attributes to objects and symbols that have situational meaning.³⁹ Social structures can influence our actions, but they do not determine them. Symbolic interactionism⁴⁰ expressed its commitment to understanding public opinion, the relationship between an individual and the community, and the interpretation of messages as fundamental value of communication.

Belloc was not a neutral writer. He daringly expressed his Catholic views in his essays (not in his fiction), a fact that attracted loneliness, indifference and enemies. Being a Roman Catholic in England was not an asset in the Edwardian days nor is it in Catalonia and Spain nowadays. Very few writers, artists and public figures openly recognise they have religious beliefs, since it is much more productive to introduce oneself as somebody belonging to the diffuse mist of agnosticism that, many people think, is the most politically correct position.⁴¹ Sustaining this well studied vagueness allows them the possibility to be accepted by a wide range of readers, listeners or voters.⁴² Yet Belloc chose a different road, since he was not just “a writer about

³⁹ Ernst Cassirer defined man as a symbolic animal. Man creates culture to adapt himself to the environment, and culture is concentrated into sets of symbols to which man gives meaning. These sets of symbols are transmitted through language, which is also formed by symbols. Symbols convey abstract relationships, like ideas and feelings, that make possible abstract thinking and science. The most important human symbolic forms are: language, art, science and religion. Cf. Ernst Cassirer. *Antropología filosófica*. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1968).

Currently robotics research finds it difficult to attach the capacity to recognise who a person is just by looking at him or her by means of a robot. Conversely, this is something human beings do immediately owing to their symbolic nature.

⁴⁰ Herbert Blumer and George H. Mead were its representatives. Erving Goffman’s sociological views have points of contact with symbolic interactionism.

⁴¹ No one shall be obliged to declare his or her religious beliefs in democratic countries, since they belong to your privacy.

⁴² Image consultants advise public figures what to say and what to conceal. There is a swarm of new jobs (personal shoppers and the like) that advise important or wealthy people how and what to wear, how to walk, how to shake hands and introduce themselves, as well as an infinite series of details to improve their body language and master communication. The overall purpose is to achieve one’s goals as far as possible and create or maintain one’s personal branding too. One of the peculiar pieces of advice is to withhold your private life and remain politely mysterious. Taking sides on tricky matters such as politics, religion and sex, are highly discouraged. Incidentally, talking about these issues is self-censored among licensed amateur radio operators. Of course, one way of making yourself famous is behaving in just the opposite way. Many hard rock musicians or people from the show business know how to appear transgressor.

Catholic ideas,” but a committed Catholic layman who confessed his faith even at inopportune moments. Generally, this dissertation is sympathetic to Belloc’s position, but also balanced, inasmuch as it tries to maintain an equal distance between Belloc’s proposals and his detractors’ commentaries.

The reader of the present essay can find it a bit sceptical about the alleged worth of theoretical considerations. It acknowledges that any critical approach is generally blinding when it is brand new, because human nature tends to look for innovations, and this tendency is steeper in the field of literary criticism, as new authors shrewdly introduce breaking concepts from the well-trodden path.⁴³ When the newness wears off, the outlook becomes more moderate, to such extent that sometimes the new approach is reduced to slight modifications of some previous literary theory. Any approach will be apparently exceeding the previous one, not always because the new outlook is obviously better, but simply because it is trendy.

In practice, it is very difficult to establish a biunivocal relation between what is enunciated previously and the many elements for analysis that this thesis provides for, as there is a gap between the theoretical framework articulated in the previous paragraphs and the final text supplied in this essay. Looking at everyday college teaching practice can give a clarifying example. Lecturers frequently deviate from their theoretical framework. Nobody makes them confess publicly their loyalty to this or that school of thought, so they can say it or not, but, of course, each lecturer has his or her preferred approach to the subject he or she teaches. Lecturers at faculties of humanities usually introduce topics by handing out printed material, reading aloud some excerpts, explaining the meaning of obscure passages, comparing ideas within the text and outside it, and advising undergraduates to read complementary bibliography. If lecturers are lucky enough, undergraduates attending sessions are motivated and, increasingly, perhaps unconsciously, the atmosphere in the classroom or seminar becomes relaxed. Possibly, the enthusiastic lecturer will invite students to sit down in a cosy circle, and intervene whenever they feel like to. Sometimes lecturers suggest lines of enquiry into

⁴³ Jacques Derrida was both strongly criticised and sincerely admired. Nevertheless, there is not agreement about the supposed consonance between Derrida’s philosophical tenets and deconstruction as the literary theory that, many consider, is the logical consequence of his works.

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literary topics and major authors, bring forward other authors' considerations, write down key words or supply diagrams on the blackboard, overhead projectors or scripted power points, use multimedia materials to illustrate or exemplify the matters they are dealing with, draw their own conclusions and accept undergraduates' observations inasmuch as they are relevant and reasonable, without being constrained by the tenets of the theoretical framework for literary analysis that these lecturers maybe said beforehand they profess. Lecturers usually approve of the lines an undergraduate pursues when he or she is writing a research task, under the condition that his or her discourse follows a logical pattern and shows genuine consistency, even if such essay does not follow the agreed theoretical framework verbatim, provided that the undergraduate quotes the sources from which he or she draws ideas for creating the written paper, and generates a sound critical apparatus too. Fortunately, academic practice is not constrained by the strict principles of whatever methodological approach, as academic freedom is allegedly encouraged and respected in that country. Whenever a lecturer feels comfortable and teaches in a relaxed fashion, he or she tends to interpret loosely the theoretical framework to which he or she has sworn loyalty, as it were.

Perception of the speed of change

In this essay, there is a pervading flair of the new compared with the old. Contrasting human inconsistencies and passions, as reflected in Belloc's fiction, with present-day modalities of thought and behaviour is the overall premise in which this thesis is grounded.⁴⁴ Those who are too young may feel puzzled at some comparisons, as they do

⁴⁴ Belloc frequently referred to the motivations which move men. "Four powers govern man, avarice, lust, fear, and snobbishness." (Letter to John Swinnerton Phillimore, dated 16th May 1920. Quoted also on page 155).

These drives were also mischievously commented by the Spanish medieval poet, the Archpriest of Hita (Juan Ruiz) (1283-1350), when he contended that "As Aristotle says, one certainty is / The world works for two things: / The first one is to earn its livelihood; / The other one is to sleep with a pleasant female." (Juan Ruiz Arcipreste de Hita. (1330, 1343) *Libro de buen amor*. Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2006. Stanza 71. *Aquí dise de cómo segund natura los omes e las otras animalias quieren aver compañía con las fembras*. [My translation])

In the biblical sphere, the First Letter of John reads: "Everything that belongs to the world – what the sinful self desires, what people see and want, and everything in this world that people are so proud of – none of this comes from the Father; it all comes from the world." (1 John, 2, 16.)

not have direct knowledge of the old background, bygone years, to compare with current tendencies of which, sometimes, we are not fully aware, precisely because we live immersed in what is *new*. We can only perceive life in an apparently continuous present which we identify with what is new. Nevertheless, the novelty of today will become older tomorrow, and much more outdated over time.⁴⁵ Even though this consideration may seem a platitude, it is not. To grasp the difference between what is old and what is new you ought to have direct experience of a long period of time. Such awareness implies you are old enough.

Being well-read may be the suitable kind of ersatz which can compensate for your lack of years and experience. In this approach, there are also implicit and explicit comparisons between several modalities of social behaviour and thought in Europe and Spain all through the various phases which constitute the period of the last seventy-eight years, or rather, from the end of the Spanish Civil War until now. Many of the sociological aspects examined in this essay require some previous familiarity with the recent history of Western nations along this period, especially since roughly the end of the Second World War (1939-1945). Both conflagrations acted like milestones that marked the way of many sociological changes which are discussed here in the light of Belloc's novels. My remarks are not just referred to literature, history or the taste of the arts, but also to unconscious opinions on apparently trivial matters. Many views that were considered normal in our country some years ago have now become completely unacceptable.

Not surprisingly, very young readers can find my observations bewildering, particularly those remarks on matters that have been continuously changing in the field of European politics, social customs, philosophical focuses (that are frequently linked to

In popular culture, there is an old saying that, currently, some people think it belongs to the diffuse world of urban legends, according to which love (and money) makes the world go round. Such saying can be enlarged with whimsical elements, depending on the version of the urban legend you are referring to or the imagination of the storyteller. For example, some people say: "There is an old Scottish proverb" that reads: "Money, women and beer make the world go round."

⁴⁵ Ludwig Klages is a figure who is not well-known outside the German-speaking world. (...) Klages develops his 'pagan' conception of time as a circle. He investigates the symbol of the perpetual cycle (or eternal recurrence) of life and death. (...) It becomes clear that, far from calling for a return to the past, what he is seeking is a new way of understanding our relation to the past in the present. Cf. Paul Bishop. Ed. *The Archaic: The Past in the Present*. (Hove: Routledge, 2012): 29-30.

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subtle, evanescent fashions),⁴⁶ Distributist theory and practice, the financial sphere of activity, looking at Belloc's apologetic trend today, new trends in Catholic thought since the 1960s, everyday school teaching practice, the role of women, and other observations on the manifold fields that are dealt with.

Human perception of change varies from one person to another, inasmuch as change is usually slow, sometimes imperceptible, but constant and real, and much more so in the field of ideas and the socially accepted tenets in each brief lapse of time. Heraclitus of Ephesus's well-known remark on the ever-present nature of change lingers on human activity. Yet you not always grasp the persistent flowing of change when you are too young, because, when you are a teenager or a very young boy or girl, you tend to think that your days form the essence of the most modern period that humanity has ever reached (of course, in the field of innovative ideas and freedom too), and nothing can exceed such splendid height. Your own strength and sensation of fullness dazzles you. On the contrary, mature men and women realise with awe how their previous concepts and ideals, dreams too, have changed – many of them privately recognise they have increasingly lowered their expectations as well – in very short lapses of time, sometimes every two or five years.

The literary sources in the quest for meaning

The fourteen novels are: *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant of Thames St., in the City of London, Exporter of Hardware. A Record of his Lineage, Speculations, Last Days and Death* (1904), *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908), *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), *The Girondin* (1911), *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911),

⁴⁶ Existentialism and Marxism are now in decline, although nobody dares to acknowledge it openly. A quick comparison between the prevalence of these two topics in literature and popular culture in the 1960s and 1970s with the current lack of references leads us to the conclusion that both movements are paused, to say the least. Many accept that the present moment represents the death of ideologies, apart from the thriving of globalisation and unbridled capitalism, perhaps Neoliberalism too. Another example of the flimsiness of philosophical fashions was the avalanche of books that combined the words and concepts Marxism and Psychoanalysis in the 1970s, as Rafael Argullol reminded us in a documentary. (Dolors Genovès-Morales [Producer] 1968. Barcelona: TVC, 1993). Bernard-Henri Lévy was the prototype of the *nouveaux philosophes* in the mid-1970s. In those days, some current affairs commentators ironically recognised that there was generally a new philosophical movement in France every ten years.

The Green Overcoat (1912), *Mr Petre* (1925), *The Haunted House* (1927), *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929), *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929), *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930), and *The Postmaster-General* (1932). Each of these novels reflects his attitude and opinion of certain aspects of British society.

In *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant of Thames St., in the City of London, Exporter of Hardware. A Record of his Lineage, Speculations, Last Days and Death* (1904), Belloc deals with the contemporary atmosphere of the Edwardian Period in which the honesty of British hardworking merchants is confronted with the mirage of risky investments in faraway spots of the British Empire. This is the first of the four political novels. A crafty Jew, Mr Barnett, designs a scheme for his own benefit, but carries along his syndicate partners on the way of humbug and eventually ruins them. At the end of the story, the new generation that attended university and got into debt in a lackadaisical lazy attitude replaces the previous generation of responsible and diligent parents who did create wealth. Inevitably, the young inherit their parents' fortune. The novel is a farcical parable about the British Empire racket and describes the recognisable host of businessmen who organise financial swindles to take everything out of it. Belloc considers the British involvement in Africa arises from the purely commercial motivation that aims at making rich men even richer through shameless exploitation of natural resources. Rich men's behaviour and goals are disgusting to the old-fashioned merchants who are accustomed to deal in goods and shipping them, not in speculating in remote places to become affluent overnight. The novel had five editions from 1904 to 1920.

In *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908), the uncertain glory of political life is depicted in a series of realistic strokes that are partially autobiographical. This second political novel presents how elusive and capricious political success is, as it is usually the result of affording heavy cash trying to keep your political position afloat and, even so, it is subject to the vagaries of fortune. An honest citizen becomes very rich thanks to successive thriving business and lucky investments. Consequently, he tries his luck in politics. After several donations to the party he is chosen as suitable candidate and wins

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in his constituency, although his election is finally declared invalid. At last he is awarded an honour after he supplies more money for a new Royal Institute.

In *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), the third political novel, Belloc describes the power of political influence on appointing inept members to crucial posts. Surreptitious peddling of political favours as well as cunning Machiavellian manoeuvres always produce the expected effects on the part of those who prefer to promote their protégés rather than value honesty. A whole person with talents, with a rare capacity to tell the truth to anyone, is raised to peerage, although he is relieved of his duties and replaced by an MP, unfit for work, who has powerful influences.

In *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), Government and Opposition are the same group of people and this situation leads to a strange kind of underlying cooperation that is carefully hidden to the public. This is the fourth and last political novel. It explains the intimate interdependence between all the members of the Government and the Opposition, because they belong to a similar social class, are intermarried or close friends and make secret agreements on political issues. They help each other in maintaining the political *status quo*, although they pretend to be political adversaries and conceal their pacts from the public. On one occasion, the House of the Commons passes a loan to remedy social problems, even though the new government after the landslide feels free to spend that money on military uses. The wife of the Prime Minister transforms the party in the Opposition into the instrument of her husband's continued success. The two main characters are easily recognisable in Belloc's contemporary political world. The title of the novel is quite revealing since the attack of a fierce bull against the leader of the Opposition will change the foreseen course of events and ruin his political career.

In *The Girondin* (1911), a historical novel, Belloc presents the internal contradiction of a revolutionary process and the role of chance in men's lives. A young man from the valley of the Gironde (Bordeaux) is forcibly conscripted by means of deception into the French revolutionary army that must fight in the Battle of Valmy. He soon realizes the revolution has changed soldiers' life very little, since everyday supplies of food and wine are even worse than before or non-existent. Ordinary people

are equally divided and either acclaim or boo soldiers when they are going through a village. The French revolutionary army is described in the most prosaic terms and the political objectives of the revolution are blurred, to say the least. The young Girondin is fatally injured in an absurd accident, not in heroic combat. Before dying, he asks to see a priest in the middle of the gloomy silence of a hospital ward, full of seriously injured and dead men.

In *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911), Belloc pays homage to “this Eden which is Sussex still.” He presents the account of a wandering through Sussex, a physical journey which implies a spiritual route towards reflection and self-knowledge. It is a sort of secular pilgrimage and a half-real, half-fictional allegory of life in which the frequent themes are companionship, longing for home, the transience of life and the unavoidable decay of the things you love. The novel was first conceived in 1902 and published in 1912. The title suggests an assortment, a medley, a hodgepodge. It tells a delightful tour through Sussex by four men during a four day, ninety-mile trek across the country, from Robertsbridge to South Harting. It is full of curious events, anecdotes, anachronisms including a level crossing at the “Battle of Battle”, inane things, songs and hymns. It is not simply a straightforward factual account of the four men’s wandering through the country lanes, meadows, forests and streams, but a meditation on the essence of life interspersed with silliness, whimsy and the irreverent which is a characteristic of Belloc. He outlines the theology of the place which is a recurrent theme in his output and omnipresent to a certain extent. The book makes the reader feel the sense of exile and, consequently, the love of home as well as the fleetingness of time and memory which fosters our desire for the divine. In its lightheartedness, the text weaves in serious and poses questions which contain deep reflections on beauty, friendship and love while resonates with the love of earth as a foreshadowing of the love of heaven.

In *The Green Overcoat* (1912), Belloc tells the story of the vicissitudes an overcoat has to endure. A bashful don wears it unwittingly and is mistaken as a wealthy businessman by two felons who kidnap him to cash the rich man’s son’s gambling debt. This piece of garment passes from hand to hand, although its possession successively

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brings calamity to any illegal owner who dares to put his hands on it. Belloc personifies such overcoat, because it behaves as the main actor who causes the whole mess. The book is a funny pastime, an apparently harmless novel of escapist fantasy, but it caricatures dons' pedantry and delusions of grandeur, young people's idleness and bourgeois power wish to climb the social ladder towards a peerage that is usually the fruit of a generous donation.

In *Mr Petre* (1925), Belloc creates the fictional story of how stock exchange operations are seriously altered by rumours. On a deeper level, Belloc warns the sycophant kow-towing to those allegedly wealthy. This amusing satire introduces the character of an ordinary Englishman, Peter Blagden, who has lost his memory and is mistaken for an eccentric millionaire, "Mr Petre," from the United States of America, a very well-known automotive industry magnate. Due to a strange series of coincidences, suppositions and confusions, Blagden becomes immensely rich, since he is like a new King Midas who turns everything he touches into gold. From the very beginning the narrative is a long chuckle. Shares soar just because Blagden says he is going to buy them and people consider everything "Mr Petre" does infallible success. However, such unexpected amount of money affects Blagden's health seriously until he realizes this is "the curse of money." The novel is an ironic account of high finance and political implications caused by amnesia. When the misunderstanding is clarified, Peter Blagden calms down and peacefully enjoys his money by sailing across the Mediterranean with his bosom friend, Buffy Thompson.

In *The Haunted House* (1927), Belloc recreates a glittering world in which everyone tries to save face. This is an Edwardian novel that describes a period of plenty in which common people, who were previously poor vegetable street vendors, climb up the social ladder and finally access aristocracy thanks to a recently acquired (and invented) nobility title which has been obtained through heavy cash and much imagination. Nevertheless, the cultural gap, which is obvious in their gait and speech, betrays them, since these *nouveau riche*'s continuous blunders give them away. This newly-rich couple tries to buy a huge estate which is illegally owned by a widow with serious gambling debts. She is continuously pestered by the private advancer who lent

her money and urgently asks her to repay it. Of course, in due time, the house of cards collapses, and everybody's real social and financial situation is disclosed.

In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), the author ironically makes fun of detective stories and their allegedly seriousness and tension. Suspense is maintained through a series of twists and turns which are grossly exaggerated to make the reader roar with laughter. The initial confusion of characters gives way to politicians' greed, lust for power and ridiculous competitiveness. Quoting the 1941 edition front page: "Mr Belloc gives his satiric genius loose rein (...) In the main the story is a burlesque on the crime story. The various sleuths who are introduced in hot and confident pursuit of the wrong man are all a joy. (...) The whole thing is swift, and gravely absurd, and truly hilarious." The story is meant to be humorous, although it also provides a detailed analysis of the sources of power such as blackmail, threat and coercion.

In *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929), Belloc introduces the love story of Belinda Montgomery and Horatio Maltravers. The novel beautifully tells the story of their difficult, nearly impossible love, because of their different economic circumstances, as Belinda is well-off whereas Horatio is an impoverished squire. Belinda's father pretensions of arranging a marriage of convenience lead to terrible consequences. In spite of the opposition of adults, Belinda and Horatio are eventually united in wealth and happiness. The account is precisely chiselled, a dexterous exercise in style that sometimes looks like something out of a fairy tale. It is a romance intentionally written in the language of the early nineteenth century which, at times, takes the form of a pastiche which conveys a dense sentimental account. The story can also be interpreted as a transfer of Belloc's deep measure of affection in his youth, when he knew Elodie Belloc and fell in love with his future wife. The novel, in this sense, is a poignant reminder that God granted him that flow of love in his youth, although it was denied in old age. Both moments are well depicted in this idealistic novel which is a cheerful expression of the instants of beautiful splendour in life which act as a foretaste of the delights promised by God to those who have the grace of reaching everlasting life. Such religious implication is literally suggested in the last pages of the novel, a text

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which was endlessly rewritten, refined and improved by Belloc until he considered it his “darling treasure.”

In *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929), the stupidity of very rich people is obviously brought to the fore. This is a satirical narration which Belloc builds about people’s games and misdeeds set in the sophisticated milieu of those who are affluent, those who pretend to be and those who try to scam both groups. Rich people’s posh attitude is supported by pedantic self-proclaimed experts, supposedly art connoisseurs of avant-garde painting. Some wealthy seek to have an allegedly unique quite absurd picture. Very soon all wealthy London and the parasites of Wealthy London are raving about this so-called “The Masterpiece,” which is quite a simple canvas from a marginal French painter, actually a penniless vagrant. The press powerfully inflates the price of the canvas, since newspapers completely intoxicate British people with the name of this artist and transform the painting into an exclusive work of art whose price soars. A resourceful smart picture dealer manages to sell three counterfeit copies of “The Masterpiece” to an eccentric lady who does not know what to do with her money and is obsessed with owning the canvas at any rate.

In *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930), Belloc questions the conventional value of some commodities as well as the frailty of economy regulations. Gold is considered a precious metal and a safe haven, although its scarcity is a major factor in its high price. The novel makes us think about what would happen if gold was more abundant; the aftermath would be a reduction in price and additional essential changes in international economic relations. This is a story in which the government and bankers are afraid of an impending economic catastrophe because a scientist has discovered how to make small amounts of gold. If the quantity of this metal increases, prices will come down and there will be other unforeseen consequences. However, Belloc’s recurrent idea of “the curse of money” disrupts the scientist’s initial plans and a series of mishaps make him run away from a place to another, basically because the police pursues him. Things are settled at last, and a new organization is designed to control the trade in gold internationally.

In *The Postmaster-General* (1932), Belloc makes fun of human greed through a fictional story that is based on real political scandal (the Marconi scandal, 1912). He whips those who take advantage of their prominent position to start making money sooner. Influence peddling and mutual blackmail force a senior official and a financier, who is very well-connected with the Attorney General, to establish an avaricious relationship in which everyone wants to take advantage of the other's problem. The novel introduces two characters who are working hand in glove to start a business based on an illegal procedure, since they both have superior information about the installation of a TV network, a monopoly which is connected with the Post Office. One of them steals a handwritten document from the other, precisely the agreement about his financial compensation in case something prevents him from participating in the proposed business. The Home Secretary, on the ground that he pretends to help the aggrieved person, also wants to enter the business and succeeds in reaching his goal. So, the three of them are entangled in the mess. Finally, a grateful Jewish businessman helps the weaker member in such collusion and provides justice by settling a fair compromise.

Analysis of Belloc's discursive literature. His argumentative thread.

When Belloc was quite old and retired because of poor health he was once having a look at his home library just reviewing superficially his many volumes. His grandson was quite near and heard Belloc mumbling he was quite a good writer.

Sometimes a child, dashing about the house in the way that children do, would come upon Belloc, not in his study, but pausing on the landing over the hall, where a shelf was kept, containing most, if not all, of his published works: over one hundred and fifty titles, counting pamphlets, biographies, essays, economic and political tracts, topography, military history, religious apologetics, comic novels and verse. And he would mutter, "My child, when I survey these books, I think what a *fine* fellow I am!" (Wilson 2003: 384-385)

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Belloc was a prolific writer, as his one hundred and fifty-three printed-works attest, but he was a multi-faceted man too. He wrote about history, essays, biography, fiction, poetry, and contributed articles for periodicals. Such work conveyed a huge variety of historical, social, and aesthetic ideas that shape his literary personality, but that require a many-sided approach to tackle them too. The present piece of work makes no claim to being the definitive study on Belloc.

I chose Belloc for my thesis for several reasons. Curiosity drove me towards him due to his peculiar personal journey. Belloc was originally a Catholic French republican who felt attracted by England, his mother's adopted country, and became a British citizen in 1902 when he was thirty-two years old. At that time, he had a wide and varied scope of life experience, the fruit of endless travelling and meeting new people at an early age. Not only did his bizarre personality attract me, but his fourteen novels as well. Within Belloc's fiction you can discover the whole gallery of characters which impersonate human passions, from honest hard work to frustration, wicked ambition, idleness, and the posh foolishness of those who like to live the high life.

This thesis is based on discursive literature, so the important task is not looking at language beauty and splendid turns of phrase but extracting meaningful concepts from the text and bind them together to reach conclusions concerning the characteristics of discourse. Discursive also means proceeding through reasoning or argument rather than intuition or aesthetic perception. It is discursive literature because it pays attention to the formal discussion of a subject by means of coherent sequences of propositions in which argumentation is crucial.

Many details from Belloc's personal situation and the influence of external events are apparent when he comes to design the plot of his novels and their denouements. His first novel, *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904) is the portrait of an honest businessman, actually an old-fashioned liberal in the manner of Gladstone, who is carried along by the supposed allure of far-away investments in a colonial venture. Belloc created a story that gave literary form to his loathing for colonialism, an idea which was originated by Elizabeth Belloc, "Bessie," his mother, who openly declared she hated the name of "British Empire" and its connotations, too. The would-

be writer who had come back from the long walk to Rome in June 1901 and described that trip in *The Path to Rome* (1902), designed the sound story of a grief-stricken merchant who becomes increasingly upset by the uncertain course which the new investment takes. This farcical parable about the contemporary scene places two hardworking, truthful businessmen, Mr Burden and Mr Abbot, in the hands of greedy and astute Mr Barnett, a Jew of German origin, who will provoke Mr Burden's final ruin. Belloc observed how a handful of wealthy bankers were controlling many political decisions and wrote this first story about plutocracy. Although he was not a businessman, he was terribly afraid of catastrophic financial implications, since his mother lost most of the family's fortune through a broker's ill-fated investments in the stock exchange.

His argumentative thread proceeded further with the next three novels, *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908), *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), and *Pongo and The Bull* (1910). They are based on his observations of political life and its associated sphere of personal ambitions. When Belloc abandoned active politics, he wrote *The Girondin* (1911) and *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911). The first one is the story of a young revolutionary forcibly recruited into the French army during the first French Revolutionary War. The army marches to the Battle of Valmy (1792), and the young protagonist experiences the boring and terrible life of being a soldier, as well as a pointless, accidental death. Belloc's republican convictions do not preclude him from presenting the prosaic story of a Girondin who discovers the fleeting love of a humble and honest country girl. *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911) is the account of four men's wandering through Sussex, not exactly a novel, but Belloc's reflections on the beautiful English county he loves, the joy of living, the passage of time, and the unavoidability of death. The book is somewhat the literary continuation of his travelogue *The Path to Rome* (1902), the tone more austere and meditative. *The Green Overcoat* (1912) is an amusing story about a vain professor who is abused by a group of young Edwardian loafers. Belloc's recurrent revenge against dons is on stage, although other sub-themes appear too: poor Jewish pawnbrokers – just the opposite of affluent Mr Barnett –

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distributive justice – the overcoat brings disgrace on everyone who takes it except its legal owner – and honest businessmen like earnest Mr Brassington.

Belloc describes the arbitrariness of financial relationships in *Mr Petre* (1925), the unwise ambition of those who want to become wealthy overnight in *The Haunted House* (1927), the futile greed of possessing allegedly-exclusive art treasures in *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929), and how money takes revenge on those who have some in *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930) and *The Postmaster-General* (1932). “The curse of money” was one of Belloc’s most cherished mottoes, although he loved life and enjoyed its pleasures, which he considered God’s gift.

A remarkable exception is *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929). Belloc builds this story as a literary exercise to reach a rounded, perfect text which follows the literary convention of the Victorian novel. We do know that he rewrote the book several times to reach a final version which should be to his total satisfaction. Belloc told his friends that he enjoyed reading it again and again.

Belloc is very concerned with the ruthless power of the press, and invents catty, sometimes exaggerated names for the newspapers that flatter their owners and serve their interests. Some newspaper names are neutral or a sham, others make a mockery of tabloids. Here are some examples: *The Review*, *The Doctrinaire*, *The Keelson*, *The Courier*, *The Moon*, *The Capon*, *The Howl*, *The Sunday Machine*, *The Messenger*, *The Chicago Judge*, *The Roar*, *The Drum*, *The Trumpet*, *The Trombone*, *The Day*, *The Modern Democrat*, *The Red Flag*, and *Oriflamme*.

The power of the press is one of the driving forces when it comes to distort reality and lead public opinion to false or invented parallel “truths which protect the interests of those who own the newspapers or indirectly support them financially. In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), Mr Merriman is the sleuth, pretending to be a reporter, who runs after a harmless tourist, Richard Mallard, whom hidden powers consider a secret agent of West Irania, the powerful foreign power which is very rich in Eremin ore. This mineral is the essential ingredient to produce a very advanced fuel which will revolutionise all transport systems. The Manager of the Truth and Justice Enquiry Corporation rings up the New York office and asks for Merriman, a private detective

who receives precise instructions about the quest for that individual. Merriman must go to the Dutch Line, end of 17th quay, and find who has booked berth 136, port side, top deck, on the *Zeeland*, sailing that evening at 6. Merriman must get a squint of the guy, note all details, and shoot him to get a picture. Mr Merriman is a faithful, alert and joyous slave of duty who is awaiting Richard Mallard and slaps him fraternally upon the shoulder and tells him that he is the man he wants to speak to. Nevertheless, Richard Mallard is terrorised and bewildered after the many interviews he had to undergo recently, so he tries to escape. Before Richard Mallard tries to move, sharp detective Merriman asks him to smile and succeeds in taking a snapshot with his Kodak. Merriman tells Mallard he must not worry, as this is just a photograph “for the paper.” Merriman pretends he must just take a photograph of any of the many travellers to Europe, as such pictures are apparently for the silly column “Birds of Passage” in *The North Pole Gazette*. This is the press syndicate name hastily invented by Merriman. Afraid, Richard Mallard offers £100 so as not to publish this picture. Merriman takes the money and vanishes, but Richard Mallard’s anguish and desperation go on.⁴⁷

But the picture! The picture! That was the rub. Nobody might care about him in New York; but the New York Sunday papers go a long way. (...) But he was getting exhausted with all this worry. It was no good borrowing trouble. He tried to convince himself that the gentleman with the camera had told a true and simple tale, and that his motive had been no more than what he had said. (...)

And so once again within a single hour all the world was satisfied. Richard Mallard had run through the whole store of his anxieties and was reposing in the repose of exhaustion. Mr Merriman had earned, over and above his salary, the prodigious sum of one hundred dollars, and double pay for leaving at the Chief’s club, within the hour after a short deal, the Kodak film, (...), and a good little précis in pencil of what that person looked like, what were the tricks of conversation, the colour of his hair and his eyes, his moustache, his

⁴⁷ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 14-22.

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particular gestures, and all the rest. His Boss was mightily relieved as well. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 23)

Belloc seriously copes with the reliability of the information supplied by the printed media, even though he prefers the comic vein to long boring reflections in his novels.

In the brief encounter between Richard Mallard and the false reporter, Mr Merriman, the influence of the press is manifested in its mighty power. An alert reader can discover Mr Merriman's indirect recommendation to Richard Mallard, a roundabout warning about how Richard Mallard must evade the press. Highly perceptive Belloc describes an ordinary citizen's fright at the far-reaching consequences of his picture being disseminated by the New York Sunday papers that "go a long way." In a hasty, brisk movement, Mr Merriman takes a picture while his highly-trained visual retention enables him later to use this retrieved information to produce a précis of Richard Mallard's looks, tricks of conversation, facial features, characteristic gestures and tics. With these materials, Mr Merriman can manipulate reality and render a "false or invented parallel *truth*" which suits best the "Great T and J Agency."⁴⁸

What Belloc foresaw about the subtle and disguised distortion of reality which the media can supply is much more pronounced nowadays with all the array of available mobile devices and the all-too-easy homemade capacity to edit images and sound. Social networks enable people to spread their own concocted pieces of information with exciting rapidity, as well as highlight real or invented breaking news which puzzle the people with whom they are in contact. Sometimes it is not so easy to make the difference between reality and fantasy, above all when you come to tackle extremely sad or striking news, if you do not have access to other authoritative sources of information.

I use suitable tools to justify Belloc's opinions in our time. Many current matters are analysed in the light of Belloc's opinions, the ideas which are easily traceable since they underlie many plots and, sometimes, the apparently weird situations he creates in

⁴⁸ This is another name Belloc uses to call the intriguing "Truth and Justice Enquiry Corporation." See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 14.

his fiction. Belloc was usually not politically correct and did not care about the impression he could create on others. His natural or carefully studied lack of restraint caused him trouble to be accepted in some social circles. His Catholicism was not exactly the guarantee that would enable him to achieve social success. On the contrary, his religion could bring animosity towards his public behaviour and writings in the midst of an overwhelmingly Protestant country in which the rich and politically-well-connected continued to consider Roman Catholics a rare minor sect, a foreign deviation from the genuine English Christianity which the Church of England represented. No matter wealthy people who looked down on Belloc were not regular church goers, as their values were those of the Established Church, and they considered themselves respectable citizens from a sound and serious nation who sometimes felt ridiculed by an impertinent Roman Catholic who could be occasionally funny, but who was too opinionated.

Religion and apologetics were not the only motivation in Belloc's writing, as he also criticised the Whig Historians' theory of history and tried to ascertain a possible new social organization in which man could retrieve freedom through reasonable possession of his means of subsistence (Distributism). It is customary to classify and tag authors according to their stylistic characteristics. Sometimes Belloc has been considered a modernist writer, but the concept "modernist" in literature is very difficult to define and, perhaps, an empty epithet.⁴⁹ Belloc could be possibly considered *fin de siècle* because he showed his discontent with the state of things in his days, whereas he foresaw impending social changes, in a similar way as Walter Starkie, the versatile wanderer adventurer and restless writer. Both were 'square pegs in a round hole.' Belloc described the period of apparent opulence which Edwardian years represented, although he felt a new social organization was necessary to establish better living conditions for the destitute.

⁴⁹ "Modernist" in architecture and decorative arts is a well-defined concept, although it seems this adjective cannot be unequivocally applied to a writer. However, some consider Henry W. Longfellow (1807-1882) a modernist, since he rewrote full passages from other authors by using his own tastes and techniques.

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A man of paradoxes

Belloc was a peculiar man, sometimes a contradictory personality who cannot be easily categorized, as he was a multifaceted writer and a social reformer who did not hesitate to swim against the tide when he felt it was worth defending controversial issues. He was also a pensive poet who wrote delicious verse for children in a serious language that told stories about how naughty children receive their rightful punishment for misbehaving or telling lies.⁵⁰ During childhood and early youth he considered he was the member of an affluent family until he realized with horror most of his family's fortune had been lost owing to the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) and subsequent unwise investments in the stock exchange. Belloc's encounter with Cardinal Manning awakened his social awareness to such an extent that he considered the poor's cause his own. Belloc never betrayed his origins. He grew to be anti-imperialist and was insightful when he wrote distinctly about this subject in his first four novels, the books which deal most directly with political matters.⁵¹

Hilaire Belloc was a man of paradoxes, a trait which is perfectly appropriate given that he was one of the best friends of G.K. Chesterton, famous for his use of paradoxical observations in confounding the conventional wisdom of his time. Belloc was an Englishman [who wrote] well over one hundred books to his credit who also vociferously represented the Liberal Party in Parliament; [he was] an anti-imperialist who had served in the French army and wrote an admiring biography of Napoleon; a defender of medieval civilization who was an avid consumer of modern technological gadgetry; the defender *par excellence* of Catholic tradition who happened to descend from a family that counted radicals, deists, and modernist reformers among its members.⁵²

⁵⁰ See *Cautionary Tales for Children* (1907).

⁵¹ Belloc's first novel, *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant of Thames St. in the City of London, Exporter of Hardware. A Record of his Lineage, Speculations, Last Days and Death* (1904) discloses the true economic nature of colonialism, the exploitative capitalist system as opposed to the official version, the patronizing idea that emphasized white man's theoretical effort to spread culture among far-away nations.

⁵² Philip B. Newman. "Hilaire Belloc: Personality and Paradox." <www.dappledthings.org>

Of course, Belloc was also “confounding the conventional wisdom of his time,” and this feature of his temperament and work clashed with the more conventional manners of the great and good. On reading Belloc’s novels, you wonder how much of the ideas he explained in detail in his essays is also present in his fiction. Consequently, I tried to follow the trail and intended to unveil Belloc’s thread of reasoning which is interwoven in the bizarre vicissitudes of the characters in his novels. Comparison between his period and current events is unavoidable, so I present many of the materials collected by following the strict order which is specified in the table of contents. Previous ideas about Belloc are reassessed starting from scratch in the light of the re-reading of his novels. Conclusions usually include a summary of such previous ideas and encourage those who want to use the provided sources to reconsider the subject on their own.

Description of the chapters

In Chapter One of this thesis, Hilaire Belloc is presented as the many-sided man he was: would-be fellow of All Souls’, journalist, biographer, scholar on military history, MP, novelist and Catholic apologist. Belloc’s historical essays were seminal for the development of his fiction, being his enhancement of French culture what constituted the appropriate ground for building the witty French scenes that are interspersed in his novels and his frequent references to French characters and culture. Although Belloc reached his peak of creativity in the Edwardian era, he was perceptive enough to foresee impending social changes and the decline of the British Empire. As Belloc’s journalistic career was hindered by his characteristically independent and unpredictable character that usually led him to argue with his prospective editors, together with his inability to meet the deadlines of his articles, he became a full-time biographer and writer of historical books. Simultaneously he began to publish novels on the thought and behaviour of his contemporaries, while in his biographies and historical essays deepened the characters of the French Revolution and described the military feats of Napoleon, a character who Belloc deeply admired, in spite of that French emperor’s excessive ambition. Belloc considered that Napoleon was the executive power that

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could spread and reinforce the tenets of the Enlightenment and the French Revolutions so as to modernize old-fashioned Europe. Belloc contended that Napoleon's defeat at the Battle of Waterloo (1815) inaugurated the splendid period of the British Empire all through the nineteenth century, that formidable tide of affluence which began to decline after the First World War (1914-1918). Yet Belloc's keen observation scanned the hard realities of those who could not benefit from the current apparent prosperity of the Edwardian epoch, for he spotted the weaknesses of that superficially thriving society that cunningly ignored the pockets of poverty as well as the squalor of urban slums.

In his personal life, Belloc settled in Sussex. He called his estate "King's Land." This was his beloved place in Shipley, near Horsham, that sheltered his family and shaped most of his literary output. Belloc built his own literary fantasy around King's Land, a personal world formed by much cherished elements: family life, friends' conversation, rural outings through the woods, entertaining walks along the Downs, sailing his cutter, the "Nona" along with his bosom friends, and enjoying Sussex legends and traditional songs. Spain was also present in his letters, as he repeatedly visited that country. He used some recollections of his Spanish adventures to create weird, exaggerated Spanish characters in his novels, for example the Duke of Emonsillado (or Duque de) and Don Heraldo de Madero in *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929).

Chapter Two analyses Belloc's perception of contemporary thought on the Christian faith, and the repercussion it had on current behaviour. He was aware that Catholics were a minority in the middle of a Protestant, indifferent, agnostic or secular society, so he assumed the role of the uncomfortable prophet who hurls fierce invectives with sound dialectical aggressiveness, the lonely preacher in the middle of the self-indulgent, satisfied Edwardian society. His *The Path to Rome* (1902) is the enthusiastic account of a young man's trip on foot to see part of Europe, "the land that the Christian faith had saved." It is also the inner reflection of a Catholic who happily rediscovers his faith. Belloc struggled against Edward Gibbon's and Charles Kingsley's biased

interpretation of Catholicism,⁵³ as Belloc was a tough debater indeed. His rationale had something of the Voltairean technique, for he was a rationalist who liked to reassert his thesis through doggedly spotting the arguing vulnerabilities of his adversaries. His main concern was agnosticism, not just facing Anglican tenets, since Belloc was very conscious of the basic argument that God is a creation of human brain. Accordingly, he tried to expose the existential emptiness of those who pretend to be happy from their agnostic position. Belloc tried to prove the inextricable relationship that linked the sheer existence of Europe with the Christian faith, as he contended that the faith made Europe. Belloc was a radical Roman Catholic republican who wanted to bring justice to social structures, even if the combination of republicanism and Catholicism sounded strange to the self-righteous. The death of Elodie, his wife, was a serious blow from which he partially recovered thanks to his sincere faith. Cardinal Manning produced a deep impression on him as he conveyed the universality of Catholic faith, an idea that Belloc spread constantly through his conscious role of defender of the Church. In his fiction, Belloc told the stories of vain people who tried to be rich and famous at any rate, but who achieved nothing of this. Belloc mocked his characters, because he contended that the real function of man on earth is to fulfil God's plan.⁵⁴ Belloc stated that Catholics should present their faith without complexes, since being a Catholic in England was a sign of belonging to the upper classes, a mark of distinction. Belonging to the posh upper crust of society was a personal situation much appreciated in a country in which people wanted to get rid of their own much-hated suburban trace. Ordinary people

⁵³ Hilaire Belloc contended that, from beginning to end, Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789) was an anti-Catholic pamphlet, although it was extremely well written, but, as a presentation of historical development, grossly unhistorical. Belloc considered that Gibbon was a leading member of the Whig interpretation of history who never paid attention to the spiritual state of those whom he described (Pearce 2002: 229-230). Gibbon, within his agnostic outlook, described the doctrinal intolerance of ancient Christians and tried to explain the relation between the fall of the Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity.

Charles Kingsley, a broad-church priest of the Church of England, encapsulated his anti-Catholicism in *Hypatia, A Novel* (1853), in which he presents the ancient Christians' hate for Hypatia as a precedent of Roman Catholic misinterpretation and corruption of genuine Christianity. He emphasizes the wickedness of priests and monks while he ridicules celibacy and other aspects of Roman Catholic ecclesiastical discipline. Kingsley attacked Cardinal Newman whom he accused of deceit and falseness.

⁵⁴ Belloc did not affirm such too-serious statement in his novels, as he was completely aware of the light tone that was appropriate to his pungent stories. In his essays, letters and private conversation he determinedly stated that man's purpose in life was reaching beatitude.

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reverenced aristocracy with its good manners. Such trait was idiosyncratic among the English, perhaps owing to the permanent trace of the long-lasting influence of the monarchy.

Chapter Six is related to chapter two and partially complements the awkward position of a Roman Catholic writer immersed in Edwardian society. Belloc's *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911) examines the four sides of his character; his political facet described colonialism as hypocritical search for money. In *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908), Belloc recreates the selection process he underwent to become MP for South Salford. Belloc soon realised that practical politics depends on compromise, as he contends in this novel. Belloc's radical trend led him to expose the badly concealed alliance between Government and Opposition. He aligned with William Cobbett's tenets in defence of farm labourers, as Belloc looked at the European civilization in its death throes, because ordinary people had been deprived from property in the capitalism, as a consequence they have become the slaves of a new master. On analysing modalities of thought and behaviour this thesis is based on the combination of both concepts: change and permanence. A century after Belloc's novels (which convey Catholic beliefs in a straight or subtle manner)⁵⁵ many of their central issues remain fully valid for our times, since the present-day concept of offshoring is caused by the same reason as contracting Chinese labour force, one of the historical processes that provoked the two Boer Wars (1880-1881) (1899-1902), as Belloc contended in his days as an MP. Now and then, the cheaper the labour force, the bigger the profits in the income statement.

In the third chapter, an analysis is undertaken of the way Belloc's fiction portrays man's obsession with money. Belloc tells several stories in which nobody can change his life suddenly in order to abandon destitution, nobody can right away change any other person's state of poverty and project him onto opulence, because you need a

⁵⁵ Belloc openly uses the Catholic concept of divine providence to describe God's plan that takes care of men and women and lovingly leads their actions. Belloc liked to use the word "providence" literally, but he also used similar ideas in a roundabout way, through the funny weird adventures his characters underwent in his novels. The readers who did not know who Belloc was could not reach the transcendental issues he was trying to convey.

stroke of luck to start a successful business. Working hard is not enough to become rich, so men have usually looked for alternative ways to make a lot of money. Belloc was very concerned with the way his contemporaries looked for material gain, invested their money and ruled their businesses on the whole, and especially the manner they handled capitals. Human pecuniary attitudes were crucial to him, as he contended that, by observing how you earn and allocate your capital, he could define what your true objectives in life were. Belloc thought you could not dissociate your personal code of behaviour from your everyday financial practice, since either you were always honest, habitually trustworthy, or you were awkwardly concealing your sly demeanour. In the second case, you were just a profiteer who scanned the horizon to see the real possibilities of posing your next swindle.

Belloc knew readers wanted and badly needed having fun, so they bought his novels or borrowed them from the nearest public library to come across interesting, sometimes also weird stories that led them to occasional smiles, maybe to thunderous laughter in their finest moments. Chapter Four describes Belloc's sincere effort to write jocular passages about human lunacy and lofty dreams, which are the basic sources of humour. Readers also wanted to be aware of excerpts of human experience filtered through Belloc's scrutinizing, satirical look and detached, aloof writing technique. Belloc reserved his stern warnings and elaborate reflections for his essays. He preferred to amuse readers by means of his novels, as he knew readers forgive literary mistakes to those authors who make them laugh and pass the joy of living along them. Life is generally dull and too hard to bear, so readers are thankful to those who lead them along the hidden funny paths that exist in many novels, although sometimes are not perceived by the most inattentive readers. Belloc is proficient in supplying these entertaining stories that merge wisely hilarity and ethical perspective.

The influence of economy in political decision-makers is crucial in Belloc's fiction. Chapter Five is concerned with such decisive factor in many decisions that are generally motivated by other apparent reasons which politicians try to convey to citizens as convenient for the social welfare of the community. Although Belloc considered himself an expert in economy, he usually drew conclusions simply through his keen

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observation on the manoeuvres of investors, and by applying the social teachings of the Catholic Church that he studied in detail. Cardinal Manning's advice reinforced Belloc's apologetic disposition. In his fiction, Belloc was pleased to invent economic circumstances that were simple transpositions of real events; this is the case with the Marconi scandal in 1912, a story that he freely recreated in *The Postmaster-General* (1932).⁵⁶ Belloc considered the stock exchange fluctuations were due to whimsical movements of capital that were guided by simple expectations of future profits and sheer rumours without any real ground on sound business. He actually simplified the stock exchange working according to his literary needs, as his readers were more interested in the narration twists and turns and the entertainment his books supplied than in technicalities. Belloc created characters who benefit from these absurd financial ups and downs, like Peter Blagden in *Mr Petre* (1925), and others who are completely ruined by them, like Mr Burden in *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904). In this chapter, Belloc's thought is contrasted with Keynesianism and its concept of aggregate demand, but also with the classical liberalism and the neoliberal tendency in the 1980s, proposed by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, with the first of their tenets, monetarism (supply-side economics). George Orwell commented on Belloc's *The Servile State* (1912) in an article in *Time and Tide*. Orwell's opinion sits side-by-side with the struggle of Joseph Rowntree (1836-1925) for workers' welfare and the original design of social security plans by William Beveridge (1879-1963). Belloc advocated individual freedom and the fight against corruption; his novels and essays supply hints to deal with the recent great recession (in Spain, 2008-2016) and its sequel of austerity measures. I introduce present day characters who are relevant in Spanish and European politics.

⁵⁶ *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930) and *The Postmaster-General* (1932) introduce a similar plot that begins with a trick to make money. It seems as if Belloc had rewritten his previous novel with slight variations. This is a case of hypertextuality, "as the global relation of a later text which is known as hypertext – with a preceding text – which is called hypotext – involving its transformation, modification, elaboration, or extension." (Marta Miquel-Baldellou. *Symbolic Transitions as Modalities of Aging: Intertextuality in the Life and Works of Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Edgar Allan Poe*. University of Lleida, 2015. 12. [PhD thesis])

The iconic image of Edwardian gentlemen underlies much of the portraits that Belloc renders in his fictional characters. This topic is discussed at some length in chapter seven of the thesis by paying special attention to Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1971). Human beings tend to seek for approval of their actions to reinforce their self-esteem, even if this pretence can imply exhibiting a false or distorted self-image. Men and women behave like actors who perform in front of others, sometimes through wearing masks. "Masks" are here used in the sense of classical Greek theatre to conceal your face and produce an artificial impression. In Belloc's theatrical artifice (his literary construct) masks are something more than mere drama props, for masks are attitudes that shape any sort of social group that tries to appear exclusive, for example high civil servants or idle, haughty landlords or aristocrats. In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), Lord Delisport uses his recently built mask craftily to perform in front of the crowd.⁵⁷ In Belloc's fiction, Public Schools are a decisive contribution to build one's adequate mask formed by neat, elegant clothes, upper class pronunciation, polite detachment, easy flowing (but void and compromising) conversation, appropriate gentlemen's accessories and belonging to a club (the more expensive the membership, the better). Traditional schoolmasters and high school teachers knew for certain that they always ought to exercise restraint. Such demeanour assured them both an atmosphere of moral authority and their objective of keeping the distance. Contemplating the conduct of others from above was always an advantage to remain aloof and create the intriguing environment that made their job easier, since most of their alleged authority was the result of wearing their mask credibly. Edwardian gentlemen considered the world their oyster. If they were wealthy enough, educated in the right schools and with convenient contacts, they could do as they pleased. Parallel patterns of behaviour exist nowadays, as vanity and shallowness are lifelong tendencies in human beings. Edwardian years encouraged refined taste for decoration, so Belloc created characters who obsessively longed for refurbishing homes and be the envy of their guests, although that mood was going to change after the First World War (1914-1918), as suggested by Isabel Colegate's *The Shooting Party* (1980).

⁵⁷ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 266.

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Belloc was not a moralistic preacher, but the perceptive witness of a period who warns us about the prevalence of real values compared to appearances and luxury.

Belloc was surrounded by the suffragette movement and the activities of Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928). Both his mother, Bessie, and his sister, Mary, were in favour of the initiatives that contributed to the female struggle for equality. In Chapter Eight, there is the enumeration of the relevant female characters in his novels, their symbolic load within the text, their qualities and manias as well as their active role in many fields, from high politics to modest housework. There are prime ministers, high civil servants, executive secretaries, idle rich girls, landladies, and maidservants, amongst other jobs. Although Belloc found enjoyment in creating the character of beautiful Belinda, the sweet romantic girl who eventually succeeds in marrying the boy she loves, in spite of the many difficulties because of the obstinate opposition from his family, he was realistic enough to depict cold, resolute women who reached senior management positions and had obedient men under their command. He foresaw the rising role of women many years before it happened.

In Chapter Nine, the thesis proceeds to draw a parallel between Belloc's fiction ideological load and current European and Spanish policies, Catalan too, as some aspects of Belloc's hints on education apply specifically to our closer environment. Belloc based his research on social and labour data; his was not the superficial intuition of a quick-witted, casual observer, but the balanced and precise reflection of a sincere believer. It was the same Belloc who was earnestly warning us in his essays, and who tried to make us laugh in the novels. For the purpose of this thesis, casting an eye over the aftermath of the recent economic depression, as well as taking into account Belloc's considerations on the possession of property can lead us to conclusions on suitable policies to put an end to the rising inequality in Western nations. This thesis is not only concerned with the formal beauty and expressive resources that Belloc properly or misguidedly uses in each circumstance, but especially, and above all, with the rational contents which underlies a particular passage. Belloc always bore in mind Cardinal

Manning's remark "All human conflict is ultimately theological."⁵⁸ Some years after Belloc's death there was a wave of fresh Catholic thinking that changed the traditional perspective of mistrust towards the modern world. This chapter introduces also a case for study: the function of Catholic school in Belloc's opinion and the reality of allegedly faith-based schools nowadays.

* * *

Belloc was certainly a free man in the sense that he truly was independent from institutions and persistent links, except for his religion. He renounced a steady job and a permanent political career. A steady job was alien to him because he could not bear being given orders. He had accepted orders as a private in the French artillery, although he could not obey the orders given to him by his superiors in the editorial world. I found his novels both serious and amusing, because his fiction sternly vivisects the mechanisms of political and economic power, particularly the use of blackmail, bribery or, simply, political influence-peddling.

As you move deeper into reading Belloc's novels, and you tie together his life with his work, you realise he "took the one [road] less traveled by / And that has made all the difference," to paraphrase Robert Frost's well-known poem "The Road Not Taken."⁵⁹ Although Robert Frost would complain about the overtone I apply here to Belloc's peculiar personality, Belloc was certainly a free spirit, an adventurous writer who lived his life in his own way. Again, being constantly on the move, his tireless activity made Belloc a character similar to the nomadic spirit of Walter Starkie:

From then on, along the route to Reggio, Cesare and Walter are joined by Aldo and Susanna. Having met up with the young couple in Cutro, where Adamo and company were camped, Cesare and Walter set out with them for Catanzaro where, according to Cesare: "there was plenty of money." (...) In the town at the tip of the mainland, the northern nomad parts company with all three. (...)

⁵⁸ See Hilaire Belloc. 1925. *The Cruise of the "Nona."* (London: Penguin Books, 1958): 47-50. Quoted also on page 556.

⁵⁹ Robert Frost. "The Road Not Taken," poem published in *Mountain Interval*. (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1916).

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Sicily was to be the last stage in the traveller's solitary ramble south. Gissing's journey ended in the stronghold of Reggio Calabria, a gateway of *Magna Graecia*, but Walter is presented as crossing over the Strait by steamer, eager to continue his pursuit of antiquity. (...) The attraction in Taormina was the ruins of the Greek theatre but it also became significant as a consequence of Walter striking up new friendships there, two Danish sisters who are reported as regarding the young traveller as "an incorrigible nomad."⁶⁰

Edwardian characters

Each of Belloc's novels has a relevant topic and specific purpose, as he made an effort to design the characters and plot for each novel influenced by his personal circumstances and the historical features of the moment in which the novel was written. Although the period in which Belloc wrote novels spans twenty-eight years the stories he tells refer mainly to Edwardian characters. His characters are either honest and moderate, well-balanced and sensible like Emmanuel Burden⁶¹ and Peter Blagden⁶² or just the opposite, greedy upstarts and crazy people like Aunt Hilda⁶³ and Jack Williams⁶⁴ who are continuously looking for having access to new ladders of opportunity, or rather, climbing up the social ladder and particularly becoming rich overnight. Belloc designs his plots in view of a not very happy end, but an end which restores the initial position, the starting point of the novel in which the stratagems or subtle techniques to become rich have not been implemented yet. His nemesis clarifies that there are not shortcuts to achieve one's goals, because everyone has to learn effort is essential, as hard work is the price to have a decent life, not splendid luxury properties. Belloc's concept of retributive justice puts everything in place and usually ridicules plutocracy.

⁶⁰ Jacqueline Hurlley. *Walter Starkie 1894-1976. An Odyssey*. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013): 87.

⁶¹ See *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant of Thames St. in the City of London, Exporter of Hardware. A Record of his Lineage, Speculations, Last Days and Death* (1904).

⁶² See *Mr Petre* (1925).

⁶³ See *The Haunted House* (1927).

⁶⁴ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932).

Readers are attracted by the funny stories Belloc creates. His plots and style are far from sophisticated, they are usually the straight elements to convey Belloc's hate of easy money and his rejection of those who save their faces through pretending to be members of high lineage. Conspiracies to commit money laundering or becoming rich overnight thanks to some silly stratagem are unveiled by a wise character who acts as the avenger of fate. This is the role of crazy William Bailey who, in spite of his irrational prejudices and stupid demeanour, helps Mr Clutterbuck to obtain his consolation prize,⁶⁵ or Charles Kirby, the shrewd solicitor who finds the missing overcoat that is the cause of the huge mess and provides justice,⁶⁶ or Arthur Lawson, the Jew who eventually helps distressed Wilfrid Halterton.⁶⁷

Things were not that easy for Belloc when he wrote his essays. Belonging to a minority that was looked on with mistrust, Belloc dared to explain the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, his view of the Whig interpretation of history and his opinion on the Christian roots and values of Europe. Yet Belloc did not try to please everyone nor flatter the great. His essays and articles provoked the conflicting views of those who had strong feelings about these matters.

Hilaire Belloc's was a household name in the Britain of his time. (...) He was a hero not only to many of his friends and peers, but to younger writers like Evelyn Waugh, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Yet his posthumous reputation has suffered much, unlike that of his friend Chesterton. Furthermore, Belloc, where he is known at all any more, is often unfortunately caricatured today as a rigid, bitter archconservative reactionary, hankering after England's lost medieval past. Statements like "[i]t was the disruption of Catholic unity in Europe [i.e. the Reformation] which let in all the evils from the extreme of which we now suffer and are in peril of dissolution," as he wrote in his 1937 *The*

⁶⁵ See *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908).

⁶⁶ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912).

⁶⁷ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932).

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Crisis of Civilization, sometimes lead readers to a false impression of Belloc's true outlook.⁶⁸

Belloc was able to write seriously on any matter and, at the same time, include funny, picturesque passages about human vagaries and personality inconsistencies. His novels deal basically with male characters, although a careful and reflexive reading brings feminine characters forward, with their kaleidoscopic range of colours. I was surprised at the richness of his observations on female behaviour. Belloc did not like to state his opinion on the pop culture stereotypes about female tendencies, particularly the more controversial chauvinistic prejudices which have been duly questioned by feminist literary criticism. He just supplied appropriate brushstrokes to depict what he had observed during his years as an MP, as well as his fine observance of everyday family life and his acquaintances' conduct. It is also possible that some of Belloc's female characters be the literary transposition of male individuals in real life, as envy, hate, wrath, self-conceit, hunger for power and many other human passions are equally common in men and women. Edwardian upper-class women wanted to be in command and claimed their deserved influence on public and private aspects. Belloc's keen eye realised the unstoppable rise of women. This thesis also deals with thirty-nine relevant female characters who can be found in Belloc's novels.

European values

Belloc's thought also casts light on present day situation which is similar to that of 1920s in many aspects. Britain had to reinvent its situation after the colonial period and now it has to reinvent a new policy to find and consolidate its place in the world after *Brexit* and other events. Belloc focuses on the economic situation of Great Britain as it was during the remains of colonial period. At the end of colonial period, England was looking for a new role in the world. Currently, England has to redefine itself again with *Brexit*. Theresa May establishes the best meritocracy in the world by valuing merit, not

⁶⁸ Philip B. Newman. "Hilaire Belloc: Personality and Paradox." <www.dappledthings.org>

just people and money on the old basis of the system of patronage, as in a meritocracy you do not need patronage but qualification.

Designing new policy is not easy since there is disillusionment, the characteristic disappointment of middle classes with the Establishment, with the traditional parties. Middle classes argue for the need of more power and influence in democratic politics. The working class asks to be better represented and the whole of this situation has many points of similarity with the rise of authoritarianism and totalitarianism in 1930s. Nowadays populism is rising because of those dissatisfied with various aspects of economic policy that impoverish them. In the long run, this process may lead to authoritarianism in the European Union and a series of events similar to those that led to dictatorship. Belloc was very sensitive to authoritarianism and rejected it because it was opposed to individual freedom. A great connoisseur of the French society and politics of his day, Belloc was aware of the paradox inherent in the consequences of the French Revolution and Napoleonic policy, as well as the contemporary French political praxis. He considered the motto “Freedom-Equality-Fraternity” was just wastepaper when you had a look at everyday living conditions of the poor.

“Post 9/11” is a standard approach in literature which emphasizes the Western need for security after lethal terrorist attacks. Of course, such literary standard represents the current state of opinion in many fields, not simply a literary “passing fad.” Belloc had his own idea of what Europe should be like. At present, we can think about what has happened to the European Union (EU) and what Belloc’s criticism was to bring through EU. His perceptions can permeate current EU’s policy and be valid against its abandonment of ethical values, for example the way Europe has dealt with the refugees’ crisis in 2015 and 2016. A substantial part of the European Union (EU) is nominally Catholic, but its Catholic ethics has disappeared. Belloc’s thought can help to unravel confused concepts and avoid European disintegration.⁶⁹ In many ways the

⁶⁹ When ‘things fall apart’ – the expression is from W.B. Yeats’s poem “The Second Coming,” and is reminiscent of Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) on the disruption of Igbo culture (Nigeria) – and the process goes on till the very extreme, war is unavoidable. Things falling apart can lead to confrontation. In the twentieth-century European history, there are many examples of this process. Adolf Hitler tried to fight Communism, but his extremist, insane ideas and policies brought war to Europe and the rest of the world.

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attitude and opinion that Belloc expresses in his novels are relevant today following the recent economic crisis, the Great Recession of 2008-2016, and the wish of the United Kingdom to withdraw from the European Union (*Brexit*), a situation which in terms of economics and the British state of democracy is not dissimilar in impact to the end of the British colonial power. Belloc, a Roman Catholic living and working in an essentially Protestant England, perceived this situation from a Roman Catholic perspective that jarred the conventional English attitude. He believed that the true nature of European society is rooted in Roman Catholicism and that for England to become a better society it would be necessary to adopt Roman Catholic values.

We can realise this in Spain, in some traditional parties' sufficient reasons. What these parties call *barones* are actually based on *patrones*, or rather, people in debt. Some leaders have also enough people in their debt whereas others are in a weak position because they have no money or personal influence and, as a consequence, they cannot establish a base for loyalty.

I was attracted by Belloc's realistic thought in everyday matters, even though many people consider his Distributist theory somewhat utopian. Belloc knew for certain that there is a global answer to the current question about why culture and reflection recede in Western society whereas populism flourishes. It is customary that celebrities have more credibility, even in the political sense, than professors, and there is a childish belief that everything must be available and free, that there are unilateral simple solutions to collective complex problems. Belloc knows the prosaic answer, as he is aware that such solutions do not exist and, in the case that they do, they will be too difficult and expensive.

Chapter One

The Life and Times of Hilaire Belloc

The Edwardian era

Delimiting the years of the Edwardian period in England is not easy since its influence cannot be clear-cut. Although Edward VII's reign spanned nine years, from 1901 to 1910, the typified English lifestyle of this epoch evolved roughly from the death of Queen Victoria and the immediate access of the new king up until the latter's death.¹ Edward VII had been Prince of Wales for sixty years, from 1841 until 1901. Some writers enlarge the scope of the Edwardian epoch,² so that the period coincides with the duration of Belloc's political activity in Parliament as Member of Parliament (MP) for South Salford, with his intense activity as a writer, and with his growing disillusionment with politics in general and the British parliamentary system in particular. In the General Election of 1906, Belloc fought the marginal seat for South Salford, on the borders of Manchester, and he succeeded in being elected MP. These were also the days when he realised that it was nearly impossible for him to find a steady job in journalism, so he decided to build up his own literary career in some kind of freelance journalist venture and as a research historian, in addition to continuing as a novelist and essayist. However, Belloc's wide range of personal experience garnered during the Edwardian period came to a sudden standstill with the death of his wife, Elodie, in 1914.

The reign of Queen Victoria came to an end on 22nd January 1901. Belloc wrote an obituary that G(ilbert) K(eith) Chesterton considered the best. Belloc showed great concern with the new perils that threatened the nation and he listed them in *The*

¹ From 22nd January 1901 to 6th May 1910. His successor would be George V.

² See Simon Nowell-Smith. Ed. *Edwardian England 1910-1914*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

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Speaker. He insisted on the disaffection in Ireland, the corruption of those who governed the State, as well as the influence of the press and plutocrats.

The choice of the setting of the house, King's Land, on the Surrey / Sussex border, as the family home, turned out to be a landmark in the emotional state of Hilaire Belloc, as well as constituting the establishment of his spiritual place. Recalling Rainer Rilke's much-repeated saying, you could also attest that childhood was Belloc's real home.³ The countryside around Shipley was a physical area he considered his own. When he was a young boy, he spent time in Shipley strolling around the property he would later call King's Land. Choosing the spot was not arbitrary or sheer coincidence; there was intentionality in taking King's Land as his permanent residence until his death. The place assumed an important role in Belloc's feelings. There were economical and practical reasons obviously, but, symbolically, and more importantly, Shipley is characterised by associations with Roman culture, as the hamlet is located on the ancient Roman road, Stane Street.⁴ As Belloc himself writes,

The foundation of England is a Roman foundation, as is, indeed, the foundation of all West. Once beyond that fringe of ancient city-states which bordered all the Mediterranean, and whose origins are older than known history, (...) the civilisation of (...) Britain as of the Netherlands, is a Roman thing; nor is it possible to prove one institution or one inherited handling of material things to have descended to us from the outer barbarism.⁵

The Bellocs lived in the midst of a self-satisfied society, affluent in general in a period of peace and plenty as many have considered these the main features of the Edwardian period. When on 19th February 1908, Belloc, as an MP, warned the House

³ Rainer Maria Rilke liked to state that childhood is our real homeland. He insisted on this thought, especially in *Letters to a Young Poet* (1934). King's Land is in Shipley, a village situated seven miles to the south of Horsham, West Sussex. The place was not just another geographical spot in the restless Belloc's life, since it would become not only his family residence, but also the spiritual place where he took refuge from any sorrow and lived out memorable moments.

⁴ "Stane" (or "stone") is hard flint stone used by the Romans in Britain to build roads. Stane Street ran from the Sussex south coast up to London Bridge.

⁵ See Hilaire Belloc. *The Stane Street* (1913): 3.

of Commons of the secrecy under which political funds were accumulated and administered, and argued that such stealth represented a peril to the privileges and character of the entire State, he was not listened to, largely because the Edwardian world felt secure in its worship of wealth. Consequently, it was not plausible to suggest that money was a moral danger. The rich lived in a world of complacency, and any suggestion of underlying social unrest was suffocated by the illusions of a society too prosperous. In contrast with this superficial atmosphere of well-being, the Bellocs were not rich at all. Eleanor was spending most of her time taking care of their small children, Louis and Elisabeth, while Hilaire was always on the move, lecturing, visiting historical sites in order to obtain background material for his historical books, and travelling around the country as part of the requirements of an MP.

* * *

As usual for the time, there were huge layers of society formed by the proletariat, the unemployed, and the poor. Jack London was twenty-four when he received a telegram from the American Press Association (APA) that asked him to travel to South Africa to describe post-war events. The Second Boer War 1899-1902 had just finished, and London was well-known for his experiences in the Klondike. Suddenly, the American Press Association (APA) cancelled the project but financed a new one on the city of London.

Jack London tried to write about the slums in London's East End, especially in the Whitechapel district. The outcome was *The People of the Abyss* (1903).⁶ Although the book may seem exaggerated, biased, or even invented, it contains a hair-raising portrait of the squalor of the poor in the London of 1902. Jack London's first-hand account of the destitute families and the miserable existence of beggars is confirmed by other witnesses who unveiled evidence of the poverty that permeated the society on a scale that is humiliating and scarcely believable for a present-day Englishman. Jack London's crudeness, which came from direct experience, caused his books to be

⁶ Jack London. *The People of the Abyss*. (London: Macmillan, 1903).

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rejected by the critics for years. Nevertheless, after the Second World War, scholars discovered the literary worth of his empirical observations and assessments.

In *The People of the Abyss*, Jack London informs of the people's jubilation on Edward VII's coronation in August 1901, an event that occurred at a time when abject poverty was widespread in English society. Jack London compared the homeless with the Inuit he had seen in Alaska. Moreover, he considered the Inuit, in spite of their experiencing starvation at times, to be free men who were not permanently weighed down with the burden of debt. For Jack London, the Inuit were strong, healthy, and happy in general. This contradiction, Jack London felt, lay in the government of the State, government mismanagement that forced half a million English citizens to have to scrape by as best they could in the metropolis of the prosperous British Empire. Sadly, the social inequalities and governmental iniquities that Jack London described with reference to London well over one hundred years ago, are still haunting the under-employed, the unemployed, and the evicted today in Catalonia.

At times Jack London's observations seem to resonate in close synchrony with opinions expressed by Hilaire Belloc in his book, particularly when it comes to the topic of struggling for the poor. Their perspectives are different though, as are the origins of their literary vocations. Jack London lived much of his youth as an outsider, spending time in prison for vagrancy. He had to endure the painful conditions of the unemployed and, as a result, became an aspiring reformer and active socialist. For his part, the youthful Hilaire Belloc thought he could begin a literary career without financial worries because he belonged to a well-to-do family, that is, up until he learned that his mother's fortune had been lost due to unwise investments. He was a keen observer of social injustice, although his conversations with Cardinal Manning⁷ were the real awakening of his outstanding role as a social reformer and nonconformist attitude to the social policies of the ruling class.

⁷ Henry Edward Manning (1808-1892) was a remarkable figure in Hilaire Belloc's life. Hilaire's mother, Bessie Belloc, once visited Cardinal Manning whom she had known even before he became a Roman Catholic. Hilaire Belloc met Cardinal Manning on several occasions soon after he left the Oratory. Later in life, Hilaire Belloc recalled Manning's thought on social and theological issues (Speaight 1957: 31).

Social unrest remained more or less pent up until 1908 when the working class stubbornly asked for the share of political prominence it deserved. Yet, in August 1889, London dockworkers revolted against the harsh conditions of their work and a strike followed. After three weeks of negotiation with the management and the strikers' representatives, Cardinal Manning succeeded finally in reaching an agreement between the antagonists to halt the dispute. Owing to his tactful intervention, Cardinal Manning came to occupy a position of prestige in public opinion.⁸

In his book *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain*,⁹ Henry Pelling reflects the contention of contemporary historians that the convergence of the violence of the militant suffragettes, the Irish conflict over Home Rule, and the unprecedented labour unrest that prevailed in Edwardian society marked the difference with the relative order and stability of the Victorian era. Pelling argues that,

[...] a consensus among historians of the Edwardian age drew a contrast between the essentially stable, liberal society of the late Victorian years, when discussion, compromise, and orderly behaviour were the norm, and an Edwardian society in which tacit conventions governing the conduct of those involved in social and political movements began to be rejected – by Pankhurst feminists, Ulster Unionists, and trades union militants. (Church 1987: 841)

Meanwhile, the upper classes were more concerned with entertainment than with business affairs, and this whole scenario produced the impression that the Edwardian world was a time of snobbery and materialism.

For her part, Elodie Belloc saw it differently; she grasped the contrast between the materialistic society that surrounded her family and the values that underlay their lives:

⁸ Shane Leslie. *Henry Edward Manning: His Life and Labours*. (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1921).

⁹ Henry Pelling. *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain*. (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

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It is almost impossible for anyone to whom God has not given it to suffer, to know what it is for two militant and convinced Catholics to live in our world in England.¹⁰

The departure point of one's political convictions is relevant to one's analysis of subsequent events, since everyone is continuously changing according to events that influence him or her. Hilaire Belloc was a French Republican, and his wife, Elodie, was an American Democrat. Because of his temperament, Hilaire Belloc's loyalties changed very little during his lifetime; as for Elodie, she devoted her life to taking care of the children and was too exhausted or too ill to have time to revise her former ideas. Nevertheless, the Bellocs' political preferences did not hamper their getting on well with the English upper classes to which most of Belloc's friends belonged. Elodie, too, was wholly accepted by Belloc's acquaintances and was entertained by them on many occasions. Although in private the Bellocs mocked the titles of English aristocracy and the landed gentry, Elodie enjoyed being surrounded by the natural beauty of the woods and fields that was usually associated with this social class. In a letter to her husband in 1901, she writes,

The wood was like part of heaven. And how the birds sang and a tribe of cuckoos called and checked the world. You are quite right, dear heart, as soon as God will let us we must have a patch of earth somewhere near a wood.¹¹

On the other hand, being overtly conscious of their origins, neither one of the couple liked to imitate the lives of the landed gentry. Elodie was a humble person who was afraid of somebody thinking that she belonged to the upper class, whereas Belloc was too proud of his family to pretend to be a snob.

¹⁰ Elodie's letter to Father Russell, dated 4th June 1907.

¹¹ Elodie's letter to Hilaire. Summer 1901.

Hilaire Belloc, the biographer

During this period, Belloc gave full reign to his Republican feelings in the form of three biographies, *Danton* (1899), *Robespierre* (1901), and *Marie Antoinette* (1909). Belloc felt attracted to Danton's personality and behaviour, as he saw many of his personal features reflected in Danton's trends. Danton (1759-1794) had been an outstanding lawyer and powerful orator and, in the end, a moderate who strove to reconcile the Jacobins with the Girondins. As a member of the Executive Provisional Council and at the same time of the Insurrectional Commune, Danton was the true head of government in France. He prevented the government from leaving Paris in the wake of the Prussian invasion, and he sent a group of commissioners to the provinces to maintain patriotic fervour. Danton succeeded in dominating the first Committee of Public Safety, although increasingly, around 1793, he began to lose power to the militant Robespierre. Believing the revolution had definitely won, he was unable to stop the Reign of Terror, was accused of treason – a very ethereal concept in times of revolution, since it was a crime vaguely applied to losers – and executed by the Jacobins. His course of action was contradictory; what for some people was the personification of revolutionary patriotism, for others was nothing but the peculiar demeanour of an opportunistic and corrupt politician.

On writing the books dealing directly with the French Revolution and the biographies of its remarkable figures, Belloc made clear his republican credentials. He was in favour of 'the republic' because of his personal conviction that *the public thing* – to take into account the etymological roots of the word – should be crystal clear as well as free of any speck of corruption; as a result, he firmly believed in and mythologized the ideals of the Revolution of 1789. Consequently, a Republican from head to toe, Belloc loathed what he thought was the British system of keeping government policies secret, a crude set of concealed alliances between those in office and their counterparts in opposition or, what is worse, the tyranny of a permanently influential plutocracy. Strange as it may seem, the passing of the years did not cause Belloc's republican beliefs to wither away. At precisely the highest point of the Edwardian complacency,

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Belloc wrote with thinly veiled suspicion about the impending perils that threatened Britain:

When the old king [Edward VII] died and was buried, it seemed as if the crowd perceived the extreme peril and doubtful chances of the future... At any of these pageants men go about saying that something has ended for many because one man has died. That is not true: but it is true that in fifteen years things have changed appallingly.

Those who care most for things most easily understandable note that the wealth of the nation is failing in contrast to its rivals. Those who care most for the things least evident have most hope, but they base that hope upon very distant and intangible things: that a province of Europe does not perish (...) The nation will live, but the road by which it has chosen to continue its life will not continue.¹²

The Edwardian age was not as politically splendidous as the Victorian era had been, and the perception of its apparently amusing atmosphere for the rich was the shallow surface of deeper realities. Belloc's keen eye noticed that the so-called Empire was not to last forever, at least in the same form as before. British maritime superpower was still to last some years, but it began to decline because of other rival nations appearing over the horizon. The First World War (1914-1918) changed many things in British colonial status. Some years before this impending change, Belloc had written the above-quoted sentence "the wealth of the nation is failing in contrast to its rivals." Modern historians analysing the Edwardian period maintain that the British felt increasingly threatened by emerging powers that were about to snatch their supremacy. The most important rival powers were Germany, Russia, and the United States of America.¹³

Belloc's *Robespierre* (1901) was quite a contrast to his *Danton* (1899). Being a very different sort of person and his conception of the revolution something more

¹² Letter to George Wyndham, dated 29th May 1910.

¹³ Lawrence James. *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1994).

diehard than Danton's, Robespierre was treated by Belloc as the revolutionary who was carried away by his own intolerance. Robespierre was the fanatic idealist who was elected as a representative of the third state to the States General in 1789, and who rose to become leader of the radical Jacobins in the National Convention in 1793. He liquidated the moderate Girondists, and helped to establish the Reign of Terror. Robespierre actually hoped to set up "the reign of virtue" by ridding France of all its internal enemies. Eventually, the National Convention, afraid of his increasing power, rose against him. Robespierre was arrested, summarily tried, and guillotined in 1794. The readers of *Danton* (1899) soon realised the similarities between the character of the French revolutionaries, as did Belloc himself, and much more so when Belloc projected his own temperament onto the biography he wrote of Danton, in particular as pertains to his concern about reality and practical matters. The image of Robespierre was described as that of a man whose puritan and idealistic obsessions had driven him to his dogmatic mania:

He stood, a pale exception, a man all conviction and emptiness, too passionless to change, too itinerant to be an artist, too sincere and tenacious to enliven folly with dramatic art, or to save it by flashes of its relation to wisdom. Where so many loved and hated men and visions till their great souls turned them into soldiers, he knew nothing but his Truth and was untroubled. (*Robespierre* 1901: opening chapter)

When Belloc came to write *Marie Antoinette* (1909), he was already completely disillusioned with parliamentary democracies and had set aside his political ambitions for good. Belloc considered that the French Revolution had summarized the whole system of renewal of a withered-up society. He admitted the revolution could have been wrong insofar as it led to too much bloodletting on some occasions due to the hubris of the mob leaders who considered themselves tough avengers responsible for setting the society to rights. Belloc felt that Europe ought to walk towards a system of true democracy in the sense that MPs should genuinely represent the feelings of their

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constituents. He believed that they should not concern themselves simply with secret party policies that had been subsequently concealed from the electorate. Such party policies, Belloc contended, were often cooked up in baffling Cabinet meetings, with the consent of the Government Ministers, or were, alternatively, by-products of political compromise with the so-called Opposition Party members, who agreed on nearly everything proposed by the Government, in spite of their pretence to criticise and control Government policy. Belloc lamented the fact that, in reality, the Opposition party *en bloc* was in cahoots with those in office in order to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the *status quo*. On mulling over the effects and consequences of the French Revolution, Belloc followed Jules Michelet's observations and Lord Acton's general considerations on democracy.

On the whole, Jules Michelet's approach to Revolution was enthusiastic, as he described its turmoil as a principle of order, exactly the opposite of those who considered the Revolution the spark of chaos and bloodthirsty anarchy.¹⁴ Although he had a wide knowledge of classical antiquity, he desired that the lower classes also be aware of the treasure it contains. Belloc had read Michelet's account of the Revolution, and he was familiar with his point-of-view as Michelet formed part of Belloc's much-loved home at La Celle St Cloud.¹⁵ Both Belloc and Michelet emphasized the power of will, and they considered that, if it is the case that the upper classes 'had the culture,' then the mass of the common people had more vitality and humanitarian warmth. Moreover, Michelet considered France to be the first nation to govern itself.

Together with Jules Michelet's ideas, reminiscences of Lord Acton's thought lingered on in Belloc's writing.¹⁶ Acton seriously criticised nationalism and the corruption inherent to power politics. He thought power was the evil consequence of political action, so dividing the size of the government was the necessary step to lessen its influence. Acton considered power came, also, from plutocracy that was another

¹⁴ Jules Michelet. *Histoire de la Révolution française*. (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1847-1853).

¹⁵ Jules Michelet (1798-1874) paid regular visits to the place in the lifetime of Belloc's grandfather.

¹⁶ Lord Acton (1834-1902) was a fervent Roman Catholic. Consequently, he was not allowed to attend Cambridge University because of his religion, although, in 1895, he was appointed Regius Professor of Modern History at the same university.

form of authority. He was in favour of a loose federation of small self-governing states. His ideal of the multinational state was nearer to the classic conception of Christendom than to the praxis of the French Revolution. Like Lord Acton, Belloc also thought the direct expression of the people's will was only possible in small communities.

The restrained passionate passages in *Danton* (1899) reveal a young man's feelings as a firm believer in the ideals of the revolutionary period. Throughout the biography, readers can trace Belloc's enthusiastic praise for the momentous 'earthquake' that brought about definitive changes in French history. When you compare the introductory chapter of *Danton* (1899) with the book Belloc wrote twelve years later – *The French Revolution* (1911) – you cannot avoid being struck by the completely different outlook expressed in the latter. The reasons for this change in attitude lies in the embittering effect of Belloc's later, harsh, political experience which makes him write frankly and concisely on the realistic effects of the French movement. In short, former revolutionary heroes had faded away, although the religiously orthodox Belloc continues to write about the Revolution with the mind-set of a religiously liberal and progressive author.

Those who considered Hilaire Belloc to be a man who always defended the Roman Catholic side were surprised at his sympathy with French revolutionaries, as if Belloc, had he been true to his faith, should logically have backed the *Ancien Régime*. However, Belloc thought that the Church in France had abandoned its expected mission, and that the Revolution was an unavoidable event, indispensable for restoring a system of justice and setting up a new order in which the wider political community could attain the sovereignty that comes from the rule of law, from society itself, and not from its rulers. Belloc claimed that the correct development of a community lies in its permanent institutions rather than on successive majorities.

A French republican criticising British corruption

On the whole, Belloc's outlook on France was positive as he avoided writing on the harsh aftermath of cruel repression that the French Revolution caused on ordinary

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citizens and Catholic Church members.¹⁷ France has a conception of laity that is different from other countries. For example, Spain has a long tradition of interference by the Church in political issues that extends throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In France, on the other hand, the strict *French Act* of 1905 gives complete freedom to believe in any religious credo, to be an indifferent agnostic, or to be a declared atheist.¹⁸ Consequently, in France blasphemy is not a crime, since the French State does not care about its citizens' beliefs, and openly proclaims freedom of expression even if such a right implies uttering remarks that church-goers could consider offensive and against their beliefs. On the contrary, in the United States of America, Evangelical churches and other religious and business lobbies keep their influence on legislation.¹⁹

Belloc was obsessed with the dishonest practice of those who hypocritically criticised the government, but who were the policy-makers for the continuation of the established system, much in accordance with the diffuse but subversive political theory. In his novel *Il Gattopardo* (1958), Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa subtly included a similar observation. This apparently harmless novel tells the story of the decadence of Sicilian rural nobility in the critical period of Italian unification. The novel is influenced by the English Victorian novel and by Stendhal's psychological analysis, but it is also a summary of political thought. Tancredi, an orphan in the novel, tells his stoic uncle Fabrizio, Prince of Salina, of the paradigmatic statement that underlies politics. It reads: "if we want everything to remain the same, we need everything to change." Lampedusa's well-known maxim condensed the recurrent political praxis that many changes are only apparent, just illusions of something that really does not exist, as the clique in power has many resources to maintain the *status quo*. Revolutions seem to

¹⁷ Belloc shunned any controversial issue about widespread revolutionary terror, illegal executions of ordinary citizens (not only of aristocrats), and the persecution of the Catholic Church in general, especially of those priests who had not sworn the 1790 Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Tortured and drowned people in The Vendée (1793-1796), where tens of thousands of civilians were massacred by Republican armies, and similar occurrences of bloodshed, were admitted to by Belloc, but he considered the Revolution essential to put an end to the previous corrupt, old-fashioned regime.

¹⁸ Émile Combes' government passed the Act (9th December 1905) that declared the complete separation between church and state.

¹⁹ The Jewish lobby guarantees that USA policy on Israel does not change.

produce sudden changes, but once bloodshed and destruction finishes the remaining dominant classes, those individuals who have not been physically eliminated during the turmoil, little by little, manage to secure their social position and successfully adapt to the new situation.

Although French and British history differed greatly with regard to revolution, the perpetuation of plutocracy within the British system was a fact that enraged Belloc to the limit. The sale of public honours was the source of the Party Funds, whereas Belloc contemplated it as another step towards the complete corruption of the system, particularly in the House of Lords, an institution that Belloc continuously tried to abolish. This idea was championed only by a minority, and it had no real entity, as was proven in the Constitutional Crisis of H.H. Asquith's government.²⁰ Belloc abhorred the secrecy under which political funds were accumulated and administered in the House of Commons. It was a subtle practice by which to reach compromise through money and, in this way, some small changes could allow the system to go on unchanged at its essential core.

Politics

Hilaire Belloc was well-suited for politics, and he considered entering parliament to propagate his reformist goals. In the first place, he was a brilliant man with remarkable oratory skills who had not found his place in other fields. Secondly, he was a restless citizen anxious to change the shortcomings of the political system. In addition to this, he could not bear hidden manoeuvres in political practice and he felt he was able to unveil corruption.

His coming to politics was not by chance, as he first attempted to read for the Bar. Consequently, in 1893 he was coached by Arthur Malcolm Latter, an outstanding scholar at Balliol and an expert in legal practice. In due time, Belloc sat for the exam but, after having a look at the papers, he went away. Abandoning law could have been a hasty decision since he had the urgent need to earn money to support his growing family because writing and lecturing were not enough to make ends meet.

²⁰ The *1911 Parliament Act* reduced the Lords' veto power.

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The real representation of ordinary citizens in Parliament had been a long-sought-after, popular wish all through the first years of the nineteenth century, but no important reforms had been implemented up until 1832. The United Kingdom had an archaic system that separated completely the monarchy from the parliamentary system. William IV, who was King of the United Kingdom from 1830 until his death in 1837, was a traditionalist who inherited a kingdom that excluded ordinary citizens from suffrage. When seventy-four years later, the radical Belloc entered the House of Commons, his convictions were in this very direction, namely, bringing real political decision-making to the man in the street.

William IV was the penultimate king of Hannover dynasty and was crowned in 1831 when he was sixty-six. He and the Prime Minister, the Duke of Wellington, were incapable of overcoming the disastrous consequences of the North-American Revolution in 1776, the French Revolution of 1789, and the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). In addition to this, the French insurrection of July 1830 overthrew Charles X of France and replaced him with Louis Philippe I. All these events amounted to a warning about the urgent need for political reform in the United Kingdom.

At that time, the House of Commons had 654 Members of Parliament (MPs), two seats for each constituency. Some constituencies had been important in the past but were left nearly deserted in the nineteenth century. Suffrage included only those men with real property, so wealthy landowners were the only voters. In 1832, Charles Grey, 2nd Earl Grey, a Whig, won the General Election against all odds. Grey had previously succeeded in making William IV sign the Reform Act 1832. Grey was Whig premier after sixty years of Tory power, except for a brief period in 1806-1807.

The Reform Act abolished deserted constituencies and eliminated some privileges of the ruling class. A part of the emergent middle class was allowed to vote, although the electorate only increased from 6% to 9%. Universal suffrage came in 1928. After this reform, the British were many light years ahead of the Spanish Constitution of 1812. The United Kingdom made its own revolution, the Industrial Revolution, that transformed a rural, static society into an urban, dynamic one. The importance of the

Reform Act 1832 lies in the breaches it opened in the impregnable fortress of mighty ruling class.

While Belloc attempted to find his place in society, Arthur James Balfour, 1st Earl of Balfour's Conservative government was in office. Balfour had been elected MP in 1874 and had been Chief Secretary for Ireland (1887-1891). He managed to pacify the island thanks to a mix of hard repression and wide social reforms. Balfour became the leader of Conservative party and, in 1902, succeeded his uncle, Lord Salisbury, as premier. Balfour's government was very active since it completely reformed public education with the 1902 Education Act, encouraged military power, and renewed the military alliance with Japan in 1904 at the acme of Russian-Japanese crisis. Yet free trade was the element that caused unrest in the Conservative party. Balfour, influenced by Joseph Chamberlain, associated the Conservative Party with imperial protectionism and consequently lost the 1906 General Election.

Balfour actually resigned in December 1905. Henry Campbell-Bannerman formed a Liberal government and dissolved Parliament. It was Belloc's turn to enter politics. In 1904, Winston Churchill had 'crossed the floor' from the Conservatives to the Liberals.²¹ At the General Election of 1906, polling day was the 13th January. At the polls, Belloc presented himself as the Liberal Party candidate for South Salford, a constituency in Greater Manchester, obtaining a majority of 852. In the same General Election, Winston Churchill, also a Liberal Party candidate at this time, defeated William Joynson-Hicks in the Manchester Northwest constituency.²² During the campaign, Belloc used to go and listen to Churchill's speeches. When he heard him say that "men would forgive a man anything but bad prose,"²³ he knew that Churchill represented something more than just a politician.

²¹ Winston Churchill 'crossed the floor' twice. First elected to the House of Commons as a Conservative Member of Parliament in 1900, he joined the Liberals in 1904, and then 'crossed the floor' back to the Conservatives in 1924.

²² Winston Churchill was elected Member of Parliament for Oldham in October 1900. Later, Churchill was Member of Parliament for Manchester Northwest (1906-08), Dundee (1908-22), and Woodford (1924-64). Hilaire Belloc was Member of Parliament for South Salford from 1906 to 1910.

²³ Quoted by Robert Speaight (Speaight 1957: 207).

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Churchill's personality and Belloc's had some similarities. Churchill was politician, essayist, war reporter, painter, and Belloc was all that too. Churchill was continuously short of money. For example, he spent triple his salary as an MP on cases of wine, and he paid his country-house mortgage with the advances on his salary that publishers supplied. Belloc, too, lived on wine and had to write non-stop to buy and keep up King's Land. Young Churchill participated in the Cuban War of Independence as an observer, travelled to India and The Sudan, described the two Boer Wars as a very-well-paid reporter and, eventually, decided to begin his political career. He had the gift of the written and the spoken word, and won the Second World War (1939-1945) for the Allies to a certain extent thanks to his ability to transform politics into an argument and language that moved his countrymen.²⁴ As for Hilaire Belloc, he was against United Kingdom government policy during the Second Boer War (1899-1902) and generally enjoyed writing on military history. For example, he was a regular contributor to *Land and Water*, the magazine that informed about the First World War (1914-1918). Both men differed in their political views. However, while both Churchill and Belloc were Liberal Members of Parliament of neighbouring constituencies for several years, Belloc abandoned active politics in 1910.

Belloc was a regular contributor to writings about the First World War (1914-1918) because he was a keen observer of troop movements and military strategy. He generally gave lectures on military history whenever asked. He also visited Spain during the Spanish Civil War and spoke with General Francisco Franco, whom he liked because he considered him one of the few 'brave men' to stand up to the internationalisation of Communism. In many ways, Belloc had an old-fashioned view of military conflicts, overtly romantic and far removed from the squalor soldiers had to endure. All wars produce many useless civilian casualties, frequently termed, euphemistically, 'collateral damage.'²⁵ Warfare also caused Belloc to pay a heavy toll:

²⁴ Churchill is best remembered for his defying Nazism and his contribution to the victory of the Allies in the Second World War (1939-1945). For this, he is considered the saviour of freedom and democracy in the West, although his trajectory is more complex and, for some, controversial.

²⁵ Any war produces many civilian casualties in spite of jingoistic official propaganda. For example, in the Second World War (1939-1945), the allied bombardment of Caen caused 20,000 civilian deaths in

Louis, his eldest son, together with many of his friends, died in the First World War, and his third child, Peter, died in the Second World War.

During Belloc's political activity, nearly half the Liberals in the new House of Commons (1906-1909) belonged to Nonconformist congregations, and, throughout that period, they kept up a close relationship with teetotallers. Belloc was not concerned about teetotalism, something he considered a piece of eccentrically-strict morality, and he took the issue with a pinch of salt. He confessed that he usually went to bed at night after drinking a pint or two of beer, although he supposed teetotallers would not consider his habit offensive since there were only eight of them in his constituency.

Nevertheless, Belloc showed a lot of inconsistency in his political activity and ended up abandoning his future possibilities of a political career, as he realised the truth about politicians and got bored with it all. During his second term as a Member of Parliament, he became increasingly tired physically and annoyed politically. Being a Member of The House of Commons at the beginning of the twentieth century was not the same as it is nowadays because, in the Edwardian period, Members of Parliament did not receive a salary.²⁶ The situation continued in this way until 1911, by the time Belloc had already abandoned politics. Many Members of Parliament in the Edwardian years were idle rich gentlemen, bankers, or astute lawyers expecting promotion prospects.

Ceaseless travelling, attending long parliamentary sessions in which principles were muddled and blurred due to debate, Second Readings, voting along Party lines, and evasive manoeuvring that are part and parcel of any political activity were factors that did not fit a man of firm, unchangeable principles who was doggedly inflexible on the whole. Parliamentary activities required persistence, and Belloc was not the type of man who was suited to go on discussing subjects endlessly. He lacked elasticity and the

retaliation for German cruelty with allied paratroopers after the assault in the Normandy landing in 1944. See Anthony Beevor. *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy*. (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

²⁶ After Baron Sewel's resignation (July 2015), his remuneration as Chairman of Committees was aired. He earned £120,000-a-year on top of £300-a-day as subsistence allowance as a Member of The House of Lords. Belloc did not have an outstanding post in the House of Commons; he was neither a peer nor a frontbencher. Notwithstanding, there is a vast difference between the affluent situation of professional politicians today and the lack of income for MPs in Edwardian times.

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ability to see how fast things could change in politics. Although he seriously criticised the corruption of the system, he really wanted to be inside the world of power and belong to it. No matter that he sometimes pretended he did not, he did have strong, deeply-held political ambitions.

On occasions, he got annoyed and he said so straightforwardly, but those were moments when he was in low spirits due to his permanent disgust with government policies. In the event, Belloc's character and public behaviour may be perceived as 'peculiar.' Sometimes he liked to impersonate the histrionic stage actor or enraged comedian in his public addresses and, in general, he could not adapt himself to the parliamentary dialectics that working successfully as a Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom required. However, he could not avoid being in the middle of it all, part of the English Establishment, but once in, he wanted to tell them they were doing it all wrong. Such an attitude caused weariness and perplexity amongst his Party colleagues and other Members of Parliament who had to deal with him on a daily basis. He wanted to be an Independent Member and was all-too-aware of the impossibility of being elected a third time on a Liberal ticket, as he openly declaimed on many occasions. A man of sound convictions as he was, his ideas on a fairer society were very rarely put into practice.

Freelance journalist

Hilaire Belloc liked the high-life, even if he was careless with money handling. Although he had to face the hardships of raising a family and keeping a large house and land property, he did not hesitate to be obsequious with friends in the form of expensive gifts of delicious meals that were offered to his acquaintances. In the middle of 1917, Belloc had a small capital for the first time. This was the result of his writing articles for *Land and Water*, the magazine about the First World War. He tried to do the same as the rich did, and thought of investing some money in Russian bonds in spite of being informed of the serious risk for its profitability owing to the uncertain Russian political

circumstances. By the end of the year, Belloc had lost everything since the Russian revolution in November 1917²⁷ made Belloc pay a heavy toll.

Consequently, he was quite poor in those years and remained so nearly all his lifespan. He hungered for a regular salary that never came, and those who knew him could attest that much of his bitterness came from poverty. He could not bear any superior head above; he was not persistent enough in his projects and usually said he was only writing for money even though everybody guessed he was speaking tongue-in-cheek. Belloc usually complained about doing only hackwork, and he enjoyed the mortifying repetition of this statement. The present-day concept of job satisfaction was totally unknown to him, as he never found that supposed self-fulfilment in employment that modern psychologists suggest as suitable treatment to bear any sort of dull job and its inherent tedious existence.

The difficulties of peaceful coexistence with his editors and publishers led Belloc to rough arguments with his bosses. It is usually impossible to change one's character and social behaviour since many supposed gurus (the so-called personal coaches) of current psychological training (health coaching) conceal or simply make up their failures or half-successes by means of rhetorical rigmroles that their clients accept half-heartedly as the unavoidable aftermath of the *treatments* they have willingly undergone. Belloc's character was completely antagonistic to any serious attempt to change his perception of reality and social demeanour because of his inner conviction that he was right.

After long periods of economic uncertainty, Belloc reached the possibility of a steady job as Literary Editor of *The Morning Post*, and he remained with the paper for five years. However, he abandoned this prospect of establishing his journalistic career in the autumn of 1910. The paper's editor, Sir Fabian Ware, was fed up with Hilaire's way of dealing with his superiors and the deficient work on the Literary Page to which he had been appointed. Belloc went to the office very rarely and did nothing to keep his section going because he was occupied with other matters that interested him much

²⁷ October 1917, according to the Julian calendar.

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more, for example, sailing his boat,²⁸ and writing his own books. He did not want to depend on others. To make matters worse, Ware complained that what Belloc wrote was always against the rich. The clash was unavoidable, and Belloc stubbornly rejected Ware's proposal of becoming a weekly columnist. Both men felt enraged and took the whole matter as a personal offence. On one occasion, Ware wrote to Belloc this shocking short letter:

Dear Belloc,

I owe you an apology for the way I shouted at you this afternoon; but please don't, on your rare and unexpected visits to the office (about which I shall say more on another occasion), stand in my door and wag a finger at me when I am engaged on private and difficult business.

Yours,

FW²⁹

Keeping a steady job implies many renunciations to personal opinions as well as accepting suggestions from team members. Sincere dialogue and understanding other people's arguments were not his strong points. Belloc did not like working within a fixed timetable or adjusting his tasks to compulsory deadlines. This independent attitude and strong character made it virtually impossible for him to have any steady job in journalism or publishing.

Apart from the idiosyncrasies of his character, Belloc could not work in a team because of his high sense of personal independence. Working together with other people was difficult for him because he had a very high self-esteem. This facet of his character revealed itself distinctly when he considered his rejection as a fellow from All Souls'

²⁸ Hilaire Belloc loved the sea, and found relaxation and dialogue with friends on board the "Nona," his beloved, second-hand sailing boat. She was a sturdy nine-ton cutter, more than thirty feet long. Her hull was approximately six feet. She was built around 1870 (the year Belloc was born) at Bembridge on the Isle of Wight. In Edwardian years yachting was popular among the wealthy, whereas soccer belonged to the working class. Although Belloc's intention was not to mark social exclusivity, he had good taste indeed. He used the "Nona" for leisure, not for racing.

²⁹ Fabian Ware's letter to Hilaire Belloc, dated 23rd March 1909.

thoroughly unfair. That event branded a painful scar in his soul, and he remembered it bitterly even when he was very old and ill. What is more, he interpreted each and every dialectical battle with his intellectual and religious adversaries, with Dr George Gordon Coulton, for example, as his own victory since he liked to attack and counterattack right up to his enemy's exhaustion and shameful flight from the battlefield. Sometimes, there was no such victory as some arguments ended in a tie, and nobody won. Belloc did enjoy debate and relished it as a hawk flying and looping-the-loop over his prey. Yet he could not lead a team and did not like to do so.³⁰

Charles Dickens influenced Belloc, or perhaps Belloc unconsciously reproduced some of the literary features that shaped Dickens' writings. Both authors linked their experience of squalor and of the lives of the poor with a sharp sense of what is comic and the art of caricature. Belloc also liked Dickens' taste for pathos, the warmth and tolerant spirit that are at the base of many of his novels – the criticism of injustice, wickedness, and stupidity that respect the moral code of the period without overstepping the limits of good taste. Both Dickens and Belloc insert whimsical and outlandish vignettes into their prose and, from time to time, create better-concocted plots and intriguing situations with satirical final touches. Sometimes money and greediness are the reason for unhappiness, as in Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854) and the characters of Hilda Maple in Belloc's *The Haunted House* (1927) and Verecundia in *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929). Both authors attack the *laissez faire* attitude that was the prominent feature of economic liberalism and the customary attitude in successive governments.

As a consequence of the publication of *The Path to Rome* (1902), Belloc became increasingly well-known and appreciated in his time, although in certain respects many readers considered him a bit of an eccentric. The book definitely made Belloc's name as it supplied the vital personality of a new author. The fluent description and chatty

³⁰ Belloc was not interested in leadership, as defined by Simon Sinek. Although Belloc enjoyed being with friends, he did not have the specific empathy and other qualities Sinek describes as being distinctive of leaders. Belloc was a lonely wayfarer, too independent to spend his time on paying attention to the possible dangers threatening the soldiers in his platoon. See Simon Sinek. *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't*. (London: Portfolio, 2014).

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passages enlivened the tired Edwardian world. It also brought back the flair of Europe into English letters.

A conscious lover of walking till exhaustion, Belloc used his enormous energy to think while walking. For this reason, some of his books deal with long outings, and others contain the scent of this physical activity. As the travel-writer he was, *The Path to Rome* (1902) and *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911) were conceived as the outcome of long walks and their resultant thoughts.

We tend to associate the act of thinking with some static position such as the pose of the thinker in “The Gates of Hell” (“*La Porte de l’Enfer*”) by the sculptor Auguste Rodin. Rodin condensed in his statue the commonplace image that comes to mind when we evoke the act of thinking. Frédéric Gros maintained that it is better to move to think. Montaigne stated that his mind did not work if his legs did not walk. Beethoven composed symphonies just walking through the woods near Vienna. Nietzsche loved to stroll in the Alps and enthusiastically defended walk-generated thoughts as he considered that German philosophy smelled of beer and hearths, meaning that it came from thinkers who were housebound. Kant, Rousseau, and Thoreau affirmed that they thought better walking than sitting in an armchair. Steve Jobs was well-known for his *walking meetings*, or rather the meetings he held while walking.

A report from Marily Oppezzo and Daniel Schwartz, researchers at Stanford University, explains that you usually think better, in a creative way, when you are moving. They realised that people that answered complex questions requiring creativity showed more creativity and imagination while walking. Both researchers believe that movement stimulates creativity, although movement is not so productive when it comes to answering a particular question. Findings are not waiting for us where we are looking for them, but frequently they appear in a context of some disorganization and when we cross data that apparently have nothing to do with one another.³¹ In his essay “Walking Tours” (1876), Robert Louis Stevenson explained how walking helps you to think creatively because it ousts immediate worries from your mind. When we are walking we

³¹ Marily Oppezzo, and Daniel L. Schwartz. “Give Your Ideas Some Legs: The Positive Effect of Walking on Creative Thinking.” *Journal of Experimental Psychology*. American Psychological Association. Stanford University, 2014. 40. 4. 1142-1152.

usually digress – we think about this and that in a similar way children do. This is an attitude of active mental relaxation that fosters creative thought.

Sweet France

Belloc's chauvinistic feelings are striking to most readers. The high opinion he had of France in nearly every aspect is astonishing, particularly of French supposedly fervent Catholicism too.

In 1943, the singer Charles Trénet composed and rendered his well-known song *Douce France*. Its chorus lyrics could also be applied to the high esteem Belloc professed to his mother-country, or rather the polished version of his homeland, the neat and gleaming France that had existed in his memory since childhood:

Douce France

Cher pays de mon enfance

Bercée de tendre insouciance

Je t'ai gardée dans mon coeur!³²

Trénet's song was released precisely during the German occupation of France (1940-1944, and the controversial period of the Vichy collaborationist regime (1942-1944). No matter these circumstances, French people have enjoyed this mellow song, full of nostalgic overtones, through generations.

Belloc did not only love his childhood recollections of 'sweet' France, its landscape, food, popular- or young recruits'-songs, and anything related to his father's and his own dear homeland, but also the Roman Catholic faith that, in his opinion, has shaped the country. Although it is certain that, during the first third of the twentieth century, French Catholicism produced outstanding thinkers, Belloc's opinion does not match the reality of a very secular European country where Catholicism was looked at with indifference since *laïcité* was most intense. During these years, roughly from 1890

³² *Douce France*. (Paris: Éditions Salabert, 1943). [Lyrics: Charles Trénet; Music: Charles Trénet and Léo Chauillac]

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until 1950, the French church was able to read the signs of the times,³³ and was outstanding because of the renewing spirit that was characteristic of educated churchgoers, Progressive theologians, and an important sector of the episcopate.

Converts abounded, as well as intellectuals and artists, who gave prestige to the universal Church, for example, Charles Péguy, and Jacques and Raïssa Maritain whose life's testimony as converts deeply influenced many intellectuals in Spain. Other examples are Paul Claudel, Max Jacob, Léon Bloy, and Russian-French painter Marc Chagall. In Catalonia, in the 1920s, the poet Josep Maria Junoy, who was very concerned with the avant-garde movement, converted to Catholicism.³⁴ After the Spanish Civil War, Joan Sales, who came from orthodox Communism, wrote about his conversion in *Incerta Glòria* (1956). French Catholicism influenced Junoy and Sales.

Belloc's contemporaries were fully aware of his biased high opinion of French prestige in every field. Max Beerbohm sympathetically made some remarks on Belloc peculiarities. Both men knew each other, and Belloc's novels partially had the satirical flair Beerbohm used when writing his own. On one occasion, Beerbohm was told that Belloc had been seen at a cricket match. Beerbohm commented ironically that he supposed Belloc would have said that the only good wicket-keeper in the history of the game was a Frenchman and a Roman Catholic. Belloc shared gladly and celebrated Beerbohm's witty sentences and literary ability.³⁵

Francophile Belloc showed his early tendency in lectures and writings in which he hated Prussian culture, its militarism, and other aspects that he included in the concept of barbarism. He considered the land of his father and the religion of his mother

³³ This expression means the underlying message that is apparently concealed in the mood of an epoch, but that seriously influences all human activity and can be adequately interpreted in terms of faith. For example, nowadays the term *dialogue* is widely accepted in every field of human activity. The Church also states that *dialogue with the modern world* is one of the signs of the times and the Second Vatican Council encourages Catholics to put it into practice, as the Catholic Church must be alert to distinguish what is central and immutable in the Gospel message and what can and should be adapted to present-day, open minded sensitivity.

³⁴ Junoy was aesthetically influenced by *Action Française*.

³⁵ Max Beerbohm's school publications already demonstrated his inbred talent for caricature and satire, always with a faultless prose style that concentrated in many books, for example, in the satirical novel *Zuleika Dobson: or An Oxford Love Story* (1911). In a series of speeches on Christmas themes, he parodied Belloc's style and other sixteen contemporaries.' These discourses formed *A Christmas Garland* (1912).

the most sublime aspects of all that he tried to defend. During the Franco-Prussian War, in 1871, Germans vandalised and smashed everything his family considered sacred – the building, furniture, documents, and portraits in his home at La Celle-Saint-Cloud. Belloc never assimilated such destruction and built his own theory about Prussian evil.

At the beginning, many friends were amused by Belloc's bias for French culture, but when the First World War broke out, Belloc's thought became more earnest and based on historical arguments that, characteristically, were filtered through his own ideology:

Comprehend the mood of the French, contrast and oppose it to that of the Germans, and you will have viewed almost entirely the spiritual theatre of this gigantic struggle. (...) This war was in some almost final fashion, and upon a scale quite unprecedented, the returning once again of those conflicting spirits which had been seen over the multitudes in the dust of the Rhône Valley when Marius came up from Italy and met the chaos in the North. (...) when the Roman auxiliaries of the decline pushed out into the Germanies to set back the frontiers of barbarism. It was the clash between strong continuity, multiple energies, a lucid possession of the real world, a creative proportion in all things (...) and the unstable, quickly growing, quickly dissolving outer mass which continually learns its lesson from the civilised man, and yet can never perfectly learn that lesson; which sees itself in visions and has dreams of itself.³⁶

Belloc's distaste for Germans has parallels in Wilfred Trotter's research on their lupine aggressiveness. Trotter studied the human need to belong to a group.³⁷ He thought that individuals are gregarious by inheritance, although the manner in which their gregarious reactions are manifested are not inherited, since they depend on "the form current in the

³⁶ See *A General Sketch of the European War: The First Phase*. (1915): 370-372.

³⁷ There are many examples of such a trend in everyday life. Many Catalans like to belong to a football club (particularly if such a club fosters nationalist feelings), to have their membership of a social and leisure club, to attend festive gatherings (*aplec, penya*), and the like. In general, they are happy in any group which receives and integrates them, as they need to express a sense of belonging to a group.

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herd to which they belong.”³⁸ This manner is handed down from generation to generation. Trotter published his *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* (1917)³⁹ at a very crucial moment, because the First World War supplied enough ground for the analysis of hidden aspects of human behaviour which became apparent in that terrible confrontation. Belloc’s “Prussian barbarians” and Trotter’s “northern barbarians” are coincident concepts:

The aggressive type was illustrated very fully by the peoples who profited by the disintegration of Roman Empire. These northern barbarians showed in the most perfect form the lupine type of society in action. (...) The lupine type of society has not proved capable of prolonged survival. (...) The history of the world has shown a gradual elimination of the lupine type.

(...)

The incomprehensibility to the English of the whole trend of German feeling and expression suggests that there is some deeply rooted instinctive conflict of attitude between them. One may risk the speculation that this conflict is between socialized gregariousness and aggressive gregariousness. (Trotter 1917: 168, 174)

Trotter declared that he was trying to pursue a type of biological analysis in his approach to instincts of the herd.⁴⁰ He considered the English were more socially peaceful than the lupine, predator Germans:

In studying the mind of England in the spirit of the biological psychologist, it is necessary to keep in mind the society of the bee, just as in studying the German mind it was necessary to keep in mind the society of the wolf. (...) (Trotter 1917: 203)

³⁸ Trotter 1917: 197.

³⁹ Wilfred Trotter. *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917).

⁴⁰ Trotter 1917: 205.

The susceptibility of the individual German to a harsh and even brutally enforced discipline is well known. The common soldier submits to be beaten by his sergeant and is the better soldier for it. (...) Finally, the head of the State, combining the most drastic methods of the sergeant, the professor, and the official, wins not merely a slavish respect, but a veritable apotheosis. (...) While Germany is the very type of a perfected aggressive herd, England is perhaps the most complete example of a socialized herd. (...) Germany has modelled her soul upon the wolf's and has rushed through the possibilities of her archetype in fifty feverish years of development. (...) (Trotter 1917: 201)

[English] society is irregular, disorganized, inco-ordinate, split into classes at war with one another, weighted at one end with poverty, squalor, ignorance, and disease, weighted at the other end by ignorance, prejudice, and corpulent self-satisfaction. (...) There can be no doubt at all that the ordinary consciousness or the vast majority of citizens of this country [England] was intensely averse from the idea of war. (...) If we are correct in our analogy of the bee and the wolf, England has one great moral advantage over Germany, namely, that there is in the structure of her society no inherent obstacle to perfect unity among people. (...) Her system of social segregation is not necessarily a rigid one. (...) The flock, the herd, the pack, the swarm, new creatures all, flourished and ranged the world. Their power depended on the capacity for intercommunication amongst their members. (Trotter 1917: 202, 205, 207, 212)

From 1871 onwards, the German Empire proceeded to destroy the existent European balance between Great Britain and France. In the Reign of Prussia, Bismarck, with talent and no scruples, snatched the Duchy of Schleswig from Denmark in 1864, ousted the Habsburg from the German Federation in 1866, and conquered Alsace and part of Loraine from France in 1870. These three wars provoked fear and mistrust in the new Germany. Bismarck reconciled with Austria by giving diplomatic support in the Balkans, pacified the Russians creating the League of the Three Emperors – Germany, Austria, and Russia – and encouraged French colonialism in Africa and South East

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Asia. When William II was proclaimed emperor, the appeasement policy stopped, and Bismarck was dismissed.

During the nineteenth century, balance reigned in Europe, and Great Britain reigned outside Europe. Bismarck inserted the unified and powerful German Empire in Europe. As a consequence, his successors achieved the situation whereby balance reigned outside Europe, and Germany reigned in Europe. This was one of the reasons for the outbreak of the First World War. Twenty-one years later, this was also one reason for the Second World War.

After the Second World War, Konrad Adenauer did his best to smother swirling German passions and to transform his country into a reliable nation by trying to reduce and eliminate German passion for extremism and its inclination to what is romantic with political overtones, the longing for an empire. In this way, the German Federal Republic became a founding-member of the European Economic Community (EEC), and the European Community remained under effective French-German collegiate direction until the fall of the Soviet Union (USSR) and subsequent German reunification. Since then, decision-making power has moved inexorably to Germany, with a bigger population and richer than France. Europe has become German, and Germany as an economic power has begun to make decisions. Germany looks towards the East: it goes southwards down the Danube and, northwards, it projects itself through Poland towards Russia, the country with which Germany has a love-hate relationship.

Napoleon Idealised

The fact that Belloc excelled in prose writing does not subtract from his tendency to enhance any French aspect and despise other nations' beauty or objective traits. This is clearly apparent when he colloquially writes to Elodie, limiting his comments to everything he sees and the way he sees it, openly testifying to his historical and ethnical

prejudices, on the occasion of the journey he undertook to obtain material for a series of articles on Napoleonic battlefields that *Pall Mall Gazette* had commissioned in 1912.⁴¹ Evan Charteris accompanied him on this journey, and they crossed the English Channel to stop at Calais for the night. They visited the battlefield at Laffeldt in the Netherlands and went on to Maastricht and Frankfurt. In Berlin, his former school friend Charles Somers-Cocks joined him, and they arrived in Warsaw. Eventually Belloc reached Moscow and, from the train, glimpsed the battlefield of Borodino. Belloc's shrewd perception of geographic features provided a sound base on which to include in his book drawings of the troops' arrangement on the Bridge of Borisov, between the Berezina River and the Dnieper River.⁴² He included sketches in other books, for example, a drawing of the French attack on Adams' Brigade and Maitland's Brigade.⁴³ Belloc associated Napoleon's actions with the ideals of the Revolution:

In this chapter, it will be my business to describe the last episode of that catastrophe in which the effort of the French Revolution turned. It is called in history "The Beresina." (*The Campaign of 1812, and The Retreat from Moscow* 1925: 241)

Many details from this journey underscore Belloc's preferences, and confirm his prejudices as he usually saw what he wanted to see. His character and disposition made him confirm his previous ideas about people and places. He did not like anything of what he visited, or simply passed through because he judged cities and monuments on first sight. Moscow, in his opinion, had a few ugly churches and an uglier palace. The truth is that he only stayed in the city less than six hours. At Borodino, he spoke with a colonel about the battle, and realised everybody admired Napoleon's military skill. Bearing in mind the hurried way in which he moved during his journey, the

⁴¹ Hilaire Belloc. *Waterloo*. (London: Stephen Swift and Co, 1912). Belloc wrote two other books about the Napoleonic era years later: *The Campaign of 1812, and the Retreat from Moscow* (London: Nelson, 1925), and *Napoleon* (London: Cassell, 1932).

⁴² See *The Campaign of 1812, and The Retreat from Moscow*. (London: Nelson, 1925): 256.

⁴³ See *Waterloo* (1912): 203.

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conversation with the Russian officer was probably a brief encounter that lasted only ten minutes.

Once more, Belloc projected his feelings as he himself revered Napoleon in the usual way many French patriots did at the time and even nowadays. Belloc includes the next quotation as the last lines of the book about the campaign of 1812. He uses inverted commas at the beginning and at the end but does not provide the source of this quotation. For this reason, we do not know if the lines are really a quotation or just one of his thoughts in such a form:

“Some envied him, some praised, a few blamed. But the greater part said that he would return, bringing with him an invincible host as was his wont, and re-establish the three colours.” (*The Campaign of 1812, and The Retreat from Moscow* 1925: 270)

Back from Borodino, the opinions Belloc gives about Salzburg and Switzerland are derogatory, and he is happy to be back, finally, in his lovely France:

I must say Switzerland is the nearest thing to moral hell the rich have yet erected. It amazes me that anyone who can avoid it should go there. I rushed through with great speed and am now here. What a heaven is the Republic after that outer Barbarism from Moscow to the Rhine.⁴⁴

Belloc admired Napoleon not only for his military ability, but also as a historical character. Belloc did his research with his characteristic mixture of historical flair to set the spots of Napoleonic battles and a tendency towards the romantic epic underlying historical facts.

We know everything about Napoleon – how he lived, his illnesses, and his character. He had grey eyes, was 1.70 metres tall, was very nervous, and had many tics. He pulled his sleeve constantly, hit his boot with his riding whip, and made faces. He

⁴⁴ Letter to Elodie, 6th September 1912.

smiled little and was not usually in good mood. He had fits of rage and broke everything, including his pocket-watch and hat. His camera assistant told such details.

Napoleon was good at nearly everything; he was a military and civil genius. Yet he could neither dance nor could he speak English, and his family life was not satisfactory. He was a moderniser, but also an imperialist who was to blame for the deaths of one million French people in a country of twenty-eight million at the time. Napoleon established the Napoleonic Code in several countries that lived practically in a feudal regime. However, he restored slavery that had been abolished by the Convention on 4th February 1794 and was responsible for the slaughter in Santo Domingo and Guadeloupe, a fact that is usually concealed.

Many French people think Napoleon embodies France in the same way as do Joan of Arc and Charles de Gaulle. Some French rejected his negative aspects. For example, Pierre Larousse, editor of the well-known dictionary, described Bonaparte as “a French general born in 1769 in Ajaccio (Corsica) and dead in Saint-Cloud on 18th Brumaire 1799.” Larousse omitted any other detail, describing Napoleon simply as a general who disappeared from the encyclopaedia when he became a dictator.

According to those in favour of Napoleon, the history was quite different since he built France and the English did not allow him to do so. Napoleon signed the Peace of Amiens in 1802, but the English started hostilities. He defended himself and broadened his empire. In 1815, when he returned for the Hundred Days, it was not his intention to go to war, but the English attacked him, and he defended himself. Those in favour of Napoleon admit that there was something that caused a general reaction against him. He created new kingdoms and dynasties and installed his family-members in them.

* * *

Belloc read modern history at Balliol College, Oxford, so he was a qualified historian thanks to his university education and character. He was very interested in military history and stood out when describing the geographical places in which the most important battles took place. He could observe landscape details that justified military plans, and some of his remarks on this issue were unique.

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He shared most of his countrymen's enthusiasm for Napoleon, not only as a capable political organizer, but particularly in his military skill. After Belloc's service time in the French artillery and his many readings on military history, he developed a kind of military loyalty; he liked to close ranks around anything related to French honour. Belloc considered Napoleon to be the keystone of French prestige throughout the nineteenth century, the century during which Belloc was born. Belloc's admiration for Napoleon's military prowess was an inbuilt trait of his temperament.

He liked to observe French military manoeuvres, and he was invited by officers to do so on several occasions. He was also acquainted with some French and British generals, and he visited the French line in the First World War and in January 1940. Belloc knew every detail of Napoleon's military ability, and he was concerned with his feats. For this reason, Belloc was commissioned to write on Napoleonic battles. He did so by emphasizing Napoleon's military technique, the innovative aspects that made him an outstanding strategist. The next three paragraphs contain Belloc's summary of Napoleon's rare ability.

At twenty-four, in 1793, Napoleon was artillery commander in the Siege of Toulon. He used a strategy based on the emplacement of batteries to create fire superiority before the assault on the different forts that protected the city which was eventually evacuated by the Anglo-Spanish fleet. Napoleon's determination, work capacity, and coldness under fire transformed him into a hero of the siege, so the Convention appointed him brigadier general. Napoleon used artillery in battle systematically and took advantage of French technological advances in armament. He used artillery as a mobile force to support infantry. In campaigns in Italy, his men disassembled cannons to carry them to the tops of the mountains to achieve increased range.

Napoleon's military expertise was based on his ability to move huge armies across Europe, and his capacity to manoeuvre and occupy the best positions which allowed him to concentrate crucial superiority of forces. Sometimes he did not have the biggest army, but it was he who obtained the best efficiency from his men. The three basic principles of his military conception were power, security, and economy of forces.

He always had the initiative, the search for the decisive strategic goal without wasting energy on elaborate, distracting manoeuvres. He trusted his espionage information to discover the enemy's weak points, and craftily used the peculiar optical telegraph called "Chappe semaphore line," introduced in 1792. He frequently won battles because he knew the enemy's movements beforehand. Napoleon gave great importance to the information of the secret service that was active on the front line and in the rear-guard of the enemy. Napoleon masterly plotted tricks, as in Austerlitz, in 1805, where he deliberately weakened his right flank to attract the enemy to it and, in this way, force him to clear the centre. Once cleared, Napoleon ordered a charge on Pratzen Heights, cutting down the Russian and the Austrian armies by half. This was a very well-set trap, and the Austrian-Russian army fell headlong into it.

He was able to move huge armies never seen before. During the French invasion of Russia, he had 691,500 soldiers, although not all of them were French as there were also allies. He reordered the composition of his army, paying attention to the specialization of different squads. He divided his troops into several army corps and marched them in converging lines that allowed him to gather them very fast to attack an adversary while still dispersed. He went straight to the objective, disregarding his enemy's strategy, and attacked the enemy's lines of communication so that their retreat became transformed into a disaster. He then used the cavalry to rout the enemy in disbandment. Napoleon used to say that, after fighting sixty battles, he did not learn anything new that he already knew before. He was a brilliant strategist who absorbed the essential military knowledge of his time and applied it successfully. Not only was he an innovator, but he cleverly applied conventional tactics as well. He was an aggressive general who deserved the loyalty of highly-motivated soldiers. In the Arc de Triomphe, in Paris, there are the names of some battles that Napoleon lost, although their names are extolled as if he had won them: Bailén, Borodino (that both Russian and French consider a victory), and Eylau, the terrible battle which the French considered they had won, but its result was strategically uncertain.

Belloc would be surprised to realise the practical religious sense of Napoleon. Some chroniclers said Napoleon never lost his faith, whereas others added he used faith

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just as a tamer of popular-class vices, in the sense that religion indirectly helped to maintain law and order. Belloc would not have liked the latter, since such Napoleonic concept implied the scarce or non-existent value of Catholic dogmas, because religion would be just the peace-keeping instrument of the rich to calm the rage of the mob.

As in many historical studies, present-day scholars could amend Belloc's findings or complete his explanations with new evidence.⁴⁵ For example, Waterloo is a battle incredibly well studied and documented. Dominique Bosquet states that written sources are based on the different authors' points-of-view, partial and incomplete. Archaeology is the means to objectify an historical event.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ The Battle of Waterloo can be analysed in terms of climate conditions and the influence of remote volcanic eruptions on the bad weather that surrounded Napoleon's defeat. On the night of 17th to 18th June 1815, Napoleon and his army bivouacked in the hope that the new day would bring another sun of Austerlitz and a victory that would allow him to win time to sit on his throne that was becoming more and more unstable. The seventh coalition against Napoleon was ready to stop his pretensions.

Ray Bradbury explained in his marvellous tale *A Sound of Thunder* the unforeseeable consequences that events happening on the other side of the planet can have. The eruption of the Indonesian volcano Tambora on 5th April 1815 on the island of Sumbawa, 12,000kms from Paris, was eight times more powerful than the one that destroyed Pompeii in 79AD. Tambora is still active at present. Novelist Edward G. Bulwer-Lytton, in *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), tells that utter devastation extended for up to 18kms around, and that ashes arrived in Syria and Egypt. Tambora provoked a tidal wave and a sharp decrease in temperature all over the world. The column of smoke was 44kms high, and the mountain that had previously been 4,300 metres high lost 1,500 metres in hours. The ash cloud darkened the sky 600kms around. Next year was a year without summer, with famines and epidemics because of poor harvests.

Historian Andrew Roberts believes that the long seventeenth century ended precisely at 21 hours on the 18th June 1815 when the Duke of Wellington and Marshal Blücher shook hands at the farm La Belle Alliance, between the Belgian villages of Plancenoit and Mont-Saint-Jean. Anglo-Prussian alliance and armies from other countries, including Spain with General Álava, had won.

British hispanist Geoffrey Parker, in *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophy in the Seventeenth Century* (2013), believes that the history of humanity is also the history of climate. Belgian historian Bernard Coppens, in *Les mensonges de Waterloo* (2009), believes that painful climate conditions were decisive in the battle, and that the disastrous conditions of the Tambora eruption had fatal consequences for the climate and crops for several years. Heavy rains, humidity, mud, and frozen wind from the east affected the troops, much more so the French who were exhausted after uninterrupted war since 1789. Chateaubriand said Napoleon had transformed France into a country of orphans and widows. Soldiers slept out in the open and went to battle completely soaked. Many lost their boots in the mud, carriages got stuck, artillerymen noticed shells embedded in the mud and did not bounce. In normal conditions, shells could do so ten or eleven times to open holes in enemy lines, something that was essential for the strategy in those years as soldiers were arranged in tight rectangular blocks very similar to chess pieces.

Napoleon, in his exile in Saint Helena in 1817, told how minimum events usually have the most serious consequences, and that the storm influenced the battle at Waterloo much more than people thought.

⁴⁶ Dominique Bosquet is a member of the service of archaeology from Wallonia, and Belgian liaison in the project. *La Vanguardia*, 14th June 2015.

Archaeological excavations try to reverse history and see what is under the soil, says Mark Evans, coordinator of “Waterloo Uncovered.”⁴⁷ Prospections sponsored with donations began in April 2015, in Hougoumont farm, the scene of the first combats on 19th June 1815. It was situated on the right of the defensive line of the allied army led by Wellington. Hougoumont was a key position that had to resist. What was planned as a distracting manoeuvre to force Wellington to send more troops to the farm was transformed into a battle within the battle that exhausted the French.

Many French believed that Napoleon’s strategy was perfect, and failure came because after the victorious battle of Ligny on the 16th June 1815, one of the emperor’s generals, contravening his orders, did not grip and destroy the Prussians under Marshal Blücher who, two days later, came to help the Duke of Wellington and defeat the French at Waterloo.

Napoleon was never in Waterloo. The battle was fought mainly in Brain L’Alleud and Plancenoit, south of Waterloo. The French called Waterloo “The Battle of Mont Saint Jean” for a very long time. In Germany, Waterloo was called “The Battle of La Belle Alliance” since this was the name of the farm where Wellington and Blücher came together after the battle. In the end, Waterloo, the most equivocal denomination, was imposed by the English. Wellington slept in Waterloo the night after the battle and there he wrote the war dispatch informing London of the allied victory.

In Waterloo, the coalition fought to eliminate Napoleon’s imperialist longing for ever, while the French fought to spread the good news of the Enlightenment throughout Europe. The confrontation between the British and their allies’ economic power and the French ideological reason was favourable to the former. Up until the First World War, the Battle of Waterloo was considered by the British the inflection point in world history that opened a period of peace and prosperity. The United Kingdom imposed its economic supremacy.

The battle took place after twenty-six years during which Napoleon had made war continuously for his expansionist ambition. If Napoleon had won at Waterloo –

⁴⁷ “Waterloo Uncovered” is a registered UK charity that is carrying out an archaeology project centered on the Battle of Waterloo (1815).

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many historians recognise it could have happened – Europe would speak French at present.

* * *

We may sum up, then, and say that the political effect of the Battle of Waterloo and its campaign was an immediate success for the Allies: that their ultimate success the history of the nineteenth century has reversed; but that the victory of Waterloo modified, retarded, and perhaps distorted in a permanent fashion the establishment of those conceptions of society and government which the Revolution, and Napoleon as its soldier, had set out to establish.⁴⁸ Yet Belloc believes that the innovative French political ideas triumphed in the long run, despite the setback at Waterloo.

Historical reconstruction of events and battles inspires volunteers from France and all Europe. The Battle of Waterloo and other great Napoleonic battles like Austerlitz (near Brno in the Czech Republic) and Borodino (Russia) are represented every year, sometimes with audiences of more than one hundred thousand. In the re-enactment of the Battle of Waterloo on 19th and 20th June 2015, there were approximately two hundred thousand spectators. 5,000 soldiers, 300 horses, and 100 cannons were mobilised. In the real battle, more than 200,000 men fought, and there were 10,000 casualties and 30,000 injured in twenty-four hours. Two centuries after the Battle of Waterloo, the defeat continues to bring pain to the French. Paris only confirmed the presence of its ambassador to Belgium in the commemorative acts of 18th June 2015, while there were top-rank representatives in the victorious field.⁴⁹

Belloc described the disaster in these words that straightforwardly present the French army's panic in disbandment. The moon is the dumb witness of the defeat:

Squares of the Old Guard, standing firm but isolated in the flood of panic,
checked the pursuit only as islands check a torrent. The pursuit still held. All the
world knows the story of the challenge shouted to these veterans, and of

⁴⁸ See Hilaire Belloc. *Waterloo* (1912): 16.

⁴⁹ In 2015, 39% of the British between 18 and 24 years associates the word 'Waterloo' with a victory over the Napoleonic army; 54% associate the name 'Waterloo' with the London railway station.

Cambronne's disputed reply just before the musket ball broke his face and he fell for dead. Lobau also, as I have said, held his troops together. But the flood of the Prussian advance, perpetually increasingly, carried Plancenoit; the rear ranks of the Six Army Corps, thrust into the great river of fugitives that was now pouring southward in panic down the Brussels road, were swept away by it and were lost; and at last, as darkness fell, the first ranks also were mixed into the mass of panic, and the Imperial army had ceased to exist.

There was a moon that night; and hour after hour the Prussian cavalry, to whom the task had been entrusted, followed, sabring, pressing, urging the rout. Mile after mile, past the field of Quatre Bras itself, where the corpses, stripped by the peasantry, still lay stark after those two days, the rush of the breakdown ran. Exhaustion had weakened the pursuers before fear had given way to fatigue with the pursued; and when the remnants of Napoleon's army were past the Sambre again, not 30,000 disjointed, unorganised, dispersed, and broken men had survived the disaster. (*Waterloo* 1912: 206)

Current historical novels shape known data into fiction that reveal Napoleon's real tendency towards mystery and esotericism. He was not only the outstanding military genius and patriot, as Belloc thought, since Napoleon also had his apparently non-rational ways to find the truth.⁵⁰

An expert in military history, Belloc published his *Napoleon* in 1932. Nevertheless, Belloc was so unhappy with the book that he did not accept its translation into French. He usually obtained first-hand evidence from geographical spots where Napoleonic battles were fought, as he travelled tirelessly to Borodino and other destinations, with the exceptions of Eylau and Friedland. Belloc thought Napoleon had the far-reaching policy to struggle for the unity of Europe, the genius to try to build the Napoleonic Empire that could cover the whole of Europe, a concept that many European emperors dreamt of when they had glimpsed, since the Middle Ages, the

⁵⁰ Javier Sierra. *El secreto egipcio de Napoleón*. (Barcelona: Penguin Random House, 2008). The author fictionalises actual data: Napoleon spent the night of 12th-13th August 1799 inside the Great Pyramid of Cheops.

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possibility of restoring the Holy Roman Empire. Napoleon imitated Charlemagne even at his coronation ceremony, in 1804, with Pope Pius VII officiating.

All in all, Belloc was realistic enough to grasp the unavoidable significance of the ultimate defeat of Napoleon. Belloc entitled Chapter One of *Waterloo* (1912) “The Political Object and Effect of the Waterloo Campaign,”⁵¹ a chapter in which Belloc states clearly how impossible it was for Napoleon to reach complete lasting victory:

There is a side question attached to all this, with which I shall conclude, because it forms the best introduction to what is to follow: that question is – “Would Napoleon have ultimately succeeded even if he had triumphed instead of fallen upon the 18th of June 1815?” In other words, was Waterloo one of these battles the winning or losing of which by *either* side, meant a corresponding decisive result to that side? Had Wellington’s command broken at Waterloo before the arrival of Blücher, would Napoleon’s consequent victory have meant as much to *him* as his defeat actually meant to the allies?

The answer of history to this question is, No. Even had Napoleon won that day he would have lost in the long run. (*Waterloo* 1912: 16)⁵²

Belloc tried to present the interdependence of Napoleon’s personal traits with circumstances of the time and atmosphere. He described the man who tried to spread by force the liberating principles of the French Revolution throughout Europe and provoked a vigorous reaction of nationalist feeling. The man convinced of his mission as a “man of destiny” who aspired to join European nations together to form a superior unity that was beyond the sheer victory at war.

Home and family in Sussex

With a growing family, Belloc found that life in London was too expensive, and he returned to Sussex in 1902. The family stayed with Belloc’s mother at his childhood

⁵¹ See *Waterloo* (1912): 9-24.

⁵² Belloc’s italics.

home, The Grange, in Slindon, while he looked for a more permanent home. Choosing Sussex as the place to live was not an event at random, for there were emotional implications as well that were the outcome of Belloc's childhood and youth. While out cycling with Elodie in 1905, Belloc thought he had found a permanent home at King's Land, Shipley, near Horsham. The couple fell in love with the place, and a year later the family moved into the house which, together with a windmill and five acres of land, remained the family home for the rest of their lives.

Shipley Windmill, now more familiar to television viewers as the home of *Jonathan Creek*, was until recently a memorial to Belloc, maintained and operated by the Friends of Shipley Windmill. Sadly, in July 2009, it closed to the public, although it can still be seen from the adjacent footpath.

Before the move to Shipley, Belloc had begun work on his famous Sussex travelogue *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911) in which four imaginary characters, the Poet, the Sailor, Grizzlebeard, and the Author, each a reflection of himself, set out on a walking tour across Sussex. They start from the George at Robertsbridge, in East Sussex, where Belloc was a regular customer, and proceed across the county to South Harting on the Hampshire border. As they walk, talking and philosophising, they drink in the beauty of their beloved county, as well as drinking the local ales at the many pubs and inns they visit along the way.

At Shipley, Belloc settled down to writing even more prolifically. For Belloc, King's Land became a symbol of permanence and stability, love and friendship. Although he still travelled widely and spent time in London, he was always happy to be back home, walking the Downs or sailing off Littlehampton in his cutter, The "Nona," and entertaining friends. In *Sonnets and Verse* (1923), he included his Sussex poems "Ha'nacker Mill," "Lift Up Your Hearts in Gumber," "Duncton Hill," and "The South Country."

Belloc was a firm believer in the muse, the inspiration a writer gains from his ideals, his surroundings, and his experiences in life. He said the poet is the instrument used by an exterior agent to bring forth the true, the good, and the beautiful. Belloc's love for his adopted county strikes a chord in those who also wish to be "walking in the

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high woods,” or who “never get between the pines, but smell the Sussex air,” as he says in “The South Country.”

On the one hand, French life attracted Belloc. Not in vain was his father a French barrister of Basque origin.⁵³ He liked French traditional and revolutionary songs, French wine and tasty food, soldiers’ conversation in Toul garrison when he was in the artillery for his military service, the country’s landscape, and the people just as they were, or embellished with his idealistic metaphorical magnifying glass. He felt he could be at home in France, far from the “stench of Protestantism” as he put it in his characteristically abrupt manner.⁵⁴ According to him, France was heiress to the millenary Catholic European tradition and the brave country that was able to fight against heathen and barbarian Prussia. French culture left a lingering trace all through his writing.

On the other, Belloc decided to become a Sussex man, loving his rambling on the Downs, in agreeable talk with country folk, sailing the “Nona” across the English Channel, and deciding Shipley would be the suitable place for home. Belonging to Sussex was the fantasy which he believed in intensely, and he was convinced the county was his dearest homeland, the land of ale, forests, farms, and sailing ships. Consequently, Belloc considered himself genuinely English, with a sound knowledge of Sussex dialectal varieties, history, and rustic behaviour.

His love affair with Sussex began when he was eight, when the family moved to Slindon, near Arundel. They rented a cottage at first, then moved to a larger house, The Grange. Belloc grew to love the woods and the Downs around his home, a love that stayed with him to the end of his life, and that had a major influence on his life and writing. In all his later travels, he always longed to be back in “The South Country,” where he could see “along the sky the line of the Downs, So noble and so bare,” :

⁵³ See <www.consolation.org.uk>

⁵⁴ Belloc used the word “heresy” frequently since he was not concerned with others’ opinions on his tough turns of phrase. He was strict on people that attacked the Roman Catholic Church, although he was extremely polite and affectionate when dealing with them personally. To our present-day sensitivity and standards, Belloc’s attitude on heresy is reminiscent of Saint Irenaeus (130-202), bishop of Lyons, who had the nickname “hammer on heretics,” expressed as such in Spanish religion textbooks until 1960s, and later transformed into the softer “a smooth scourge of heresy.”

I will hold my house in the high wood
Within a walk of the sea
And the men that were boys when I was a boy
Shall sit and drink with me.⁵⁵

In his childhood, Belloc was a solitary boy only accompanied by the feminine members of his family. There were not any of those “boys when I was a boy” actually, so his literary fantasy about Sussex was packed with good friends with whom he enjoyed outings and relaxed conversation in the manner of *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911).

One day, the very young Belloc was walking alone across the glade of beeches beyond Slindon and he saw the sea at a distance. The adult Belloc kept fond recollections of that momentary, evanescent sensation, the first time he felt at home. He enjoyed nourishing the poetic fantasy that occasioned this verse:

If I ever become a rich man
Or if ever I grow to be old,
I will build a house with deep thatch
To shelter me from the cold,
And there shall the Sussex songs be sung
And the story of Sussex told.⁵⁶

Belloc wanted to be remembered for his verse. Lovers of Sussex will always associate him with the poems he wrote expressing his love for his adopted county. His verse extolling the joys of walking in the downland countryside led him to being known as the Sussex Poet Laureate.

⁵⁵ “The South Country” in *Sonnets and Verse*. (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1954).

⁵⁶ See Belloc’s essay “The Mowing of a Field” in *Hills and the Sea*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1906): 202.



Fig. 3. Back garden, King's Land, Shipley, near Horsham, West Sussex

The Sussex landscape appealed to Belloc's backbone in the same way as the Alps in *The Path to Rome* (1902) had rekindled an intense aesthetic pleasure and sacramental perception.⁵⁷ Arnold Lunn wrote that Belloc could do more than describe nature, as he could depict the exact impression of a southern sunrise, in particular.⁵⁸

No matter how evocative the Sussex landscape was, when it came to everyday family matters, the difficult daily routine of living together, Belloc was very commanding indeed, although he did not realise the consequences of his hard-natured demeanour. He could not avoid that some flashes of his personality were shocking for those who knew him. His relationship with his five children was not easy, and some of them became increasingly estranged. His character was fruit of the high self-esteem he unconsciously built since childhood and throughout his undergraduate years. At La Celle St Cloud, his mother and aunt believed that young Hilaire was more charming when more aggressive. At school, he was as brilliant as uneven. When he entered university, he was five years older than his peers and had a wider experience as a man of the world. His high self-esteem was also underlying the relishing debates he was leading with convincing and dialectical vehemence at Balliol. Being acclaimed president of the Oxford Union and gifted in rhetorical skills, Belloc felt confident that he could beat any serious opponent. Of course, he could not understand why he was rejected as a Fellow of All Souls' since he was convinced of his impending thorough success. He never accepted such failure, and he became bitter because of this, as he vividly recalled when he was very old.

Some of these features made him immensely attractive too, even after his bereavement due to Elodie's death. Although he went on outwardly bluff, sarcastic, and funny, such attitudes concealed his deep sorrow. Louis, his eldest child, died at the end of August 1918 while he was flying to bombard a German column of war supplies.

In spite of appearances, Belloc kept his inner sadness to himself, and he tried to show a normal temperament to his friends, but his face became more and more serious,

⁵⁷ Belloc used the term "sacramental" many times to refer to the transcendent significance of land. He considered aesthetic pleasure and poetic rapture essential steps to the knowledge of God and a kind of sacrament, or rather, a way of obtaining the grace of God, God's help.

⁵⁸ *The Tablet*. 29th July 1950.

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and he maintained some sad habits both in his perpetually dark suits and the mourning paper he always used for his letters. His grief was of a peculiarly guilt-ridden kind since, in Elodie's lifetime, he had neglected her while he was permanently on the move around London or on the continent. Despite taking care of his family members and supplying them with everything necessary for their material needs, Belloc did not spend much time talking to Elodie and accompanying her as she required. When she died, Hilaire kept his personal dereliction concealed in his suffering spirit. The noisy and talkative Belloc was conscious of his pessimistic side and inner distress, as he was terrified of emotional exposure and built a carapace of jollity:

He was a man of robust health and strong will who, when trapped into exposing his deeper feelings, regained his balance, as it were, before you had noticed what had happened. (...) I remember a man saying to him: "So your old friend Philip Kershaw is dead". He said "Yes," and was silent for a moment. Then he burst into song, and everyone joined in.⁵⁹

Such was Belloc's strength in moments of sorrow. He preferred to recover through Sussex poetic overtones:

The way in which our land and we mix up together and are part of the same thing sustained me, and led on the separate parts of my growing poem towards me; introducing them one by one; till at last I wrote down this further line:

One with our random fields we grow.
(...)
So, therefore, though myself be crosst
The shuddering of that dreadful day
When friend and fire and home are lost
And even children drawn away –

⁵⁹ J.B. Morton. *Hilaire Belloc, a Memoir*. (London: Hollis and Carter, 1955): 45.

The passer-by shall hear me still,
A boy that sings on Duncton Hill.

Full of these thoughts and greatly relieved by their metrical expression, I went, through the gathering darkness, southward across the Downs to my home. (*The Four Men: A Farrago* 1911: 160-161, 162)

Remembering Spain

Spain was the remote, peculiar country Belloc visited in 1905 for the first time and, on other occasions, most of them just walking on the slope trails and rough ways of that stony, near-barren southern country. He was interested in landscape, culture, and people. After such journeys, he usually offered a straightforward, coarse account of what he saw to his friends. Some parts of Spain were, and still are, semi-desert, similar to many African steppes for a person accustomed to the greener and softer prairies and woods of France and England.

The next letter may be shocking to present-day Spaniards, although it is very realistic about the decay of institutions, buildings, and communications in 1905 Spain. This text is also filtered through Belloc's peculiar ideas on France's marvellous spiritual essence. The reference to Napoleon's ability to wake up drowsy Spaniards is amusing:

The government and all public affairs of Spain are about what you might expect from negroes. They are really inexcusable for laziness and utter lack of discipline. It would astonish you to see this place. It is a pity Napoleon did not get there earlier and stay longer; he might have re-invigorated it as he did the valley of the Rhine. As it is, positively nothing is done. All the French roads stop dead at the Frontier and even the mule paths up the passes often cease to exist when one gets over on to this Southern side. All the clocks are stopped, all the windows broken and all doors off their hinges.

Catholicism (or mysticism in excess) has been made to blame for it and it might certainly have such effects, but as a fact it has nothing to do with it. The

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people are a good deal less Catholic than in France, the Church has more power, or rather it is less attacked politically, but the number of men who go to Mass is less than in France. I think a good deal more Catholicism would wake them up a little.⁶⁰

Today, nobody would dare write such politically incorrect reference to “negroes.” Many things have changed since Belloc wrote that letter, even accepting Belloc was not concerned at all with other people’s opinion, and this was one of the reasons he was rejected later in life by some social circles.

Thirty-one years later, foreign visitors to Spain were also annoyed at the country’s lackadaisical way of dealing with everyday matters:

All foreigners alike are appalled by their inefficiency, above all their maddening unpunctuality. The one Spanish word that no foreigner can avoid learning is *mañana* – “tomorrow” (literally, “the morning”). Whenever it is conceivable possible, the business of today is put off until *mañana*. (...) In Spain, nothing, from a meal to a battle, ever happens at the appointed time. (...) A train which is due to leave at eight will normally leave at any time between nine and ten, but perhaps once a week, thanks to some private whim of the engine-driver, it leaves at half past seven. Such things can be a little trying. In theory, I rather admire the Spaniards for not sharing our Northern time-neurosis; but unfortunately, I share it myself.⁶¹

Without any further reflection to ponder over his impressions of Spain, Belloc straightforwardly compared the Spanish character with the traits of other nations:

The Spaniards have in common with the English: Monarchy, Kindliness, Religious manias, Megalomanias, Self-regard, *Sporadic Art*, *Atrocious Cooking*,

⁶⁰ Letter to Miss Hamilton, 8th August 1905.

⁶¹ George Orwell. 1938. *Homage to Catalonia*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966): 16.

Sexual Decency (exaggerated), Bad Army; with the French: Splendid bodies, Sound sleep, Careful Agriculture, Vivacious accent (*not* gesture), Cruelty, Sudden False judgement, Filthy whitewash, no appreciable Aristocracy; with nobody else: One train a day from large towns; said train starting at 2 to 3 a.m. and going eight miles an hour; use of mules, hardly any roads; with Everybody Else: Electric Light, stupid newspapers, chemical beer, the Providence of God.⁶²

This is a striking spontaneous perceptual approach, the evident fruit of Belloc's first-hand observation. Other contemporary visitors to Spain observed slightly different things, for example, instead of "splendid bodies," Spanish tended to be "short legged" – Laurie Lee watching Spaniards from a train, and Spanish "atrocious cooking" was described by George Orwell as being very nourishing for injured soldiers once you got accustomed to olive oil. Belloc described things as he saw them; he was not concerned with checking the impartiality of his impressions, because he was just writing an informal a letter to his friend Maurice Baring.

Although Belloc recognized the Church was under attack in France, he went on admiring the very Catholic France – he believed that there were more church-goers in his beloved mother-country than in the not-so-Catholic Spain – a pious tendency he could have grasped only in his imagination since the real France was much more secular. Belloc bore in mind the title France had traditionally borne since the conversion of Clovis I – baptised between 496 and 499 A.D. – the first Frank king: "France the eldest daughter of the Church" or "France, the favourite daughter of the Church." In recent years, French president Jacques Chirac (1995-2007), when commenting on a visit by the Pope, added the traditional periphrasis "France, a country of old Christianity."

In 1907, Belloc crossed the Pyrenees on foot and walked to Madrid:

Yes, at last! Madrid! But at what cost! All the way burning deserts from the Pyrenees onwards and my Christ! What cooking! Never again! (...) But never again on foot across those brown Sahara plains and those formless, treeless hills.

⁶² Belloc's literal punctuation, italics, and capital letters. Letter to Maurice Baring, 27th September 1907.

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(...) The country has defeated me as it did Napoleon and sundry others. What an ugly country, a curious place, more like the moon than the earth.

I have had enough of Spain. I have crossed the Pyrenees by a difficult col [*sic*] that makes me sick to think of even now, so steep it was and so precipitous for one on foot and all alone. I have marched to Huesca, to Saragossa, to the hills of Teruel, to the hills of Cuenca and here.⁶³

Belloc decided not to return to Spain, but he failed to fulfil his promise. Mervyn Herbert was attached to the Embassy in Madrid in 1924, so Belloc motored across the Pyrenees with Mervyn and his wife in that same year, through Cerbère. Belloc was to come back to Spain again in 1939 during the concluding phase of the war and had a ten-minute interview with General Franco.

The reference to Spain as an ugly country, sometimes similar to the moon, is not shocking when one considers how arid and eroded some parts of Aragon and Castile are, precisely most of the areas he walked across on his route to Madrid. Not to mention the south-east part of Spain, for example, Almeria, that is very influenced by the scorching wind from the Sahara.

In Spanish literature, it is difficult to find an enhancing song to soften the landscape that inspires or soothes human existence in the manner of Wordsworth's poems, set in the Lake District, and other Romantic authors. The average Spanish peasant in central areas of the country considers the rural environment a hostile place to live in, too hot and dry in summer and very cold in winter. On top of this, abrupt storms or irregular rains contribute to increasing erosion. This is so everywhere except for the artificially-irrigated areas and the greener north where Atlantic humid winds influence the coast with more regular rains.

No matter how rough Belloc's opinion was on that far-away Spain, it could be very perceptive and objective too. Gerald Brenan, George Orwell, Laurie Lee, and many other foreign visitors sympathetically added their own comments on Spain's arid

⁶³ Letter to Maurice Baring, 27th September 1907. It was written from a café in the Puerta del Sol, Madrid.

landscapes, the Spaniards' inefficiency, and the people's peculiar character, a character that was redeemed by George Orwell in his *Homage to Catalonia* (1938):

There was no more to be said; it was time to part. Both of us bowed slightly. And then there happened a strange and moving thing. The little officer hesitated a moment, then stepped across, and shook hands with me.

I do not know if I can bring home to you how deeply that action touched me. It sounds a small thing, but it was not. (...) I record this, trivial though it may sound, because it is somehow typical of Spain – of the flashes of magnanimity that you get from Spaniards in the worst of circumstances. (...) They have, there is no doubt, a generosity, a species of nobility, that do not belong to the twentieth century.⁶⁴

When Spain was not yet the feverishly consumerist country it is today, foreign visitors were usually very welcome and friendly, accepted by the locals within that peculiar rural atmosphere, full of curiosity and generous approach, that has vanished for ever. The English historian Paul Preston recalls how...

When I came to Spain for the first time in the 1960s, Madrid still had those typical craftsmen streets with their peculiar smell, noise, and atmosphere. Later on, I arrived at the small town where I got accommodation. I was warmly welcomed by the villagers that came and saw “the Englishman” with curiosity. Just the opposite, at that time in France, people were suspicious of tourists. (...) Obviously, things have changed a lot through the years and, at present, when you enter a bookshop in Madrid, you can find the same books you could buy in London or New York.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ George Orwell. 1938. *Homage to Catalonia*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966): 212, 213.

⁶⁵ Miguel Angel Domínguez interviews Paul Preston on the radio programme “Cinco continentes.” Radio Exterior de España. 17th July 2015. [Transcription. My translation]

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Obviously, Spain has changed a lot over the last one hundred and ten years, since the days when Belloc walked doggedly across the country the first and second times (1905, 1907), but its culture continues to attract foreign scholars.⁶⁶

Belloc and Catalonia

Belloc, this impressive English writer with a Catalan surname,⁶⁷ was a strong, stout man, full of that characteristic mental and physical energy that sometimes allowed him to write during the whole night or walk untiringly for miles on end. From the time he was very young, he was eager to discover the world and felt that characteristic, unquenchable wanderlust that exhausted him, but that also supplied him with new materials for his writing. He travelled through France and was fully conversant with the Provence and other areas from the south. He walked through Rosselló, Capcir, the Alta Cerdanya (at present, in the French Department of Pyrénées-Orientales) and entered the Catalan part of this countryside through the town of Bourg-Madame. He described many aspects of the local culture that he distinctively called Catalan, particularly the language, daily timetable, cuisine, and customs. He crossed into the town of Puigcerdà and described the landscape of the Baridà (the sub-region around El Pont de Bar), all the way along the cart track that passes alongside the River Segre down to La Seu d'Urgell and Andorra.⁶⁸

He crossed the Pyrenees on several occasions and clearly saw the difference between Catalan people and Aragonese or Basque dwellers. Belloc immediately noticed the Catalans' mother tongue, since he had a good ear to appreciate any new language. On other occasions, he also visited the Val d'Aran (Aran Valley), Sobrarbe (in the

⁶⁶ English speaking scholars maintain widespread interest in Spanish cultural affairs and in its several languages, Basque, Catalan and Galician apart from Castilian. For example, Sharon G. Feldman, professor of Spanish and Catalan Studies at the University of Richmond, has recently published her studies on Àngel Guimerà's (the writer from Vendrell) *Terra Baixa* and *Maria Rosa*. The list would be endless and encompass the huge series of English speaking visitors to Spain, from cranky Romantic ramblers, Bible sellers, and International Brigade members in the Spanish Civil War, to twentieth and twenty-first century hispanist undergraduates and scholars.

⁶⁷ Apart from Bell-lloc d'Urgell, Bell-lloc del Pla (La Plana Alta) and its Valencian transcription as Benlloch, Belloc also exists as a commune in the French Department of Ariège. Bell-lloc is also a frequent surname in Catalonia and it can also be found in Aragon, Valencia, and other Spanish regions, either in Castilian transcription (Belloc) or in old-Catalan spelling (Belloch).

⁶⁸ See *The Pyrenees* (1909): 259-282.

region of Huesca) and he commented on the strong local wine, “that wine that comes from the inside of a goat-skin.”⁶⁹ Peter Gilbert Belloc, Hilaire Belloc and Elodie Hogan’s fifth and last child, had a job in Barcelona in the 1930s, where he worked for an electrical company.⁷⁰ Hilaire Belloc also visited Barcelona, Tarragona and even mentions he once entered Catalonia through the mountain pass La Bonaigua, which he transcribes as “Bonaigo.”⁷¹

* * *

Belloc’s visits to Spain were just anecdotal in the context of his large literary production. After settling down in King’s Land, writing his books about Napoleonic campaigns as well as his biographies of the French Revolution figures, working some time as a freelance journalist, and trying out his political skills as MP for South Salford, Belloc launched his invectives against the surrounding Edwardian England through his novels and essays to restate his ideological position in society. The following chapters develop Belloc’s concern with Roman Catholics’ role in England, pecuniary attitudes, his ironic view of political power implications, the iconic image of Edwardian men and women, and women’s increasing political and social empowerment. Shrewd Belloc glimpsed the consequences of impending changes which carried him to envisage the future. With the passing of years, the most sagacious observers have come to realise that, in retrospect, Belloc was correct in many areas.

⁶⁹ See *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911): 78. This reference is repeated on page 281.

⁷⁰ Wilson 2003: 277. The electrical company was very likely *Barcelona Traction, Light and Power Company, Limited*, popularly called “La Canadiense.”

⁷¹ Hilaire Belloc. “A Pedestrian in Spain.” *The Morning Post*. London, 11th August-8th September 1924. Also in: *The Living Age*, 1st November 1924. 267-276. <www.unz.org>



Fig. 4. Conversaion Piece. Belloc, Baring, and Chesterton.
Painting by Sir James Gunn

Chapter Two

A Square Peg in a Round Hole: The Social, Religious, and Economic Predicament of a Roman Catholic Man in Edwardian England

Belloc was a radical Roman Catholic republican – a strange combination of beliefs that were not so common in his days – because he did not fit the reactionary stereotype that some people considered appropriate for Roman Catholic thinkers. It is true that Pope Leo XIII had invited Roman Catholics to participate in the French Third Republic that began in 1875, a system of government ruled mainly by Masonic figures. The Pope considered that it was about time to put an end to the confrontation between the French Catholic Church and the Republic as he considered Roman Catholics should take part in the new institution.

By temperament and inclination, Belloc was Voltairean in the sense that he liked to defeat other's arguments by spotting their weakest points. Yet he did not accept easily what others argued against him because he considered the defence of the Roman Catholic Church his most important mission and, whenever he believed that a statement was true, he repeated it for years on end. Hilaire and Elodie stuck to their religion knowing full well that they formed part of a minority in late Victorian England, although Belloc thought that Roman Catholicism was a majority in the Continent in terms of the numbers of persons baptised in this Church. He maintained that being a Roman Catholic was a form of being universal. So his mission was to present Roman Catholicism to the English middle- and upper-classes in the sense that this religion kept a sense of social distinction and intellectual strength. Strange as it may seem, this was one of the main arguments Belloc used to talk to English audiences who could not conceal their snobbery.

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Pilgrimage to Rome

The Path to Rome (1902) is one of Hilaire Belloc's finest books from the Edwardian period. Both Belloc and the critics thought this was his greatest work. The book describes the physical and spiritual adventure of a young man who was marked by his faith. It is the story of Belloc's pilgrimage on foot from Toul (in north-eastern France) to Rome, singing all the way, to fulfil the vow he had made to "...see all Europe which the Christian faith has saved... ." Belloc just woke up and took off from the aforementioned French town, walked across the Alps, and walked down to the Eternal City. The book is the account of the hiking trail that Belloc trudged along from the 6th until the 29th of June 1901, the day he arrived in Rome. When he was in Rome, he visited the tomb of the Stuart kings of England. Belloc thought the Stuart dynasty¹ were the rightful monarchs of England.

¹ Hilaire Belloc wrote occasionally about the English monarchy, and three specific books on the Stuart dynasty: *James the Second* (1928), *Charles I, King of England* (1933), and *Charles II: The Last Rally* (1939).

The Stuart dynasty is the general name applied to the old Scottish family of the Stewart, that adopted the form Stuart from 1542 onwards. This was the dynasty of the kings of Scotland from 1371 to 1688. From 1603 (the Union of the Crowns) to 1688 they were also simultaneously kings of England, Scotland and Ireland, except a brief hiatus between 1649 and 1660, which covers the period from Oliver Cromwell's rule to the Restoration of the English monarchy.

Although Belloc considered the Stuart kings the authentic monarchs of England, not all of them were Catholic, strictly speaking. Here is a brief summary of the dates of their reigns and religious affiliations.

James I of England (James VI of Scotland) was the son of Mary Stuart and Henry Stuart (Lord Darnley), both Catholic. He reigned as King of Scotland from 1567 to 1625 and as King of England and Ireland from 1603-1625. He was allegedly an Anglican who partially tolerated Catholics, although for some time he sanctioned repressive measures against them after the Gunpowder Plot (1605).

Charles I was James I's son. He reigned as King of England, Scotland and Ireland from 1625-1649. He married a Roman Catholic, Henrietta Maria of France. Charles I, an Anglican king, emphasized the sacramental nature of the High Church. Precisely owing to this, Charles I's views were considered too Catholic by reformed groups. Charles I was executed in 1649 for political reasons during the English Civil War. Oliver Cromwell was one of the fifty-nine signatories of Charles I's death warrant.

Charles II was the second son of Charles I and Henrietta Maria of France. Charles II was actually the firstborn, as his previous brother died in childbirth. Charles II was King of Scotland for a brief period (1649-1651) and King of England, Scotland and Ireland from 1660 to 1685. He embraced Catholicism on his death-bed.

James II was the third son of Charles I and Henrietta Maria of France. James II was King of England, Scotland and Ireland from 1685 to 1688, the year he was ousted by the Glorious Revolution. James II was the last Catholic King of England, Scotland and Ireland. James II was succeeded by his eldest daughter, Mary II, and his son-in-law, William III (William of Orange), who were Protestant.

Incidentally, the Duke of Berwick, James Fitz-James (1670-1734), who was James II's illegitimate son, led the army of Philip, nephew of King Louis XIV of France, (Felipe V of Spain) against the Hapsburg and Catalan forces in the Spanish War of Succession.

Like Patrick Leigh Fermor,² Belloc decided to walk across Europe and cross the Alps. He started his journey in an adventurous way, carrying neither luggage, hiking equipment, nor even a knapsack. He walked along dressed simply in a suit, a tie, and city street shoes.

The Path to Rome was published in 1902, and this piece of work actually made Belloc's name overnight since it is a classic, the ultimate result of Belloc's far deeper personal experience and internal transformation than the sheer walking of the journey implied. The title does not mean anything related to converting to Roman Catholicism, but the journey young Belloc undertook and the adventures he relished with gusto include the intimate reassertion of his faith. The pages are dense with a *joie de vivre*, although the tone is not as profound as the older, wiser, and (on many occasions) the more scowling of Belloc's writing. It is certainly the case that the core of the book is rooted in his encounters with the people he meets along the way. At that time, Belloc was a French-English, turn-of-the nineteenth to twentieth century writer who contemplated his faith with enthusiasm and full of the vigour that only youth can provide.

His religious scope is optimistic and differs from his contemporary compatriot Georges Bernanos' earnest sad contemplation of Catholicism, and from Graham Greene's moral dilemmas.³ Whereas Bernanos (1888-1948) expressed his Christian

The Duke of Berwick's descendants are relevant protagonists in current Spanish social life. Cayetana Fitz-James Stuart, 18th Duchess of Alba, succeeded her father, Jacobo Fitz-James Stuart y Falcó, in his Spanish titles, one of those being Duquesa de Berwick. Her father was the 10th Duke of Berwick, and he died in September 1953. As Cayetana was his only child, she became the 11th Duchess of Berwick. She died in November 2014, and her eldest son, Carlos Fitz-James Stuart y Matínez de Irujo, inherited the Duchy of Berwick.

² Patrick Leigh Fermor (1915-2011) was a writer and historian, although he excelled as an elite operative behind the lines by working together with the Cretan resistance during the Second World War. His group of men successfully kidnapped German General Kreipe on 26th April 1944.

He was self-taught on several fields and could speak Greek and other languages too. Patrick Leigh Fermor enjoyed writing travelogues and was a keen observer of people and landscape, which makes him similar to Belloc. Above all, he was a courageous wayfarer who was capable of moving over long distances with a minimum kit. For example, in 1933, when Patrick Leigh Fermor was eighteen, he crossed Europe, walking from The Netherlands to Greece.

³ Georges Bernanos (1888-1948) took an active part as a soldier in the First World War, in which he was repeatedly injured. This was the conflagration about which Hilaire Belloc wrote critically through his military observations as a regular contributor to the magazine *Land and Water*. Bernanos was a convinced Catholic who had nostalgic monarchic sympathies, even though he lived in a republican country like

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convictions in a mystical way, with an admixture of romantic, religious extravagance,⁴ and while Greene (1904-1991) dealt with morally ambiguous, present-day issues,⁵ Belloc had no doubt whatsoever, as he displayed a sound rational⁶ faith that was devoid from any sensitive experience that could be remotely associated with mysticism. Belloc did not hesitate. He was convinced truth lay in Catholic doctrine.

Sometimes Belloc draws conclusions that concur with his own idealistic concept of French everlasting values, even though historical reality could easily contradict this positive prejudice. Secular and materialistic France did not (and does not) fit the description of the rural faith that he applied to the whole of the nation he very much loved and actually bettered through his usual tendency to resolve matters quickly. The following passage refers to a small Swiss commune that is very near the French border.⁷ Belloc subtly observes their pronunciation of Latin is influenced more by German than by French. The town being Undervelier, situated in a corner of Switzerland, the reader could presume that Belloc is referring to a country other than France, but the references to the strength of the villagers' Catholic faith are also applied to the French population

France. Bernanos' was a situation exactly the opposite of Hilaire Belloc's, a man of strong republican convictions, in spite of living in a monarchical country like Great Britain. Bernanos' literary perspective is more tragical than Belloc's. Whereas Belloc, in his essays, presents a monolithic winning vision of the Catholic faith, Bernanos insists on the tragical essence of man's struggle for achieving the grace of God in the middle of the usual tepidity of religious life or the dullness of rural life.

Bernanos was in Majorca at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. At first, he supported General Franco's regime, but he soon realised the harsh political subsequent repression and wrote crudely about mass executions in *A Diary of My Times* (1938), which seems to be a condensed version of his other book *Les Grands Cimitières sous la lune* (1938).

⁴ Georges Bernanos' *Dialogues des Carmélites* (1948) is a remarkable example. This book was the final revelation of Bernanos' intense Catholic faith. Belloc would never have written books such as Bernanos' *Sous le soleil de Satan* (1926), *L'Imposture* (1927), or *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (1936), because the anguished mysticism of a Catholic priest tempted by desperation or the behaviour of another who has lost faith but keeps up appearances, were themes he never contemplated worth commenting on. The tragic vision of Christianity, the darkness of faith and doubt were matters too far away from his scope. Whereas Bernanos felt very disappointed that no signs of spiritual renewal were noticed in France after the Second World War when he was invited by Charles de Gaulle to return to the country, Belloc always considered France the seed of genuine Christianity.

⁵ Henry Scobie in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* (1948) is the tormented character victim of unresolved moral problems and consequent remorse.

⁶ Belloc's character and upbringing led him to the rational certitude of Catholic dogmas (although rationalism and religion are usually considered antagonistic) since his faith was not based on the pious devotion of the prudish churchgoer (he hated the do-gooder attitude), but on strong personal conviction that he considered crystal-clear and indisputable.

⁷ In the present-day district of Delémont, in the French-speaking canton of Jura, Switzerland.

actually. Belloc did not like Switzerland as a whole, and he specifically declared so years later. In this passage, the Swiss Jura is presented as a continuation of the French Jura. In the sketch Belloc drew,⁸ there is his trajectory from Toul to Épinal, Remiremont, and Ballon d'Alsace.

I hung on to my cart, taking care to let my feet still feel the road, and so passed through the high limestone gates of the gorge, and was in the fourth valley of the Jura (...) There, in this silent place, was the little village of Undervelier, and I thanked the boy, withdrew from his cart, and painfully approached the inn, (...)

A cigar is, however, even in Undervelier, a cigar; and the best cost a penny. One of these, therefore, I bought, and then I went out smoking it into the village square, (...)

As I leaned there resting and communing, I noticed how their church, close at hand, was built along the low banks of the torrent. (...)

As I was watching that stream against those old stones, my cigar being now half smoked, a bell began tolling, and it seemed as if the whole village were pouring into the church. (...) Certainly, to see all the men, women and children of a place taking Catholicism for granted was a new sight, and so I put my cigar carefully down under a stone on the top of the wall and went in with them. I then saw that what they were at was vespers.

All the village sang, knowing the psalms very well, and I noticed that their Latin was nearer German than French; but what was most pleasing of all was to hear from all the men and women together that very noble good night and salutation to God. (*The Path to Rome* 1902: 87-88)

He provides the account of hiking up a misty mountain near Interlaken and, when the clouds part, he realizes that the path has just ended and he is on a precipice just about to step out over a drop of thousands of feet into the lake below. The narration is stunning:

⁸ See *The Path to Rome* (1902): 7.

You will observe that the straight way to Rome cuts the Lake of Brienz rather to the eastward of the middle, and then goes slap over Wetterhorn and strikes the Rhone Valley at a place called Ulrichen. (...)

The Brienzer Grat is an extraordinary thing. It is quite straight; its summits are, or course, of different heights, but from below they seem even, like a ridge: and, indeed, the whole mountain is more like a ridge than any other I have seen. (...)

The rain was now indistinguishable from a mist, and indeed I had come so near to the level belt of cloud, that already its gloom was exchanged for that diffuse light which fills vapours from within and lends them their mystery. (...) As I pushed with great difficulty and many turns to right and left through its tangle, a wisp of cloud enveloped me. (...) At another time I stopped for a good quarter of an hour at an edge that might have been an indefinite fall of smooth rock, but that turned out to be a short drop, easy for a man, and not much longer than my body. (...) So I said to myself – “I will sit here and wait till it grows lighter and clearer, for I must now be within two or three hundred feet at the top of the ridge, and as anything at all may be on the other side, I had best go carefully and knowing my way.”

Suddenly, with no warning to prepare the mind, a faint but distinct wind blew upon me, the mist rose (...) and I was looking through clear immensity, not at any ridge, but over an awful gulf at great white fields of death. The Alps were right upon me and before me, overwhelming and commanding empty downward distances of air. Between them and me was a narrow dreadful space of nothingness and silence, and a sheer mile below us both, a floor to that prodigious hollow, lay the little lake. (...)

Surprise and wonder had no time to form in my spirit before both were swallowed up by fear. (*The Path to Rome* 1902: 115-118)⁹

⁹ To read the whole account, see *The Path to Rome* (1902): 115-120.

He vividly described the mountains, vistas, and his fellow travellers. *The Path to Rome* (1902) supplies many asides to the reader on travel literature, history, humour, art, and theology, because Belloc writes as if the reader is a good friend of his. The book comments on land, people, and God using, wittily, the turns of phrase of a writer who appears, at times, self-deprecating and a bit of a mad wanderer. Belloc likes to add his reflections on religion, and can go off on lengthy digressions, being, overall, a very entertaining writer. He does not dodge one's personal process of rejecting and retrieving faith:

My whole mind was taken up and transfigured by this collective act, and I saw for a moment the Catholic Church quite plain, and I remembered Europe, and the centuries. Then there left me altogether that attitude of difficulty and combat which, for us others, is always associated with the Faith. (...) Musing much more deeply than before, not without tears, I considered the nature of Belief.

Of its nature, it breeds a reaction and an indifference. Those who believe nothing but only think and judge cannot understand this. Of its nature, it struggles with us. And we, we, when our youth is full on us invariably reject it and set out in the sunlight content with natural things. (...) It takes years to reach the dry plain, and then we look back and see our home.

What is it, do you think, that causes the return? I think it is the problem of living; for every day, every experience of evil, demands a solution. (...)

And this is hard: that the Faith begins to make abandon the old way of judging. (...) It is hard to accept mysteries, and to be humble. (...)

I went slowly up the village place in the dusk, thinking of this deplorable weakness in men that the Faith is too great for them, and accepting it as an inevitable burden. (...)

The Catholic Church will have no philosophies. She will permit no comforts; the cry of the martyrs is in her far voice; her eyes that see beyond the world present us heaven and hell to the confusion of our human reconciliations, our happy blending of good and evil things.

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By the Lord! I begin to think this intimate religion as tragic as a great love. (...) Yes, certainly religion is as tragic as first love, and drags us into the void away from our dear homes.

It is a good thing to have loved one woman from a child, and it is a good thing not to have to return to the Faith. (*The Path to Rome* 1902: 88-90)

The wanderer to Rome rejoiced in not having to come back to the faith because he had never lost it, even though he was not always so certain of his internal convictions. Hilaire Belloc could also recognise his periods of wobbly beliefs when, some years before, his Catholicism was a bit obfuscated by his young republican ideals to the extent that his certainties at that time had been dimmer than when he enthusiastically started his journey to reach Rome. Belloc likes to comment on the close relationship of the faith and Europe all through the centuries. This was one of his beloved mottoes, in addition to the combat and struggle that are inherent in the Catholic faith, because it is not a subject for the meek and timorous, but an enterprising adventure for those humble enough to accept the mysteries and the faith's "inevitable burden" to face the oft-times tragic battle against evil that "drags us into the void." The faith means also plunging blindly into the unknown.

Bereavement and faith

After Elodie's death in 1914, Belloc felt shattered, and his grief was terribly deep. During Elodie's lifetime, Belloc did not have time to spend with her and his family on account of his being continuously on the move. After his wife's death, Belloc convinced himself that he had loved her very much, and he put into practice the saying that states that 'the love you remember for ever is that love that lasted the exact time to be unforgettable.' In a letter to John Swinnerton Phillimore, he wrote about his inner sorrow and described his faith in arid intellectual terms without any reference to the mystical side of faith that should be an essential element in Catholic spiritual life:

I write you this brief line because I know no one else intimately on earth who is fully possessed of the Faith. (...) It is not as though I had any vision, comprehension or sense of the Divine order. (...) I was content to keep the door and fight the crowd outside the church and now my office is valueless to me.¹⁰

Belloc was walking the dark passage of faith, his pace wobbly and tired. As he declared many times, dogma was his strength, and he found it the very foundation of the Church. Nowadays, Roman Catholic presentation of dogma has been simplified, and conscious, present-day Roman Catholics tend to concentrate their faith on social action.

The differences between Belloc's faith and the modern sense of it are distinctly shown when he describes his fight to defend 'the Church fortress' from its restless enemies. Modern Roman Catholics are told to keep a sense of "commitment," a personal involvement in everything they believe in and to give a specific boost to transform reality according to the Gospel.

In spite of the wide use of this terminology, many Roman Catholics do not know that "commitment" and "transformation" come from philosophical movements that emanated prior to and around the time of the Second World War (1939-1945), basically, existentialism, Marxism, and, especially, the concept of "praxis" that would transform unfair capitalist structures of dominion. Pope Francis reminds Roman Catholics that paying attention only to social justice without a sound, religious inner-experience may transform the Church into a purely non-governmental organization (NGO).

Belloc's faith was rational, cold, based on immutable dogma, excluding heresy, vociferous, bellicose, and tinged with apologetics. Modern Roman Catholics are supposed to be committed, willing to participate in the new, more emotional liturgy, open to dialogue and new ideas, collaborative with members from other religions or with no religion at all, and cooperating in peace efforts, environmentalism, and animal welfare. The list of elements constitutive of current Roman Catholicism could be longer.

¹⁰ Letter from Hilaire Belloc to John Swinnerton Phillimore, dated 17th March 1914.

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Belloc considered human beings to be, on the whole, great builders of idols. Philosophers critical of religions¹¹ denounce man's illusion when he creates gods in his own image and likeness. For them, such idols are fakes that cannot quench our thirst for infinity. Although we must purify faith from obsolete beliefs, an excessive iconoclastic attitude can lead us to empty dryness and remain with absolutely nothing, not even faith. There is no knowledge of God without some kind of mediation.¹²

Changing one's selfish lifestyle is always difficult because all of us are full of ourselves and we tend to consider that others are the people that have to convert. Being a Christian implies finding your situation in the world to look at everything in a different way, feeling involved in social transformation because this is the task of the true believer. Belloc was not a docile, conformist, meek believer; he was in no way a harmless churchgoer. He aimed at social change. Christians must struggle for awakening critical conscience in everyone and encourage individual and social change, personal *conversion* in specific, Christian terminology. Instead of looking in a non-introverted way at the example of Jesus Christ, many Christians are happy just to follow the lines of thought that they agree with and that fit their personal likes. The social initiatives that are consequence of faith produce a fruit that is obtained always in the long run, even though Christians must support anything that can allow the poor and outsiders to live with human dignity and not lose hope that is the main drive of human life. Catholics must give reasons to live and hope.¹³

¹¹ Particularly Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach (1804-1872), who considered the concept of God to be merely a projection of man's desires. According to Feuerbach's remark, God did not create man, but just the contrary.

Michael Brant Shermer, a former devout evangelical Christian, is currently completely sceptical and occasionally describes himself as an atheist. Shermer contends that all religious beliefs are based on social, cultural, emotional or psychological issues, and that the faith is a learning, a transmission. Cf. Michael Shermer. *The Believing Brain: From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies – How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them As Truths*. (New York: Times Books. Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2011).

¹² For example, Roman Catholics recognise Jesus, the Bible, the Church, and other ways (mediations) to reach the knowledge of God, a spiritual and mystical knowledge, that is, not a positive one, because it is unrelated to empirical evidence.

¹³ *Gaudium et Spes* 31. This was an Apostolic Constitution coming from the Second Vatican Council. It was approved in 1965.

Belloc had several encounters with Cardinal Manning, the first being when he was a five-year-old boy, in 1875. At that time, he listened to Cardinal Manning's preaching at the Brompton Oratory. Manning's persistent and lasting influence on Belloc's thought made him understand and proclaim the universal feature of Catholicism, and spread its everlasting value, even in the face of those English Catholics who usually behaved in a spineless, shy consciousness of their faith in the midst of an indifferent and opposing atmosphere.

Far from Cardinal Newman's too-parochial attitude,¹⁴ Belloc liked Manning's straightforward statement about the universality of the Catholic Church, a perception far away from the narrow-minded perspective of some British Catholic communities that contentedly assumed the role of a minority sect inside the huge "Established Church," Anglicanism. Belloc did not hesitate in despising the Catholic teachers and students whom he knew at Newman's Edgbaston Oratory School in Birmingham, and he commented scornfully on their outlook on the external world:

[The boys] looked at me like enormous giants. It was fearfully rough, and I suffered heavily (...) and there was bad bullying and as for the attitude towards the outside world, it was that of the Old Catholic clique.¹⁵

Belloc identified himself with Cardinal Manning's brave belief in the doctrinal and social strength of the Catholic Church. Belloc's faith was boosted by his conviction that his main concern was going to be with agnosticism and atheism, much more than his arguing with the Church of England. This statement is quite shocking since his everyday praxis did not confirm such course of action. At this point, mentioning his peculiar relationship with Cardinal Newman is relevant. Belloc did not like him on the whole because he found the peculiar attitudes of a don in him, and Belloc was sick of dons due to his previous experience and to other personal reasons. On top of this, Belloc considered Newman to be some sort of sad man, not aggressive enough to face his

¹⁴ Andrew N. Wilson. *Hilaire Belloc: A Biography*. (London: Gibson Square Books Ltd, 2003): 20.

¹⁵ Hilaire Belloc, in a letter dated 16th March 1925.

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enemies in the field of apologetics and a bit of a moaner who was continuously crying about not being fully understood in his efforts to boost Catholicism in England, as well as having to bear others' petty jealousy.

Although Belloc did not state these opinions so clearly, this is what the reader can conclude when analysing the letters that he wrote on the matter and realising the oblique references to what Belloc considered Newman's defects. Broadly-speaking, Belloc did not share the usual Catholic opinion of reverence for the Cardinal. On top of this, he made indirect (and odd) references to his distance from Newman's figure, and he pretended not to be interested in the relationship between Catholicism and Anglicanism when Bede Jarrett asked for his contribution in the form of a preface for a book on Newman.¹⁶ Of course, Belloc refused to write it:

Quite honestly, I do not know anything about him [Newman] (...) Newman's whole position turned upon the difference between the Anglican and the Catholic, and that is a subject which has never come across my life and interests me but little.¹⁷

Against the Whig interpretation of history

Hilaire Belloc's verse and essays are relevant, but the long series of biographies that he wrote after the First World War are far from perfect, even though they supply memorable moments such as the death of Milton and Cromwell. Belloc also excels in the epigrammatic overtones that he uses to describe wicked William Cecil. In the 1930s, Belloc was compelled to produce second-rate historical books, not because he intentionally wanted to write them lackadaisically, but because he realised that he could not earn a living from journalism. Newspaper editors did not like his sort of articles which bluntly stated that parliamentary democracy was nothing more than the external aspect of the corruption of capitalism. Far from occasionally suggesting this obsessive idea in a roundabout way, Belloc stubbornly hammered the point home. On top of this,

¹⁶ Bede Jarrett. *Newman's Apologetic*. (London: Sands and Co., 1928).

¹⁷ Belloc's letter, dated 7th February 1924.

Belloc's prejudice about the press barons rejecting him and the supposed manoeuvres of the *Daily Express* to exclude Catholic contributors from its columns can be counteracted by his inveterate habit of not observing the time limits and going his own way:

The fact that Belloc was an unreliable columnist, frequently late with copy, and given to disappearing without warning to the Continent for weeks at a time, probably had as much to do with his failure to secure employment as a journalist as did his allegedly intolerable ideas. (Wilson 2003: 326-327)

Many of the biographies and portraits that Belloc wrote in the 1930s were actually the means to convey his own view of history:

For whether he purports to write about Cardinal Wolsey, or Thomas Cranmer, or Charles II, or John Milton, or Cardinal Richelieu or Oliver Cromwell or Louis XIV, he tells the same old story. That is, Catholic Monarchy is alone capable of protecting the interests, freedom and property of the private citizen. The enemies of Catholicism at the time of the Protestant Reformation were in cahoots with the powerful new bourgeoisie, the money power represented by families such as the Cromwells and the Cecils. Charles I was the last monarch in England who was able to preserve the freedoms of the common man. The Rich, represented by Cromwell, took over the running of the country when they chopped off King Charles's head, and they have, in effect, been running it ever since. There were attempts (the 'last rally' of Charles II, the heroic James II) to suppress the Rich, who had of course invited the Jews to settle in London almost as soon as the King's head was severed from his body. But they failed. (Wilson 2003: 327-328)

In his own way, Belloc fought against the version of history which lecturers conveyed to him during his years as a young undergraduate reading modern history at

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Balliol College. Belloc was perceptive enough to pick up the thread of official¹⁸ history and distinguish what, he thought, its intentional distortions were from the actual facts as he considered they had happened.

A simple statement of the Whig interpretation of history could be thus. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Whigs supported the power of Parliament whereas the Tories usually backed the King and the aristocracy. The Whigs considered their proposals had prevailed and led to the establishment of the constitutional monarchy in Britain, the system which, so the Whigs thought, had encouraged political freedom and progressive life in the long run. By analysing some facts from English history, British Whig eyes stated a general theory of history and considered there was a long-standing tendency of progress from Catholic ignorance and absolutism to Protestant science, peace, and prosperity. This reasoning constituted a category which, according to the Whig interpretation, explained satisfactorily the development of history. Nevertheless, the appalling realities of the First World War, with its aftermath of human suffering, and the first signals of the decline of colonial power brought into question the Whig interpretation of history.

Some historians, like Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859), William Stubbs (1825-1901), and George Macaulay Trevelyan (1876-1962) tend to describe the English past as a continuous fight between the Protestants and their allies, the Whigs, who are in favour of progress, and the Catholics and Tories, who have always hampered it. The term Whig, in this sense, has been applied not only to members of the Whig party, but also to writers who are in favour of the idea of steady progress over time.

The most eminent and respectable of official historians was G.M. Trevelyan, and the most readable was his great uncle, Thomas Babington Macaulay. Belloc returned to Macaulay when he was at work with his *James II* (1928):

¹⁸ Many people doubt that an “official” history could exist in a free country like Britain. Robert Speaight writes: “When John Fisher and Thomas More were canonized in 1935 the British Legation to the Holy See received instructions from the Foreign Secretary (Sir John Simon) to pay no attention to the event. It was a pretty insult from one Lord Chancellor to another.” (Speaight 1957: 413) Eighty-two years are a long period of time. Since then, things have changed a lot though. Currently St John Fisher and St Thomas More are also listed in the calendar of saints of the Church of England.

It is as fresh and vigorous reading to me in the decline of life as it was to me in youth, and it is as fresh and vigorous reading to the man of today in the London of petrol and an immense income-tax and cads in control as it was in the London of the great Whig houses and the carriages and pairs, and a government of gentlemen. Is that not a remarkable thing to say of any man? [Hilaire Belloc (1928) *A Conversation with an Angel*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1931]

And the remarkable thing was that Macaulay did not date. His philosophy was dead, and his falsehoods were discredited, but almost alone among the early Victorians he was still abundantly alive. (Speaight 1957: 413)

Thomas B. Macaulay wrote a five-volume work, *History of England from the Accession of James II* (1848). Since the very beginning he mentions he is going to recount the errors which alienated the loyal gentry and priesthood from the House of Stuart, as well as trace the course of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 which put an end to the struggle between the kings and their parliaments, to establish a new reigning dynasty which ensured the authority of law, the security of property, and the freedom of individual action. Macaulay identified the thread of progressive change through the series of events he analyses. He considered the ratification of Magna Carta in 1215 a daring attempt to limit the powers of Norman kings, as Norman kings represented French and foreign powers which had to be stopped in their claims. Macaulay thought the Reformation of the sixteenth century boosted individual liberty against the monkish despotism of the Catholic Church. Although Charles I and James II had tried to hamper Parliament's authority, the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, had eventually defeated James II's reactionary Catholic beliefs. So William of Orange (William III) was the champion of English liberties. Once again, the Battle of Culloden in 1746 suppressed the Jacobite rising of 1745, and prevented the Roman Catholic prince Charles Edward Stuart from restoring his dynasty. Macaulay enhanced those who were in favour of the powers of Parliament and struggled against kingship and churchmen as the heroes who freed England from absolutism.

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Belloc, for his part, did not agree with Macaulay's laudatory view of the Protestants' feats to give back freedom and progress to the people. Belloc considered Macaulay's view that sixteenth century Reformation, instead of struggling against the monkish despotism of the Catholic Church, looted the monasteries to increase some families' affluence:

Of those who got hold of what had once been the revenues of many thousands living a corporate life, the majority were the greater and lesser feudal lords, that is, men from the rank of the village squires up to lords of many combined manors, the great feudal houses, such as the Percys and the Howards. A certain appreciable minority were mere adventurers, men who had used their position in the public service to get hold of the newly transferred wealth. Of this sort the so-called "Cromwells," whose real name was Williams, are an excellent example. The whole point of Oliver Cromwell, for instance, was that he was a cadet of one of the new millionaire families made by the new Reformation land settlement.

The economic effect of this vast revolution was *to create a class financially more powerful than the King* and becoming richer and richer as time proceeded. (Belloc 1937: 420)¹⁹

Herbert Butterfield (1900-1979) published a slender revisionist book, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), and openly questioned the traditional tenets of the Whig history, particularly the idea that liberal parliamentary democracy was the best form of government for everybody. Butterfield, who was then a young Cambridge don, coined the term the "Whig interpretation of history" and considered this tendency a misleading account of those so-called progressive, liberal, and democratic heroes who had drawn concessions from the absolutist powers. He called "Whig interpretation" the tendency to write on the side of Protestants and Whigs to praise successful revolutions

¹⁹ Hilaire Belloc. "English Monarchy: The Significance of the Abdication." Seward Collins. Ed. *The American Review*. New York: February 1937.

so as to emphasize certain principles of progress in the past to produce a story which is the ratification and glorification of the present. Butterfield requested objectivity as the essential attitude of a historian, and he was against the glorification and distortion of the past to build a general theory to explain the present. He considered the past was not the only element to justify the present, since it was not correct to judge historical characters by exclusively paying attention to their attitude when they were for or against the Whig's idea of British progress towards religious and political liberties. As a committed Christian, Butterfield felt the Whig's historical optimism considered sinful human beings the protagonists of their own destinies, a function which only God has. Butterfield's opponents considered this last statement a new prejudice in his interpretation of history. The Institute of Historical Research in London agreed with Butterfield's methodology towards in-depth-archivally-based professional research as opposed to any grand narrative used for nation-building purposes. Even though Butterfield's book could have passed unnoticed at the time of publication, it was reprinted in 1950, just after his bestselling *Christianity and History* (1949).²⁰ Since then, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931) became widely read in university settings.²¹

Belloc made a real effort to destroy what he thought was a legend and concealed vested interests. He considered the real business of any Catholic historian was to render the past events accurately, so as to debunk the myth of official history. Catholic historians should tell their story in such convincing terms that even men hostile to this religion could accept such writers' versions as true. Obviously, the academic world considered Belloc a man with a *parti pris*, and his works were easily questioned, much more so due to their lack of bibliography and references.²² It is not surprising that he omitted to report his sources, since Belloc was usually under significant pressure from his urgent need to earn more money to support his large family. He felt compelled to write non-stop, in full knowledge of the risks of such inappropriate behaviour in an

²⁰ Herbert Butterfield. (1949) *Christianity and History*. (New York: Scribner, 1950).

²¹ Herbert Butterfield (1931) *The Whig Interpretation of History*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1965).

²² Speaight 1957: 409-410.

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allegedly-sound historian who must be ready to face criticism successfully. Belloc used to say that he was not writing for a scientific journal, but for the general reader, so it was not necessary to supply any critical support that would bore him or her. He thought that if a writer about popular articles was too worried about unnecessary detail, he or she could miss unity too. On the whole, he did not agree with the Oxford dons and the official historians:

The phrase, of course, begged a pretty big question. Is there such a thing as English official history, and if so, what is meant by it? Belloc would have answered that the English governing classes (in his day they mercifully still governed) were educated at Oxford and Cambridge, and that the only history they knew was what Oxford and Cambridge dons taught them. Historical truth was confined within a vicious circle of mutual advantage. If the dons had begun to teach what their alumni did not like, they might have to quit their quadrangles. At all costs a national myth must be upheld. (Speaight 1957: 412)

Robert Speaight describes Belloc's attitude to the official historians:

This was how Belloc would have argued, and if you had asked him for the contents of the myth, he might have summarised them as follows:

The English people derive their character and their institutions from Saxon tribes settled in these islands during the fifth century A.D. In spite of being conquered and converted by the Romans, they retained only a small part of these foreign influences and it was not until they cast them off that they became a united and powerful people, and eventually a great imperial power. In throwing off the yoke of the Roman See they established the national character of their religion, and in getting rid of the Stuarts they laid the foundations of that Parliamentary and social democracy which is flourishing today, both in the British Commonwealth and in the United States. (Speaight 1957: 412-413)

Generally speaking, Belloc did not trust dons' reliability on their approach to historical issues. Belloc recognised in private that he had his own prejudices, though, and he was aware of the painful wound that he had to endure lifelong after he was rejected as a Fellow of All Souls'. Yet occasionally he supplied relevant details which unveiled some dons' ignorance in certain fields. James V. Schall summarises Belloc's comments on the dons' errors of reasoning as they are explained in *The Cruise of the "Nona"* (1925):

"What are their motives?" he wonders of the academics. The thing happens in all countries and in all universities, "but one is puzzled why it should come into being at all." These are the same folks, Belloc recalls, who say that the Gospel of John was not written by John, or that Homer did not write Homer, or that "the Battle of Hastings was not called the Battle of Hastings – although the people who fought it there called it the Battle of Hastings." These same Dons also think that Caesar's *Gallic Wars* was written by his tutor – "and all the rest of the nonsense." No doubt, Belloc's own unpleasant experience with the university is reflected here.

This force that causes academic Dons to "make fools of themselves," Belloc thinks, can be reduced to three basic elements:

1) "First of all, there is the vanity of the learned man." Since so few other scholars know about the situation, the learned man can get by with false conclusions without too much notice. The vain Don likes to think himself right and all the normal clods wrong. Today there is such a mass of technical evidence that people will swallow almost anything.

2) The second reason for their making fools of themselves is the "love of the marvellous, though it is a love of the marvellous appearing in a very degraded form." (...) The love of the marvellous, the desire of uniqueness, causes the scholar to ignore common sense and his own experience.

3) The third reason is negative. It is the "perpetual substitution of hypothesis for fact." This tendency Belloc finds to be "the greatest mark of Dons

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today.” With this attitude of mind, the Dons find that they cannot “weigh the proportion of evidence.” Hypothesis make all sorts of result possible, in spite of the evidence. The “certain, the probable, and the absurd” can thus be no longer distinguished. (...) The hypotheses of the Dons prove something approaching the absurd because they marvelled at their own theories more than the facts. The greatest mark of the Dons today does indeed seem to be (...) the systematic reduction of *what* is into what might be and the subsequent difficulty in discovering any difference between the two. (Schall 2013: 39-40)

Belloc did not reject all academics. For instance, he admired Charles William Chadwick Oman’s research capacity, and Herbert Albert Laurens Fisher, tutor of modern history at the University of Oxford, for his synthesis skill. He remembered the deep impression William Stubbs made on him when this professor of modern history profiled Henry II’s character. Belloc was a young boy when he heard Stubbs. However, all in all Belloc felt completely dissatisfied with the general trend of the teaching of history since he considered it was biased against Catholicism in Britain, so he spent time on re-elaborating his view and published his own books on the matter, especially a series of historical biographies: *Oliver Cromwell* (1927), *James II* (1928), *Richelieu* (1930), *Wolsey* (1930), *Cranmer* (1931), *Napoleon* (1932), and *Charles II* (1940). On writing about Cromwell, Belloc mocked him and amused himself a lot too. Even if Belloc recognised Cromwell’s skill as a cavalry leader and a natural-born intriguing person, he also enjoyed describing how wealthy Cromwell was and some personal weakness of this historical figure which other writers concealed:

[Cromwell was] a man on whom the official English history has lied more freely than on anybody else. He came of a gigantically wealthy family and was connected by marriage and blood with about a dozen millionaires of his day. It is great fun to see how bewildered he was by finding that it was necessary that he should take on the boredom of government which he didn’t like one little bit. He was a great cry-baby, always breaking out into a loud Boo-Hoo upon every

occasion that lent itself to sentimentality. (Letter to Miss Pauline Cotton. 13th February 1934)

Belloc also tried to deal with English history from the Roman Conquest to 1910. He published *A History of England* in four volumes which appeared in 1925, 1927, 1928, and 1931. The collection finished in 1612. The initial project was writing three other volumes, although they were never completed:

On 1 August 1907 Belloc had written to A.C. Benson expressing great admiration for the latter's brother, the convert-priest and bestselling novelist R.H. Benson. Belloc wrote that he had met him once or twice and liked him enormously. He confessed a great sympathy for Benson's historical novels, since Belloc thought he would be the man to write someday a book which gave some sort of idea what happened in England between 1520 and 1560. In the event, Benson's early death in 1914 meant that he would never fulfil Belloc's hopes. Instead, increasingly frustrated at the Protestant bias of the Whig historians, Belloc began to study the period himself. In 1908, *The Catholic Church and Historical Truth*, Belloc's first foray into the contentious world of religion and history, was published. In later years, he would publish studies of key figures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as Wolsey, Cromwell, James I, Charles II, and Cranmer. His *How the Reformation Happened*, published in 1928, would represent his attempt to put the whole period into context. (Pearce 2002: 129)

In his days as an MP, Belloc did not hesitate to speak up and took any opportunity to raise the question of distorted history, even though it is doubtful that his observations had a deep impact on the audience:

This speech, delivered on 7 May 1906, exhibited Belloc at his most robust and most fiery. It also represented an early indication of his determination to expose

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the bias that had distorted the facts of English history. He complained that no proper history was taught in the universities and public schools, otherwise people would know that ‘since Diocletian nothing can compare with the persecution of the Catholic people of this country by the wealthy and official classes.’ He continued: ‘It has not been a popular persecution, but a cold, deliberate and bloody persecution on the part of the men who got hold of the land of the country after the dissolution of the monasteries. Can you wonder after two centuries of such suffering we emerged a wholly distinct and highly homogeneous body?’ The Catholic minority in England, having suffered so much for their faith, were not about to surrender it. (Pearce 2002: 108)

Belloc never wrote against Luther’s main accusations against the Church of Rome: the sale of indulgences to sinful souls to finance the new St Peter’s Basilica in Rome as well as the corruption of papal Rome. Luther had previously travelled to Rome in November 1510 and was scandalized by the luxurious life of Pope Leo X and the prelates. Belloc was against sumptuous life,²³ and considered it opposed to the genuine Catholic faith. Generally, his opinions were confined to the English Reformation.

Belloc considered the dissolution of monasteries a point of departure for the rise of a new class of rich landowners, the plutocracy that was in cahoots with the Tudors to seize the economic power that, Belloc thought, would have evident links with future political decisions from that moment onwards. In 1534, the parliament conferred authority on Thomas Cromwell²⁴ to inspect all abbeys and convents to instruct their dwellers on the new royal regulations to control them, because the King was the new head of the Church of England instead of the Pope. In 1535, the parliament delegated these powers to a committee. Between 1536 and 1540, the Crown seized monasteries and confiscated all the properties of the Roman Catholic Church in England. The

²³ Belloc considered Dominican priest, father Vincent McNabb, a holy man, precisely because of the sound consistency between his sincere Catholic preaching and his admirably austere life. (Pearce 2002: 273).

²⁴ Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) was descendant from Thomas Cromwell (circa 1485-1540). Oliver Cromwell was the great-grandson of Richard Cromwell, who was Thomas Cromwell’s nephew.

expropriation took place roughly simultaneously with the Protestant Reformation in continental Europe. Henry VIII required, as a royal tax, that everybody continued paying tithes to him, exactly the same as they had been doing to the monasteries until their recent suppression. The King demanded any gold or silver object. Monasteries were usually very rich, as they had much fertile farm soil, many agricultural holdings, housing wealth and cash. Nevertheless, the greed of royal officials and Henry VIII's own hasty action caused that many estates were sold to aristocrats and minor rural nobility at a very low price. Ornaments and valuables were sold to wealthy landowners. Religious buildings were dismantled to extract building materials. Many art treasures which were considered impossible to be sold were simply lost. Belloc argued that the dissolution of monasteries represented a real economic transformation of the country, since the new plutocracy was going to be the rising class which would actually rule England:

The power of the monarch, as of all real executive governing power, power to nominate officers or to break them, to grant titles, to receive incomes out of regular public revenue, to make peace and to make war, appeared stronger than ever at the death of the most despotic, but unbalanced, Henry Tudor in 1536 [*sic*].²⁵

Now Henry Tudor began without meaning to do so an economic revolution of the highest import. He not only suppressed the monasteries with their great wealth and seized that wealth for the Crown, but he also started the precedent that any collegiate or corporate property might thus be looted. (...) Some of that wealth he had merely squandered on favourites or people who for the moment dominated his vacillating and easily dominated temper; but the most part was sold in a hurry at very low prices – in general for about half its value. (Belloc 1937: 420)

²⁵ The king died in 1547.

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The dissolution of monasteries in England was the first step in the general European trend which, little by little, dispossessed the Catholic Church of its properties, for example the confiscation of all the churches by the State since the French Revolution. Currently Catholic churches in France are owned by the government itself. In Spain, the Ecclesiastical confiscations carried out by the ministers Juan Álvarez Mendizábal (1836-1837) and Pascual Madoz Ibáñez (1855) were aimed at seizing the properties of religious orders, but respected the churches and parish buildings. Victor Emmanuel II of Italy deprived the Pope Pius IX of Umbria, The Marches, Tuscany, Parma, and Modena in 1860, and the remaining part of the Papal States in 1870. In general terms, in all these countries the commissions appointed to compile the batches manipulated the process and, as a result, only nobles and urban moneyed upper classes could buy huge estates which were unaffordable by small farmers. The main consequence was that there was no creation of authentic middle classes, because poor rural people had to emigrate and became urban proletarians.²⁶

Belloc repeatedly stated that the rich in England, like the Cecils and the Cromwells, succeeded in eliminating the weak dynasty of the Stuarts, which were the only kings who dared to face the rich and protect individuals' rights. The rich replaced Catholic monarchies by new dynasties with which they were in cahoots to become the new ruling class of England. The contents of Belloc's view on history were influenced by what he picked up from his conversations with Cardinal Manning and aspects from his sermons. Belloc re-elaborated Manning's thought into his own rationale. Some of Belloc's arguments are flawed since there is no evidence that the Stuarts did more to protect individual property than Cromwell did.²⁷ Belloc inevitably simplified history and silenced some aspects when he considered that omitting details could justify his arguments. A.N. Wilson writes: "So, his James II emerges as a brave patriotic figure with a love of the sea; but we are not told of his perverted love of torture."²⁸

Belloc also referred to the French situation when first Richelieu, and later Louis XIV, a Catholic king, succeeded in controlling the rich, an observation that has some

²⁶ In Britain, enclosure policies sped up this process.

²⁷ Wilson 2003: 328.

²⁸ Wilson 2003: 328.

truth in it, as this king wisely preferred to keep an eye on the rich and aristocracy by taking strict measures to keep the wealthy physically within the court of Versailles. In this way, Louis XIV successfully prevented them from conspiring against him. From these and similar facts Belloc built his own theory by affirming that Catholic monarchies were better able to guarantee citizens' freedom and property. Belloc considered the situation in France changed when Louis XVI was unable to stop the rich. So, Belloc thought, the French Revolution was the necessary step to improve things. Belloc characteristically was a fervent revolutionary in his youth and supported monarchy in middle age.

His opinion about later stages of the English Monarchy were realistic, for he depicted the monarchy as some honorary institution which, very much in accordance with the English taste, granted honours:

There had in the midst of the process been an effort on the part of one of the shadow Kings (George III) to attempt some small approach to real power, but whatever chance that had of being realized was knocked on the head by the grievously unpopular war with France and America, which ended in the loss of England's first colonial Empire.

Now though the Crown had thus apparently disappeared and had become no more than a sort of vague symbol of unity, it was still more than a mere office, for it was vested in a person, a human being with a will and ability to exercise that will. (...) The King or Queen of the moment was in some small part a monarch. For instance, titles and honours (which are more sought after in England than anywhere else) depended in some small degree upon the monarch's choice.²⁹

Many of the books Belloc wrote in the 1930s have a monotonous tone and repetitive arguments that make them scarcely interesting. Belloc found pleasure in

²⁹ Hilaire Belloc. "English Monarchy: The Significance of the Abdication." Seward Collins. Ed. *The American Review*. (New York. February 1937). 423.

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repeating what he considered true, either in the debates at the Oxford Union or in his historical works:

If Belloc is occasionally absurd in his implication that all the papists in English history were good and all the Protestants were bad, he was contradicting absurdities which were quite as gross. The sad thing is that, by the time he wrote most of the English history, he did not have the time, or the money, or the inclination to do any of it properly. With sufficient leisure and incentive, he could have written some supreme great biographies. It is a great loss to the world, for instance, that he never wrote properly about Napoleon. And, had he been caught at the height of his powers, he could have written the most superb biography of St Thomas More, for there is much that More and Belloc have in common, both as controversialists and humourists. (Wilson 2003: 329)

* * *

Belloc felt that his main concern was to correct the bias of the Whig historians which had controlled the study of history for three centuries. He considered that history was the recovery of the past which should imply the integration of the self, insofar as a man without history is incomplete, since any man can only truly lay hold of his own past. He agreed that history can only be written from within and exemplified his view by telling that an atheist could not write a history of Christendom, because he or she cannot interpret the past because he or she lacks empathy and intuition. Belloc considered the Whig biased because you cannot enter history without being wounded or enlisted by it, as you must take sides and declare your loyalty:

The Whigs of course could not even begin to comprehend the counter charge of bias on their part; Belloc was merely being tendentious! In their own eyes they were completely objective, yet bias against Christianity, albeit expressed in scintillating English prose, is one of the characteristics of Gibbon, the paradigm of the Whig historian. (...) The bias of Whig historians derives from their theory

of 'Linear Progress.' The theory is as dogmatic as any other theory of history, whether it be determinist or cyclic. (Cooney 1997: 8-9)

Belloc was aware that he represented a minority. Roman Catholics were and are a minority in a Protestant country,³⁰ even if we take into account that, like everywhere else in the world, at present for many allegedly Christian believers, their religion represents more a cultural milieu than a conscious personal option. Yet Belloc thought it was worth awakening dormant consciences and face what he considered distortions of the Whig interpretation of history. In his loyalty to the Roman Catholic cause, Belloc was not the naive Catholic who accepted everything that the pervading clericalism of that time considered right to rule and control everything within the Church, from theology to liturgy. Belloc knew his faith constituted a minority group, so his role to support his religious principles was to close ranks to protect English Roman Catholicism from external hostile criticism or abrupt mockery:

Belloc had a soldier's sense of discipline and he was too conscious of the English Catholics as a minority with their backs more or less permanently to the wall to allow himself to give rein to his feelings when they were ruffled by his co-religionists. He had been attacked in *The Tablet* over an article on Gibbon for the *Dublin Review* (April 1917); and Wilfrid Meynell, who was then editing the *Dublin*, offered him space for a reply. He declined on the ground that the English Catholics could not afford an open division in their ranks. He did reply indirectly, however, in *Studies* the Irish Jesuit Quarterly; and in private he would sometimes give vent to his irritation...

I have been having my bellyful of clerics lately. I always like to associate with a lot of priests because it makes me understand anti-clerical things so well. They have been making me give for nothing addresses on subjects

³⁰ In 2015, Roman Catholics were around 8% compared with 17% faithful to the Church of England, 17% faithful to other Christian Churches, 5% Islamists, and 49% who declared that they had no religion. The present writer could not find reliable statistics referring to the 1930s.

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where I usually command 15 or 20 pounds outside and at the same time they have been treating me with contempt, a thing I do not forgive. *Caveant sacerdotes* [Beware of priests]. (Letter to E.S.P. Haynes. 9th November 1909)

After one such gathering he arrived to lecture at Repton, and banging his hat down in the hall remarked to William Temple: ‘The Catholic Church is an institution I am bound to hold divine – but for unbelievers a proof of its divinity might be found in the fact that no merely human institution conducted with such knavish imbecility would have lasted a fortnight.’ (Speaight 1957: 382-383)

Belloc was a sincere Roman Catholic believer in the pew. He venerated Catholic priests in their own field of competence: the Mass, as ministers of the sacraments, preaching the homily and anything related to their sacred ministry “within the church premises.” Yet he was annoyed at their haughty attitude and occasional incompetence. On the whole, however, Belloc’s private outbursts of rage³¹ could not prevent his determined defence of Roman Catholicism from coping with all sorts of difficulties arising from the aggression of the Whig interpretation of history.

Historical distance. Methodological detachment

Looking at historical facts from a distance can make us forget some aspects of that remote times. The next two paragraphs may appear a platitude, because everybody pretends to know these details, controversial as they are. These two paragraphs are perhaps an oversimplification of the situation of Europe in the Protestant Reformation

³¹ At the time of Belloc’s letter, one hundred and eight years ago, it was customary in the Catholic Church that priests unconsciously considered the lay completely illiterate in matters of theology and, by extension, thoroughly ignorant. Precisely one of the characteristics of Catholic discipline was the strict control of parish life by priests. Behind this trend there were the consequences from historical inertia, but also the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation mood. No Catholic lay could systematically study theology and obtain a Catholic university degree in theology, just the opposite of the Lutheran practice, particularly in Germany. Catholic contemporary view is completely different, as most Catholic institutions encourage theological studies for everybody. Current leading role of the laity in the Roman Catholic Church is a recent tendency. The change began diffidently after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and has gained momentum in recent years.

period, but they supply a brief overall view of the unfathomable abyss between the sixteenth century everyday policy and the current concept of human dignity. It is worth recalling these aspects, as our present-day political ideas have nothing to do with those of the Reformation period.

In the modern age, kings and queens considered their countries as their private property, no differently from the attitude of a farmer who feels the legitimate owner of his or her farm, a squire's attitude towards his or her estate, and the modest gardener who cultivates his or her back garden. They can lease, sell, split or enlarge their plot. The king or queen considered himself or herself the proprietor of the nation, entitled to do whatever he or she liked with the patrimony. In general, his or her religion was more a cultural tradition, the sense of belonging to a group, than a personal consciously chosen faith, a voluntary commitment to God. Religion was not a private activity, but a public label that justified political action. The Stuarts were rejected, not only because of their Catholicism, but also due to their absolutist trend and their alliance with the French king. Their alliance with the Catholic France of Louis XIV was contemplated as a treason to English independence, since great part of the population thought they should not depend on a foreign power. Then and now British people are very proud of their country's independence, and this feeling forms part of their inbred identity. Henry VIII and Elizabeth I were very clever in presenting the Protestant Reformation as the legitimate struggle for defending England against the Pope, after all, a foreign power too.³² Of course, at that time the Pope was an earthly king and a foreign power, apart from the visible head of the Roman Catholic Church and the Primate of all Roman Catholic bishops.³³ The religious meaning of the Pope and the essential union of all Roman Catholic bishops with him (the communion with the Church of Rome) were disregarded, and the Reformation was presented as an act of legitimate sovereignty, a

³² Quite rightly, Margaret Thatcher argued that she was defending the Falklands against a foreign power. Theresa May and the Eurosceptic politicians declare that they are defending Britain from Europe's interference through Brexit. Brexit supporters wish to regain sovereignty, as they do not want Europe to dictate British laws. With all due caution, present-day politicians exploit the convincing, traditional argument of British independence, because they know it is deeply rooted in the national character.

³³ According to the Roman Catholic Church's tradition, the Pope is the bishop of Rome and the Successor of St Peter. The Pope is the Primate of the Roman Catholic Church. English Christians considered him to be so until the Protestant Reformation.

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concept which was thoroughly successful.³⁴ As soon as the First Act of Supremacy 1534 came into force, only educated people noticed the separation from Rome through the Protestant Reformation, while illiterate poor peasants could not see much difference. Yet the momentum of reform quickly spread. After Queen Elizabeth I, England definitively was a Protestant country, in spite of the occasional Catholic plots.

In the sixteenth century, from the political point-of-view, countries belonged to their kings and queens; their subjects had no individual rights, as they felt obliged to follow their feudal lord to participate in battles. Feudal lords in turn were the king or queen's vassals, and should be loyal to their king or queen, or face death. Lords could either be favoured by the king or queen, and enjoy privileges, or fall from the grace of the king or queen and be sentenced to death through torture, which was the habitual proceeding. Many twenty-first century people do not know that torture was considered both a system of verification of testimony and a method of executing the death sentence. Generally, judges considered that a defendant did not tell the truth, unless he or she were subjected to torture, a procedure that they mistakenly considered infallible. Of course, some tortured people pleaded guilty of participating in any crime charges,³⁵ even in those in which they did not intervene. Trials, if any, were completely opaque and proceeded by the king's or queen's clique, no matter if the court of justice was called the Star Chamber or a Royal Council. The proof lies in the fact that such courts always gave judgment which pleased the king or the queen. Anybody could be found guilty of "treason," the typical offence of which you could be accused if the king or the

³⁴ The Archbishop of Canterbury is the 'Primate of All England.' With the Protestant Reformation, he replaced the role of the Pope, although he is not the head of the Church of England, which is an exclusive function of the king or the queen. Thomas Cranmer was the first Archbishop of Canterbury who agreed with the First Act of Supremacy in 1534, the legislation which declared Henry VIII the "Supreme Head" of the Church of England. Currently the Archbishop of Canterbury only has religious authority in the Church of England. Other provinces from the Anglican Communion have their own spiritual leaders. Many conservative Roman Catholics do not know that Holy Orders in the Anglican Communion sometimes are valid (even from the Roman Catholic point-of-view) if the *apostolic succession* was and is well maintained. The apostolic succession is the doctrine that the authority of Christian bishops derives from the Apostles through an unbroken line of consecration.

³⁵ Physical pain is unbearable. Gestapo officials knew that, and a French general in the Algerian War, Jacques-Émile Massu (1908-2002), too. Not all prisoners collapse under torture. Jean Moulin (1899-1943), the director of the National Council of the Resistance in France during the Second World War, withstood the torture without giving anybody away. He died as a result of prolonged torture. Very few people could resist torture, in the sixteenth century, and now too.

queen arranged that. People were put to death because of obscure reasons of state which very frequently concealed the king's or queen's private whims.³⁶ All the above can be applied to any European country (particularly England, France, and Spain alike) at that time, with very few exceptions.³⁷ In a time deprived of entertainment whatsoever and without our ubiquitous electronic gadgetry, poor rustics and idle aristocrats could escape from everyday boredom by attending public tortures and merciless executions, the longer and more cruel the better. Present-day concept of civic rights has nothing to do with the political practice in the centuries which generated the Whig interpretation of history.

* * *

Seeing things from a distance, any approach to history can be as illuminating as it is misleading. Very few scholars accept humbly that social sciences in general can only supply approximate perspectives, as what we currently consider the ultimate conclusion, the definitive finding on some field, may obviously be overtaken by the breakthrough of a new theory based on some archaeological discovery, recently found historical document, revolutionary statistical study based on allegedly "new" evidence, or appealingly revisionist, new approach to past events. Frequently social communities have their own interpretation of certain historical facts.³⁸

In their day, the Whig historians did a study of historical prospective, although the prospect theory (which is a mathematical model usually applied to economics) when it is extrapolated to historical analysis is but a random process which produces unsafe predictions for the future. "Doing prospective," as historians like to call it, is a risky exercise. Given similar circumstances, no serious historian dares to predict future events from past experience (like the Whigs predicted a steady line of progress in English

³⁶ For example, Thomas Cromwell's execution.

³⁷ Popular culture thinks that The Netherlands were very tolerant. Some current Dutch Catholics do not think so.

³⁸ For example, after the Spanish Civil War, the new regime had its own theory about "the good" and "the bad" Spaniards to justify the new state of things. Moreover, present-day Catalan people for independence have their own, either clear or diffuse, historical interpretation of Spanish unfair treatment of Catalonia since the dynastic union in 1479 until the present.

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history), as human freedom is not predetermined. Men and women can always choose from a range of possibilities.

Furthermore, fashion is also a relevant, sometimes unconscious aspect which influences anyone arguing about historical subjects. Fashion has only one purpose: making something go out of fashion to buy.³⁹ A topic which arouses strong feelings among historical writers at a certain moment can also be out of scope and forgotten over the years. The sense of urgency that Belloc felt to attack the Whig view on history was not perceived by most of the affluent people who sent their children to the most exclusive schools. More often than not, the wealthy used to accept the tenets of the official history as the basic outlook on ‘the true English history.’

The trace of the Whig interpretation of history in Belloc’s fiction

Belloc rarely includes allusions to religion or to the Whig interpretation of history in his fiction. When they appear they are just funny, quick references.⁴⁰ He usually writes satirically about some Anglican clergyman,⁴¹ and unleashes a flood of invective against the external social aspects of the established religion, particularly towards those non-practicing Christian people who feel compelled to go to church once they have reached a certain status, because they consider it the suitable way to socialize with important people.⁴² Although Belloc does not supply literal references to the Whig interpretation

³⁹ Luc Ferry said this sentence at the end of a brief intervention when he was asked about the prospective French president, Emmanuel Macron. Rafael Poch. “Preguntas sobre un presidente atípico.” *La Vanguardia*. 7th May 2017.

⁴⁰ In this portrait, Belloc inserts a perfunctory adjective, “atheist,” which suggests an oblique reference to lack of religion as a fashionable, relevant credit in academics. This is not a sheer coincidence, as there is clear intentionality in the sentence: “He [Charles Lexington] was a man typical of his profession and a good hand at his trade: atheist, industrious, clear-headed, very conscientious about his work, trying hard to keep up the standard of his pupils...” See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 20-21.

⁴¹ Reverends Mr Caley and Mr Atkins. See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 149, 186. Reverend Arthur Bootle is the well-meant cleric wearing a “dog” collar, somebody of “the profession of the Christian Priesthood. (...) The moment he spoke there could be no doubt as to which denomination he belonged to. He was official, national, regular.” This Anglican minister wants to convert an apparently drunk vagrant, (who is actually the disguised and silent Professor Lexington, trying to escape from an uncomfortable situation) to virtuous life through a pious sermon. Belloc exaggerates Reverend Arthur Bootle’s simplicity to transform his monologue into an amusing passage. See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 213-218.

⁴² This is the case with a couple of parvenus, Lord and Lady Mere de Beurivage. See *The Haunted House* (1927): 152-153.

of history, the reader notices Belloc's strong distaste for it all. He is a radical because, as a storyteller, he distances himself from the ruling class by ridiculing its habits and its usual necessity of establishing distances with common people. When Belloc introduces a new character who belongs to the high class, he tidily describes his or her ancestry by relating him or her to some remote historical figure, even if such figure can be an invented name. Such invented names follow a certain morphological pattern or are compound names that are an imitation of real people. Belloc enjoys creating whimsical characters of fatuous dons who naively take advantage of a coincidence which is beneficial for their interests or who want their own way at all costs and consider that living around the rich is the best way to attain it.⁴³ Pretending that he is writing for a wide audience, basically formed by idle, upper-class women, Belloc describes a young couple's sumptuous marriage ceremony which is conducted by an Anglican priest, although half of those attending the ceremony maybe are Catholic. Belloc carefully inserts Catholic reflections, combined with words of satisfaction that make the reader bemused by Belloc's minced words. The passage suggests that this is, perhaps, a wedding according to the Roman Catholic ritual or something similar.⁴⁴

New times of Christian brotherhood

Belloc would be surprised at the ecumenical practice of the present-day Catholic Church and the affectionate treatment of "separated brethren," which is the name used by Catholics to designate Protestant and Orthodox Christians. All evangelical confessions originated since the sixteenth century are inspired in Luther's postulates. There is no turning back on the overcoming of the 1517 schism between Catholics and Protestants, as there are essential formal and theological requirements that are missing, but the attitude and tone of relationships have changed since the 1960s.

In 2017, the Protestant world encourages activities to commemorate the fifth century of the Protestant Reformation. All through the centuries this anniversary used to be occasion for controversy, attacks, excommunications and mutual rancour. The

⁴³ Professor Higginson in *The Green Overcoat* (1912), and Lord Hambourne in *The Haunted House* (1927).

⁴⁴ This is the final scene in *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 186-188.

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Catholic change slowly began in 1963, when the first initiatives suggested the later visit of Pope Paul VI to the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1964. In 1966, Michael Ramsey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Pope Paul VI met in Rome and signed a common declaration to re-establish unity. Since then several encounters have marked the ecumenical journey.

John Paul II and Benedict XVI facilitated the signing, in 1999, of the Joint Declaration on the doctrine of Justification by Faith, which was subscribed to by Catholics and Lutherans to clarify their respective positions and identify the common points. Pope Francis travelled to Sweden and met Munib Younan, president of the Lutheran Federation in the Malmö Arena on 31st October 2016 in memory of the 500 years of Luther in Sweden. That very day, 499 years after Luther made his 95 theses public in Wittenberg, Pope Francis was received in Lund⁴⁵ by Antje Jackelén, woman Archbishop of Uppsala and Primate of the Church of Sweden. In Lund Cathedral, there was an ecumenical ceremony in memory of Luther, and for reconciliation. Pope Francis thanked God for the gifts that the Protestant Reformation brought to the Church and prayed that everybody repented of the dividing walls raised by them and their ancestors. The pope thanked Luther's work in giving the Holy Scripture a greater centrality in the life of the Church.⁴⁶ Martin Junge, the Secretary General of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) regretted that, in the sixteenth century, Catholics and Lutherans exaggerated and caricatured their opponents to make them look ridiculous. All Protestant and Catholic prelates embraced each other.

In the joint declaration that was signed, Protestants and Catholics asked forgiveness of God for having hurt the visible unity of the Church. All signatories recall

⁴⁵ Lund is the See of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

⁴⁶ Of course, Pope Francis is criticised by conservative groups, particularly by four cardinals who wrote him a respectful but extremely critical letter, in September 2016. These cardinals are the German, Walter Brandmüller and Joachim Meisner, the North American, Raymond Burke, and the Italian, Carlo Caffarra. Their letter asked the Pope about the new norms which allow, in certain circumstances, divorced faithful who have remarried to receive communion. Pope Francis did not answer the letter. In her article "Avvenire intervista Bergoglio" in the Italian Catholic newspaper *Avvenire* (18th November 2016), Stefania Falasca notes that the Pope referred to some people who still do not fully understand the changes fostered by the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, changes which, Pope Francis thinks, have only been honoured halfway. While some reproach him an excessive rapprochement towards the Lutherans, and even trying to transform the Catholic Church into Protestant, Pope Francis indicated that he does not lose sleep due to this subject.

that, after the schism in 1517, religion was manipulated for political purposes.⁴⁷ The Catholic *Caritas Internationalis* and Lutheran World Relief signed an agreement of cooperation at the global level in which the assistance to refugees, migrants and the poor was considered a common Christian task.

Catholics and Lutherans recognise that a common challenge in Sweden is curbing the strong secularism. Some Catholics believe that Lutheran Church lacks spiritual strength, as the Church adapts to the secularised society more and more, and this process produces a religiosity without any kind of moral demand and very little spirituality. Some Lutheran ministers affirm that their Church makes decisions in a very democratic way. They do believe that society affects their Church, but this is the point since the Church must meet the demands of its faithful. They recognise that the Catholic Church impose precepts that are stricter, but they have doubts as to whether Catholics meet these norms.

Any forecast about what Belloc could have thought after reading these last paragraphs is uncertain. This is an unknown prospect. Belloc had a flair for perceiving true holiness wherever it was, irrespective of religious denomination. For example, he recognised his Methodist nurse, Sarah Mew's sanctity. Had Belloc known the Lutheran pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life and death, he would have revered his heroic holiness. Even so Belloc's temperament belonged to the world, he thought, of Catholic perennial certainties, in which any responsible believer had to defend his Church against foes of any kind. Belloc would possibly agree that you ought to communicate your faith from the grassroots, since talking about faith begins first at life and later at doctrine.⁴⁸ Contemporary people reject anybody who talks on behalf of an external authority, even if he or she speaks about God. Currently, people do not pay attention to the beauty of

⁴⁷ Martin Luther (1483-1546) at the beginning was isolated and at serious risk owing to his boldness. Some princes from the Holy Roman Empire backed and protected him, partially captivated by his reformist ideals, but also because they wanted to shrug off the yoke of the imperial authority of Charles V. The Peace of Augsburg, in 1555, put an end to the European wars of religion and imposed on the subjects of each territory the faith chosen by their respective princes. *Cuius regio, eius religio* [Whose realm, his religion].

⁴⁸ British journalist, Austen Ivereigh, co-founder of *Catholic Voices*, and Yago de la Cierva, expert in corporate communication, published *Cómo defender la fe sin levantar la voz: Respuestas civilizadas a preguntas desafiantes*. (Madrid: Ediciones Palabra, 2016). This book proposes a realistic, assertive way of communicating the Catholic faith.

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the doctrine of salvation, as they first check if the person who proposes it deserves to be listened to.

Defender of the Church

Devoted mainly to apologetics, Hilaire Belloc was a Catholic of the Church that came from the 1st Vatican Council (1869-1870), sure of its dogmas and ready to face those critics of Catholicism. In words and demeanour, Belloc represented the Church that had closed in on itself and had become deaf to many of the changes that shook the first half of the twentieth century.

It can be stated with some assuredness that Belloc received his first religious instruction at the feet of his mother Elizabeth, coming to realise his family's sincere religious attitude, or from the Catholic fathers at Edgbaston Oratory School. Although he did not like the atmosphere at The Oratory, he did not renounce his religious faith in his teenage years, something that is usually the frequent reaction against parents and education, then as now. His Balliol years represented a lapse in his faith, not because Belloc abandoned it, but because he was more interested in his activities as president of the Oxford Union and subsequent debates in which he famously took part with vehement success.

When Belloc was rejected as a Fellow of All Souls' College, he interpreted it as a reaction against his "militant Catholicism," even though he was not exactly so militant at the time. Actually, he had moved a long way from the piety of his boyhood. He had promised his mother that he would attend Mass regularly, and he probably did so, but his temper inclined him towards scepticism and his Roman Catholicism was not so fervently apologetic as it became later. His wife Elodie's sound faith strengthened Belloc's Catholicism. Strange as it may seem, his convictions were more Roman Catholic than Christian, since Belloc's aim was to defend the Church above all else. Belloc considered Roman Catholic dogma to be at the core that supported the whole Roman Catholic building.

After the First World War and Elodie's death in 1914, and as the years were passing by, Belloc reached the firm conviction that his mission was to demonstrate the

truth of Roman Catholicism and defend the Roman Catholic Church in England. In most of his essays, this was the basic issue, although he continued to write his shocking, satirical novels that contained quite absurd and twisted plots to amuse readers and because he assumed writing was the essential way he had to sustain his family. A consequence of his fierce defence of Roman Catholicism was that people considered Belloc a Roman Catholic propagandist who struggled to spread his ideas from his unmovable position, as someone who stubbornly defends the very same fortress repeatedly.

The main trait of Belloc's faith was a complete separation between his feelings and the sound contents of Roman Catholicism. While G.K. Chesterton was a natural believer, owing to his character and inclinations, Belloc was a convinced Catholic in spite of his rational and impious temperament:

I am by all my nature of mind sceptical, by all my nature of body exceedingly sensual. So sensual that the virtues restrictive of sense are but phrases to me. But I accept these phrases as true and act upon them as well as a struggling man can. And as to the doubt of the soul I discover it to be false: a mood: not a conclusion. My conclusion – and that of all men who have ever once seen it – is the Faith. Corporate, organised, a personality, teaching. A thing, not a theory.⁴⁹

And the letter goes on humbly to explain how he lacks profound religious emotion since “grief has drawn the juices from it” [from the “meat” of religious emotion]. Belloc, despite feeling lonely in the darkness of Faith, affirms the Sanctity, the Unity, the Infallibility of the Roman Catholic Church. Belloc finally declares he wants to reach Beatitude, “which is the goal of Catholic Living.” It is this sincere summary of the truths that moved him, traced, nearly to the letter, from the Creed he recited frequently in Mass. Belloc's literal reference to beatitude is the straightforward declaration of a devout Roman Catholic who aspired to sanctity, as was frequently stated in the homilies of Roman Catholic priests and the instructions of catechists.

⁴⁹ Letter to G.K. Chesterton when he became a Catholic, dated August 1922.

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Immortality was the issue that most worried Belloc, and he was deeply impressed after listening to Father Vincent McNabb's lecture on the matter. Life after death is a central issue for believers and non-believers. Man has the urgent need to find any rational answer to the magnitude of this tragedy, which is another element present in the society of risk, as Ulrich Beck theorized. French Catholic philosopher, Jean Guitton, wrote about life and death and, in his book, he recalls his encounter with François Mitterrand who was President of France at the time. Guitton died when he was ninety-eight. Mitterrand asked him about the meaning of death when he felt it close-by. Mitterrand asked two main questions: What is death? What is the great beyond? Guitton answered that he had only two answers: either life is absurd and finishes with death, or life is a mystery. Confronted by such dilemma, Guitton preferred mystery – "a staircase where we are coming up the steps."⁵⁰

Answers are in the area of intangible issues and dependant on the space you leave to transcendence. Victoria Camps writes about these issues and summarizes the fundamental problem by recognising that the process of secularization has succeeded in getting by without the hypothesis of God, or the transcendent to tackle the problems and conflicts of our world. Secularization means giving up thinking about some questions.⁵¹

Such unavoidable questions seize man again and again, and can cause him some anguish because existential questions lie at the very root of human existence. Religion is not the only solution to human problems, although it can cast light on them and provide a sense of life.

The same strong determination Belloc showed in defending British Catholics rights to their own schools was also shaping his struggle against the long-standing tradition of laicism that had permeated Europe since the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution. When he was young, Belloc rejected Modernism and Americanism, and he always stuck to what the Church taught.⁵² Pope Leo XIII had condemned

⁵⁰ Jean Guitton. *Mon testament philosophique*. (Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 1997).

⁵¹ Victoria Camps, and Amelia Valcárcel. *Hablemos de Dios*. (Madrid: Taurus, 2007).

⁵² Americanism was the tendency to overestimate action when confronted by contemplation. It appeared among Catholic clergy in the United States of America at the end of the nineteenth century when a biography of Father Isaac T. Hecker was published in 1897. Americanism tried to simplify Roman Catholic dogma in order to adapt it to modern life. Pope Leo XIII wrote the apostolic letter *Testem*

Americanism in 1899, and Pope Pius X faced scepticism and doubt when he condemned Modernism.

Modern readers may be puzzled when they realise the nature of the religious trend that Belloc undertook at the time, given that he gave his unconditional support to each and every one of the official theological statements of the Roman Catholic Church. He, the rationalist thinker and writer, did not hesitate in reinforcing orthodoxy since he considered it the indisputable Truth that casts light on the innate Good Will within the conscience of people.

Although Belloc's persistent defence of the Roman Catholic Church included a revision of the Whigs' interpretation of history about the Protestant Reformation and later events, his ideals were religious, not political. Once he had abandoned active politics, his essays encouraged a society influenced by Distributism, the Roman Catholic social doctrine that, he thought, should shape a possible, fair society of free men. He considered the Roman Catholic Church should be near the people, not just enclosed within sacristies. Belloc did not use literally these words,⁵³ but such was his pervading message.

It is true that Belloc was against the interference by priests in any field apart from Church sacraments and moral teaching. On the other hand, he deeply resented the secularism that was the all-pervasive atmosphere of his days. Pope Pius IX (1792-1878) had been the last pope to keep the Papal States until 1860 when Victor Emmanuel took all his territories. Consequently, the Pope excommunicated him and other leaders of the

benevolentiae nostrae, dated 21st January 1899, to Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore in which he stated the supremacy of contemplation.

Modernism was also a movement that sought to adapt Catholic doctrine to the supposed requirements of modern thought. Modernism usually considered dogmas to be mere historical formulae that summarised the thought of a particular period. Softening the core of Catholic dogmas reduced them to nothing, as dogmas lose their immutable true character and perpetual validity. Pope Pius X condemned Modernism in the encyclical *Pascendi* (1907).

⁵³ Pope Francis used such words when he expressed his belief that the Catholic Church must encounter the poor in a way similar to that carried out by the priests from *villas miserias* in Buenos Aires.

See Roberto Morozzo. *Monseñor Romero. Vida, pasión y muerte en El Salvador*. (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2010). Morozzo (1955) is a contemporary lecturer in history at the Università di Roma Tre (Rome). He is a biographer too. In this book, he explains how Jorge Mario Bergoglio organized a team of thirty priests on the outskirts of the capital to work with the homeless. Belloc lived in the country and usually paid attention to the social conditions of peasants and self-employed workers. Bergoglio lived in the city and was concerned with the urban poor.

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Italian unification. Although these historical facts were not the only aspects of the growing, nineteenth-century secularism, they are significant since they occurred at a time close to Belloc's youth and to his first contact with the Faith. The Roman Catholic Church had been distrusting the civil world since the Enlightenment and even before, and its usual reaction had been strict apologetics and being on guard against heterodoxy. Nevertheless, the Roman Catholic Church officially put an end to such suspicion in the Second Vatican Council.⁵⁴

Academic freedom: the right of a minority

Hilaire Belloc was very concerned with Roman Catholic education in schools, and he took part in the debate when the Bill was presented in the House of Commons. Augustine Birrell was President of the Board of Education, and he introduced the 1906 Education Bill which was intended to address Nonconformist grievances arising from the 1902 Education Act. Birrell was in charge of piloting such a complicated bill that was eventually passed after long parliamentary debate. Although Belloc voted in favour of the final version, he was not satisfied with the treatment given to Roman Catholic children.

In 1902, Parliament passed a new Education Act, drafted by A.J. Balfour (who became Conservative Prime Minister later that year), which radically reorganised the administration of education at the local level. It abolished the school boards in England and Wales. All elementary schools were placed in the hands of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) under the control of the county and county borough councils. In Scotland, the school boards survived until 1918 when they were replaced by elected county authorities and, in 1929, by the County Councils. There was much concern both within and outside Parliament that there should be more measures to ensure that children were healthier. In 1906, needy schoolchildren received further assistance under the Education (Provision of Meals) Act. It allowed Local Education Authorities to

⁵⁴ Hilaire Belloc bravely defended the unity of the Roman Catholic Church and its mission of salvation. Yet his reliance on dogmatic strength and skill in debate to argue uncompromisingly against those outside the Roman Catholic Church was stymied by the renewed Church that sprung from changes affecting the Roman Catholic presentation of doctrine some years after Belloc's death in 1953.

provide meals free-of-charge when parents could not afford to pay. The Education (Administrative Provisions) Act of 1907 required Local Education Authorities to see that all schoolchildren under their care received medical inspection.

Apart from these new regulations concerning children's well-being, there were other demands in the field of religious instruction. Nonconformists, Jews, and Catholics disagreed with the proposed minimum common syllabus that did not represent their beliefs.

Aiming at defending the Roman Catholic parents' right to choose fully Roman Catholic schools for their children, Belloc made vehement speeches in the House of Commons insisting on academic freedom, a concept that has been repeatedly demanded by religious and private schools in contemporary Spain.⁵⁵

* * *

Not only religion as a subject in school syllabus but the general focus on Catholic values as a whole were the basic principles Belloc considered worthwhile when planning everyday activities in Roman Catholic schools. The long struggle for 'the Catholic school' reached its peak in 1906 when Nonconformists urged the tackling of the Education issue. Augustine Birrell's Bill aimed at Voluntary schools⁵⁶ appointing teachers of the same faith as the children who attended these schools and who professed a particular faith.

One of the consequences was that Roman Catholics could have Roman Catholic teachers for all the posts in their schools, although frequently the Anglicans would not. Roman Catholics were against the Cowper-Temple clause that encouraged the teaching of a vague version of Christian common values consisting only in some Bible reading and the singing of hymns. Roman Catholic ambitions could not be satisfied in practice,

⁵⁵ This issue is very controversial because it provokes Spanish politicians' strong feelings depending on their ideologies. The Spanish centre-right is in favour of academic freedom. The Spanish centre-left, although it accepts such constitutional right, is suspicious of the concept. Left-wing parties think academic freedom conceals subtle illegal profits for private institutions, fosters social inequality, and a few private institutions are single-sex schools. Widespread coeducation practice has become a kind of ethical value in Spain. Left-wing parties in general distrust religious education (as a school optional subject) and consider that it manipulates students' conscience.

⁵⁶ Voluntary schools were run by private organizations and would have all their costs met by central or local authorities. Such schools were subject to jointly administered inspections.

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since it was impossible to give equality of treatment to Roman Catholic and County Council schools. The multiplicity of sects made any practical solution very difficult. Belloc supported the Second Reading of the Education Bill on the 7th May 1906, as he thought the Lords would amend it:

The Catholics feel that they are in a sense exiles in this country, (...) If you could devise a purely neutral and secular system, then you could logically say, "We do not ask you to pay for our morals or our philosophy, neither should we pay for yours"; but when you ask us to endow the opinions of the vast majority of people of this country, so long as we are a minority we can stand up and say, "As we pay, so we must receive." (Speaight 1957: 212)

Belloc accepted that a single school area should be neutral, even if the school had been Roman Catholic, because you have no right to teach a small minority something they do not believe in. If four-fifths of the people in an area demanded a particular teaching, they should have it. Politicians realized they could not pass this daring proposal.

On the 10th June 1906, Belloc voted against the Government. Augustine Birrell denied that the Cowper-Temple religious instruction had been rejected by all Roman Catholics since many of them had accepted minimalist, simple, non-denominational teaching. Belloc rejected the amendments introduced by the House of Lords, and made a daring speech in the House of Commons interspersed with French logic, Irish fanaticism, Conservative instincts, and Radical principles that bewildered the Liberal Front Bench, the party to which Belloc belonged.

As time went by, Belloc admitted that no solution would satisfy Radical and Nonconformist opinion, but he was not ready to accept a national system of religion and morals because the Roman Catholic Church was not a sect:

They [Roman Catholics] are not especially careful that their children should hear the Lord's Prayer, the Sermon on the Mount, or a translation of Jewish scriptures. They are specially careful that their children have about them

emblems significant of the Faith, as the Crucifix, and statues of Our Lady and of the Saints; that they should thoroughly know the Penny Catechism; that they should regularly attend Mass; that they should appreciate from the beginning of consciousness and from their earliest years the physical presence of Jesus Christ on earth today in the Blessed Sacrament through the miraculous power of a priesthood, and the power of the same priesthood in the Sacrament of Confession to absolve from sin.⁵⁷

Every Minister of Education dreams of a feasible system in which all children receive simple, common, religious instruction. The demand of Roman Catholic schools with Roman Catholic teachers for Roman Catholic children paid for by the Government in power was impracticable in politics. This argumentation was too absolute to be passed easily and, in the nature of English politics, the proposal could not be met.

The Education Bill 1906 was passed by the House of Commons, but the House of Lords amended it to such an extent that it was effectively a different bill. Eventually, the House of Commons rejected the amendments and the Bill was dropped. This made it impossible for Augustine Birrell to continue in his post. In January 1907, he was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland, to replace James Bryce who had been made British Ambassador to the United States of America. Reginald McKenna succeeded Birrell at the Board of Education.⁵⁸ On the 19th May 1907, the new Education Bill received its Second Reading in the House of Commons. Belloc assumed that Roman Catholics were ready to accept some sacrifices provided that they were not intolerable. The whole question had caused public boredom, and Belloc eventually voted in favour at the Second Reading.

⁵⁷ Letter to *Tribune*, 1907.

⁵⁸ Reginald McKenna was a Liberal Imperialist. He served in the Liberal governments of Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith as President of the Board of Education, First Lord of the Admiralty (1908-11), and Home Secretary. He was considered pretentious by his opponents, as well as methodical and efficient, but with nil charisma by his critics.

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Europe and the faith

On condensing his thought about Christianity, Belloc repeatedly said, “the faith is Europe, and Europe is the faith.” This central thesis was developed in his book *Europe and the Faith* (1920) that was a comment on the lectures Belloc gave to Roman Catholic students of London University during the First World War (1914-1918). From a historical point-of-view, it is true that Europe had been built on the remains of the Roman Empire and late Christian preaching during the Barbarian invasions. However, Belloc’s Europe – indeed, present-day Europe – is much more than that, and Christianity is not the only force that shaped it. Europe is a kaleidoscope of languages, cultures, and nations. Such diversity has been the source of cultural richness and, also, of conflict for many centuries. Nevertheless, Belloc contemplated the reality of Europe from his *latinitas* and could not help projecting his deep knowledge and admiration of Roman culture onto the European tradition.

Belloc believed that Europe ought to find its Christian roots once again. He also believed that France was the nation that had best preserved European Christianity above the substratum that the culture of the Roman Empire had laid over the whole known world. Trajan, who was Roman Emperor from 98 to 117 A.D., tried to unify East and West into a cultural whole, although he did not succeed in this difficult enterprise. Justinian, who was a Byzantine (East Roman) Emperor from 527 to 565 A.D., enacted a law, the Justinian Code, the “*Corpus Iuris Civilis*” (9th April 529 A.D.) that tried to bring together all Roman legislation that was scattered throughout East and West. One of the positive features of Roman culture in the imperial period was that an inhabitant of the furthest eastern corner of the Empire could travel to the most western point of it and be familiar with the laws and institutions that ruled and protected him.⁵⁹

Roman Catholicism was never a political asset in Great Britain as its members were a minority and they were generally neither rich nor powerful. Belloc was fully aware of this fact, but he urged Roman Catholics to present their faith in Britain with an

⁵⁹ This statement summarises much of the work on classical antiquity of Santiago Posteguillo, novelist and Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Jaume I University in Castelló de la Plana, Spain. He is very concerned with the history and culture of Ancient Rome. See Santiago Posteguillo. *La legión perdida. El sueño de Trajano*. (Barcelona: Planeta, 2016).

attitude of courage and without their usual inferiority complex since he characteristically considered being a Roman Catholic a feature of the chic and true universal spirit and, therefore, much more European than Anglicanism:

...the civility of the Faith will make a deep impression if it is presented, but it has to be presented. The difficulty just now is that English Catholics do not present it at all. They fiddle about with unimportant things of detail or fill the air with their hymns of praise of Protestants for being allowed to live. (...)

Four powers govern man, avarice, lust, fear, and snobbishness. One can use the latter. One cannot use the first three. Blackmail is alien to Catholic temper and would cut little ice. Pay we cannot, because we are not rich enough and because those of us who are will not use their money rightly. Threaten we cannot, because we are nobody, all the temporal power is on the other side. But we can spread the mood that we are the bosses and the chic and that a man who does not accept the Faith writes himself down as suburban.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Letter to John Swinnerton Phillimore, dated 16th May 1920.



Fig. 5. Hilaire Belloc (*Punch*)

Chapter Three

Pecuniary Attitudes: Money and Human Nature

[in *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904); *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908); *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909); *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911); *The Girondin* (1911); *The Green Overcoat* (1912); *Mr Petre* (1925); *The Haunted House* (1927); *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929); *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929); *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930); and *The Postmaster-General* (1932)]

Hilaire Belloc's Roman Catholic faith was inextricably associated with his particular social conscience, and his perception of how wealth should be achieved, managed, and distributed. Unselfishness and detachment were the right attitudes, according to his perception of illicit fortunes. He perceived such ethical course of action as the demeanour that was correct in itself, due to inherent goodness, independently from what one could achieve from it. To a certain extent, Belloc's thought as to richness was like Kant's statement of Categorical Imperative, since Belloc wished all people behaved like this declaration established, considering this to be suitable behaviour for all citizens.

Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means.¹

Belloc considered the Christian message was based on the exhortation to compassion, brotherhood, solidarity, and the harmonization of what is individual within what constitutes community.

¹ Immanuel Kant. 1785. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. [Trans. James W. Ellington] 3rd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993): 43. The concept also appears in *Critique of Pure Reason* (2nd edition, 1787).

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A close reading of his novels may lead us to a clearer perception of what Belloc considered fair and appropriate in the society of his day. From the huge gallery of characters that pervade Belloc's novels, there is always a central group that belongs to the upper classes. Some of them are really aristocrats, although they have come close to destitution, whereas others have risen from the lower classes and, thanks to some devious business or other, have earned a lot of money. All in all, Belloc thought that the human struggle to obtain material gain was but a foolish vain endeavour that led you nowhere.

Distributism

William Cobbett had a powerful influence on Belloc.² Being rebellious and thoroughgoing himself, Belloc felt attracted by such radical who so harshly portrayed the misery of rural workers. In his youth, Belloc had also heard about Eli Hamshire's saying: "Three acres and a cow."³ Belloc was in favour of Distributism, the social theory arising from Catholic Christianity.⁴ Belloc's social thought is condensed in three of his books: *The Servile State* (1912), *Economics for Helen* (1924) and *An Essay on the Restoration of Property* (1936). He stated that the majority of citizens are either Proletarian or really poor and deprived of any property whatsoever. As a result of that situation most of the population must render service to the owners of the means of production, the capitalists.

² William Cobbett (1762-1835) was an author Belloc liked and widely read both at Balliol and later. Cobbett's published output was enormous, as he wrote virtually on everything, particularly on farming and politics. Formerly a Tory, Cobbett ended up as an independent who acted and wrote as a convinced radical in favour of small traders and farmers. Belloc admired his remarkable energy, his opinionated trend and his fine journalism.

³ Eli Hamshire wrote letters to Joseph Chamberlain, the radical Liberal Party member who held several posts in office and in opposition. Hamshire used this expression to encourage Chamberlain's struggle against the Conservative Leader Lord Salisbury as well as to foster benefits for newly enfranchised agricultural labourers. Being Chamberlain a renowned orator he used these words as part of his political campaign against rural poverty; the phrase referred to an ideal land holding for every citizen. G.K. Chesterton also used such motto to summarise his own distributist opinions.

⁴ Distributism is the political theory that advocates the ownership of industry by "guilds" of workers. It is not offered as a blueprint for Utopia; it proposes that property be so widely distributed that ownership is the norm. The Distributist programme claims the state should protect small property against amalgamation and promote ownership by favourable laws. Belloc's conversations with Cardinal Manning and his reading of Leo XIII's Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) led him to conceive the practical creed known as Distributism. *The New Witness* (1913) and *GK's Weekly* (1925) were the two papers that spread such ideas. Their readers formed a coherent political group, the Distributist League, in September 1926.

In a crafty observation, Belloc argued that the capitalist state is unstable, as the mass of workers are really free to either work or not work, even if they are pressed to do so because they need to support themselves and their families. Their employers are constrained to contract them at the cheapest possible price, since salaries must be low if companies want to be competitive. A state of conflict therefore exists, and many consequences are generated by this imbalance: if the workless cannot buy, the producers cannot sell, so the capitalist system generates prices in excess of purchasing power; even those affluent enough cannot buy everything that is available in the market.⁵ A possible solution could be exporting such unsold goods, but the problem still lingers on since uncontrolled growth implies depletion of natural resources. Distributists thought that eventually such uncontrolled growth would destroy itself because of its internal contradictions. Marxism had also introduced its own theory about the internal contradictions of capitalism. Nevertheless, whereas Marxism encouraged class struggle, Distributism relied on individual conscience and Christian sense of equity.

Distributism encouraged the Proprietary state, which meant the widespread distribution of property among the majority of families. Belloc considered this the natural economic condition of man and, in accordance with Christian teaching. The alternative would be a free society formed by free and lawful men who would be able to live on their own endeavours. It did not mean the confiscation and re-distribution of property, nor did it mean obligatory ownership. Distributism proposed the state should protect the existing small property against big companies' policy of buying smaller ones and amalgamation. Belloc knew it would not be easy, but it would also be feasible.

Opponents of the idea argued that Distributism had never been put into practice except in very small communities in the 1920s, for example, the commune of craftsmen from Ditchling, in Sussex, which was part of an outstanding experiment.⁶ Critics of

⁵ See *Economics for Helen* (1924): 62.

⁶ The sculptor Eric Gill and other companions established an experiment in communal life in Ditchling, Sussex. In 1921 they founded the Guild of St Joseph and St Dominic which was a Roman Catholic community to protect and promote its members' manual work and kept similarities with the Arts and Crafts Movement from William Morris. The community was set apart from society and was based on the Distributist ideas of Chesterton and Belloc. Hilary Pepler ran the community's Saint Dominic's Press that published *The Game*, a monthly journal. This community was especially prosperous after the First World

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Distributism considered it could not be attested as a proven system of regulating labour relationships. Sometimes Distributism was related to the system of economic production implemented by associated cooperatives.⁷ Some critics also believed it was a new form of corporatism that was similar to the associations of guilds and despised Distributism as some sort of odd primitive mediaeval socialism, old fashioned, too utopian and impossible to be put into practice in the days of Marxism and class struggle pre-eminence. Those critics even thought that the ideological core of Distributism sounded like some extrapolation of the 17th century Diggers and Levellers egalitarian rural communities.⁸ Distributism also clashed with the concept of the standard tactics used by the daring struggle of the workers' movement; trade unions and Labour Party members considered Distributism and the like drives too tame and ethereal to reach genuine social justice.

War (1914-1918) when young people joined it, as they were tired of the dehumanising atmosphere of industrial life. The activity of this unique experiment in the early twentieth century continued, with ups and downs, until 1989. (See "A child of Ditchling's community experiment" in the *Catholic Herald*, London, 11th March 1983.)

⁷ Richard D. Wolff is professor of economics emeritus at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. In his article, he describes some features of the Mondragon Co-operative Corporation and comments on a different way to produce goods and services as well as to establish adequate labour relationships, a system that contrasts with the usual techniques of capitalism. Wolff declares alternatives do exist. For example, within the Mondragon Corporation, workers choose their executive members by a simple election process. Whereas the different rate in salaries in the standard capitalist system, when one compares top executives with the lowest-paid workers' salaries is 400, in the Mondragon Corporation such rate is only 6.5. See Richard D. Wolff. "Yes, there is an alternative to capitalism: Mondragon shows the way." (*The Guardian*, 24th June 2012).

The Mondragon Corporation is a huge group of companies that work together within a cooperative framework. From its inception in 1956, Mondragon Corporation partially implemented some of the principles of Distributism. A Basque Catholic priest, José María Arrizmendiarieta, led four determinate youngsters so as to encourage their good business acumen in the middle of impoverished Spain of the autarchy policy period that followed the Civil War.

⁸ The Diggers, also called True Levellers, were a little group of only about 100-200 people that encouraged daring social reform and put into practice some sort of agrarian communism from 1649 to 1651. Gerrard Winstanley founded such group whose members were imbued with the first republican ideas that arose from Oliver Cromwell's army. The Diggers had a Christian inspiration and were one of the Nonconformist dissenting groups that emerged at a time of great social unrest in England. Its members came from low classes and proposed an egalitarian society in every aspect, so they tried to reform the existing social order through the creation of radical cooperative small communities to cultivate common land. They were against the Enclosure Act and claimed land should be given to the poor and held in common. Eventually they were dispersed by local landowners.

Money-making and status

Such group of ambitious people intended to enhance their personal status by reaching the aristocratic stage, either by generous donations to some minister or party in power, or simply by literally buying their peerage. Although some families have true aristocratic roots, others are not genuinely aristocratic from a historical point of view, but simply well-to-do people or just the opposite, formerly important social groups with no money or property at all, so they become ruined nobility with some coat of forgone past glories, as they do not want to lose their pretended former allure. In his fiction, Belloc tried to chastise the rich for their unbecoming behaviour and excessive ambition, as he was convinced that modern times required less competitiveness and more sense of community. In general, Belloc was for less vacuous mobility or crazy speed and more interiority, less consumerism and sincerer human relationships, less technological restlessness and more humanity, less breaking up and more unity, less individualism and more sharing and peacefully living together.

Belloc's novels usually criticised plutocracy, either traditional landowners or the "nouveau riche." His invectives were also aimed at people who lived off the income from investments or real estates. He generally depicted rich people trying to achieve their money goals whatever the cost might be. Such characters frequently invested in the Stock Exchange and sometimes they obtained a final dubious reward after so much toil and moil. There were occasional funny references to the Devil, as the tempter who fosters and leads people's mischievous drives. Although this peculiar character – the Devil – may sound an old-fashioned remnant from bygone days, the Devil was a frequent reference in the Catholic discourse of Belloc's epoch.

At the end of many of his novels, Belloc apparently punished greediness because he thought this was the suitable manner to deal with such a human, deeply-rooted, sick-minded desire. He did it by restoring the original situation through unexpected events that eventually disappointed these would-be rich people. It seems that Belloc believed in the circular order of events and the return of identical circumstances, both in his fiction

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and in real life. He subtly evoked the classic theory of the Stoics⁹ and Nietzsche's later reformulation,¹⁰ although Belloc's idea was also reminiscent of St Augustine's Christian legend and his own belief in the relativity of worldly things when compared with eternal life.¹¹ In a passage of his fifth novel *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911), Myself states that men's great felicity seemed to be the doing and undoing of any task whatsoever. In this way, Belloc conveys the idea that human activities involve a circular nature through some sort of mythical everlasting return:

While you were speaking, Sailor, it seemed to me you had forgotten one great felicity, manly purpose, and final completion of the immortal spirit, which is surely the digging of holes and the filling of them up again. (*The Four Men: A Farrago* 1911: 33)

No matter which is the chosen course of action for any human behaviour, Belloc likes to supply a diffuse sense of overall justice, some kind of ultimate retribution that simply takes his characters back to the original starting point of the novel or places them in their well-deserved position of happiness or regret, according to their previous ethical behaviour. However, no emotional load dampens his dénouements, as a persistent atmosphere of coldness lingers on.

Belloc fought adamantly against the upper-class posh bias of wealthy people and enjoyed toying with storybooks that tended to regard the rich as too self-satisfied, socially useless citizens who aimed at nothing but increasing their income and prolonging their laziness. To his great joy, Belloc considered dons as one of his

⁹ The Stoics believed that man should live rationally and in harmony with nature, and that virtue is the only good. The virtuous man should be indifferent to pleasure, as well as to pain and misfortune. He must achieve spiritual freedom and conformity with the divine reason controlling all nature.

¹⁰ Nietzsche mentioned the Stoics at the end of the Prologue in the 2nd edition of *The Gay Science* (1887). He paradoxically commented "their superficiality through their remarkable depth."

¹¹ The medieval legend "Augustine and the Seashell" tells a story of the boy who tried to bring all the sea into a small hole in the beach sand. The story referred to St Augustine's strenuous effort to explain the nature of God and comprehend the immensity of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Any Catholic reader of Belloc immediately realizes the similarity between "the digging of holes and the filling of them up again" and the evocation of this Augustinian legend. Yet there is another philosophical implication, as St Augustine specifically mentioned that man was created for God, so man can only find full rest and plenitude in Him. *Confessions* (A.D. 397-398) X, 27, 38. Belloc firmly believed in the longing for God.

favourite scapegoats; he thought academics were ignorant chatter-boxes who could only coax the very credulous and fatuous into believing in dons' supposedly intellectual superiority and clairvoyant ability. Even if many dons are presented as poor little devils with no money at all, Belloc likes to laugh at dons' obsession with becoming members of the affluent élite and their taste for socially interacting with the rich. This is the case with the bashful and pretentious Professor Higginson in his seventh novel *The Green Overcoat* (1912). Socializing with the rich – Belloc makes dons think – could be very convenient to obtain funds to publish their books and scientific journals, as well as raise funds in order to better university facilities.

Business and character-building

It is characteristic of Belloc to offer a protracted introduction to present the protagonist or a relevant character in his fiction. He can use ten pages to make clear he is writing about a real person he knows very well, for instance, the first pages from his first novel *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904). Many protagonists are businessmen who behave honestly and who have considerable wealth. Ethical nuances are introduced too, as honest Mr Burden openly says that everyone in office should tell whatever shares he possesses. Belloc right then adds that Mr Burden “refused to follow the logical consequences of his creed” (*Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* 1904: 84). Obviously, he is very inconsistent, as he does not practise the general principle he proposes for the rest of the world.

Mr Burden's startling piety and considerable wealth influenced people to elect him Justice of Peace in the County of Surrey. The name of “Burden” and its tragic connotation is ironically commented at the end of the novel. Mr Burden is associated with the derogatory overtone of “a heavy sack” that is to say, the painful duty he has to endure.

Mr Barnett, taking it upon himself to be spokesman said: “My dear Mr Burden!” and he took Mr Burden's hand in his right hand and put his left hand over it and held it fast, to show a real friendship; (...) Mr Burden said: “Thank ye”: he sat

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down slowly, as would a man that bore a heavy sack upon his shoulders, and the rest sat down around the table. (*Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* 1904: 288)

As the novel progresses, Mr Burden is more frequently ill, and Belloc repeats Burden's inability to understand what is happening around him:¹²

The constraint which he felt in Mr Barnett's presence; the certitude he had that Mr Barnett was a genius and a maker of England; (...) all these contradictions put his mind into a whirl. (*Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* 1904: 224)

Shares continuously go up and down, but Mr Burden feels old and weak,¹³ and is astounded at these fluctuations. He is possessed by sadness continually.¹⁴

This literary feature appears again and again: the protagonist begins not to understand the current events and enters some mist of confusion. In Belloc's second novel *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908), the protagonist contemplates what is happening "in real perturbation and suffering" (*Mr Clutterbuck's Election* 1908: 174). Each step upwards in Mr Clutterbuck's political career has been boosted by his granting of money to the party. At the end of the novel, precisely when he is already entering old age, Mr Clutterbuck obtains a very ironical compensation for his money: "The first stone of the institute was laid, and Sir Percy Clutterbuck received his high reward" (*Mr Clutterbuck's Election* 1908: 276).

Public schools and universities are also presented as institutions expert at 'building solid character.' In *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904), Cosmo enters such institutions that "make him a man" (*Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* 1904: 19-21). In the different context of Belloc's fourteenth novel *The Postmaster-General* (1932), Belloc slips into the text one of his peculiar innuendoes when he contrasts youngsters'

¹² See *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904): 223.

¹³ See *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904): 241.

¹⁴ See *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904): 240.

idealism with the older generation's stony heart.¹⁵ Older people are more concerned with money whereas youngsters unconsciously just live on ideas very frequently.

Men and risk-taking

Belloc's novels generally introduce people who daringly invest money in faraway goals that represent risky enterprises like mines, railways, delta plans for irrigation projects. The M'Korio Delta, near Cameroon, is one of those investments.¹⁶ Very few of these financial adventures are finally successful, since lack of agreement between partners or some unforeseen event make them unfeasible. Risky and foolishly adventurous investments may provoke honest men's bankruptcy. Belloc liked to mention "the curse of money": he thought that desperate search for wealth inevitably led to disaster, because his concept of justice and equity transformed man's ambition into a whirling abyss.

Mr Burden increasingly begins to feel the strange and persistent suspicion that the M'Korio business is not going to be successful.¹⁷ Belloc provides a premonitory paragraph to warn the reader of the impending peril that lies in wait for the protagonist.¹⁸ At a meeting with his partners, Mr Burden loses control and a terrible outburst follows.¹⁹ He dies after arriving home.²⁰ At the end of the book, Belloc writes Mr Burden was an "Honest Englishman and a good man" (*Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* 1904: 312).

In Belloc's third novel *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), Charles Repton is a baronet²¹ and a solid master of finance who invests in Van Diemens, the company that is going to develop all the North-eastern coastline of Australia²² by means of a huge railway line that is also known locally as "The Out and Out."²³ Bingham is the

¹⁵ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 165.

¹⁶ See *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904): 55, 61.

¹⁷ See *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904): 205.

¹⁸ See *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904): 218.

¹⁹ See *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904): 297.

²⁰ See *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904): 311.

²¹ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 81.

²² See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 8-9.

²³ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 39.

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redoubtable impervious Charles Repton's partner in Van Diemens business.²⁴ There is another businessman, Ole Man Benson, who is the Chief Equaliser of huge investments at the Durango Investment Company and other societies.²⁵ His main investment is Popocatepelts, in Mexico. This scheme is a dam construction that turns out to be completely ruined.²⁶

Such series of misfortunes involves the rare tendency many wealthy landowners, merchants or manufacturers assume in Belloc's novels. It seems as if money and bad omen were marching together. The use of sustained irony makes Belloc's novels funny but renders them difficult to fully comprehend for readers who are less accustomed to spontaneous literary analysis.

The frequent practice of blackmail entangles some characters who get involved in obscure affairs with other members of the same social class. For example, in *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904), Mr Capes visits Cosmo's rooms and asks for a compensation of £750 for his "beloved and injured daughter" (*Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* 1904: 38). This case seems to be no other matter than the girl's frustrated expectations of a prospective marriage, although Mr Capes tries to take advantage of the fact to obtain money from the supposed offender. In Belloc's opinion, disputes about money lie at the bottom of many human relationships.

This is the case of *honest* Mr Clutterbuck,²⁷ who sincerely tries to do business with the society formed by two partners: Baron of Czernwitz and a Mr Boyle. On the course of events, Mr Clutterbuck discovers the Baron has just died and Mr Boyle may be a swindler, since he has suddenly disappeared and the police suspects Mr Boyle could be concealed in Buenos Aires.²⁸ As a result of this strange affair, Mr Clutterbuck loses £5,000,²⁹ but at the same time he invests money in the once discredited property of Curricant Docks and thanks to the Government's new plans for such port earns a lot

²⁴ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 12, 38.

²⁵ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 16.

²⁶ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 26-28, 29.

²⁷ See *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908): 202.

²⁸ See *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908): 27.

²⁹ See *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908): 31 and *ff.*

of money.³⁰ In Belloc's twelfth novel *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929), a quite absurd cheap picture – due to perils and sheer chance – enjoys an incredible career and finds refuge in the noblest of London's private collections.³¹ All through this novel, Mr Bensington – one of the main characters – puts into practice his crafty illegal procedures to become a rich art dealer. He has each of his pals card-indexed and keeps a whole dossier of their movements and little compromising adventures. Mr Bensington makes them cooperate through blackmail or bribery.

Belloc likes to create characters that play with money and behave like puppets on the strings of fortune, because their money comes and goes repeatedly while they can not do anything to stop such foolish and blind succession of events. Their ultimate profit or losses depend much more on the whims of luck than on the carefully calculated risk and ability to invest in solid mutual funds or reliable investment schemes. Belloc likes to play with the concept of unforeseeable strokes of luck; in this way, he makes his characters happy or miserable as he likes. This literary device is not Belloc's malicious way of torturing his characters; Belloc's novels try to make their readers aware of the true nature of human greed and its dangerous consequences.

Money and politics

Real people from London in those days (1904-1909) nourished the creation of some characters that Belloc craftily depicted. For example, in *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), Belloc introduced Mary Smith, a widow³² who was going to play an important role in the novel as the person who eventually achieved one of her main goals, promoting George Mulross Demaine.³³ Belloc transformed the real character of his acquaintance Margot Asquith (née Tennant) into his fictional Mary Smith. In the real London, the intriguing, political-gossip hostess Margot was related to members of most of the aristocratic families in England. Within the novel, Mary Smith obstinately fights against everything and everybody to reach her ultimate objective: basically

³⁰ See *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908): 33.

³¹ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 38.

³² See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 19.

³³ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 17-19, 24.

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“networking” that is, increasingly broadening her social contacts with anybody that is socially important. After many vicissitudes, at the end of the novel, senior and tired Honest Repton is deservedly promoted to the House of Lords while helpless George Mulross Demaine is also promoted to the new Warden of the Court of Dowry, due to Mary Smith’s surreptitious peddling of political favours and cunning Machiavellian manoeuvres.

One of the most persistent Belloc’s obsessions was the subtle way politicians intermarried, just belonging to related or collateral families, relatives, or kinship. Belloc realised politicians represented roughly identical interests, in spite of the different labels they adopted. Left and right wings he thought were formed by the same kind of people. For example, Mary Smith’s cousin is William Bailey, an eccentric, wealthy and middle-aged celibate.³⁴ Dolly – as friends colloquially call him – is the Prime Minister³⁵ who is also Mary Smith’s cousin.³⁶ Mary Smith’s familiarity with Dolly is cunningly used to achieve her private goals. Belloc introduced Dolly again in his fourth novel, *Pongo and The Bull* (1910). In this novel, Dolly is a young prime minister who is extremely popular and in whom readers have recognised the real public figure of Herbert Henry Asquith.³⁷

Far from the usual tactics in everyday politics, Belloc was convinced that complete honesty was possible, even if such kind of honesty was his own very peculiar concept of this virtue. As a result, he considered any manipulation from the stated rules as well as the sheer establishment of – in his opinion – unfair rules should be considered illegal and denounced immediately. Such behaviour caused him a lot of antagonism, as he was intransigent in contents and manners when it came to arrange any political compromise. As time went by, Belloc became partially isolated, discouraged in his former suggestions and decided to abandon active politics as an MP candidate. Perhaps

³⁴ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 33.

³⁵ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 72.

³⁶ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 18.

³⁷ Herbert Henry Asquith was British prime minister from 1908 to 1916. As head of the Liberal Party he fostered great activity and political reform. Yet in *Pongo and The Bull* (1910) Belloc’s keen eye devised a novel that best summarizes the subtle but real alliance between the two major parties. The book oozes Belloc’s disillusionment with the Parliamentary system.

he did not realise that political action was based on calm and persistent struggle to reach some sort of compromise. Dialogue is in the very nature of politics and it implies not only the ability to talk concisely on one's pretensions but also to know the right time to claim daringly, put pressure on your opponents and – just the opposite – knowing how and when to give something up or capitulate – in a clever way – if need be. Political intelligence lies much in the ability to know your wing's real possibilities of success and the ultimate result of your struggle. This process requires much careful calculation and thorough knowledge of the deep social and political reality, not just a superficial overview of appearances.

In any political strategy or process, the power of the press is decisive, although some newspapers support a character's course of action only partially, so as to maintain some pervading way of non-commitment in case a particular prospective business could turn the other way around as time goes by. Newspapers steer a middle course between open support and half-hearted encouragement in order to keep readers pleased and increase their circulation. People tend to accuse rich merchants of having bought the London press, as they frequently appoint some of their favourite men as editors of the most influential newspapers.³⁸

Capitalism and the crisis of Christian faith

Belloc's preoccupation with the way people handle their money-investment, risk-taking and so on is especially relevant. In the recent economic crisis,³⁹ the very foundations of capitalism appear to be under threat and this phenomenon is closely linked to values, ethics and the morality of decision-making. One of the characteristics of present day capitalism is its urgent need to obtain high profit in very short periods of time. Globalisation has sped up the whole process, since the speed at which the money flow – goes forward and comes back, suddenly changes direction invested in volatile opportunities precisely to come out of them once more and take a different way in a never-ending succession of twists and turns – produces an impression of dizziness on

³⁸ See *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904): 90, 94.

³⁹ The fall of Lehman Brothers in the United States of America in the year 2008 signalled the visible commencement of the recent global economic crisis.

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the investor. It is not the investor who actually controls his money, but the middleman who takes decisions. Consequently, the investor's ethical responsibility is completely alienated by a system that does not take into account the investor's opinion and will.

This and other features can transform business into a mechanism for transferring one's responsibility to a stranger. Also, not unconnected with the current crisis of capitalism and its relation to ethics, there is a parallel crisis of faith, especially in the European Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. Belloc always believed that Roman Catholicism was the religion of Europe and formed the basis of Europe-wide values and morality. He believed that without Roman Catholicism, Europe as we know it would cease to exist or, at least, would cease to be the same:

I desire you to remember that we are Europe; we are a great people. The faith is not an accident among us, (...) it is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh: it is a philosophy made by and making ourselves. We have adorned, explained, enlarged it; we have given it visible form. This is the service we Europeans have done to God. In return He has made us Christians. (*An Open Letter on the Decay of Faith*, addressed to C.G. Masterman, 1906)

He realised Christianity was in crisis especially in Europe and the core of such turmoil was faith. Then and now, many countries of old Christian tradition had become reluctant to the Gospel message. At present, there is tiredness of faith, vocations to priesthood are at a standstill and there is a growth of scepticism and disbelief. Churchgoers are increasingly old people and their number diminishes constantly. Europe is in an economic and financial crisis that, fundamentally, is based on the ethical crisis that threatens the Old Continent.⁴⁰ Belloc proposed we should find the light that could enlighten our knowledge, not only with general ideas but with particular

⁴⁰ The Republic of Ireland is an outstanding example of a country in which Catholicism has been a symbol of national identity, although some will consider that simply the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland has been traditionally priest-ridden and protected by the political power. Another sample of this trend is the traditional influence of the Polish Catholic Church in politics. In Spain, an equivalent of such "old Christianity" could be some sort of National-Catholicism with its structures based on political power and clerical authoritarianism.

imperatives, some sort of drive that could move our wills. He considered these questions must be answered by the announcement of the Gospel, new evangelism, so its message becomes *the* event and the announcement be transformed into life. However, for Belloc, such announcement does not consist in changing the original Gospel from Jesus or nostalgically going back to old beliefs and tenets.

The new announcement is called so because it has new addressees and new announcers of the Gospel. The addressee is the Western World that is secularized and post-Christian in some aspects, with its idols of scientism, rationalism and relativism. The novelty in the modern period of the announcement of the Gospel is the laypeople that constitute a species of nuclear energy for the Church as to spiritual matters. The clergy is a minority while the Christian laity are numerous.

To critics who are not aware of the true character of Belloc, it could be argued that Belloc was not a genuine and sincere Catholic believer, but a writer of Catholic ideas. This assumption is far from reality, since the problem is that Belloc was *too* Catholic, even to the point of intolerance. He was a practising Catholic so convinced of his beliefs that could challenge anyone to argue about any specific creed and the philosophy of life that stems from it as a logical consequence. Belloc considered that true faith implies sincere commitment, not just some pious appearance to be accepted among well-to-do neighbours to be fully accepted in their circle of acquaintances.

Money and class-climbing

Belloc knew the irresistible attraction wealthy people or rich aristocrats had for the average people. He creates a scene in his ninth novel *The Haunted House* (1927) in which Lord and Lady Mere de Beurivage regularly attend Anglican services only in a prolonged effort to enter the socially-influential group of people, those that at the beginning of the twentieth century went to the Anglican chapel every Sunday, not precisely because of their thorough religious convictions, but as one of the distinctive traits of their social class. Taking advantage of this religious gathering, Hilda tries to ingratiate herself with Amatheia, as Hilda is very interested in selling her own estate to Amatheia.

On Sunday mornings Lord and Lady Mere de Beurivage went to church. They attended Divine Service. (...) they received the consolations of religion from eleven o'clock till close on lunch. (...) Aunt Hilda was with them, you may be sure. She could go in the best car. (...) Hilda and Amatheia [Lady Mere de Beurivage] agreed upon the excellence of the parson, the former with enthusiasm (for was she not the seller?) but the latter (being purchaser) with more caution. (*The Haunted House* 1927: 152, 153)

Belonging to the Established Church was one important ingredient to concoct your public self-image, your mythic legend as an active member of the affluent upper class. This was the same even if you were an upstart, as was the case with the couple that called themselves "Lord and Lady Mere de Beurivage." They were originally simple street sellers by a wheelbarrow who became nouveau-riche people that obviously wanted to belong to the upper crust.

Sometimes genuine aristocracy is accepted by Belloc but in those cases, aristocrats are sensible members of a historical elite that behave within some code of honour and are not interested in showing off. In Belloc's sixth novel *The Girondin* (1911), Belloc creates a mysterious encounter of the protagonist, Georges Boutroux, with a lady, "the Spinster de La Roche," who is a member of the former French landed gentry, the equivalent class to English landowners. The lady represents a serene and detached observer of the revolutionary process; although she says she liked some things from the previous period she carefully stays aside from any political opinion about the revolution. Belloc presents this lady in a positive way. He likes her social class but hates plutocrats whom he considers inept upstarts who want to replace the genuine English nobility that had brought stability to the country and embodied a whole tradition of (good) manners.

The encounter between Boutroux and the lady is one of the few moments in Belloc's novels in which he, a generally brisk and tough author, gives way to his near-romantic vein. The military commander sends a patrol of five men to requisition five

horses from a nearby country house and farm. Boutroux is the lieutenant in charge of the soldiers and the mission. The tone of the encounter is full of poetic references. The middle-aged lady has a pleasant, gentle, somewhat ironical voice. She is neither tall nor large in body, and yet she is not frail; there is a pretty dignity of movement. The mistress of the place invites Boutroux to come in and take wine at the terrace while the French soldiers and the groom are grouping the horses. A fragrant August night is the surrounding environment for the lady's mysterious words and Boutroux's half-invented, half-real replies. The lady speaks about the soldiers' suffering in a sincere tone of pity that moves Boutroux. She asks many polite questions about the meaning of the impending war, political wings, the passing of time and love. Above all she sweetly enquires about the "young lady" – Boutroux has just mentioned – who has given him his military commission. They both speak not about a particular girl but about the universal woman every man loves, as well as the universal male lover from the past every woman sadly recalls. The brief conversation increasingly becomes more intimate – to some extent even existential – but the melancholic tone pervades: love recollections and sentimental grief have left everlasting scars on Boutroux and the lady:

[Boutroux said:] "I am neither with one set of the dogs nor with the other."

She laughed gently in the darkness.

"When you are my age, Lieutenant," she said, "you will be more certain of that than ever, and you will only take sides in the things to which your heart moves you. ... (*The Girondin* 1911: 297-298)⁴¹

Money and transition

A complete change in scope involves wealthy classes and local aristocracy. From avaricious and disgustingly ambitious Amatheia Huggins and Hilda Maple in *The Haunted House* (1927), or fatuous Higginson in *The Green Overcoat* (1912) and the like, Belloc moves to the dignified figure of the French mistress of the farm in *The Girondin* (1911). Consequently, it is not just money what transforms characters into

⁴¹ See *The Girondin* (1911): Chap. XVIII.

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revolting human beings, but their own vices and wickedness too. The whole novel about the French Revolution is quite different in tone and purpose. It is not the usual sarcastic story that many Belloc's novels tend to be, but a serious attempt to supply a many-sided reflection on that political turmoil, as it includes a thoughtful consideration about a young idealistic revolutionary who is inevitably pushed to an uncertain fate due to blind circumstances.

Belloc's ideas – fictionalised in the form of novels – have some relevance and communicate some message for today's ongoing crisis. For liberals, the worry has always been the relationship – interference – between Church and State, but what Belloc may be hinting at is that it is the relationship between faith and the economic order that is fundamental to our survival as Western democracies. The values we hold are linked to the way in which we manage money, carry out business transactions, and accept risks. Just to prevent everybody from their natural tendency to compromise or to be accommodating with their morals when faced with unfavourable circumstances, Belloc continuously reminds us of our duty to believe and behave in a unified way, by avoiding any misconduct whatsoever so as not to dissociate our confessed values from our everyday economic decisions.

On writing about money matters, Belloc supplies both direct and oblique references. An interesting case is that of Mr Petre.⁴² On coming back from America, a man loses his memory while he is travelling from Southampton to London by train. In a general confusion, everybody assumes he is a different kind of person and mistakes his true identity. The man is puzzled at the beginning, but he feels compelled to follow this state of things and accepts people calling him "Mr Petre," although this is not his real name. He is thought to be a wealthy shareholder and he hesitatingly plays his part in this unexpected role. Mr Petre earns a lot of money in the Stock Exchange due to sheer coincidence, crafty observation and good luck:

⁴² See Belloc's eighth novel, *Mr Petre* (1925).

He began to realise it. (...) he, Peter Blagden of Harrington, a poor gentleman. Insufficiently provided, embarrassed – had an immense lump of money; over three million pounds. (*Mr Petre* 1925: 160)

But the gigantic sum in the locked cupboard of his bedroom above less affected him than the doubling of his insufficient revenue two years before would have done. He desired nothing but his old friends, his home and the peaceful passage of age, and these were now secure. (*Mr Petre* 1925: 170)

Such are Mr Petre's goals in life and he admires his old friend Buffy Thompson who "had done nothing all his life, and was therefore a very happy man" (*Mr Petre* 1925: 191). Mr Petre eventually discovers he is really Peter Blagden. Thinking it over, from the perspective of old age, Peter Blagden feels money generally brings misfortune:

I've never yet heard of anything being done with a lump like that that didn't bring disaster to all concerned. How can one give big money and not give a curse with it? (*Mr Petre* 1925: 192)

Peter Blagden rejoices in his economic welfare – he is very rich at the moment – and peacefully spends his retirement yachting and talking with his best friend, Buffy Thompson.⁴³

Having an amount of money also means a very useful way to help companions in extremely difficult circumstances. In *The Girondin* (1911), Nicholas is the experienced servant of Senior Boutroux – Georges' uncle – who generously helps Georges Boutroux to escape from revolutionary justice, as Georges has killed Miltiades accidentally and has also hurt the revolutionary sentinel who was standing by Georges' uncle's main door. Old Nicholas helps injured Georges with food and gives him all the money he has. Belloc thinks money is only useful not as a static possession that –

⁴³ See *Mr Petre* (1925): 191-192.

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through sheer accumulation – gives pleasure to its greedy owners, but because of the good actions it may cause:

His mind rapidly surveyed his lessening chances. “Nicholas,” he said, “I have no money.”

“Oh, Master Georges,” said the old man, “all I have is yours.”

“Why then,” said Georges, smiling at him, “let me have it. You shall not in the long run be a loser.”

(...) [Nicholas gave him] a pathetic bunch of assignats [*sic*] worth on their face value two hundred livres. (*The Girondin* 1911: 79, 80)

Money and doing without money

The very nature of some accounts makes them suitable to create a whole universe in which money is not essential, since there are always other unexpected ways to support oneself and one’s accompanying group of wayfarers. In *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911), Grizzlebeard is the richest of all four men,⁴⁴ while the poet, on the contrary, has nothing at all.⁴⁵ A repeated topic is that money is not necessary, as food and other resources seem to come out of the blue in the novel. In some cases, the explanation goes along mythical paths or is a tall story for example the reason Belloc provides to explain how the Sailor can obtain food for free. When the other three men ask him how he has managed to find his hut open and packed with provisions, the Sailor simply says:

“Why, you must know that near this house lives a Troll, who many many years ago when he was young was ensnared by the love of a Fairy, (...). He is my landlord, as it were, and he it was that gave me this tea, this milk, this sugar, and this loaf, but it is no good your asking where; for no one can find that war-lock house of theirs but me.” (*The Four Men: A Farrago* 1911: 38)

⁴⁴ See *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911): 100.

⁴⁵ See *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911): 144.

But once more, money is also very useful to invite onlookers to have beer and make them happy. There is a passage in which the Sailor sings a song about the Pelagian Heresy⁴⁶ and the other three join in the chorus.⁴⁷ When they have finished the song, half the inhabitants of the hill are standing round. The Sailor makes a speech to them and leaves five shillings upon the table, so the crowd may have their beer.⁴⁸ In Belloc's novels – and in his personal life too – drinking wine or beer was a very natural way to enjoy life to the full and celebrate the “joie de vivre.”

Brand new coins irradiate their lure and attract men because of their beauty but also – and above all – due to the soundness of their value:

I took from the ticket-pocket of my coat a sovereign, new minted, yellow red, stamped in the effigy of the king, full-weighted, excellently clean and sound. And holding this up between my finger and my thumb, I said:

“Here is my first love! Whom I met when I first came out from the warmth of home (...) who has ever been absolutely sure and true, (...) has ever been sterling and fixed and secure.” (*The Four Men: A Farrago* 1911: 119)

Human nature goes on and on thinking about money as if it was some sort of built-in constituent of our being humans. The four men begin to speak about what they think being rich is like and the things they could do if they were so.⁴⁹ The possibilities associated to wealth have been a frequent human chimera since the mists of time.

* * *

Following the traditional view of the Catholic priests of his epoch, Belloc felt that money and lust formed the central core of man's downfall. Old Catholic teaching considered that worldliness, Devil and lust were the enemies of soul. Worldliness meant

⁴⁶ Pelagianism was a Christian heresy that held that men are not naturally sinful and have “free will” to take the first steps to salvation by their own efforts. This challenged the basic Christian doctrines related to “Grace”, the “Original Sin” and Christ's Atonement. Belloc freely includes the three men's song as an interlude between two passages from the novel.

⁴⁷ See *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911): 48-49.

⁴⁸ See *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911): 51.

⁴⁹ See *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911): 78-80.

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many things especially greediness for money, vanity and the wildly chaotic search for amusement. Such ethical discourse used to underlie many of the Sunday sermons in the Catholic churches at the beginning of the 20th century. Belloc wrote about this idea in a roundabout way by introducing the concept of “selling one’s soul.” His was not a concept reminiscent of Goethe’s *Faust* or Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*,⁵⁰ but a mythical story from his own. Belloc’s account begins when Grizzlebeard is a bit angry and confused after arguing with a stranger about philosophy. The Poet respectfully tells him it is a good thing to agree “and also to bend oneself to practical matters” (*The Four Men: A Farrago* 1911: 138), but Grizzlebeard, still smouldering, says in a gruffy way:

“What our fathers called “selling one’s soul.” Yes; it is the easiest and the worst thing a man can do” (*The Four Men: A Farrago* 1911: 138-139).

The Sailor tells the story of how a man tried to sell his soul to the Devil, precisely following the topic Grizzlebeard had began to comment on a moment before.⁵¹ In the literary convention of this fantasy, Peter’s soul is a *material thing* that is wrapped up in a nice parcel. So the story goes and has an odd ending when this wretched fellow feels he has been swindled the price and has a sudden fit of wrath:

At this Peter the Politician got up swearing, and went out, forgetting to take his soul with him, and leaving it there on the table all tied up. (*The Four Men: A Farrago* 1911: 142)

(...) In a little parcel in brown paper and with a strong, splendid string. (*The Four Men: A Farrago* 1911: 140)

⁵⁰ Goethe’s *Faust* (1808, 1829, 1832) basically presents a man who seeks access to transcendent knowledge denied to the rational mind. Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (1604) is a play in which Faust is a doctor in theology who sells his soul to the devil for power and knowledge. On his part, Belloc invents a humorous story that tries to amuse the reader.

⁵¹ See *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911): 140.

The sailor adds man usually starts racing and careering and bounding and flying with the Money-Devil after him,

until at last (somewhere about sixty as a rule or a little later) he gives a great cry and throws up his hands and falls down. Then does the Money-Devil come and eat him up. Many millions love such a course. (*The Four Men: A Farrago* 1911: 32)

Later on, the Sailor goes on saying that there is another Devil too: lust:

Millions are seen to pursue this lust-hunted course, and some even try to combine it with that other sort of money-devil-huntedness. (*The Four Men: A Farrago* 1911: 32)

* * *

The figure of the *wise man* is usually a constant of Belloc's novels. Belloc manages to include the peculiar appearance of some character or other who imperceptibly directs the action, from some central conundrum – the core of the problem – to the final solution. This is a kind of serene character that eventually contributes to setting events or helps somebody in trouble due to his or her clairvoyance of facts and well-balanced judgement. He or she is usually a cold-blooded person who copes with reality in a very thoughtful and wise course of action and is able to draw precise conclusions from his keen observation and capacity of reasoning. This person appears – more or less unexpectedly – in the middle of the novels. He either solves the main problem and cooperates on the disentanglement of some trouble or speeds up the dénouement. In any case, he is the shrewd person who fosters the protagonist's final success, makes the characters face their inescapable destiny or supplies some kind of ultimate justice. Some remarkable examples of *wise men* are Mr Lawson in *The Postmaster-General* (1932), Mr Kirby's sensible demeanour in *The Green Overcoat* (1912),⁵² both Dr

⁵² See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 328.

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Knickerbocker and Repton in *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), realistic Cosmo – to a certain extent – in *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904), crafty Bowring in Belloc's thirteenth novel *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930), and so on. The 'wise man' is not always a sheer unselfish kind-hearted actor; for example, Bowring certainly arranges everything to foster a correct distribution of posts and wealth, but in exchange he takes advantage of it all and obtains a remarkably good job and a desirable salary too.

Characters are usually canny and distrustful. They take precautions in whatever they do and foresee some sort of back door to escape, just in case things start going bad. They make every effort to sustain suitable alibis and keep in touch with valuable witnesses who help them by giving evidence when the occasion requires. Such characters pursue material gain as their main goal; they try to earn money or obtain promotion in their jobs or political posts. His prolonged experience as man of the world trained Belloc to be an expert in the variety of techniques to guarantee one's results and he reflected so in his novels.

Some characters in the stories – on some occasions they are also members of the *wise men* group – know all the tricks, since they belong to the callous clique that masters every crafty and shady dealing to reach their ultimate goals and increase their profits. Sometimes Belloc includes tough characters that impersonate the many virtues of military strategists. Belloc read modern history at Balliol, liked military history and was an expert on French and British battles. He travelled through Europe to document the exact surrounding of each and every battle that he was commissioned to write about. He used part of his command of military techniques to display characters that are observant witnesses of others' behaviour so as to reach their own conclusions and design suitable plans to attain a particular objective. These characters are crafty and capable strategists with a peculiar ability to think very fast and correctly. In the manner of spies and double agents, they are able to be ahead of their enemies and take the initiative or suddenly change the course of action if any emergency occurs. Belloc planned many of his novels to lay successive traps to catch those greedy for money in some sort of maze they could never escape from.

The Postmaster-General (1932)

One of his fantastic stories revolves around television. Belloc introduced this topic that was very new to the nation, as the Royal Charter that established terms for television broadcasting dates from 1927, while regular British television broadcasting began in 1936. He used this invention as an excuse for a new novel that is reminiscent of the Marconi scandal that he had witnessed in his days as an MP. Belloc's novel *The Postmaster-General* (1932) condenses some of the characteristics of his other novels about avaricious and crafty characters that take every step towards becoming rich overnight through dishonest procedures. Set in futuristic March 1960 – the novel was published in 1932 – the story introduces politicians and businessmen who are seeking an important government contract regarding television monopoly. The difficulty lies in who should ultimately prove possessor of a gadget called Dow's Intensifier, the electronic device that can make long-range television practicable.⁵³ Although the government selection committee has decided against James McAuley,⁵⁴ he produces a note previously prepared by him on official paper consisting of twenty typewritten lines and asks Wilfrid Halterton – the Postmaster-General – to sign it. Halterton demands – in fair exchange for his daring signature – another statement signed by McAuley. On the paper, McAuley offers him the management of the Corporation, “ten thousand” as a salary, and “free of tax”.⁵⁵ After the meeting, in a funny brisk movement, McAuley manages to steal this written statement from Halterton's jacket pocket.⁵⁶ In full anguish, Halterton asks for a second letter from McAuley⁵⁷ who cheekily denies having given Halterton any letter at all.⁵⁸

Completely annoyed and fed up with everything, Halterton asks for advice to politically experienced and wise Jack Williams, the Home Secretary.⁵⁹ Williams is really an upstart, since he originally was a very poor man who lived in a muddy slum up

⁵³ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 15.

⁵⁴ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 18.

⁵⁵ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 25-26.

⁵⁶ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 29.

⁵⁷ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 38.

⁵⁸ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 44.

⁵⁹ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 73-81.

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North before the Great War.⁶⁰ Williams is a very good billiard player and one day he is playing with McAuley. After beginning the set, they hang their coats on the pegs. Crafty Williams manages to convey the two envelopes from McAuley's coat inner pocket in a flash.⁶¹ Williams has always thought that obtaining possession of documents in a roundabout way is necessary for success in politics.⁶² Williams is demanding Henry Gunter to pay what is owing to him, as he helped Gunter on three occasions when Gunter had stolen money on one occasion by cashing a cheque due to his weakness and unbecoming behaviour. So Williams always takes advantage of these facts when the occasion requires.⁶³ Williams asks Gunter to copy in handwriting McAuley's letter and Halterton's contract.⁶⁴ After this, Williams takes photographs of Gunter's copy and the two original documents. Several skirmishes follow when both Halterton and McAuley try to retrieve their own mutually stolen documents.

Embittered Halterton tells his sad story to understanding Lawson⁶⁵ who immediately makes a plan to help him.⁶⁶ Belloc introduces this new character – Arthur Lawson – who tries to help distressed Halterton, because around 1930 Halterton had sincerely helped Lawson's brother after the accident Halterton had provoked.⁶⁷ While driving through London Halterton ran over Lawson's brother, but he gave him all his support, responsively helping him, paying all his hospital expenses and supplying additional money for convalescence and recovery. As the years passed by, Lawson became immensely rich while Halterton slipped backwards in regard to money.⁶⁸ When the time is right, Williams blackmails McAuley by showing him the photographed documents⁶⁹ and determinedly asks for 51% in order to control the new corporation.⁷⁰

⁶⁰ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 48-49.

⁶¹ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 104-105.

⁶² See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 116.

⁶³ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 121.

⁶⁴ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 122.

⁶⁵ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 241.

⁶⁶ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 243-249.

⁶⁷ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 158-165.

⁶⁸ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 167.

⁶⁹ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 200.

⁷⁰ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 202.

Lawson arranges a business dinner, and once there, Lawson firmly declares he is the owner of Dow's Patent.⁷¹ Lawson states that he has two proofs of what McAuley and Halterton did to get written documents from each other.⁷² McAuley feels betrayed; he produces both documents and hands them in to Lawson.⁷³ Irritated McAuley goes away from the dinner meeting. Lawson appoints Halterton manager of the new company and politely orders Williams to take a note to McAuley suggesting that he should make Lawson allotment of a certain number of shares from the new "flotation."⁷⁴ With that property Lawson is assured of a permanent income equivalent or greater than which Halterton will receive as general manager.⁷⁵ As soon as Jack Williams comes home, he looks for the original documents and finds his locked cupboard empty.⁷⁶

Belloc describes shrewdly the series of ravings that greediness for money can cause in men. A summary of the story and its moral could be thus. McAuley is the bright fellow who wants to keep the whole business for him alone and tries to convince Halterton that they will do it on a fifty-fifty basis. Halterton – who is a high civil servant – even if he knows he can be accused of corruption, plays along with McAuley. At the same time Halterton easily obtains the documents written by McAuley to cover his back. Halterton does not know that McAuley will steal the same documents from him. Another high civil servant, selfish Jack Williams, takes advantage of the fact that Halterton has asked him for help and also tries to get the whole business for him alone. Apparently, Jack Williams has a reputation as an honest man, but through a corrupt manoeuvre he robs another thief: Williams robs McAuley of what McAuley had previously stolen from Halterton. Williams counterfeits the contract and the letter that he has just stolen and takes photographs of them too. As a consequence, at this moment Williams has three copies simultaneously of each document: Williams has always born in mind that this material will be very valuable for blackmailing victims in the future.

⁷¹ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 271.

⁷² See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 271.

⁷³ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 272.

⁷⁴ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 280.

⁷⁵ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 285.

⁷⁶ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 272.

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However, Williams is outwitted because somebody rifles his safe and he loses any expectation of prospective business. Then Lawson appears out of the blue: he is a Jew who is grateful to Wilfrid Halterton for the good deed the latter carried out for him some thirty years before. Yet Lawson is both thankful and an opportunist who knows how to take advantage of the entangled situation: he is the person who obtains the best profit, as he is obviously a *wise man*. Thanks to his brilliant management of the situation, Lawson definitely helps anguished Halterton and earns a good lump sum for his trouble. In this story, Belloc introduces a series of three villains who successively set traps and eventually it is a Jew who tries and sentences them all and earns a lot of money.

Some Bellocian constants appear in the middle of the novel. Shares rise, fall and rise again thanks to interspersed rumours and scandals. For example, it is interesting to observe how shares rise, fall and slowly crawl up in New York: 29s, 31s, 35s, 60s, 16s, 14s...⁷⁷ There is also the topic of the parties that take turns in Office: the Socialist Party and the Anarchist Party come to power in due rotation, which is completely sarcastic in Belloc's fictionalisation.⁷⁸ Political opportunism is brought on stage: the caustic side of the point is that no matter which party is in Government and which in Opposition, Lord Papworthy's personal value and completely adequate profile, fully recognised by a gentlemen's agreement, allows him to remain in power. And this goes on and on as the party rotation system requires. So Papworthy stays in Government in a post held for life. Belloc states this piece of tomfoolery in a very subtle, mocking paragraph.⁷⁹ In addition to that, Belloc presents the character of a Jew who is paradoxically crafty, distrustful, intelligent, fair (the order of these adjectives does not matter), and who sets things right finally. The author of the novel contemplates its characters sarcastically and writes a parable of what life in business is like and its inherent corruption.

⁷⁷ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 54, 137, 178, 181, 199.

⁷⁸ Hilaire Belloc likes to design extreme tendencies that have the least possibility to succeed in real politics. He enjoys imagining exaggerated labels for parties whose everyday policy cannot be distinguished from their adversaries'. Belloc's purpose is cracking a political joke so as to amuse the reader. Any Anarchist party, even if such group can exist in Britain, has the dimmest chances of obtaining a constituency. See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 11, 12, 98.

⁷⁹ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 98.

The wicked or foolish people who appear in the story represent just the opposite of what Belloc considered truly ethical. Paul Ricoeur remarked that the moral proposition that stems from the Gospel surprises everybody. Christianity fosters love to enemies, forgiveness and sharing with those who do not give you anything. Present day society, similar in many ways to that of Belloc's time, lives in an ethical atmosphere that is soaked in those tiny principles that guarantee peaceful coexistence and good understanding within lay societies that are – and were – increasingly secularized and plural in respect of cultural and ethical issues. These principles – in the best of cases – make possible justice and symmetry of rights in western societies, even though such *status quo* based on equality and tolerance is not enough, as according to the Christian ideal principles such as hospitality and brotherhood are required too. Belloc thought human beings should be in a state of tension to reach a possible stage where Christian principles, no matter many consider them impossible, should pervade and provide for society with generosity and establish the situation in which help should be freely given in human relationships.

Belinda. *A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929)

Human relationships are just one target of *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929), but in this case the novel concentrates on the impossible love story between Horatio Maltravers and Belinda Montgomery. Once more, money and social class interfere with true love, since Robert – Belinda's father – has previously selected Sir Hugh Portly – a man of excellent lineage and wealth – as Belinda's prospective husband. However, “Divine Vengeance,”⁸⁰ “Final Justice,”⁸¹ and “the all-seeing Providence of the Creator”⁸² will redirect Sir Robert's expectations through a different channel. Of course, the novel has a happy end, but what most surprises the reader is the sharp contrast in tone and purpose with the other novels of Belloc. He produces rolling sentences with such an exquisite vocabulary that the whole effect is that of a delicious journey into Victorian tastes. He rewrote this novel several times and spent a lot of time

⁸⁰ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 144.

⁸¹ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 145.

⁸² See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 176.

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polishing up the text until he reached its final version that is partially tinged with a *belles-lettres* style. Belloc's nature of nostalgia, sentimentality and romanticism (which he carefully concealed) oozes out of *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929).

* * *

There is something in Belloc's writings that tends towards humanism, which was a term stigmatized by leftist intelligentsia in the 1960s. When the reader analyses Belloc's novels in depth, he discovers his lyric universe belongs to the tradition of travel literature and also to the minor literature of banishment. His narrations flow – or rather, jump from a short story onto another – without any clear distinction between fiction, autobiography and literary essay, according to a wave rhythm that folds on itself. Even if Belloc is remarkable for his precision for details, his writing is not emphatic. He sets up miscellaneous images in the text; those are images without footnote, as they can come from a museum or from the pockets of an overcoat: they are like tickets from inns of a faraway town or snapshots from a deserted street. G.K. Chesterton's drawings that are adjacent to many pages are funny illustrations to amuse the reader, but they do not alter the thread of the story. Belloc's novels show concern for geography as the suitable stage for history. This concept lies in the centre of his melancholy for the past. As to geography, Belloc's characters need to know where they are, even though some of the places can be just spots on the map that Belloc has never visited, as it is the case with Richard Mallard, the protagonist of Belloc's tenth novel *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), who visits many real and invented places. Belloc's trend is part of his youth, and it is not surprising that his output involves his characteristic melancholic touch. His travels are similar to those that ancient cartographers made in which the territory was increasingly unveiling itself. The pilgrim is also a species in danger of extinction, but such is a pattern of experience on Belloc's part.

Belloc's English does not have a modern colour and it is influenced by the language that only existed in his memory. The images in his stories stop history in a series of shots, sometimes one by one, and frame the account in an anachronistic

realism. He does not want his readers to mistake his characters for illustrations, as his are not illustrated novels but images that are part of the text.

Turning to the fugacity of the novel as a genre, dwelling on this aspect can have implications on Belloc's ideas about pecuniary attitudes. Many of the jokes or innuendoes in Belloc's novels are less than impenetrable to the present-day reader except for those who are fully aware of the political atmosphere and social events of the period that is described in each particular novel. The society that is depicted in Belloc's novels – roughly the people from 1900s to 1930s – no longer exists. As one particular society disappears, the novels that were fruit of it and consequence of its traits tend to lose interest, their allure also vanishes, and new readerships replace the former ones. Belloc was generally monothematic. He tended to be the scourge of the rich and one of his favourite topics was the shameful buying of aristocratic rights, since he liked to create characters who had bought their peerage just handing out huge sums of money to some leading party, the government or the premier.

Lord Basil Blackwood was one of Belloc's close friends. Blackwood's keen eye immediately grasped the innuendoes and straightforward assertions contained in many of Belloc's novels, particularly in *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904). Although Blackwood found the book intelligently written, as well as soaked in the author's peculiar irony, subtle, restrained and continuous, he mentioned Belloc's obsession with the rich:

My dear Belloc,

I am very slowly and with great delight reading "Mr Burden." I think it is your masterpiece. I am sorry of course that you *always* harp on the same string and that your general scheme should be such a common one. That is, eternal mockery and denunciation of the rich. (...) I know that's your hobby and you share it in common with the demagogues of Trafalgar Square, Hyde and Regents parks but on this common place base you have erected a most original structure and I have rarely been so diverted before as I am now reading this biography. I can't congratulate you too warmly.

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It's a book one will always be able to take up and read a page or two because on every page there is a chunk of wit. (...)

I must say I have been most genuinely amused by it.

(...), if only you could be persuaded to change your strings if only you were able to curb your petty jealousy of those who are richer and more prosperous than yourself!!! I am as poor as you, but I am not perpetually writhing under the knowledge that others – a limited few – are rich and well.

(Letter dated 10th November 1904)

In spite of his friends' commentaries, Belloc went on and on clinching and insisting on the same idea.

In his political career, Belloc ended up by abandoning his future possibilities, as he realised the truth about politicians and got bored with it all. Much of the real day-to-day-Belloc, the politician who was an MP, was included in his novel *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908) and *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909). When Belloc was an MP, nearly half the liberals in the new House (1906-1909) belonged to Nonconformist congregations. This fact has a close relationship with the teetotallers who are politically active in *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908).

The sale of public honours was the source of the Party Funds. Belloc thought there was widespread corruption in the House of Lords. What Belloc most abhorred was the secrecy under which political funds were accumulated and administered in the House of Commons too. He considered bribery and corruption were going too far with their manoeuvres of influence peddling or strategies of subtle power dealing. All in all, Belloc lacked flexibility and the ability to see how fast things could change in politics. Although he seriously criticised the corruption of the system, he really wanted to be inside the English Establishment and belong to it. Belloc did have personal ambition and aimed at being in the middle of the political arena, but once in, he would be a very

controversial member, because he wanted to tell everybody that they were doing it all wrong. His character and behaviour were filled with conflict and not suited to the patient persistence that working as an MP successfully required.

At the end of *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), Belloc displays the sharp contrast between able and honest Repton and incapable and helpless Demaine. Belloc summarizes the situation in the speeches of both characters in the House of Commons. The relevant concept is how Belloc ridicules the ability and worth of the Lords, as it is Belloc who speaks through Repton. Repton's speech goes on and on reviewing the poor capabilities of most of the members of the House of Lords.⁸³ He says less than eighty men, hardly 5% own their peerage due to real merit, hard work or personal outstanding qualification. All the rest have been appointed for unworthy reasons, mainly because of hereditary right, kinship, friendship or personal influence. Repton declares falsehood has been thrown on those who obtained their posts because of personal merit. Rumours and unscrupulous press spread the news that most of them obtained their peerages thanks to bribery, or simply in exchange for money or due to foreign concessions for England's economy (oil, mines and so on).⁸⁴

Nowadays aristocracy is more based on money than on traditional heritage. Most rich people's goals are: profitable speculation, tax evasion and living in any tax haven. Belloc and many of his contemporaries fought against the sheer existence of the House of Lords. Historically speaking, the Labour Party – and the left in general – have sporadically threatened to abolish it, but the House remains an institution that at present does exist and is still going strong.

It was not always this way though. In 1295 the first English parliament was constituted. It was formed by 50 members that ranged from archbishops, bishops, abbots, noblemen to representatives of the counties and cities. In 2011 there were 788 members. Such huge difference in size was the consequence of the many changes the House has undergone all through the seven centuries of its existence. For example, in 1649 the House was abolished by Oliver Cromwell, although it was convoked again in

⁸³ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 230 and ff.

⁸⁴ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 231.

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1660 during the Restoration. The House was transformed into an upper house by means of the Act of Union in 1706. George III created new lords in the period 1783-1806, especially to allow William Pitt, the Younger, his First Minister, to achieve a sound majority. George III's successors also created new lords, but from the Reform Bill (1832) on the power of the House of Lords began to decline. Belloc was in favour of weakening the influence of the House, as his views on the power of the very few were those of a diehard radical, not very different from the opinions of the leaders of his own party (Liberal), for example David Lloyd George and Herbert Henry Asquith. All through the 20th century (and into our days too, of course) several attempts to do away with the House have been partially successful, mainly on the part of the Labour leaders (Harold Wilson, Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock). In 2012, Conservative Premier, David Cameron, also tried to reform the House even if the project was definitively postponed.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ In 1906, the Liberal government came into power. In 1909, David Lloyd George was Chancellor of the Exchequer and presented the People's Budget in the House of Commons, a project that contained several new measures among which one taxed the properties of rich landowners. Such tax was rejected in the House of Lords that was dominated by Conservatives. Liberals went on transforming this land tax into the core of the next electoral campaign and won the elections again in 1910. The Premier, Herbert Henry Asquith put forward the initiative to reduce the power of the House of Lords. The *Parliament Act 1911*, the new *Parliament Act 1949* and the *Salisbury Convention* (that was approved of through an agreement between Conservative and Labour MPs in the Labour term of office (1945-1951, Clement Attlee was the Premier) were increasingly reducing the effective power of the House of Lords. From its foundation in 1900, the Labour Party continuously stated his historical opposition to privileged classes, particularly hereditary rights in the House of Lords. The *Life Peerages Act 1958* introduced non-hereditary lifelong lords. In this way, the hereditary condition of the Lords was abolished whereas women, meritocratic members and those coming from political parties could freely have access to the House. The *Peerage Act 1963* allowed hereditary lords to renounce their titles. In 1968, Harold Wilson's government put forward a partial reform by means of which hereditary lords could debate but not vote. A coalition of labour and conservative members defeated the bill. Michael Foot was for the suppression of the House of Lords. Neil Kinnock tried to introduce partial reforms. When the Labour Party was in office, in 1997, it promoted the *House of Lords Act 1999* whose goal was the abolition of hereditary lords.

Finally, Conservative David Cameron's proposals for major reformation of the upper house tried to reduce the House members, from 800 to 450. Queen Elizabeth II presented the plan of the government for that year to the Parliament on 10th May 2012. Cameron's aim was also to establish that 80% of the lords were directly elected for a non-renewable period of 15 years. The other 20% should be appointed by an independent commission according to the merit of the candidates. 2015 should be the year this new act was in force, just coinciding with the next general election.

The three main parties had previously agreed on the need to democratise the House of Lords in the elections of May 2010. Passing this reform bill was also essential for Nick Clegg's Liberal Democrats (that formed a coalition government with Cameron's Tories), as they considered this issue the reason for many of the votes they had obtained.

Conclusions

A much-admired Dominican priest, father Vincent McNabb (1868-1943), exerted deep influence on Belloc's ideas about social relationships. McNabb was highly considered by many outstanding Catholics both for his elaborate and precise ideas on social justice and the sanctity of his life. The personal example of austerity and intelligence that this Dominican monk proposed to those Catholics who knew him was some sort of beacon to navigate across the stormy ocean of political and social dispute. His directions condensed the central core of the Catholic social teaching of those days. British Distributists considered him one of their banners and followed many of the reflections his books contained, for example, *The Church and the Land* (1926). This book consists of a collection of essays addressing the problems of the Industrial Revolution with Christian philosophy. McNabb casts light upon industrialism and the rise of unemployment as well as the evil of the wage system. He projects Christian social thought upon the importance of land ownership and the restoration of craft production. Economic thought is connected with spiritual goals, since he depicts the essential links between real work and spiritual salvation.

On one occasion Belloc was very impressed by McNabb's conference on "the transition of Death."⁸⁶ Belloc's life-long friendship with the remarkable figure of this priest contributed to shape his own, Belloc's, Distributist ideas. No Catholic priests appear in Belloc's novels and the few Anglican ministers that are introduced in them are usually presented as members of the coterie of flattering guests that swirl around well to do people. Surely Belloc planned such caricatures on purpose, as he liked to write satirical novels and keep his more serious reflections for his political essays. Belloc did

All in all, Cameron froze the reform because he realised the bill was obviously going to be defeated. Paradoxically, one hundred dissident Conservatives were ready to vote against the bill, as they thought they were going to lose some privileges, although their official excuse was that the reform would transform the House of Lords into a partisan chamber that would eventually undermine the authority of the House of Commons. The Labour Party did not agree either with the proposed calendar since they thought more time should be spent on studying the bill.

⁸⁶ Cf. Letter to Mrs Raymond Asquith, 30th November 1929.

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not in the least run after prestigious Catholic people, yet he had a flare for the authentic life of this holy man, McNabb, and the deep sense of faith he radiated.⁸⁷

Belloc does not elaborate any economic theory, but a general reflection on the ethics of business. Economists, even if they provide general statements that try to explain a particular issue in an understandable style for the general audience, actually convey their theories through mathematical operations, basically by using functions, equations, probability and statistic estimations. They try to account for the periodic fluctuations of economic cycles and the speed at which the periods of growth and recession occur. Belloc was a man of letters and a social reformer, so he did not try to work out a mathematical model that satisfactorily could improve the general trend of economy. He was more concerned with exposing the weaknesses of the capitalist and socialist systems.

Within a frame of irony and sarcastic outlook, Belloc designs most of his novels as stories around the anxious struggle to earn money and the irksome urgency to obtain it fast. Their moral is that those individuals too ambitious end up outwitted and completely disappointed in their pretensions. The search for fast profit has turned men crazy, particularly in the world of finance and speculation. The wish for material gain has made man forget the basic premises to achieve authentic happiness.

Belloc's readers may wonder about the relevance of his warnings and forward-looking approaches. Everybody recognises that our recent economic crisis implies also a crisis of values, even though nobody agrees on which are the values that are worth being preserved and fostered. This relativistic trend is a feature of postmodern societies: no universal truths are accepted, as plurality of ethics and beliefs is taken for granted. Nevertheless, Belloc's intuition has proven true: neither capitalism nor socialism have solved man's needs, as they have enslaved man and reduced him to the state's or the master's servant. Belloc proposes that we come back to rural environments – that is one of the issues of *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911) – where man can keep their small, but sufficient plot of land and herd to support himself. In this way, man will become a free

⁸⁷ Cf. Edward A. Siderman. *With Father Vincent at Marble Arch*. (Oxford: Blackfriars Publications, 1947). The author was an atheist contender with Vincent McNabb at Hyde Park. Edward Siderman expresses deep admiration for such an eccentric and convinced priest.

and contented individual, which is and was his original and natural situation. “Small is beautiful” Distributists say, “development must be sustainable” environmentalists state. Protagonists from Belloc’s novels usually find rest and internal peace by renouncing their former ambitious projects or getting rid of the entangled web of money in order to return to their real surrounding and original status. It is the way back to everyman’s *natural* life.

Belloc’s religious and social values crashed into the society in which he lived. He had the conviction, audacity and boldness to live his faith against everybody and everything if need be. Belloc understood Christianity as a personal effort to live austere, a frugal use of money as a means to achieve happiness and personal growth, but without the usual greediness he verified all around. His option conflicted with the widespread values of wealthy and influential people, that is, their laziness that was linked to unbridled consumerism and need to boast about their outstanding status. Belloc’s personal attitude was alternative in that sense.

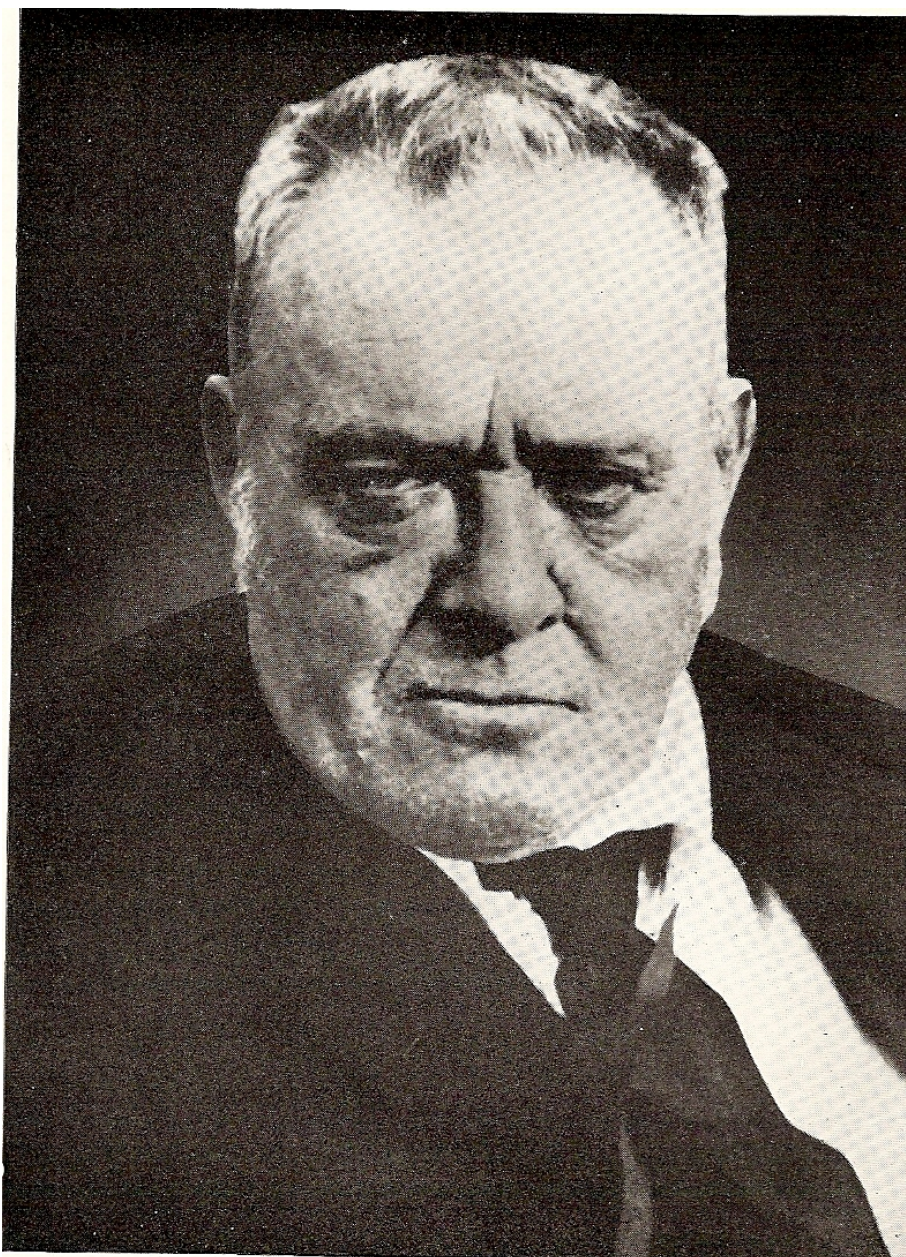


Fig. 6. Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953)

Chapter Four

Ambition and Human Nature: Wit and Irony as Weapons for Social Change

[in *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904); *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908); *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909); *Pongo and The Bull* (1910); *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911); *The Green Overcoat* (1912); *Mr Petre* (1925); *The Haunted House* (1927); *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928); *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929); and *The Postmaster-General* (1932)]

Scope of the chapter

Readers are always thankful for comic amusement, and generally much more so when humorous situations help to relax the atmosphere after some strained paragraph. Humour has a liberating effect in an audience which finds itself looking at what is dramatic with the essential detachment that allows it to bear it. Readers do not laugh by chance, because the author sets the stage for humour through anticipation, sometimes by means of long preparation so as to raise their awareness for what is absurd. Sense of humour in individuals varies according to geographic backgrounds and their deepest cultural perceptions,¹ such that, for example, what makes a person brought up in Spain laugh does not always coincide with what a person brought up in England finds laughable. Unexpected events, surprise, paradox, and inconsistency may be ingredients for humour.²

The functioning of humour in Belloc's fiction comes sometimes from the inadequacy of some character's alleged superiority that provokes his ultimate downfall. Foolishly arrogant behaviour is the source of much of his comic scenes. Incongruence

¹ David Lodge. Ed. *Modern Criticism and Theory. A Reader*. (London: Longman, 1988): 208.

² Noël Carroll. *Humour: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

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between reality and lofty dreams is one of his preferences, the element that lies at the bottom of the humorous brushstrokes that Belloc uses when he portrays the snobs' behaviour by means of some semi-hidden joke and the comic asides that surround the scenes.

Generally, Belloc writes stories that are immersed in a context of sustained irony that is maintained throughout the situations that the characters experience, their peculiar dialogue, and the final state each of them deserves by the end of the novel. Belloc bases his satire partially on the dialectal pronunciation he attributes to upstarts and to those who step on their colleagues' toes in order to achieve their objectives, individuals like Amatea and Georges Huggins in *The Haunted House* (1927), whose pronunciation betrays their plebeian origins. Following this trail of sarcasm, Belloc abuses the university lecturers who are personified as petulant dons. In a boomerang effect, these 'educators' are usually hit back by their own concocted humbugs.

Sometimes Belloc's humour is nearly imperceptible, for example, in the account of the first meeting of Horatio and Belinda in the garden when they fall in love 'at first sight.' It is an exquisite scene told in well-rounded language that conveys both the innocence of the two young lovers and the pervading influence of Cupid who monitors the action from afar.³

Belloc's sense of humour frequently lies on innuendoes that boost the social jibes that are implied rather than stated, as the words rarely convey the prank to the reader literally. Belloc deeply admired Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop* (1938), a book that Belloc contended was truly comic.⁴ Belloc preferred writing a whole humorous passage rather than cracking isolated jokes here and there. He was not concerned with inappropriate respect for other people's opinion, since his character led him to be irreverent on a few occasions, especially when he dealt with his favourite topic, the rush to make money.

³ *Belinda. A Tale of Affecion in Youth and Age* (1929).

⁴ Joseph Pearce. *Old Thunder. A Life of Hilaire Belloc*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press; London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002): 259.

The observation of human folly

Much more than in his essays and his books about political reform, Belloc builds a series of novels that create a full sequence of peculiar characters with common characteristics. His narrations are based on sustained irony and superb imagination. The word *wit* may have several meanings, but this term will be understood here as a synonym of fruitful imagination, one of Belloc's literary virtues. Many novels begin with some passage that bemuse the reader and invite him to go on reading:

Wilfrid Halterton, Postmaster-General (...) sat before the wireless electric heater in the study in his new flat, at the top of the new Clarence block overlooking Hyde Park from the north. He was waiting for a visitor. He was waiting for McAuley, the younger McAuley, James. (...)

* * *

He shook hands warmly with his host as the Postmaster-General showed him to the door, walking at his side. (...) In the tenth of a second McAuley had removed the envelope from the side-pocket, passed it in a flash round his back into his other hand, and got it into that breast-pocket of his where its little brother [envelope] already lay. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 11, 29)

In this passage from a first chapter, Belloc creates the intriguing atmosphere he is looking for. This is one of the essential factors in fiction literature and the necessary ingredient to build an interesting story that does not tell straight everything that is going to happen from the very beginning; on the contrary, the story is developed little by little through twists and turns so as to divert the reader's attention from a too simple line and lead him along the winding road of a funny narration that has some unexpected end. Belloc writes his novels with the definite purpose of the social reformer: his stories aim at changing some aspects of the world as it is. Consequently, he usually devises his plots to mock at posh attitudes or offer a reflection on what he considers the ridiculous behaviour of some of his contemporaries. His output is not just some empty

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entertainment to pass the time idly, since it contains a definite purpose to establish the base for social change.

It seems that humour is native to humankind, as there have been funny snippets in every literary period since ancient and classical cultures. Although humour refers to broad emotional mood, wit exclusively denotes apparent ingenuity in the building of surprising situations that are really the final product of a long process on intellectual originality and mental sharpness. Man has always observed folly in others and sometimes transformed silliness into an unstoppable source of humour both in real life and in literary fiction. To the general readership, the word *wit* has been associated with the reaction that any work of art arouses in the spectator when it makes the audience laugh unexpectedly or brings amusement and delight to everybody present. Wit has been commonly associated with *humour* and with a form of repartee above all. Wit partakes of refinement and involves a certain tincture of learning, charm and saltiness. We generally accept that humour is usually related to satire, irony and wit, even if these terms are frequently confused with one another. Belloc enjoyed the lack of gravity and fostered imagination to design witty stories that could combine both wit and earnestness. He exerted himself to cultivate the mental agility and linguistic grace that were very much a product of his conscious art and much dedication.

He liked to polish *Belinda. A Tale of Affecion in Youth and Age* (1929) once and again till he achieved elaborated passages that he read really enjoying the final outcome of this refined style novel. The moment when Horatio and Belinda meet Venus, who is pretending to search for his son Cupid, is described through ingenious rounded prose that omits any gods' proper name and sets a scene of romantic simplicity. The ease of this excerpt may appear comic to present day readers:

The moment was magical. It was as though some music had transformed the world.

Breast deep in fern, the small and laughing fauns, who love the awakening of life, hid tiptoe, sidling, peeping, benevolent; but in the heart of the

high wood a Presence, shining in a shaft of light, triumphantly let fly the arrow from the bow.

* * *

They had passed through the high wood, side by side, saying but very little, not daring to touch each other's hands, when they saw before them, as they slowly paced, the figure of a woman.

She was standing by the fence of the open park field with the elms beyond, as though awaiting some one; (...)

"Have you seen," she said, addressing them first in a deep melodious voice and an accent hardly foreign, "Pray, have you seen my Boy as you came through the wood? He wandered there with a bow and arrows for his sport, and I expect his return." (*Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* 1929: 23-24)

Elegant and nearly imperceptible humour in *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929) is transformed into much more down to earth comic strokes when Belloc comes to describe human ambition and silliness.

Contemplating life from unusual perspective

Readers usually apply the word *humour* to any work that makes them laugh. However, a buffoon in words should not be confused with a gifted humourist. A humourist is not simply a joker, he or she is a person with a peculiar mental framework that supplies him or her with the ability to contemplate life from unusual perspectives, as he or she sharply perceives that life is incongruous, pretentious and absurd. Humour implies some well-designed thread that moves into the reader's mind to shock him after the initial paragraphs and makes him eventually smile with the sincere conviction that arises from the writer's expertise to convey everyday paradox through subtle narration. For example, Jerome K Jerome's humorous account of a boating holiday on the Thames *Three Men in a Boat* (1889) has been both praised and disdained since reception considered the book contained either wittily amusing passages or simply a sample of buffoonery and clownish tinges that made it funny but not genuinely humoristic. The

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reception by critics ranged from lukewarm to hostile. The average reader may find it undated, as it contains jokes that seem fresh and witty even today. On the whole, this travelogue was an overwhelming success, in spite of being a simple easy-going work of fiction that presented a group of dull individuals who coped with everyday adventures from which Jerome extracted a few humoristic strokes of the brush. The book frequently digressed into humorous anecdotes and included well known stories such as when two drunken men slide into the same bed in the dark. These were classic comedy set-pieces that people much liked then. Sometimes the humorous sections are interspersed with sentimental and serious passages and such imbalance gives the impression of unevenness. The use of slang was not much appreciated by some readers who considered it vulgar. All in all, the novel cleverly combines wit and sense of humour.

Not only are wit and humour essential factors in literature but the necessary step to entertain the reader and, what is more, to provide the necessary atmosphere of enjoyment that allows him or her to have a good time just browsing a book for pleasure.

Good literature usually diverts you; this does not mean that it has to be necessarily humoristic or jocular, but as long as it keeps on attracting the reader's attention it may be considered good fun. (...) I think people must read when they are mature enough. (...) The great pleasure for all of us would be discovering a book we have not read yet and read it.⁵

Literary sense of humour has produced a keen handling of irony and subtlety on some occasions. Sometimes political incorrectness has also appeared in humorous stories. Chaucer, Sterne, Shakespeare were the forerunners. Later on, G.K. Chesterton, Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, P.G. Wodehouse, and Alan Bennett came on stage. Shakespeare excelled in his comedies with the ambiguities that he masterly interspersed and the war of the sexes he conveyed. Sterne wrote his eccentric novel *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767). Dr Johnson witty sayings are a model of sharpness. James Boswell, his

⁵ Miquel Alberola. "La literatura buena suele divertir. Entrevista a Martín de Riquer." *El País*. 28th August 2002. [My translation]

biographer, closely observed Johnson's wit. William Thackeray's *The Book of Snobs, by One of Themselves* (1848) was a remarkable compendium of humour as well as *Diary of a Nobody* (1892) by the brothers George Grossmith and Weedon Grossmith.

It is a frequent mistake to introduce generalisations that do not reflect the real tendency of literature. It may be argued, for example, that commenting "British" humour is not an exact way of dealing with the whole of the literary output of centuries and centuries in Britain, as there may be as many kinds of "British" humour as each and every British writer likes to express. It is, therefore, necessary to accept the inaccuracy of this expression as a rough way of coping with all kinds of influence Belloc received from the huge amount of his reading.

British humour has swung between two poles. The first one includes satirical sophisticated skill based on what is implied but not said, as in the case of Wodehouse. The second one refers to the cinema comedies produced by Ealing Studios in London that supplied good doses of social satire and black humour even if they were concealed under their innocent appearance, or the shameful farce that is fed by the popular theatre of variety performance as in Alberto Cavalcanti's *Champagne Charlie* (1944) and the peculiar form offered by the cinema in the *Carry On* film series (1958-1962).

The criticism of British institutions and characters that appear in those films is already seminal in Belloc's novels, for example doctors' brooding demeanour when they conceal their "secret" knowledge and procrastinate their praxis with the anguished patient, judges' lack of commitment, slow bureaucracy and so on.

G.K. Chesterton created that improbable private investigator Father Brown following the humorous tendencies that Dr Johnson sketched. Max Beerbohm was also Belloc's good friend who produced marvellous drawings that were really prodigious caricatures of writers from his days. Evelyn Waugh wrote a series of ruthless satires: *Decline and Fall* (1928), *Vile Bodies* (1930), *Black Mischief* (1932), and *Scoop* (1938), although some years later, in his maturity, he was more concerned with a melancholy tribute to the disappeared aristocratic England.

On reading Belloc's novels, you can notice one of Sterne's characteristics when he wrote the many volumes of *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767). In Sterne's writing, the

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plot is badly (or freely) arranged in the sense that the protagonist's adventures jump from one volume to another, since Tristram frequently disappears in many pages to reappear suddenly on another occasion to digress from the conversation that is taking place at that moment and speak on several subjects that have no close bearing on the thread of the story. Sterne's novel is sometimes shapeless and provides enough room for the author to express his opinions on several matters as he pleases. In a similar way, Belloc's style is viscose sometimes and similar to Sterne's peculiar pattern when he planned his novel to give free rein to his own thoughts that consequently were scattered at random here and there.

Dr Johnson's witty sayings influenced Belloc's sharp tongue and epigrams whereas Evelyn Waugh's early books supplied doses of satirical humour to Belloc's books. Apart from reading Waugh, Belloc personally encountered him on several occasions.

It is relevant to distinguish those authors who craftily insert humoristic anecdotes at random from those others who supply a whole humoristic story. In the first case, some particular passages may be funny whereas in the second the complete plot is amusing due to the taste the widespread spice of humour provides to the whole account. As a comic dramatist Belloc plans amusing situations by contemplating and imitating human folly to obtain in a nutshell the seed that gives rise to laughter. He does so from a balanced point of view, since he is intellectually very acute observing human behaviour in detail but his view is also unusually sympathetic and warm hearted. In *The Green Overcoat* (1912), there is a bashful professor whose vain sense of self-importance will become the ultimate whirl that will discredit him.

Professor Higginson was glad to get back to his lodgings on that Thursday night;
(...)

I will not deny that some vanity had arisen in him, for he felt the approach of a little local fame. Now vanity, especially when it is connected with the approach of a little local fame is not good for Professors, even in this world; for their

chances in the next it is fatal. It is a foible only too acceptable as an instrument to the Enemy of Souls.

Thus it was that there fell upon this worthy, stilted and hitherto rather obscure provincial pedant the Great Chance of English life: to receive a note from the private secretary of the widow of Mr Camp, of Chicago, and to speak before the Research Club, where, as it seems, Men are Made! (*The Green Overcoat* 1912: 135, 174)

Many witty situations that Belloc present actually contain built in paradoxes, epigrams, subtle exaggerations, clever verbal expressions, double meaning and concise or deft phrases. These literary devices convey the concept that Belloc's wit is condensed in what often is thought but never properly expressed. Literary wit can be considered as a distinct variety of discourse, one that is fundamentally different from wit, humour and laughter in non-literary contexts. So, Belloc's witty passages owe much to the emphasis on brevity, eloquence and surprise, as they pay particular attention to the power and provenance of the modern epigram.

Funny names

One of the astonishing devices Belloc uses is his criticism of the press in the form of the peculiar names that he invents for newspapers. In *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904), Belloc mentions *The Keelson*,⁶ *The Review*,⁷ *The Doctrinaire*,⁸ and *The Nation*.⁹ Some tycoons concentrate most of the papers in one area, although Belloc ironically states that this is not related to the purpose of manipulating public opinion:

People accused Mr Barnett of having bought the London press. (...) Mr Barnett had not bought the Press; the Press is not to be bought. (...) He was the

⁶ See *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904): 4.

⁷ See *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904): 94.

⁸ See *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904): 95.

⁹ See *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904): 96.

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proprietor of *Little Ones*, *Boy's Chatter*, *The Woman*, *The English Country Side*. For some months, in the interval between the bankruptcy of Sir Charles Binsted and the formation of the Agricultural Union, he had also owned *The Farmer's Friend*. (...) He was also part owner (but only part owner), of the rival *Holborn Review*. (...) Mr Jefferson, the owner and editor of so important a sheet as *The Gazette*, was connected with Mr Barnett in the old business of the Hay-market Bank; but if that is to be taken as an evidence of corruption, or even of undue influence, who would be safe from such an accusation? (...) Mr Powler was appointed editor of *The Review* by Mr Barnett. (...) Mr Powler took with him Mr Heinrich Rallé to *The Doctrinaire*. (...) Mr Barnett was very friend [*sic*] of Mr Jenkins, the proprietor of *The Nation*. (*Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* 1904: 90-96)

In *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908), another newspaper appears under a neutral banner, namely *The Courier*.¹⁰ In *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), Belloc comments on three newspapers. *The Times*¹¹ which is a real newspaper and two invented names, *The Capon*¹² and *The Moon*¹³. [This last title can be introduced maybe mockingly looking at the real *The Sun*.] In *The Green Overcoat* (1912), Belloc invents the funny name *The Howl*¹⁴ that is going to be one of his most cherished fictional newspapers, as this same name is used in three other novels.¹⁵ *The Sunday Machine* is presented in *The Green Overcoat* (1912)¹⁶ whereas *The Messenger* and *The Chicago Judge* are also some papers that appear at random in *Mr Petre* (1925).¹⁷ Another exaggerated amusing

¹⁰ See *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908): 217.

¹¹ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 150.

¹² See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 154.

¹³ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 221.

¹⁴ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 131, 159.

¹⁵ See *Mr Petre* (1925): 14; *The Haunted House* (1927): 247, 248; *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 59, 66.

¹⁶ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 153.

¹⁷ See *Mr Petre* (1925): 36, 40.

newspaper name is *The Roar*.¹⁸ This title suggests a complementary animal noise that adds funny overtones to previously mentioned and omnipresent *The Howl*.

Belloc's novels are built to depict a huge gallery of characters that lead the reader to consider each and every aspect of human behaviour. His outlook is full of humour, as the perspective he casts upon people and events is tolerant and detached, particularly so when Belloc reviews the characters' weaknesses. The whole narration constitutes a serious struggle for developing entertaining passages that flow through suitable words to convey adequate images or situations that express socially accepted ideas in a new and creative way. Such was the peculiar Belloc's tragicomic manner to blend his conservative thought with original expression.

Judges and lawyers

Mr Justice Honeybubble's story represents Belloc's serious effort to write a passage about both the well-balanced manners of judges and the uselessness of many of their decisions. Belloc introduces this character once more in *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911). Honeybubble enters an inn, the Cricketers' Arms, with the object of eating and drinking something before going on to take the train at Petworth.¹⁹ Some peasants are discussing a point of difficulty formed by three completely unconnected elements: two pigs, the change of a sovereign and Chichester market. Very soon the three topics dilute into one, as Honeybubble concentrates his ability to discern only on the affair of the pigs. Belloc enlarges this story for six long pages in which Honeybubble entertains the rustics with technicalities as well as his flourished judicial rhetoric (of course he invents the word "Barottage" to make things more abstruse and obscure to the illiterate clients in the tavern) to reach no conclusion at all while the bemused audience eventually accepts such oddly amusing legal opinion with a respectful silence.

"For the law" said I, "is not the dull subject some think it, but a very fascinating trade, full of pleasant whims and tricks for throwing an opponent. (...) I have

¹⁸ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 59.

¹⁹ See *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911): 128.

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notes here of what the great Judge Mr Justice Honeybubble, said and did when he harangued men at Duncton in the Cricketers' Arms twenty years ago, (...) Well, then, Mr Justice Honeybubble was a man full of sane humour, my friends. He was a healthy habit of body. He was a man, as are many of the law, who preserved a vigorous gait into old age, and an expression of alertness in his limbs and his eyes. (...)

Mr Justice Honeybubble (...) took pity on these fellow-men, and said:

“Perhaps gentlemen I can be of some use to you.” (...) “The peasants, who took him for no less than a noble Justice of the Peace, land-owner, and perhaps colonel of some auxiliary force, respectfully acceded to his desire.”

(...)

[Honeybubble] concluded: (...) “I have tried to preserve and lay before you a general view which should be absolutely impartial; and now I must leave you to your decision.”

With this Sir Thingumbob [*sic*] Honeybubble nodded to all present (...), and, passing briskly through the door, left them drowned in a tremendous silence. As he went out he had the kindly thought to order the replenishment of their mugs, (...) he went through the darkness smiling to himself all the way and humming a little tune.

Now was not that a fine full-fed judge and worthy of being remembered as he is throughout this valley for that famous decision?” (*The Four Men: A Farrago* 1911: 127-129, 132)

Belloc depicts a character that impersonates kindness, fluent speech and elegance. The name “Honeybubble” contains a built in ironic load, in this way following Dickens' tradition of wittily invented names that were a summary of many human tendencies embedded in one simple character.

Far from being this passage the only reference to the legal system and its peculiar protagonists, Belloc continued creating new characters of lawyers and judges that enriched his range of opinions about the apparent fairness but real nonsensical

rigmarole of the judiciary establishment. He also invented these members of the Bar in an attempt to broaden the scope of odd people who tried to obtain substantial revenues from the most astonishing legal suits. For example, there are other judges who play their part in *The Postmaster-General* (1932), particularly Sir Henry Chasible, Sir Andrew McAuley, Attorney General (Belloc seems to like *McAuley* as surname),²⁰ and the lawyer Mr Tartle. Belloc cannot restrain from introducing his much-loved Justice Honeybubble once more.

The trial of that unfortunate nincompoop, Reginald Butler, took but little of the public time (...) It was all over in two days, and we can get it all over in a very few pages. (...)

Moreover, since tax payers' money was available unlimitedly, it was only reasonable that at least two days of expenses fees and lawyers' incomes should be provided. (...) the Attorney-General was booked to appear in a still more lucrative case on the third day.

The great lawyer and deeply respected man who was to try Butler for criminal libel was Sir Henry Chasible. (...) It looked at one moment as though Mr Justice Honeybubble would have been given the duty. (...) But Mr Justice Honeybubble had broken down, and was in need of repose for some weeks, having overstrained himself through the intensity of his summing up in the recent case of *Sligo v. Jay*. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 204, 207)

The gallery of specimens includes Sir Anselm Atterleigh, K.C., Mr Pott and Mr Smith, juniors to Sir Rory Hawlboy, and ineffable Mr Justice Dove ("Dove" also suggests one of Belloc's characteristic innuendoes). Dove is craftily and symmetrically drawn by Chesterton on a double page that show the sober face and impartial behaviour.²¹

²⁰ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 23, 24, 38, 223, 230, 240, 273.

In this novel, James McAuley is usually shortened Jimmy. He is the moderate man who speaks and acts on behalf of the gang of card gamblers, as he is in command of the group. Melba, his stout companion, accepts McAuley's authority and decisions.

²¹ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 235, 236, 274-275.

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Reality strikes back. Unexpected bends

In *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), Belloc creates the character of G. Quinlan Smith, an American financier who eventually solves the main political problem of Dolly, the current Prime Minister. Dolly badly needs to obtain a loan to solve the problems of India's famine, although he tries to spend the money on other matters really, even if the House of Commons keeps an eye to control this huge amount of money. The jocular register of the story appears when Belloc tells us the American financier is unable to hear properly. He has also developed an obsession with collecting every supposed personal object Benjamin Disraeli could have been using in his times. Belloc exploits these two features – being a collector and his being hard of hearing – in a series of funny scenes that include G. Quinlan Smith's illegal arrest by the French police when the American financier was on one of his excursions to obtain one of his precious treasure elements to enrich his private collection: Disraeli's silver teaspoon. The comic vein is also apparent when G. Quinlan Smith shuns one of the frequently- appearing busybodies by taking advantage of his ailment. Once again, reality strikes back when G. Quinlan Smith becomes a victim of his resourceful and opportunist stratagem. Cunning G. Quinlan Smith has the excuse of his ailment whenever he thinks it convenient and suitable to his plans, particularly when some situation forces him to slip out unnoticed. On the whole G. Quinlan Smith is completely successful in his efforts to get rid of annoying bores and, to round off the plot, Belloc succeeds in transforming G. Quinlan Smith into the avenger opponent who defeats the Duke of Battersea, another financier much hated by Dolly.

At the beginning of the novel, the Duke of Battersea had managed to lay unacceptable onerous conditions for the Indian loan. However, G. Quinlan Smith, a very rich man who happens to be deaf, is the one who comes out best following the whole misunderstanding, having used his deafness opportunistically as an asset in the game.

Though human folly is laughable, such jests may be improved if the writer adds something of his own – namely, wit. His stories make readers think they recognise what Belloc is talking about and which path Belloc is going to tread to reach the foreseeable dénouement. Yet surprise suddenly appears, and the narration frequently takes

unexpected bends in a way similar to that by which a madman elects to go around the wrong corner. The apparent humorous outlook has deeper implications, as Belloc distinctly purports that there is a stern intention to change some aspects of society through the sustained irony his stories convey. His literary purpose as social reformer has implications for our understanding of the comic dimension in Belloc's literary output.

English national character is wittily introduced in the straightforwardly opinionated trend so characteristic of Belloc:

It is a beautiful trait in our national character that the poor will ever welcome the wealthier classes (...) that sort of imbecile ignorance of reality and childish trust in rogues which is common to all liberal professions save that of the law, which is rare in merchant, which is universal in dons.

If the mass of our people love a guileless simplicity in their superiors, when it is accompanied by debauch they positively adore it. (*The Green Overcoat* 1912: 99)

One of the frequent essential conditions to receive a substantial heritage is to be educated as an Englishman. Although this previous condition is necessary to develop the plot in the story, there is also some mocking undertone in the statement. Being educated as an Englishman is presented as the necessary step to reach social promotion and remain in the exclusive group of affluent people. In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), William Mallard is an entrepreneur in Havana who has the manic impulse to adopt, in extreme old age a baby surreptitiously brought in no one knows where. When William dies, he leaves the boy everything he has on the condition that the boy – Richard Mallard – has to be educated as an Englishman and can only get his inheritance at 25.²² Belloc consciously accepted and loved being an Englishman but hated plutocracy and all conventions from the upper classes.

²² See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 24-25.

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The concept of one essential cultural or social condition to obtain free access to wealth and prestige was one of the central elements in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), although in this play the farcical tinge transforms the apparently shallow plot into an amusing criticism of the widely accepted social conventions pertaining to marriage and upper-class manners.

Variety of registers

In Belloc's fictional stories, direct references, even daringly insulting, frequently have dons as their scapegoats. Belloc did not write well balanced descriptions of academics because he liked to toy with his prejudices and generalizations about their supposed proud ignorance. At the bottom of his hatred lay the resentment for not being accepted as a fellow in All Souls'. Yet he transformed his rejection by such group into a variety of characters funny and peculiar, as they make the reader smile or openly laugh at their incompetent showing off and their subsequent blunders. The satire goes on and on enriching Belloc's ability to create new characters that broaden the range of possibilities to impersonate and summarize the author's negative opinion about university professors. In *The Haunted House* (1927), Lord Hambourne is a don who was a psychology expert during the war, although his students consider him a cad and a charlatan who is inappropriately holding a Professorship of Psychology at Oxford. Hambourne is very proud of "his official quality of University Atheist."²³ Belloc designs this character so as to give full rein to his aversion for this social group and mockingly invents an onomatopoeic device to enjoy successive funny passages from the novel:

When they all swarmed into the dining-room for luncheon, though they were only seven they managed to make what Lord Hambourne called in his literary productions "a buzz of conversation," wherein appeared regularly, like the cry of a tame duck, his own "Quate! quate!" as he sat next to Amatheia. (*The Haunted House* 1927: 92, 103, 155, 158)

²³ See *The Haunted House* (1927): 155.

By way of contrast with the English low classes that used to show reverence and awe towards upper ones Belloc draws a portrait of the average American as a much more open minded and simple fellow. American individuals seem to behave in a more normal way, easy going in manners and facts, and feeling generally unconcerned with and unimpressed by some posh English characters. Unfortunately, the contact between some American and English people sometimes brings about some sudden change in the former, as they tend to imitate the life style of those upstarts in all their artificial and too elaborate mannerisms. The interaction with the haughty English people and their pretentious demeanour make some Americans wish to enter this supposed aristocracy even if paying for this honour is required.

In *The Haunted House* (1927), the protagonist, John Maple, refuses to go to university and prefers building his life in London. He is very sociable and gets in touch with everybody, his father's acquaintances and Hilda's, his aunt.²⁴ Hamilcar Hellup is a wealthy American widower who visits England. He has a daughter, Isabel. John meets Isabel at Lady Pattle's and eventually they fall in love. Lady Pattle, who is in turn infatuated with Hamilcar, succeeds in making him pay the prime minister for his peerage.²⁵ In this way Belloc introduces the customary habit of reaching superior social status for those who formerly had only money but no title of nobility. Generally speaking, once you have enough money you long for something else in the form of becoming a member of the elite or rather, achieving nobility through that element of which you have a sufficiency: money. This has been a rather understandable human tendency over the centuries and Belloc does not hesitate to include it in his novels.

Browsing through the pages of Belloc's novels the reader realises he used his own "sense of style" since he shrewdly distributed a variety of language registers that were interrelated with the psychological traits of his characters to produce a wide range of effects on the reader. He implemented his semi instinctive knowledge of the linguistic appropriateness which corresponded as closely as possible to the average

²⁴ See *The Haunted House* (1927): 53.

²⁵ See *The Haunted House* (1927): 58.

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speaker when he or she was immersed in different circumstances of context and situation.

Belloc reflects American English pronunciation and inserts his own invented American idiolect since he makes Bo (colloquial name for Isabel) speak her simple jargon. A very relevant character in *The Haunted House* (1927), this girl has a specific role as John's girlfriend when she helps the boy to find a very imaginative solution to the financial trouble aunt Hilda has irresponsibly created. By means of sentences uttered in the typical American way Belloc is so familiar with due to his travels all through the United States, he creates an atmosphere of a plain style of life²⁶ that contrasts with the elaborate and exquisite social habits as well as the bombastic style of conversation of some aristocratic (or just posh) English people:

Bo held up her finger.

"Get it right, boy," she said. "Pop's not crazy for the house, but he'll be guided. D'you get me?" (*The Haunted House* 1927: 94)

Wherever Bo speaks "Pop" means "papa". In the same colloquial register, Lovey Lad is Bo's dog. Bo also calls boyfriend John "Jacko"²⁷ or "Dog-Man".²⁸ Belloc had a keen ear for the most frequent varieties of English and he used several of them to show social class and register. The humorous effect appears through exaggerated utterances and inadequate turns of phrase in the mouth of upstarts who pretend to belong to the upper classes. Posh attitudes on the part of Hilda, Amatheia and the like bring a smile to the reader's face whenever he realises the artificiality of these characters' conversation and

²⁶ Social differences appear not only in the way American people speak but also in their handling of money. Then and now, in the United States of America there is a great tradition of granting money to support projects of social interest that range from museums, universities and hospitals to orchestras, high schools research centres and many others. These subsidies allow many of these projects to work as private institutions, as they cover the expenses of research and the logical deficits in their budgets with such donations. Providing money in this way reflects great social responsibility that accounts for a generalized feeling of private economy. It is the idea that private institutions will thrive through their own means and that government help will prove unnecessary. The USA government eases this sponsorship through suitable tax reductions to the donors.

²⁷ See *The Haunted House* (1927): 96, 98.

²⁸ See *The Haunted House* (1927): 99.

their frequent blunders. Although Belloc's brisk dialogues and tempo probably do not aim at creating a poor copy of Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913), the fact is that the reader is shocked by how cleverly Belloc mocks at pretended rich people who lack a thorough educational background and consequently make a fool of themselves whenever they speak about issues they do not have any command of.

Comparisons are easy to draw on Belloc's part when it comes to contrast some of his characters' stingy attitude towards grants that derive from some American benefactors' munificence.²⁹ At the end of *The Green Overcoat* (1912) sheepish Professor Higginson has to give a lot of money to his own university. He is supposed to obtain this fund thanks to the generosity of Brassington, but Higginson's is not a voluntary donation. It is a compelled act that is forced by the sly decision of Kirby, the lawyer who has invited Brassington to give £10,000 as the price for his avowed aim of obtaining a peerage.³⁰ All in all, it is a sort of compromise. The patronage is presented sarcastically and does not involve the positive social tinge and philanthropic character Belloc has observed in his journeys to the States.

The road to social reform

Human desire to obtain fame and money is unstoppable and Belloc likes to express this human trend with gusto. In *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929), he tells the story of a quite absurdly-cheap picture that, due to perils and sheer chance, experiences an incredible career, and eventually finds refuge in the noblest of London's private collections.³¹ This picture is personified in some degree, just as Belloc did too with the peculiar overcoat that nearly had a life of its own in *The Green Overcoat* (1912). Both the picture and the overcoat bring misery and happiness in turn to those who successively own them. All through *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929)

²⁹ Some institutions, for example Harvard Business School in 2012, publish a year report about the funds. This report specifies the past alumni's name, surname, year and programme in which they graduated along with their voluntary donations that will be destined to scholarships and improvement of the university facilities. In 2013, the same policy is followed by Harvard Medical School that uses grants to research biotechnological treatment of cancer.

³⁰ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 331.

³¹ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 38.

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Bensington, one of the main characters, puts into practice his illegal procedures to become a rich art dealer. He has each of his buddies card-indexed and keeps a whole dossier on their movements and little adventures. Eventually Bensington makes them cooperate through blackmail. Ambition and snobbery strike back, as in the “Epilogue” and “Super-Epilogue” affluent Verecunda pays for the three existing copies of the “Masterpiece.” There is no such “Masterpiece,” but a ridiculous odd painting made by a down and out so called “artist” who is starving to death in Paris. The other two paintings are counterfeited copies of no value. Belloc scornfully writes that everybody “is happy at the end of this book.”³² He finds no necessity to add any moral reflection because harsh reality suddenly makes everybody aware of their stupid behaviour as if they were looking at themselves in the mirror.

Belloc’s prophetic vein casts light on many situations that exist in today’s economic reality as well as in some countries whose evanescent policies are designed for fast growth. In the first decade of the twenty first century the triumph of globalisation has created a variety of ties between companies and people. Three decades of education of the political elites have been necessary to achieve this goal, thereby convincing them to abandon the former protectionist policies over many of their activities (not all of them) and consequently in this way enable the freeing-up of the flow of resources.

It is a generally-accepted fact that many would be politicians do not expect a life of corruption and easy money. A very different aspect is the reverie of speaking in front of a group of people (even if what is spoken is of little substance) who are ready to clap hands at every utterance. On top of this, there is the mirage of coming out the balcony of some important institution to proclaim the definite solution to each and every fundamental problem. Belloc thought there was nobody who had the will to serve and was exclusively devoted to politics. Most politicians dream of transcending history because they consider themselves a genuine philanthropic drive. Yet when they are in a secluded meeting they usually feel they are part of some illegal device to distribute public resources. Many politicians assume they are part of the group that rig these

³² See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 318.

affairs and accept they are in cahoots when they write the public project specifications to benefit the company from a friend entrepreneur or some company they like for strategic reasons. They justify their behaviour because of the well known psychological argument that consists in accepting the lesser evil: corruption is widespread and systemic³³ but at least a small group of conscientious politicians do good things.

When you remain a long time inside politics you realize that maybe it is about time to reach some personal enrichment or at least you may have the opportunity to struggle for it. This is so much so when you realise how everybody else has taken advantage of the legal dissents you have provoked during your time in office. At the end of their careers, dismayed second rate politicians realise how their salary has not allowed them to obtain enough private savings and how difficult it has been to reach the doors of the private enterprise if you have not managed to reach the top of it all previously.

All in all, Belloc is not precisely a writer of humour since his interests range from historical essay to Catholic apologetics. Yet his comic vein is present in many of his novels because of his peculiar process of building a story. He pays attention to detail, either physical descriptions or psychological features. In this deeply ingrained tendency he cannot help commenting human inconsistency and in these crafty observations he includes his funny personal remarks that constitute the amusing material that make his readers smile or occasionally roar with laughter.³⁴

³³ On 4th January 2013, the British tax office published the name and photographs of the thirty-two most important convicted of tax evasion in 2012. The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, David Gauke, declared that this initiative was aimed at showing the importance of declaring one's complete revenues and paying one's taxes. The Spanish equivalent was a much more lenient regulation, as Mariano Rajoy's government approved of paying only for ten per cent of your undeclared income (or dirty money) if you voluntarily declared it before 1st December 2012. In general, British conscience is stricter regarding tax matters, as a popular campaign was raised against major multinational companies that pay very little as corporation taxes, for example, Starbucks Corporation among others. UK Uncut (a network of protest groups) considers that Starbucks promise to pay £20 million (equivalent to €24.6 million) in the period 2013-2015 is a desperate effort to distract attention and public pressure. Starbucks, which has been based in the United Kingdom since 1998 and earned €500 million in 2011, nearly did not pay any taxes because it transferred all its revenues to its Dutch subsidiary. Google and Amazon acted in a similar way (*La Vanguardia*. 5th January 2013).

³⁴ Belloc considered humour highly balsamic and the infallible remedy, as it helps to create distance between you and your troubles. G.K. Chesterton's sketches were the final outcome of those wonderful moments in which he was commenting with Belloc the characters and plots of his novels. On these

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The jocular trend of some scenes is a road to social reform, much more so from the apparent detachment of a novelist that observes reality from a distance. Belloc's literary technique looks like the mildly scornful spectator who sees everything from a back-row seat and sympathetically smiles at both what is on the stage and the audience's responses. His attitude is not only that of the relaxed spectator but the restless play director as well. Most of his stories contain a serious kernel that is wrapped in several layers of interpolated stories with occasional funny sketches. There are accounts interspersed with the witty conversations of those villains that usually act the counterbalance of the more serious protagonists. This peculiar piece of stage machinery of his skill moves the actors in the play, so to speak, like puppets that walk, speak, laugh, plot or get enraged at the end of Belloc-held strings. The puppeteer allows his marionettes to perform by means of his many-sided voices that resemble the oral output of a whole group of actors behind the dark curtain in a sort of odd Punch and Judy show. Belloc's humour has the definite purpose of exposing the innate greediness of human beings and ridiculous struggle to keep up appearances. He mocks pedantry and also makes readers laugh at people's absurd search for money and useless effort to become socially relevant.

occasions, Eleanor, Belloc's eldest daughter, usually heard both men's laughter next door through the wall. The drawings were so inspired that they contributed to bring new ideas to Belloc's writing. Belloc knew that he could reach a much wider readership through humorous passages, even people who did not agree with his allegedly-intolerable political ideas. Humour tends to be "a good bridge for spanning age gaps and other signs of difference amongst people." (Casado-Gual 2004: 44)

Chapter Five

Power and Control: The Economic Factor in Political Decision-making

[in *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908); *Pongo and The Bull* (1910); *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928); *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929); *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930), and *The Postmaster-General* (1932)]

Parliamentary control of public spending

Belloc was not a professional economist and many of his assumptions were sheer intuitions about what a more just and egalitarian system should be like. He basically considered plutocracy's objectives had replaced legitimate political aims, and this had been so since the English Reformation.¹ His lifelong obsession was that democracy had been replaced by a system in which the richest class was ruling the country under the double appearance of the government and the opposition on two rows of front benches arranged face to face in the House of Commons. The two groups really concealed the same clique group that was interrelated by kinship, friendship, business, or simply being in cahoots:

Therefore, Hammersham had his way and he and the Home Secretary, by a little after half-past eleven, were bowling along towards Hammersmith in the excellent motor which in the natural course of things had been presented to Jack Mills by an old, old friend – recently ennobled. (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 282)

¹ Since the 1534 *Act of Supremacy*.

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“In the natural course of things” is the roundabout way to specify the process of becoming “recently ennobled.” Belloc suggests the car was part of the price such old friend paid for his peerage.

In a real democratic state, administering public money is essential in any economic policy. This is a common feature of all governments no matter which ideology they have. The situation changes in dictatorial states because in those countries there is some sort of ideological orthodoxy that compels you to believe in or at least pretend to do so in public, apart from paying your taxes too. In times of peace, let alone the emergency of a war, tax policy in democratic nations is the core of policy-makers, as the government in office will plan how heavy the income tax will be, what the general arrangement and distribution of taxes, including VAT, will be, the property tax system (‘rates’) and, above all, how the government is going to spend public money, or rather what the budget is going to be like. Putting it simply, you are going to pay, and politicians are going to decide on what they are going to spend the money. Although this seems to be an oversimplification of the process, the previous words may be a clarifying summary of the universal economic policy in the democratic world, especially when we get down to the nitty-gritty terms and avoid disguising the ugly truth by means of a more sophisticated and obscure language.

In Belloc’s days, the tax system was not planned as it is now, although the first British system of social insurance was passed by Lloyd George’s government. Belloc’s personal relationship with Lloyd George was far from easy going and Belloc’s opinion on political matters largely differed from those of the cabinet minister. In 1904, Belloc met Lloyd George at the annual dinner of the Palmerston Club, although Belloc did not approve of the policies of either Palmerston’s social reform policies or Lloyd George’s 1909 budget since he considered a great mistake the idea of a “nanny state” that could provide for citizens’ adversity, particularly financial help for the sick and infirm in exchange for their freedom.

The concept of the common good was the basis for honest rule. Professional politicians from his days and, also, those from the present day would think this idea a pervading objective of far away times an obsolete aim that is no longer the driving force

of economic policy. Belloc would also introduce the internal and external control of profit and losses so as to certify the thorough truthfulness of any business. Companies should accept an external control – an audit in present day terminology – and demonstrate their own accountability, because they should be able to give an explanation and establish responsibilities. Such assessment could spot faults in order that economic punishments in the form of fines or sanctions might be applied if need be. Moreover, Belloc contended that the government itself should also be subject to this sort of control and retain and sustain its accountability based on the information and transparency received by the citizens and, at the same time, the government's transparency as perceived by the governments of other nations:

When the B.I.C.O. [*Bureau International pour le Contrôle de l'Or*] was released six months later (...) the comments of our Press did honour to the national genius and that unfailing political instinct which has given us our great modern statesmen. (...) *The Day* [a newspaper] gave as it were the keynote to the whole, stamping its semi-official character on the praise it accorded. (...) *The Modern Democrat* [another newspaper] said (...) *The Drum* (...) stated that as a nation we were not given to boasting. (...) *The Howl* spoke in much the same voice. (...) *The Trombone* (...) said only the Empire could produce men like Sir Charles Lexington and Lord Taylor. (...) Only one false note was struck, the *Red Flag* (...) regretted that the financial side of the new organ should be independent of Parliamentary control. (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 293-296)

Belloc thought this process was very difficult indeed since any analysis of the government's and companies' accountability used to plunge the country into ideological debate and he considered ideologies blurred truth.

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Audit activities

Belloc is remembered for promoting Catholic values in books, articles and public controversy. Many of his views were shared by a major portion of English Catholics between the two world wars. Critics accused him of whimsically writing on historical events without the essential reference books, being too aggressive in argument, anti-Semitic and disdainful of non-European cultures. His comic novels, even if they could be hilarious and sound witty to readers until 1930s, were increasingly forgotten by new generations. So, it is the task of this thesis to analyse contemporary facts in light of Belloc's insights. The historical analysis of Belloc's life will be set aside, as there have been several authors that have done it thoroughly. The extrapolation of the social remarks that are embedded in Belloc's novels will help me to project his wide range of opinions on today's economy and its inherent social consequences.

Belloc's concept of political honesty would contrast sharply with present day reality in Spain. In June 2013, the Institute of Accountancy and Accounts Audit (*Instituto de Contabilidad y Auditoria de Cuentas*) of the Spanish Ministry of Economy (*Ministerio de Economía*) started proceedings against Deloitte, the auditing firm that is responsible for the truthfulness of 80% of the Spanish Banks. Deloitte alternated its work as auditory and as a consultancy agency in the months previous to the commencement of quotation of the Spanish bank Bankia on the Spanish Stock Exchange. Both activities constitute an infringement of the law that regulates the work of auditors in Spain since no organisation is allowed to participate in the commercial management of a particular company and audit the same firm. In Spain, an auditor's independency is considered essential so any activity against this feature is considered a serious mistake because it interferes with the core of the auditor's job. Any serious punishment or suspension against Deloitte on the part of the government would mean the collapse of Deloitte in Spain because of its many clients. Bankia went bankrupt less than a year after Deloitte approved of Bankia's bookkeeping records which allowed the bank to gain €3,100 million from investors, the majority of whom were clients of the seven saving banks that had previously formed the cluster "Bankia."

Audit firms must certify a company's accounts, basically the Profit and Loss Account and the balance (assets vs. liabilities). At the beginning the relationship between a company and its audit firm is correct but as years go by this relationship can begin to corrupt.

The European Commission is studying the idea of compulsory rotation of audit firms, although the Congress of the USA dismissed the measure after WorldCom and Enron scandals. Deloitte claims that obligatory change complicates audit activities because the initial price is enormous until human teams bring up to date. Those in favour of rotation think just the opposite, because they consider that a public tender could reduce prices too.²

On legality and transparency lies the essence of democracy, as the present-day citizens and their children will depend greatly on their capacity to understand economic reality. Globalization in the financial world implies any country is exposed to what is happening in other countries and it is necessary to understand why. For example, at present the European banking union is an essential project, although there are few people who can understand it. Because of the insufficiencies shown by the Euro-zone, the world network of financial safety depends a lot on the USA's economic policy. Most of these questions include such technical complexity that the average citizen feels them too far from his everyday life. Any ethical policy should be devised in the belief that the man in the street is able to understand the whole or a part of these technical aspects without considering ideologies. Citizens must have this information that along with transparency could transform their votes into an efficient weapon.

The recent economic crisis began when banks supplied too many loans to real estate markets. The subsequent real estate bubble burst because banking activity had become global and major banks had mutual harmful credits. Banking bankruptcy originated the credit crisis. Credits began to run out and economies immediately shrank.

Economists for austerity think that only the balance in budgets and reduction in public debt will restore confidence. Keynesian economists think that a deliberate but

² In Spain, according to 2013 legislation, auditors are compulsory for the companies that have two of these three conditions: having more than €2.85 million in assets; invoicing €5.7 million or more; and having at least fifty employees.

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temporary increase in deficit combined with a simultaneous program of fiscal stimulus can oust recession.

Paul Krugman, Martin Wolf, and Robert Skidelsky are in favour of broadening fiscal deficits instead of reducing them.³ Excessive banking credit can be considered as a symptom of deeper economic faults. Thomas Palley perceives it as a way to counteract the growth in income inequality, as a consequence of which easy access to affordable credit replaces the unsuccessful guarantee to the welfare people can expect from social democracy.

The artificiality of Japan's monetary expansion⁴ has proved partially successful in speeding up economic recovery. In 2013, economists have learned from the Fed that a country should take the necessary measures the precise moment they can have the biggest multiplier effect. When Stock Exchange rates decrease, there is not always a clear reason for it. Two thirds of share movements do not obey any fundamental piece of information, or rather an essential piece of information that affects the companies' value. Such movements are called "noise" in the markets and one should take advantage of it.⁵

Machiavellian traits

Some characters from Belloc's novels exert power on others through their wealth and social influence. The main characters in his novels are financiers, either as a profession or as an entertainment. Very few are manufacturers so the whole group of characters depend more on Stock Exchange fluctuations, sheer good luck, and their brokers expertise than their ability to manage a factory that produces goods to be sold or a company that supplies customer services. This is the case with Peter Blagden in *Mr Petre* (1925). Blagden's strange fate makes him very lucky, since he becomes a financial magnate whose name makes the stock markets of the world wobble. The

³ Robert Skidelsky. *Project Syndicate*. Robert Skidelsky is a member of the House of Lords, historian, and Emeritus Professor of Political Economy at the University of Warwick, Coventry.

⁴ In 2013, it is known popularly as "abonomics" because of the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The use of blendings is frequent in economists' jargon.

⁵ Jaume Puig. "Mucho ruido y pocas novedades." *La Vanguardia*. 7th July 2013. Supplement. "Dinero." 27.

reason for his success is quite absurd, as he is not really the financier everybody believes he is. Blagden's memory is a blank, but bankers presume he is "a Mr Petre" the well-known American tycoon. This odd circumstance is enough to boost the stock exchange and, as a consequence, Blagden himself becomes immensely rich:

He began to realise it. (...) he (...) had an immense lump of money; over three million pounds. (...) What he chuckled over was the high comedy of this immense fortune in his hands. (...) He had for a moment the boyish impulse to do something really amusing – to go out there and then, that morning, pick up a telephone and give some critical order which should shake a wobbling market. He might sell half a million Moulters, and wreck them; Lord! What fun! (*Mr Petre* 1925: 160)

By exaggerating ambition and greediness for money, Belloc inserts some considerations in novels that are funny and illustrate the internal contradictions of capitalism. For example, gold is precious for several reasons being scarcity one of them. In *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930), the problem is just the opposite as a new method of making gold has been discovered by Henry Bolter and Charles Lexington. They succeed in obtaining gold from lead⁶ or mercury, thanks to the technology that issues from "the modern theory of the atom".⁷ The business world is alarmed since the

⁶ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 39-42.

⁷ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 65.

Belloc used his high school knowledge on physics and chemistry. He knew Dmitri Ivánovich Mendeléiev was the researcher chemist that described the first version of the Periodic Table of the Elements in his two volumes of *Principles of Chemistry* (1868-1871).

Belloc was born in 1870, so Mendeléiev's research was quite new when Belloc was in secondary education between 1880 and 1887, although the news of these discoveries probably did not reach him until years later. The syllabi of the two schools he attended, Heath Brow, a preparatory school, and Oratory School, were aimed at other subjects.

Forty-three years later Belloc published *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930) by blending elements from the medieval belief in the possibility of "the transmutation of metals" and "the modern theory of the atom."

Hydrogen is the most abundant element in universe. It is also the origin of the other elements to a certain extent. Mendeléiev discovered how the elements could be created one by one by simply adding protons and neutrons to their nuclei. The old dream of medieval alchemists was precisely this course of action, as they tried to transform lead into gold. In the twentieth century, it was known that the basic

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abundance of this metal is going to cause an unstoppable fall in its price precisely as a fatal consequence of the law of supply and demand. Consequently, politicians and bankers want to stop gold production and try to reach an international agreement to put an end to gold manufacturing.⁸

In another novel Belloc introduces a new sort of energy Eremin. In the little state of West Irania, south-west of the Caspian, a fabulous deposit of Eremin is discovered in 1972 although the novel was published in 1928.⁹

Therefore, some considerable competition for that essential gives activity to the world; especially is it necessary to the fleets by water and by air which have grown so prodigiously since the last and Third Universal and Eternal Peace Treaty.

(...)

It lay with him [an Accredited Representative] what concession should be given in the matter of the West Iranian deposits, and to whom. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 38, 39)

Any new possibility of an exclusive concession on raw materials makes greedy civil servants anxious to lay hands on it. Eremin and Durandite are the two ingredients that have to be mixed in an exact proportion to obtain the new fuel “for rotarian engines”.¹⁰

problem was the amount of energy necessary to succeed in this experiment. Hydrogen is the simplest element in nature. It has one proton in its nucleus. Helium is next in complexity: it contains two protons and two neutrons in its nucleus. Stars continuously fuse nuclei of hydrogen to obtain nuclei of helium and huge amounts of energy. In the first part of the twentieth century scientists explained how stars can maintain their brightness millions or thousands of million years. As a result, they could also explain the formation of the different elements of the Periodic Table from hydrogen. This is the phenomenon called stellar nuclei-synthesis. Iron is the last element that can be produced in a stellar furnace. The next reactions to obtain, for example, gold from alchemists are endothermic, that is, they absorb energy instead of producing it. Only the explosion of a supernova is capable of supplying the necessary energy to form gold, platinum, and other precious metals.

However, Belloc liked to play with his readers through a story in which two crafty fellows take advantage of a crazy undergraduate's skill to produce small amounts of gold from a lump of lead thanks to an apparently sophisticated melting pot that is just an electric furnace of his invention.

⁸ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 286.

⁹ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 38.

¹⁰ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 37.

Belloc states a scientist should not look for money:

But, believe me or not (...) there is in the mind of your scientist a simplicity and a virtue very greatly to be praised, and to be admired unreservedly – until it is corrupted. Discovery, and truth based upon discovery, occupy him in his pristine candour far more than any other appetite; and that, I suppose, is why the greatest of his kind die poor – which is as it should be. (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 61)

* * *

Hilaire Belloc's last two novels deal with the insatiable thirst for money. In *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930), the synthesis of gold is the excuse for the race after immediate profit whereas in *The Postmaster-General* (1932) a group of wise guys (politicians and businessmen) compete for the exclusive exploitation of the electronic intensifier that will make long range TV feasible. As TV exploitation is a dealership granted by the government the race to be the first implies all sorts of bad tricks. Very improbable facts shape both novels. In *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930) the point of departure is the transmutation of metals, a medieval legend that Belloc manages to reshape in a credible style. In *The Postmaster-General* (1932) two women are in power, something unbelievable in the male-chauvinistic society and politics of the 1930s. The novel consists of a futuristic story in which Wilfrid Halterton is the Postmaster-General in Mrs Boulger's second administration in 1960, and Lady Caroline Balcombe is the leader of the Anarchist Party, at that time in opposition.

Sometimes the plot entanglement in the novels forces some characters to ask for help to others they trust in principle. As the story goes on the reader discovers with surprise how this new supposedly honest character also asks for his fair share of the whole business for his "disinterested" help:

Yet he [Lexington] felt in the long midnight – for that night he did not sleep – two anxieties. In the first place, he must, without delay, put down briefly and

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clearly upon paper exactly what he had done. (...) Next, he must rely upon another man's advice [Bowring's] for the first steps to be taken.

(...)

Bowring paused and hesitated. He had hitherto been a good friend; but business is business. He turned the situation rapidly over in his mind.

(...)

"I'm your man," said Bowring. (...) Nor was a word put down in writing by either of them, when each was alone, (...) in Lexington's little note-book, and the two words "fifty-fifty" on Bowring's cuff.

(...)

"But I [Lexington] think we can begin to increase, can't we?" There was rather an anxious look in his eye as he said it. He wanted to increase. This new source of income was becoming familiar to him and was breeding new small needs.

(The Man Who Made Gold 1930: 62, 77, 79, 91)

To maintain influence and this controlling spirit investors and politicians take clever courses of action that are inspired by the malicious methods that Machiavelli observed in his contemporaries. "Machiavellian" means the most malevolent of strategies. Politicians in general follow Machiavelli's directions. They know for certain that man is fickle and selfish by nature and that he feels tempted by power. Something similar occurs when nations, as a whole, are observed, as human nature is never persevering: it is relatively easy to convince men of something, but it is very difficult to keep them convinced. To preserve power, a shrewd politician must put into practice all injustices at the same time, and grant favours little by little, so that people can appreciate them better. Any person in command, either an executive businessman or a politician, will always obtain better results from serious punishment that turns into chastisement in other people's perception than if he or she just gives little warnings that eventually will lead to the company's or the nation's uprising.

In political strategy, it is essential to know who is going to be in charge, as it is really helpful for future demeanour to know beforehand who is going to be annoyed by

whom, and who can annoy in turn. The ultimate purpose of many in command is not to exert power as some divine commandment customary in the Middle Ages, or as a result of the citizens' will, but simply to keep power and preserve the state of things unchanged. Of course, a good leader or ruler must be a master of seduction precisely in order to manipulate his team or nation successfully.

In many business and commercial fields, employees always respect the authoritarian leader much more than the other weak and undecided one, although the media and democratic societies make us think this is old-fashioned practice. Authoritarian and hidden or secret tactics are especially relevant inside parties where the metaphorical use of the foil and Machiavellian fencing decides many issues due to the usual opacity of their arguments.

In Belloc's opinion, being a politician implies all sorts of tricks and manoeuvres to reach one's goals. Consequently, politicians are not honest people, although sometimes they try to appear so. This is the case when crafty Bowring interrogates the Waif:

"He wasn't a gentleman," put in Mr Bowring, "he was a politician."

"Talked like a gentleman, sir!"

"Yes, he's been washed. But no matter." (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 173)

And the novel goes on mocking at the "perfect" English order:

The threats of death were pale compared with it. Like everybody who knows England and nothing but England, with its perfect order and huge police machine, he did not believe in assassination and kidnapping. These things were more in keeping with the Mediterranean races or our nobler cousins of the New World, who must be excused the liveliness of a young nation. (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 178-179)

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Fashion is also a means to show power and social influence, whereas many people follow fashion just to show off and become a member of the exclusive elite whose borders are marked by gleaming luxury and supposed wealth. In Britain, in the 1950s, rich people (also male members) began to dress in unusual colours, for example, pink, to escape from the dull grey that was customary in those days. Eccentricity in clothing, or some will prefer “originality,” was not habitual that time, nor was it comparable with widespread variety in garments and looks that are usual today. Social commentators from the 1950s used to say, in humorous chatter when gossiping, that you could know how far you were from London simply by observing the eccentric colours in the clothing of passers-by. The nearer you were to London, such showy dandies irradiated with more intensity, and the frequency you could see these toffs increased, too. It was a clarifying example of direct proportionality in mathematics, as simple as that.

Individual freedom and corruption

One of the general trends in Belloc’s economic thought is pessimism. Although he can’t demonstrate the final catastrophe of capitalism as a whole, he does foresee the present and future exploitation of man by man, following Thomas Hobbes’ well-known aphorism.¹¹

Nevertheless, making predictions is useless, particularly when it comes to doing so about non-linear tendencies that really tell us much more about today’s economic reality, but not about the future. Two editors of *The Economist*¹² who have made conjectures about the future, foresee that, in 2050, it is possible that we will be going strong and perhaps even better than at present. On the whole, the outlook is optimistic because their book explains globalization will continue, but in a controlled way, with no going back, but with no vertiginous progress either. Global GDP will be 3·8% a year until 2050, which is less than in other periods but, as population growth will be slowing

¹¹ Thomas Hobbes’ aphorism *Homo homini lupus* [Man is a wolf to man]. This saying was created originally by Plautus (258-184 B.C.) in his play *Asinaria*. Thomas Hobbes popularized it in *De Cive*.

¹² Daniel Franklin, and John Andrews. *Megachange: The World in 2050*. (London: *The Economist*, 2012).

down, the global GDP per capita will grow 3·3% more than in previous periods of bigger growth.

Matt Ridley reminds us that the planetary pessimism of recent years has never come to stay: harvests have been doubled, woods have slightly increased their extension, glaciations have not reached us, the rise in sea levels has not sped up, lethal viruses have not decimated the planet, and computers survived the change of millennium.¹³

Individual freedom associated with the possession of small property was one of Belloc's obsessions. He thought man should be equidistant from ruthless capitalism and tyrannical Communism.¹⁴ If we take the concept of individual freedom to its ultimate consequences, new unforeseen repercussions may appear. This is the case when we come to consider issues such as the banking secret and related matters.¹⁵

One of the unforeseen consequences of the 11th September 2001 attacks in the United States of America is the loss of the banking secret. Yves Mirabaud, president of Mirabaud and Cie, a private Swiss bank, thinks that the argumentation that governments

¹³ Matt Ridley. *The Rational Optimism: How Prosperity Evolves*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010).

¹⁴ On analysing the social problems of his days Belloc always bore in mind Leo XIII's warning on Communism, Socialism and Nihilism in his encyclical *Quod Apostolici Muneris* (1878). Official Catholic perspective on these political groups had not changed in 1930s when Belloc visited the United States of America for his lectures on these subjects. Pope Pius XI published *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) in similar terms.

¹⁵ Banking secrecy is one of the steps designed to guarantee individual rights, as are the inviolability of the home, religious freedom, and privacy in communications, amongst other things. (See Anthony Lester. *Five Ideas to Fight For*. London, Oneworld Publications, 2016. 145ff) Provided that the money you, or a company, keep in a bank has paid compulsory taxes, nobody can scrutinise your funds. Income statements are supposed to be enough. Banks have the authority not to reveal your private data to public administrations. A judge can only enquire about your bank accounts *via* court decision. This is the usual proceeding in democratic countries. Theoretically, that is.

Digital management always leaves a trail that is easily retrievable and that can be criss-crossed with the multifarious traces you produce on automatic tellers, computers, and portable devices. Judicial police have engineers who can read virtually any memory device. Nobody is currently so sure that banking secrecy exists any more. Some countries, like Denmark, wish to abolish physical money and allow only credit cards or any other means of electronic payment. With this regulation in place, the bank and the government can know how you spend your money. European public opinion contends that this is illegal.

It is in the public domain that some countries used to have much firmer banking secrecy based on strict bank-client confidentiality. An example of this is the Swiss banking system. In 2014, the OECD promoted a protocol on the automatic exchange of financial information that should come into force in 2018, and that one hundred countries have signed up to. It remains to be seen if the number of so-called 'tax havens' will decline substantially as a result.

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are protecting their subjects through the loss of the banking secret is not true, because if governments know everything this is bad news, as the protection of privacy is extremely important. Exactly as with the professional integrity of lawyers and doctors, the banking secret is aimed at protecting the citizen. It is said that exposing the banking secret is a necessary step against tax evasion, but this is not so. For example, in the case of the 2013 Cyprus crisis, a high percentage of citizens' deposits that were over €100,000 were used to account for the banks' losses. At present, there are several offshore banking places outside the City of London in which concealing money is very easy, for example, in Delaware in the United States of America. Thousands of companies have their headquarters there and hide their profits by means of the stratagem.¹⁶

Luxembourg is a very competitive country in the business of the management of collective investment schemes.¹⁷ Whereas in Spain all participants in these schemes appear in the lists that the CNMV¹⁸ publishes, in Luxembourg there is the advantage of an information policy that is much more discreet as to the investors' identity.

All these considerations about liberty in trade and investment would be widely dismissed by the harsh opinions of Belloc on plutocracy. He was in favour of personal freedom and privacy, but he hated the rich on the whole.

When Belloc entered university his access to superior education was a serious effort to become fully conversant in humanistic studies, and his main concern was modern history and participating in the memorable debates at the Oxford Union. His degree could not allow him to earn money in the business world. After finishing his degree, he had a slight inclination to acquire the necessary knowledge to work as a lawyer, but later events made him change his mind about being called to the bar. All in all, Belloc's university years were not aimed at a practical job in the sense the financial world considers worth applying for, but at broadening his scope as man of the letters.

¹⁶ "Special correspondent, Sergio Heredia, interviews Y. Mirabaud." *La Vanguardia*. Supplement *Dinero*. 7th July 2013. 25.

¹⁷ SICAV in Spanish: *Sociedad de inversión de capital variable*. Such holding companies obtain important fiscal benefits and are usually considered an investment system that looks like offshore banking. SICAV have been increasing at a very high speed all through 2014. 380 have been added to the 3,030 that existed at the beginning of this year. More than 32,000 million euros will be accumulated at the end of 2014. The fund's average profitability has been a 5.2% during 2014.

¹⁸ *Comisión Nacional del Mercado de Valores*. This publicizing harms investors' interests, of course.

Those degrees based on economy and engineering were essential for science studies but only remotely suitable for the sphere of humanities which definitely constituted Belloc's real experience at Balliol. The American fashion of business schools was still too far away and when they came in full during the second half of the twentieth century Belloc was already a semi disabled gentleman that had stopped writing and led a private life. Yet many topics from the following paragraphs are already sketched in Belloc's novels, for example, entrepreneurship, commercial innovation, solution to new problems, research, transparency, and wealth redistribution.

A different approach to superior education was put into practice by American innovators in the field of business schools. Belloc studied humanities at Balliol when business schools on the other side of the Atlantic were very concerned with the connection between university tuition and commercial praxis in the sense of applying knowledge to increasing profitability. Frederick Terman was a trustee from the University of Stanford San Jose, California that in 1940s took some decisions that in time would change the history of innovation. He made every effort to encourage teachers excellent research and at the same time to foster the enterprising spirit in students. By following this tendency, he achieved the competitive funds I+D+R that were aimed at electronic development throughout the Second World War (1939-1945) and the Cold War. He also encouraged his students to avoid emigrating to the affluent East Coast after graduation when they were looking for a job. Some of these students created their own *start-ups* in nearby garages and placed them within Stanford Research Park. Terman was a pioneer in combining scientific leadership and enterprising initiative. Very soon San Jose Valley turned into Silicon Valley, the well-known technological cluster.

Enterprising spirit is encouraged through education, the social referents you observe and cultural context that surrounds people. Entrepreneurship requires a combination of creativity, initiative and action. Creativity can be fostered, as it is a process similar to the artistic process: a scientist tries to find solutions to complex problems and an entrepreneur tries to develop an innovating business plan. Belloc creates the character of Henry Bolter, an undergraduate in his fourth year who is reading

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for a degree in Electro-Chemistry at St Olaf's, and who manages to design a new method to produce small amounts of gold thanks to a crucible and furnace.¹⁹ Apart from the methodology he uses, an entrepreneur is a person who generates new projects and becomes emotionally involved through strategy knowledge, market prospection, finances, and communication theory. Entrepreneurs value change in any context.

Belloc was little concerned with this reasoning since he inserted snippets that exemplified his contempt for the theoretical business skills of the rich:

“A NOBLE WOMAN, something or other planned to something or other” (as Wordsworth droned), etc. A Noble Woman. (...) Not one of Nature's gentlewomen. Far from it: a Parrell by birth, great-granddaughter of old Parrell, George the Fourth's last friend, and great-great-granddaughter of Sir Thomas Parrell, Lord Mayor of London, who had begun life as a boot-black. You can't have better lineage than that! (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 250)

Belloc likes to ridicule the origin of richness. In this case, a rich woman comes from lazy ancestors and her wealth is inherited, not earned by her own job. On top of this, everybody knows that it is nearly impossible to become Lord Mayor coming from the humble job of being a boot-black. Belloc empirically knew that you never make money simply by working to the point of exhaustion.

Generating and distributing knowledge is the essential mission of university. Universities generate knowledge through research and distribute it by spreading it and training competent professionals. University education must pay attention to the encouragement of leadership, team work, cross curricular subjects, learning based on experimentation, problem solving, dual education systems, university lectures and lab activities, as well as training in companies' real environments, international perspective, and creation of new models. The ideal entrepreneur is a person who takes the initiative, develops his own company, succeeds and is able to finance new teams of young entrepreneurs.

¹⁹ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 16, 22, 39-41.

There have been many stages in the social and economic purposes of university all through the centuries. In the Middle Ages, it was an institution devoted to spreading knowledge of the classical world; in the Enlightenment, it became the generator of its own knowledge; and nowadays, it works like a pump of enterprising projects and crucial economic driving force for those countries that want to compete in the world premiership.

Belloc's opinion about his university education was certainly pejorative, as sometimes he seriously doubted dons had taught him something sound. As he did not like the academic subjects that were the core of business-school statistics, quantifying methods, accounting, strategy, finances, economics, marketing, and the like, he chose humanities. Yet he freely wrote about his views on industrial innovation and market economy, matters that he inserted in his novels through situations, crafty sentences, and innuendoes. When he went to Oxford (1893-1896) and entered Balliol College, he opted to read Modern History. Applied economics was taught in the United States of America in those years.²⁰

Nowadays, innovation means supplying added value to your clients, doing it in a sustainable way, and generating income for your company. A company that does not innovate will eventually disappear. At present, innovation has become so essential that managing a firm really means managing innovation. The Innovation Union Scoreboard from the European Union analyses twenty-eight sets of rules of conduct and procedure to assess innovation. An executive usually leads innovative processes by integrating the knowledge about the functional areas of a company with the opportunities that new technologies offer. It is a movement from an industrial model with hierarchical and pyramidal structures to a kind of company with flat structures that copes with the invasion of globalisation and information technology. The leader usually designs the

²⁰ Wharton Business School (University of Pennsylvania) began its lectures in Philadelphia in 1881. In 1900, Tuck School of Business (New Hampshire) began its activities, and was the first academic institution to offer a Master's Degree in Business Administration (MBA). The University of Chicago's Booth School of Business designed the first doctorate syllabus in 1922.

Needless to say, in the United Kingdom, there were also university institutions such as the Birmingham Business School (established in 1902) that began providing higher education to business leaders and entrepreneurs at the beginning of the twentieth century, a few years after Belloc's graduation.

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strategy and the technician implements it. Apart from traditional skills, leaders must develop communication abilities and group dynamics. Entrepreneurs are people who compromise their time and resources in a project of uncertain results, so innovation also means many risks. Business schools plan courses about innovation in which students work with real cases, practical cases, “learning by doing,” and the use of advanced business simulators.

When Belloc described a businessman’s abilities he emphasized his initiative and courageous determination. The leader who envisages the strategy and the technician who puts it into practice are usually the same person in his novels. This is the case with Sir Percy Clutterbuck who gets involved in a disastrous business. He supplies food to the British army in South Africa during the Second Boer War (1899-1902). Later on, the army compensates him for his loss, and Clutterbuck invests money in the once discredited property of Curricant Docks. Thanks to the Government’s new plans for such a port, he earns a lot of money.²¹

Transparency in European southern countries

There is a close relationship between any government and transparent institutions and efficient public management based on the rule of law and economic growth. This seems to be one of Belloc’s most cherished principles and the ultimate criteria to assess politicians’ ethical performance.

There has always been corruption, particularly in the Catholic countries from the south of Europe with authoritarian tradition. On some occasions, politicians and civil servants have tried to become rich at any cost. For example, big parties with responsibility in office had to trick their electorates to account for their huge expenditure. The lack of Protestant ethics that rewards merit, the selection of politicians by the leadership of the parties and of the bureaucrats by the old-boy network and partisanship, undersupply, and slow justice are factors that produce the global result of corruption and impunity. To solve these problems, we must put forward the control of the finances of the parties, open tickets for electoral campaigns, recruitment of civil

²¹ See *Mr Clutterbuck’s Election* (1908): 33.

servants through merit, and tendering processes for contracts and public-works licenses. Independent judicial authority must also control parties' foundations, youth sections, and electoral campaigns. Justice officials must have sufficient means to penalise.

The private sector is a decisive element in this phenomenon, as the benefit of corruption results in private pockets. Corruption must be transformed into a non-profitable business and the private sector should establish its own rules to self-control its activity. So far, the penalties are ridiculous, and guilty people or companies are eventually absolved. Consequently, this lenient atmosphere encourages the private sector to yield to the temptation of continuing with illegal activities.

Government should cast an eye on the identity and transparency of those involved in the creation and management of companies because the activities of ex-civil servants in the private sector should be restricted insofar as they work in fields that are directly related to their previous posts as civil servants. What is more, citizens should not tolerate electoral tickets that include suspected corrupt members, although they are only under indictment.

Sometimes lack of transparency in southern Europe has been compensated through laudatory comments on the excellence of outstanding artistic or industrial intuition, for example, Italian industrial design or Spanish painting. The concepts of beauty, rationality, comfort for the user, or reliability in engines and devices are generalised and sometimes taken for granted. Yet such qualities are not exclusive of Mediterranean designers, and frequently form hackneyed slogans in tourist brochures.²²

Had Belloc observed the Spanish banks praxis in the period between 2006 and 2012, his carefully scrutinizing eyes would have spotted the corruption techniques that underlay the whole affair of preferential shares. Most of the people affected by

²² The light of the Mediterranean sunshine is a commonplace when critics judge Spanish painter Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923), or some Italian cars style and interior decoration, for example, Pininfarina's industrial projects. Catalan architect and designer, Rafael Marquina (1921-2013), created his well-known olive oil cruet that won the 1961 and 1986 Delta de Oro Prize. This oil cruet was presented as "transparent, stable, and accurate," and it was, owing to its material (glass) and functional qualities. Very soon, such traits became generalised and were applied to many Spanish designs, as if they were due to Spaniards' inherent talent. Achille Castiglioni (1918-2002) was a remarkable Italian architect and designer, recognised all over the world. Milan Fashion Week is launched as an excellent event that epitomises Italian genius. In the same way, many products are advertised as if they had a special, inimitable design merely because they are Italian.

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preferential shares invested all their money thinking they were actually signing up to a fixed term account with a very attractive interest rate and without any risk whatsoever. However, banking employees in many cases took advantage of the investors' good faith and their knowledge of banking matters to make their clients believe one thing and sign up to a very different type of deal. Minor investors thought they were investing money with no risk and believed that their investment was easily retrievable. In fact, they were buying something very similar to shares from a desperate savings bank that was trying to solve its terribly serious problems of financial solvency. Bankia was one of the banks involved in this practice, and its unwise management brought about its clients' enraged accusation of swindle and illegal action. A cluster of terrible lawsuits against Bankia was the aftermath of the whole affair.

The recent economic crisis has forced banks to retrieve common sense, and the perception of financial risk has changed. In Spain, from 2007 to 2012, the banking business has decreased from forty-seven to seventeen banks. Banks know for certain that they are not going to obtain easy money and that the most important obligation of a solvent bank is to give back deposits. To be able to do so the basic capital must stay within the bank. Many banks have given up high profitability to maintain a stable and prestigious portfolio. They do not want to make the mistakes of the banks in Cyprus that, until 2012, used to buy Greek treasury bonds because of their high interest rates. At present, many banks try to buy German bonds, since this is a way to ensure these banks' survival.

Flattering press

The role of the press has been decisive on many occasions. In August 2013, *Der Spiegel*, Hamburg's prestigious weekly newspaper, was about to be led by journalist Nikolaus Blome, former *Bild Zeitung*'s executive. *Bild Zeitung* is well known for its editorial line that makes this paper into something of the gutter press. Wolfgang Büchner, chief editor of the huge press agency DPA, seriously considered the idea of appointing Blome as deputy head and chief of the editorial department in Berlin. Blome was widely known for his liberal conservative bias and the opinions he stated in *Bild*

when he began criticising Greece's economic problems since March 2010. Blome considered Greece guilty of the crisis in Europe and for more than two years *Bild* denigrated this country with false reports about Greeks' laziness, luxurious pensions, and high life. In 2012, 49% German people were in favour of Greece abandoning the euro. Although the idea of Blome joining *Der Spiegel* could sound contradictory it was not actually, since he was very near this paper's editorial line of economic orthodoxy. In 2013 both *Der Spiegel* and *Bild* supported Angela Merkel and the general consensus of German establishment fundamental issues.

Belloc mocked the press by considering newspapers the shameless loudspeakers of the dominating class. *Der Spiegel* and *Bild* supported Merkel's policy, the fictional paper headlines Belloc invented were usually servile flatterers of the government. All in all, each paper paid lip service to its owner's old-boy network:

Pongo was very happy indeed when, that evening in Paris, (...) He bought the English papers on the Boulevard, and he read them with ironic satisfaction. (...) He could tell almost before he opened those papers what each would say.

The *Moon* pointed out the necessity for such trivial changes, congratulated the Prime Minister on a well-earned holiday, and understood that Pongo himself had greatly benefited by his short sojourn upon the coast of Azure. (...)

The *Capon* was in a different mood, for its proprietorship was in very different hands. Indeed, the proprietor of the *Capon* was not related in any way to the proprietor of the *Moon*, and the only link between them was the marriage of the sister of one man to the nephew of the other man's oldest friend. (...)

All that sort of thing was the fringe of the frills. Pongo turned with much more anxiety to the city columns of the two papers and there he found less consolation. *There*, there was a beautiful unanimity! (*Pongo and The Bull* 1910: 238, 239, 240)

Unstable growth cycle

Many people attest that technology is the last resource when conventional policy runs out. The sudden increase in unemployment in western society, the decrease of real salaries from 1993 to 2014, and the slow but unstoppable erosion of middle class have unleashed a renewed unrest. The economic crisis of the past few years is so strong that it tinges our view of the future with dark colours, so much so that hope in information technologies has both supporters and detractors. Robert Gordon, economist from Chicago North-western University, and Tyler Cowen state that there has been a decrease in productivity per hour of work in the United States of America: from 3% in the 1960s to less than 1% in the 2000s. Gordon concludes that the growth cycle, inaugurated two-hundred and fifty years ago, will not be resumed in the near future. In his opinion, the two centuries of uninterrupted progress would not be the norm, but the exception. Tyler Cowen, economist from the Georges Mason University, is a bit less gloomy. Cowen states that we wanted flying cars, but instead we got 140 characters. Cowen is not impressed by touchscreens, drones, Facebook, or Twitter, and he believes that 3D printers have only advantages in transportation. Charles Irving Jones from Stanford University estimates that 80% of the growth between 1950 and 1993 had to do with improvement in education. David Autor from MIT admits biotechnology will be very innovative in the near future, but it will have little effect in everyday life. Present-day, optimistic economists think that conventional macro-economy finds it very difficult to benefit from the advances of information technology. They believe that pessimism is inseparable from big crisis periods, in the same way as it was also necessary to wait a hundred years to assess the complete effects of the two industrial revolutions.

The aftermath of capitalism

Hilaire Belloc died in 1953. Since 1942, when he suffered from a serious stroke after a series of minor embolisms, he did not write anything relevant. Due to his poor health, he was actually unaware of the economic situation in those days. When we look back to the

1950s from our present-day perspective we realise Christian democracy, Social democracy and Neoliberalism were the three constitutive elements in Western governments after 1945. These three political and economic tendencies contributed to form the Democratic Welfare State that was governed by the rule of law. This was the concept of the German *Sozialstaat* that was successively transformed into the terms *market social economy*. In 1848, Lorenz von Stein had coined the German term to call for the necessary social reforms that any state should implement in order to improve the living conditions of the lower classes and, thereby, avoid social unrest and revolution. From the 1950s onwards, Trades Union leaders considered there had been a long successful struggle to improve working conditions. It seems to have been so, with ups and downs. Nevertheless, this process of amelioration of social conditions came to a sudden standstill with the 2008 to 2016 recession. The aftermath of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher's Neoliberal period influenced some European leaders, particularly German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who was convinced that the solution to the debt crisis lay in austerity measures:

Neoliberalism is the immediate product of the conservative revolution. Thatcher in 1979 and Reagan in 1981 implemented neoliberal measures that transformed the social contract in force since the Second World War and redefined what was considered possible and ideal.

The deregulation that was introduced acted as a time bomb. In this way capitalism initiated a stage in which it has been settled until the Great Recession of 2007.

15 – M Indignants Movement, Occupy Wall Street and other movements were reactions against this dynamic, exactly the same as May 1968 in France. Democracy has consisted in a revolt against the winners of global capitalism since the beginning of modernity.

That conservative revolution had followers as the *neocons* that settled in the White House with George W. Bush and that usually crouch behind Donald Trump.

Millions of people fell into the trap. They began to feel more identified with life styles and submission projects of an unattainable elite. Those that fell into error were acting against their own interests and did not identify with their neighbours any more from who there were hardly any minimum differences that separated them in the scale of values. Everybody knew that the offer supplied by Neoliberalism was irrational, but many people accepted the proposal even if everything was a big lie.

Neoconservatives cancelled the political control of capitalism out of control that Franklin Delano Roosevelt had implemented with his New Deal. American New Deal and European Welfare State provided protection in exchange for renouncing the aspirations of political emancipation of revolutionary tradition and the acceptance of a life style harmed by consumerism and salaried job.

Between the end of the Second World War and the 1973 oil crisis there was the golden age of capitalism. The overcoming of capitalism (according to Marxist view) was not produced. Instead of this there was a kind of passive revolution within capitalism. As a consequence, the citizens' material sustenance and social organisation that came up continued to be based on taking advantage from others.

Every morning, when we come out of home, each of us confronts similar people to whom we try to defeat in an endless succession of economic challenges. What was called some time before "exploitation of man by man" is summarised in "I buy cheap, I sell expensive" in the largest number of areas in social life.

On one occasion, somebody asked Margaret Thatcher which political accomplishment had been most important in her life. "Tony Blair and the New

Labour,” she answered. This is the key to the arrival of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of British Labour on 12th September 2015.²³

Belloc shrewdly noticed and explained citizens’ renunciation to individual freedom in exchange for a bit of security, exactly as stated in the previous quotation of Joaquín Estefanía’s review. Consumerism and salaried job, Belloc agreed, are matched with the Welfare State system.

Austerity measures have been considered the remedy for the recent economic crisis (2008-2016), particularly by those who were already convinced of their validity and were ready to believe in their healing power. Although taxes are necessary, the key policy is to collect money to the maximum, but in a fair and unbiased way. On many occasions, the candidates who win an election have previously promised to reduce taxes, but once in office they feel compelled to increase them. There is no popular tax, but some eventually lead to a popular uprising. This was the case with the ‘poll tax’ that put an end to Margaret Thatcher’s policy and political career.

Only in 1377 and 1380 had a similar tax been put into effect and its consequences had been disastrous, as in 1381, the tax triggered the farmers’ uprising.

The ‘poll tax’ had been approved of on 9th January 1986 by Thatcher’s cabinet, and it came into force in Scotland on 1st April 1989, one year before in the rest of Great Britain. Thatcher tried to stop overspending in many municipalities, especially those ruled by the Labour Party. One of the mainstays of Thatcherism was to turn tenants into owners of housing. Even at that time, of an electorate of 40 million only 17 million paid rates.²⁴ Thatcher’s original idea was to replace rates increasingly by the new ‘poll tax.’ In working-class neighbourhoods, rates were nearly non-existent, so in Thatcher’s first term of office (1979-1983), the percentage of funds that the Exchequer spent on towns decreased from 61% to 53%. Local authorities reacted by raising rates 36%. Confident Labour mayors thought the electorate would not punish them for doing so because

²³ Joaquín Estefanía. “Todo era mentira.” *El País*. 19th September 2015. Estefanía reviews César Rendueles’ book. [My translation] See César Rendueles. *Capitalismo canalla*. (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2015).

²⁴ The Spanish equivalent would be “Impuesto sobre Bienes Inmuebles” (IBI).

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practically only middle-class citizens paid rates. Thatcher restricted rates, so the Greater London Council (GLC) of Ken Livingstone and sixteen other major cities refused to collect the 'poll tax.' The conflict brought about the abolition of the GLC. In Scotland, after only six months, the Conservatives suffered a severe defeat, and 15% of the owners did not pay the 'poll tax.'²⁵

Convinced liberal capitalists thought and publicly declared that state intervention was not necessary because business world was able to control its excesses on its own. The accepted motto was "*laissez-faire*" in the economic sense that is, no matter what problems free capitalism can cause the market momentum – its inbuilt capacity for reaction and self-control – will calm any dispute between bosses and salaried employees. However, the analysis of the economic history from the first Industrial Revolution to the present-day crisis shows that this supposed self-control of the market has not worked at all. Western governments have been issuing laws to protect workers from unbearable working conditions, very similar to cruel slavery in nineteenth century England, and recurrent economic crisis have been questioning those supposedly benevolent, self-regulatory capitalist traits.

Classical Liberalism fostered the idea of freedom without restrictions. Although Neoliberalism defended some concepts from the classical Liberalism of the nineteenth century, at the same time accepted new political alignments and included later ideas that, on the whole, transformed it into a new distinct economic current. For example, monetarism encouraged by Milton Friedman and the Chicago School of Economics, since roughly 1955, was the major opponent of the policy of economic intervention by the State. By the end of the 1970s, these theories had been increasingly accepted as the real alternative to the performance of Keynesian economics throughout the 1973 oil crisis.

Neoliberal policy was in favour of increasing interest rates, reducing the offer of money so as to reach a near-zero inflation rate. In this way, Neoliberals believed the risk of devaluation could be avoided. Neoliberal policy encouraged increasing taxes on

²⁵ *The Guardian* remarked that if the Duke of Westminster was paying £10,255 a year in rates, from now on, with the 'poll tax,' he would pay £417, exactly the same amount as his private chauffeur!

consumption – in spite of the fact that such indirect taxation punishes poorer taxpayers – and reducing taxes on production, personal income and company profits. It was also in favour of reducing public spending and deregulating trade and investments, as they are essential elements for economic growth. Neoliberalism stood for capital mobility and job flexibility. In general, it considered that private enterprise is more efficient and productive than public institutions. As a result, the private sector must be encouraged because it is the real supplier of wealth and the public should be reduced to minimum. This economic school of thought states that the best way to distribute wealth is through the growth of production, the trickle-down policy that allows social welfare to permeate down to each and every individual. Of course, Left in general, and Post-Keynesian economists have attacked Neoliberal policies as the root of all evils engendered within recent crises during the period 1990-2008. They state that Neoliberalism dramatically increases the impact of crises of confidence.

Keynes opened a new perspective on economics with his major book *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936). This work was intended as an answer to the Great Depression of 1930s. He analysed the causes and consequences of the variations of aggregate demand²⁶ and its relationship with employment and income. He focused on the relationship among demand, production and unemployment. He concluded that when national demand falls critically short of productive capacity, this leads to a state of economic depression that may last indefinitely. The solution is to create demand by government spending and low taxes. Excessive demand, by contrast, leads to inflation and should be curbed by tight-budgeted policies. Keynes tried to allow national and international institutions to have the power to control economy in periods of recession by means of state budgeted spending or rather fiscal policy. He justified this course of action by pointing to the multiplying effect that happens when there is an increase of aggregate demand. Keynes' key argument was that when there is low demand, the public sector can raise aggregate demand to foster the growth of economy by increasing public spending provided that it does not increase interest rates as an

²⁶ Aggregate demand is the total demand for final goods and services at a given time and price level. It is, actually, the demand for the gross domestic product of a country.

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undesirable consequence. Keynesian thought deeply influenced Western governments after the Second World War (1939-1945), since they tried to encourage demand through taxes, public expenditures, and monetary policy. These measures usually implied increasing money emission, sometimes a dangerous decision since it had implications in inflation rates and devaluation.

As time went by, Keynesianism was not only an economic current, but an ideological tendency as well. Inflation and stagflation had been considered opposed concepts until Keynesian theories were implemented. After the Second World War, Keynes' proposals were associated with social welfare. The very concept of the Welfare State was deeply ingrained in Western democracies from the 1950s and 1960s, when confronted with the unstoppable advance of Communist countries. What had begun as a proposal for recession periods was transformed into a permanent policy based on continuous increase in public spending and monetary offer. Chronic inflation immediately appeared, although it was considered to be the lesser of the two evils, provided that high employment and consumption could be maintained. During the 1970s, stagflation slowed down Keynesian practices because economists thought they brought about unbalanced public budgets and increased inflation.

In the recent economic crisis, Japan and the United States of America have restated some principles from Keynes' theory, for instance, the monetary expansion policies that tend to encourage economic recovery and employment. In 2013, Haruhiko Kuroda, the audacious Governor of the Bank of Japan, succeeded in taking his country out of deflation thanks to his revolutionary monetary policy. Monetary expansion tries to foster investment. It keeps close relationship with the speed of the machine that produces banknotes. The central banks of the United States of America and Japan keep their active policy of buying public debt issued by their own countries to maintain low interest rates to finance their budget deficit and stimulate private banks to invest in productive economy if they want to obtain bigger profitability. Just the opposite pertains in the European Union. The negativity of the European Central Bank in respect of financing Eurozone public debt provokes adverse reactions in some countries. For example, in Spain, around 2013, there are interest rates of more than 5% for public debt

that attract banks much more than loans to companies and families, as these involve bigger risk. Nevertheless, Mario Draghi, the President of the European Central Bank, reversed the tendency in March 2015 by means of a significant quantitative easing.²⁷

In a capitalist society, private individuals or commercial groups supply goods and services. Free enterprise and private ownership are essential elements of this economic system, as state control is the lowest possible and aimed at supervising the process legally. The means of production are owned and controlled by private people who try to obtain profit from their work and compete with one another within a loyal framework. Defenders of capitalism state that it is the most efficient way to wealth and progress. Belloc was not at all concerned with the capitalist concept of growth as a necessary step to well being. His personal philosophy on the subject stated that a limit should be placed on the unstoppable human urgency to become richer and richer, as wealth was not a synonym of happiness.

When you consider the present-day state of the economy in Spain, the ageing of society and low salaries for young people project a gloomy perspective over future. It is accepted that Spain's bubbling growth previous to the 2007 economic crisis was due to building companies and real estate agencies. The truth is that the public sector was an immeasurable source of employment. Those who were born between the end of 1950s and 1970s believed in the goodness of the public sector. When they came of age the country needed all kinds of professionals and civil servants. Many people believed that this was part of a universal logic that implied uninterrupted growth, even though many of them later realised that all was product of a particular historical moment. The British *Institute for Fiscal Studies* analyses those generations by taking into account British data and referring to British population too.²⁸ The improvements that were registered from generation to generation have come to a standstill. Those who were born in the

²⁷ The European Central Bank (ECB) implemented quantitative easing at a rate of €60,000 million per month, although such amount was later increased. Initially, the ECB wanted to reach one million million euros in total. The purpose of this purchase of treasury bills and private assets was to fight deflation (a negative inflation rate). In January 2018, the ECB reduced this acquisition to €30,000 million per month. It is believed that, in principle, this quantitative easing will be maintained until September 2018, depending on the circumstances.

²⁸ Andrew Hood, and Robert Joyce. *The Economic Circumstances of Cohorts Born Between the 1940s and the 1970s*. (London: Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2013).

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1960s and 1970s have lower salaries than the previous generation. The pension that they will obtain will be progressively smaller than their salaries immediately before retirement. They are likely to be reliant on inherited wealth if they are to be any better off in retirement than their predecessors. The vectors that justify such tendency are the ageing of population and the foreseen low growth in future years. These can explain the low salaries of young people, the people that are now paying contributions and have to pay for tomorrow's pensions. All this is bad news and refutes the implicit capitalist myth of increasing economic growth.

Capitalism requires a high level of consumption of goods and services to achieve its long-sought-after goal of increasing growth. After the Second World War (1939-1945), the widespread use of advertising encouraged consumerism. Many years before, in his well-known essay *The Contrast* (1923) Belloc expressed his shock at the differences between Europe and America. This is a lively book that investigates the similarities and contrast between the Americans and the British. Americans come out more favourable, over all. Most of the observations are still fresh and evocative. The book is written sincerely, and Belloc's keen eye saw that publicity was the outstanding feature of the American social spirit. He considered publicity the essential feature of the market-place. Advertising had already begun in the United States of America and a few other developed countries before the war. Consumerism, sped up by publicity, became relevant in all western nations because of the abundance of goods thanks to mass production at reasonable prices. Goods had become affordable because salaries had slowly risen in turn. The underlying social philosophy was that politicians and businessmen had succeeded in transforming needs into desire and human desire has no limits. Belloc laughed at such attitude on consumerism since he preferred staying with friends in a relaxed conversation interspersed with historical and philosophical snippets or funny anecdotes, the moving songs he usually invented, wild laughter on some occasions and the vapours of wine that seasoned such happy moments. He actually despised money and its associated meanness because he thought every worldly vanity should be considered an evanescent reality that inexorably led us to eternity.

He laughed at the rich and used insulting adjectives, for instance, “parasites,” to describe them in his novels. He did it consciously and knew for certain that readers would have a benevolent attitude to his jibes, as he selected words to create hard language for hilarious purpose. In a humorous book, you can say something you could not in real life, in a face to face conversation:

By the time it was staged at Martin’s, two days later, all wealthy London and the parasites of wealthy London, and all the artists, and all the writers (poor fellows!), and a good third of the suburbs, were raving about the Masterpiece. (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 74)

The real value of cash was much criticised by Belloc. He used to write full paragraphs mocking the invention of money, as he considered commodities constitute man’s real wealth not a bundle of banknotes that apart from not having true correspondence with authentic valuable goods – even the gold standard related to monetary standard would be officially abandoned in Britain in 1931 – were just one of the many traps of capitalism.²⁹

Fair distribution of property

Facing the problem of having to choose between the two major economic systems, Belloc preferred what many have roughly called the ‘third way.’ Although these two words have been widely used to denominate everything that is not mainstream, in Belloc’s case they were applied to his distributist ideas. Certainly, the ‘third way’ has been used to refer to the peculiar economic system of Marshall Tito’s Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Non-Aligned Movement, 1970s Spanish liberal cinema, Christian Democrat politicians’ appeasing attitude to a theoretically-possible

²⁹ In Belloc’s short story *The Mercy of Allah* (1922), real economic value is not based on paper bank notes, but on commodities such as cows, land, and food. Belloc was firmly convinced that paper money has fiduciary value.

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referendum in Catalonia,³⁰ and many other issues according to anyone's tastes and preferences in varied fields that range from political philosophy to artistic tendencies. Belloc's 'third way' implied the utopian system that stemmed from Catholic social teaching.

The central thesis in Belloc's books was that only by a fair distribution of property could people lead independent, free lives. Western capitalist democracies were insatiable in their search for "growth," and this concept implied huge injections of capital that, in turn, demanded profitability. To obtain the necessary profitability, the exploitation of the working-class was essential, and this absurd chain of circumstances eventually brought doom to workers.

Belloc realised that most of the existing social problems do not arise from adapting the economic objectives and structures to the people, but just the opposite. Economic profit has been considered the ultimate goal, instead of aiming at achieving a better quality of life for everyone. Whenever somebody mentioned the remote concept of 'welfare state' to Belloc, he grinned suspiciously, and answered back by asking what the concept of 'welfare state' was, who the 'welfare state' was designed for, and what the objectives of such policy really were.

Belloc believed that, by accepting the state's guardianship and protection, individual freedom was lost by the people who had agreed to it in exchange for the leftovers. He was in favour of creating new economic structures that were not exclusive, in which person and background were the main points and could provide a dignified life-style for everybody. What is more, he considered such new policy something feasible, and not just an ethereal fancy of the usual cranks that prowl around anything they consider exotic.

³⁰ J.A. Duran-Lleida put forward a new course of action to cope with Catalan President Artur Mas' proposal to hold a referendum on the "Right to Decide" on 9th November 2014. According to some separatist leaders, this referendum would be the first step towards Catalan independence from Spain. His blurred ideas tried to foster dialogue on the issue, but did not provide specific ways to solve the political dilemma.

Joseph Rowntree's and William Beveridge's contributions

Joseph Rowntree (1836-1925), the Quaker philanthropist and businessman from York, was a firm supporter of the Liberal Party, the same political group to which Hilaire Belloc belonged from 1906 to 1910. Rowntree wanted to improve the quality of life of his employees. Belloc did not know him, nor did he meet him by chance, although the similarity of objectives both men had is astonishing, for example, finding ways to reduce poverty and giving workers a say in the appointment of their immediate supervisors that is quite a close step to the cooperative work encouraged by distributism.³¹

In 1907, Rowntree funded the *Nation*, a weekly journal for social reform. In 1910, he helped purchase the *Morning Leader* and *The Star* to prevent these papers from becoming Conservative-biased. Belloc's career as an MP was in full swing when these Rowntree's initiatives in the press took place. Rowntree was very critical of the Anglican Church for its lack of interest in dealing with social injustice. He was in favour of abolishing the House of Lords, since he thought it prevented social progress. Belloc agreed with this initiative, but for a different reason, as he considered the Upper Chamber was formed by a majority of members who had bought their peerage.

William Beveridge (1879-1963) was a progressive social reformer who persistently worked towards founding Britain's Welfare State. He was educated at Balliol College at the University of Oxford. There he studied mathematics, classics, and law. In 1903, when he was working at Toynbee Hall, a settlement for social work, he became interested in social services. He was introduced to Winston Churchill in 1907. When Churchill was appointed President of the Board of Trade in Asquith's Liberal government (1908-1915), he summoned Beveridge to transform him into a high civil servant who designed plans for unemployment insurance, since Beveridge was considered the main authority on the issue.

³¹ Joseph Rowntree was very interested in politics and regularly attended debates in the House of Commons around 1850. In 1869, his company only employed thirty workers. By the end of the century, the company had over 4,000 employees.

Just the opposite of Belloc, Rowntree was an active member of the Temperance Society and wrote several pamphlets on the subject, including *Public Control of the Liquor Trade* (1903), and *The Taxation of the Liquor Trade* (1906).

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Beatrice Webb deeply influenced Beveridge to internalise the principles of the Fabian Society socialists. The Fabians appointed him director of the London School of Economics (1919-1937). Once there he struggled to keep the Fabian Society's influence on the School, a decision that was seriously hampered by Edwin Cannan and Lionel Robbins. In 1941, Ernest Brown was Minister of Health, and he gathered a committee of officials to analyse existing social insurance and related services. In 1942, Beveridge's report, *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, was published. It was a step further for the National Insurance scheme established by Lloyd George in 1911.

This report recommended all workers should pay a weekly national insurance contribution. The fund would pay subsidies to the unemployed, sick, widowed, or retired. The scheme aimed at supplying a minimum standard of living to everybody and proposed a National Health Service. Beveridge's proposals were accepted even by Conservatives who considered the outlook of a healthier and more motivated labour force the essential factor that would increase British industrial production. In 1946, Clement Attlee's Labour government implemented Beveridge's recommendations that were the basis of the modern Welfare State.

Studying at Balliol and working in Asquith's administration did not mean that Beveridge and Belloc usually met. They only met once actually, and on this occasion, Beveridge found unconscious Belloc at the Reform Club, so no meaningful words were uttered on economic matters. Belloc was already seriously ill.³²

Beveridge's sound knowledge on the Welfare State and Belloc's suspicious attitude on the system make them opposed contemporaries. While Beveridge soundly argued the necessary steps to establish a system that is fundamental in western countries' everyday life, Belloc subtly argued citizens' surrender and unveiled their new slavery when they accept the terms modern states impose on people in exchange for safety.

³² On 30th January 1942, Belloc had a slight stroke at the Reform Club. It so happened that Beveridge found him unconscious and Belloc was brought to King's Land, his West Sussex home, to recover. Belloc had heart problems, complications occurred, and pneumonia appeared. Beveridge and Belloc had met by chance, but there was no conversation whatsoever.

Belloc's outlook

The possession of land was the reasonable solution to this unbearable enslavement. Belloc envisioned an ecological interrelationship between humans and nature, acknowledging the inherent connections between people and their surroundings, as he thought true freedom lies where a man, by sensible use of earth, receives his nourishment and preservation. Bridging the gap of time and space, this was the idea condensed in Catalan President Francesc Macià's familiar saying: "[All we want is] home and our little vegetable garden."³³ By uttering these words, Macià meant other social elements too, for example, a welfare state for the people. Although he came from Catalan bourgeois and conservative background, he diverted towards more independent and progressive positions. Macià realised that national progress and social progress are closely interwoven. In the case of Belloc, bearing in mind the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 and the political factions of the seventeenth century – for example, the Diggers – he revived an undercurrent of political thought which has run through English society for many generations and has resurfaced from time to time. He held the common belief that England had become subjugated by the "Norman Yoke." This legend offered an explanation that, at one time, a golden Era had existed in England before the Norman Conquest in 1066. Since the Norman Conquest, the "common people of England" had been robbed of their birthright and exploited by a foreign ruling class.

Political strategy usually implies all sorts of techniques to pretend serious attitudes on the part of the government to solve people's real problems when they are nothing else other than manoeuvres to achieve and keep power. Examples can be found in Belloc's novels and in Spanish everyday affairs.

In *Pongo and The Bull* (1910) Dolly³⁴ is the Premier who keeps a good relationship with Pongo in spite of his belonging to different parties that are in coalition

³³ Even though everybody accepts Francesc Macià (1859-1933) actually uttered such sentence, as it is part of the man and his legend, it is very difficult to prove the time and place in which he said it. Probably it was said more than once by him and his followers. This sort of motto condensed the ideology of his party *Estat Català*.

³⁴ "Dolly" is the only name Belloc supplies to speak about the Premier. Dolly can be the nickname Belloc intentionally uses to tease the reader, as no full name is provided in any page of the novel. Following the literary convention of the book, the reader knows that name 'Dolly' refers to Herbert H Asquith (Liberal

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at the moment. Mr Pennybunt is the Opposition leader. People call him Pongo. The action is set in the spring of 1925, which is a futuristic background for a novel that was published fifteen years earlier. Dolly and Pongo are good parliamentary companions. Dolly is the leader of the National party whereas Pongo is the leader of the new Socialist party, the Straights. Both parties are in office thanks to a coalition agreement, so Pongo indirectly helps Dolly to pass the Indian Loan Act, a huge allowance aimed at alleviating famine in Gordon's district. After many adventures that are told in interpolated stories set in France, precisely when the reader foresees Pongo will be able to help Dolly in the final argument and voting in Parliament, a strange element alters the chemical balance of the plot. Many miles away from the House, Pongo is calmly walking through a field between Winckley and Habberton, two imaginary hamlets in Somersetshire, when a fierce bull attacks Pongo and makes him take shelter in a hut for hours. Dishevelled Pongo eventually manages to arrive in time to participate in the final voting at Westminster. Dolly is defeated by thirty-seven votes. The ending of the book places everything upside down, as Dolly obtains an enormous majority in the General Election a month later and his government puts into practice most of the projects that had been rejected a short time before.³⁵ Dolly is perhaps hypocritically sorry for Pongo whom luck has excluded from any future political job whatsoever.³⁶ Free public expenditure is particularly striking when people realise that the approved allowance for the so called Indian Loan is surreptitiously devoted to military uses, exactly as Dolly had repeatedly insisted in the previous months when he stated in parliament that the Government should have a free hand to do what it liked with the money.³⁷

In 2003, the Spanish economist Miguel Sebastián and the journalists Mariano Guindal and Mar Díaz-Varela had a revealing conversation on how different the ideas

Prime Minister 1908-1916) in real life. The physical portrait of Dolly, character, political manoeuvres, and his wife's social class are a mirror on Asquith's personal life and political behaviour. Similarly, "the solid British judgement touched with Celtic fire" that Belloc applies to Pongo make this figure the literary description of David Lloyd George in real life. See *Pongo and The Bull* (1910): 119.

³⁵ Belloc includes an ironical one-and-a-half-page Epilogue to describe the internal contradictions of politics. Even though Dolly lost the voting on the Indian Loan, he is actually the winner in the impending General Election, and he satisfactorily puts into practice everything that was previously rejected. See *Pongo and The Bull* (1910): 304-305.

³⁶ See *Pongo and The Bull* (1910): 304.

³⁷ See *Pongo and The Bull* (1910): 287.

of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the future Prime Minister of Spain had been before and would turn out to be after the general election in 2004. Miguel Sebastián openly admitted neither Rodríguez Zapatero nor he were qualified to rule Spain. The following year, the Socialist Party (PSOE) won the election and its leader, Rodríguez Zapatero became Prime Minister, a post he held from 2004 to 2011 and Miguel Sebastián was later appointed Spain's Minister for Industry, Tourism and Trade, a post he held from 2008 to 2011. Apart from this conversation, in *El declive de los dioses* (2011) Guindal shows how different governments (from different parties) did nothing to put the brake on the Spanish economy that had been out of control for decades. They only passed acts on matters that could attract declared voters and those of the fickle people who belong to ideological fields that are close to their parties, but who usually do not vote and inflate abstention rates.³⁸

Belloc insists on politicians' hypocritical attitude when they pretend to fight for their principles and simultaneously reach an agreement with one another in private meetings. In *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), Dolly calls Pongo to tell him about the arrangement with the Duke of Buttersea to get financial help for the Indian Loan which will not work.³⁹ Dolly wants nobody to know they both are trying to arrange political issues through concealed encounters, because it is essential to keep up appearances. Belloc could not bear such sort of political compromise and criticised openly this sort of trick. He thought the concealed pacts between government and opposition were part of the shameful behaviour deeply ingrained in the political praxis of his days.

Inevitably, Belloc tried to reach the root of human ambition, not only the politics of power but also to the unquenchable thirst for money. He was a man of principles and of unyielding loyalty to the Catholic social doctrine of his days. Belloc consciously studied and proclaimed from the platform Pope Leo XIII's doctrine that condemned Capitalism's reckless treatment of workers and Socialism as atheistic and chimeric.⁴⁰

³⁸ Cf. Mariano Guindal. *El declive de los dioses*. (Barcelona: Planeta, 2011).

³⁹ See *Pongo and The Bull* (1910): 120.

⁴⁰ Belloc was very concerned by Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891).

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In his 1937 lectures at Fordham University in the United States of America Belloc considered that the two most pervading economic systems at that time, Western capitalism and Soviet Communism, were destroying the basis of society.

There only remains as an alternative to apply the fruits which the Catholic culture had produced when it was in full vigour, the restriction of monopoly, the curbing of the money power, the establishment of co-operative work, the main principle of the Guild, and the jealous restriction of usury and competition, which between them have come so near to destroying us. (*The Crisis of Civilisation* 1937: 62)

“The curbing of the money power” not only implied slowing down the rich ambition and their urgency to control political power, but every Christian man should struggle to achieve a personal commitment to the true Gospel as well, in a conscientious effort to walk towards what is absolute, God himself. Belloc’s philosophy of life was shaped by the spirit of the Beatitudes that sprang from the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew not so much in the sense of “Blessed are the meek...,” as Belloc was neither a pacifist in character nor in his religious principles, but in the sense of the first statement of the Beatitudes. “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” Belloc was a firm believer, but his personal flair would also add: “... for they will obtain a plot of land that will make them free and really human.”⁴¹ Belloc was convinced that wealth degenerates into greed that drives human beings to accumulate properties without putting them at the disposal of society. The same happens with power that frequently degenerates into dominion and exploitation of other people. Belloc was aware of the fact that this world, even if it is good, is not the ultimate situation in life, it is not definitive. The first commandment in the Decalogue resounded in Belloc’s mind: “I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt have no other gods.”

⁴¹ Belloc named his own home in Shipley, West Sussex, “King’s Land.” The overtone may also be “the Land of the Lord.”

He was certain you could not serve God and money at the same time, so greediness was idolatry.

When the reader goes through the pages of Belloc's essays, he has the impression that Belloc was a man that summarised the Catholic teaching of his days. Leo XIII was elected Pope in 1878, when Belloc was seven. At that time, the Roman Catholic Church was suspicious of left-wing organisations that, nowadays, many Roman Catholics consider logical products of workers' movements or to which some Roman Catholics belong.⁴² Although the Pope seriously rejected Socialism and expressed little enthusiasm about democracy, he had a realistic approach to politics and was skilfully diplomatic. In 1879, Chancellor Otto von Bismark abandoned *Kulturkampf*. The Pope put an end to the confrontation between the French church and the Third Republic and encouraged participation in the republican regime. Leo XIII reshaped the diplomacy between the Holy See and the nations of the world by revisiting the works of Thomas Aquinas.⁴³ Belloc was a keen follower of Roman Catholic doctrine on social issues, and Thomism came to be the subject matter of some of his lectures in the United States of America.⁴⁴

Years later Pius XI published *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), and he insisted on a renewed disapproval of Communism and its criminal consequences. Belloc assumed this encyclical was an answer to the Great Depression of 1929, because the encyclical proposed a new order based on subsidiarity.⁴⁵ *Quadragesimo Anno* stated the unity of society could not be based on the class struggle, and the economic order would not be abandoned to the free combination of social forces that can ignore any moral principle whatsoever. Free market can be beneficial, but nobody can expect that the economy alone governs the world as workers' hard experience proved. The encyclical affirmed

⁴² Pope John XXIII distinguished between dogmatic ideologies and legitimate workers' social movements. Cf. Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961).

⁴³ Leo XIII also fostered new academic institutions for biblical study and opened Vatican archives to both Catholic and non-Catholic scholars. He encouraged the expansion of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States of America, and the approach to the Anglican Communion and to the Greek Orthodox in a consistent ecumenical tendency that would be revived in the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

⁴⁴ Belloc paid three visits to America between the two wars: in 1923, 1935, and 1937. He also took the chair in Louvain for a lecture on Thomist economics in 1925.

⁴⁵ In Roman Catholic social teaching, *subsidiarity* implies that one should not withdraw from individuals and commit to the community what they can accomplish by their own enterprise.

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that economic imperialism and the internationalization of money are disastrous, because money looks for home in itself.

When George Orwell read *The Servile State* (1912) he commented favourably on the book in a review for *Time and Tide*.⁴⁶ Yet Orwell asked how property could be divided in a highly-industrialized economy. Belloc replied that:

Ownership of shares in small amounts, a very wide distribution of the interest upon National and Municipal debt, free men owning and farming their own land or holding it on low customary leases, artisans working with their tools in their own shops are to be discovered in all the civilized countries of the West from Ireland to Italy; the proportion of families economically free is in some countries so large as to determine the whole character of society.⁴⁷

Belloc was intensely critical of industrial capitalism. What is more, he contemplated Socialism as only promising a different sort of economic slavery. Sharing out land in small parcels among the people (the very essence of Distributism) could be the solution. This was a quite impracticable policy, and he realised the subsequent frustration of this Utopian endeavour. This can explain Belloc's flirtation with Mussolini. In a letter to Charlotte Balfour, Belloc told her about his encounter with him in 1924:

I had a long talk with him alone. He has read assiduously and has good judgement on the whole. I bade him not exaggerate decline of British power, which he is somewhat inclined to do. On the other hand, he fully understands that Parliament is no longer serious with us and that a "Labour" gang is just the same as a "Liberal" or "Unionist" or any other. He appreciates the fact that

⁴⁶ Some years later Orwell commented again on Belloc's book. Cf. George Orwell. *Second Thoughts on James Burnham*. (London: Polemic, 1946).

⁴⁷ *Time and Tide*. 20th April 1940.

international financiers govern us, but he is puzzled at our yielding to that power when its aims are obviously at issue with the good of the country.⁴⁸

In spite of his half-hearted admiration for Mussolini's ideas, Belloc's main concern at the time was usury. Lending money for interest was regarded as a grave sin in medieval times. Only Jews could provide this service forbidden to Christians. Many Jews became affluent, which caused envy and resentment amongst Christians. Belloc believed that nineteenth-century capitalism was nothing but usury, and that consequently capitalism was alien to Christian culture:

Their [Chesterton and Belloc's] critique of British Imperialism in its last phase was often morally justified but was unbalanced by their exaggeration of the part played by Jewish finance in imperialistic adventures. (...) Many other people besides Jews had investments of either money or patriotic emotion in the war [the Boer War], without which it could not have been conducted.⁴⁹

"Mr Samuel (or Sammy) Montague, Financer," is a character that Belloc enjoys describing and makes him the stereotype of the physical and moral defects that, in his opinion, a usurer Jew can have. Belloc likes to remark "Montague" was an ancient crusading name. The observation is a funny paradox since, after many centuries, a crusading name has been transformed into the surname of a Jewish money-lender. Montague is short, old, hump-backed, with a nasty beard, although he enjoys a high standing with the Ormeston poor.

As the old man shuffled down the street eyes watched him from window after window. He was to the broken poor of Ormeston what certain financial houses are to The Masters of Europe. They feared, they hated, they obeyed him; and

⁴⁸ Letter to Balfour, 21st February 1924.

⁴⁹ David Lodge. *The Novelist at The Crossroads*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).

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while he shuffled on few men whom he met would fail, if he met them alone, to do his bidding. (*The Green Overcoat* 1912: 199)

Belloc returned to his old nightmare of usury. He created the story of Mahmoud, an oriental financier who tells his nephews how he managed to become immensely rich.⁵⁰ The character of this usurer is treated sympathetically, and the author's outlook is one of tolerance and delight in comparison with the reckless cruelty that Belloc used depicting the portrait of the Duke of Battersea,⁵¹ even if we take into account that both characters impersonate the same hateful features:

A month later when the General Election had given an enormous majority in Dolly's favour, (...) routed the cranks, jumped on the House of Battersea, and obediently devoted the Indian Loan to military uses, the Duke of Battersea understood certain things in the English character which had hitherto escaped him; and, as is often the case with men of the Duke of Battersea's kind, he respected Dolly for having thrashed him soundly – but he could not forgive the house of Smith, Fisher and Co., and their commission rankled in his mind for three long years, at the close of which I am exceedingly glad to say the Duke of Battersea, having lost a good deal more money, died. (*Pongo and The Bull* 1910: 305)

In America, the rich were not worshipped, thought Belloc. People did not bow down and worship a wealthy man only because of his money. In Britain, this tendency had been odious at the turn of the century and by the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 it had become unbearable for it meant undermining moral values. In Britain, the general tendency was thinking that Americans worshipped money, but Belloc contradicted such belief. During his visit to the United States of America in 1923, Belloc noticed Americans enjoyed making money; so did he of course. Belloc was a vital sort of person

⁵⁰ See *The Mercy of Allah* (1922).

⁵¹ The Duke of Battersea – Mr Barnett's alternative name – is an insatiable miser who can help Dolly to raise money in his Indian Loan adventure. See *Pongo and The Bull* (1910).

who realised North Americans liked the things money could buy. So he did likewise, because Belloc loved life and enjoyed it to the full. He was endowed with life and its customary pleasures that he lively tasted with gusto, but he was firmly convinced that there was another everlasting life after death. Americans were practical people; they could be envious like everybody else, but they did not worship affluent people; they simply watched them.

Belloc knew that to fully understand the economic situation you must pay attention to three important factors: the cycle – economic expansion or recession, the tendency (rise or decrease) and the seasonal variation in the case of Spain, either the harvest season, the peak, tourist season or the long recurrent period of economic stagnation. He thought governments should introduce some essential correcting measures to counteract the instability of the system. Belloc followed his variable mood tendencies when he considered economics from a distance. In his personal experience and in the lives of others, he was aware of the mysterious injustices and frustrations that shape man's existence. No matter what bankers or usurers thought, he considered money was relative, since happiness, if such concept can be mathematically measured, did not depend on wealth but on other factors such as sharing common experiences in a relaxing discussion and enjoying good company. Belloc in a state of thoughtful pondering would assert it is very difficult to find a happy person among the rich.⁵² Without personal freedom – and property, of course – Belloc thought all sort of economic activity became nonsense and made man very unhappy. Belloc's sceptical vein and religious detachment also underlay his brooding attitude on world matters and, frequently, his deep reflection on the brevity and contradictory nature of human life can be shocking to some materialistic, present-day readers. His thought on this field had biblical reminiscence:

It is useless, useless, said the Philosopher. Life is useless, all useless. You spend your life working, labouring, and what do you have to show for it? You work for

⁵² Zygmunt Bauman said so, and considered happiness is the joy you feel when you get beyond unhappy moments. He added that a life without conflict would be awfully boring. Núria Escur. "La entrevista." *La Vanguardia*. 17th May 2014.

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something with all your wisdom, knowledge, and skill, and then you have to leave it all to someone, who hasn't had to work for it. (...)

As long as you live, everything you do brings nothing but worry and heartache. Even at night your mind can't rest. (*Ecclesiastes*. 1, 2; 2, 21-23)⁵³

Belloc disliked grandiloquence even his own. He mockingly wrote

It has long been a matter of debate among philosophers whether the poor or the rich be the more miserable: nor are any better suited to debate the matter than philosophers; for they come of the poor and live among the rich most shamelessly. (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 231)

The undertones of these lines suggest the hypocrisy of some so-called intellectuals who create new theories to explain unforeseeable political and economic phenomena, although their final goal is to maintain their personal status, even disregarding the real value of their chimeras in the solution of serious problems such as unemployment and national debt. Belloc's habitual attitude is despising international organizations. He writes mockingly about them no matter their presumed good will activities:

“Salaries? That's what the League of Nations is *for!*”

“Lots of places for the foreigners,” he went on enthusiastically. “There'll be a President, of course, and a Vice-President and a Consultation Council – German head?” (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 291)⁵⁴

Around 1920 Belloc noticed his capacity for hard work was diminishing. English tradition was not prone to assimilate Belloc's books on social and political aspects precisely because of his negative outlook, particularly when he repeatedly

⁵³ See *Good News Bible*. (New York: Collins/Fontana, 1976).

⁵⁴ At the time when Belloc was writing these words, the League of Nations was a new organization. It had been founded ten years before the book was published, in 1920, and only one year before, in 1929, the building work of its headquarters in Geneva began.

remarked that parliamentary decisions usually concealed the mean interests of plutocracy, the minority that, in his opinion, was really leading the country. He was too inflexible to appreciate the changes that were going on in the world, for example the far-reaching consequences of the rise of the British Labour Party that was to replace the Liberal and become a serious political contender since then. Belloc did not assess the origin of the Soviet Union (USSR), in 1922, with its powerful policy in the east and dogmatically anti-Christian praxis. What he had written about Islam in the Middle Ages took a new form in the growing importance of Soviet expansion, as it was going to threaten Europe for nearly the rest of the century. Increasingly, Belloc lacked the power of renewal and the skill to surprise old and new readers, although he went on writing in favour of what he considered were the good causes.

On economy, as on other political and social matters Belloc kept a grumpy attitude that came from disappointments in his personal life. Being a completely self-assured person, he enjoyed telling everybody what he should do and arguing about any proposed course of action. He reckoned himself an expert in the field of economics. As a result, in his comic novels he interspersed crafty observations on the rich blunders or straightforwardly abused anyone whom he considered a disgusting posh member of the plutocracy that was governing Britain. Nevertheless, Belloc knew his mother Bessie's fortune had been completely lost due to unwise investments, and he had to do hackwork⁵⁵ to support himself, his five children, and to cover the expenses of his West Sussex home, King's Land. His not being accepted as a fellow at All Souls' College, University of Oxford, turned out to cause lifelong injury to his self-esteem. Another personal frustration came from his abandoning active political life in 1910 and his lifelong inability to have a steady job. Yet the greatest frustration of all derived from his character. He was intellectually restless, dissatisfied with any achievement he could reach and continuously on the move. He liked to be in the middle of everything, as he

⁵⁵ The word was used by Belloc when referring to his urgent need to earn money to support his family. So, he agreed that he had to write non-stop due to non-literary reasons most of the time. Two journalists interviewed Belloc when he was seventy-five, and he teasingly answered that he only wrote for money. See Hugh Kingsmill, and Hesketh Pearson. *Talking of Dick Whittington*. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1947): 213.

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enjoyed conversation as well as debate for hours on end. His inexhaustible energy always pushed him forwards, but the effort was going to take its toll on his health.

Belloc's ideas and personality were not accepted then and now. On many occasions, he vociferously uttered and recklessly wrote about uncomfortable truths or controversial issues that were only his private opinions, but that he wanted to transform into universal unquestionable theses. Being a Roman Catholic implied belonging to a minority, and Belloc's beliefs did not make easier his being a popular figure, much more so when, by character and convictions, he was a bellicose man. He did not like the political technique of regulated silence that is frequent among crafty politicians. Remaining silent for some time can be a weapon to attack your adversary, but you must know when and for how long. It is the classic trick of the magician who asks the audience to look at one card while he is moving another one into his other hand. Misdirection is the old trick that, based on psychological techniques, diverts the spectator attention to another place. Belloc himself included this trick in this peculiar passage where misdirection begins as a physical manoeuvre:

Then, licking the flap and pressing it down, to keep state secrets hidden from all profane eyes, Wilfrid Halterton, Postmaster-General, put the envelope into the pocket (...) "Now," said that great captain of industry (...) "I must be off." (...) James Haggismuir McAuley stopped a moment in the passage, looked up at the wall, and said:

"That's a fine etching, Wilfrid!"

Wilfrid turned his long thin neck round to follow the connoisseur's gaze. As he did so, in the tenth of a second James Haggismuir Mc Auley had removed the envelope from the side-pocket, passed it in a flash round his back into his other hand, and got it into that breast-pocket of his (...)

That business transaction did not take five seconds all told. It had taken Wilfrid Halterton ten to move his neck. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 29)

In this case the physical movement to conceal the envelope will be later transformed into careful calculation to divert Halterton's attention from the issue. Politicians call this technique marking the agenda, or rather, the practice of sorting out which issues are to be dealt with openly and which ones must be concealed for the moment. The ultimate objective is to distract public opinion changing the order of priorities debate. Deliberate silence on any incident can supply precious time to think about alternative ways to solve the problem and, in the meantime, storms can clear up.

Belloc was familiar with this well-known technique and included scenes involving this technique in his novels. Yet he did not like others using it in real life, and he boasted that he knew the intentions of those politicians who pretended acting honestly when they were actually marking the agenda in debates. He liked to unveil profiteers and wanted everybody to know it.

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann introduced the theory of the spiral of silence to clarify how people adjust their opinion to that of the majority.⁵⁶ When a person has to decide between two opposed tendencies, agreeing with the predominant point of view strengthens his or her self-confidence and allows him or her to express his or her opinion without reservations. On the contrary, if he or she does not agree with the predominant view, he or she will tend to be silent. This sociological theory did not apply to Belloc, and it can explain partially why he was not openly accepted by most of the people even if, of course, he had a faithful group of close friends.

Belloc liked controversial statements, argument, debate, and staying in opposition, although he was clever enough to understand that nobody is accepted by everyone. Belloc knew his enemies outnumbered his good friends and, simultaneously, he was able to develop some sort of carapace to take cover from those lying-in-wait to attack or discredit him. He accepted the challenge and went on letting the cat out of the bag whenever he thought it worth doing so. Many apparently concealed ideas may be extracted from Belloc's comic novels. They are usually uncomfortable truths that are conveyed by a resourceful writer who enjoyed being considered a bit of a daring

⁵⁶ Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann. "The Spiral of Silence." *Journal of Communication*. 24. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977).

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epigrammatic wit: 'a slap is some one-sided applause'; 'in politics, there is always the danger of belonging to majorities'; 'the problem of impartial people is that they are bribed by both sides'; 'the crowd is the plural of nothing.'

Chapter Six

An English Variety of Roman Catholicism. Edwardian Ethics, Morality, and Modes of Political and Social Behaviour

[in *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904); *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908); *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909); *Pongo and The Bull* (1910); *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911); *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929); *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929); *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930); and *The Postmaster-General* (1932)]

In this chapter, there is a description of Belloc's traits as an awkward politician and member of the Roman Catholic minority who struggled to make his faith visible and reasonable¹ in the middle of an indifferent background. Belloc's views were usually merged into his literary activity, both as a reader and author.

Belloc aligned with the radical wing of the Liberal Party, among other reasons, because he disagreed with the British colonial policy of cheap, nearly slave labour force in the goldmines in South Africa. He was convinced that both capitalist concentration and socialist tenets could not find the adequate solution to the fair distribution of property that he considered the essential step to people's well-being, for he believed that the allotment of small plots of land to each family was the base of decent life.²

As an extension of his distributist principles, Belloc liked living in the country and rambling on hours around Sussex woods with some friends, a situation that he fictionalised in *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911), that represents a vindication of the

¹ Robert Speaight. *The Life of Hilaire Belloc*. (London: Hollis and Carter, 1957): 384.

² Hilaire Belloc. *The Servile State*. (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Classics, 1977): 80-81.

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pleasures of rural life and the peace of mind arising from the contact with nature. Belloc sets the paths in Sussex up against the political intrigue as reflected in his political novels, *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908), *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909) and *Pongo and The Bull* (1910).

His social concerns did not distract him from continuing to savour literature within his reduced but select group of favourite authors, especially poets like Milton and Keats, because Belloc's urgency to explain his measures of social reform did not prevent him from reading his most relished passages. He excelled in the decade 1901-1910, the fruitful years when energetic, still young Belloc published their outstanding works. As a novelist, Belloc devoted his efforts to expose middle class inbred snobbish pose but refused to walk along the intricate path of psychological niceties. Since he wrote his novels very fast, his fiction lacks the perfectionist gist of the accomplished craftsman which features the born novelist.³ In spite of some lackadaisical passages, Belloc was a storyteller who succeeded in pushing forward funny vignettes that involve the seeds of social change. Belloc argues that a society of small owners is possible, provided that governments be able to foster such new outlook through suitable tax policies.

Literary tastes change, just like fashion in dressing inexorably transforms existing clothes into outmoded garments. Belloc's novels were increasingly neglected from the half of the twentieth century, as the society described in his stories had been progressively vanishing and, of course, because literary tastes had changed. Belloc was anti-modern and anti-industrial for his adversaries, who described him in this way, in an effort to oversimplify his Roman Catholic intangible principles that were firm in the dogmatic formulation of his faith, but disrupting and radical in his struggle for social justice. It may be argued that occasionally Belloc grew careless in small, though still important, subject matters. His style consists of a rare mixture of erudition and depressive realism that makes him authoritative in large ones. This chapter examines Belloc's proven record of his skill to combine his faith with remarkable literary creation.

³ A.N. Wilson. *Hilaire Belloc: A Biography*. (London: Gibson Square Books, 2003): 392-393.

Fictionalisations

During the Edwardian period, Belloc went on with his inexhaustible literary output because he realized his place was as a writer (maybe also as a journalist) much more than in politics. His novels from that time are easily penetrable and the reader can enjoy Belloc's many asides, inferences, and innuendoes, as well as his exaggerated jokes on human weakness and the characters' ultimate failure to achieve their shameful goals. The world of Belloc's fiction is easily understood once you are familiar with the circumstances of Edwardian London in which he moved and projected his ambitions to exert power. Relentless irony and satire are the two essential ingredients that seasoned his novels about this period.

A.P. Watt was the crafty literary agent who helped Belloc a lot by obtaining substantial commissions in advance for his books and good payments for his writing on the whole. About A.P. Watt, Hilaire Belloc once wrote:

This man is a Scotchman of enormous shrewdness. He forces publishers to take books and gets you admirable terms, seizing himself 10 per cent. Not only does he force publishers to take books, but he forces them to advertise them and sell them.⁴

During the Edwardian years, Belloc wrote seven novels: *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904), *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908), *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911), *The Girondin* (1911), and *The Green Overcoat* (1912). The first four included his usual satires about politicians and businessmen, grinding an axe on the plutocracy he much hated and thought was the root of many evils in the United Kingdom of those years. *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911) is the recreation of the four sides of his own character, depicted with the paint strokes of the landscape artist of the rural south Sussex he knew well and loved. *The Girondin* (1911) is the story of a young French revolutionary who is pushed by the turbulences of an uncertain fate. *The Green Overcoat* (1912) is the creaking

⁴ Letter to John Swinnerton Phillimore (1905).

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satire that reflected the misfortunes of a don who is involved in an odd adventure promoted by a group of unscrupulous, scrounger young men.

Emmanuel Burden, Merchant... (1904) is an ironical criticism of the supposed honesty of the British Empire as jingoistic people try to present the colonial adventure to contemporary public opinion.

I have seen the Empire, Mr Burden, in its broader and its remoter aspect. (...) I can say that it has never reposed, that I have never seen it reposing, upon any other basis (upon any other permanent basis) than the energy, the shrewdness, the courage and the probity, of our English business men. (*Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* 1904: 151)

Belloc stated that colonialism was a hypocritical search for money through exploiting natural resources, especially in Africa. Some Jewish families were backing the whole affair. In the novel, Mr Barnett⁵ is the character who resembles Jewish bankers like Rothschild⁶ or Oppenheimer, the real Edwardian profiteers who were at the centre of the financial world. Barnett is a Jewish financier of German origin who encourages heavy investment in the M’Korio Delta Scheme. On the other hand, Mr Emmanuel Burden and Mr Charles Abbot represent the honest commercial tradition; they are persuaded to participate in such foolish adventures, that is, up until Abbot realizes that the commercial society formed to exploit the scheme is just a strategy set up in the stock exchange to enrich only Barnett. By the time Burden sees through the ruse, it is too late, and he suffers a fatal stroke. Belloc’s mood clearly depicts the real purpose of the

⁵ “Mr Barnett,” or “Lord Lambeth,” and, eventually, “the Duke of Battersea” (these three names are always the same person, a person who has been accumulating more and more power) is never mentioned by his first name. This sly Jew is always simply called “Mr Barnett.” Mr Barnett appears on page 43 of *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904), but he is also an influential character in the next three political novels, *Mr Clutterbuck’s Election* (1908), *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), and *Pongo and The Bull* (1910). Mr Barnett, now the powerful Duke of Battersea, dies in the last page of *Pongo and The Bull* (1910). It is worthwhile noting that Barney Barnato, a British Jew, was a South African Randlord and a rival of Cecil Rhodes at the end of the 19th century. <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barney_Barnato>

⁶ The Rothschild bank funded Cecil Rhodes in the development of the British South Africa Company at the end of the nineteenth century. The British South Africa Company carried out extracting activities similar to Belloc’s invented M’Korio Delta company.

British Empire as a purely commercial affair that is far removed from the hackneyed phrases about Imperial glory and the Whiteman's responsibility to spread civilisation to far-away countries.

Belloc's trajectory as a Member of Parliament provided fertile ground for literary output. He quickly condensed his political experience into two novels that implied a change in mood and perspective since they were not as earnest as *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904). In the novels written after 1906, Belloc's tone is benevolent and his attitude towards people more charitable, as he magnanimously depicts characters in many situations from bewilderment to comic moments. Although the author mocks human defects, the end is a final compromise to insert a semi-amusing situation that makes the reader smile.

Politics and significant events of the early years of the Edwardian period influenced Belloc's fiction. The Second Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902) provoked strong feelings in Great Britain since it basically divided public opinion in favour and against the conflict. This war indirectly marks the beginning of *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908), as the protagonist is involved in a strange business affair related to food supplies for the British army.

But Mr Boyle, clean-shaven, with deep-set restless grey eyes, (...) looking earnestly at the fire, said abruptly:

“What I have come about tonight, Mr Clutterbuck, is a business proposition. (...) What I've got to put before,” said Mr Boyle shifting in his seat, gazing earnestly at Mr Clutterbuck and speaking with concentrated emphasis, “is eggs!” (*Mr Clutterbuck's Election* 1908: 4-5)

The story goes on, and Clutterbuck becomes entangled in loss, although he receives government compensation later and begins to invest in fruitful business.

Belloc recreates the peculiar atmosphere of his interview for admission as a candidate for the Liberal Party in the pages that describe how the Board of Examiners from the Mickleton National Committee interviews Clutterbuck as prospective

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candidate for the next General Election. The four questions imitate those Belloc had to answer in real life:

“The first thing we have to ask you, Mr Clutterbuck,” boomed out the terrible hierarchy, “is your attitude upon the Irish question?”

(...)

She asked Mr Clutterbuck in a manner suggesting persuasion rather than pressure, what his views might be upon the establishment of female courts of justice.

(...)

“I have now to ask you the gravest question of all: How would you vote in the matter of temperance reform?”

(...)

He added leaning forward, to the evident annoyance of his colleagues who desired to have a word, “what about the policies of Offences Disfranchisement?”
(*Mr Clutterbuck’s Election* 1908: 94, 95, 96, 98)

“His six torturers” do their job.⁷ At the end of the interview, they shake hands and the ordeal is over. Four days later a letter comes from the Acting Secretary of the Mickleton National Executive Deputation:

It spoke in warm terms of Mr Clutterbuck’s character and genius, admitted differences of opinion upon more than one point and severely informed him at its close that he was admitted to the full title of Prospective National Candidate.
(*Mr Clutterbuck’s Election* 1908: 100)

When the National Liberal Association in London recommended Belloc to apply, the Salford Selection Committee asked Belloc several questions in his interview on 13th May 1904. Belloc opposed the 1902 Education Act in order to defend freedom

⁷ Belloc’s literal words. See *Mr Clutterbuck’s Election* (1908): 98.

of education for Nonconformists and, consequently, for Catholics too, because state schools, which were supported by taxes paid by everybody, only taught the Established Church religious perspective. In second place, Belloc faced down Temperance Reform. After this, he tackled Chinese Labour. Next, he considered Home Rule and some people's opposition to a National Council in Dublin. Later on, Belloc commented on Tariff Reform and declared he was a Free Trader. Eventually, Belloc did not conceal that he was a Roman Catholic. The Committee unanimously adopted him as the Liberal candidate.

In the political world, Liberal David Lloyd George's magnificent oratory was against the Boer War, and Belloc agreed with him on this point. A form of protectionism, the Tariff Reform was proposed by Unionists with the purpose of transforming the Empire into an economic unit. The Liberals were against this measure that, they thought, would make food more expensive. When Belloc entered politics, the Liberals won a landslide in the 1906 General Election.

The capacity to utter an exaggerated opposite version of what Belloc really thinks is a frequent narrative resource in *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908). The novel has a passage in which Mr Harman, barge and transport master, loses his temper and enters into a serious argument with one of his employees, Mr Peake. The whole affair is complicated later, and the Union calls for a strike. A lawsuit follows, and Belloc inserts amusing observations on the English character.

We are not logical people: we refuse to be bound by the formal syllogisms so popular with the lower races of Europe and especially among the dying Latin nations. There is no doubt that Mr Justice Compton reflected (...) the permanent common sense of the nation. (*Mr Clutterbuck's Election* 1908: 104)

Everybody who knew anything about Belloc knew, for certain, that he did not believe this. In fact, he believed exactly the opposite. He never thought that the Latin nations were dying, as he wrote in the passage, particularly his beloved France, and he never

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thought there were lower races either. Belloc wrote these comic lines, that did not reflect his own opinion, to depict some popular English stereotypes.

Mr Clutterbuck is an honest merchant, a representative of the English middle class, who is actually the reincarnation of Mr Burden in his previous novel. The most repulsive character is Mr Barnett – the Jewish financier appears again – who has paid for and obtained his peerage and has become the Duke of Battersea. The novel goes on to narrate the vicissitudes of the bewildered Mr Clutterbuck who, eventually, is not elected Member of Parliament as he wished, but who feels obliged by circumstances to pay selflessly for the building of a so-called Royal Caterham Valley Institute.

Nowadays, the novel has lost part of its charm because only those readers aware of the Edwardian background can understand the twists and turns of Mr Clutterbuck's political career. Nevertheless, many passages are still amusing. The end of the novel is quite funny. Mr Clutterbuck obtains very little of what he aimed for, but inevitably spends his money on a disappointing honorary ceremony:

The bazaar was held, subscriptions gathered, Patronage of the most conspicuous sort received, the first stone of the Institute was laid with many allusions to the approaching festival of Anglo-American goodwill. (...) On that day, which is now the chief festival of our race, when so many and such varied qualities receive their high rewards, the storm-tossed spirit of Sir Percy Clutterbuck was at rest. (*Mr Clutterbuck's Election* 1908: 276)

Belloc's pessimistic and realistic view on politics trickles out of some scattered passages and terse sentences.

And this was Mr Clutterbuck's first introduction to the great truth that practical politics depend on compromise. (*Mr Clutterbuck's Election* 1908: 95)

The second political novel of this period, *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), introduces the character of Charles Repton, a Cabinet Minister who goes mad and says

what is very inconvenient in the most unsuitable circumstances due to his apparently deteriorated mental health. On one occasion, Repton's speech goes on reviewing the poor capabilities of most of the Members of the House of Lords.⁸ Fewer than eighty men, hardly 5% of the total, own their peerage because of real merit, hard work, or personal, outstanding qualification. All the rest have been appointed for unworthy reasons, due mainly to hereditary right, kinship, friendship, or personal influence. Repton daringly states that falsehood has been thrown on those who obtained their posts owing to personal merit. Rumours and an unscrupulous press have spread the news that most of them obtained their peerages thanks to bribes, or simply in exchange for money, or for foreign concessions for England's economy in the form of oil and mines. Repton is eventually cured of his mental condition using alternative medicine, and he obtains a peerage on the condition that he supports the helpless Demaine, Mary Smith's protégé.

In *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), Belloc condenses much of the constitutional crisis concerning the House of Lords and the political events of the period 1909-1910. The Liberal government was unable to implement its radical programme completely since the Conservative House of Lords blocked it. Lloyd George's 1909 People's Budget caused the reduction in the peers' power in the Parliament Act of 1911. The book is one of Belloc's peculiar novels that involves a rather silly tale to convey much of his considerations on the politics of those days through the quite absurd stories of which he was very fond.

All in all, *Pongo and The Bull* (1910) deals with the shameful alliance between Government and Opposition, that tacit compromise for a common policy even though politicians try to conceal what is behind the curtain of appearances. Dolly⁹ is a young and popular Minister who had previously appeared in *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908) and *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909). He is the invented character that corresponds to Herbert Henry Asquith in real life.¹⁰ Belloc's usual technique is to stretch the fibre till the jokes are transformed into hilarious matters that form the whole of this scathing irony. Characters are entangled in ridiculous situations that lead them to fiascos. For

⁸ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 230, and *ff.*

⁹ No full name is given.

¹⁰ Herbert Henry Asquith was Liberal Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1908 to 1916.

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example, G. Quinlan Smith is the wealthy banker that Dolly badly needs to obtain the necessary loan to set things right in India, as the initial idea of obtaining the money from the Duke of Battersea has proven impossible because of his ambition and exaggerated conditions:

As he went up those stairs the Duke of Battersea was settled in his mind. He had secured the Indian Loan, and the commission appertaining thereunto.

He stopped upon the landing to take breath, and Dolly courteously stopped with him. (...) As the Duke of Battersea stopped there taking breath, his old usurer's heart continued to be glad within him. (...) The Duke of Battersea was at the top of the stairs and his little calculation was over.

By his side, Dolly, as silent as he, raged inwardly. (...)

Sixty-six is late in life for a man to become a man, and the mood of anger will not last long at such an age. (...)

He was being bullied: his country was being bullied by the money lenders. (*Pongo and The Bull* 1910: 77-79)

Mary Smith advises Dolly not to quarrel with the Batterseas. She promises to speak to G. Quinlan Smith, her husband's uncle.

Quinlan is involved in absurd vicissitudes in France and, owing to confusing events, is confined in prison. The interpolated stories that cause his imprisonment and even Quinlan's physical description and manias provoke the reader's laughter. In Quinlan's funny contradictions and the ridiculous portrait that Belloc depicts, the reader appreciates a stereotyped image of American businessmen and politicians. They are usually fast and practical, much more so than their European counterparts. Belloc will include other American characters in future novels, and he enjoys commenting on American culture, as he has an extensive catalogue of people and events after his many travels to the United States of America. Belloc includes his concocted, comic ingredients in the form of improbable facts in real life of the Edwardian period, such as the assumption that the railways have been nationalised, or by presenting the serious

problems in Ireland in 1910-11 disguised as an Indian crisis that implies famine and social turmoil. The novel expresses Belloc's disillusionment with politics, particularly with the Parliamentary system, as is reflected in his letters of that period.

William M. Thackeray (1811-1863) had already produced funny vignettes in *The Snobs of England* (1846-1847) that were published in *Punch* and, later, under the title of *The Snobs of England, By One of Themselves* (1848). It contained traits of cutting humour and excellent portraits of the characters. He inserted snippets of social satire in most of his writings by following the English humoristic tradition, so much so that Thackeray devoted himself to studying the tradition of English humourists. He also published *The English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century: A Series of Lectures* (1867) in which he was very concerned with analysing Henry Fielding and Laurence Sterne's literary skills. In a similar way, Belloc usually tended to write long ironical stories that mock snobs and that, also, create exaggerated portraits of upstarts.

The Four Men: A Farrago (1911) summarised Belloc's preoccupations on political analysis in a similar way William Cobbett had foreseen the story of Western capitalist democracies. In Cobbett's *Rural Rides* (1830), the real-life conditions of labourers in the field are displayed. His writing is direct and straightforward when he refers to the use of land, as the situation of farmers was worsened by the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution. Cobbett's picture of rural England at the beginning of nineteenth century was that of a vanishing world. Cobbett was as opinionated as Belloc and believed that the witness' direct observation was the best source for writing on social issues.

Living in ugly and stressing industrial towns provoked the return to country houses for everyone who could afford to. In 1906, Belloc and his family moved from Slindon and had a new home in Shipley, near Horsham (West Sussex). They bought a property that included an old mill, a row of cottages, a garden plot – five acres in total – and he called the whole of it King's Land. Belloc and his family loved the spot and considered themselves part of it. Belloc had a detailed knowledge of Sussex, the county he rambled around and that inspired many of his books. The subject matter of *The Four*

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Men: A Farrago (1911) is Sussex, actually, even though the spiritual trajectory of Belloc in the form of four distinctive characters is also there.

People moving from urban areas were to blame for the loss of Sussex's peculiar speech, traditional agricultural techniques, and ancient folklore:

One very curious result of it to-day is the difference between the modern settlement of East Sussex and of West. The newcomers with their villas and their search for something old, that they may destroy it by their admiration, had different chances in the two parts of the county. In the West [Horsham] they formed, as it were, islands which stood alone in the midst of a resisting environment. They would build you a Haywards Heath which was like a London suburb, (...)

In East Sussex you get, on the contrary, whole belts of country into which the spirit of the great towns had penetrated, perhaps for ever. (...)

There is no peasant in the world so rooted in his customs and so determined to maintain them as is the Sussex peasant. (...) he has been virtually bought or sold by distant families alien to the Sussex tradition, or what is worse, Colonials and random rich men who make themselves great by the purchase of an ancient estate with whose traditional history they have no sympathy. (*The County of Sussex* 1936: 158-159)

Through the text percolates the idea that Sussex was inevitably to lose its traditional character, so Belloc's purpose was also to describe things as it had been till recently. The four characters in the book usually make a detour just to avoid coming across any important town shaped by newcomers from London.

Anecdotes are frequent, and the series of strange events does not follow a strict logical order. Belloc included the subheading "*A Farrago*" in the title perhaps because he wanted to warn the reader that he planned the book with complete authorial freedom that is apparent in the whimsical sequence of events. Belloc enjoys including an interesting comment on fortified Gascon of the Vall d'Aran and Aragonese wine:

And I, to please them, spoke of true wines, notably of that wine which comes from the inside of a goat-skin in Val d'Aran, Sobrarbe, and the roots of Aragon: the vilest and most tonic wine in the world, alive with the power of the goat. (*The Four Men: A Farrago* 1911: 77-78)

Belloc felt he was watching European civilization in its death throes, since salaried slaves had been jammed into city slums and were not free because they depended on a successive scale of chiefs: foreman, master, landowner, boss, owner, chief executive officer, or welfare state. Just the opposite, Belloc believed man could be happily independent with his own home and means of livelihood. His creed was exactly the opposite of capitalist obsession with the inevitability of growth as the essential element to guarantee prosperity. The unwanted consequence of growth is the spoiling of landscape and the elimination of traditional rural life. When he wrote the book, the traditional Sussex way of life was increasingly disappearing and was being replaced by the uniformity that was, and still is, characteristic of industrial urban societies. This phenomenon was countrywide, and Belloc's perception could be extrapolated to many spots of Europe.

Change is always present, although some people are unaware of it and do not pay attention to it because they are moving at the same speed as change. Time is the basic element, the engine that produces change. Another factor is people's movement; in *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911), newcomers from London and surrounding areas provoke change too. A century ago, Belloc saw come into fruition many of those changes that he was keen on describing in his writing. Nowadays, and especially since the end of the Second World War, all Western nations have received the persistent influence of North American culture, and have become uniform.

The novel has also other prominent themes – the presence of decay, and longing for home and happiness in companionship. Although many paragraphs contain noisy encounters and witty dialogues, the pessimistic tinge is also there, especially at the end when the transience of life is the prelude of a new and everlasting life after death.

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Grizzlebeard invites his companions to go back to their homes because “the journey is done,”¹¹:

“Nothing remains but the things of which I will not speak (...) But I who am old will give you advice, which is this – to consider chiefly from now onward those permanent things which are, as it were, the shores of this age and the harbours of our glittering and pleasant but dangerous and wholly changeful sea.”

When he had said this (by which he meant Death), the other two, looking sadly at me, stood silent also for about the time in which a man can say good-bye with reverence. (...)

I watched them, straining my sad eyes, but in a moment the mist received them, and they had disappeared.

(...) I would have blessed them had I known some form of word or spell which might convey an active benediction, but as I knew none such, I repeated instead the list of their names to serve in place of a prayer. (...) All the land which is knit in with our flesh, and yet in which a man cannot find an acre nor a wall of his own. (*The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911): 158, 159-160)

Literary value

Belloc produced excellent writing, partially shaped and designed as an oratory, since he conceived his novels and essays and dictated them in full paragraphs, not in isolated sentences of a dialogue or short snippets of a story. This peculiar trend of style was attested by his secretaries, for example, Ms Bonnie Soames.¹² His Latinity became a kind of deeply ingrained mannerism, and he enjoyed including peculiar English vocabulary of French origin that he considered congenial as well as Latinisms.

Sometimes he used French terms that also exist in English vocabulary:

¹¹ See *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911): 157.

¹² Her real name was Jane Soames Nickerson. She eventually married Hoffman Nickerson, the wealthy, kind American who provided accommodation and connections for Belloc whenever he arrived in the United States of America for his lectures. Hoffman Nickerson loved history, admired Belloc, and was Belloc's host in New York and Miami from 1923 onwards.

...the company was prepared to develop all the North-eastern littoral of the Australian Continent... (*A Change in the Cabinet* 1909: 8-9)

“Littoral” is an English word spelt exactly as in French. It is not very used, since native speakers could prefer “coastal,” or “shore region.” Belloc’s neologisms are used in funny passages. In *A Change in the Cabinet* (1909), he enjoys inventing a new illness:

Madame, he continued, “the Caryll’s ducts in Sir Charles’ head are ob-structed, hence the recurrent pain and the lamentable attack of VERACITATIS from which he in-dub-it-ab-ly suffers.

“Velosy what?” gasped Lady Repton.

“*Veracitatis*, Ma’am. The phrase is my own.¹³ (*A Change in The Cabinet* 1909: 210)

Of course, as its Latin root suggests, this new illness means abruptly telling the truth, calling a spade a spade.

“Bosky” and “bosquet” are genuine English words, although advanced foreign students of English may have never seen such terms.¹⁴ They sound strange, coming from French, because of its ending (bosquet), or even Spanish, due to its root (bosky):

Wimbledon Common is bosky. (...)

It was a large and convenient bosquet. I am not good at the names of shrubs, but the shrubs which shrouded its exterior were nicely tangled. (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 189, 190)

¹³ Hyphens, capitals, italics, and punctuation literally written by Belloc.

¹⁴ The shrub or bush *Buxus sempervirens* – *boix* in Catalan – is called “box” in English. The terms “bosky,” that is, “boxy,” and “bosquet,” may well derive from this. There is a hill near Dorking, on the Surrey / Sussex border, called Box Hill on which many *Buxus sempervirens* grow.

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Belloc enjoys including the alliteration of “shrubs which shrouded,” so characteristic of a man who loved musicality in language.

Proper names for new characters sometimes look like Latin blendings:

Verecundia, or Vurry, as he obstinately called her, had given him away. It was abominable of her, and it rankled to the depths of his heart. (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 84)

“Verecundia” could be a “well-seasoned” woman if we pay attention to its probable Latin etymology. “Well-seasoned” condenses many funny overtones. This invented name fits her perfectly, as Verecundia is immensely rich, greedy, posh, and fatuous, and she is always showing off. Her fortune amounts to twenty million pounds (1929 value).¹⁵ She offers £10,000 for the Masterpiece,¹⁶ a ridiculous painting, actually rubbish, made by an alleged exceptionally-gifted avant-garde French painter. Fate strikes back and teases Verecundia since, at the end of the novel, she foolishly has to buy four copies of the same Masterpiece, the real one and three forgeries.¹⁷

Latin appears unexpectedly in mysterious encounters:

“Because I am very rich already,” said the Man in the Chair in a low metallic voice, full of dirty satisfaction ... “I am exceedingly rich. I have more money than any other man in the large town of the north where I was born. Yes, I’m rich enough.”

He leaned forwards towards the fire for a moment, then he took out a card and tossed it to the Sailor.

“That’s my name,” he said. And we bade him “Good day,” and all went out. (...)

¹⁵ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 308.

¹⁶ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 87.

¹⁷ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 318-319.

Now when we had gone about a mile from Steyning and had so turned into the Washington Road, the Sailor bethought him of the card, and pulled it out, and there was written –

Mr. Deusipsenotavit,
Brook's.

(*The Four Men: A Farrago* 1911: 80, 81)

The reader does not know who the “Man in the Chair” is. And “Deusipsenotavit” can be rendered “God Himself saw it.” Belloc describes the strange man in despising words, just as if he was a nasty creature from Avernus.¹⁸

Belloc took it for granted that the heterogeneous scope of his readers would be familiar with such peculiarities in his use of language, and fully understand or like them. Some readers probably smiled with approval too.

* * *

The classic summary of recommended procedure when addressing important business people in a presentation runs this way: keep it short and sweet, but real, know your numbers, bring a story. When Belloc discussed ideological issues, he stuck to the general scheme young professionals use in presentations, the system business schools teach their students. It is not a selling discourse, but the presentation of a project or enterprise in front of a potential client. The basic idea is to condense the message that can attract somebody's attention over a very short lapse of time in order to arrange to have an interview with this person later on.¹⁹

The brief speech you would make to a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to convince him of your plan's positive aspects would have specific features.²⁰ What you try to communicate must be crystal clear, your interlocutor must be interested in it, and you must gain his/her attention. You must think things through sufficiently to achieve

¹⁸ In Ancient Rome, Avernus was considered the entrance to the underworld.

¹⁹ Philip B. Crosby created the concept around 1980. It was popularized and widely practised in business schools in 1980s and 1990s.

²⁰ Garr Reynolds. *The Naked Presenter: Delivering Powerful Presentations With or Without Slides*. (Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2010).

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clarity of ideas, and practice efficiency in explanation, precision in numbers, conciseness, synthesis, and much creativity. The only essential rule is that you must do everything perfectly – the irony of this nearly impossible condition is obvious. You must have a specific goal, with a clear purpose and strategy. Answers must be supplied before questions. From your interlocutor(s), you must know his/her/their interests, style, resources, and the time he/she/they can spend. You must stick to the point and, once you are sure it is understood, go to the next subject. The situation is very similar to a job interview.

Storytelling is essential in leadership. This means the capacity to tell a story in a convincing way and influence listeners throughout the narration. Having a story that is skilfully linked together proves that you have posed the problem adequately and have brooded on it from different angles until you found a possible solution. Your creative touch makes the difference. You must familiarise yourself with the values of the company you are meeting and be ready to demonstrate your firm commitment.²¹

Storytelling is one of the crucial ingredients in successful business presentation, but it is much more so in projecting an enthralling novel, as the main goal of fiction is just suggesting. Hinting at sound concepts may be done through creating characters and atmospheres by means of which readers can glimpse the author's ideas that ooze out and that really inspired his/her writing. Essay is the genre that allows the author to explain ideas in a denotative and unambiguous way. Belloc was usually terse in his essays, sometimes funny and comic in designing the roundabout route that shaped his novels.

Of course, Belloc enjoyed telling stories that could lead the reader astray in the first pages and gradually come back to the point. Through long introductions and descriptive paragraphs that presented characters in his novels, Belloc liked to get down to the nitty gritty and blow the gaff. Revealing some political secrets that everybody knew and even took for granted, although they were concealed within the atmosphere of politeness and good manners (perhaps hypocrisy) that was mandatory in Edwardian

²¹ Igor S. Popovich. *Loser No More! Negotiate Better and Win More Often*. (Perth: Career Professionals, 2011). The author is an Australian writer and presenter in the self-improvement field. Engineer by education, he is consultant of an international management-training organisation based in Perth. He trains in the art of negotiation, persuasion, and conflict resolution.

years, resulted in his fiction being funny at the beginning. Yet Belloc felt increasingly socially-estranged as years passed. Initially, Belloc's early novels, lectures, and political addresses amused people, but his repeated, unchanging opinions (that banged on well-to-do people's tired brains) shut Belloc away in the characteristically-secluded space of his later years.

Inconsistent prose writers use vague phrases to explain blurred meanings, for example, "deepest America."²² When Belloc wrote about the lonely, empty spaces of Spain's central plateau, its arid and ugly shapeless mountains, he supplied an overall picture very similar to the common place of 'deep Spain,' although he did not use this term. "Deepest" is loosely associated to the ideas of unexplored, unknown, mysterious, and sinister places, cultures, and people.²³ In our peculiarly-Spanish manner of referring to primitive surroundings, we apply the adjective "deep" and the superlative form "deepest" to anything that is redneck, remote, unknown, rural, sometimes coarse or cruel, and that we are unable to describe in a different way. Current Spanish journalists use the adjective to refer to bloodthirsty, illiterate, rural murderers. It is an imprecise myth on the whole.

The Edwardian period came to an end when George V had access to the throne in 1910. His father, Edward VII, and his elder brother, Albert, had died. He bore the difficult task of managing a society that claimed social change. The working-class, born in the Industrial Revolution, formed Trades Union while the aristocracy complained about their loss of privileges. In his usual sarcastic way, Belloc described social changes and how aristocracy – sometimes nearly bankrupt – was increasingly being replaced by a different class: capitalists and affluent professionals. A horrified aristocracy began to realise how taxes increased:

²² You can add this adjective before many countries: deepest England, deepest Scotland, deepest France, deepest Spain, but also deepest Catalonia, although some Catalans would not accept this phrase could be applied to their land because they consider it is only the home of polite and educated people. Journalists use the words "deepest Catalonia" to refer to Catalonia's central area (Vic, Ripoll, Solsona, Berga, Manresa, and Igualada) that is fiercely nationalist and characteristically stands out in the results of political elections.

²³ Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner, Arthur Miller, and others have written on the subject.

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Clara, Duchess of Aberavon, was not only a noble woman but a good woman. (...) She was *really* rich. It's rare, these days, in people of her class. She had plenty of money: Parrell money of her own. Her retirement in this excellent house of Holy Cross Abbey, where she lived with her unmarried daughter, suited her fifty odd years. (...)

She was indignant with high taxation, she had great pity for the unfortunate, she liked to get her labour cheap. (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 250-251)

The Duchess of Aberavon is actually the great-great granddaughter of Sir Thomas Parrell, Lord Mayor of London, who had begun life as a boot-black.²⁴ She is an upstart with all the vices of genuine aristocracy. She wants fugitive lecturer Charles Lexington to repair the electrical system for free. In her characteristically patronising attitude “she liked to get her labour cheap”:

It is a blessed thing to combine charity with a saving of household expenses. (...) He [Lexington] worked steadily through the remainder of the daylight. By evening all the lights in the hall were working – and had cost Clara nothing. (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 255, 258)

In 1911, George V signed an Act of Parliament whereby the House of Commons came to be dominant over the House of Lords. This attitude won him the enmity of many of his former friends. In 1924, he was the first King of England to appoint a Socialist as Prime Minister, namely, the Labour Party leader Ramsay MacDonald, whom he defended before the Conservative MPs. George V encouraged MacDonald to go on in office in his moments of despondency. During the Second World War (1939-1945), King George V changed his German surnames Coburg-Gotha into Windsor, the name of the historical castle where the royal family had their residence. He was able to use the wireless to come closer to the people, and he was the first sovereign to enter the

²⁴ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 250.

houses of British subjects. He did so physically when he visited some mining villages in Wales, and also over the air-waves when he invented the Christmas address.²⁵

Many things had changed, from politics to new inventions that were becoming increasingly popular and shaped a faster way of communicating that, in turn, changed the pace of events into a speedy era. Edwardian years were gone for good, and many things had also changed in Belloc's personal life and literary mood. After leaving politics, he could have qualified for the bar, or he could have obtained a steady job in journalism or publishing, but his independent character and other circumstances prevented him from entering these worlds.

Instead, he chose to write historical books, essays, lecturing, and going on with his unclassifiable novels, a mixture of intriguing satirical plots, full of funny paradoxical situations that, by the end of the story, usually bring the characters back to the very starting point, since he liked this sort of circular trajectory, designed by destiny or providence.²⁶ Belloc firmly believed in God's providence, but he did not hesitate to use the term in amusing irony too:

The Bull made up his mind for one last attempt; he drew himself up magnificently – anyone with a soul less base than a politician's would have admired the sight – he lifted up his head to Heaven, where the Father of Bulls resides and helps them in their bovine wars, he squared his splendid shoulders, lowered his front again for duty, and wough! He charged. ...

* * *

Just as the end of all things had thus come to the Leader of the Opposition, Heaven, which rules all well, and has a peculiar eye for England, would not

²⁵ In 1932, for the first time, the BBC Imperial Service broadcast the King's first Christmas address in which he addressed all his subjects, "snowbound or in the deserts where only voices through the air can reach."

²⁶ Belloc frequently uses the term "providence." He does not care that his readers might think the concept absurdly old-fashioned or too religious. Belloc believes in the Catholic meaning of the word – God's careful guidance to help man – and he uses it freely, especially when any character can be led astray by knavish actions, and providence straightens him/her out.

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allow so mighty a thing as the parliamentary system to perish. (*Pongo and The Bull* 1910: 278-279)

Belloc likes to apply the stern Roman Catholic concept of providence to apparently shallow, stockbreeding matters. The Bull that is going to have decisive influence in delaying Pongo's transcendental speech in the House is personified as the good believer who "lifts up his head to Heaven," trusting in God, and asking for his blessing in his impending attack on Pongo. In addition to these ironical lines, Belloc includes his amusing reference to "Heaven (...) [that] has a peculiar eye for England" and, paradoxically, reminds the reader that it is Heaven that safeguards the parliamentary system, the very political system that disappointed Belloc so much.

* * *

Two historical facts in English economic history at the beginning of the twentieth century fostered Belloc's reflections on the evils of society. The use of imported Chinese labour in the goldmines of the Rand in the Union of South Africa disgusted him, as did the Afrikaners (Boers) and the British Labour Movement. Such cruel Capitalist initiatives made Belloc align with the radical wing of the Liberal Party. Lloyd George stated that Chinese labour brought back slavery to the British Empire. The second issue was the way in which Irish peasants accepted their becoming proprietors, instead of permanent tenants, under easier conditions. This change was brought about by Balfour's administration, thanks to the Irish Land Act of 1903.²⁷ Belloc was in favour of it, despite its being approved by a Conservative government, and the law broadened the scope of the measure into a general principle that was going to shape much of his later thought:

²⁷ In 1886, Gladstone had tried to introduce a measure to allow the Irish peasants to buy their own land, but it had been rejected in Parliament.

[Belloc was convinced that in] a universal Catholic society, [there would develop] from the very sanctity in which it held property, a society in which the mass of citizens would own property.²⁸

Once the Edwardian years had passed by, Belloc reached the conclusion that growing capitalism produced man's unhappiness in the same proportion that unwise belief in socialism led to much the same situation, since both systems were unable to cope with man's real problems. In the spirit of his conversations with Cardinal Manning, he felt that only the distribution of reasonable property to each man could transform society.

Being a social reformer did not distract Belloc from his intense taste for literature, not only as a writer, but also as a reader. When Belloc read for pleasure, he tended to choose the Classics: Homer, whom he considered the foundational poet of humankind, Catullus and, when he was at sea on the "Nona," Virgil. He knew full passages and verses by heart, and obtained spiritual nourishment from these authors, as Belloc was an aesthete.

He relished satire with gusto, much more than any other type of writing. A notable exception was history and poetry. Belloc considered the second the best expression of literary creation. Milton and Keats were his favourite poets. Milton's superb rhythm, masterful placing of words, and intense visual imagination delighted him. Belloc considered the last quality a remarkably English one, and he learnt from Milton's skill in it, since he thought visual imagination could recreate in words the whole landscape of southern England.

His frame of mind and reading habits made him impervious to the new and the strange. Belloc was so accustomed to savouring the great ones and discovering their many virtues that he felt bewildered when somebody recommended to him Gerard Manley Hopkins' highly original but difficult poetry. Belloc did not appreciate the value of it, with its innovative metric structure. Hopkins' poetry had much to do with rare prosodic features that did not move Belloc. Hopkins' poetry was not fully appreciated until the 1920s, when many scholars commented on his skilful innovations in rhythm

²⁸ John P. McCarthy. *Hilaire Belloc, Edwardian Radical*. (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1978): 102, 271.

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and the new ways he sought to give force to his meaning by using original word associations and through the sprung and outriding rhythms.²⁹

Belloc enjoyed reading Gray's *Elegy*, but, in this case, poetry was associated to fond personal recollections because Belloc had learnt it as a child. Belloc admired Byron because he conveyed experience still familiar to Latin Europe. All in all, Belloc did not usually move away from the poetic world he was familiar with, and he did not read contemporary poetry.

Maurice Baring's novels sold better than Belloc's. Baring openly recognized this fact and told Belloc so. While Belloc refused to deal with personal life, couple's problems, and their psychological aftermath, Baring wrote about adultery, even though it was condemned by spiritual advisers, and precisely because of his increased female readership. Most novel readers at the time were women, and they enjoyed other themes, romantic, and full of human conflict, something different from the usual satiric plots that Belloc constructed.

Belloc felt at ease unveiling the snobbish attitudes of the middle class and its unavoidable clique of latecomers. John Galsworthy made his name as a novelist with *The Forsyte Saga* (1906-1921), a group name for three novels and two short stories on the Forsytes. This series is an interesting guide to the lives of the wealthy bourgeoisie from Edwardian times up to the 1930s. Galsworthy was a very good storyteller, and, in this cycle of novels, he deals with the life and attitudes of the wealthier English middle classes, typified by Soames Forsyte, the character Galsworthy introduced in *The Man of Property* (1906).

In this novel, Soames is a man who is obsessed with collecting all kinds of valuable property, including his wife, the wronged Irene. Flaubert had already

²⁹ Sprung rhythm is characterized by metrical feet of irregular composition, each having one strongly stressed syllable, often the first, and an indefinite number of unstressed syllables. Outriding rhythm includes an extra unstressed syllable within a metrical foot. It is said that Hopkins imitated William Langland's *Piers Plowman* and later medieval poets in seeking the effect of crafty alliteration and two adjacent stresses.

Hopkins also used counterpoint rhythm: a slightly varied rhythm imposed upon the original pattern. It is a rhythm including so much metrical inversion that the prevailing cadence ceases at times to prevail, so that a complex rhythm results from the coincidence of the basic cadence with its inversion. Consequently, two rhythms are running at once. Milton constantly used counterpoint rhythm too.

introduced this theme in *Madame Bovary* (1857), when Charles Bovary marries Emma Rouault, the main character, to offer her really nothing except exhibiting his wife as a trophy. Flaubert created an allegorical novel very critical of French bourgeois society of the nineteenth century subsequent to the French Revolution and the absolutist government of Napoleon.

Soames' ability to accumulate material possessions does not bring him pleasure. Through the series of situations, the protagonist undergoes in *The Forsyte Saga* (1906-1921), there is a fundamental transformation from 'archetypal man of property' to 'universally respected senior.' *The Man of Property* (1906) is nearly contemporary with Belloc's *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908), though the theme and perspective are not. Galsworthy's first play *The Silver Box* (1906) shrewdly showed the difference in the treatment the rich and the poor can expect from the law,³⁰ the theme Belloc enjoyed including in *The Green Overcoat* (1912).

An acute sense of social justice was the driving force that moved Galsworthy throughout life. Although he aimed at keeping the balance between the powerful and the destitute, his sympathy was always engaged on the side of the defenceless. Galsworthy offered the portrait of the upper middle classes as they used to be, because their kind of life was swept away for ever by the First World War (1914-1918).

After the war, this social class realized their old ideas were broken, while they had little hope of lasting peace and happiness. Galsworthy saw human existence in terms of the hunters and the hunted. This is the theme of the majority of his novels and plays. He challenged some of the Victorian society ideals; for example, he introduced the theme of a woman in an unhappy marriage. Belloc was never interested in these psychological conflicts, and he shunned delicate subjects that could contradict his religious principles.

Belloc did not pay attention to well-conceived psychological intricacies and feminine conflicts in the manner of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857), Leo

³⁰ Boozy loiterer Jones is given a month's hard labour for assault, and is told by the magistrate that he is "a nuisance to the community," the very same words that Barthwick MP had used of his son, who goes scot free, although the trouble originated with him. Jones protests from the dock: "It's 'is money got 'im off."

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Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1877), or Leopoldo Alas' *La Regenta* (1885), the realist novels published in instalments that became highly successful. Readers in general, and much more so feminine readers, liked stories about unsatisfied, bored, well-off women looking for illicit love in adultery, who are eventually doomed to failure because of their immoral course of action. Flaubert created the character of Emma Bovary, a woman who is a regular reader of romantic novels and has ideas about marriage that do not correspond to her relationship with Charles, her husband. She daydreams through her longing for an idyllic, privileged life, but back to reality, she is bored with Charles and eventually falls ill. Emma's boredom is caused by her lack of personal goals and interest in specific things in her life. She is astonished by luxury, money, and power, and she looks for forbidden love. Of course, her final doom is just around the corner.

Yet Belloc's plots are just the opposite of Flaubert's, Tolstoy's, and Alas' carefully-planned plots and patient, slow, exquisite writing. Belloc usually produced novels in haste – just in a week or two – as sheer divertimento and, on most occasions, forced by his urgent need to earn money to support his family. To compare Belloc's and Flaubert's capacity for concentration when writing is worth doing since it casts light on the former's lackadaisical attitude towards fiction. Belloc considered his fiction to be a mere by-product, as he thought the only real lasting literature was verse. For his part, Flaubert anticipated several formal experiences from the twentieth century because of his technical and stylistic accuracy. He had an eagerness for perfection, and he did not renounce it at any cost, even though it implied a huge personal effort. He wrote slowly, and was scrupulously precise and well-documented, but he kept up an attitude of disillusion as to youthful hopes. Through his extraordinarily-carefully-crafted prose, dense with meticulous historical reconstruction, he expressed the prestigious past that allowed him to escape from everyday triviality, despite describing banal events in a detailed manner.

Flaubert insisted on spotting vulgarity in an almost morbid way, and he studied it with fascinating disgust. He was an advanced member of French naturalism, and a modern realist who exemplified several facets of his sense of failure: the unfeasibility of grandeur, ideal love, and knowledge, as romantics understood them. He described, in a



Fig. 7. Front cover. Hilaire Belloc. (1929) *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age.* (New York and London: Harper, 1929)

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cold and detached way, the circumstances in which failure happens. Always in a despairing mood, he focused on the analysis of the unpardonable vulgarity and nonsense of his age which, for example, he condensed in the character of the chemist Homais in *Madame Bovary* (1857). On the whole, this novel was a paradigm for universal realist literature as it has been for French philosophy from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries.

Just the opposite of Flaubert's self-esteem that was the outcome of obsessively-painstaking work through complete dedication to producing prototypes of the novel, the elderly Belloc remembered his novels from a pessimistic perspective since he was haunted by the "hack-work" nightmare³¹ that, he thought, had been the whole of his fiction production. He was quite happy with his travel book and meditative journey *The Path to Rome* (1902). Belloc was delighted with *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929), too, the book he cherished and repeatedly revised to better that novel till he found a satisfactory final form. Yet in Hesketh Pearson's interview,³² when the ailing Belloc was nearly seventy-six, he stated with apparent sincerity that he only wrote for money. Although his tone was tersely serious and his answers humble, those who knew Belloc discovered the trace of self-parody in his words, uttered tongue-in-cheek, with their underlying self-mocking overtones. Belloc had written many good books that could not be overshadowed by occasional second-rate pieces of work.

For the rich, Edwardian England was a sweet period of pleasure between the ruins of Victorian greatness and the horror of the First World War (1914-1918). The presence of Edward VII, an aesthete monarch, covered a decade that faded in the trenches of France and in the subsequent nostalgia that was recreated by some of the great British writers of the period, among them E.M. Forster, John Galsworthy, H.G. Wells, Kenneth Grahame, P.G. Wodehouse, Ford Madox Ford, and Joseph Conrad.

³¹ He did not use this word literally, although the fact is that he was disappointed with most of his fiction because he usually wrote too hastily. Belloc did not like to spend his time on revising the final version of his novels before publishing.

³² Hesketh Pearson, and Hugh Kingsmill. *Talking of Dick Whittington*. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1947): 209-213.

There were also others who were born in that period and who succumbed to his influence, such as Evelyn Waugh and Nancy Mitford.

Just the opposite of what Victorian magnitude had meant, the Edwardian period was a little world of lazybones, rich kids, and rural aristocrats, centred in London and that overflowed into all country houses. However, precisely because of this, the golden cultural perception of that time of masters and servants, of upstairs and downstairs, has never gone entirely out of fashion in The British Isles.

The four novels that constitute *Parade's End* (1924-1928) by Ford Madox Ford, summarised in Tom Stoppard's version, were the base for an ambitious TV mini-series, wonderfully interpreted and directed for demanding viewers.³³ The quality of narration, its evoking ellipsis, the innumerable details, and its literary dialogues reflect yesterday's world that culminates in the Great War (1914-1918). A love triangle appears, formed by Christopher Tietjens, a Conservative aristocrat of old principles, his spoilt and sensual wife, and an adorable and romantic suffragist. Madox Ford was a writer between two centuries who committed himself to using new narrative techniques, and he was the forefather of the flashback.

Other writers had a different outlook, and they described the squalor on the margins of society. Realist Arnold Bennett supplied pictures of the poor and miserable in *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908), his famous novel set in the "Potteries," and in *Riceyman Steps* (1923).

Belloc considered himself a historian who enjoyed writing about topics from his field, much more so than trying his ability as a novelist. He wrote:

In history, we must abandon the defensive (...) We must make our opponents understand not only that they are wrong in their philosophy, not only ill-informed in their judgement of cause and effect, but out of touch with the past: which is ours.³⁴

³³ Producers: David Parfitt, Selwyn Roberts, Michel Camilo, Damien Timmer. BBC, 2012; HBO, 2013.

³⁴ Hilaire Belloc. "Preface." Hugh G. Bevenot. *Pagan and Christian Rule*. (London: Longmans and Green, 1924): ix.

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I am just completing a book on the campaign of 1812. I find it fascinating work. Literary work should be composed for the love of it – it is a bad thing as a profession.³⁵

The period 1901-1910 was remarkable in Belloc's literary output. He wrote his three funniest novels and his best travel-literature during this decade. Some readers considered Belloc was at his best when writing the serious verse of those years. Yet his fantasy was concentrated in his *Cautionary Tales for Children* (1907), the eleven tales in rhyming couplets – illustrated by Basil Blackwood – that delighted young audiences and adult verse lovers alike. Belloc was one of best prose writers of the century, although he was a man of many gifts and did not concentrate his efforts entirely on writing. Had he done so, his reputation would have been thorough and long-lasting, but his range of interests was wider, and his effort was scattered over too many fields.

Belloc was a radical Roman Catholic intellectual, along with his friend G.K. Chesterton, who lived in Edwardian England, and who attempted to provide a sort of 'third way' between capitalism and socialism. Belloc christened it 'Distributism,' the social system that allows for individual ownership of property and the means of production. He broke with the party system, finding both parties to be driven by the same bunch of interests. Belloc eventually favoured the monarchy as opposed to the party system. Many of his essays were opposed to modernism, and he retained a medieval taste which was heavily influenced by his Catholicism. He sincerely defended his point-of-view by arguing for a feasible society of small owners, and he did it with his characteristic impetuosity. But he respected others' opinions, particularly in personal encounters, because he was convinced that resorting to the concept of moral superiority was a perfect boomerang.

Belloc's thought took turns from his beginning as a radical to his subsequent turn which led to the publication of *The Servile State* (1912), the book that predicted that the National Insurance Act of 1911 was going to become a system of social

³⁵ Letter to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, 8th July 1922.

protection in exchange for individual freedom. He opposed this new legislation which would give rise to the current Welfare State.

After his struggling in the political arena as an MP and writing three novels about it, most of Belloc's formative experiences were over. Travelling, mainly on foot, crossing the United States of America twice, studying at Balliol College, Oxford, doing his military service in the French artillery, and walking to Rome, added enough background for his creative skill. His finest writing, his best essays, lay ahead. After the Edwardian period, Belloc knew where he stood, chose an individualistic literary career, and glimpsed what he was capable of doing by way of giving out great riches from the store of his experience. He no longer needed to seek out new experiences, even though his restless character kept him always on the move. As he became more of a public figure, he assumed that people knew where he stood and what his presuppositions were. He went on brandishing the sword of faith, although his message was sometimes too ruthless to be accepted, and his prophetic warnings not easily listened to.

The irksome need to earn his living and support his family compelled Belloc to go on writing compulsively. Recalling the urgency of handing in his books ready for publishing made him consider the literary relevance of his output by the standard he would like to have attained. Yet he liked to review most of his verse, and he enjoyed the many lines he knew by heart. When Belloc was calm, chatting with close friends, all those present realized that he paid much attention to his literary achievement. In particular, he wanted his verse to endure forever:

I am distressed at not being able to finish my verse. There is still a good deal of it unfinished and I feel the time is short. Verse is the only form of activity outside religion which I feel to be of real importance: certainly, it is the only form of literary activity worth considering.³⁶

Most fiction is ephemeral, so Belloc's novels began to be removed from libraries in the 1950s and 1960s. Very few novels can endure the passing of time, particularly

³⁶ Letter to Maurice Baring, 6th June 1941.

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those that are based on caricatures of people from specific historical moments. Maybe only a restricted number of philosophical or psychological novels that supposedly deal with universal human attitudes can obtain the privilege of permanent validity. Despite ignoring Belloc's novels, readers in 2018 must bear in mind that there is not such pretended richness in present-day fiction. Harold Bloom, who considers himself a bit of secularist with Gnostic tendencies, loosely states that, in present literature, there is not anything radically new. *The Western Canon* (1994) is his most influential book against usurpers of aesthetic supremacy: Marxist critics, feminists, new historicists, and anybody who reads a poem like a social document or mixes politics and ideology with literature.³⁷

Bloom called *school of resentment* such tendentious reading, and he added that careful, meticulous, and disinterested reading is a fading art. He thinks that most of those so-called poets are mere versifiers, and that most of the so-called critics are not; they are simply journalists, ideologists, or propagandists. He declares that Dr Johnson was and is the major Western literary critic, as the function of true criticism is to enhance mere opinion with knowledge. Bloom is not interested in those who give their opinion without knowledge, and he goes on to add that a deep knowledge of philology – Greek, Latin, Provençal, Hebrew, Romance languages, and the history of English – are essential to supply sound criticism. Many so-called critics ignore these matters, and they are not at all concerned with them. Bloom tells his students to become secluded whenever they find a remarkable poem or prose passage, read them aloud, even sing till they possess them, and learn them by heart since memory is the mother of the Muses. He thinks teaching, reading, and writing are three names for the same activity.³⁸

Knowledge of Latin and French was something Belloc excelled in. He could also savour good poetry and prose in the way Bloom recommends. Belloc was a versatile personality that did not always fit in with the historical period in which he

³⁷ For example, Tennessee Williams (1911-1983) was considered a good writer because of literary reasons, particularly for his ability to reflect the opposition between the individual and society, but not because of his alcoholism and homosexuality. Some approaches mix up literary quality with ideological reasons.

³⁸ Valerie Miles. "Interview with Harold Bloom," at his home in New Haven, Connecticut. [Spanish translation: *El País*, 9th December 2014]

found himself living. He was brought up at the end of Queen Victoria's reign, produced funny absurd verses, and took part in radical politics in the times of Edward VII. His aunt called him "Old Thunder," since she noticed Hilaire was something of a child prodigy.

Belloc partially influenced part of a wide strip of the well-off English society that read his books, at first with delight, later trying to bear his jibes willingly and, finally, reducing him to complete isolation and oblivion. He was the perpetual wandering writer who walked across Europe longing for feverish adventures, while singing to the deeply-rooted peasantry around its crackling fireplaces and submerged himself in its venerable traditions that stopped the cruelty of time. Belloc's thinking offers a unique perspective for those who look for an alternative philosophy to that of modern-day consumerism, capitalism, and socialism. Unfortunately, society is heading more in the direction of his *The Servile State* (1912), and away from the alternative Belloc proposed. Belloc was the enemy of the rich and capitalist avarice, the flag bearer of the English Roman Catholics who became proud of being so.

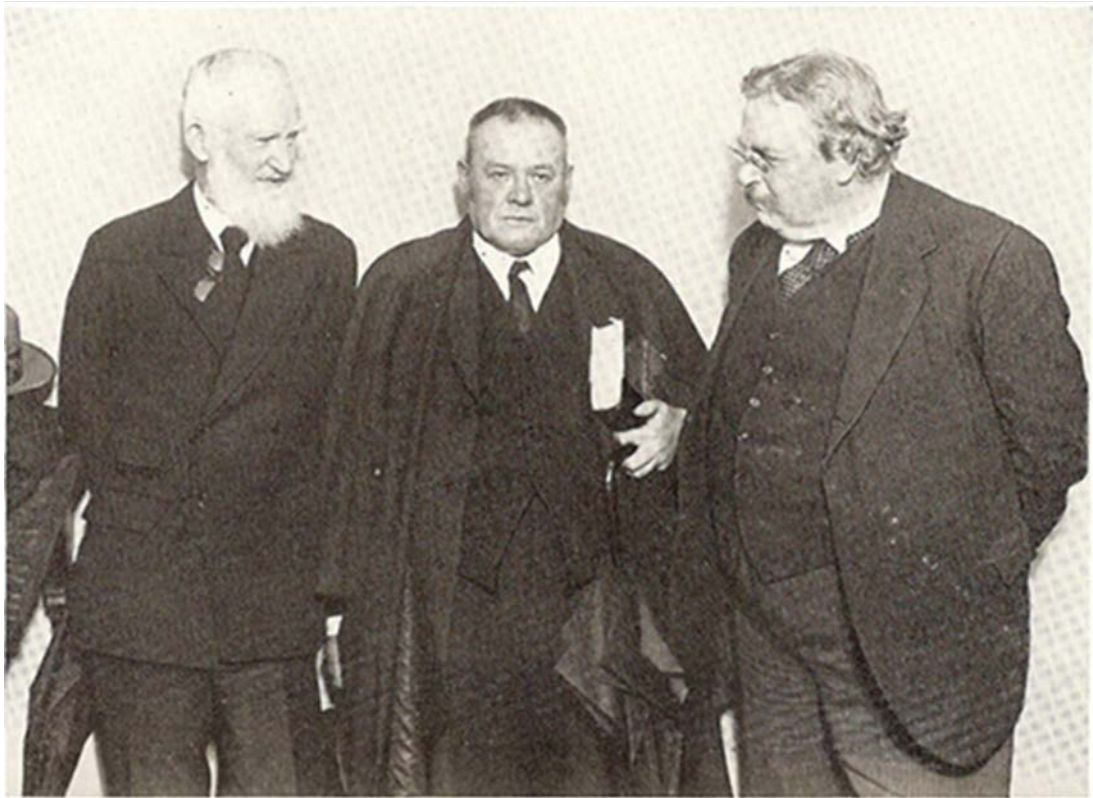


Fig. 8. George Bernard Shaw, Hilaire Belloc, and G.K. Chesterton

Chapter Seven

The Iconic Image of the Edwardian Gentleman

[in *The Green Overcoat* (1912); *The Girondin* (1911); *Mr Petre* (1925); *The Haunted House* (1927); *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928); *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929); and *The Postmaster-General* (1932)]

Edwardian demeanour

Edwardian gentlemen projected an iconic image that was nourished by the presentation of self in everyday life. External aspects in a person's dress and behaviour concealed the way this person intentionally tried to show himself to others. It was not sheer chance that shaped external look, but the intended plan to appear in this or that way, to convey their image in the eyes of others. These attitudes also involved different sexualities that were disguised in the self-effacement techniques craftily used by those idle men in tweed suits who were at their best in shooting parties, social gatherings, and entertaining.

In this chapter, there is an analysis of how Edwardian men and women present themselves in Hilaire Belloc's novels, and his perception of the relationship between men and women. Gentlemen in Edwardian period were usually well-groomed. They projected an iconic image since individuals were presenting themselves taking into account their own internal image; the way they were in control was the way they appeared. Some of them were aggressive, helpful, kind, or cynical. They projected an image on their relationship with other men and women. Men dealt with women in a particular manner and had peculiar forms of sexuality that followed the conventions of the time: Edwardian men usually treated women with deference, were respectful, and put them on a pedestal, yet they usually kept women at a distance. It was the time when

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men's clubs expanded with force, and provided the protective area for male, much-cherished privacy.

Belloc created many characters who impersonated such tendencies and were the summary of the observations he stored in his mind about the peculiar behaviour of his contemporaries. He liked to exaggerate vices and virtues to achieve the general comic tone that involves many passages, particularly when Belloc offers the portrait of ambitious rich people that struggle to increase their fortune faster since they are never satisfied with what they own,¹ and occasionally they squander too, or sheer upstarts that long for a superior status they do not have and act as the suitable counterweight of that posh multitude.

Analysis of the presentation of self

In the field of sociology, Canadian researcher Erving Goffman wrote an outstanding handbook, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), that renewed the scope of previous works upon observing everyday behaviour and the psychological implication as well as sociological conclusions you can obtain of our habitual masks. The book was a revision of his doctoral thesis (1956) about cultural anthropology that was based on data collected in a field study on the Scottish island of Unst, one of the North Isles of the Shetland Islands. In 1950, Goffman spent a year on the island doing ethnographic research. He was a member of the department of social anthropology at Edinburgh University from 1949 to 1951. Later, he worked on two projects about social sciences at the University of Chicago. In his 1959 publication, he replaced the name of Unst by the more general "Shetland Isle." His observations were based on scientifically classified details and, also, fruit of his relaxed conversations with the islanders:

The illustrative materials used in this study are of mixed status: some are taken from respectable researchers where qualified generalizations are given

¹ For example, Lord Delisport is a formerly-poor railwayman who eventually becomes very rich due to chance and good luck. He is never content with his wealth and aspires to obtain the concession of a brand-new fuel, Eremin, that has proven essential for internal combustion engines. See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 103-104.

concerning reliably recorded regularities; some are taken from informal memoirs written by colourful people; many fall in between. (Goffman 1971: 9)

Goffman conceived his book as an explanation of human interactions based on the maintenance of roles through the necessary techniques to make them credible. The leading theme of the book was the metaphor of a theatre in which the person is like an actor who performs both on stage and backstage. The person is being watched by the audience, although the person in turn also acts as the audience for his viewers' play. This mutual process is like a two-way radio, a transceiver that provides immediate feedback.

Human activity tends to either please other people or, more prosaic and frequently, look for its own interest. In any case, humans project their idea of self and desired impressions. On studying human behaviour, looking at animals is generally the parallel complementary ground for observation, particularly the way they establish hierarchy degrees and the motivation for their actions.

Mammals are the most intelligent and evolved. For this reason, they are usually accepted as pets, and humans sometimes build strong affective bonds with them. This is due to our tendency to consider that pets do understand our language and feelings when the evidence shows they just recognize the leader of the pack in the case of dogs, a very hierarchical animal, or the person who feeds them and treats them well in the case of donkeys and many others. Most animal behaviour can be explained in terms of instinct, training through trial and error, reflex system practices (Ivan Pavlov's experiments on classical conditioning) and custom. Roughly twenty thousand years ago, man learned how to tame animals, particularly dogs, with immediate reward for an expected behaviour favourable to human interests. Smell is, in most cases, an animal's way to recognize its human master. David Attenborough's documentaries remind us that penguins are wild creatures despite their agreeable and apparently peaceful nature.² So penguins do not care about our need to see them prancing around or pleasing us in any way. Just the opposite, humans generally tend to search for others' approval, as this is a

² David Attenborough. *Emperor Penguin*. (BBC, 2010).

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key element in building assertiveness in adolescence and possibly in adult life as well. Many familial coexistence conflicts arise from lack of support to others' behaviour.

When living together there is a reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's action, especially when they are in immediate physical presence. Whenever a person communicates with another, in face-to-face interaction, he tends to project an image that is not his real self but is his rehearsed part in the play of human relationships. It is a sort of performance:

Performance is the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers. "Part" or "routine" is the pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance, and which may be presented or played through on other occasions.³

An effective performance requires a "front" and a "setting." All the expressive equipment used in the performance forms the "front," no matter it is displayed intentionally or unconsciously. Furniture, décor, physical layout, and other items scattered around in the background that constitute the scenery and stage props to give way to human action may be considered the "setting,"⁴:

"Personal front" are the other items of expressive equipment, the items that we identify with the performer himself. (...) [These are] insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like. (34) "Appearance" are those stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer's social

³ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 26-27.

⁴ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 32-33.

statuses (...) whether he is engaging in formal social activity, work, or informal recreation.⁵

Drama stage and techniques provided suitable similes to explain what happens at the core of human activity. These elements belong to the dramaturgy approach Goffman developed:

[In human relationships (“performances”) there is a “front” and a “backstage,” these terms taken from their similarity with the “regions” in a theatre stage.] Two kinds of bounded regions have been considered: front regions where a particular performance is or may be in progress, and back regions where action occurs that is related to the performance but inconsistent with the appearance fostered by the performance. It would seem reasonable to add a third region. (...) Such region could be called “the outside.” The notion of an outside region that is neither front nor back with respect to a particular performance conforms to our common-sense notion of social establishments, for when we look at most buildings we find with them rooms that are regularly or temporarily used as back regions and front regions. (...) Those individuals who are on the outside of the Establishment we may call “outsiders.”⁶

Given a particular performance as the point of reference, we have distinguished three crucial roles on the basis of function: those who perform; those performed to; and outsiders who neither perform in the show nor observe it.⁷

⁵ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 34.

⁶ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 135.

⁷ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 144.

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For different reasons humans tend to impersonate a role that is coincident or not with their actual place in society. The part they play acts as a constraint for most of their actions and the external image they want to show:

Masks are arrested expressions and admirable echoes of feeling, at once faithful, discreet and superlative. Living things in contact with the air must acquire a cuticle, and it is not urged against cuticles that they are not hearts; yet some philosophers seem to be angry with images for not being things, and with words for not being feelings. Words and images are like shells, no less integral parts of nature than are the substances they cover, but better addressed to the eye and more open to observation. I would not say that substance exists for the sake of appearance, or faces for the sake of masks, or the passions for the sake of poetry and virtue. Nothing arises in nature for the sake of anything else; all these phases and products are involved equally in the round of existence.⁸

Words and images can conceal part of the person's true character and intentions. Actors in a performance want to project their preferred definition from themselves, the shell and cuticle that protect their inner self, and wish the audience to accept it as it is displayed. Occasionally, there are disruptions, and the accepted definition of the situation is discredited. Sometimes actors and audience pretend that nothing has changed despite embarrassing unexpected blunders that spoil the whole play, because everybody finds the intended strategy profitable to their interests or simply wish to keep the peace.

Richard Mallard, and other characters

In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), Belloc creates the character of Richard Mallard, a Cuban citizen of supposed English stock who travels to Europe. Mallard is especially careful to acquire the natural phrases of the English leisured classes. Although he is not

⁸ George Santayana. *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*. (London: Constable, 1922), included in Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. [Page before "Preface"]

a native Englishman, he enriches his conversation with terms he thinks are genuinely English and uses at random “What?”⁹ He comes to England and expects a country of lords and servants, neat and well-ordered in which everything forms part of the stage he has foreseen in his imagination:

The waters stretched out before him leading towards England, its quiet, its decency, its courtesy; England of the books he had read and the films he had seen, where well-bred lords wearing their coronets with unaffected simplicity pass leisurely through the vast apartments of their country palaces, all opening one out of the other like a picture gallery and are served by hosts of gigantic liveried attendants with powdered hair. He was for England, wherein all should be ceremonial; where the sentences began with “Sir” from the equals and ended with “Sir” from his deferential inferiors. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 30)

This was the topic image most foreigners could have of the country, no doubt the fruit of much reading of novels that presented a biased or partial view of the country and a strict separation of social classes that was customary at that time. Belloc’s humour tendency possibly had in mind an idealised image of Sussex, perhaps the sleekest area in Britain. Sussex was a suitable place for creative artists, lots of them, but they used to underplay and work unobtrusively. This attitude was good for their art, but not for their popularity. These were artists behaving in a different way from Hollywood’s lure, and without its visibility.¹⁰

However, in the novel, as time goes by, the neat England that lies in Mallard’s imagination begins to wither and fade away. After many a quarrel with Lord Delisport, a dismayed Mallard changes his mind:

⁹ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 27.

¹⁰ Sussex was the home of Edward Elgar, Rudyard Kipling, and many others. In 1900, Kipling lived in Rottingdean, a coastal town near Brighton. He used his steam car to drive through the English countryside. Elgar moved with his wife Alice to live in the village of Fittleworth (West Sussex) just after the First World War (1914-1918). He composed his *Cello Concerto* there.

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With a set mouth and an expression as determined as his own unfortunate soul was in a whirl and staggered, Richard Mallard passed out, without a good night, and heard the taxi told to drive to his hotel.

For a moment, in his maze, he was about to give another address – the railway; but he thought better of it. He sank back into the cab and wondered whether he was awake or dreaming. (...)

He slept that night not at all. In the agony of it his mind clarified, and his decision was made by morning. England was a mad-house for him. He must put the sea between him and all this Bedlam. He must cut himself off altogether. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 160-161)

Mallard does not want to be famous, but he is mistaken as the manager of a very important concession of “Eremin” ore. Belloc invents Eremin as the essential fuel for new engines, and one of the most concealed industrial secrets that all nations want to be in possession of. Belloc’s like for geostrategy is apparent in this excerpt:

The whole Rotarian motor power in industry and transport was now more and more dependent on Durandite and, therefore, upon Eremin. The only large deposit of Eremin known under paying conditions was in that tangled frontier line between the new Annihilationist Republic of West Irania, which Moscow had set up after the collapse of Turkish resistance, and the boundaries of Iraq. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 101)

Belloc’s flair was outstanding, and he had premonitions of the turbulent political processes in some areas both in the twentieth century and nowadays too. The invented West Iranian republic ambitions – he invented a derivative of the real state of Iran – Moscow’s interference, and Iraq’s turmoil continue in current political affairs.¹¹

¹¹ Vladimir Putin’s obsession with Russian greatness and the Western countries’ despise of Russian military power and persistent claim for its areas of influence are at the root of some recent crises. In February 2014, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula, a part of Ukraine, despite Western warnings that

In the novel, Mallard is always annoyed by a crowd of journalists because of his supposed connections with Eremin. Those are the paparazzi that run after him continuously and interfere in everything he does. This is the prize of fame and the heavy burden Mallard has to carry painfully since he has to offer a performance that does not suit him:

He left the city. At Birmingham [Alabama] he could be at peace. Little did he know! His fame had preceded him. Not one but five tormentors met him at the railway station. Wasn't he the guy Lou Davis had scored? They followed him in procession to his hotel. When he refused to unlock his door, they laid siege. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 29)

With a tough, cold temperament, Lord Delisport is a self-made man. His real name is George Goodge, and he was originally a poor proletarian of very humble origin, although, later on, he pretended he was from aristocratic stock. Belloc describes him as an empire-maker, newspaper-owner, and Marquis. Above all, he was anxious to increase his fortune:

Lord Delisport (...) was walking up and down his office, deeply engaged in thought. It is a habit grown too rare in men of his exalted world; but when I tell you that he was thinking about money, you will understand both him and me the better.

(...)

Friends in the City had nicknamed him the Toad; the kindly and humorous epithet expressed but half a truth, for his expression bore none of that gaping innocence which is so characteristic of Batrachians. But it is true that he was cool and that the surface of his soul was unguent, while his portraits –

this constituted a violation of international law. Since the 1990 Gulf War and the earlier Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), Iraq has been completely devastated while peaceful civil life has become impossible.

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especially those in full face – did sometimes startlingly suggest the humble animal whom he thus honoured. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 98-99)

But a long time ago, things were not so easy for George Goodge. Even though Lord Delisport had a magnificent office, he could not help remembering the noise and uncomfortable railway workshop of his young man's days:

It was a very large room, and as Lord Delisport was one of those modern men of affairs who appreciate the value of beauty in their surroundings, he had had it completely furnished as a replica of the Oak Room at Andhamhurst Abbey. Messrs. Delavigne, to whom he had given the contract, had been so conscientious as to include copies of the Holbein and of the anonymous Jacobean portrait in the original. (...) Lord Delisport could not bear the noises of the street and had determined to have his Holy of Holies at the back of the great building. As for the shunting of trucks, the hooting and whistling of engines, the grinding of wheels on rails, the enormous gasps of steam, and the rest of it, they soothed Lord Delisport. They reminded him of his earlier years, when he also had worked upon the line at that shameful low wage. The contrast between then and now delighted him. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 100-101)

Consequently, Lord Delisport has built a new mask, a new front to perform in front of the crowd. Old days of squalor are forgotten, or so he thinks. He is very conscious of his new status and wants everybody to know his determination to maintain it and enhance his social condition more and more if possible. Yet one's dark past usually strikes back, and Tommy is in charge of this mission the very day George Goodge has to ask him a favour:

He [Lord Delisport] rang up a little public-house on the other side of the river. (...) After a pause, he heard the voice, and he was glad to find it was that of Tommy himself: Tommy, his old mate of years ago, when they had worked side

by side in the railway yards. (...) He [Tommy] had been provided with the capital after a little conversation some years back when he and Lord Delisport, then plain Mr Goodge and only beginning to make good, had recalled anecdotes of old times, some of them not wholly to the wealthier man's advantage. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 103-104)

Sleuths' personality

In Chapter One and Chapter Two of *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), the British government sends several sleuths to capture Mallard and compel him to tell the conditions his supposed government – of Belloc's invented West Irania – demands to reach an agreement on the exploitation of Eremin. In the final chapters, the host of secret agents increases, and a new platoon is added:

In the town of Stratford-on-Avon four wearied men, exasperated by a night in the train and changes at unearthly hours, forgathered in the lounge of the Swan of Avon, the new and complete hotel which mirrored its 12 stories in a Historic Stream. They were restoring themselves with cocktails, and they were Sleuth A, Sleuth B, Sleuth C, and Sleuth D. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 161)

Another agent is added to this group of four. He is a French agent, Hippolyte Dubois, whom Belloc comically calls "Sleuth E."¹²

At the beginning of the novel, in Chapter One, the mongoloid diplomatic agent is presented seated on a pinnacle of rock on the Labrador Coast looking for any rescue ship to appear on the horizon. His ship, the *Bergen*, "well stocked with the novel but expensive Durandite (...) had dropped her screw (or propeller) like a good egg upon the Banks."¹³ The story of Chapter One is silent from then on, till that strange fellow suddenly reappears in the final pages.¹⁴ It turns out that he is the true representative of

¹² See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 166.

¹³ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 34.

¹⁴ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 176.

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the West Iranian Government, whereas Mallard is only a modest bachelor tourist.¹⁵ Belloc's weird combination of an apparently daft guy and his real, important identity contributes to ridicule the crime-story genre.

Mallard escapes to France to avoid being pursued by the four sleuths A, B, C, and D.¹⁶ Immediately the British government looks for a French agent to trail fugitive Mallard:

The Home Office, Worsing, Delisport learnt from the [Hotel] Titanic that their man [Mallard] had flitted by the boat train – and the one to do the right thing was, as you may imagine, Lady Caroline.

She got on to the Quai d'Orsay and deluged them with particulars. Stop him at Boulogne! Stop him anywhere! (...) If he had got away, had they, the French Police, the right man to track him?

They had. They had a man indistinguishable from an Englishman. (...) One whose idiom was perfect, whose accent exact, whose clothes and hat and even boots were pure St. James's, and one, moreover, whose very manner was English: silent, reserved, gentleman. (...) By name Hippolyte Dubois. In the Profession Armand de Berensac. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 161-162)

Hippolyte is a French secret agent who thinks no one could take him for anything but an Englishman. He thinks he is “using the right English and doing the right things.”¹⁷ His

¹⁵ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 179-180.

¹⁶ Belloc enjoys describing many characters' escapes to France, or their families' relationships with the mother-country he knows well. In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), Mallard flees to France in a planned strategy to get rid of the sleuths who are chasing him. In *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), the American millionaire G. Quinlan Smith goes to France in search of antiques (113, 143). Right then, Pongo departs to look for Quinlan who has got into trouble with the police (196). In *Mr Petre* (1925), Peter Blagden runs down to Southampton and buys a boat to go off cruising with his friend, Buffy Thompson. In *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929), Horatio Maltravers sets off and goes eastwards. For two weeks, he goes through Hampshire holdings, Sussex hamlets, and Kentish garden till Dover (97-99). Then he crosses the English Channel and, finally, his ship reaches Boulogne (105-107). Later on, Belinda falls ill and goes to France to recover (152). Eventually, Horatio and Belinda marry in France (186-188). In *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929), Henry Delgairn goes to Paris with his friend, John Pailey, to visit the old studio where he lived and studied art when he was young (9). In *The Postmaster-General* (1932), Guy des Cuoyes is an expert in finding out things and bringing them off (248). He came from a family that had left France for Jersey in the religious troubles around 1710.

first sentences in English give him away because he blunders, although he thinks he has a good command of this language. Hippolyte makes every possible mistake in terms of vocabulary – false friends and suitable turns of phrase – devices that scornful Belloc repeats in just a few lines to exaggerate the comic situation:

At dinner, he [Hippolyte] tackled the Pursued One in his native tongue.

“The time is fine,” he said. “It was but time. We shall have beautiful time for some time. I so hope all times. Is it not so?” (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 166)

Yet Mallard is more concerned with his need to keep calm and not show any face that could supply any hint about his personality:

A vague throb of fear passed through Richard Mallard’s soul, like the throb of an old wound. There was something sinister about this.

But he put a good enough front on it.

“Parliament will have a meet again,” continued Hippolyte, whom we will call Sleuth E, and even, in compliment to his nationality, E with an accent. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 166)

Mallard’s front is suitable to the occasion. Belloc uses literally “front,” precisely the word that condenses the well-known concept in Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959).

Sometimes the sleuths talk to each other nonchalantly, but they keep strictly to the “rules of the profession.” Sleuths pay attention to their dramaturgical action so as not to trespass the rules that help them to keep their suitable “front,”:

Common misery had made them [the sleuths] friends and opened their hearts all one to the others, though the rigorous rules of the Profession were well

¹⁷ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 109.

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maintained; nobody poached, and nobody cut in. Each served faithfully for his pay. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 161)

The whole affair becomes more and more mysterious because sleuths in charge of catching Mallard begin to see dangerous spies everywhere:

Hence the progress – the interrupted progress – of the powerful if somewhat Mongoloid Agent from West Irania to these shores. Hence also the precautions of a man not wholly devoid of suspicion to arrange that he should travel when and how he chose, in a happy *incognito*, and to land in England, when he did so land, under the same conditions. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 39)

So, a spy's sly personality and crafty camouflage techniques are taken for granted. He, maybe, is an outlaw who needs to escape from a worse fate by means of enrolling in risky actions. When he approaches English shores "he should remain a perfectly free agent to discuss and to agree, ..." ¹⁸:

Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind and of his motive for having his objective, it will be in his interests to control the conduct of the others, especially their responsive treatment of him. ¹⁹

Belloc writes on how a plain clothes man (secret police) can enjoy an enormous variety of the experience since he can dress like a bargee, a miner, a Tommy, an omnibus conductor, or a toff. ²⁰ What is more, secret police can enjoy wearing good clothes and looking respectable men. Belloc uses the expression "Toff Service," meaning a policeman in plain clothes, because such a policeman impersonates a toff, and, in this job, there is the inherent privilege of the expensive tailoring that Belloc likes to describe comically as a peculiar domesticity:

¹⁸ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 39.

¹⁹ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971): 15.

²⁰ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 77-78.

It is one of the splendours of the Toff Service that among the perquisites are good clothes, and you have a right to keep them. None of your reach-me-downs: you are measured for them, and you acquire a wardrobe which in due course your wife sells or retains for grand occasions, according to the finances of the household. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 79)

Essential discretion

Belloc provides an ironical explanation of how a party descends from another even if the origin of the whole stream seems improbable and impossible, too. For example, Communists can be traced back to “the old Tories.”²¹ Of course, this is one of Belloc’s characteristic imaginative exaggerations that is based on nothing from the real world. He likes to have fun from sheer paradox:

The Official Secretary had acquiesced (...) it might be unwise to discuss the matter before domestics at meals. (...) Many an important transaction (...) has been ruined by the choice of a babblers.

“Palmer?” said the Home Secretary, who heard the name for the first time. “Oh, Palmer. Yes. Palmer! Palmer will do very well! You will generally notice about these men who are efficient in secret service of any kind that they have a sort of native discretion.” (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 42-43, 44)

It is convenient to be discreet and to maintain one’s self image consistent enough so that some matters must be discussed privately to avoid intrusion. Many elements cause disruption on the performance, for example, being a bigmouth. Sometimes uttering some sentences in an impersonal polite voice can be very productive, especially if one pays attention to time and does not stretch too much on talking:

²¹ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 41.

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There would appear to be a relation between the amount of modesty employed and the temporal length of a performance. If the audience is to see only a brief performance, then the likelihood of an embarrassing occurrence will be relatively small, and it will be relatively safe for the performer, especially in anonymous circumstances, to maintain a front that is rather false. In American society, there is what is called a “telephone voice,” a cultivated form of speech not employed in face-to-face talk because of the danger in doing so. In Britain, in the kinds of contact between strangers that are guaranteed to be very brief – the kinds involving “please,” “thank you,” “excuse me,” and “may I speak to” – one hears many more public-school accents than there are public-school people.²²

Palmer is an agreeable civil servant, blue eyed and clean shaven. Although he is only twenty-eight, he has already acquired all the tricks of his trade and is ready to work hard since he is marked for promotion. When he takes a taxi, he feels relaxed in the car, as Belloc reminds us it is you and me who pays for it. Palmer’s expenses in his new mission are naturally paid by taxpayers,²³:

For Mr Palmer was very careful in making out the whole list of his expenses, and the taxi at Southampton came into that list.

Before he went on to the private office, he turned for a moment to sniff the half-tide air and to enjoy the sunlight. You would have had some difficulty if you had seen him standing thus to decide whether he was Eton and New College, Eton and Balliol, Winchester and Balliol, Harrow and Balliol, Winchester and New College, Eton and King’s, Winchester and Trinity, Rugby and Sid Sussex, Repton and Worcester, or even Radley and Teddy Hall. And your hesitation would have been natural, for he was none of these things. And it

²² Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971): 215.

²³ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 46.

was as well. For it left him unrecognised by those whom it was his duty to observe. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 46)

The list of Public Schools is revealing. Palmer's "front" is not easy to be traced back since, in Palmer's case, the supposed background and character-building techniques of an exclusive Public-School do not provide the essential hallmark to be a member of the elite.²⁴

Palmer is inquisitive when reading Mallard's notes. This attitude does not represent his habitual presentation of self, because it is a necessary manoeuvre to obtain the maximum of information in a very short time, as Palmer is an agent in the government's service who must obtain essential data about Mallard. Palmer manages to pretend to come across Mallard on a train by chance. They are travelling on the train from Southampton to London. By pretending to look for a first-class cigar to invite Mallard, Palmer actually comes out of the dining car to go at top speed to Mallard's compartment to scrutinise his private papers.

It was a set of half-finished notes. Time pressed, but Mr Palmer had a first-rate memory. He photographed on that memory of his the names jotted down. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 52)

Although Palmer's front is not easily traceable, Belloc introduces another character, Sir Henry Hardham, whose nickname "Mossy Face" is due to his aspect:

The Home Secretary had faithful and devoted ones [domestics] in considerable numbers. (...) He reluctantly let the bar and the doubtful potman [*sic*] slide for the moment. (...) It was a nice move. Yes, old Mossy Face (such was the playful term used for Sir Henry Hardham by the faithful and devoted ones of his

²⁴ By coincidence, Len Deighton (1929-) used the same surname and created the character of Harry Palmer, the unglamorous agent that gets involved in dangerous affairs. Harry Palmer is a working-class anti-hero. The character's name and surname were precisely chosen because of their dull overtones.

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domestic staff) had met his fellow Mallard, only last night at Mother Corvan's. (*But Soft: We Are Observed* 1928: 106)

Hardham is Mary Bullar's cousin, and his post a good example of nepotism. Caroline Balcombe considers him a completely helpless fellow, just "an old idiot"²⁵ who has never done a stroke of work in his life and who does not want to.²⁶ Belloc calls Mary Bullar "the reigning Prime Minister,"²⁷ in this way abusing politicians in general. Hardham is the Secretary of State for Home Affairs.

Mary Bullar sat in regal dignity awaiting the moment when she should reply for herself and all her colleagues to an indictment which was being delivered with intemperate zeal upon a recent point of policy. At her side, all her great colleagues sat in rank, her cousin, the dignified Sir Henry Hardham, next her, peculiarly interested in the debate. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 186)

Lady Caroline Balcombe is the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Belloc calls her "the Indispensable," as she is the commanding woman who interferes in many of Mary Bullar's initiatives. She has the gift of compromise and moderation to be the leader of the Anarchist party, and she seriously declares the only anarchy she knows is the one achieved by constitutional means.²⁸ Belloc enjoys introducing such contradictory ideas that are funny and ridiculous. No anarchist is especially good at behaving moderately and liking compromise, just the opposite. What is more, the idea that anarchy could be reached by constitutional means is surrealistic and hilarious, as anarchy is, by definition, the struggle against any regulation.

²⁵ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 61.

²⁶ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 62.

²⁷ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 41.

²⁸ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 55.

Drama roles

In literature, and possibly much more in real life, people and literary characters impersonate dramatic roles, parts of a whole play that is constituted by everyday needs and theatre conventions. The very word “mask” has drama overtones:

Sir Henry did manage to get one or two fairly good looks at the Enigma – with the very natural result that he thoroughly endorsed Mr Palmer’s minute on those too-candid features. Had he not read the phrase somewhere, “a Consummate Actor”? He repeated the words to himself: “Consummate.” He found it satisfactory. Actor! The Home Secretary knew little of acting or any other art, but he knew enough to see that this murderous ruffian and wielder of vast economic powers, an unscrupulous revolutionary villain for whom half Europe was on the watch [he refers to Mallard that the government thinks is the head agent of West Irania], had astonishing talent in the wearing of a mask. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 67)

Masks are not only drama props, but general attitudes that shape people in their haughty civil service activities too:

The Court opened, and Mr Service, the highly respected stipendiary magistrate, was in his most judicial mood. It was impressive to watch the deep lines on that impassive face, instinct with order, a very mask of Justice. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 88)

The choice of the judge’s proper name is not sheer chance. Belloc comically uses “Stipendiary” as a first name because it means somebody who receives a stipend, a salary for his job. In the United States of America, a stipendiary magistrate is precisely a paid professional magistrate. Belloc adds “Service” as a surname because the judge works (or does his service) because he is paid, just as anybody else, from the lowest of the low to the Speaker of the House of Commons. The comical vein is in the platitude of

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“Stipendiary Service” that Belloc emphasizes.²⁹ What is more, Belloc feels like inserting the same G.K. Chesterton’s drawings of judge Mr Stipendiary Service twice on two consecutive pages, although each pair of drawings shows the judge first in a serene listening attitude and later in a stern rebuff.³⁰

On one occasion, dinner is arranged by the Home Secretary at the end of the week at his niece’s. Mallard is awed and bewildered. The dinner is a quiet one, designed to rope in the secret Envoy of West Irania everybody supposes Mallard is. Secrecy through key words is also present in the apparently shrewd conversation:

When the women had gone, the Home Secretary drew his chair up towards his nephew-by-marriage, the host of the evening, who had already got Mallard at his side, and they had a little conversation of three on the subject of Port. The Home Secretary learned all about Port in the West Indies. (He knew that the West Indies was the cue. And he could not in public show any scepticism.)

At last (they had arranged it between themselves) his niece’s husband said, as he rose from the table:

“Mr Mallard, I think my uncle would like to say a word to you in private upon a certain matter. (...)

“Yes,” put in the Home Secretary genially. “Ah! Exactly! Exactly! Are you free to give me a moment, Mr Mallard?” (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 67-68)

“West Indies” are the cryptic words that trigger up the precise moment to leap to the matter that was the reason for the dinner: to force Mallard to grant the concession of Eremin:

The Home Secretary pulled out his watch and said:

²⁹ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 90, 91. There is a caption under G.K. Chesterton’s drawings that comments on the powerful impartiality of Mr Stipendiary Service while hearing evidence.

³⁰ Each pair is repeated twice, so there are four drawings in total. See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 90, 91, and 174, 175.

“Mr Mallard, to cut a long story short, what about the Concession? I take it you have approached no one?” (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 71)

The members present at the after-dinner conversation had previously agreed on the suitable moment to tackle the important issue. Erving Goffman describes the baffling mystification that is present in many social gatherings:

The audience senses secret mysteries and powers behind the performance, and the performer senses that his chief secrets are petty ones. As countless folk tales and initiation rites show, often the real secret behind the mystery is that there really is no mystery; the real problem is to prevent the audience from learning this too.³¹

In the general pursuing and control of each other’s manoeuvres, the sleuths try to cast an eye on Mallard’s movements, but Mallard does the same in turn. Very soon they realize any observer is also observed:

Mr Chippy was on a Toff Stunt. He was on the Toff Stunt at the Titanic Hotel and in clover. He was on the Toff Stunt as “covering” Richard Mallard.
(...)

The worthy young man [Mallard] upon whom he had been told to Keep his Eye was taking notice, and that would never do. (...) He was beginning to think that the observer was himself observed. He must be wary. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 78)

Mallard is perpetually annoyed at being followed and watched wherever he goes.³² Consequently, there is no “backstage” for Mallard.

³¹ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971): 76.

³² See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 88-89.

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Gentlemen's accessories. The club

During his travel to England, Mallard carries a cane because these accessories “are regarded in the New World as necessary to European travel,”³³:

The question how far the men who rise to the top of the Civil Service take on the “tone” or “colour” of a class other than that to which they belong by birth is delicate and difficult. The only definite information bearing on the question is the figures relating to the membership of the great London clubs. More than three-quarters of the membership of our high administrative officials belong to one or more clubs of high status and considerable luxury, where the entrance fee might be twenty guineas or more, and the annual subscription from twelve to twenty guineas. These institutions are of the upper class (not even of the upper-middle) in their premises, their equipment, the style of living practised there, their whole atmosphere. Though many of the members would not be described as wealthy, only a wealthy man would unaided provide for himself and his family space, food and drink, service and other amenities of life to the same standard as he will find at the Union, the Travellers’, or the Reform.³⁴

Belloc describes another respectable club a little. Of course, it is an invented one to fit the needs of his novel. It is the club where Mallard reluctantly has to encounter Delavere. Goffman’s insistence on the tone and colour of a class is not alien to Belloc who knew everything from experience, even the essential presence of high civil servants in such an institution to provide the necessary lure of respectability and prestige. Belloc was a member of the Reform club too:

The first move came in the shape of a very nice little note brought to the Titanic [Hotel] by hand, from William Delavere, one of the more private of the private

³³ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 85.

³⁴ H.E. Dale. *The Higher Civil Service of Great Britain*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941): 50, quoted by Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971): 33-34.

Private Secretaries. It told Mr Mallard how strongly the authorities had felt for him during the ordeal to which he had been subjected and asked very politely for an interview at any time which suited him. Would he come to Downing Street, or would he prefer that Mr Delavere should come to his hotel?

(...)

Poor Mallard! He had not desired it. All he wanted was to be left alone – and here was this mysterious machine at work again!

However, it was an honour; it came from very near the Throne. (...) As for the place, why, he would be obliged if Mr Delavere would make it the Cousin's Club, to which he had been very kindly admitted as an honorary guest by the efforts of his travelling acquaintance, Mr Palmer. It was a good, respectable club, not so grand as to overawe the stranger, full of Civil Servants and with a sprinkling of politicians, a few sailors, and one or two writers; and the rest, nonentities of leisure. Could they meet there at noon?

Mr Delavere would be delighted. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 92)

Delavere interviews Mallard. Delavere sees his new talents appearing in his imagination, as he is heading for great things, perhaps being a governor, or better, an ambassador.³⁵ During the conversation, Delavere craftily suggests the supposed concession of Eremin he believes that Mallard is in charge of. Honest Mallard is trying to escape from such uncomfortable situation, although Delavere goes on pressing him to give up. Eventually, Delavere invites Mallard to have a good seat under the Gallery in the debate that is going to take place in the House next day. Mallard has other plans and prefers to keep them in a dark secret:

No, Mr Mallard was much obliged, but he had other plans. And so he had! He was for the Lakes. But he kept it dark.

³⁵ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 95-96.

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Well, Mr Delavere hoped they might soon meet again, and so made for the door and his taxi in something as near jubilation as an astute young man of the world ever gets. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 96-97)

Certainly, there are sound reasons for Mallard to keep his plans dark. “Dark secrets” are defined by Goffman as part of a team’s strategy:

One overall objective of any team is to sustain the definition of the situation that its performance fosters. This will involve the over-communication of some facts and the under-communication of others. (...) A team must be able to keep its secrets and have its secrets kept.

(...)

There are what are sometimes called “dark” secrets. These consist of facts about a team which it knows and conceals, and which are incompatible with the image of self that the team attempts to maintain before its audience. Dark secrets are, of course, double secrets: one is the crucial fact that is hidden, and another is the fact that crucial facts have not been openly admitted.³⁶

Secrecy is not always possible, although keeping up appearances is important, and some conversations must be concealed from servants. When Mallard wants to escape from Lord Delisport’s (and his secretary, Miss Gaylord’s) stratagem to get him entangled, a terrible row follows. Enraged Mallard shouts, but Delisport calmly tells him not to do that before the servants:

“Let me go!” shouted Mallard; he dashed for the handle of the door of the little study and shook it. He was legitimately surprised to find that it was locked.

(...)

“I shall remember this!” he [Mallard] cried angrily over his shoulder. But that same shoulder his host tapped cheerfully as he followed it into the hall.

³⁶ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971): 141.

“Not afore the servants,” he said quietly. “Not afore the servants – “and then, louder, “Mr Mallud wants a taxi, Johnson.” (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 159-160)

Discretion is the hallmark of upper classes, especially when they are not born in this exclusive circle and become a bit of an upstart. In *Mr Clutterbuck’s Election* (1908), Belloc describes the changes the Clutterbucks begin to make as soon as they earn money and try to improve their external signs of the new wealthy status:

It was a long debate between himself and his wife whether or no they should set up a brougham; and Mrs Clutterbuck, having pointed out the expense of this method of conveyance, herself decided upon a small electric landaulette. (...) She argued with great facility that in case of any interruption in train service, or in the sad event of her own demise, it still be useful for conveying her husband to and from the City.

(...)

No extra servants were added to the household; but in the matter of dress there was a certain largeness; the cook was trained at some expense to present dishes which Mr Clutterbuck had hitherto only enjoyed at the Palmerston Restaurant in Broad Street. (...)

Simultaneously with this increase of fortune, Mr Clutterbuck acquired a clean and decisive way of speaking (...) and he permitted himself minor luxuries to which he had hitherto been unaccustomed. (*Mr Clutterbuck’s Election* 1908: 35-36)

As Mr Clutterbuck becomes affluent, his performance increasingly changes. A new mask and its inherent array of accessories are enjoyed with gusto, because they give his family access to the new world of rich people and their presumed happiness.

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Impossible privacy

Not only social circumstances force people to be discreet, but also, nowadays, technology makes it impossible for most of us to obtain privacy in the days of *Big Data*. The movement of our computer mouse, email, the websites we visit, downloads, purchases, and all other computer-generated actions are stored somewhere. Servers and governments know everything we do and can use this sort of information for purposes we do not know. Belloc foresaw such processes many years before:

Poor Innocent! Who can destroy record in the modern world? Are there not tickets and receipts for tickets? Is there not a carbon copy of everything? And is not all the time in which we live like one huge haystack of document and document and document, wherein all that we do is set down? (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 165)

Faster and clearer than carbon copies, electronics supplies trace of everything we do.

Lord Delisport, now Marquis, remembers his humble origins because his present status is purely artificial and fruit of many coincidences and his crafty demeanour.³⁷ He keeps up appearances, and tries to consolidate his authority at any rate, especially putting pressure on the unknown foreign agent to force him to grant his supposed Eremin concession. Surrounded by a thick atmosphere of political envy, Lord Delisport knows for certain he must face and impress Mary Bullar and Caroline Balcombe:

The individual will have to act so that he intentionally or unintentionally *expresses* himself, and the others will in turn have to be *impressed* in some way by him. (...)

There are two kinds of communication – expressions given and expressions given off. (...) [The latter is] more theatrical and contextual kind,

³⁷ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 101.

the non-verbal, presumably unintentional kind, whether this communication be purposely engineered or not.³⁸

Angus Worsing of Glasgow is his rival.³⁹ Lord Delisport, now an “Empire Builder” in Belloc’s words, blackmails Tommy to oblige him to obtain information about Mallard. Belloc likes to place the epithet “Empire Builder” on many characters who have high self-esteem and consider themselves transcendental figures as to the welfare of the nation.

In his first novel, *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904), Belloc presents himself as guided by Providence [God’s design] when he describes Mr Burden’s many virtues that are related to the grandeur of England:

I cannot pretend that I had intended it at the outset to convey any great religious or political lesson to the world, but I will confess that long before my monograph was perfected a conscious meaning inspired my pen. (...) I was convinced of the Destiny of a People; I was convinced that every man who forwarded this Destiny was directly a minister of Providence. I was convinced that the Intrepid Financer, the Ardent Peer – nay, the Soldier of Fortune, whom twenty surrenders cannot daunt – had in them something greater than England had yet known.

(...)

Honest Englishman and good man – I wish I could have written of him in nobler terms. (*Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* 1904: ix-x, 312)

Yet Belloc used “Empire Builder” ambiguously. At the beginning, the expression had a slightly positive meaning, but, as years passed, he did not believe in the presumptuous

³⁸ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971): 14, 16.

³⁹ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 102.

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ambition of some of his characters, and he preferred to treat them in a scornful outlook that was only apparently respectful and flattering,⁴⁰:

When we study the interaction between two teams in everyday situations we find that often the superordinate team will be expected to unbend just a little. (...) Thus, the reserve which upper-class people in Britain maintain during interaction with tradesmen and petty officials has been known to give way momentarily when a particular favour must be asked of these subordinates.⁴¹

It is not exactly “upper-class reserve” that gives way momentarily, but sheer exploitation of inferiors on the part of the “superordinate” Lord Delisport. Lord Delisport is anxious to gather a lot of information about a plenipotentiary foreign agent who can grant the concession of Eremin. He compels Tommy to look into the matter:

The Agent [Mallard] who was coming to negotiate had passed through America. He knew that. He had got it through the usual channel. He was on his way to, or had just reached, England. But under what name he would pass, at what exact date he would (or had) come, Lord Delisport was still ignorant. Yet it was essential to get hold of him before the official world did.

(...)

He took up the telephone and pulled out his watch at the same time. It was not yet eleven.

(...)

After a pause he heard the voice, and he was glad to find that it was that of Tommy himself: Tommy, his old mate of years ago, when they had worked side by side in the railway yards. (...) Indeed, it was by Lord Delisport’s help that poor Tommy had been able to buy the little business of the Coal Wharf Arms and serve drink to the sailors who frequented it. He had been provided

⁴⁰ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 107.

⁴¹ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971): 196.

with the capital after a little conversation some years back when he and Lord Delisport, then plain Mr Goodge and only beginning to make good, had recalled anecdotes of all times, some of them not wholly to the wealthier man's advantage.

Today it was the other way about. It was no longer Tommy who could squeeze him, it was rather Lord Delisport who had the power now to prevent the police acting against Tommy upon information received, and in natural gratitude Tommy would do odd jobs for his protector, or alternatively suffer the consequences – which he didn't want to. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 103-104)

Feminine suspicion

Mary Bullar, the Prime Minister, is afraid Caroline Balcombe would supplant her, because Caroline is the first informed of the mistake about Mallard. Mallard is not the Deputy of West Irania. So Caroline calls Mary a chump.⁴² The government, through Caroline Balcombe,⁴³ offers Mallard £120,052 a year⁴⁴ for life as a compensation for their pursuit and ill treatment. This is also the prize of his silence.⁴⁵

Belloc writes scornfully about the stupid government's justification for paying such amount:

I need not add for the intelligent reader that the sum thus provided appears on the Estimates as "Butter for the Garrison of Singapore." Though what on earth they can do with butter in a climate like that ... However, I can't be bothered. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 185)

Belloc's innuendo is clearly a bit anti-feministic:

⁴² See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 182.

⁴³ Lady Caroline Balcombe is the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

⁴⁴ To grasp the proportion of the value of the pound sterling, it should be borne in mind that this novel was published in 1928, although the story is set in 1953.

⁴⁵ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 184-185.

“Earth can show no more majestic sight than the Front Bench of the House of Commons. There the highest intelligence of the nation, wedded to its noblest characters vie one with another in the display of eloquence and wisdom; of foresight, of practical ability, and of exalted virtue.”

If this were true – as it was – in Huggin’s time when the 20th century was still young and women in public life but a rarity, how much more true is it to-day, when they occupy many among the chief offices of State? (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 185)

Arabella Slackett coached another Born Fanatic [*sic*], Balmy Jane.⁴⁶ Although Balmy Jane does not speak in Parliament, there is another member to replace her in accusing the government of the blunder. Cannock of Cardiff, a man who is a Party of One, shouts his speech at the Commons. He knows half the story about Mallard’s ordeal since Balmy Jane “got it top side down and twisted.”⁴⁷ Enraged, Mary Bullar takes revenge by answering back fiercely against the allegedly false accusations of Slackett, Jane, and Cannock.⁴⁸

All in all, Belloc wrote one more novel about the supposed intrigues of government agents in search of the wrong man. The whole plot is a bit ludicrous, although Belloc enjoys stretching more and more the vein of stupid people that fall into the trap of fame and money:

Mr Belloc gives his satiric genius a loose rein in this latest volume... In the main the story is a burlesque on the crime story. The various sleuths who are introduced in hot and confident pursuit of the wrong man are all a joy.

The whole thing is swift, and gravely absurd, and truly hilarious.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 186.

⁴⁷ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 186.

⁴⁸ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 187.

⁴⁹ These words appear on the first page as a complement to the title. The excerpt belongs to brief reviews from *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Spectator*.

Belloc enjoys writing a funny story by using an apparently serious tone that increases its humorous tinge. The first sentence to introduce this paragraph is but a comic exaggeration that gives way to the enumeration of failures that constitute a political mess:

Wild horses shall not tear from me the details of what followed: but I will tell you this much – that there was the usual muddle, when it is important for the Executive and Judiciary to communicate. Servants got the wrong message, masters and mistresses were out, hurried secretaries sent notes to houses from which their chiefs were absent; first and last about a score of human beings up and down political London were occupied in one tangle after another. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 88)

Playing your part as an educationalist

Sustaining an atmosphere of moral authority and keeping your distance were some of the most relevant qualities of teachers in the traditional school,⁵⁰ although traditional teaching has been increasingly vanishing since social values apparently changed from authoritarianism to open democracy.⁵¹ Loose educational values and permissive schooling are not exclusive Spanish phenomena, but a widespread European tendency. Those societies that fostered and maintained traditional education no longer exist. As a consequence, nostalgic teachers – the adjective ‘nostalgic’ itself is clearly a pejorative term – are a rarity and obviously ignored.

In the traditional school of thought, apart from the exemplary behaviour that was taken for granted in a good teacher and the presumed command of the subjects he or she

⁵⁰ Traditional teaching and the principles of “New School” (progressive education) coexist in most current schools.

⁵¹ This is a highly controversial issue, but it seems to be the general tendency in the Western world. In 2016, in Catalonia, Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) proposed that schools should be equitable, popular, egalitarian, secular, comprehensive, Catalan, mixed, and rooted in the environment. Some of these values need disambiguation, since their meaning varies from person to person. Traditional school usually shunned political goals and concentrated on cramming, learning, competitiveness, and strict discipline.

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taught, some colleges of education used to train them in the specific way teachers should address students. Such learned demeanour was actually a “performance” in Goffman’s terms. Teachers should talk loudly, speak clearly, slowly, without hesitation, and state their orders distinctly without unnecessary repetitions. They should be level-headed, balanced, and well-adjusted, without any euphoria moments or fits of rage. Above all, they should never tell a joke or be overly histrionic through the exaggerated gestures that sometimes accompany a funny story. Studied harshness contributed to build the usual teacher’s front, as equanimity and seriousness should constitute the pervading impression.

To a certain extent, the traditional teacher’s attitude should look like the essence of a slogan used to call your attention to a conference on assertiveness: “the impact of a serene and consistent presence.”⁵² In the traditional school, the simple presence of a serene teacher allegedly pacified pupils’ restless nature.

Some disruptions could imperil any teacher’s flawless performance, particularly if he or she showed any character feebleness. He or she should always behave with a firm character, as any slightly perceptible weakness could provoke pupils into taking advantage of it and misbehave. Punishment, if any, should be always a prudent decision. Diminishing a cruel punishment or recognising she/he had been too irritable, even worse, excusing him-/herself for such unwise decision, could discredit a teacher immediately:

We find that discrepant roles develop: some of the individuals who are apparently team-mates, or audience, or outsiders acquire information about the performance and relations to the team which are not apparent, and which complicate the problem of putting on a show. Sometimes disruptions occur

⁵² This was the title of Yogesh Sharda’s conference, organized by Brahma Kumaris in several Spanish towns in 2015. Although some critics believe Brahma Kumaris conceals a destructive sect, the lecture was presented as a self-help activity to enhance personal growth, happy thought, and meditation.

through unmeant gestures, *faux pas*, and scenes, thus discrediting or contradicting the definition of the situation that is being maintained.⁵³

Strict discipline and pupils' stiff demeanour could only be maintained if the boys and girls were accustomed to remaining silent and raise their hands if they needed to ask a question. Walking in a line (or in twos) was compulsory when students had to move about, either within the school premises or outside on cultural visits. Teachers actually trained pupils to absorb this strict new performance.

Such patterns of behaviour should be learned from a very early age or else they would never be internalised. At the beginning this drill could be painful since it required much coercive practice – frequently reinforced through punishment such as copying, standing up for a long time or detention – but once such tough discipline was nearly inbred, students were trained in a semi-military demeanour in a natural way. Present-day educationalists would consider this idea inadequate and cruel though.

Young Belloc had his portion of tough discipline. Belloc attended Mrs Case's preparatory school, Heath Brow, in Hampstead. There he was described as an intelligent boy, but indolent. In September 1880, Bessie Belloc (née Parkes) asked Cardinal Newman if her son could enter the Oratory School at Edgbaston, Birmingham:

Your Eminence, I desire to place my little son under your care at the approaching term. His name is Joseph Hilaire Belloc and he is just ten years old. (...) He is a good little boy and he has hitherto never been separated from me.⁵⁴

Belloc remained there for seven years.

Enrolling Hilaire at the Oratory was not a hasty thought, but Bessie's balanced and considered decision. Attending a Public School was the essential option for those boys who were to live in England. Public Schools were considered the quality guarantee

⁵³ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 231-232.

⁵⁴ Marie Belloc Lowndes. *The Young Hilaire Belloc: Some Records of Youth and Middle Age*. (New York: P.J. Kennedy, 1956): 51.

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that led boys to professional and socially-successful life because of their strict, demanding education standards as well as networking prospects. Eton was a suitable place for Roman Catholic upper-class families, but, after the Oxford conversions, the Roman Catholic view changed. Jesuit Stonyhurst and the Benedictine centre at Downside could also supply adequate education for Roman Catholic boys, although some Roman Catholic parents chose the Edgbaston Oratory because it kept up with the quality standards of Public Schools and met the Roman Catholics' spiritual needs. At that time, there were approximately eighty boys at the Oratory.

At the beginning, Belloc found it difficult to adapt himself to the rough new life. Any boarder could have described a similar experience, because boys tend to behave in a similar way everywhere. They unconsciously accept the peculiar herd-instinct that is customary in boarding schools, as forced coexistence desensitises to some extent. Belloc thought the food was uneatable, and the older boys bullied younger ones. Unlike Public-Schools there was no fagging.⁵⁵ The young, well-built boy displayed an early independence of mind that was going to hamper school regulations, as he felt discipline constrained his aspirations. As Belloc became a senior, the horrible perception of the former defenceless boy bettered. He became increasingly popular and made lifelong friends, like Arthur Pollen and Charles Somers-Cocks. Very soon, Belloc enjoyed success in studies of the Classics and did well at the Oratory.

Belloc's experience as an Oratory pupil could be analysed within the frame of "team performance" and "front" in Goffman's terminology. At that time, teachers behaved in a sly manner so that nobody could guess what they were thinking, their feelings, and their probable responses. Mocking and nicknames are widespread in closed institutions such as boarding schools, so it is convenient to conceal any obsession or mannerism, otherwise schoolmates begin to call you or the teacher names and abuse both of you. Bullying has always existed, although now it is publicised through social networks. Then and now, torturers are happier the more their victims suffer.

⁵⁵ The word has no sexual overtones here. In the tradition of British boarding Public-Schools, "fagging" was the series of menial chores younger students had to do for senior ones. In the Spanish Army, it was a kind of regular activity, as commissioned officers chose a responsible soldier as his adjutant. He was a sort of personal assistant called *asistente*. This practice was abolished many years ago.

Consequently, teachers and pupils knew they should build a carapace to conceal their lives and feelings. This was the convenient learned technique of self-defence in a rough environment.

At seventeen, Belloc considered a naval career to be suitable for him and, in October 1887, he began his course at Collège Stanislas⁵⁶ in Paris, a Roman Catholic institution where Marianist fathers (the Society of Mary)⁵⁷ ruled the school and were picky about many small details. In line with these rules, students should consider his schoolmaster God's delegate, as this idea was reinforced through Roman Catholic instruction and was, in reality, a transposition of the characteristic vow of obedience of religious orders.⁵⁸ Naval cadets wore their specific military uniform. Marianist fathers marked excellent conduct and outstanding school work by means of a fussy system of counting points awarded in these matters. Emulation was a landmark in French Roman Catholic schools, and many religious orders imitated and exploited this technique because it was highly productive. Sometimes teachers arranged pupils in pairs, and

⁵⁶ This school was an ordinary academic college and, in part, a kind of prep-school for military training-colleges. Charles de Gaulle and other important personalities attended Collège Stanislas.

⁵⁷ Collège Stanislas was not ruled by Marist Fathers but by Marianists. Some writers on Belloc confuse both religious institutes that are contemporary and similar.

⁵⁸ The French school of spirituality was strict and mystical. It was a long tradition, beginning with Pierre de Bérulle and continuing with Henry Boudon, Jean-Jacques Olier (founder of the Society of St Sulpice), Saint Louis de Monfort, and many others. In some respects, it was an orthodox and sincerely devout reaction against Jansenism. Jansenism and the Sulpician Order were completely opposed, although they shared asceticism and highlighted prayer.

Jansenism, a distinct movement within French Roman Catholicism, emphasized original sin, human depravity, and predestination. They thought God predestined only some men to salvation through an absolute decree of his almightiness. God saved the predestined by means of "efficacious grace." Nobody knew the number of those predestined by God beforehand, although the doctrinal aftermath was tormenting and fostered guilty feeling. Jansenists were opposed by the Jesuits that spotted their Calvinist affinities. In practice, Jansenism fostered asceticism and moral strictness. The Roman Catholic Church declared Jansenism heretical in 1653, 1656, 1707, and 1713. In the eighteenth century, persecution in France, under Louis XIV, drove much of the movement into the Netherlands. In France, it survived as a school of thought within the church.

The Sulpicians (Society of Saint-Sulpice) had the purpose of the education of priests and parish work. They supported orthodox Roman Catholicism and insisted on the academic and spiritual formation of their members. The Sulpicians were very strict in moral issues and had high prestige for the revival of the parish life, reform of seminary life, and the revitalization of spirituality. Sulpician seminaries characteristically encouraged solid academic teaching and high moral tone. The Sulpicians were against any kind of heresy, and they safeguarded Roman Catholicism in such a way that Pius X stated they had been the salvation of Christianity in France. French founders of religious orders, La Salle (Lasallian Brothers), Chaminade (Marianists), Champagnat (Marist Brothers), were influenced by Sulpician teachers at the seminary. Collège Stanislas educational practice distilled aspects of this spirituality.

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every boy had to compete with another boy (called 'emulous partner') and obtain more points than him. At the end of the month, one boy won and had his free afternoon or evening of recreation, while the loser was given some hours' detention. Belloc had to endure a similar system since Collège Stanislas' students could go out from school walls into Paris, compulsorily accompanied by a senior student, only if they had won that right through their precious points in application and conduct. Resulting pupils' anguish and stress were not taken into account in this period because competitiveness was highly appreciated and a seal of demanding schools. The honour roll was accepted by everybody as a necessary step to excellence.

Some religious orders of French origin were anxious to observe silence as the main educative factor in school handling. So, they developed a signal system that could replace spoken words. Lasallian brothers and Marist brothers, as well as the Society of Mary (Marianists), introduced the clicking (in French *craquement*, in Spanish *chasca*) of a kind of wooden device that proved practical in school work. It was a snapping boxwood peg that encoded the basic directions teachers must give in everyday classroom matters (its military equivalent would be the bugle). For example, when children were told to stay in a ring to recite their lessons, Latin declensions, mental arithmetic, or the like, such clicking signals stated if their answers were right or wrong. Standing up, sitting down, putting their books away, standing in line were also ordered in this way.

No uncomfortable questions as to discipline were asked to those Catholic teachers provided that their results were outstanding. Many of these minor teaching innovations were the result of trial and error: anything that worked was immediately put into practice, duds were discarded. Nevertheless, Belloc never accepted external regulations since he could not stand taking orders that restricted his freedom. He choked. In early December, after two months at Collège Stanislas, he returned home in London.

From a Catalan point of view, most of these petty regulations look like old-fashioned relics from a loathed past. They tend to be associated with the authoritarian repressive school of the Francoist period, the kind of school that has been increasingly

scorned since the middle of the 1960s. The French educational system was heavily influenced by Napoleonic rules,⁵⁹ but currently French upper classes accept and appreciate the demanding requirements of Grandes Écoles.⁶⁰ Being accepted in these institutions is the passport to high posts in the civil service, well-paid executive or business jobs and prestigious status. École Polytechnique students marching in nineteenth-century military uniforms through the Champs-Élysées on the 14th July Parade in 2016 is a really weird image from the allegedly antimilitaristic Catalan point of view.

* * *

Many generalisations are false or biased. Sometimes they are projections of our ordeals and hates. French traditional Roman Catholic education was not necessarily repressive, as tolerant teachers were also there. For example, François Mitterrand was born into a Roman Catholic family in Jarnac, Charante. When he was ten years old, he entered the Roman Catholic boarding school École Saint-Paul at Angoulême that was ruled by diocesan fathers. After leaving school, he entered a students' residence in 104, rue de Vaugirard in Paris which was ruled by Marist Brothers. Novelist François Mauriac, a family friend, advised Mitterrand to stay there. Mauriac himself was a past pupil of the Collège Grand-Lebrun in Bordeaux that was ruled by the Marist Brothers. Older Mitterrand recalled his school years serenely:

La Bible a nourri mon enfance. Huit ans d'internat dans une école libre à Saint-Paul d'Angoulême m'ont formé aux disciples de l'esprit. Je ne m'en suis pas dépris. J'ai gardé mes attaches, mes goûts et le souvenir de mes maîtres bienveillants et paisibles. Nul ne m'a lavé le cerveau. Je suis sorti assez libre pour user de ma liberté. Comment après un tel apprentissage et quelque distance

⁵⁹ Some Grandes Écoles were founded or remodelled by Napoleon.

⁶⁰ École normale supérieure, École nationale d'administration, and many other elite schools.

que j'ai prise avec lui, n'aurai-je pas été apte à comprendre qu'un socialiste avait le droit de croire en Dieu.⁶¹

In theory, and much longer in practice, traditional teachers knew for certain that, once they succeeded in disciplining their "platoon," any difficult school work became easier. Speaking (or shouting) too much is one of the main causes of a teacher's fatigue. Above all, as any traditional teacher knows all too well, the less he or she speaks, the more silent pupils are in turn. Of course, this crafty teachers' strategy was only possible when parents unquestioningly supported them.

Nowadays parents are suspicious of teachers in many fields. Educated parents tend to doubt the validity of any teacher's method, especially if it implies silence and submissiveness. As a result, discipline is non-existent, and such loathed term has been replaced by the more reasonable "students' rights and duties."

Other factors have contributed to change school work perspectives. The birth index has increasingly decreased; family relationships are difficult because both parents have a paid job and no time to take care of their children. As a consequence, many parents spoil their children to make up for those parents' lack of care and attention. Teachers find it difficult to deal with spoiled, restless, or violent children. Fierce competition between schools to have enough registered "normal"⁶² students grows stronger with every passing day. As a result, a teacher's authority is weakened since he or she has to defend his/her job, for example, by not reporting his/her pupil's serious misbehaviour. Any teacher knows pupils are sacred.

Yet many Catalan middle-class parents want their children to attend Roman Catholic *escola concertada* or state-run schools (*escola pública*) with a low migration rate. This is particularly apparent when it is time to pre-enrol children in schools:

⁶¹ Jacques Baudet. "François Mitterrand et l'école Saint-Paul d'Angoulême." (*Point of vue*, Bordeaux, 26th March 2012); Olivier Sarazin. "*Les années Saint-Paul*." (*Sud Ouest*, Bordeaux, 28th April 2012).

⁶² Most teachers are afraid of having to cope with maladjusted pupils that come from impoverished districts. In the Spanish/Catalan ESO system, these pupils have been grouped and collectively named *aula d'adaptació curricular*, *grups d'atenció a la diversitat*, or *aula de projectes*. Many schools use different euphemistic names to label such classrooms. Senior teachers try to avoid such groups. As a consequence, new arrivals have to bear the burden.

The Catalan Education Act (*Llei d'Educació de Catalunya*), in its article 4, states that everybody has free access to the education system under the same conditions. The government (...) must guarantee parents the right to choose the school for their respective children. This is actually an empty gesture. Many families applying for pre-enrolment for their children will enter a game of chance to make sure that the law theoretically guarantees them the right to choose responsibly the school they consider most adequate for their children.

The origin of the problem is the great demand concentrated on a few schools (*concertades catòliques*) or state-run schools (*escoles públiques*) with a low migration rate. Anguish is guaranteed since no father or mother wants to place their children's future in the hands of fate. Can the administration resolve this dilemma?⁶³

In spite of the many accusations made to traditional methods, most parents prefer “reliable” schools provided that they do not implement too strict disciplinarian measures. Middle-class parents want their children to be proficient in any subject without having to bear the heavy burden of old-fashioned discipline.

Apart from educationalist considerations, traditional school always provided a suitable stage for dramaturgical performance:

If an individual [the teacher] is to direct others, he will often find it useful to keep strategic secrets from them. (...) If one individual attempts to direct the activity of others by means of (...) authority, threat, punishment, or coercion, it will be necessary to convey what he wants done and what he will do if it is not done. Power of any kind must be clothed in effective means of displaying it. (...) The most objective form of naked power, i.e., physical coercion, (...) is often a means of communication, not merely a means of action. (...) The image that one status grouping is able to maintain in the eyes of an audience (...) will depend

⁶³ Ramon Manté-Prats. “Igualtat al sistema educatiu?” *La Vanguardia*. 10th April 2016. [My translation]

upon the performers' capacity to restrict communicative contact with the audience. (...) A framework of appearances must be maintained.⁶⁴

Teachers' performance has increasingly changed in the last decades. Mixed abilities are difficult to cope with since they are the main challenge for current comprehensive schools. Diligent pupils stick at school-work while bearing the pandemonium of slack pupils frolicking about and having fun. Noise and distraction are omnipresent in the classroom through endless talking, laughing, and running about the room.

Fumbling with tablets and laptops behind the teacher's back or shamelessly using smartphone touchscreen user interfaces to watch and send instant messages may be entertaining and a good way to shun tough school-work for unmotivated teenagers. Strangely enough, a few pupils do pay attention to the teacher's indications, particularly when he or she uses the interactive whiteboard.

Some teachers maintain that the chatter and input provided by mobile devices is an essential step in the implementation of active education, as well as cooperative and constructivist learning. There is a universally accepted statement from the active school educational theory that affirms that tutoring is the basic strategy to supply the student with driving directions to reach his learning and personal autonomy. This declaration may be true for motivated or clever students, but not for those who feel obliged to attend school for five or six boring hours a day and badly need any distraction. Sometimes learning can be funny, although school is not always the most appropriate place to have fun.

New tendencies state that children must be happy at school – no matter they be spoilt or badly adjusted to future responsibilities in an unmerciful, competitive society – since education should be the respectful building up of a child's unique, original personality.⁶⁵ On the whole, a new educational rhetoric, usually based on ethereal

⁶⁴ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 234.

⁶⁵ Some idealistic lecturers at teacher-training colleges and trainee teachers from the LOGSE period (1990s) argued that teachers should deal with pupils carefully, as if young boys and girls were delicate

concepts, has justified and explained the potentialities of such relaxed atmospheres. Definitively, a new performance has replaced the obsolete one.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, traditional teachers' experience has proved that a subtly-authoritarian atmosphere can be very helpful in fostering hard work and discipline⁶⁷, as this performance contributes to avoiding students' irrelevant questions and dangerous familiarity. Needless to say, current educationalists consider this course of action outdated and inadequate to meet the needs of "active school" or "progressive education," as opposed to "traditional education" concept.

In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), Lord Delisport uses many of these resources from traditional teachers, including coercion, when he considers it an essential technique to oblige Mallard to give in.

The quest for power

Lord Delisport is certainly aggressive in his conversation with Mallard because he wants to delve into Mallard's supposed secret mission to establish contacts with foreign governments to set up a concession for the exploitation of Eremin. Delisport takes the initiative at every twist and turn in their conversation in order to set matters clear and to avoid Mallard's innocent excuses and digressions:

flowers in a garden. This was a cliché used either to defend or criticise the blessings of the new Education Act. As soon as those idealistic trainees began working in real school environments, the idea withered.

⁶⁶ Eugènia De Pagès. *La generació Google. De l'educació permissiva a una escola serena*. (Lleida: Pagès Editors, 2014); Alberto Royo. *Contra la nueva educación*. (Barcelona: Plataforma Editorial, 2016).

Alberto Royo's ideas cast doubt on Professor César Coll-Salvador's much-in-vogue considerations on education. Coll's concepts on constructivism in the classroom, as well as his contributions on educational competences that, he contends, must lead the learning concepts into meaningful learning are widely accepted. This dazzling terminology, that belongs to the corpus of the current philosophy of education, constituted some of the theoretical tenets that shaped the basis of the Ley Orgánica General del Sistema Educativo (LOGSE), 1990. Nevertheless, the daily work of a secondary school teacher is much more prosaic and is not enhanced by such airy views.

⁶⁷ Nowadays these two concepts, "hard work and discipline," are completely questioned and generally disregarded. "Discipline" is considered a politically-incorrect term in pedagogy. Nevertheless, many young teachers covertly behave in a traditional way without recognising they do, because they do not want to be stigmatized as disciplinarians. Some of them slowly change their former naïve performance once they realise the real difficulty of school-work. Their fear of losing authority and being discredited in front of parents and students makes them shift towards a more reliable, "traditional" performance.

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The dinner at Lord Delisport was of no particular moment. (...) There were but fifteen guests, all men. (...)

Richard Mallard was kept until the last of them had escaped. (...) It seemed as though Lord Delisport desired to be alone. And so he did – but alone with Richard Mallard. (...) He came straight to the point, as it was his pride to do.

“Look ‘ere, Mr Mallud,” he said, “afore we tork o’ this bit o’ good news, I’ve got a bone to pick with you.”

“What’s that? Eh? Said Richard, standing off a little at the tone. But there was more than the tone to come. Lord Delisport lurched forward and poked the young man in the ribs, and added greasily:

“A bone about Scotland – understand?”

“No, Lord Delisport ... I’m ... I’m afraid I don’t understand.” (...)

“Yer don’t? Wall, sit down,” said Lord Delisport. (...)

The great leaders of English society are not without energy, or they could not reach the summits they do. Elderly though he was, the worthy peer heaved himself up by the arm of his chair, looked straight into the young man’s eyes, and pressed him down again by the shoulders. (...)

There was genuine admiration in his tone, and once more he winked, and once more his right hand made as though to dig his companion in the ribs. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 156-158)

And the story goes on with Delisport’s sudden thrusts and other convincing resources to poke about in Mallard’s planned trip to Scotland and the relationship the whole affair can have with the Eremin concession. Delisport does not hesitate to use all registers – colloquial, amusing, and threatening – to achieve his purpose and worm all relevant details about Eremin out of Mallard. Belloc straightforwardly tells the reader that resolution was the essential quality an English leader should have to reach the top of the heap:

“Manner” refers to those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation. Thus, a haughty, aggressive manner may give the impression that the performer expects to be the one who will initiate the verbal interaction and direct its course. A meek, apologetic manner may give the impression that the performer expects to follow the lead of others, or at least that he can be led to do so.⁶⁸

Of course, Delisport is in command. His aggressive manner makes clear he gives the orders and directs the course of communication. Mallard is the meek submissive victim who tries to escape from that intimidating fellow.

Nowadays, the term ‘leadership’ and similar concepts have defined every technique to hold and maintain power over a human group. Edwardian gentlemen knew how to belong to the upper-class and marry the suitable women once they had a good command of the subtle manoeuvres that gave access to the cream of Britain’s wealthy lot. They were generally lazy men from rich families who felt protected from any external disruption thanks to their Public-School education, family bonds, exquisite politeness, and adequate social contacts:

For the British gentleman living at the turn of the century, the world was his oyster. Provided he was sufficiently wealthy, educated in the right schools, in possession of the proper attire, and on intimate terms with the right people, he could do what he liked and go where he liked with little fuss. (...) The number of gentlemen’s clubs exploded in the late Victorian era, as they provided refuge for the unattached and the married man.⁶⁹

Many characters in Belloc’s novels pursue fame, money, and power, although power surely condenses the other two. Belloc always paid attention to the many ways

⁶⁸ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 35.

⁶⁹ Evangeline Holland. *A Day in the Life of an Edwardian Gentleman*. [14th August 2012] <www.edwardianpromenade.com>

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human beings try to achieve and retain power. Not everybody can exert power, and Belloc likes to create the character of a sleuth who is badly paid and far away from the greedy powerful ones:

Mr Chinny, a Plain Clothes Man, hadn't an ounce of burden in his mind. You may think that odd in a man of such a profession, but I assure you it is so. Power, that chief corrupting devil in the ruin of man's souls, had never come near him. I blush to say that he received less than Eight Pounds a week. It was his simple duty to Keep an Eye on Them.⁷⁰ (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 77)

The clothes you wear along with your stealthy demeanour can build the necessary atmosphere of social distance based on mystification:

Restrictions placed upon contact, the maintenance of social distance, provide a way in which awe can be generated and sustained in the audience, a way (...) in which the audience can be held in a state of mystification in regard to the performer.⁷¹

Then, as now, being wealthy usually provided a front of dominion and priggishness, a carefully-calculated but seemingly spontaneous detachment from everybody, that constitutes the essential gap for maintaining the mystery and aloofness that the powerful require to establish and restate their position.

Drama techniques are the feature of those jobs that deal with people. Doctors, lawyers, teachers, shop assistants, judges, policemen, and many others try to project a carefully-studied personality that conceals their real one. This front is the result of rehearsed performance and sometimes is enhanced by impressive props:

⁷⁰ Belloc writes these expressions in capital letters.

⁷¹ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971): 74.

We can follow the diffusion of crucial fronts – such as the laboratory complex of glass, stainless steel, rubber gloves, white tile, and lab coat – which allow an increasing number of persons connected with unseemly tasks a way of self-purification.⁷²

These “unseemly tasks,” perhaps improper or unbecoming, become dignified through the adequate utilization of accessories that supply an appearance of respectability, the front of dignified work everybody looks for:

Selecting one appropriate front from several not quite fitting ones may be found today in American medical organizations with respect to the task of administering anaesthesia. In some hospitals, anaesthesia is still administered by nurses (...) [so they] have a front involving ceremonial subordination to doctors and a relatively low rate of pay. (...) The difference between the front maintained by a nurse and the front maintained by a doctor is great; many things that are acceptable for nurses are *infra dignitatem* for doctors.⁷³

There is a front region, a kind of on-stage space, where the performance is on display, and a back region, a backstage area, where arrangements are made while the leader’s directions are listened to, rehearsed, and internalized by all the actors in the play. A school director, a head of a group of medical intern residents, a shopkeeper, a police chief, and any manager in charge of a group of workers is the leader who supplies instructions for a successful task:

There will be a back region with its tools for shaping the body, and a front region with its fixed props. There will be a team of persons whose activity on stage and in conjunction with available props will constitute the scene from

⁷² Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 240.

⁷³ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 38.

which the performed character's self will emerge, and another team, the audience, whose interpretative activity will be necessary for this emergence. The self is a product of all of these arrangements, and in all of its parts bears the marks of this genesis.⁷⁴

The interpretative activity of the audience follows the cues supplied by the actors' performance. Marketing discoveries and proxemics-applied research have suggested that a permanent smile, greeting before the customer does so, attractiveness, and the like are essential elements to deal with clients. A very wide and huge desk to keep your distance, elegant but austere attire, being attentive to listen carefully to what the client has to say, along with calm answers and kind explanations that convey confidence, are some of the surrounding props and skilful techniques professionals use to impress clients.⁷⁵ The fact that everybody expects these details in a polite conversation does not imply that they are not previously and craftily prepared beforehand:

Mr Barnett smiled.

Leaders of men have led men always by a smile. Here also was a leader, and it is my duty to describe at great length this individual charm.

When Mr Barnett smiled, his lips, which he kept closed, did not bend upwards as they do with commoner and weaker men, but downwards like an arch, lending an astonishing vigour to his expression.

(...)

Such was Mr Barnett during these rare flashes which his friends already knew, and which, after he had made the M'Korio, were destined to captivate no less than two crowned heads, a Prime Minister, four Admirals, ten General

⁷⁴ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 245.

⁷⁵ Dale Carnegie (1888-1955) designed courses to improve self-confidence and foster communication skills. He was a keen observer of people's behaviour, and he explained how people can build a sturdy personality and enhance their relationship with customers and strangers.

Officers, editors in great profusion, innumerable professors, and a whole army of divines. (*Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* 1904: 158-159)

Mr Barnett does nothing for free since he knows every trick to reach his goals. Even his smile is the manoeuvre to attract Mr Burden and others to a risky investment that, eventually, is ruinous.

Assertiveness and deception

The image everybody projects on others is the fruit of the human instinctive need of assertiveness. Many cultural periods of humankind have described man's activity as a more or less conscious drama technique in which what man actually is and the external aspect he tries to show do not coincide generally. For example, Indian castes encouraged the strict social division into separate classes with different degrees of prestige and specific functions. They constituted an immobile, rigid system of social stratification that perhaps originally was designed by the upper class to rule the country and, later, included in Hindu practice.

Assertiveness is also one of the constituents of teenagers' personalities. Teenagers tend to look for their personality as a distinctive element that forms their identity and, very frequently, they like to belong to a group of friends. As a consequence, they shun their parents' advice not to listen to their friends' remarks. Sometimes teenagers assume an artificial role of rebelliousness that is increasingly abandoned as years go by. A teenager usually plays a part in his gang's theatre by following the tacit rules of the group, although his role will be blurred and replaced by another more serene one after the troubled period of adolescence.

The Spanish Golden Age supplied insight into the human tendency to impersonate other people's character and virtues, or just pretending to be what you are not. Sometimes, literary themes were not just fashionable comedies of manners, but reached other genres that dealt with the alleged absolute religious truths of that period. Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681) wrote a play, *The Great Theatre of the World* (1641), that was a Roman Catholic metaphysical explanation of the world, and it presented

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human beings as actors who, compulsorily, must play their part on the stage [the world] because God wants this to be so. Actors are free but are held accountable for their actions after death when God will judge them. The play is an *auto sacramental*⁷⁶ that has completely different development and purpose from what twentieth-century sociologists have defined as the presentation of self in society:

The claim that all the world's a stage is sufficiently commonplace for readers to be familiar with its limitations and tolerant of its presentation, knowing that at any time they will easily be able to demonstrate to themselves that it is not to be taken too seriously. An action staged in a theatre is a relatively contrived illusion and an admitted one; unlike ordinary life, nothing real or actual can happen to the performed characters – although at another level of course something real and actual can happen to the reputation of performers *qua* professionals whose everyday job is to put on theatrical performances.⁷⁷

Belloc created some characters that deceive everyone. Bachelor tourist, Richard Mallard, is mistaken, and greedy politicians, as well as their contracted sleuths, pursue him in search of the Eremin concession they think will be a serious step to Britain's competitiveness in the field of new fuels for engines. Mr Petre is another character Belloc creates based on a series of strange coincidences due to an Englishman's sudden memory loss when he comes back to his country after spending some time in the United States of America.⁷⁸ In both cases, the protagonists' front deceives those who are in contact with them and is the source of messy situations and funny moments. In *Mr Petre* (1925), the story begins in 1953 with the return of Peter Blagden from New York. He

⁷⁶ *Autos sacramentales* were similar in some respects to old *Morality Plays* in England. Following the strict moral code of the period, Pedro Calderón de la Barca wrote several plays that represented Roman Catholic official doctrine through allegorical techniques. The *Great Theatre of the World* (1641) stated that human life is brief and temporary, the lapse of time in which each person must accept the role God designed for him or her. God in the afterlife will reward or punish everyone according to moral standards. This play bears a close similarity with *Life Is a Dream* (1635) by the same author.

⁷⁷ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 246.

⁷⁸ See *Mr Petre* (1925).

loses his memory completely, and chance circumstances combine to identify him with John Kosciusko Petre, the great American millionaire who eventually comes to Europe on business to discover, with rage, that someone has stolen his identity:

In that same great Rotor boat which had brought the new millionaire and his fortune to Plymouth upon that April day, those five months gone, was borne to the shores of Europe a real old millionaire, a matured one.

(...) That real old millionaire, that matured one, had indeed taken the same boat; and his name *was* quite certainly and without ambiguity, and without problem, and without mystery or miracle, John Kosciusko Petre. (*Mr Petre* 1925: 169)

Peter Blagden's bewildered retiring demeanour and the absurdities and prejudices of the people that surround him in London form the fertile soil for the growth of such a huge mess:

When an individual appears before others, he will have many motives for trying to control the impression they receive of the situation. (...)

When an individual plays a part, he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be.⁷⁹

Blagden's motive to control the impression he produces on others is his perplexity at finding out the strange courtesy everybody has when dealing with him, and how fast his small investment in the stock exchange is growing. He cannot imagine this course of events is due to everybody's supposition he is a well-known American tycoon. Blagden

⁷⁹ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 26, 29.

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becomes involved in enormous transactions, and the brief words he utters contribute to building his reputation as the most astute businessman of the day:

If he buys, everybody follows, and his chance expression of opinion breaks up a luncheon party, everybody rushing for the telephone. Perhaps the loss of memory is a little arbitrary in its working, but it is a good device for the display of Mr Belloc's scornful irony. For, of course, everything that Mr Petre says and does is idiotic. A man reputed to have fifty million pounds must be a master-mind, and financiers feel that they must crawl before him or be ruined.⁸⁰

Belloc laughs at the silly, mimetic effect wealth produces on those who are not rich enough, but who try to reach that affluent condition. Blagden is a reliable model to imitate when he buys or sells shares at the stock exchange:

One of the richest sources of data on presentation of idealized performances is the literature on social mobility. In most societies, there seems to be a major or general system of stratification, and in most stratified societies there is an idealization of the higher strata and some aspiration on the part of those in low places to move to higher ones.⁸¹

Belloc also invents the character of Mr Burden, and he writes about him as his real friend. Belloc creates this new mask to tell the story of a decent merchant who is swindled by dishonest, greedy Mr Barnett. Although the narration literally specifies Mr Burden exists, the fact is that he is a sheer construct:

I have written "when the Government bought at 5 3/8." The thought has perhaps no right to appear in this account, but I cannot forbear to place on record my

⁸⁰ "The Mad World of Mr Petre." *The Guardian Archive*. 5th June 1925. [5th June 2012] <www.theguardian.com>

⁸¹ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Hardmonsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 45.

regret that Mr Burden did not live to see the great silent scene in the House of Commons when the Government announced their intention of buying the Company. (...) I knew him perhaps better than any other man knew him. (...) Alas! before even the first negotiations had been opened at Lady Manningham's garden party, my dear old friend was dead. (*Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* 1904: 165-166)

The need of assertiveness is related to adequate management of impression. Others see the external aspect you want to project, provided that your performance is flawless. Efficient management of impression is not an easy task because it requires paying sustained attention to your role performance and remaining disciplined, dramaturgically speaking. A resourceful actor can cope with any unexpected emergency so as to cover up on the spur of the moment for inappropriate behaviour on the part of any other performer who can commit unmeant gestures or produce sudden disruptions. Discretion is essential, as a responsible performer does not spoil the show by lackadaisically disclosing its secrets.

In a similar way, like Peter Blagden in *Mr Petre* (1925) who unintentionally deceives everyone because of odd circumstances, Georges Boutroux in *The Girondin* (1911) plays the part of a madman credibly when the situation requires. Boutroux has killed a man accidentally and has to escape because the revolutionary militia wants to arrest him. Georges stealthily runs away from the inn where people are going to be told about that strange manslaughter, and he convinces an eighteen-year-old postilion to let him carry the post to Mirambeau. Boutroux pays him one hundred livres [*sic*] and everything is arranged. It is raining, and the coach passes Etudiers.⁸² One passenger is in the chaise, "the nervous professional man who had been so silent during the altercation at the inn."⁸³ At a crossing, Georges takes the wrong road by mistake, and the passenger starts complaining. Georges pretends to be mad, and he speaks like somebody in between a ghost and a prophet in order to puzzle and frighten the lawyer:

⁸² See *The Girondin* (1911): 106.

⁸³ See *The Girondin* (1911): 104.

“The matter!” said the unfortunate lawyer. “The matter is, you dirty fool, that you will find yourself in jail with the break of day!” (...) “Oh no,” he [Boutroux] said in a gentle manner, but (as he hoped) a little oddly. “Oh no; I shall not be in jail – I shall be in the Kingdom of my Father. It lies,” he added ecstatically, “a little beyond the Hills of Gold.”

“Good God!” cried the lawyer loudly. Then he muttered to himself, “I have to deal with a madman.” (*The Girondin* 1911: 109)

The conversation goes on in very similar terms. Eventually, Boutroux realizes the lawyer is exceedingly afraid after such a long, absurd dialogue with him all through the night’s journey.⁸⁴ On the whole, Boutroux succeeds in performing his role naturally, and he reaches his destination, a new hamlet where he can slip away. There are no unmeant gestures nor sudden disruptions in the show. Boutroux knows that being a good actor is worthwhile for the achievement of one’s goal.

Individuals performing in a team

To maintain a given projected definition of the situation, a set of individuals is often required, a group that struggles to keep the *status quo* going on, or rather, a team that works in intimate cooperation. This is the “performance team,” the group that consists of “any set of individuals who cooperate in staging a single routine.”⁸⁵

In *The Green Overcoat* (1912), Belloc creates the characters of Jimmy, Melba, and Algernon who are the buddies involved in a strange adventure. As impecunious, posh Algernon owes a lot of money from bets on card games, Jimmy and Melba are resolute to cash the money even the hard way, but they blackmail the wrong man since they confuse the stern businessman, Mr Brassington, with a don, conceited and credulous, Professor Higginson. Brassington is Algernon’s father. Jimmy and Melba

⁸⁴ See *The Girondin* (1911): 116.

⁸⁵ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 85.

form the gang that ill-treats Professor Higginson, the so-called Pragmatist, as this is his pretentiously new proposed school of thought:

“Hit him, Jimmy! Hit him in the face!”

“Not yet,” said Jimmy ominously. “Jerk him up, Melba!”

At some expense to the Professor’s nerves Melba obeyed, and the learned Pragmatist found himself once more upon his feet. He kicked out vigorously behind, but only met the air. It was as he had dreaded! He had to deal with professionals! (*The Green Overcoat* 1912: 21)

At the end of the novel, Jimmy tells bewildered Algernon his father has already paid the debt.⁸⁶ However, Professor Higginson has been hit, kidnapped, and humiliated by bullies Jimmy and Melba who behave like the members of a team planning unwise extortion and whitewashing their felony:

Often small cliques form not to further the interests of those with whom the individual stages a show, but rather to protect him from an unwanted identification with them. Cliques, then, often function to protect the individual not from persons of other ranks, but from persons of his own rank. Thus, while all the members of one’s clique may be of the same status level, it may be crucial that not all persons of one’s status level be allowed into the clique.

(...)

A team may be defined as a set of individuals whose intimate cooperation is required if a given projected definition of the situation is to be maintained. (...) Since we all participate on teams we must all carry within ourselves something of the sweet guilt of conspirators (...) concealing or playing down certain facts.

⁸⁶ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 278.

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(...) We can expect the performer to live out his conspirational career in some furtiveness.⁸⁷

Belloc designs the plot in a series of twists and turns until everything is set right and comes back roughly to the starting point:

[Those fond of novel] and essay are delighted by two essential characteristics: the casual lightness of style (what Baldassarre Castiglione called *sprezzatura*) and the craftily inserted changes of direction in the subject matter that make it different from what was initially outlined.⁸⁸

Sojourn on a country estate

The English upper class used to dramatise its presentation of self at its best on leisure occasions. In *The Haunted House* (1927),⁸⁹ Hilda Maple pretends to belong to the upper class and behaves accordingly through fine manners and elaborate conversation. However, her studied front is merely a crafty strategy to sell a house that is not hers – she is the dubious heiress of her brother's country house – to a couple of toff parvenus, Lord George and Lady Amatheia Mere de Beurivage, who have a lot of money and suitable pose. To complement so much affectation, both dress in full regalia when they first visit Hilda at Rackham Catchings, the manor house she tries to sell them subtly:

His [George's] considerable though not elongated form was protected from the inclemencies of the weather by a fur coat and, as to his legs at least, by the mounted skin of a very fine African lion, the head of which drooped, fierce towards his feet, while the hinder quarters performed the same office of comfort for his wife, who sat upon his left.

⁸⁷ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 89-90, 108.

⁸⁸ Fernando Savater. "Stevenson vivo, viajero y escritor." (*El País*. 16th January 2016). [My translation]

⁸⁹ *The Haunted House* was published by Arrowsmith in 1927 and by Harper in 1928. All quotations are from Harper's Edition.

And what a wife!

Her dress [Amathea's], though the afternoon was yet young, seemed compounded of a material wherein there entered no small proportion of gold.

(...)

As she [Amathea] thus swept up, throned, the stern look of mastery which befits the mistress of such great possessions still dignified her glance, yet it dissolved into delighted smiles and half-closed elongated eyes of joy as she caught sight of dear Hilda unconventionally rushing out to meet her upon the very threshold.

(...)

“Darling Hilda!”

“Oh! Darling Amathea!”

The two women were clasped in each other's arms. (*The Haunted House* 1927: 145-146)

Hilda has redecorated and renewed part of the building. Belloc mocks her ridiculous, out-of-scale and exaggerated taste. Through sly refurbishing, Hilda pretends to sell an allegedly Tudor mansion that combines genuine English style with oak panelled walls that supply a sumptuous atmosphere.

The Edwardian period had fostered refined taste for decoration, and Art Nouveau definitely influenced rich people's lifestyle. The period was reminiscent of and contemporary with the French “Belle Époque.” Belloc exploited the rich's obsession with marking the difference in every aspect, and Hilda was one of his preferred scapegoats. Although the novel was published some years later, Belloc remained an Edwardian in many aspects, and his characters embody many tendencies of this period.

Belloc straightforwardly despised some kinds of landowners, not all of them, since he considered landed gentry were necessary for the country. One of his characters, Signor Alessandria, is flattering Mr Delgairn in *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929):

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He [Signor Alessandria] sighed profoundly.

“Ah! How much I envy you!” he said... “And how much more I envy you for living in such a house as this! We have nothing like it in our country.” (...)

Young Mr Delgairn nodded as one gentleman to another. He did not know; but landed folk are a caste all over Europe. (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 160)

The term “caste” has become an abusive comment or a deserved epithet – it depends on one’s ideology – in recent Spanish political arguments. Belloc used the word in this indictment eighty-seven years ago. Recently, “caste” has frequently been used by a left-wing political party in Spain.⁹⁰

In the Edwardian period, aristocrats were typically entertained by a wealthy host, usually a local landowner who impersonated something of the old values and good forms that vanished after the Great War (1914-1918). Landed gentries were somewhat different after the war, and social changes sped up. Evelyn Waugh suggests this theme in a discussion of the British upper class:

Look back twenty-five years to the time when there was still a fairly firm aristocratic structure and the country was still divided into spheres of influence among hereditary magnates. My memory is that the grandes avoided one another unless they were closely related. They met on state occasions and on the racecourse. They did not frequent one another’s houses. You might find almost anyone in a ducal castle – convalescent, penurious cousins, advisory experts, sycophants, gigolos and plain blackmailers. The one thing you could be sure of not finding was a concourse of other dukes. English society, it seemed to me,

⁹⁰ At the beginning, some leaders of Podemos enjoyed using this adjective to make awkward jibes about adversaries. As the party gained momentum and was successful, in the 2015 Spanish General Election, the term was increasingly replaced by other politically-correct arguments.

was a complex of tribes, each with its chief and elders and witch-doctors and braves, each with its own dialect and deity, each strongly xenophobic.⁹¹

Avoiding one another except on the racecourse, not finding several dukes together, the usual complex of tribes and xenophobic instincts did not hamper shooting parties. Posh people's habits and mannerisms were and are the result of education and conscious demeanour too. The need not to mingle with the lower classes and mark the boundaries of their status causes a specific behaviour involved in good manners that mark them out as different from common people:

The line dividing front and back regions is illustrated everywhere in our society. As suggested, the bathroom and bedroom, in all but lower-class homes, are places from which the down stairs audience can be excluded. Bodies that are cleansed, clothed and made up in these rooms can be presented to friends in others.

(...)

[There are] important dynamics and disappointments of social mobility, be it mobility upward, downward or sideways. In attempting to escape from a two-faced world of front region and back region behaviour, individuals may feel that in the new position they are attempting to acquire they will be the character projected by individuals in that position and not at the same time a performer. When they arrive, of course, they find their new situation has unanticipated similarities with their old one: both involve a presentation of front to an audience and both involve the presenter in the grubby, gossipy business of staging a show.⁹²

⁹¹ Evelyn Waugh. "An Open Letter." Nancy Mitford. Ed. *Noblesse Oblige*. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1956): 78, quoted by Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 104.

⁹² Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 124-125. 133.

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Edwardian rich people enjoyed being invited by magnanimous hosts who entertained them in manor houses. This provided the suitable occasion to present and restate each person's front to the audience and, of course, be involved in the gossipy business of staging the show.

One such scene was described in Isabel Colegate's ninth novel *The Shooting Party* (1980). The novel collected all the social niceties characteristic of 1913 England in a one-week sojourn on a country estate, shortly before the outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918). A group of aristocrats gathers for a weekend shoot. Sir Randolph Nettleby is the host. His carefully-organized hunting party is also the occasion for discreetly concealed adultery, bitter conversations between husband and wife, a surprising conflict with a staunch animal rights supporter, and the eventual breach of the gentleman's code since the story ends with a sudden tragedy that is presaged as the novel goes on. It is also a clever analysis on class consciousness that pervades the game shoot and subsequent staying in the opulent stately home.

Rich people in the shooting game contract local beaters such as Tom Harker, the game poacher, who will eventually be badly injured in the head by Gilbert Hartlip and die. Aristocrats deal with locals in a haughty attitude, but accept them into the group because they need their help in practical matters such as loading guns, carrying equipment, and finding pheasant nests:

It has been suggested that an intrusion may be handled by having those present switch to a definition of the situation into which the intruder can be incorporated. A second way of handling the problem is to accord the intruder a clear-cut welcome as someone who should have been in the region all along. The same show, more or less, is thus carried on, but it is made to include the newcomer.⁹³

⁹³ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 140.

Aristocrats like to be served and helped. Consequently, they do their best to treat newcomers with studied familiarity so as make them comfortable within the group. Nevertheless, there is not always such a fluent and regular contact with subordinates, especially when very rich people realise somebody wants their influence in order to enter into the exclusive social circle of the affluent. In *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929), Hardham is a parasite, a gambler actually, who calls himself the Duke of Emonsillado. He comes close to an immensely rich woman, Verecundia, to ask her precious influence to reach an outstanding place in the circle of the privileged. Verecundia is an art collector and connoisseur who does not accept him as her intimate acquaintance:

And the reason that he growled about coming to London, and that when he went there he stayed defiantly in hotels, was this:

Verecundia, or Vurry, as he obstinately called her, had given him away. It was abominable of her, and it rankled to the depths of his heart.

(...)

He ought to have climbed into the London rich through Vurry; instead of that, Vurry had thrust him off the ladder, and he was just embittered. (...) There are some men who, however rich, cannot get through the gates in London. They are just too much for the stomach. (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 84-85)

Verecundia is fed up with Hardham, since she considers that ridiculous Duke “a fly in her ointment.”⁹⁴ Hardham takes his final revenge when he sells his replica of the Masterpiece to Verecundia for £20,000. He knows that access to the back and front regions of a performance is not only controlled by the performers, but by others. Verecundia, of course, controls the stage, the performance, and rejects him. There are others circumstances though. Hardham voluntarily stays away from the region into

⁹⁴ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 81.

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which he has not been invited.⁹⁵ Eventually, this canny profiteer strikes back and obtains a good lump of money.

In *The Shooting Party* (1980), Sir Randolph foresees the values of this sheltered world are soon to be shattered for ever.⁹⁶ His flair foresees impending changes:

[The coming of a new age of] striking industrial workers, screaming suffragettes, Irish terrorists, scandals on the Stock Exchange, universal suffrage. (...) The politicians are determined to turn this country into an urban society instead of a rural one [and to] take away the power of the landed proprietor.⁹⁷

Although the novel describes the behaviour of a group of rich people within a leisure atmosphere, aristocrats had other social bondages, such as the perceived obligation of living and dying with apparent dignity and honour, no matter the hypocrisy that used to conceal their private vices. In everyday life, this attitude gave way to some sort of uptight demeanour that was perceived by the more gregarious lower classes. Goffman's keen eye and cynic perspective provides an example.

Dramatic and directive dominance are dramaturgical terms. (...) Performers who enjoy such dominance may not have other types of power and authority. (...) Performers who have positions of visible leadership are often merely figureheads, selected as a compromise, or as a way of neutralising a potentially threatening partner. (...) Whenever inexperienced or temporary incumbents are given formal authority over experienced subordinates, we often find that the formally empowered person is bribed with a part that has dramatic dominance while the subordinates tend to direct the show. Thus, it has often been said about the British infantry in the First World War that experienced working-class

⁹⁵ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 223.

⁹⁶ Alan Bridges was director of the film with the same title in 1985.

⁹⁷ These words are uttered by Sir Randolph Nettleby, proprietor of the estate in Isabel Colegate's *The Shooting Party* (1980), as quoted in Jonathan Yardley's review in *The Washington Post*. 7th August 2008.

sergeants managed the delicate task of covertly teaching their new lieutenants to take a dramatically expressive role at the head of the platoon and to die quickly in a prominent dramatic position, as befits public-school men. The sergeants themselves took their modest place at the rear of the platoon and tended to live to train still other lieutenants.⁹⁸

Much more than living and dying in a prominent dramatic position, some members of the shooting game consider competition is the most important element to enhance the prestige of a remarkable aristocratic hunter. This is the case with Lord Gilbert Hartlip in Colegate's novel. Other guests prefer to flirt, have frivolous conversations, boast about their properties, or commit adultery. All in all, *The Shooting Party* (1980) is a relentlessly truthful portrait of Edwardian nobility.

Edwardian rich people found their suitable atmosphere in leisure, sports, and entertainment. Tea parties and outings were frequent amusements. There is a placid scene of a tea party in the early twentieth century that reflects the gentle quality of life at that time. The photograph shows a group of well to do people having tea in the garden. They are seated on the grass and pass time in agreeable conversation.⁹⁹

Fashions slowly changed because leisure sports encouraged more mobile and flexible clothing styles. After the First World War (1914-1918), the hems of skirts lost some inches. Belloc created the character of a young American woman, Bo, John Maple's girlfriend in *The Haunted House* (1927), who talks fast American slang with a broad American accent, wears the usual shorter skirt from the 1920s and is resourceful in any circumstance:

Therefore, when Bo came over from her school, (...) with her straightforwardness and beauty and (to be quite just) her hardness, she had duly impressed herself upon London, she was the Honourable Isabeau Hellup. Then did she begin with a great verve a career of conquest; and her father was prouder

⁹⁸ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 105-106.

⁹⁹ F.J. Mortimer's photograph at *The Radio Times*. (Hulton Picture Library).

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of her than of any deal he had ever made in his life. (*The Haunted House* 1927:
60)

The girl is sharp and crafty, particularly when it comes to helping John against greedy Aunt Hilda. She is the daughter of Hamilcar Hellup, a wealthy American widower. Although Belloc does not literally mention her skirt length, G.K. Chesterton's drawing suggests the modern attire of the girl.¹⁰⁰

Landowners could live entirely from rental income, although the 1870s agricultural depression was a first step towards their decline. In *The Shooting Party* (1980), there is no mention of the fall in grain prices that was the origin of their decline in those depression years. The novel foresees the impending war that changed habits and values. Landowners were local nobility who had contributed to the local government centuries before, even though this function increasingly vanished. To avoid the dullness of monotonous life, they usually became hosts to groups of guests whose sole aim was entertainment. Foxhunting, pheasant shooting and other shooting games, tea parties, dinners, dancing, masquerades, and similar events were appropriate occasions to get to know new people, to hold amusing conversation, to carry out general self-indulgence, and to have fun. The aristocrats' way of life contrasted with the local rural poor, who were hired as "beaters." Locals drove the game for the aristocrats to shoot at.

Life was relatively easy as long as you had money. There was another dark side to the squalor in the streets of London, as Jack London described in *The People of the Abyss* (1903). After the war, heavy taxation on huge properties caused landowners' decline. The great differences between the wealthy and the poor during the Edwardian era fostered great changes later in political and social life.

In *The Shooting Party* (1980) Tom Harker, the game-poacher who is nevertheless known and liked by everybody, does not suppress his class resentment:

¹⁰⁰ See *The Haunted House* (1927): 60.

The techniques of derogation (...) point out the fact that, verbally, individuals are treated relatively well to their faces and relatively badly behind their backs. (...) Backstage derogation of the audience serves to maintain the morale of the team.¹⁰¹

The idealized version of oneself

In *The Postmaster-General* (1932), Belloc brings back to life Lady Caroline Balcombe. She is also the leader of the Anarchist Party, the same party Belloc invented in the novel he published four years before. Lady Caroline Balcombe is at present in Opposition.¹⁰²

In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), Caroline Balcombe was a Baugh of Woolstone by birth, attached to the Anarchist Party¹⁰³ and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.¹⁰⁴ She was sixty-five, tall, slight, and energetic. Being an outstanding Anarchist leader, she was moderate though:

She had inherited that gift of compromise and moderation which happily prevented the Anarchist party from falling into the hands of its extremists. There was perhaps no one more hated by the handful of Wild Men in her own party or by the small separate group of Annihilationists. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 55)

Belloc likes to entangle the figure of Caroline Balcombe in political mess, and he invents a particular political formula to place her within suitable connections to remain in office even with politically-rival colleagues:

¹⁰¹ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 173.

¹⁰² See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 12.

¹⁰³ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 54.

¹⁰⁴ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 56.

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In spite of being in Opposition for so many years, she had now been attached (under the well-established formula of Personal Coalition), since its formation in 1976, to the communist Ministry, of which Mrs Bullar was the energetic chief. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 55-56)

Belloc enjoys designing near-impossible combinations and abusing politicians: moderation and anarchy have rarely gone hand-in-hand since they are opposite concepts actually; nobody has ever known any annihilationist party; and an anarchist being a high civil servant in a communist ministry is not the usual practice.

The Postmaster-General (1932) tells the story of a simple person, Wilfrid Halterton, who is Postmaster General in Mrs Boulanger's second administration in 1960 (again, Belloc chooses a futuristic setting for this novel). There is an impending huge TV contract that comes within the domain of the Post Office. Halterton is soon deeply involved in a muddle of intrigue since he likes to participate in big business, but his simplicity makes him an easy victim to shrewd financiers and politicians. James Haggismuir McAuley, unscrupulous financier, plans a stratagem to entangle Halterton, but he is superseded in this crafty business by Honest Jack Williams, who is certainly not honest at all.

Honest Jack Williams, the Home Secretary, is the profiteer who tries to blackmail Wilfrid Halterton, the Postmaster General, to earn a lot of money through the new TV licence. Jack Williams' career is very similar to despotic Lord Delisport in *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928). Both men come from obscure poor origins:

Jack Williams was reading his newspaper, propped up against the coffee pot, and anyone who had seen him would have said: "Here is a man who has risen from very small beginnings to a modest, but, for his station, prosperous middle age. This little semi-detached villa (...) is for him comfort and even luxury. He contrasts it in his own mind with his origins in that miserable muddy slum up North where he passed his starved childhood under a mother broken with child-bearing and a father alternately drunk and sober, and bringing in (...) about a

pound a week, in the old days before the Great War when the poor were really poor.” (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 48-49)

Lord Delisport cautiously pretended he belonged to ancient aristocracy, and he performed accordingly. Consequently, he avoided any reference to his humble past:

These great Masters of the Modern World are masters of themselves.

(...)

Tommy, his old mate of years ago, when they worked side by side in the railway yards. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 103-104)

These two characters, Jack Williams and Lord Delisport, are very concerned with keeping to themselves the mystery of their poor origin, although sometimes they feel the contradiction of a phantom of the past that brings back uncomfortable memories, and they find themselves in any predicament that causes perplexity, despite their efforts to maintain their opulent appearance:

A performer tends to conceal or underplay those activities, facts and motives which are incompatible with an idealized version of himself and his products. In addition, a performer often engenders in his audience the belief that he is related to them in a more ideal way than is always the case.¹⁰⁵

Whenever a performance is taking place, those present are possibly taken in to believe the performers are acting in good faith and sincerely playing their role. Goffman clarifies performers may be sincere or not, although they must behave convinced of their own sincerity:

There are not many French cooks who are really Russian spies, and perhaps there are not many women who play the part of wife to one man and mistress to

¹⁰⁵ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 56.

another; but these duplicities do occur, often being sustained successfully for long periods of time.¹⁰⁶

Master Delisport did not feel so sure of his outstanding social position for he had his competitor, Angus Worsing, a remarkable share-shuffler who was on to Eremin too.¹⁰⁷ Both masters, Delisport and Worsing long for increasing their money lump as fast as possible at any rate:

Now if Richard Mallard had known Europe, and especially this island better, (...) he would have seen far more. He would have seen in Mr Worsing the virtues and the vices of his kind. He would have seen a preoccupation with money, not from greed, but because the pursuit of riches was the only serious activity he knew.

(...)

Moreover, if he had known our world, Richard Mallard would have wondered how two men so different as Worsing and Delisport could both be in the same trade of share-shuffling. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 129)

In *The Postmaster-General* (1932), Honest Jack Williams is Home Secretary, as well as a great strategist, who imagines a plan to get hold of a profitable TV business. He obtains valuable information against his rivals, Wilfrid Halterton (the Postmaster General) and James McAuley (a financier whose brother is Attorney General) who have reached a secret agreement to share out future material gain. Honest Jack Williams is a villain who is ready to interfere in anything to achieve his interests. Belloc likes to write “honest” before that fellow’s name to mock politicians once more.

Through a fast manoeuvre, Jack Williams steals a letter and contract that are essential documents for the concession. So, he gets possession of these documents in roundabout ways, a process that is necessary for success in the great game:

¹⁰⁶ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 77.

¹⁰⁷ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 122.

There he [Jack Williams] sat, with the two trophies of his genius displayed in either hand, mastering each in turn, and conscious that he was in impregnable possession of what could now give him unchallenged control. The whole great coming business of Television was in his power, as he followed the words of those two letters: the typescript signed by Halterton promising the contract to McAuley, the manuscript written wholly in McAuley's hand promising the post and salary to Halterton – two master keys that opened all the doors. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 116)

To proceed further with his plan, Jack Williams asks Gunter, a poor devil, to copy in handwriting both documents. Jack Williams had protected and concealed Mr Henry Gunter three times when Gunter stole money, on one occasion by cashing a cheque due to his weakness and unbecoming behaviour. So, Williams always took advantage of these facts when the occasion required:

What Williams had done on that long past day was this. He had made up the loss on the cheque – it was a considerable sum to him in those days – no less than £15, out of his own pocket. Thenceforward, he had protected Gunter, though necessarily reminding him from time to time of the knowledge he had. (...) Mr Gunter was normally of use to him principally as an agent whose name could be used in buying and selling stock by orders given over the wires. It was only on particular occasions that he was summoned – and this was one of them. (...) The Home Secretary took Mr Gunter into his study, got him ready for dictation, and then read out to him for taking down first the document signed Halterton and then the document signed McAuley. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 121-122)

Belloc was a man of the world and knew all the tricks. He liked to create sly characters who were keen on blackmailing poor, wretched guys to achieve their goals without

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dirtying themselves. Dirty jobs were for other people, not for the canny members of the bourgeoisie:

There are many performances which could not have been given had not tasks been done which were physically unclean, semi-illegal, cruel, and degrading in other ways; but these disturbing facts are seldom expressed during a performance. (...) We tend to conceal from our audience all evidence of “dirty work,” whether we do this work in private or allocate it to a servant.¹⁰⁸

Detailed observation of others’ behaviour supplies hints to improve upstarts’ longing for higher social status. “You earn money by following, with patience and meticulous observation, the rich that are losing it.”¹⁰⁹

Reality and contrivance produce a kind of balance that conveys the performance of characters in a novel. In *The Postmaster-General* (1932), Lord Papworthy is the permanent Minister of Fine Arts:

A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing, to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well-articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it is none the less something that must be realized.¹¹⁰

Papworthy stays in Canada for a while, and he returns with a young wife, Joan Papworthy, who spoils her husband’s prestige a little by falling in love with a lunatic poet, Reginald Butler.¹¹¹ The caustic side of the point is that, no matter which party is in the Government and which in Opposition, Papworthy’s personal value and complete

¹⁰⁸ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 53.

¹⁰⁹ These words are uttered by Don Rodrigo (Fernando Fernán-Gómez), the protagonist in the Spanish film *El abuelo* (1998), based on Benito Pérez Galdós’s novel (1897) of the same title. Producer: José Luis Garci. [My translation]

¹¹⁰ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 81.

¹¹¹ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 196.

adequate profile, fully recognised by a gentlemen's agreement, causes him to remain in power, either as a properly-speaking Minister of Fine Arts, or simply occupying his seat as a Member of Parliament, though as a member of the Opposition. And this goes on and on as the party rotation system requires. Consequently, Papworthy stays in Government in a post held for life. Papworthy is a talented turncoat. Such attitude guarantees him that he will not be removed. Belloc explains this piece of tomfoolery in a subtly-mock passage:

One set of authorities on constitutional practice were for setting up a special rule *ad hoc* to fit the case of the Minister of Fine Arts. They suggested that the tenant of the day should change his party with each election. The other set – in my judgement the more reasonable – suggested that he should sit as a member of the Government when his own party was in power; and then, when he had passed into Opposition, should still sit as a member of the Government, though as a member of the Opposition. When his party should come in again, he should continue to hold office as a member of the Government party, then, if God granted him life, when he went into Opposition again, he should still sit once more as an Opposition member of the Ministry – and so on, until God should cease to grant him life. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 98)

This is the same arrangement as the case of Lady Caroline Balcombe in *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928) where she is the indispensable Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs for life, in spite of political changes.¹¹²

Papworthy knows how to climb to the top of power, but others also learn their way, even if they began as street vendors on a greengrocer's mobile stand:

George Adolphus Huggins was born in a small street off the Old Kent Road early in the 60s of the last century. His first introduction to commercial life was made at the age of twelve as assistant to his father Jack, or, as one tradition has

¹¹² See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 56.

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it, Jim Huggins, who sold fruit and vegetables from a barrow in that neighbourhood.¹¹³

Huggins marries Matilda and goes on as a costermonger. Huggins deposits other people's money in a bank. The common fund is called Goose Club's. He obtains an interest of £150. He wins more money by betting on horseraces and lending money "at an interest rate (the profession of private banking),"¹¹⁴ in this way increasing his total revenues. Then he sells the humble barrow-stall, and the newly-rich couple move to a villa in the northern suburbs where they change their former appearance and customs to become a well-to-do family. Matilda transforms her name into Amatheia which she considers more in line with her new status. From her new position, George Adolphus Huggins manages to make intimate friends with Hilda Maple. He listens, by chance, into a phone call and takes advantage of the information he obtains through crafty investments. As the Huggins' wealth increases, rich couples begin to invite them to social gatherings. Eventually, Georges Adolphus Huggins manages to come into the aristocracy under the new self-awarded title of Mere de Beurivage.¹¹⁵ Belloc summarizes the process telling his readers Huggins is a war profiteer:

Lord Hambourne [a lecturer on psychology at Oxford, a don], then, was coming to Rackham [Mrs Hilda Maple's charming place in Sussex] on the Saturday early; he was coming in time for lunch and (being poor) by train.

(...)

He hoped, with a doubtful hope, that something would happen, though it was difficult to see what could happen with a dull woman like Hilda Maple and a Yankee lord [Lord Hellup] and a war profiteer [Huggins]. (*The Haunted House* 1928: 139-140)

¹¹³ See *The Haunted House* (1928): 107.

¹¹⁴ See *The Haunted House* (1928): 111.

¹¹⁵ See *The Haunted House* (1928): 107-119.

As a man of the world, Belloc observed a man's anxiety to earn money and a woman's need to show off her affluent position. Usually women, and more much so, wealthy women, did not work in the 1930s. Rich wives flaunted their jewellery and were content to tell everybody about their prosperous situation:

Individuals who perform in a particular team will differ among themselves in the way they apportion their time between mere activity and mere performance. At one extreme, there will be individuals who rarely appear before the audience and are little concerned with appearances. At the other extreme are what are sometimes called "purely ceremonial roles," whose performers will be concerned with the appearance that they make and concerned with little else. (...) The same division of labour can be found in domestic establishments, where something more general than task qualities must be exhibited. The familiar theme of conspicuous consumption describes how husbands in modern society have the job of acquiring socio-economic status, and wives the job of displaying this acquisition.¹¹⁶

The Postmaster-General (1932) insists on Belloc's lifetime idea of unveiling the gallery of power-seekers who are concerned with money as their only lifetime goal. Most of them are self-made people who reach the top despite their poor origin, although they achieve their prominent positions through shrewd investments and, sometimes, sheer swindle.

Belloc enjoyed shaking bourgeois certainties in a way that would be characteristic of postmodernism later on:

In general terms, it [postmodernism] can be said to describe a mood or condition of radical indeterminacy, and a tone of self-conscious, parodic scepticism towards previous certainties in personal, intellectual and political life. (...) It is

¹¹⁶ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 106-107.

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felt that the “grand narratives” of human progress and liberation, rooted in Enlightenment thought, have lost credibility, and that a culture of detached media images has come to suffocate and clone the “real world,” ousting old-fashioned worries about the relationship of the image to the real.¹¹⁷

Since the fall of Berlin Wall in 1989, terms such as ‘postmodernism’ have been gradually disappearing. From around 1995, nobody mentions it. Nobody confesses him- or herself openly Communist either, as the dilution of ideologies was coming to stay, whereas “sustainable development” was in vogue in the 1990s, meaning progress without pollution or other disadvantages of the developed world, such as atomic energy.

No matter what our projection of self is, ethics should permeate all human activity. Moreover, experience shows that sooner or later the truth is revealed, and any human tactic of pretending to play an artificial part may become useless:

When I could buy a second hand yellow Volkswagen Beetle, it was one of the days in my life I fondly remember. At present, a group of managing directors have lied to the market. (...) A mistake that many people know and that they won't be able to conceal, because confidentiality does not exist. You must do things properly because of a basic ethical reason, but on top of this because if we do things badly it will be known, and this is inevitable.¹¹⁸

After the Volkswagen emissions scandal in September 2015, legal and financial repercussions followed. Although industrial reliability is an issue that can be considered beyond the field of the projection of self, there must be a limit in the probable fake aspect of human behaviour. Human activities can be concealed by our everyday masks,

¹¹⁷ Raman Selden, and Peter Widdowson. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993): 175.

¹¹⁸ Pedro Nueno. “Arreglando.” *La Vanguardia*. 4th October 2015.

but integrity should pervade the base of everything. Otherwise coexistence becomes impossible.¹¹⁹

Erving Goffman was aware of the essential need for ethics in any human activity:

Perhaps a moral note can be permitted at the end. In this report the expressive component of social life has been treated as a source of impressions given to or taken by others.

(...)

Underlying all social interaction there seems to be a fundamental dialectic. When one individual enters the presence of others, he will want to discover the facts of the situation.

(...)

The individual tends to treat the others present on the basis of the impression they give now about the past and the future. It is here that the communicative acts are translated into moral ones. The impressions that the others give tend to be treated as claims and promises they have implicitly made and claims and promises tend to have a moral character.¹²⁰

Little did Belloc suspect that his novels could be analysed in terms of the projection of self his characters performed. The fact is that he created characters who impersonate honest, neutral, and insidious aspects of human behaviour. Belloc's stories usually finished with half-hearted praise of virtue, because he maintained some sort of permanent self-detachment from human actions. He was not a moralistic preacher. On the contrary, he liked to present apparently absurd stories that craftily conveyed human silliness and our usual fatuous ambition to earn cash fast along with our delusions of greatness.

¹¹⁹ The Volkswagen emissions scandal in September 2015 heralded in the era that has come to be called "post-truth." Oxford Dictionaries selected "post-truth" as the international word of the year for 2016.

¹²⁰ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971): 241, 242.



Fig. 9. Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953). Painting by Sir James Gunn /1949).
This painting hangs in the Hall of the Oxford Union (Speaight 1957: 496)
(See Joseph Pearce 2002: 278)

Chapter Eight

Representations of Women

[in *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904); *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908); *A Change in the Cabinet* (1909); *Pongo and The Bull* (1910); *The Girondin* (1911); *The Green Overcoat* (1912); *Mr Petre* (1925); *The Haunted House* (1927); *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928); *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929); *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929); *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930); and *The Postmaster-General* (1932)]

Belloc lived surrounded by women in his childhood. Apart from his mother, Bessie, and his sister, Marie, his two grandmothers were also at home, nurtured him and were captivated by young Belloc's occurrences and antics. He grew up in a select cultural environment, as his mother had a large circle of literature-lover friends, including George Eliot who frequented her get-togethers. Later in life Belloc came to know Elodie, the American woman he was going to marry and whom he sadly mourned when she died quite young in 1914, at the age of forty-two. A very social and talkative person, Belloc knew many women, either his own secretaries, his friends' wives, influential women in London's coteries or bosom women friends like Lady Juliet Duff, the widow of Sir Robert George Vivian Duff, 2nd Baronet of Vaynol Park. Belloc was infatuated with her and, from 1916 onwards, he dined with her almost every night when he happened to be in London. Nevertheless, their relationship was only based on sincere, friendly esteem and mutual admiration.

It is not strange that Belloc created several female characters in his fiction. The representation of women was increasingly changing from stereotypical to innovatory traits. In his first novels, women do not talk much, except when their husbands are present, they are smart dressers who have a dignified manner, although they are usually submissive. The tendency changes little by little, and in *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), *The*

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Girondin (1911), *The Haunted House* (1927), *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), and *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929), determined women appear, and some of them are very wealthy collectors of art, chief executive officers, or high-ranking officials.

In this way, Belloc imagines a female struggle for political power and the threats surrounding political leaders, in this case women leaders. Belloc goes ahead of his own time, and he constructs a world of political ambitions in which women are the protagonists. Fifty-one years before Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1979, seventy-seven years before Angela Merkel became Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2005, seventy-eight years before Michelle Bachelet became the President of Chile in 2006, and eighty-eight years before Hillary Clinton put herself forward as USA presidential candidate in 2016, Belloc imagined the entertaining political sphere which is showed in *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928). Belloc was somewhat innovative when he introduced women in top positions in his novels. It is true that he generally creates atmospheres that are full of patriarchal values and stereotypical representations of women, but he just accepts them. Some of his female characters rival each other, while sisterhood, as a sincere cooperation relationship, is not foreshadowed in Belloc's novels.

Sorority, Sisterhood

Sisterhood can be defined by the relationship of brotherhood and solidarity between women so as to create support networks which push forward social changes in order to achieve equality. The term sisterhood is based on Latin roots; just the same as brotherhood or fraternity, which comes from the Latin root "frater" (brother), in this case the Latin root is "soror" (sister). Sisterhood, or sorority was coined in the 1970s by feminists in the United States of America, and it is a slogan which spreads and calls women to become united while they offer mutual support before the pervading culture, which is still patriarchal and in which discriminations survive in an entrenched way. Sisterhood implies ethical, political, and practical dimensions of contemporary feminism. Women look for positive relationships and some sort of existential alliance

with other women. This collaboration presupposes inbred political action to fight against all forms of oppression. Women try to obtain reciprocal support to increase the power of gender and the vital autonomy of each woman. Such complicity is neither an end-in-itself, nor a naïve plea for an allegedly natural solidarity between women. They claim female complicity to achieve social change, so this abetting means a political dimension. For example, in Iceland, since 1975, women demonstrate every year on a particular day at 14:38 hours against the gender pay gap. This is the time from which women “work for free.”

In Spain, twenty years ago, the word “gender,” as it currently stands, did not exist. *Femicidio* is included in the Dictionary of the Royal Academy of Spanish (RAE) since 2014. Marcela Lagarde was the Mexican anthropologist who coined this term to designate the situation of women in Ciudad Juárez. In Mexico, the feminist digital review *antesdeeva.com* proposes a series of hints to foster sisterhood in the country. A subheading in this magazine affirms sorority is the social agreement between women whose goal is the empowerment of female gender.¹

Belloc described women in ambivalent terms. Such tendency pervaded through his literary production because, some men of letters agree on this, a writer always writes the same novel.² A writer changes as time goes by, his circumstances and frame of mind too, but his inbred ideas and personal obsessions usually tend to remain fixed over time. What is more, his or her own ideological position and personal beliefs, which he or she does not state literally, because he or she is neither a philosopher nor a politician, can be guessed at by the reader by just analysing the creation of characters, the use of subtle metaphors, plot intricacies, and final solutions to the denouement of the novel. All these

¹ Cristina Sen. “Sororidad, la nueva fraternidad entre mujeres.” *La Vanguardia*. 18th December 2016.

² Spanish novelist Luis Landero repeated this saying to recognise the creative substrate which is common in many novels:

Q – Even though the two novels are very different, there is a trait which identifies one and the other. It is the failure of their protagonists. The characters in your books are people who are not what they would like to have been.

A – Yes, this is my theme. In fact, I am working on a third novel which is also related to this topic. (...) In my third novel, this is what comes. I have not thought it out beforehand, but this is what comes. So it must be true that we are always writing the same novel. (Marta Rivera de la Cruz. “Entrevista a Luis Landero.” *Espéculo. Revista Literaria*. No 1. November 1995. Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1995). [My translation]

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elements are not designed and chosen by sheer chance; they are the result of a conscious decision on the part of the novelist.³

Some of the women in Belloc's novels represent exactly what the society of the day expected from a self-respecting woman, basically a discreet, elegant person who remained unobtrusively on a second level, always ready to help her husband and boss, and offer him emotional and spiritual support. This is the case of Mrs Eliza Burden and her daughters Ermyntude and Gwynnys in *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904). Similarly, Mrs Clutterbuck (no proper name is given) is a serious, balanced woman who only speaks in the presence of her husband. Mrs Clutterbuck duly encourages her husband when he feels a bit depressed on Election Day of 1911. In *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908), women are very few; they are running smooth and they are almost not seen, except for Mary Smith, who is an evanescent character in this novel, but her sudden appearance serves as a precursor to her future remarkable activity in the following novels.

Sometimes, there is a picturesque note to make the reader smile. In *The Green Overcoat* (1912), Professor Higginson's landlady, Mrs Martha Randle, is a wise and shrewd widow who has a long experience of coping with the most frequent male excuses to conceal nights out. Her clinical eye makes her suspect that Higginson is hiding something uncomfortable for him, and she is curious to hear more about the don's lengthy absence. Professor Higginson's torn clothes and mangled body suggest that he has been boozing and squabbling with other "undesirables." Mrs Martha Randle produces "a continuous string of lamentations and questionings," for she is very con-

³ The Swedish Academy announced this morning that the 2014 Nobel Prize in Literature has been awarded to French writer, Patrick Modiano, "for the art of memory with which he has evoked the most ungrasped human destinies and unlocked the life-world of the occupation."

Many of Modiano's novels, like his debut *La Place de L'Etoile*, examine the moral struggles of those living under the Nazi occupation – and the dreamlike experience of navigating time and loss. (...) Though he has written more than twenty novels, Modiano has said that he is "always writing the same book." (Noah Gordon. "French Author Patrick Modiano, 2014's Nobel Laureate in Literature." Washington DC: *The Atlantic Daily. World Edition*. 9th October 2014) <www.theatlantic.com>



"Our younger hostesses"

*Pleasing sketch of the Honble. Isabeau Hellup with her dog
Lovey-Lad; from the pencil of Mr. Louth and appear-
ing (syndicated) throughout the Press of
England and America*

Fig. 10. Isabeau Hellup. Drawing by G.K. Chesterton. *The Haunted House* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1928): 61

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cerned about upholding the good reputation of her boarding house in Ormeston's Quebec Street.⁴

In *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), Mary Smith is a widow who plays an important role in all kinds of matters, from personal relationships to political activities. Belloc brings female characters to the forefront and inaugurates his literary period in which women will have a decisive effect in far-reaching issues. Women are no longer static figures, but people who are very aware of their personal value and want to intervene in everything. For example, Victoria Mosel, in *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), behaves as a bold intruder who, taking advantage of her friendship with Margaret De Villon, the Premier's wife, has fun just dealing with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in a shameless familiarity that shocks the reader, even though such female attitude takes place in the relaxed atmosphere of a spring break in a stately home. There is a nuance of sorority between these three women, Margaret De Villon, Mary Smith, and Victoria Mosel. The first two women seriously try to achieve their objectives, political and personal, whereas Victoria Mosel's demeanour is lighter and juvenile. Yet the three of them understand and tolerate each other's initiatives beyond the moments of nervousness and impatience.

Belloc introduced, later, another group of three women in *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928) who are interrelated, since they participate in politics simultaneously. Mary Bullar as a tough Prime Minister, and Lady Caroline Balcombe as the omniscient and "indispensable" Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs who is very concerned with her objective of interfering with Mary Bullar and, if possible, supersede her. The third woman, Arabella Slackett – with her nickname Balmy Jane – is mentally ill, and Belloc calls her and her clique "BFs," in other words, "Born Fanatics." At the end of the novel, Balmy Jane annoys Mary Bullar and Lady Caroline Balcombe in a memorable House of Commons session, although Mary Bullar's brave defence of British democracy and of appropriate Government action emerge triumphant. These three women do not share the same objectives in the positive sense, although they all seek power. The struggle for political (and personal) power is a constant in the female characters of Belloc's latest

⁴ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 105-111.

novels, so much so that the empowerment of the female gender, which is one of the main goals of sorority or sisterhood, ceases to be an abstract goal and becomes an urgent objective in a daily struggle.

Such three women are far away from the apparently submissive role of both efficient secretaries, Miss Gaylor and Miss Rose Fairweather, the restrained behaviour and obedient attitude of Mrs Eliza Burden and Mrs Clutterbuck, and the sweet resignation of beautiful Belinda. On the contrary, Mary Bullar, Lady Caroline Balcombe, and Arabella Slacket want to rule right now; they are ready to fight to achieve their commanding posts in the nitty-gritty arena.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949)⁵ commented that women have always been referred to in their role as wife, mother, sister or daughter, and that it was about time that women reached their specific identity.⁶ In the last novels of Belloc, references to women as wives or relatives of important men are just sheer anecdotes, since most of the women have remarkable jobs and their decisions are politically important. In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), Ethel Mudgson is mentioned at the very beginning of the novel as the head of the espionage service in Europe, based in southern France.⁷ Furthermore, perhaps Mary Smith is one of the most relevant female characters that Belloc creates. Inspired by Margot Asquith (née Tennant), the second wife of the Premier Herbert H. Asquith, Belloc describes a very determined woman who is very well-informed and well-connected, helps several politicians, advises them, influences them, promotes her protégés and is nearly everything in public life, but never doubtful, hesitant or self-conscious.

Margaret Mead (1901-1978) emphasized humans are very pliable. Women in Belloc's latest novels assume many functions traditionally associated with men, particularly leading roles. In addition to this, Belloc presents some women as ambitious

⁵ Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2011)

⁶ Sometimes women had a relevant role though. In the Civil Code of Catalonia (derived from Catalonia's customary law), the eldest daughter could inherit all the properties of the family, exactly the same as a male heir. She was the *pubilla* (heiress). The *pubilla* could sell all the properties without permission from her husband, a legal norm which did not exist in Spain, as a woman needed her husband's permission to do so.

⁷ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 30-31.

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human beings ready to pull the carpet from underneath their rivals in order to be the first person in each line to achieve the leadership.

Sorority does exist in many fields, although the feminine struggle is not a uniquely homogeneous tendency, but it represents a huge variety of ideas, objectives, and policies. The women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s generated diverse lines of thought. Currently, there are political initiatives in the European Union that propose new measures to deal with women in a distinctive way, for example, in pharmacological treatments which were considered homogeneous for everybody until recently.⁸

Naturally, Belloc was aware of the suffragette movement and Emmeline Pankhurst's (1858-1928) decisive activities for social transformation, her persistent social activism which constituted a kind of sorority, a sound female alliance earlier in the twentieth century. She created the Women's Social and Political Union in 1903. Belloc published his first novel the next year, and he observed increasingly how the female struggle for equality was characteristic of industrial societies, and how they gained momentum as soon as society acquired some degree of well-being. In France, his native country that he knew very well, Jeanne Schmahl (1846-1915) founded the "Union française pour le suffrage des femmes," and Cécile Brunschvicg (1877-1946) was one of its leaders.⁹ Yet Belloc was not prone to write and argue about this subject matter. Belloc wrote about women who were natural leaders, even though his novels had the characteristic satirical tinge that relativized his opinions about the issue. More than reciprocal support among women, Belloc wrote about their open competition to attain and maintain power. In this respect, women are very similar to men.

⁸ Beatriz Becerra is a Spanish MEP and Vice President of the Human Rights Subcommittee in the European Parliament. She is also a member of the Committees on Women's Rights, Development, and Requests.

On 14th February 2017, her report on gender equality in mental health and clinical research was passed. She claims that clinical trials of drugs must be done both on men and women, so labels on drugs must detail if there were women participating in those clinical trials, and if such drug effects can differ depending on the sex. Side effects must be also specified differently, for men and women, particularly regarding some mental conditions, for example, depression.

⁹ Women were given the vote in 1920 in the United States of America, in 1928 in the United Kingdom, and in 1931 in Spain.

* * *

In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), Mary Bullar is Prime Minister, another woman, Lady Caroline Balcombe, is Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, another woman, Ethel Mudgson, is the most efficient spy and head of the central “Distribution Office” in Europe, another woman, Arabella Slackett (or Balmy Jane), is the main intruder in everyone’s life, another woman, Miss Gaylor, is the neatly-dressed secretary who eavesdrops behind the thick curtain on behalf of her male boss, and other women, such as Sally Goff and Mrs Baddenham, look at everything in amusement or surprise. This is a female field of relationships, sometimes kind, sometimes showing a fierce struggle for power, sometimes simply hilarious and, on some occasions, a bit crazy, which Belloc concocted to form *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928).

This novel was entitled *Shadowed!* in the American edition of 1929.¹⁰ In that year, a magazine review in the United States of America described the novel thus:

[This is] Lady Caroline Balcombe, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the England (in 1979) of Mr Belloc’s fancy. Lady Caroline is nevertheless holding portfolio in the Cabinet of the Communists, headed by Mrs Mary Bullar, and including, for the Home Office, Mrs Bullar’s cousin, a gentleman, with six generations of squires behind him, who was “therefore, naturally of the Communist party, the spiritual descendants of the old Unionists, themselves the spiritual descendants of the old Tories, for, thank Heaven,” cries Mr Belloc, “there is no breach of continuity in our institutions!”

This continuity is further suggested by the fact that all these people are involved in an effort to wring from the representative of West Irania, a radical little state under the sgis [*sic*] of Moscow, a concession to exploit his country’s valuable minerals before the concession can be bought by either of two groups of capitalists, one headed by a millionaire peer and journalist, the other by a canny Scot. And perhaps it also indicates what seems to Mr Belloc merely the continuity of tradition that all these three rival groups start in full cry after the

¹⁰ Hilaire Belloc. *Shadowed!* (New York: Harper and Bros, 1929).

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wrong man, an innocent, timid colonial on his first visit to England, whose protestations are taken merely to indicate “deepness,” and who is hounded through a series of adventures by a consistently wrong-headed persecution which reduces him to violence and the reader to helpless mirth.

The comment of Mr Chesterton’s illustrations enriches the text every few pages, and Mr Chesterton’s rollicking pencil has never been so happy. As a burlesque mystery story, a gorgeous, breathless farce, a good humoured (or usually good humoured) satire on politicians, millionaires, detectives, and the devious ways of high finance, Mr Belloc’s book leaves nothing to be desired. And if one detects satire on personages and events less remote than 1979, and even find in the pudgy, bucolic Mrs Bullar and the adventurous Lady Caroline suggestions of contemporary Titans, Mr Belloc’s inner intention and the reader’s consequent unholy joy is a matter entirely between them.¹¹

* * *

In *Mr Clutterbuck’s Election* (1908), the protagonist has been married for eighteen years. Mrs Clutterbuck¹² is described as a very polite, self-restrained woman who habitually dresses in black, her hair is black, too, and shines “with extraordinary precision.”¹³ She speaks little, except in the presence of her husband and is, on the whole, “a cultivated woman of the gentle sort.”¹⁴ She has no children and is active in four charity societies.¹⁵ Mrs Clutterbuck does not want to interfere with any of her husband’s activities:

As Mr Clutterbuck entered, Mrs Clutterbuck continued her work of embroidery at the yellow centre (...) nor was she the first to speak.

¹¹ “Rollicking Satire.” *The Saturday Review of Literature*. New York. 2nd March 1929.

¹² No first name is given.

¹³ See *Mr Clutterbuck’s Election* (1908): 8.

¹⁴ See *Mr Clutterbuck’s Election* (1908): 8.

¹⁵ See *Mr Clutterbuck’s Election* (1908): 9.

Mr Clutterbuck, standing at the fire parting his coat tails and looking up toward that ornament in the ceiling whence depended the gas pipe, said boldly: “Well, he got nothing out of *me!*”

Mrs Clutterbuck, without lifting her eyes, replied as rapidly as her needlework: “I don’t want to hear about your business affairs, Mr Clutterbuck. I leave gentlemen to what concerns gentlemen. I hope I know *my* work, and that I don’t interfere where I might only make trouble.” (*Mr Clutterbuck’s Election* 1908: 10)

Mrs Clutterbuck’s attitude is precisely what could be expected from a correct wife of the middle class at the time that the novel was published. When Mr Clutterbuck is ill his wife solicitously helps him in anything:

He was languid and utterly indifferent, as convalescents are, to what had hitherto been his chief interests, but as a matter of widely duty Mrs Clutterbuck felt herself bound to read him at full length the City article in the *Times*. (...)

A strong Imperialist, like most women of the governing classes and of the Established Faith, whether of this country or of Scotland, she naturally rejoiced to observe securely forged yet another bond with the Britains Overseas. She could not comprehend little of the technicalities of promotion, but she was aware that another of these achievements (...) was upon the eve of its success, and she rejoiced with a joy in which the love of country stood side by side with a pure and sincere attachment to her religion. (*Mr Clutterbuck’s Election* 1908: 50)

Belloc’s anti-imperialist tendency is apparent in these last lines which certainly are a bit mockingly cynical in their intimate blending of imperialism and patriotic religion. Since the novel was published in 1908, most readers could find these considerations perfectly adequate and even uplifting. Rogue Belloc could write with tongue-in-cheek humour

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about Mrs Clutterbuck's many virtues. Of course, she was a faithful worshiper of the Established Church, and very kind to members of other denominations:

In religion, she was, I need hardly add, of the Anglican persuasion, in which capacity she attended the church of the Rev Isaac Fowle; though she was not above worshipping with her fellow citizens of other denominations when social duty or the accident of hospitality demanded such a courtesy. (*Mr Clutterbuck's Election* 1908: 9-10)

When Election day arrives – 19th November 1911 – Mr Clutterbuck is very nervous and depressed in turn. The night before at the Stephens, he cannot get much sleep, although Mr and Mrs Stephens, as well as Mrs Clutterbuck, help him to pull himself together. Both women invite Mr Clutterbuck to take the front seat in the car and keep his nose into the air to face up to the difficulties:

He [Clutterbuck] rose tired out at seven, dressed wearily, and came down upon that fatal day, November 19, 1911. He saw with increased depression that it was raining. (...)

During the few moments after breakfast which our great English merchants devote to glancing at the daily Press, he could not bring himself to look at the papers which lay upon the table. (...)

Luckily for him his cheery host [Mr Stephens] did not leave him long in this misery. He found him standing listless in the hall, slapped him on the back and said in a loud and hearty voice:

“You've got to come with me! The motor's ready and the Missus'll be coming down at once. Then he whispered as the suggestion required: Brandy? All's Mum!”

(...)

They went out together to the car. Within a quarter of an hour his hostess and Mrs Clutterbuck had joined them. There was a little byplay as to who should

sit in the front seats – a byplay in which Mr Clutterbuck himself was too dispirited to join – but it was soon decided by the ladies themselves that the hero of the occasion should appear next to the driver, nor did the physical danger to which such a position exposed him enter the minds of these loyal friends. (*Mr Clutterbuck's Election* 1908: 133-134)

Women are here supporting the “hero,” the candidate for the National Party, Mr Clutterbuck. They are encouraging a man, which is one of the qualities that shaped the traditional role of women at the time. In the scene quoted here, they are a bit late getting into the car. Belloc writes “a quarter of an hour,” perhaps because of the finishing touches of make-up and styling their adequately elegant dresses. The text does not say so, readers can infer it from Belloc’s remark. Mr Stephen’s jocular language includes the funny expression “the Missus,” since his aim is to encourage the hesitant Mr Clutterbuck. Readers are not completely sure Mrs Stephens would have liked such a word to designate her in her presence.

From Margot Tennant to Mary Smith

A new female character is introduced in *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908), and she exceeds the features of a discreet woman of the Edwardian period to become an aristocratic member of far-reaching social influence. Mary Smith is of a well-established middle rank and a member of the stronger core of the governing class. She is the intimate friend of the Prime Minister. William Bailey is Mary Smith’s brother and the Prime Minister’s relative too.¹⁶ Mary Smith loves her brother, in spite of his eccentric demeanour:

Mary Smith loved her brother. She did all she could to dispel these mists and to bring out that decent side of him which had made him years ago as popular a young man as any in London – but he was past praying for. A private income, large, like all the Bailey incomes, of over £4,000 a year, permitted him a

¹⁶ See *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908): 62, 63, 180, 274.

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dangerous independence; (...) depending upon the perpetual attention of his manservant Zachary, an honest fellow enough, but one who, from perpetual association with his master, seemed to have imbibed something of that master's eccentricities. (*Mr Clutterbuck's Election* 1908: 180)

On 2nd July 1911, the Clutterbucks sweep up the London Road to St James's Palace and to Mary Smith's home. They leave at night, at 11:30, while Mrs Clutterbuck complains about her fatigue, although her husband is very happy because he thinks Mary Smith has supplied a transcendental change in his life by just indicating that young Irish Charlie Fitzgerald can be his brand-new secretary.¹⁷ Mary Smith appears again in *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), although in that novel William Bailey is her cousin, an eccentric, wealthy and middle age single:¹⁸

Belloc was quick to turn his political experience to literary account, and the result was two satirical novels, *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908) and *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909). (...) They lack the gravity, and therefore the permanence, of *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904), although Burden himself is reincarnated in Mr Clutterbuck, another honest and bewildered representative of the English Middle Classes. (...) Other characters, like Mary Smith, the Edwardian hostess who makes or mars political fortunes, now appear among the *dramatis personae*. Belloc had met her, no doubt, in the fashionable circles which he used occasionally to frequent but to which he never, in any serious sense, belonged. (Speaight 1957: 252)¹⁹

* * *

It seems that Belloc was inspired in the real person of Margot Asquith (née Tennant), Herbert H Asquith's second wife, to create the restless character of Mary Smith. Obviously, he selected only some features of Margot Tennant's temperament and

¹⁷ See *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908): 71, 77, 78-79.

¹⁸ See *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908): 33.

¹⁹ Robert Speaight. *The Life of Hilaire Belloc*. (London: Hollis and Carter, 1957)

transformed them as he pleased. Margot Tennant was a peculiar woman in many aspects, and it is not strange that Belloc paid attention to her, as it was nearly impossible not to observe her independence of thought and action. The Prime Minister, Herbert H Asquith and Belloc got on very well during the years Belloc was MP for Salford, so it is likely that Belloc gained important first-hand knowledge about Margot Asquith. When Belloc created the character of Mary Smith, particularly in her wanderings in *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), he had in mind Margot Tennant's attitude in respect of her encouragement of her husband's ambition. In real life, Margot Tennant introduced Herbert H Asquith into the socially well-established, traditional upper class of which the Prime Minister had had no previous experience. In *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), Belloc included such features of Margot Tennant's character in the cunning way Margaret De Villon, Dolly's wife, both argues, jokes with Dolly, and drives him forward, too, when he hesitates about which political path he must take. In real life, Margot Tennant was very frank, perhaps too much so in her prominent position as wife of the Prime Minister, but she preferred to follow her inbred tendency to utter caustic, clever remarks.

When Asquith's first wife, Hellen K. Melland, died of typhus fever in 1891, he was already in love with Margot Tennant, a girl who was not from the aristocracy but who belonged to a wealthy family. She was the daughter of an affluent businessman, a very lively and wilful girl, also unpredictable and very snobbish in social and intellectual matters. Violet, Herbert H Asquith's daughter from his first marriage, recognised Margot's sincere devotion to Asquith.

Anne de Courcy wrote her book on Margot Tennant, and her Introduction described some aspects of Margot's enthralling personality:

Most books have at least one *raison d'être*. Mine is a fascination with Margot Asquith – her originality, wit, chic, vitality, the intensity of her emotions, often so forcefully expressed – and the drama of her last five years as Prime Minister's wife during a time that is one of the most important in our history.

Margot was someone who had created herself and her own path through life. She was largely self-educated, with a passion to learn more. In an era when “Society” was narrow, close-knit and aristocratic, Margot, a tradesman’s granddaughter, surmounted by sheer force of personality the invisible stockade that surrounded this elite to arrive at its inner heart, disposing *en route* with any of its conventions – such as chaperonage – that she considered meaningless.

But what she really enjoyed was the conversation of the highly intelligent; and by the time she was twenty-five, she was friends with most of the cleverest men in the country. Gladstone, who wrote a poem to her, sat her on his knee; Oscar Wilde dedicated a story to her; admirers wrote to her daily; the great Benjamin Jowett, Regis Professor of Greek and Master of Balliol College, Oxford, advised her on what to read and whom to marry. No beauty in an age of “beauties,” she compensated for her lack of looks by superb, stylish clothes. (Anne de Courcy. *Margot at War. Love and Betrayal in Downing Street, 1912-1916* 2014: 1)²⁰

Those who knew her are certain that,

Margot was a woman of extraordinary style. She flashed through London society at a time when society was very hard to break into. She behaved quite differently from other girls at the time. (...)

The sixth daughter and one of 11 children of Charles Tennant and his wife Emma, Margot had enjoyed a girlhood unshackled by the usual restraints imposed on her sex, roaming the moorlands at will near the family estate, Glenn, in Peebleshire. Her sporting passions were riding and golf, but she was as admired for her sharp wit and intelligence.

(...)

²⁰ Anne de Courcy. *Margot at War. Love and Betrayal in Downing Street, 1912-1916*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2014): 1.

Why was it that so many people disliked her? Because she dared to be different? She was very truthful. So, in the case of being pro-German, she had been to Munich when she was 17 (...), and she admired German music and culture. (...) Margot wouldn't lie.

Margot, who bore five children, of whom only two survived infancy, pursued a career as a writer after her husband's death in 1928 left her with little money.

(...)

[Margot had] the urge to tell the unvarnished truth.²¹

Margot was very close to her sister, Laura. When they were young girls, they were really wild, uninhibited, and spent a lot of time in outings around the estate house or wandering through nearby moors. Riding and golf were Margot's lifelong passions. She was not afraid of anything anymore, a very determined girl indeed, because she was accustomed to risk and sporting activities. Margot was physically very brave and was pleased to hunt with a pack of hounds. Nevertheless, she never recovered from Laura's death in 1888, and she suffered from insomnia continuously. Her conversation was sharp and witty to such a point that sometimes she gave every impression of being a bit rude.

At any rate, Belloc observed this woman from a distance and resorted to her feminine determination when he created the character of ineffable Mary Smith, the gossip, intriguing, well-connected, influential upper-class lady who advised anyone while openly or furtively helped or hindered political careers in turn.

In *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), Mary Smith is a widow who is going to play an important role in the story. She succeeds in one of her main goals, that is, promoting her *protégé*, George Mulross Demaine. Mary Smith is like a kind of good fairy, a kindly powerful woman who always...

²¹ Peter Stanford. "Meet Margot Asquith – a prime minister's wife who was more vilified than Cherie... The rumours and myths surrounding Margot Asquith fuelled her biographer Anne de Courcy's fascination with her." *The Telegraph*. 29th October 2014.

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plumps across the scene and is perceived to be the friend, the confidant, the cousin, the sister in law of at least three quarters of what counts in England. (*A Change in The Cabinet* 1909: 17)

She indulges in the companionship of anybody who is important and has relatives everywhere, near or distant, friends whom she calls by their Christian name.²² She is a very influential character.²³ A.N. Wilson explains how Belloc created Mary Smith from Margot Asquith's temperament and demeanour:

Margot was the intriguing gossip political hostess, related to most of the aristocratic families in England, forever shoving her relations and her rich Jewish friends into positions of prominence.²⁴

* * *

In *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), Mary Smith arranges George Mulross Demaine's marriage to a very rich American girl, Studie Benson, Ole Man Benson's daughter. Demaine is a complete fiasco as an MP, but he is lucky to be Mary Smith's "sort of nephew." She is the wily matchmaker who knows best what is convenient for clumsy Demaine. On one occasion, Mary is fed up with her *protégé*, and she angrily expels him from the Petherington's House where they are having a party because Demaine awkwardly trips and stumbles over the great stuffed bear at the entrance.²⁵ Nevertheless, all in all Mary Smith is persistent in helping Demaine, at any rate to find some worthy post in the political Establishment.²⁶ She is thinking about the prospective vacancy of the Warden of the Court of Dowry, although she needs to oust honest Charles Repton to succeed in her manoeuvre.²⁷

²² See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 17, 19.

²³ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 18.

²⁴ A.N. Wilson. *Hilaire Belloc: A Biography* (2003): 149.

²⁵ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 49-50.

²⁶ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 64.

²⁷ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 63, 111, 128.

Mary Smith's cousin is William Bailey, an eccentric, wealthy bachelor²⁸ who already appeared in the previous novel, *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908). People call colloquially "Dolly" the Prime Minister who will be a major character in the next novel, *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), with the same nickname. In *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), Dolly is Mary Smith's cousin and she deals with him with great homeliness.

The Prime Minister wished from the bottom of his heart that he could live in that field for a week. He rose to one despairing rally:

"Mary," he said, "suppose it rains?"

"Oh Dolly, Dolly, Dolly!" she answered stopping short and standing in front of him. "It's for all the world as though you were just back from school for the last time, and I was a little girl who had been sent for on the grand occasion to tea."

She put both hands on his awkward shoulders to stop him and she kissed him anywhere upon the face.

"It won't rain, Dolly," she said, "I've seen to that." (*A Change in The Cabinet* 1909: 67)

By the end of the novel, Mary Smith has succeeded in her craving, as helpless Demaine is appointed the new Warden of the Court of Dowry, just replacing honest Charles Repton who is awarded a peerage in turn. When the long session at the House of Commons finishes, there is a magnificent supper-party at Mary Smith's in St James's. Belloc describes the grandeur of that social gathering, and he makes Mary Smith invitingly utter that all important people will be there:

When the House of Commons rose, near midnight, Dolly and Dimmy [Demaine] went out together by the door of the private rooms into the cool air and there in the courtyard were the glowing lamps of Mary's motor car. She beckoned them, and they got in.

²⁸ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909): 33.

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“You got to come to supper tonight,” she said mysteriously. “They’ll all be there.”

(...) after them in single file raced through London half a dozen taxis and cars and broughams all making in a stream for St James’s.

It made such a supper-party as Mary Smith alone in London could gather!

Her sister-in-law, with the Leader of the Opposition, and his brother; his right-hand man who had been Chancellor in the last administration; his nephew, the Postmaster General; Dolly himself; Dolly’s brother-in-law, the Secretary for India; his little nephew’s wife’s cousin at the Board of Trade, and his stepmother’s brother at the Admiralty, sat down, – and so did Dimmy, who was there without his wife, and also, I regret to say, without a stud, or rather without the head of a stud, in his shirt; for somehow it had broken off.

But the reader will have but an imperfect picture of that jolly table if he/she imagines that it was a mere family party.

Our public life is a larger thing than that! Of the five members of the two front benches who were not connected by marriage, two were present... (*A Change in The Cabinet* 1909: 233-234)

Belloc goes on whipping what, he considers, is the corrupted world of English politics, its interconnection and peculiar system of exchanging favours, a whole rigmarole controlled and encouraged by the subtle and persistent influence of Mary Smith.

Active Margaret De Villon, shrewd Mary Smith, and playful Victoria Mosel

In *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), Dolly, the Prime Minister, is happily married to Margaret De Villon, thirty years younger. Margaret De Villon is very rich, the daughter of a French nobleman who naturalised forty years before when Margaret was just a baby. Dolly’s wife is also involved in political issues, as she wants to break her

husband's, Dolly's, majority.²⁹ Mary Smith is Margaret De Villon's confidant, and Victoria Mosel, who is still unmarried, is Margaret de Villon's bosom friend. Mary Smith's innumerable cousins loiter about Habberton's stately home.

Belloc just says in passing that the reader, maybe, is familiar with the peculiar character of Victoria Mosel in some previous novel. She is a gossipy woman who likes the high life, eating, smoking, horse-riding, and enjoying the good things in life. She also likes to interrupt other people's conversation, and to be the first to break the news, so she is completely satisfied when she proves that she knows something that the others do not. She competes to become the most well-informed member of the group:

Mary Smith was beginning [to speak], when Victoria Mosel came into the room humming loudly; she was in her riding habit, not much splashed, her hair tidy, and her eyes full of curiosity which made Dolly, who was about to answer, shut his mouth like a steel trap. (...) She passed on, still humming louder than ever, to a sideboard, cut herself a large slice of cold meat and bore her plate to the place by the side of the Leader of the Opposition. The ten years which had passed since the reader last met her (if he ever did) had left her still unmarried. She drew her chair in noisily against Pongo's, gave him a hearty slap on the back, and begged him not to mind her if he was talking shop; then added:

"I can always pump Mary, you know."

"There is nothing to pump, Vic," said Mary Smith a little sharply.

"Yes, there is," said Victoria Mosel calmly, "But it doesn't matter anyhow, for it's all out."

"Then you know more about it than we do, Miss Mosel," said Pennybunt grimly.

"Aunt Rebecca does," said Victoria unperturbed. And a vision of the Duchess of Battersea floated before the perturbed minds of the two politicians.

Two more of the party strolled in; two of the younger ones, brothers, a couple of Mary's innumerable cousins.

²⁹ See *Pongo and The Bull*(1910): 18.

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(...)

There was a silence until Victoria Mosel, having thoroughly finished her plate of meat, and decided to eat no more, whipped out a cigarette, and as she was lighting it mumbled:

“Peggy’s back!”

“What!” shouted the Leader of the Opposition, quite forgetting his manners.

“I told you so,” said Dolly, with a curious smile.

“You did nothing of that sort,” snapped Mary Smith. (...)

“Where is she?” said the Leader of the Opposition at last, a little wildly.

“Aunt Rebecca’s, of course,” said Victoria Mosel, enjoying her triumph.

(Pongo and The Bull 1910: 26-28)

Margaret De Villon has a peculiar sense of humour when the occasion requires. She is not the sheer noble, caring, and devoted wife some Edwardian people might think appropriate, but a clever woman who knows where it hurts most and knows how to criticise and kid. One day, Dolly and his wife, Peggy, coincide at the lawyer’s, as they usually go there to check separately the state of each other’s business. They are in the waiting room for quite a long time, and they laugh at each other by making witty remarks on the other’s bad luck because of their mutual delay. Although the scene is apparently funny, it is shocking how cold and detached the couple is. Belloc depicts husband and wife more as ironical, even mocking, business mates than as a close married couple:

Since his marriage, one or two little arrangements had had to be made from time to time to consult her lawyers in connection with them. The husband and wife understood each other perfectly, and Peggy had immediately consented after her marriage to put her affairs into the same hands as his. How delighted, therefore, was not Dolly to find, when he walked into the waiting-room of the lawyer’s office, that Peggy, in another enormous hat, and mauve today, whereas only

yesterday she had been blue, was sitting there looking at a pile of old illustrated papers. (...) He wondered at the office's discourtesy in keeping a woman of her position waiting. It is very difficult for people who count in modern England to express such petty injuries. Dolly got near it by asking Peggy whether she was waiting for somebody who was upstairs. Peggy answered by saying:

“For that matter, why are they keeping *you* waiting? They might have known it was you! You don't know how like yourself you look, Dolly!”

Then they both laughed.

They were skirting on the edge of that most dangerous subjects, the deference due from the middle class to its superiors. They were hinting at it in little phrases that they only used to each other. (...) a stammering lad came in sweating with fear and said Mr Crump was exceedingly annoyed and wished to say how sorry he was. And would not Peggy come up *at once*? There had been a misunderstanding!

Peggy, simply remarking “I've won, dear,” swept upstairs. (*Pongo and The Bull* 1910: 188-190)

The scene goes on with Mr Crump sending another employee to apologize for the delay and asking Dolly to come into the office immediately. Peggy calls Dolly to come into the office in her usual informal way:

And the painful incident was luckily closed by the ring of Peggy's voice from the top of the stairs telling Dolly to come up, it was something they could discuss together. Dolly was relieved; he hated business.

As a result of that little interview both husband and wife were somewhat wealthier when they left the office. (*Pongo and The Bull* 1910: 190)

This seems to be just an amusing anecdote. Yet the reader notices Belloc's reflections on strict social class – “the deference due from the middle class to its superiors”; “it is difficult for people who count... to express such petty injuries” – and the slight

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impression that Peggy is in command in everyday matters, as her determined attitude suggests that she is the one who takes the lead. It is not very frequent that the wife of the Prime Minister calls him from the top of the stairs at a lawyer's office, perhaps shouting out his pet name, "Dolly," and gives the Prime Minister instructions about what they are going to do next. The head lawyer and several employees hear everything, which adds the comic nuance to the situation.

Mary Smith continues to be crucial, since her dead American husband's uncle, G. Quinlan Smith, is going to supply the badly-needed money for the Indian loan. The Indian loan is the major problem of Dolly's government, to such a degree that Pongo, the leader of the Opposition, surreptitiously helps him to find a solution. Thirty years before, Mary Smith had married G. Quinlan Smith's nephew, Bartelot Smith, although, after less than a year of married life, Bartelot had left Mary Smith, the wealthy widow she was.³⁰

Dolly's late marriage "forbade slanderous tongues to say that she [Margaret De Villon] had "made" her husband."³¹ Mary Smith acted as a matchmaker who decided it was about time Dolly should marry Margaret, "Peggy."³² "Peggy trusted her own political judgement more thoroughly than she did her husband."³³ Belloc transforms the figure of real life, the Prime Minister Herbert H. Asquith, into Dolly, the basic character in this novel. London's upper-class social circles took an ironic look at Asquith's middle-class manners that contrasted with their own, and were also polished, to some extent, by Margot Tennant's more refined, posh style. Such is the overtone hidden in Belloc's sentence mentioned above: "...slanderous tongues... she had "made" her husband."

It is this tacit alliance between the two major parties which forms the core of the comedy in his [Belloc's] novel *Pongo and The Bull*. Dolly is still the young and popular Prime Minister, as he had been in *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* and *A*

³⁰ See *Pongo and The Bull*(1910): 5, 32, 33.

³¹ See *Pongo and The Bull*(1910): 41.

³² See *Pongo and The Bull*(1910): 43.

³³ See *Pongo and The Bull*(1910): 43.

Change in The Cabinet, and he is very recognisable once more as Asquith, of whom Belloc wrote in his ‘Memoirs,’ ‘What gave him the position he did ultimately attain was his second marriage to Margot Tennant... She counted as being in the heart of the smart people, not from descent of course, for of that she had none, but from the wealth of her family.’ (...)

In the novels, Asquith (Dolly) is not married to Margot (Mary Smith); she is the widow of an American millionaire and he himself is married to a connection of the Peabody Yid [a popular nickname of Mr Barnett, Lord Lambeth or the Duke of Battersea].³⁴

In *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), the “connection of the Peabody Yid” is Margaret De Villon.³⁵ She is not a calm, reserved woman, but a very active political member who dares to contradict her husband’s policy whenever she considers it convenient. While Dolly and Pennybunt (Pongo) turn again on a broad walk at Habberton, Belloc’s invented country house and village in Somersetshire³⁶, on a spring day, the Prime Minister comments his friend the difficult finance situation. Their conversation provides shrewd hints about Margaret De Villon, Dolly’s wife, determined action in political affairs:

Pennybunt’s first inquiry was how the finance of the situation stood. It was to this that the Prime Minister was leading him. (...)

It was increasingly clear as the Prime Minister continued his confidences, or rather his search for support and advice, that there had been a

³⁴ A.N. Wilson. *Hilaire Belloc: A Biography* (2003): 174.

³⁵ The Peabody Yid, with his many synonyms (the Duke of Battersea, Lord Lambeth and the like) is the same person, Mr Barnett. Belloc created this character as a compendium of the Jew crafty bankers who, in his opinion, were furtively ruling Britain. The M’Korio investment which is described in *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904) is not only a remote, invented, colonial adventure that is fruit of Belloc’s rich imagination. Every time you cross the threshold of the railway station in Lleida you are walking on what was the shared property of the Rothschilds. From 1856 to 1941 the “Compañía de los ferrocarriles de Madrid a Zaragoza y Alicante” (MZA) was one of the three private major railway companies that operated in Spain. The Rothschilds were one of MZA’s main shareholders. In 1941, after the Spanish Civil War, the railways were nationalised under the name “RENFE.”

³⁶ See *Pongo and The Bull* (1910): 299.

very bad hitch indeed. There had been a singular slackness of competition in securing the Indian Loan when it was first hinted at. (...)

Dolly repeated it and repeated it (for Pennybunt questioned him closely); the hitch was not due to any kind of public panic; but every one of the great houses had asked privately for conditions he could not give. (...) Both men were thinking of the same name, but Pennybunt suggested it first after a few seconds of silence: it was the Duke of Battersea's.

The Duke of Battersea, the chief and most respected of British financiers, was now a very old man. His landing in this country as plain Mr Barnett, the early prejudice on the failure of the Haymarket Bank, his resurrection with the making of M'Korio were things of a generation ago – forgotten today. (...) [His active philanthropic work] had gained him first in the street, later with the rich, the rough but loving title of the Peabody Yid.

He was the very centre of Dolly's world, Mary Smith's constant and firm friend, (...) his name alone could support the credit of a country. England had done well to forget her grudge against such a man.

The Leader of the Opposition [Pennybunt] (...) knew that Dolly's wife was almost part of the Battersea household. (...)

Suddenly, and as though he were talking about a different matter, Dolly broke in (...):

“You know about the Straights?”

Pongo answered vaguely that of course he knew about the Straights. He made some popular joke about the Straights' support of the National Party, and he laughed. “They're *your* majority,” he said; he chuckled again.

But Dolly was very grave. “You know how much the Straights think of my wife?” said Dolly bluntly.

“I know that they have the highest opinion of her judgement and that she's made them if anybody has,” answered Pongo reverently.

“Well,” said Dolly (...) “the Straights want relief works – nothing but relief works. (...) They might perfectly well break away if the Indian policy

didn't suit them." (...) That means a majority against the [Indian] loan... for I won't *budge*." (*Pongo and The Bull* 1910: 11, 13-17)

The Prime Minister is in a difficult situation, because he urgently needs financial support for the Indian loan, a huge investment which can soothe serious social problems and poverty in that far away dominion of the British Empire. He secretly asks for advice and help to the Leader of the Opposition, a fact which Belloc detests since he believes that government and opposition only pretend they are actual rivals in the role-play of the Parliament, but they are close friends in private. Strict Belloc considers this attitude unforgivable hypocrisy. To make matters worse, the Straights – Belloc explains they use this peculiar name to designate really a socialist policy – are in coalition with the Prime Minister's National Party, although they are about to abandon the coalition because they only aim at social improvements. Margaret De Villon, "Peggy," the Prime Minister's wife, plays a double game, as she supports her husband, but, at the same time, encourages the Straights' probable attempt to break the coalition:

"You mean," said Dolly, "the Straights would go into the lobby alone?"

"Can't answer for the wild men," said Pennybunt cheerfully, "but there's no sort of danger."

(...)

Dolly did a little thinking. "You see," he said, feeling for his words, "you never can tell. ... Your lot *may* get up a cave – 'specially if the Straights bolt!"

"Well, why should the straights bolt anyhow?" ventured Pongo.

That was the root question of all, and the hardest one for Dolly to answer, but it had to be faced, for the compact between the two men was too grave to be shirked upon any plea whatsoever.

"Peggy may want them too," he said slowly.

(...)

"Why on earth should your wife..."

"Well, she does!" snapped Dolly.

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“Why on earth should your wife,” repeated Pennybunt, who was not the most gentle of men on occasion, “want to break your majority?”

“I didn’t say she did,” grumbled Dolly, “I said she *might*. She might think it the best moment to go to the country – she’s a fixture at the Batterseas,” he added, going the whole hog in his confidences.

“O-o-h, I see ...” said Pennybunt. (*Pongo and The Bull* 1910: 17-19)

Margaret De Villon, Peggy, is invited to the Batterseas regularly; she is actually part of them. She helped her husband, Dolly, to keep his political majority thanks to the Straights’ coalition with his party, although Dolly suspects that such coalition days are possibly numbered. In the elections of 1918, Peggy discovered the Straights (the Socialist party):

She had not invented them, far from it; she had not even given them the nickname by which they were now popularly known. (...) The Straights were simply something that was bound to come: they were a body of pure Collectivists, trained in the career of municipal Socialism, hungry for work, crammed with detailed knowledge, but for all that unswerving in their political theory. (*Pongo and The Bull* 1910: 44)

Belloc’s description of “municipal socialism” seems to be the premonition of the Greater London Council abolished by Margaret Thatcher’s government in 1986 under the accusation of the left-wing Labour administration spending too much.³⁷ Paradoxically in *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), Peggy is a wealthy woman in favour of left-wing municipalism; nothing new to European politics, although other examples are more frequent in southern countries. In Italy, Enrico Berlinguer (1922-1984) was a wealthy aristocrat married to a Catholic woman, Letizia Laurenti, who was the national secretary of the Italian Communist Party from 1972 up to her death in 1984.

³⁷ Many of such European territorial entities have undergone similar problems, for example, the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona.

Giangiaco Feltrinelli (1926-1972) was an exceedingly wealthy Italian publisher who was also an ardent communist revolutionary and member of a small group of extreme-left Italian guerrilla who were interested in carrying out terrorist acts in urban environments. Nevertheless, in 1910, when Belloc published *Pongo and The Bull*, very rich people were not usually for socialist policies; just the opposite. In Edwardian society, wealthy classes were more concerned with the high life, whereas revolutionary strikes were reserved for proletarians.

Paradoxically too, the Straights – socialists – supported the National Party (Dolly's) which had a general programme of armament and an Imperial policy. Even though, the Straights stood for the nationalisation of all means of production, distribution, and exchange. The Straights returned to Westminster in 1918 with twenty-three seats stronger than they had left.³⁸

Peggy chooses some men who are not very relevant for important posts and does her best to push forward her husband's political career, although sometimes she fails to select the appropriate course of action:

In the penumbra of the Straights, among the men who voted with them but did not obey the party Whips, Peggy chose two for Under-Secretaries. (...) In every way, she made the Straights the instrument they had become of her husband's continued success; and her husband, for all his doubts of her political wisdom, could never forget this capital point in her favour.

She had put Stoup in the Cabinet, and Stoup was never sober; it was a scandal. (*Pongo and The Bull* 1910: 48-49)

When Dolly tries to contact the Duke of Battersea to agree on the Indian loan, Peggy sweeps into the room bringing Moss, one of the Straights' Whips. Dolly is worried because somebody may have seen Moss entering the house, and this may be politically compromising in the future. Some time ago, Moss was an auctioneer, and such job produced in him the dangerous habit for a politician, namely, that of talking too much.

³⁸ See *Pongo and The Bull* (1910): 47.

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Dolly feels nervous and foresees uncomfortable questions from Moss, even though Moss is theoretically a political ally. Dolly pretends somebody has phoned him and that he must go away on an urgent errand, but this is obviously a convenient manoeuvre to escape from the upcoming awkward conversation. Although Dolly generally is backed by Peggy, sometimes he feels entangled by Peggy's rather daring initiatives:

Such was the political situation at the opening of the week before Whitsun, 1925, when Dolly had returned to London to approach the Duke of Battersea upon the flotation.

The moment Dolly reached his room in London on the Monday afternoon, he took up the telephone and asked Eddie, his secretary, to ring up the clerk downstairs and to call Battersea House.

(...)

Hardly had Dolly put the receiver on its rest again when he heard in the passage a familiar contralto voice.

(...)

Dolly imagined one hundred possible people who might be accompanying that rich contralto. Ten to one it was one of the Straights. He was certain it was one of the Straights. (...) His wife swept into the room, and the first thing she said was, "I've got Moss with me."

(...) Her hat also was enormous, and she was instinct with command.

(...) "Oh, I know that," said Dolly. "Good heavens, Peggy, I wish you wouldn't do these things! (...) You oughtn't to bring Moss here. Everybody who comes into the house is seen! ... I'm not dealing with the Straights," he said pettishly. "Besides which, one doesn't see the Whip – one sees the leader of the party."

"I'm the leader of the party," said Peggy radiantly and absolutely refusing to sit down. (*Pongo and The Bull* 1910: 50-53)

Peggy's contralto voice in the hallway announces a determined woman who "is instinct with command," entering the hall to give the orders and tell her husband that *she* is the leader of the Straights. Peggy is radiant with self-affirmation when she confronts her husband's pleading statement about the inappropriateness of bringing the Whip of the Straights into the house.

Dolly does not like the Duke of Battersea's "old usurer heart,"³⁹ but he cannot avoid being in the middle of the Battersea's intrigues for several reasons. Battersea house occupies the bottom of St James's Street.⁴⁰ The Duke of Battersea purchased the derelict site as a favour to Peggy "and to Peggy's newly wedded husband."⁴¹ Dolly is angry because his country is being bullied by money-lenders, like the Duke of Battersea, but Mary Smith advises him not to quarrel with the Batterseas. She promises to probe her deceased husband's uncle, G. Quinlan Smith, about the probability of supplying enough money for the Indian loan and succeeds in her endeavour.⁴²

On Friday morning of Whitsun week, the Leader of the Opposition, Pongo, and the American financier, G. Quinlan Smith, arrive in London after their eventful adventures in France. Everybody is to meet for a party in cosy but historic Habberton. Dolly is worried about several issues:

That Saturday evening Habberton dined with a sober festivity, and Mary Smith said to Dolly upon her right:

"The Peabody Yid [the Duke of Battersea] wanted to come!"

"Is he coming?" said Dolly anxiously.

"I couldn't refuse him," said Mary, "but something turned up. He said that Peggy was really keen upon his asking Moss and one or two others of the Straights for dinner. (...) The Straights pretend that they don't go out of town for weekends."

"Oh!" said Dolly nervously.

³⁹ See *Pongo and The Bull* (1910): 77.

⁴⁰ See *Pongo and The Bull* (1910): 63.

⁴¹ *Pongo and The Bull* (1910): 64.

⁴² See *Pongo and The Bull* (1910): 77, 63-64, 80-91.

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“Don’t bother,” answered Mary in a low tone, “it’s all settled, thank God!”

(...)

Dolly was not yet at his ease, and after dinner Mary Smith tried to make him talk, and failed.

They were in the billiard-room, Pongo was walking round the table, and Victoria Mosel was his partner. She did all manner of amusing things; she chalked the end of Pongo’s nose; she sprawled full length over the green cloth; she caught the Leader of the Opposition a side-whack with her cue; never had she been fuller of subtle sprightliness.

(...)

“Dolly,” said Mary, in a tone still lower than that which she had been using, “you are worried about something.”

(...)

“Oh, it’s the whole boiling,” said Dolly wearily; “old Battersea and my fool of a wife, and the Straights. ... It makes me sick on the floor,” (...) “I’d like to chuck the whole thing!”

“You said that twenty-five years ago, Dolly,” remembered Mary, murmuring, “just after the Brixton election. You said you were going to chuck it then! But you didn’t, Dolly. ...”

“No,” said Dolly gently, and deeply affected as well. “You told me not to.”

“Well, I’m always right,” said Mary; (...) Dolly put his hand upon her arm quickly.

“Mary,” he said in real distress, “what would you do?” (*Pongo and The Bull* 1910: 242-244)

On the whole, Dolly trusts Mary Smith who, on difficult occasions, helps him to find the possible way out. Mary Smith’s self-assertion – “Well, I’m always right” – does not sound like a peculiar bravado, but the reassuring turn of phrase to calm Dolly in his

dismay. Meanwhile, frivolous Victoria Mosel is presented as the shallow woman who slacks around and happily enjoys her leisure time. In the novel, Belloc subtly inserts occasional paragraphs that indicate that the whole of Victoria Mosel's time is spent on solace and looking sophisticated. She behaves like a lifelong teenager who seems to be giving herself airs most of the time and trying to attract attention at any rate.

These three women, Margaret De Villon (Peggy), Mary Smith, and Victoria Mosel do not appear in the final part of the novel which describes the adventures of Pongo and the fierce bull that attacks him and prevents him from reaching the Houses of Parliament in time for the crucial session. Peggy is the devoted wife who has firm political convictions and who does not always agree with her husband's policy; just the opposite, frequently she supports the party that poses problems to Dolly's. Mary Smith is the experienced activist who reassures Dolly and helps him to clarify what initiative to take when he hesitates about choosing one way or the other. Victoria Mosel is a rubbernecking creature, the gossipy woman who prefers to amuse herself and supply a bit of entertainment to others.

Female intelligence

A funny interpolated story conveys Belloc's remarks on the relationship between external feminine appearance and level of intelligence. The observations which Belloc made in 1910 about this issue may seem very controversial nowadays.

Jean Jacques Bertot is a thief who escaped from the police after the robbery at the French villa of Les Charmettes. Bertot's wrongdoer companions, M. Arton and Mme. Yahoff, were immediately arrested by the French police patrol on horseback after the thieves' car accident.⁴³ The three of them are art thieves, and G. Quinlan Smith one of their customers. G. Quinlan Smith is in France obsessively trying to find a silver teaspoon that belonged to Disraeli. After wriggling out of the hands of the police, Bertot disguises himself as a woman and takes the Riviera Express, pretending to come across G. Quinlan Smith by chance, although Bertot knew beforehand that G. Quinlan Smith was going to travel on that train. When Belloc describes this scene, he adds some

⁴³ See *Pongo and The Bull* (1910): 101-102.

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reflections on female features, peculiar remarks on feminine intelligence that may sound politically incorrect nowadays:

The Riviera Express stops, as in duty bound, at the main stations of that charming littoral; it reaches Mentone well on in the afternoon.

G Quinlan Smith was finishing a late lunch in the food-car (...) as the train slowly pulled out of Villefranche, when a face not wholly unfamiliar to him attracted his attention.

It was the face of a stout, squarely built lady with the short hair and masculine appearance which so often accompanies exceptional intellectual power in women. Even a close observer would have been puzzled to say whether she was of British nationality or a citizen of the United States or even (though that seemed less probable) one of those pioneers of the Feminist movement in modern France who have recently attracted the admiration of the world. (*Pongo and The Bull* 1910: 141-142)

Currently, no women would share Belloc's peculiar remark about female intelligence, particularly the connection which Belloc sets up between the masculine appearance of a woman and her probable high intelligence. The reference to "those pioneers of the Feminist movement in modern France" is more neutral, and Belloc cleverly adds a double meaning phrase (or perhaps an innuendo) "who have recently attracted the admiration of the world." Each reader will interpret the whole sentence according to his tenets and personal experience.

Madame de Schahrr's shelter

At the end of *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), another lady, Madame de Schahrr, offers shelter to a group of MPs in the middle of the stormy parliamentary session in which Dolly foresees his government's probable defeat. A little before the session, in his office at the House of Commons, Dolly privately thinks about and imagines, or reviews, the order of speeches and parliamentary replies. After the first part of the session, during the

break, when Dolly's group realises things are starting to go wrong, Dolly's MPs meet to have dinner at Madame de Schahrr's:

That Monday when Dolly got up to town he was very really tired.

(...)

The business of the House of Commons, which he had enjoyed more than most of his kind (which so many of his kind cannot bear), he looked forward to with fatigue.

(...)

The public was as full by this time of the Relief works as of the [Indian] Loan – fuller, indeed. The City took the security of works for granted, and all the humanitarians were with them now, in the House and out of it.

(...)

He [Dolly] came into the House towards the end of Questions.

(...)

There was to be Dolly's speech; Pongo was to come in at the end of it; then Moss would deliver himself ...

(...)

Dolly was down for about an hour, till five; Pongo was to come in a little before five; Dolly was to be at the height of his slanging of Pongo when Pongo came in; Dolly was to get particularly personal about ten minutes to five, and he, the Opposition Whip, was to take his cue from the worst of the slanging if Pongo should be late, and to go and fetch him.

(...)

It was essential to get the whole thing over before eight, because of the dinner at Madame de Schahrr's.

(...)

* * *

Something had gone hopelessly wrong,

(...)

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At Madame de Schahrr's, the professional politicians were drowning their sorrows in wine. (*Pongo and The Bull* 1910: 286-290. 299-300)

Once again, a determined wealthy woman, Madame de Schahrr, helps Dolly and some of his closest MPs by giving them a splendid dinner. Maybe the Germanic surname "Schahrr" is a bit too far-fetched, particularly by adding the second "h" and the double "rr" at the end. In any case, Belloc always liked to play with the reader and tease him a bit.

Isabel, Georges Boutroux's love

In *The Girondin* (1911), a young French republican, Georges Boutroux, has to escape from the Jacobin agents who are looking for him because he has accidentally killed a man in a fight to defend his uncle's house. He disguises himself as a charcoal burner by turning his clothes inside out and using ashes of a small fire to smear his face and hands.

A young eighteen-year-old girl asks him for a charcoal sack. The girl is Isabel, but many people call her Joyeuse or Joïse as a nickname. She is an orphan who lives with her stepmother and works in her farm. Joyeuse is Madame Perrin's foster daughter and must obey her and work on any errand her severe landlady can entrust her.

Georges steals a huge round loaf, a gourd of wine, and a charcoal sack from a sleeping, giant man, and he carries the charcoal sack to Joyeuse who pays a silver piece for it.⁴⁴ There is a suppressed, restrained, but affectionate dialogue between Georges and the girl:

"Young lady," said Boutroux with great courtesy, as he shifted his sack again to the other shoulder a little more wearily, "first let me tell you that the path is getting long; and secondly, let me tell you that the quarry of which I speak *does* turn and rend the hunter. It is its nature so to do.

"But is the chase not wounded too?" she said.

⁴⁴ See *The Girondin* (1911): 129, 133, 136, 138.

“Oh, child,” he answered, sighing, “have I not told you that both are wounded” Hunter and hunted too!”

“Never yet,” she said in a lower tone, “has any charcoal-burner called me a child.”

“And never yet,” he answered in a tone yet lower than hers, “has any child, however beautiful, called me a charcoal-burner.”

(...)

“Charcoal-burner,” she said, “I have known no charcoal-burners come to my father’s house, though they come so often during the charcoal-burning days, who seemed so little fitted to their trade as you. Now, if you have something that you are not saying and that you would wish to say, say it, and I will keep faith; for I know very well that this forest is sometimes a refuge in days like ours.”

When she had said this, she watched him with a little smile, looking for a new look in his eyes; and he, putting on an appearance of due sadness, said, –

“Young lady, it is not one hour since I met you, and yet the thing I have to say is very near my heart. (*The Girondin* 1911: 140-142)

The girl supplies food and drink and conceals Georges in a little hut near the farmhouse. Georges stays there for seven days. Joyeuse usually brings him homebaked bread and cold meat to eat.⁴⁵ When the girl first brings something to drink there is a short conversation:

She put both flagons resolutely behind her back, and said: “How do you know that they are yours?”

“I do not know,” he said, “but I am very thirsty.”

(...)

“if you will not drink first I will not drink at all.”

My mother told me once,” said the girl, “that women must not drink wine.”

⁴⁵ See *The Girondin* (1911): 149, 154.

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“There is something in that,” said Boutroux; “your mother was a wise woman. And what did she say of water?”

“Oh, one may drink water; but I am not thirsty. Nevertheless, since you need companionship, I will drink both wine and water with you.”

(...)

When they had so drunk wine and water together in a sort of sacramental way, they said nothing more. (*The Girondin* 1911: 144-146)

From time to time, Belloc enjoys including the expression “sacramental” which means some sort of spiritual communion, either with nature, as in *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911), or in this case, in *The Girondin* (1911), when the young fugitive and the young compassionate countrywoman, who hides and loves him, drink together water and wine, a “sacramental” fact which the reader may interpret as the beginning of a rare intimacy between Georges and Joyeuse. Belloc writes “sacramental” in an apparently roundabout way, although he is aware that he refers to the ritual of the Roman Catholic sacrament of Communion in which a faithful believer receives the Eucharist under the species of bread and, on some occasions, wine too.⁴⁶ There is also a rare intimacy – “communion,” common union, sharing of thoughts and emotions – between Georges and Joyeuse, because, as Belloc subtly explains, they are in love, and he makes it a priority to assure that the reader understands this, because he repeatedly describes their mutual infatuation through soft expressions and similes.

Sometimes Belloc uses the word “lover,” but only in chapter titles. For example, Chapter IX is entitled “In which a Lover finds himself in the Dark,” and Chapter X is entitled “In which Two Lovers find themselves in the Daylight.”⁴⁷ Belloc describes a brief love story with careful words, as he did not like dealing with these topics and very rarely referred to the psychological features of his characters, and least of all to any

⁴⁶ Other Christian churches, the Anglican Church and Lutheran churches also have the Holy Communion, although Belloc probably only thought of the Roman Catholic sacrament, since he was completely convinced of his faith. Communion is a sacrament in Roman Catholicism. The Lord’s Supper is another name for the administration of the body and blood of Christ in other non-Roman Catholic churches. These Christian churches differ in the doctrinal (dogmatic) formulation and pastoral practice of Communion.

⁴⁷ See *The Girondin* (1911): 150, 164.

sexual overtone. Yet he supplies two titles for successive chapters that literally specify that the upcoming story is about “a Lover” and “Two Lovers.”

The Darkness in Chapter IX represents the fact that Joyeuse is in Georges’ hut very early in the morning, when it is still dark, because the girl wants nobody to notice Georges’ presence on the farm:

Having so thought on the matter, he [Georges] rose sharply from the fern litter and the straw, shaking them about him with a small noise. He coughed to clear his throat, and he had begun some sort of little song to cheer him, when he heard a low “Hush!” and peering into the dark corner of the shed before him, he saw the figure of his sleeping and his dreams.

She was leaning blotted out in the shadow against the wooden wall. Her arms were crossed upon her firm young breast. (...) She did not speak, but whispered, –

“Speak low. I have been here waiting for near an hour, lest you should be betrayed.”

Boutroux approached her without any noise. She uncrossed her arms as he came and clasped her hands before her. He took her left hand and kissed it gently, and he thought, even in that half-light, that her colour rose as he lifted his face to hers.

(...)

“It was you,” he said, “who came in the night and put this cloth over me against the dampness and the cold, and it was you who put the straw about my feet and knees.”

“It was I,” she answered. “Here we keep much of the husbandry, and often my pails are left here for the milking, – so none could wonder.”

As he said this to her, she lifted one arm a moment as though to lay it on his shoulder, but she let it fall again and would not. “Very soon,” she said, “they will be astir.” (*The Girondin* 1911: 151-153)

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Joyeuse invites Georges to remain in the hut and not move. She promises to bring him food. Belloc describes in favourable words the agreeable presence of the girl and her sturdy youth when she lifts the pails. Belloc writes about Georges' gaze on the girl as she walks out of the hut and combines the girl's leaving with the first morning sun-ray coming in through the door.

She put the yoke upon her graceful shoulders so that they were bent to her labour, she straightened herself and swung the pails and went out to the field, short-kilted, walking strongly and with the morning upon her. He saw her for but a moment as she passed the door, but almost immediately, as she left him, there came palely through that same entry the first ray of the sun; it bore with it a sort of miraculous enlivenment and a changing of all things as it came. And Boutroux thought to himself again: –

“Undoubtedly these are great days!” Then he considered all that she had told him – how she had told him to lie close and to speak to none, and how she would visit him again. (*The Girondin* 1911: 154)

Georges Boutroux's happy feelings when he thinks about Joyeuse is a signal he is in love with her, even though they never confess their mutual love, because the events rush by with Georges' sudden disappearance when he is compelled to join the revolutionary army.

Before that forced leaving, when Georges is still in his hut, Joyeuse becomes increasingly worried as days go by, and her voice is more anxious, for she knows several men are trying to arrest Georges.⁴⁸

Her voice, which had been hurried and troubled when she had last brought him succour, was now more troubled and more hurried; (...) And as she began to tell him his own story, coming slowly to it, and hesitating, she held him once

⁴⁸ See *The Girondin* (1911): 155, 156.

involuntarily, and held him close, to complete her telling of it, and she spoke to him in a terror which was a great and proud thing for him to hear; (...)

Her speech was halting: she told him the last things, so that he must question her gently, almost as by caresses.

(...)

“Friend,” she whispered to him, “you said in that first speech of ours – which, oh my God, is surely all my life ago! – that you were a hunter at times.”

“All men are hunters at times,” he said.

“Friend,” she said, (...)

“But, she said, with a little sob, and laugh at his perpetually turning her phrase, “this hunting is no hunting of lovers, and they have you in chase and on other flank as well, for I will tell you: – This morning as I left you with the pails to go milking, I met no one (...) only Peter in the hollow, the son of the man they call Rich Hamard, who has the main croft and farms the taxes here.

(...)

“Oh, let me tell you,” she said, and sighed. “He said to me threateningly, ‘They are looking for coin.’ ‘For what coin?’ said I, roughly. It is he who comes with a set wooing every Sunday eve before the Mass and on the eve of the feast days to sit by the fire; and he claims to sit next to me, and my father will have it so. Since it is so, I must treat him lovingly or roughly; I treat him roughly, for I will treat him in no other way.”

“You do well,” said Boutroux, “to treat all men roughly; (...)”

“Friend,” she said, “when he spoke about that coin I knew what he meant. He meant the money paid you for the sack of charcoal.” (*The Girondin* 1911: 156-159)

Joyeuse expects Georges to answer her “gently, almost as by caresses.” She likes to speak with Georges and be in company with him. On top of this, she hopes that he will talk to her affectionately. Georges encourages her to deal with men in a rough way. Treating men roughly is a traditional female mechanism to keep bore-beaux away, but we may infer that Georges would like Joyeuse to be only for him. Both lovers use the

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term “friend” to address each other; they never use “my love” or any synonymous phrase. Belloc goes on with his restrained language. Nothing new for current sweethearts, as most of them refer to his or her fiancés as his or her “friend.” This word may be the same by chance, although the meaning is quite different in Belloc’s demure 1911 novel from the informal language of 2017 youngsters who generally do not like commitment or complications in love. As the conversation moves forward, Joyeuse’s troubled voice announces armed men are tightening their grip on Georges Boutroux:

“And what is that?”

“If I tell you you will be angry,” she answered, and was silent. (...) Then she said, –

“In the great city, there was someone who killed a man, and he did against The People. They say that they have traced him to our woods, ...”

(...)

“It was I, said Boutroux, “who killed the man.”

(...)

Friend,” she said softly, “I am not blaming you.”

(...)

She grasped his wrists with her hands, and he wondered at their sudden strength in the darkness.

(...)

“Have you no charm?”

“I have, said he, “as you should know. It is a gold medal of Rocamadour which my mother gave me when I was a child. I have it on the chain of my neck, a silver chain, and till I lose it no great harm will befall my body. ...”

(The Girondin 1911: 160-162. 173)

Joyeuse’s stepmother betrays Georges Boutroux and hands him over to the French revolutionary army, instead of her son. Georges has no choice but to accept this or be

arrested and perhaps guillotined. Before climbing up into the cart, Georges notices his medal has been taken by Joyeuse:

He asked himself in what moment the lover's theft was done, and he thought he remembered; and as he so remembered, he smiled. (*The Girondin* 1911: 178)

A too-neat Madame Perrin. The traitor

Belloc created the female character of Madame Perrin as a summary of the feminine qualities to achieve one's goal through guile and treason. The character could have been designed as a male person, but for some of Belloc's private literary whims, he preferred to build a female creature, an elegant witch, who takes advantage of Boutroux's awkward situation.

When Georges Boutroux's stay in the hut becomes impossible because hiding him there endlessly is dangerous for him and for his protector, Joyeuse, too, the girl tells him she has a plan laid for him whereby they will be safe.⁴⁹ Sometime before, Joyeuse had already told him she had a place of safety and a plan for him.⁵⁰ There was a bad omen when she said this, since her eyes were filled with tears. The girl knew of Boutroux's final destination and of Madame Perrin's treason, but she could do nothing to avoid it for several reasons. After a brief conversation, they both come to the great royal road, and Joyeuse leads Boutroux to a cottage at the door of which...

[...] a woman, neat – too neat – severe, aged and expectant, changed from an expression of suspicion at their coming to an expression somewhat more genial as she saw the girl and knew her again.

“Well, Joïse,” or since you are now so old, shall I call you Isabel?” She looked with a mixture of disapproval and of command upon Boutroux's wretched externals, but he was holding himself very well (...) “Sir,” she said in a formal manner, “since you have suffered for the King – I have heard the whole story from my foster-child – you may claim from me anything you will.”

⁴⁹ See *The Girondin* (1911): 173.

⁵⁰ See *The Girondin* (1911): 169.

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“I claim nothing,” he said.

“You shall have your life at any rate,” said the old woman. She said it in the peasants’ manner, and Boutroux heard in her tone the false kindness of peasants bargaining. He looked full in her hard eyes and wondered what the price of his safety would be – and whether he would choose to pay it. (*The Girondin* 1911: 169-170)

The old woman is making a plan. She shrewdly has found a way of replacing her son, who must join the republican army and possibly will be killed in action, by Georges Boutroux, the young fugitive from justice who, Madame Perrin knows for certain, has no other alternative but to join the army or escape endlessly and be, finally, arrested by Bordeaux Jacobin revolutionary bailiffs. Then Boutroux is likely to be sentenced to death by guillotine:

He felt a plot in the place. Better be flying and hiding, he thought, and no one’s will but my own to guide me, than be subject to the calculations of others – and the interest of this Hag of the Years. (*The Girondin* 1911: 170)

Boutroux feels suspicious of the old woman, that perfidious hag, as she leaves the room on an errand:

“Joyeuse,” he said, “what is this old woman into whose hands you have delivered me?”

“Her name is Perrin,” said Joyeuse: her lovely eyes were more anxious than her lover’s; she looked at him and pleaded, divining his suspicion and his fears.

“What is her plan with me?” he asked.

“I cannot tell – I dare not know ... Before her substance grew, in the old days, when my mother died, my father hired her to his farm, and she fostered

me. In her second marriage, she came to this place. Oh! do as she bids you. She has power in this countryside.” (*The Girondin* 1911: 171)

Boutroux and Joyeuse are talking in the bare kitchen of the house. The old woman returns and tells him to follow her, since he must wash, shave, and dress in a certain fashion. When Boutroux is ready, he comes back to the little kitchen, a stark bare room...

Its emptiness of her struck him like a chill of presentiment. There was no-one there, only the old peasant woman, standing strict and forbidding, who watched him hardly; she was ready with orders rather than with counsel. She so eyed him, waiting for him to speak.

“Madame,” he said, “where is that foster-daughter of yours with whom I came?”

“She has gone out, I think,” said the peasant woman steadily; “but it is no matter, for your business now is with my son.”

(...)

“But where is Joyeuse?”

“Young man, you understand me clearly,” continued the peasant woman, with fixed thin lips, “and you will understand me further. Nothing is given for nothing. If you lose your head, lose it. If you would end safe, you will obey and be tame. Climb up into the cart that is now at my door and sit beside my son, who is to drive it. (...) It is pleasanter than a short imprisonment and a public death.”

“Where is Joyeuse, old hag?” (...)

The old lady was quite unmoved. “I am bound to tell you nothing, young man,” she said.

(...)

“Old woman,” said Boutroux insolently, and swaggering up a little towards her, “you have heard the saying that one may as well be hanged for a

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sheep as for a lamb; and I take it that of the two you are less a lamb than a sheep. You have heard it said that I killed a man?"

"Yes," said the old woman; "and I believe it." She did not shrink from him; she fixed her small eyes on him like needle points. (*The Girondin* 1911: 176-177)

Boutroux realizes he is forced to go, and that there is no other choice. A stout man appears on the doorway, one of Perrin's serfs, and threatens Boutroux because he considers Boutroux is bullying her. Boutroux understands he must go, or find himself prisoner, although he considers the chances of life and of possible retaliation. When he is about to climb up into the cart, a harsh jeer takes place:

"You are right, Madame," said he over his shoulder; "I am a fool and passably mad. And you, Madame, are an accursed old Royalist witch whom my honest friends The Jacobins will do well to burn. I will send them, never fear, and you and your house above you and your damned traitor serfs will be roasted and pass in smoke."

(...)

[The old lady answered] "Go and replace my son: you are fitter meat for Brunswick," she called after him. "We have a use for your carrion."⁵¹

Madame Perrin's coarse treatment is contrasted with Joyeuse's mildness. Belloc depicts Madame Perrin as the crafty old lady who knows of Boutroux's stay in the hut and pretends not to notice and not to care about it until she has designed a plan to get rid of that fugitive and take advantage of his difficult position between the hammer and the anvil. Replacing one recruit for another was not something uncommon at the time.⁵²

⁵¹ Brunswick was the supreme commander of the Prussian army in the upcoming Battle of Valmy (20th September 1792).

⁵² Armies knew approximately how many recruits could be obtained from each municipality. Officers counted men, but were not able to check identities, as there were no reliable systems for doing it. Belloc says openly that the revolutionary army was a chaos in some aspects. Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney (St

She is a shameless opportunist who does not hesitate to take any course of action to promote her own interests. Madame Perrin rabidly answers back when Boutroux shouts sly digs at her; “We have a use for your carrion” is very derogatory.⁵³

Belloc built this female character to personify wickedness, although the fact that Madame Perrin was concealing her son from obligatory conscription and the terrible conditions of military life which implied continuous strain and being injured or killed in the imminent battle, added a touch of instinctive, maternal defence.

The Spinster de La Roche

Chapter XVIII of *The Girondin* (1911) is a surprising chapter, full of realism with a scent of a romantic encounter. “Perrin” is the name Georges Boutroux uses in the army. This new name is a stratagem to prevent revolutionary agents from arresting him. Consequently, Georges Boutroux is now “Sergeant Perrin.” Boutroux’s hussars regiment leaves Orleans and reaches Chateauneuf. A captain orders Boutroux to requisition five horses from The Spinster de La Roche’s stately home, a manor house which is marked as “suspect” in the revolutionary military documents.⁵⁴ Boutroux must take five men at random to fulfil his duty. As he does not know the way to this château, he knocks at the door at random in one of the village houses. A half-awake man grumbles and curses the soldiers for a cartload of devils. When Boutroux asks him to show the way, the old man mocks the Spinster de La Roche in a doubtful overtone, in a suggestive innuendo:

John Vianney) deserted from Napoleon’s Army in 1810. He could avoid punishment (possibly by being shot) because his younger brother replaced him.

⁵³ Madame Perrin deeply scorns Georges Boutroux, apart from compelling him to assume a terrible fate. She insults the young Jacobin by calling him “carrion,” in other words, dead and rotting flesh, an image that is the last step when you want to convey the idea of something revolting. Once again, war turns ordinary people into savages. Survivors from the Spanish Civil War or from any other twentieth century European war attest such human degradation. In times of war, allegedly honest citizens become ruthless, selfish persons.

⁵⁴ See *The Girondin* (1911): 284.

“Captain,” he said more humbly – and the private soldier leading the orders grinned [Boutroux is just a sergeant] – “I am willing enough to come, but you understand one lives in the same town, and though the lady’s reputation ...”

“Oh yes, I understand,” said Boutroux; “but where is it?”

“I’ll come with you,” sighed the old fellow. (*The Girondin* 1911: 287)

The old man fetches a lantern and accompanies the soldiers along half a mile...

“The Château is through there,” said the old man.

“The Château!” said Boutroux.

“She is a person of consequence,” said the old man. “I have no quarrels; I am no politician; I live and let live. She is a person of consequence ... of the rest I say nothing. And let me tell you, from what I know of the old cat, she dislikes to be disturbed and her doors are always locked.” (*The Girondin* 1911: 287-288)

A small, thin, trembling woman opens the door. The old man says anxiously and whispering,

“Need I stay?”

“No, Citizen,” said Boutroux, “you are free of these things.”

“You will not give my name to her? She has many friends – too many!” said the man anxiously. (*The Girondin* 1911: 290)

The mistress of the place has a gentle, somewhat ironical, very agreeable voice, a bit like fine metal, “like silver tempered to steel.”⁵⁵ The lady’s face wears a light ironical smile. Her hands are small and strong, continuously clasped before her. Her body is small, but not frail, and she acts in a way of composure, some self-possession which grants her a pretty dignity of movement. Her hair is grey with touches of a whiter grey

⁵⁵ See *The Girondin* (1911): 292.

and it is her own hair, not an artificial wig. She has attractive black eyes with an expression which invites Boutroux to know more of her:

His eyes were used to the darkness, the haunting light of the summer stars glimmered upon the gracious curves of her grey and silvering hair. Her face was turned towards him, and he could imagine many things.⁵⁶

Georges Boutroux politely apologizes for the urgency of the situation:

“Madame, I have no written order,” said Boutroux, seriously moved. “I intend no discourtesy – but the Army is in urgent need. If I had a written order it would be easier.”

“There is no need for that, Lieutenant,” she answered in a lower tone, and with a charming submission. “The Army may do what it wills.”

“But I will give the receipt and the claim, and all that you may ask for verification,” continued Boutroux eagerly. “I really regret, I very greatly regret ...”

You need not regret, Lieutenant,” she said. “We must all do our duty. (*The Girondin* 1911: 293)

The lady is in command, although the military command is Boutroux’s. The lady behaves in a calm manner; she is not afraid of the strange revolutionary situation that may unexpectedly turn against her social class interests, and Belloc introduces her as an attractive woman, not because of her physical beauty, but for the mysterious touch with which she behaves and speaks. The title of Chapter XVIII shows the superiority of the Spinster de La Roche toward Georges Boutroux: “In which an Old Lady shows the Way to a Young Gentleman.”⁵⁷ After reading the whole chapter, the reader knows the lady does not show any physical way, but shrewdly and kindly commenting on several

⁵⁶ See *The Girondin* (1911): 299.

⁵⁷ See *The Girondin* (1911): 291.

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subjects, she makes Boutroux explain what he thinks of the impending war, military duty, love, and the passing of time. They talk about the path of life actually. The lady's serene experience of life supplies a unique outlook on Sergeant Perrin (Georges Boutroux) and gives him pause for thought.

While the groom leads the lumpish soldiers to look for the horses, Boutroux and the lady converse:

“And you, sir,” she said turning to Boutroux, “pray come in and take wine: it will not be a short business, only two of the horses are in the stable here. Two others are at the farm at the end of the park, and one will have to be caught. He is out at grass.”

(...)

Said Boutroux to himself: “What queens one finds upon the march!”

(...)

“The night is warm, Lieutenant; we will take this wine for you, and this bread, outside and put them upon a little iron table that is there and sit until your men have returned.”

Boutroux was willing enough.

(...)

That small enclosed park was fragrant in the August night – it was secluded. One might dream in it, on such a night, that there were no such things as grooming and marching and arms.

(...)

“Lieutenant,” said the lady, “are you for the frontier?”

“Yes, Madame,” he said, “and all the regiment.”

(...)

“I envy you, Lieutenant.”

“It is plain truth, Madame,” he said, “that people told me your house was suspect; but I do assure you, by my lack of a beard, that I will keep faith with anything you say (...)

No, the house is not suspect ... but I regret the better times.” (*The Girondin* 1911: 295-298)

The conversation goes on to convey the frequent attitude of mature people, a mixture of disappointment at the banality of life and stressing about what really matters. As the conversation proceeds, the lady feels cold, and Boutroux helps her to put a shawl round her unhurriedly and carefully. Belloc writes down Boutroux’s private thoughts:

“I have heard,” thought Boutroux to himself, as he lingered upon this gesture, “that a woman is not a woman until she is forty: now this lady is certainly a woman.”

She thanked him and said –

“Lieutenant...? When do you march?”

“I do not know, Madame; too soon, whatever the hour may be.”

“But to-morrow?” she said.

“Yes, certainly, Madame, and more probably this very night.”

“You soldiers never sleep,” she replied to him, in such a tone of pity that he was moved again. (*The Girondin* 1911: 298)

The lady speaks straightforwardly and kindly, her conversation flows smoothly and expresses her attitude of frankness, but also her mature understanding of a young soldier’s feelings and the compassion for the suffering of the service. Boutroux feels at ease with the lady and, sometimes, he is also stirred.

The lady asks the Lieutenant to do her a favour, and Boutroux answers her he is ready to do anything for the lady. She answers in a dignified way and expresses her satisfaction at dealing with these willing men who attend a woman’s pleas:

“Lieutenant, will you do me a favour?”

“Madame,” said Boutroux with singular alertness, “I will do any favour that is within my power, and most of those that are not.”

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“You have spoken as a man of the trade should,” she answered nobly. “Do you know, Lieutenant, we women who stay behind love men who will do what is asked of them by the Nation ... or by any other dame.”

“Aye, Madame,” he said, “and we soldiers love to be asked it ...” She asked what he did not expect.

“Why then, Lieutenant, tell me, I pray you, while those clodhoppers are stealing my cattle, tell me how you came to be in the service, and to be marching thus. Had you ever the King’s commission?” (*The Girondin* 1911: 299)

The expression “we women who stay behind love men who will do what is asked (...) by another dame” suggests the lady’s affection for the young man who, she knows, will go away in some minutes. Boutroux perceives this loving influence.

He invents an answer which combines false events and reminiscences of partially true ones. He tells the lady he is the son of a lawyer in Paris, a Judge of the High Court. His father designed him in marriage for a young, gracious and rich girl who died. Boutroux invents he enlisted at the cavalry depot at St Denis and was in the ranks for two years. When the lady asks how he obtained his grade, Boutroux explains the quite simple and absurd system of moving grades one place forward to solve the lack of qualified officers in the revolutionary army. He praises the lady in a roundabout way when he confesses his lieutenancy to be the very generous act of a woman, The Spinster de La Roche who is just talking to him at the moment and is calling Boutroux “Lieutenenat,” but Boutroux is just “Sergeant Perrin.” Boutroux literally adds: “[Upon a summer night, which means just at the moment of speaking] I loved her well enough.” –

“Men do not often rise as you have risen,” she said. “Tell me before we part how you obtained your grade.”

“It is a curious story, Madame. An old gentleman whose name I did not know, but who had evidently great authority, was for promoting me with an indecent rapidity. I had already been named a sergeant for some weeks when he

urged me successively up the ranks of lieutenant, captain, major, and even colonel.

“It is incredible!” said the lady, staring at him with wide eyes.

(...)

What gave me my commission, and that to which I owe my lieutenancy, was the very generous act of a woman.”

“Really, Lieutenant,” said the lady, “women seem to have played a part in your life!”

“Ah, Madame,” said Boutroux solemnly, “I never knew how much until to-night.”

“And so,” went on the lady, a little too rapidly, “it is to a woman that you owe your title of lieutenant, you very young man?”

(...)

“Did she know you well?”

“No, Madame, nor I her; but for a brief moment upon a summer night I loved her well enough.”

“What power had she to give you such advancement?”

“Nothing, Madame, but her word: yet words were of a sort spoken in a tone which I will long remember.”

(...)

“You march before dawn?” she asked.

“Madame,” he said, standing before her in the night, “I have told you: we go when we are ordered, and I believe that the orders will come by daybreak or before.”

“Well, she said, catching at her words, “I shall ask from you a receipt ... and a due note ... I can give you nothing more in exchange.” (*The Girondin* 1911: 302-304)

Such final words emphasize the practical aspect of the requisition which is the subject that brought the detachment to the château. The last sentence is mysterious though, “I

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can give you nothing more in exchange.” “Nothing more” may refer to something material, more cattle or even money, although it may also mean a bit more of her time, listening, affection, and dedication. The encounter with the lady brings Boutroux a haven of peace in the middle of the tough march to the front line. He feels attracted by her mature beauty, and her kind, wise, sometimes ironic treatment of him, which distils a diffuse sense of maternal affection without indulging in patronizing.

At the end of the chapter, Boutroux asks the lady for permission to mount the horse and leave. This is a gesture of courtesy and respect, as he does not need a civilian permit to do his military duty. When the small cavalry troop leaves the château, Boutroux looks behind to see the gracious figure of that charming lady:

Boutroux once outside the door, and standing at a horse’s head, turned to the lady of the house as she stood with the light upon her watching him go. “Have I your leave to mount?” he said.

“All my leave to all you will,” she answered.

(...)

Riding behind his men Boutroux could not forbear to look over his shoulder; he saw, or thought he saw, near a light upon the first story the head, and the inclination of the body, and the gesture with which an hour’s acquaintance had too much accustomed him. (*The Girondin* 1911: 305-306)

The encounter with the lady, just an hour of conversation, and Boutroux’s observation of the noble tone, grace, and demeanour of the Spinster de La Roche, has left a deep impression on Sergeant Perrin. He goes away, but while he rides her horse out into the fields, he cannot help thinking he has just grown fond of that lady.

Mrs Martha Randle, an experienced widow and Professor Higginson’s strict landlady

Mrs Martha Randle controls Professor Higginson’s foolishness and scolds him a lot with exclamations and complaints after Higginson’s bizarre adventure with the Green Overcoat at John Perkin’s party and subsequent kidnapping by elegant James McAuley

and stout, pasty-faced Melba. The whole story is told in Belloc's *The Green Overcoat* (1912).

Mrs Randle has a considerable presence; she is a large woman who gives the impression of an excellent and weighty person.⁵⁸ She observes tattered Higginson walking down the street heading home in the morning. After Higginson's ordeal at Greystokes, the house in which he has been imprisoned for days, he reaches home in Quebec Street, in Ormeston, Belloc's invented town in the Midlands.⁵⁹ The don is in rags and feels certainly ashamed because some people look at him with curiosity. Mrs Randle looks at Higginson like people look at ghosts that return from Hell. The lady falls heavily against his unexpected form and nearly brings Higginson down the steps. Curious onlookers comment that strange man should not treat his wife like a savage. Embarrassed Higginson thrusts Mrs Randle within the house and slams the door:

Mrs Randle, with a large affection, stood at the table before him, leaning heavily upon it with her fists, and saying, "Oh, sir!" consecutively several times, until her emotion was sufficiently calm to permit of rational speech. Then she asked him where he had been.

"It's the talk of the whole town, sir! Oh! and me too! Never, I never thought to see you again!" at which point in her interrogation Mrs Randle broke suddenly into a flood of tears, punctuated by sobs as explosive as they were sincere. (*The Green Overcoat* 1912: 106-107)

Two policemen come, and a considerable crowd grows at the door. Mrs Randle comes up with her face red and full of tears, although her weeping is overlain with indignation because she considers all this mess is a violation of her house...⁶⁰

The first of the policemen had hardly begun his formal questioning of Professor Higginson, when the second, looking a little closer, recognised his prey. (...) To

⁵⁸ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 106.

⁵⁹ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 286-287.

⁶⁰ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 107-108.

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prove his zeal, he dispersed the crowd of loungers, saluted, and told the Professor that it was his duty to ask him formally certain questions. (...) There was a report of fighting. To this Mrs Randle interposed without a trace of logic, "Fighting yourself!" (*The Green Overcoat* 1912: 108)

As the conversation goes on, Higginson becomes suddenly worried, since he has to invent a different story from what really happened at Greystokes, as he thinks about the cheque he was compelled to sign by the two bullies pretending to be a different person, Mr Brassington, and the consequences of such counterfeit. The bullies found Brassington's checkbook in a pocket of the Green Overcoat and succeeded in making Higginson sign the cheque since they considered he was lying about his identity in order not to pay. They thought the don was the real Brassington.

Consequently, Higginson tells the policemen that he first has to wash and dress properly, although what he really needs is to buy time and sort out his ideas. At the end of the first part of the conversation between the don and the two policemen, Belloc adds his reflections about female nature:

"We quite understand, sir," said the policemen, taking their stations in the ground floor room, and drawing chairs as with intention of sitting down and awaiting his pleasure.

"I will see you when I can. Mrs Randle, please bring me some hot water."

And with these words the poor man dashed upstairs to his bedroom upon the first floor.

There are ways of defeating a woman's will when she has passed the age of forty, and these are described in books which deal either with an imaginary world of fiction or with a remote and unattainable past. No living man has dealt with the art, nor can wizards show you an example of it.

Therefore, when Mrs Randle returned with the hot water, it was Mrs Randle that won. (*The Green Overcoat* 1912: 109-110)



Fig. 11. Professor Higginson. Drawing by G.K. Chesterton. *The Green Overcoat*. 1912 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1947): 190.

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While Mrs Randle's motherly hand tests the water temperature, she opens fire with a pressing rattle of questions because she would have to tell, she says, her own version to any inquirer. "At each stage in her operations she was careful to threaten a fit of crying."⁶¹ Belloc makes clear to the reader that the coercive power of combined female tears with women's persistent complaints, regrets, and making a fuss are like the overpowering percussion of a steam hammer on male, allegedly-determined resistance. Belloc seems to suggest that female hype undermines male firmness sooner than later.

Belloc likes to present the war of the sexes precisely through warfare vocabulary, by means of military terms: "the enemy," "tactics," "operations," "outposts," "open fire," "manoeuvre," "standing firm," "taking cover," and the like...

Professor Higginson's tactics were infantile. They were those of his sex. He took off his evening coat and waistcoat preparatory to washing. Upon minor occasions in the past, mere affairs of outposts, Mrs Randle had taken cover before this manoeuvre; to-day the occasion was divisive, and she stood firm.

'—and the Principal of the University too, sir! And his dear young lady! And, oh! when they put that news in the paper, which wasn't true, thanks be to God—'

Here, as Mrs Randle approached tears again, the desperate philosopher threw his braces from his shoulders, plunged his face and hands into the water, and fondly hoped that when he lifted it again the enemy would have fled. But Mrs Randle was a widow, and the first sound he heard as the water ran out of his ears was the continuing string of lamentations and questionings.

"Where's the towel?" he asked abruptly.

"Where it's been since last Monday, sir," said Mrs Randle. "Since that last Blessed Monday when we thought to lose you for ever! I never thought to change it! I never thought to see you back all of a heap like this!" (*The Green Overcoat* 1912: 110-111)

⁶¹ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 110.

Higginson has a saving idea after brooding over his perplexity about his forgetting the day of the week. He cunningly pretends he does not know where he is, what and where Quebec Street is and who his landlady, Mrs Randle, is:

“Where am I?”

“You’re here, sir! Oh, you’re here!” said good, kind Mrs Randle in an agonised tone, positively going down upon her knees (no easy thing when religion has departed with youth) and laying one hand upon his knee.

The Professor laid his left hand upon hers, passed his right hand over his face, and gasped in a thin voice –

“Where’s here?”

“In Quebec Street in your own room, sir! Oh, sir, don’t you know me? I’m Martha Randle?”

The Professor looked down at her with weary but forgiving eyes.

“I do now,” he said; “it comes back to me now.”

“Oh, Lord!” said Martha Randle, I’ll send the girl for the chemist!” and she was gone.

Women may be stronger than we men, my brothers, but we are more cunning; and when she had gone the Professor, dropping the mask and dressing with extreme alacrity, made himself possible in morning clothes. His plan had developed still further in the few minutes it took him to go downstairs, and as he entered the room where the policemen awaited him, he was his own master and theirs. (*The Green Overcoat* 1912: 113-114)

In this funny scene, touching the other’s hands may imply trust and a pretended gesture of weakness. Higginson wants to convey these attitudes when he lays his left hand upon Mrs Randle’s left hand. The Professor tries his best, as an actor in a play, while the landlady sincerely thinks he has lost his memory and tries to help him.

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The reference to male guile contrasts with Mrs Randle's natural intelligence and experience of life, because she was a widow,⁶² and Belloc makes the reader infer that she knew all the tricks; in particular, she was an expert in not believing in the usual male lies. She knew how to pump men, and she wanted to know where Higginson had been, so she used all the resources of female expertise, especially those which implied being emotional and making a fuss when the occasion required.⁶³

Other female figures in The Green Overcoat (1912)

Professor Higginson has just finished his lecture at Guelph University when a shy girl asks an apparently innocent question which Higginson interprets as a crafty innuendo on his recent, odd adventure with the underworld creatures. Ashamed Higginson tries to shun as fast as possible:

The great clock of the University buildings boomed out noon. He shut his notes, looked with his weary eyes at the young faces before him, now lifted to his own, and said –

“Next time we will take the Automatic Functions of Guest and Bunny. It is new ground, and I think it will interest you.”

A timid, fair-haired girl to the rear of the left centre asked whether they need buy the third edition; she only had the second. He said, full of thought for her purse, that there was no necessity to do such a thing, whereat the student added –

“But, Professor Higginson, it deals with the Subliminal Phenomena of a Loss of Mem – ”

“That'll do! That'll do!” cried Professor Higginson sharply.

He could have sworn that he heard a titter! He looked up wearily at the window as his class tramped out. (*The Green Overcoat* 1912: 147)

⁶² See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 111.

⁶³ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 106-107.

The responsible, fair-haired girl unintentionally triggers somebody's mockery of the conceited Professor Higginson. An innocent female question about Higginson's handbook upsets him, because he knows his invented story is an absolute bizarre nonsense with the only purpose of keeping things going and sustaining his reputation.

As Higginson becomes well-known, a pile of letters reaches him every day. Fame comes to him under its less pleasing aspect, because he considers his duty as a scientist to answer handwritten each of these letters, so the effort causes him great strain. Belloc dares to tell us that there are not many Professors of Psychology, and that only three have written books.⁶⁴ Higginson writes two letters with the utmost care, since their addressees are important people, a Cabinet Minister and an ex-Cabinet Minister. Both people are inveterate meddlers who are interested in Higginson's extraordinary experiences and "dabbled in such things in the intervals of [their] enormous occupations."⁶⁵ Higginson selects candidates to receive his answers according to their social importance and particularly their wealth:

Professor Higginson had never written to such great men before. (...) He wrote courteously and at enormous length to a Great Lady whose coronet stood out upon the paper like a mountain, and whose signature he could yet hardly accept as real, so tremendous a thing did it seem to him that such an one as She should have entered his life. (*The Green Overcoat* 1912: 160)

Later in the novel, that rich lady is Mrs Camp from Chicago.⁶⁶ She gives Higginson the chance to speak before a posh audience:

Thus, it was that there fell upon this worthy, stilted and hitherto rather obscure provincial pedant the Great Chance of English life: to receive a note from the private secretary of the widow of Mr Camp, of Chicago, and to speak before the

⁶⁴ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 159.

⁶⁵ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 160.

⁶⁶ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 170, 173.

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Research Club, where, as it seems, Men are Made! (*The Green Overcoat* 1912: 174)

When the day of the speech arrives, the audience is certainly formed by members of the government, but also scoundrels and relevant celebrities, particularly sophisticated women with huge fashionable hats:

They passed through a door and a lifted curtain and came into the great room. There was a small raised platform to which the Professor was guided. (...) [There was] the mass of Cabinet Ministers, fine ladies, actresses, money-lenders, black-mailers, courtesans and touts, the chief thing that impressed him was the enormous size of the women's hats! (*The Green Overcoat* 1912: 302)

Celia Cyril

In *Mr Petre* (1925), there are two journalists, Arthur and Batterby, who try to interview or write a report on the aloof Mr Petre, the American engines tycoon, "the rotor man,"⁶⁷ although they do not know his face and appearance. Mr Petre is not the real John Kosciusko Petre they suppose he is, but an ordinary citizen, Peter Blagden, who has lost his memory and, due to several strange coincidences and circumstances, registers in the hotel as "Mr Petre."

Mr Petre comes out of the hotel, and the journalists in the hall do not notice him because of this. Arthur telephones Mrs Cyril to tell her that Mr Petre is in the hotel. When Mr Petre comes back to the hotel after buying some sundries and reaches his room, the phone rings. It is Mrs Celia Cyril who wants to thank him for the support Mr Petre gave to her husband, Leonard, when he was in America:

[Batterby] looked at his watch, and wondered that Arthur was so long. Yet there was nothing wonderful in the delay. Arthur was telephoning. He was telephoning to Mrs Cyril.

⁶⁷ See *Mr Petre* (1925): 23.

Before he had returned to the lounge and to the impatient Batterby, a stout, rather bewildered man, middle-aged and grey, but active in his step, had passed by him, and had gone rapidly through the great turning doors into the street. It was Mr Petre, seeking a Gladstone bag and linen and hair brushes and all that might be necessary to restore him to citizenship.

(...)

Mr Petre was a full two hours in making his purchases. (...) At last he had fully packed his newly-purchased bag; he had brought it back to the hotel; he had followed it up to No. 44. He sat down beside it, (...) when the telephone on the table in his room rang suddenly, and he took it up.

A woman's voice, very clearly articulate, rather too high, asked if that were Mr Petre, and announced itself as Celia Cyril. (...) The voice told him it knew he *hated* being fussed, but he had always made an exception of dear Leonard, hadn't he? (*Mr Petre* 1925: 16-18)

Celia tells Mr Petre he will get her note and that she hopes he will be able to come. She will send her car. When Mr Petre replaces the handset in its holder he looks up *Who's Who* and finds Leonard Cyril must be dead, as there is no Cyril in this guide. A young child in a bright uniform brings Mrs Cyril's note in which she asks Mr Petre to come for lunch next Wednesday. Mr Petre answers back, saying he will be pleased to be to lunch, even though he considers that party just an occasion to infer who he is.⁶⁸

He glanced again at the letter, turned over the sheet and found a postscript. "You know how discreet I shall be and how familiar I am with your rules. The Press shall not hear a word of it. It was by the merest *accident* that I heard of your presence in London myself, and even if you send an answer that you are not there at all, I shall *quite* understand, – CC" (*Mr Petre* 1925: 20-21)

⁶⁸ See *Mr Petre* (1925): 19-20.

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Celia Cyril has a house on the south side of Grosvenor Square.⁶⁹ She has organized her party and is receiving her guests. A lot of friends attend the luncheon party, in which Mr Petre feels to a certain extent compelled to participate.⁷⁰ Marjorie Kayle is also at Celia Cyril's social gathering...

There was a kind old Cabinet Minister, who was rather deaf and kept on putting his hand to his left year with a beatified look; a rich young woman who had married a still richer lord in the North of England, and who wrote small, carefully-sculptured pieces of bad verse; (...) Lady Batton (Henry Batton's wife, not the old lady); and Marjorie Kayle, who had only one leg and was very witty. But great as these people were, they were nothing like as great as the room. It was perfectly enormous, and Mrs Leonard Cyril, relict of the late Leonard Cyril, who had no particular business but had certainly thriven wonderfully by it, and who was herself the daughter of Pallins the old artist, gloried in the dimensions thereof. (*Mr Petre* 1925: 23)

Belloc enjoys introducing characters of rich and generally idle people. In this case, there are more women than men, but this is not surprising since the hostess is a woman who has a female circle of acquaintances.

Marjorie Kayle resents the great wealth of Celia Cyril. Marjorie knows many details about Mr Petre, for example, that he never answers a letter, and that he is madly against giving anything, although sometimes he gives a lot when he feels so inclined:

Mrs Cyril had just begun, "They say that whenever he washes he –" when the big yellow door was thrown open and a servant in archaic clothes said mournfully, "Mr Petre!" introduced a grey, sturdy, but lively figure, and shut the door very gently again behind him. There was a silence as at the entry of God.
(...)

⁶⁹ See *Mr Petre* (1925): 23.

⁷⁰ See *Mr Petre* (1925): 25.

Never was a man more deeply impressed than was Mr Petre by the solemn deference he received. One after another (...) spiritually knelt before him, and there was manifest in their eyes and in their gestures all the spirit of religion. (...) Marjorie Kayle exceeded. (*Mr Petre* 1925: 25)

Marjorie Kayle is a well-informed woman who loves popular gossip, although she also reads tabloids, magazines and, if necessary, humanitarian publications such as *Powler's Humanitarian Weekly*.⁷¹

During the luncheon party, Mr Petre's hostess puts to him some questions which Mr Petre answers carefully so as not to unmask himself, as he has forgotten everything. Belloc explains how money is the central issue that is the origin of this social occasion:

As the fowls of a farmyard strut aimlessly back and forth picking aimlessly at the ground after the convention of fowls, but very empty of interest in their lives, so had the people behind Mrs Cyril's table spoken first of a play, then of a novel, then of a politician, then of a criminal; and then still more languidly, of a coming eclipse. Their words were the more vapid and without stuff, because each man and woman had in his heart one object, and that object was John K Petre, high above the few lords of the free modern world: fifty million pounds incarnate, and come to dwell amongst us. There, before them, in the flesh. (*Mr Petre* 1925: 26-27)

Ironic Belloc writes the three last lines, simply paraphrasing the Christian concept of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."⁷² Immediately after, Belloc goes on with his farmyard metaphor to introduce "Touaregs," a French investment fund in which all present are very concerned:

⁷¹ See *Mr Petre* (1925): 24.

⁷² *John*, 1, 14.

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As the fowls of a farmyard will change their whole beings, clucking and chattering prodigiously and scrambling together in a swarm, and the whole flock alive with appetite when a handful of grain is thrown down; so did the people round Mrs Cyril's table change inwardly and outwardly at once upon the appearance of Touaregs. Their souls and bodies became alive, their wings were flustered, their minds clashed and struggled. (*Mr Petre* 1925: 27)

This metaphor works perfectly well for it imaginatively represents the greed of all those present at the luncheon party and their anxious, unspoken hope that the recently-arrived Mr Petre advise them on the convenience of a profitable investment, for example, in "Touaregs." What stirs the guests at the party, and their wealthy hostess, Celia Cyril, too, is material gain. They are concerned with these deposits in the market, "Touaregs," of which the French government is very mulish about the concession. The story goes on, and Belloc characteristically designs the stratagem, as hesitant Mr Petre says he is going to buy "Touaregs." Immediately everybody runs to telephone to their stock brokers with orders to buy "Touaregs," and in some days "Touaregs" soars to the maximum.

The luncheon party supplies a good occasion for the social play. Celia Cyril, Marjorie Kayle, Lady Batton, and the two other gentlemen know they are there apparently to socialise, although there is a business objective underlying the social occasion. Yet the play is successful because each person tries to believe in the part he or she is playing:

When an individual plays a part, he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be. (Goffman 1971: 28)

All the fowls in this farmyard (gossipy members in Mrs Cyril's luncheon party) believe that Mr Petre is really the American tycoon they believe he is. The fowls happily accept a specimen is authentic and their expectation comes true.

Mrs Malton

Belloc creates the character of honest Mrs Malton, the kind-hearted, humble woman whom Mr Peter contracts as a servant. In *Mr Petre* (1925), Mrs Malton is unobtrusive and loyal, very different from the other female characters Belloc presents in his novels, who were frequently higher-class or upstart women who concealed ulterior motives. It is possible that Belloc was inspired by Sarah Mew, who was a babysitter when Hilaire Belloc and his sister were young boys. Mrs Mew was a Methodist nurse who impressed the young Belloc because of her moral rectitude.

Mr Petre tells Mrs Malton he has a secret to confide in her, as he has to change his name continuously to avoid being followed. Mrs Malton helps Mr Petre to shun everybody, Charlie Terrard included. Terrard is the lawyer who advises Mr Petre in his investments:

[Mr Petre] fell ill. He had long ago cut off his telephone. His bouts of country air failed to cure him. (...)

He refused all service save that of a woman who came in late of a morning and left at night. (...)

There came a point where the servant grew alarmed. She had heard Terrard's name and knew his direction. She told him, and he had written asking to call again, fearing to come without warning. He had received a shaky line in reply, saying that the millionaire [Mr Petre] would rather be alone.

The message troubled Charlie Terrard. (...)

He [Mr Petre] knew not whom to trust. It quaintly occurred to him (and quite rightly) that he would trust the good and humble woman who served him. (...)

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“Mrs Malton,” he said, “I want you to do something for me,” He eccentrically pulled out a five-pound note, and Mrs Malton grew faint at the sight thereof. It gave her a turn.

“Mrs Malton, I trust you.”

I’m sure,” said Mrs Malton, with an old-fashioned bob.

(...) “Mrs Malton, what is my name?”

“Mr Patten, sir” said Mrs Malton.

“Well,” said Mr Petre, “I’ve got a secret to confide to you. My name’s not Patten. It’s Jasper.”

“Indeed, sir,” said Mrs Malton dutifully. She had no doubt at all what was the matter with her employer, but her loyalty stood firm. (*Mr Petre* 1925: 125, 135-136)

Mr Petre asks Mrs Malton to go to the library and bring him the latest book on “Loss of Memory.” Mrs Malton returns bringing back Wittrington’s book. As Dr Wittrington is already dead, another name is suggested, Sir Henry Brail, in preppy Harley Street:⁷³

“Mrs Malton, I want you to go to the Public Library, and ask them for a book, any book, on Loss of Memory.” Mrs Malton bobbed again. She thought it was an extraordinary fuss to make about nothing, and five pounds left her under some strain of conscience. (...) [Mr Petre added] “Take a cab, be quick and keep the change.”

Mrs Malton (...) was looking forward to taking home that piece of paper unbroken; but her virtue was proof, and her loyalty.

“Mrs Malton, I want you to go to the nearest telephone, and say that you are speaking for a man who will give any fee that may be asked to visit the greatest specialist upon this,” and he wrote down upon a piece of paper ...

(...)

⁷³ See *Mr Petre* (1925): 136-137.

Mrs Malton was longer than he liked; but when she got back she was clear enough, and very sensible.

Dr Wittington was dead. A name had been given her. It was the name of Sir Henry Brail, with an address in Harley Street. She had written it down in her large, childish letters. (*Mr Petre* 1925: 136)

Eventually, Mr Petre recovers his memory, not because of the three doctors who treat him, but due to his encounter by chance with his long-life friend, Buffy Thompson. The former Mr Petre now knows he is, and has always been, Peter Blagden.⁷⁴

Peter Blagden tells Mrs Malton he is going to move to Patcham and that he would also like her to continue to be his maid there. He asks her to arrange everything for the removal and gives her five pounds. Belloc adds a reflection about this good-natured woman who does not believe that virtue must be rewarded in this world – the reader can infer that virtue will be certainly rewarded in eternal life – but who always behaves faithfully, honestly, and is a sincere believer in God. She humbly thanks God for her good luck whenever things go well. Mrs Malton was educated in the faith, partly because she lived in an Essex area – a march – and was brought up “in a very old-fashioned way.” The inference is that no people receive sound Christian education in 1925, the year this novel was published. On top of this, Belloc considers generally there is no reward in old age and no virtue in younger ages:

Mrs Malton made no terms. Nor did it occur to her that virtue could be rewarded in this world. For in her station of life reward is unknown, as in higher stations virtue. She simply thought that God, in Whom she believed (for she had been brought up in a very old-fashioned way on the lonely edge of an Essex march) had sent Mr Petre with a gift, and in her philosophy that was not reward but good luck.

(...)

⁷⁴ See *Mr Petre* (1925): 152.

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Mrs Malton, returning to her task, mused on the common madness of the wealthy, and humbly thanked Heaven for her good fortune. (*Mr Petre* 1925: 165)

Hilda Maple and her bosom friend, Matilda, later called Amatheia, and finally called Lady Mere de Beurivage

In *The Haunted House* (1927), John Maple is beset with troubles in his failing personal life as he battles his ambitious Aunt Hilda – Hilda Maple – who becomes the dubious heiress of John’s father’s former house. Some unfortunate vicissitudes cause John Maple’s momentary loss of his long-awaited legacy, Rackham manor house.

Hilda’s deceased husband lent successive amounts of money to impecunious John Maple’s father who could not repay the money. After many years, John’s father dies and, although John is the heir, Hilda ought to have the usufruct of the estate as long as she lived. As a result, John Maple is really poor, while Hilda has everything, because she acts as if she were the proprietor of a huge estate which is not hers, since she is only the usufruct. Yet Hilda tries to sell Rackham secretly and illegally. She wants to keep the money to pay her huge gambling debts. Hilda refurbishes and modifies Rackham to such a degree that “all looked new, most abominably aping agee.”⁷⁵ Hilda re-baptises Rackham as “Rackham Catchings,” while her nephew contemplates this initiative with disgust.⁷⁶

Boastful Hilda invents and broadens her own legend of aristocracy as to Rackham Catchings. She lives in a dream world of becoming socially important and puts on airs. She invents the figure of Sir Harry Murtenshaw whom she calls “The Ancestor.” She also “tacks a ghost on to Sir Harry.”⁷⁷ A young couple of upstarts, George Huggins and Amatheia, are prospective buyers of Rackham Catchings, so Hilda tries to attract them in several ways. This couple is nearly illiterate, although they are exceedingly rich, and they have called themselves Lord and Lady de Beurivage.

⁷⁵ See *The Haunted House* (1927): 46, 51.

⁷⁶ See *The Haunted House* (1927): 50.

⁷⁷ See *The Haunted House* (1927): 68.

The reason why Aunt Hilda transformed Rackham into a bizarre mansion that is a bad-taste hodgepodge of architectural and decorative styles is because she is fighting debt, as she gambled and lost everything, except Rackham. She is in a hurry to sell the house to any affluent people, because Mr de Vere, her creditor, begins to press Hilda insistently to get his money back. Hilda calms her conscience and self-justifies her mean financial demeanour:

Now Mr de Vere of Jermyn Street was beginning to press. But she would sell Rackham and all would be well.

Such is the heart of woman that she told herself all this was quite fair to John. He would be her heir – the fact that she would have nothing to leave him did not alter that. She had made him an honourable offer to send him to Oxford, and he had refused. She was perpetually asking him down to Rackham, and wasn't that kind of her? Indeed, he did not come half enough. She respected him for that. It was the Maple blood – Aunt Hilda by this time had come to believe that she herself was a Maple. (*The Haunted House* 1927: 87)

Although Hilda cannot help feeling remorse about her greedy activity, she tries to calm down by means of shallow arguments for self-justification, which is the typical attitude we all tend to engage in. Even if this desire for justification is a universal human trend, Belloc includes a sentence “such is the heart of woman that...” which would be seriously criticised by current feminist criticism, as it may be considered discriminatory. Belloc, in 1925, was completely alien to this school of criticism. In fact, he usually wrote freely without paying attention to other people's opinion.

Lord Hambourne is an Oxford don who was a psychology expert during the First World War, although his students consider him a cad and a trickster. He belongs to the clique which loiter around Rackham. He flatters Hilda, and she thinks his company enhances Rackham and its world of supposed luxury. Lord Hambourne is a pedant who is supposed to certify the allegedly antiquity of that Tudor house, but he is one more of the sluggards who swarm around the stately home.

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Aunt Hilda knows Hamilcar Hellup, Lord Hellup. He is an American wealthy widower who comes to live in England and buys his peerage.⁷⁸ Aunt Hilda tries to sell Rackham to Hamilcar Hellup, Bo's father. Bo is John Maple's girlfriend, whose real name is Isabeau Hellup, but everybody calls her Bo. Bo thinks Hilda is a bit infatuated with Hamilcar Hellup:

Bo held up her finger.

"Get it right, boy," she said. "Pop's not crazy for the house, but he'll be guided, D'you get me?"

(...)

"The Proud Dame of Rackham can obtain of the Baron, my father, what boon she craves, fond youth. He's refuse her nothing, wouldn't Pop. Wait till you see him with her. 'Sides which, he's told me."

(...)

And how could Bo already know such things when he, the son of the house, had noticed nothing? It offended his pride.

(...)

"And what does aunt Hilda say about it?" was John's next question when he had recovered from the shock.

"Not much yet," said Bo. "Pop's shy. He's not said anything. But he will, and if he finds that buying the place at her price is a persuasive, why, he won't look twice at her figure; I mean her demand, her estimate. Though I guess it's hell-high." (*The Haunted House* 1927: 94-95)

A man, John, is surprised at a woman's, Bo's, intuition and sense of observation. Bo realizes Hilda's manoeuvre very quickly, while John is not aware of the love affair related to business.

The story is increasingly complicated when Hilda gets to know a wealthy couple who actually come from the lower class. They are Georges Adolphus Huggins and

⁷⁸ See *The Haunted House* (1927): 58.

Matilda, originally fruit and vegetable costermongers. After some successful business transactions and petty swindles, this couple obtained a lot of money, and they flaunt richness through their car, chauffeur, jewels, and expensive clothes:

Affection mellowed things, and the air was kindly when in half an hour after the Hellups an enormous machine, the size of a cottage, driven by a gentleman whose uniform vaguely recalled the General Officers of Central American States, and having by his side yet another uniformed gentleman of a more moderate type, purred, roared, halted and panted grandly before the door.

Therein, through large spaces of glass could be seen a huge bunch of hot-house flowers, set in a silver sconce. It faced in its gay opulence the owner of the splendid conveyance, Lord Mere de Beurivage himself. His considerable though not elongated form was protracted from the inclemencies of the weather by a fur coat and, as to his legs at least, by the mounted skin of a very fine African lion (...) [that] performed the same office of comfort for his wife, who sat upon his left.

And what a wife!

Her dress, though the afternoon was yet young, seemed compounded of a material wherein there entered no small proportion of gold. (*The Haunted House* 1927: 144-145)

Hilda also likes to impress the important couple, George and Amatheia. Hilda's aim is to sell Rackham to any wealthy candidate who is ready to discuss pricing:

Aunt Hilda gave them time to recover from the enormous fatigues of the journey, solacing them with tea, impressing them with the dignified figure of Corton [the butler]. Then only, when she had gathered them together (...) did she take them round in a herd, to put a climax to their rivalry for the house by filling it with history. (*The Haunted House* 1927: 146)

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Belloc enjoys laughing at the sharp contrast between their near illiteracy and the airs and graces they struggle to show in public. Hilda immediately ingratiates with them to increase the number of possible purchasers of the building. Georges and Matilda succeed in calling themselves Lord and Lady Mere de Beurivage. Matilda very soon becomes Amatheia, a name she considered very chic. Belloc transcribes Matilda's words in her funny ruffraff pronunciation:

Amatheia, First Baroness of Beurevage [*sic*], stood in ecstasy [*sic*] upon the lawn, holding darling Hilda's arm solidly in the crook of hers – two solid arms well interlocked. In spite of the thickness and the shortness of her neck, she carried her head a little upon one side, partly from the intensity of her emotions, more through her conviction that such an attitude befitted the occasion.

“Oh, Ilda!” she said, “darling Ilda, wot a gem! What a reel Jule!” Then she sighed. “I wish the Prime Minister could see it, that I do,” she continued. “Yer can't think 'ow 'ot 'e is on old English 'ouses. Why, I tell you strite, Ilda, show that man an old English 'ouse, and he just fair goes off the deep end – as the saying is. He said to me once, he did, “Amatheia,” he says – 'e calls me Amatheia, 'cos Uggins don't like to call me Mattie – yet we're pals, ye' know – ” and here she nudged her hostess strongly in the rib with a powerful elbow, and that lady, having before her one approach to fifty thousand pounds, stalwartly bore the blow. (*The Haunted House* 1927: 172)

Belloc enjoys describing how sweet and tender Hilda and Amatheia's friendship is. With the help of Chesterton's pencil and sharp imagination, the novel supplies a mild drawing of their soft embrace and kisses. The caption reads:

Fond embrace of Hilda, relict of the late William Maple, Esquire, of Rackham Catchings in the County of Sussex, and Amatheia, wife of George, First Baron of Beurivage (pronounced Bruvvish) (*The Haunted House* 1927: 147)

Bo and John make a plan. As John is a ventriloquist they prepare a headless ghost by imitating a beheaded gentleman from the sixteenth century, precisely Sir Harry Murthenshaw, “The Ancestor” which was invented by Hilda herself. Bo encourages John Maple to give Georges Huggins and Matilda (Amathea) a scare by making the headless dummy appear anywhere in the dark house and using his hoarse voice through his ventriloquist skill.

Belloc describes Bo as a clever – a bit of a rogue – determined, young, American woman with many resources to help her coy boyfriend recover the manor house. Bo calls John “Dog-Man.” She is one of those women who “know their minds,” “those of the kind who make happy marriages:

“Dog-Man [John],” she [Bo] said, “how’s your end? Have you bitten ‘em? Have you bitten ‘em good and hard?”

There was no lack of healthy determination in *this* conspirator. Women know their minds. At least, some women do. And especially those of the kind who make happy marriages. John was learning every hour. But pray remember that the woman tempted him.

He was a little ashamed, and he did not meet her eye.

“I have suggested things, Bo. I did say a few words. Made an atmosphere.”

“Was he scared?” persisted his implacable prelate.

“I’m afraid he was,” said John. (*The Haunted House* 1927: 169)

They make appear Sir Harry Murtenshaw’s beheaded phantom several times to terrorize some of Hilda’s guests, particularly Lord and Lady Mere de Beurivage, to such an extent that Georges Huggins is terribly shocked, and lies in bed half-conscious and muttering. Right then an ambulance takes him to hospital. As a consequence, Amathea is really angry and gives Hilda a dressing-down. Hilda loses the only couple that could buy Rackham:

“Amathea,” she bleated, *dearest* Amathea! ...”

But her adversary blazed out in terrible wrath.

“You shet yer ‘ed!” she yells without reserve. “It’s you did all the ‘arm, it is!” Then to the procession. “Ow, ‘andle him gentler,” ‘ear him groan – ow!” Then to her hostess, “Look on wot yer done!”

“I don’t see what I’ve done,” began Mrs Maple, but Amathea interrupted her again.

(...)

“Amathea ...” began Mrs Maple again.

“Don’t you Amathea me, Mrs Miple!” shouted the peeress with all the subtle charm of Aristocracy, as she crashed one hand on a table still sordid with last night glasses, and stretched the other in wild denunciation. “Don’t you Amathea me! I wish yer’d never been born, nor I to meet yer! With yer ‘umbug and yer lies and yer Black Devil, and all! (*The Haunted House* 1927: 266-267)

Screaming and insults pour out until Matilda’s – or Amathea’s – face is crimson; she is panting and sweating, and her voice almost exhausted:

Rackham Catchings was as quiet as the dusty scene of an explosion when the rumble is over: but it was as wrecked. Aunt Hilda Maple sat down, a wreck herself, her elbow upon the table of the hall, her dizzy head supported in her left hand.

(...)

“Well, John ...”

“I’m still here, Aunt Hilda,” said John dutifully. “Whatever you want me for, I’m still here. And ... And, Aunt Hilda, I’ll still buy Rackham.”

(...)

John put the papers down upon the table, and his fountain-pen by the side.

Then in that silence the Ancestor spoke from his frame. He spoke in a deep voice, and with a gravity that belied his features.

(...)

“Woman! Woman!” boomed on Sir Harry Murtenshaw, Knight, from the depths of his painted chest. “Is he not the Rightful Heir?”

(...)

She reeled a little. John Maple helped her up and seated her. She signed. (*The Haunted House* 1927: 268, 270-271)

Belloc arranges this last part with a slight change in the normal legal proceedings, because John Maple has no need to buy his own house. John makes an agreement with Hilda about Rackham because, according to the testament, he would only have the house after Hilda’s death. Hilda is the usufructur. What John does is to have access to his house as the only heir in advance.

The novel finishes when Hamilcar Hellup comforts and hugs Hilda, who cries bitterly.⁷⁹ Hilda is the ambitious woman who builds a careful plan to obtain a lot of money to cover her debts and eventually must recognise her greed is completely useless and has led her to doom.

Hilda recognises she is guilty of attempting to swindle, and she confesses to the ghost:

“Oh, sir!” came abruptly and strongly in sharp agony from Hilda Maple’s lips. She sank suddenly upon the floor to her knees and clasped her fingers convulsively, imploring the clemency of her dreadful visitant [The Ancestor’s ghost], “Oh, sir, I am a sinful woman!” She buried her face in her hands. (*The Haunted House* 1927: 271)

Mary Bullar, the reigning Prime Minister

⁷⁹ See *The Haunted House* (1927): 272.

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This headline is taken from Belloc's paradoxical sentence in *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928):

The Secretary of State for Home Affairs relied very properly, upon the younger and more active brain. It would not be true to say that he knew nothing whatever about the great section of official activity over which he presided, for he had so presided over it nearly three years – in fact, ever since Mary Bullar, his cousin, the reigning Prime Minister, had formed her Cabinet. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 41)

There is an ironical paradox or tongue-in-cheek exaggeration in “the reigning Prime Minister,” because a Prime Minister has executive power, but he or she does not reign. Only kings and queens reign. Nevertheless, Mary Bullar is such a commanding person that she looks like a queen from the French absolutist period. Belloc relishes mocking his characters, especially when they are bossy and impatient.

Mrs Bullar is successful, whereas her predecessor, Lady Sarah Palasch, was not a suitable person to be Head of the Party, because she was not able enough to deal with difficult matters, had many family troubles, was continuously distracted by the ups and downs of her daughter and the problems with her fifth husband “and the cheque.”⁸⁰ On the other hand, Mrs Bullar is hardly fifty, strong, and capable. She has a square face, determined mouth, and decided eyes that induce a sense of respect in those present.

At N° 10 Downing Street, Mary Bullar is talking with the Home Secretary, her cousin Henry Hardham:

“It’s no good arguing,” said Mary Bullar. “Someone has got to give the order, and I have given it. My dear fellow,” she added, pushing her chair back from the table, crossing her legs (or rather ankles, for she had Presence), “it’s not a thing I like saying, but if you do not care for the duties of your office, you are always free to resign.”

⁸⁰ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 62.

(...)

“So that’s settled,” she went on. “Did you come in your motor?” (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 64)

Of course, Henry Hardham is very upset when the sharp interview finishes. Henry Hardham manages to invite Richard Mallard to have dinner with him. After the dinner, Henry Hardham tries to worm the news about the Eremin concession out of Richard Mallard without any result. Henry even threatens Richard, although Richard knows nothing at all because he is not the right man the whole government is looking for. Richard is just a tourist who wants to visit England, but a series of confusions has transformed him into the goal of the sharpest agents. Mary Bullar decides Plain Clothes Man will watch Mallard to arrest him on some silly pretext.

But Soft: We Are Observed! (1928) is a futuristic novel which describes imaginative facts which take place in several years: 1931, 1952, 1972, 1976, and 1979.⁸¹ In contrast with previous novels, Belloc builds female characters who sometimes predominate in this story. Mary Bullar, Lady Caroline Balcombe, Ethel Mudgson, and Arabella Slackett are the most prominent.

Ethel Mudgson, efficient Distributing Agent

There are other female characters in the novel. Ethel Mudgson, First (and Last) Baronne de Larance⁸² is the Distributing Agent of the M Section, “the one organised by the Allied Governments for dealing with a particular matter in which they pooled.”⁸³ In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), The Distributing Centre is like a central European office which coordinates espionage from the Mediterranean Coalition. It is based in France.

When Belloc introduces this new character, he places her, seated at a mignone little table “of ormolu and inlay,” writing a letter in her house overlooking the coast of Provence. She is a very handsome, fifty-year-old, fair-haired woman, although part of

⁸¹ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 37, 40, 55, 56, 185.

⁸² See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 30.

⁸³ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 31.

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her hair is artificial, with large eyelids. On the whole, her aspect is elegant and has “a look of veiled pride.”⁸⁴ After her husband’s death, when he had an accident with a revolver in the gardens of the Casino of Monte Carlo, she “had failed during all these long years to harpoon a second mate. (...) But she did not starve.” She knew how to keep her husband’s good relationship with the police, and she became a Distributing Agent. Currently, she is finishing her letter:

It was an answer to her own most urgent, anxious, three successive cables of a day upon an unnamed person’s health, and especially upon who was looking after Toto [Richard Mallard].

The Distributing Centre was satisfied. She gave the missive to her chauffeur to be taken to the station, and on from the station by the appointed person in the express for Calais. Then she went off to lose a well-deserved 10,000 francs at the tables, and so to bed. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 32)

In a roundabout way, Belloc tells the reader Ethel’s husband committed suicide after losing money at the Casino. In spite of this bad memory, Ethel goes on happily playing money “at the tables.”

Lady Caroline Balcombe, Constitutional Anarchist

In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), Lady Caroline Balcombe comes from a great family; she is a Baugh of Woolstone by birth. She is indispensable as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.⁸⁵ In the middle of the twentieth century, her father had been a second leader of the Anarchist party. One of Lady Caroline Balcombe’s famous programmatic sentences is uttered in the great meeting at Bristol in 1952, in which “Constitutional Anarchy” is strangely proclaimed. This is certainly a rarity, some complicated sort of anarchy which is constitutional. There is no country in the real world and never has been any one in which anarchy is constitutional, since both

⁸⁴ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 31.

⁸⁵ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 56.

concepts are antagonistic. Yet Belloc likes to write paradoxical sentences like this one, just looping the loop and teasing the reader:

The high soprano voice which rang out like a silver trumpet on that occasion, and the words it found to express the very soul of Statesmanship, will hardly be forgotten so long as representative government endures:

“I am as profoundly attached to Anarchy, and to all the principles of Anarchy, as any woman or man here present. But the only Anarchy I know is an Anarchy to be achieved by Constitutional Means. ...” (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928)

Lady Caroline Balcombe is sixty-five, “still young as political life goes, or at least young for the high office she occupies,”⁸⁶ and is tall, slight, and energetic. Her husband, Charles Balcombe, died some time before. Lady Caroline Balcombe has been thirty years in political activities without interruption. She has the gift of compromise and moderation, merits which keeps the Anarchist party away from unwelcome extremisms:

She was one of those women of whom one feels that they occupy naturally and inevitably a certain place in politics.

(...) It was not even the authoritative position which she had taken on the rare occasions when she spoke in debate upon the international position of Britain (...) she had certainly distinguished herself quite early in her Parliament career as a private member in her speech upon the long past American and Canadian Alliance against Japan. Her defence of Tuffler’s policy (...) put into form, clear cut and convincing, what all were thinking more or less confusedly, but what none had so formally expressed:

“Though Mother and Daughter differ – yea, even with heat – are they not Mother and Daughter still?”

⁸⁶ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 55.

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The present Archbishop, then Moderator of the Christian Liberty Churches, has confessed to me that he was moved to tears by the sublimity of the metaphor.⁸⁷

Her voice strikingly trembles upon the parallel of a young beauty “better fitted to be adorned than a woman of maturer years!”⁸⁸ Lady Caroline Balcombe’s soprano voice and the contralto of Mary Bullar, her Chief, help to emphasize everything Lady Caroline Balcombe affirms with aplomb.

Belloc places Lady Caroline Balcombe sitting before her great desk in a huge room, holding in her left hand a tortoiseshell and gold lorgnette. She is just revising a Memorandum. Callingham is her assistant, one of her Permanent Secretaries, and he is standing respectfully at her right hand. Belloc is ahead of his time and maliciously tells the story of a bossy, female, high-rank civil servant giving orders to a meek, male secretary whose main concern is to flatter her, going with her flow, obeying immediately her whims, and doing everything possible to keep his post. Belloc enjoys supplying this short story of female dominance upon a fearful, servile, male secretary.

When the lady asks Callingham if a line or a paragraph is redundant, the bootlicker invariably answers, “Yes if you think so,” and Lady Caroline’s “little gold pencil [goes] steadily through the whole paragraph...”⁸⁹ So far so good. Lady Caroline Balcombe goes on copy-editing the Memorandum. Every now and again, she raises her eyebrows and tells Callingham the text is too long. Callingham respectfully offers to take it back and make it shorter, although determined Lady Caroline Balcombe decides she is going to revise the full chunk herself. When she finishes her work, she is fully satisfied of such an accomplished task.

Then Lady Caroline Balcombe broods over the helpless Home Secretary, Henry Hardham who, to make matters worse, is Mary Bullar’s cousin. Lady Caroline Balcombe wants Henry Hardham to meet Richard Mallard whom she calls the “Mystery Man,” because she does not know his real identity. Lady Caroline Balcombe tells

⁸⁷ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 57.

⁸⁸ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 58.

⁸⁹ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 59-60.

Callingham, straightforwardly, what she thinks about such an idle and incompetent chap, namely, Henry Hardham:

“Cally,” [Callingham] she said, “I think we must jog Mary, and make her jog that old idiot of Henry.”

She looked up and smiled once more at her Permanent Secretary in a bewitched manner, born of many years’ experience – of nearly sixty years’ experience – for in the rank to which the leading families of the great Anarchist party belong that sort of thing begins in the nursery.

(...)

Callingham’s was a duteous smile.

“We’ll put her through it,” said his chief, briefly: “ring, Cally, ring.”

(...) Then she gave tongue.

“Mary, you’ve got to get hold of Henry and make that old jackass see this Mystery Man himself.” (...)

She listened to the short contralto reply, then spoke again:

“Kick? Of course, he’ll kick! He’s never done a stroke of work in his life, and he doesn’t want to! But this time it’s chip in or bust. Delisport will be on to it, and so will Worsing. We’ve got to get our foot in the door *first*.” (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 61-62)

Lord Delisport is George Goodge, empire maker, newspaper owner, and Marquis.⁹⁰ Mr Angus Worsing of Glasgow is a private businessman.⁹¹ Both of them are running after Richard Mallard to obtain the concession of *Eremin*, a recently discovered fuel.

As the novel draws to a close, Lady Caroline Balcombe is in a hurry to prevent Richard Mallard from escaping, so she gives the suitable orders to arrest him at the hotel, The Titanic:⁹²

⁹⁰ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 98.

⁹¹ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 102.

⁹² See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 161.

The telephone queries raining in from both Departments, from Lady Caroline herself, from Worsing – oddly enough none from Lord Delisport; that nobleman was holding his hand.

(...)

The Home Office, Worsing, Delisport learnt from the Titanic that their man had flitted by the boat train – and the one to do the right thing was, as you may imagine, Lady Caroline. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 161-162)

Lady Caroline Balcombe and Mary Bullar have already arranged a sequel. The important matter is to nab Richard Mallard and hand him over to an English escort. The police should not be called, since everything could be transformed into an official secret to avoid any further trouble:

If nothing cropped up they could always make it official secrets or something – there'd be plenty of evidence for *that*. The great thing was to nab him: after that he could be cooked to what sauce they pleased and made easier to deal with. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 162)

Richard Mallard escapes to Scotland and enjoys Angus Worsing's hospitality. One day he is walking with his host on the high road, not far from the South Lodge of Glenaber. There is a Granite Pub with a bench outside, on which three men are seated, talking and enjoying the fine weather. Richard Mallard recognises one of them as the man who had followed him into the "Black Horse" in the Lake District, and of whom he thought he had caught a glimpse in the Clan Tarroch Hotel. However, as Richard Mallard and Worsing are passing by the pub, none of them look up. Richard Mallard's suspicions and anxieties are heightened further the next day:

He was still under the influence of that coincidence – or worse – when, the next day, a new guest coming to Glenaber added to his ill-ease and made it poignant.

She was familiar to those who know the wealthy through newspapers alone as the Honourable Arabella Burnett, to the registers in Somerset House as Arabella Jane St Valery Slackett, born in 1944, spinster, but to her equals as Balmy Jane.

Her appearance supported the epithet. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 148)

Honourable Arabella Slackett, also called Balmy Jane. Enlightened lady and misunderstood visionary

Richard Mallard sees Arabella Slackett (*alias* Balmy⁹³ Jane) for the first time as a new guest in Glenaber. The lady is going to pursue him everywhere and become his excruciating nightmare. “Her appearance supported the epithet” means, roughly, that her hair is pale and scanty, she has very light grey eyes, her gestures are very emphatic, and she has bouts and fits of odd enthusiasms. She has virtues similar to what would be a peculiar mixture of Jesus Christ and Don Quixote, and, of course, she is also incorporated into several political and social activities:

She was a Redeemer of the Human Race and a Redresser of Wrongs – in theory as in literature.

(...)

She was of the Brethren, she held Annihilationist views. She suffered for the sufferings of man. She knew that light had come from the East, that salvation had appeared in Moscow more than sixty years ago [she meant the October Revolution in 1917], and that now the dawn had spread over the East. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 148-149)

⁹³ “Barmy,” pronounced exactly the same as “balmy,” means “daft,” “mad,” or “crazy.” This is an example of Belloc’s thinly-disguised attempt to appear ‘politically-correct’ in his presentation of a woman.

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Belloc is describing a visionary, lunatic, insane woman who has numerous obsessions, and who goes on with her absurd vagaries literally up to the last paragraph of the novel.⁹⁴ Balmy Jane, Arabella Slackett's nickname, sticks in Mallard's mind and is like a haunting curse upon him.

G.K. Chesterton's drawing depicts a half-mad woman, quite slender, with lank but spiky hair and clasped hands, looking at the sky with wide-open eyes. Balmy Jane's face has an expression of horrified interior enlightenment. The caption reads:

Immoderate gesture of Balmy Jane under the influence of Democratic enthusiasm. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 152)

Balmy Jane is well-connected with important people, for she is Henry Hardham's niece, the Prime Minister, Mary Bullar, is her mother's cousin, and Lord Corvan has married her sister. She works nobly for the emancipation of mankind and, at the same time, consciously interferes in people's lives. She is usually aware of what is happening, although no one pays attention to her intuitions:

The middle classes regarded her with a mixture of awe for her rank and of horror at her speeches, her own lot knew her to be harmless. It is rather chic to have a few reds knocking about. They season the dish. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 149)

Belloc seems to suggest that well-known people's lives are tasteful if they are immersed in a leftist group, since "it is rather chic to have a few reds knocking about." He observed that a slightly left-wing aroma usually helped one to thrive in cultural life.

⁹⁴ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 189.

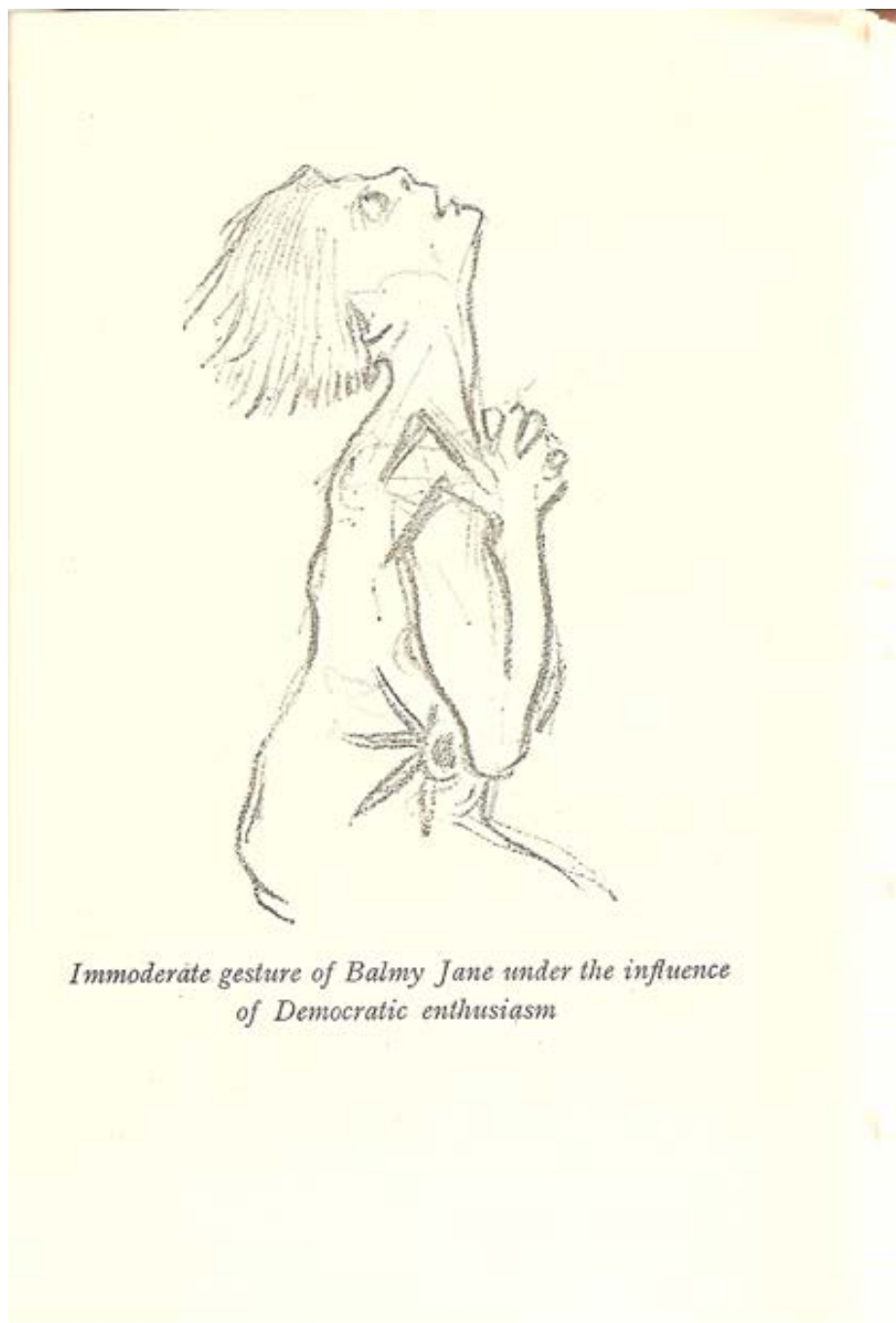


Fig. 12. Balmy Jane. Drawing by G.K. Chesterton. *But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928 (London: Arrowsmith, 1930): 249.

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Balmy Jane knows many government members are hunting Richard Mallard for the concession of Eremin, and some of them are thinking about the possibility of arresting him. Balmy Jane, in her frequent misunderstandings and hallucinations, feels that the supreme light has spread from Moscow and reached the whole East, although Europe has still resisted such a spiritual dawn. She thinks West Irania is the district which has played a remarkable role in the Liberation of Mankind, so its main Agent, the special Envoy with authority to decide on the Concession of Eremin, bewildered Richard Mallard, has bravely denounced the atrocities at Pangbar, particularly the tortures and the drownings in the Caspian.⁹⁵

She [Balmy Jane] had been firmly sure that all those tales of tortures, and the drownings in the Caspian, were lies. Now she was trebly sure.

(...)

Richard Mallard was rooted. He was held. He didn't even continue his original twist and start. He froze on it. But within he was all protest. Was it not enough that he had endured her at breakfast? That he had been compelled the last night to hear flaming whispers on the Pangbar atrocities?

(...)

Richard Mallard trembled. He felt in confused mixture some dreadful fate of which he had been warned, a lunatic woman threatening he knew not what, spies left and right – and in such a mood, he stiffened again and stood rigid with open eyes... (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 149, 150-151, 153)

⁹⁵ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 149. Pangbar is an invented name. Belloc chooses Pangbar to denominate some eastern geographical spot. In real life, Pangbar usually appears as an Indonesian surname. There is an important mountain with a similar name to our Western ears, Nanga Parbat (26,660ft), which is in Pakistan. The Caspian [Sea] is also chosen for its remote overtones. Pangbar and the Caspian are two spots which insistently crop up in Arabella Slackett's unbalanced mind.

Belloc is fond of the term "Caspian" in this novel. When the real Envoy of West Irania does appear, a quite dull Mongolian individual called "Chap 1," he asks the Money of the Concession for fifty years should be deposited, in sterling, in the Caspian Bank in the City of London. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 177)

Balmy Jane is on tenterhooks trying to speak to Richard Mallard, because she foresees the terrible dangers which lurk for him. Her duty to prevent him thrills her:

How she envied her sister, Lady Corvan, for having been privileged to entertain him at her own table! How she burned to help!

With what a leaping heart, then, did she hear that name at her first introduction – Mallard! It was the name under which her Divinity had chosen to disguise himself, and as she looked at the gentle face, the quiet eyes, she was indignant at the way Capitalism had maligned him.

(...)

She manoeuvred to sit next to him at dinner and poured out her wealth of indignation against the grievous inequalities of the world. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 149)

Nevertheless, Balmy Jane has no opportunity to speak to Richard Mallard after dinner, although she follows him permanently with her looks. This attitude amuses another woman present, Sally Goff, but greatly annoys Mrs Baddenham, “Worsing’s sister, who was acting as hostess.”⁹⁶ Next morning at breakfast, Balmy Jane seriously warns Richard Mallard he is in danger. Mallard feels upset at Balmy Jane’s words and strange attitude. He escapes to the garden alone to calm himself, but Balmy Jane chases after him. She is out of control:

But his [Mallard’s] mood in no way discomposed her. She was the Wrath of God. (...) For the jejune but resolute Arabella fell suddenly at his astonished feet, clasped her hands, and cried to him, gazing upwards in a Messianic ecstasy, “Saviour! Deliverer!”

(...)

With an advance closely recalling Ethel Napier in the part of Lady Macbeth sleep-walking, she approached him.

⁹⁶ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 150.

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(...)

“We are alone!” she whispered. (It was abominably true!) She rose suddenly to her feet, and looked fully at him with her full, excessive vision. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 153)

She extends her hands towards Richard Mallard and places her face near his. “For a dreadful second he feared her lips – she expected this.”⁹⁷ Richard runs for the house to get rid of such a nutty woman. He takes the train to Glasgow to shun this crazy creature and the three sleuths who annoy him:

In the train, Richard recovered. He remembered. He’d left his things behind. He’d played the lunatic – but he was free. ... What a moment!

He took out his ticket – it was for Glasgow only. He felt for his money and his traveller’s checks. They were on him. Good! (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 154)

Eventually, Richard Mallard is compensated by the government, since the real Envoy of West Irania appears, and the whole mess is redressed. On 8th July 1979, there is a debate in the House of Commons some hours after the last agreements on the Eremin Deposits of West Irania. Balmy Jane, Arabella Slackett, misunderstands everything and makes a fuss. As she is not a member of the House, she has indoctrinated a fatuous, dim-witted MP to speak on her behalf:

And what was the occasion of such high debate?

It was all along of Arabella Slackett. With the sure instinct of the Born Fanatic [BF], she had got hold of the Wrong End of the Stick and, not a member of the House itself, she had coached another Born Fanatic, who was a member, to hurl the lightning bolts of indignation at the administration of the nation. (...)

⁹⁷ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 153.

For Balmy Jane had heard three-quarters of the story and had got it top side down and twisted. Hence the speech to which the Front Bench were listening in silent scorn.

(...)

[He] was a man who was a Party of One, Cannock of Cardiff. His flaming red hair, his burning coals of eyes added to the effect of his lean figure, his violent gesture, his trembling wrath. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 186)

Cannock of Cardiff, a BF, to use Belloc's newly-coined term, defies everybody to deny the facts that only he knows. He thinks everybody has persecuted and tortured the secret Envoy from West Irania, and he details his own story about how the government has transformed him into an innocent victim. Mary Bullar sets things right, and the members of the House burst into a roar of cheering and applause. The last paragraph of the novel insists on how BF Balmy Jane is:

But Balmy Jane still holds firm to her Faith, and she will spend some years in attempting to worm out from her relations and hosts in half the country houses of England where the true, the original Envoy of West Irania (or his murdered corpse) may lie concealed.

THE END

(*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 189)

Belloc's satiric genius builds a completely farcical novel about crime stories. Balmy Jane resembles one of those people everybody knows or has privately observed, with amazement and terror, who are insane, confuse everything, and continuously pose problems.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Although Belloc's tone and intention are only light and satirical, Balmy Jane appears to be a schizophrenic woman. Her mental condition characteristically implies hallucinations and loss of touch with reality.

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Miss Gaylor

Lord Delisport invites Mallard to have dinner, and he compels him to sign a document by means of which Mallard settles the Eremin Concession between Lord Delisport and himself.⁹⁹ When desperate Richard Mallard wants to go away, he dashes for the handle of the door of the little office and shakes it, but finds it locked. Then Lord Delisport calls Miss Gaylor, the young, docile secretary who is hiding behind the curtain, and she writes down the conversation under the orders of shrewd Lord Delisport:

“Miss Gaylor,” called Lord Delisport to her surrounding air, and a very discreet, very neatly dressed, very quiet young woman came out from behind a thick curtain which nobly draped one of the windows of the room.

“Yer’ve got that all down, ‘aven’t yer?”

“Yes, Lord Delisport,” said the unmoved lady in a business-like tone.

(But Soft: We Are Observed! 1928: 158-159)

The young girl is very polite, responsible, self-possessed, and perfectly at her ease.¹⁰⁰ All these qualities of such a submissive woman do not exactly fit with the current typical female image of what the present-day woman should be: attractive (in her own way, not just “neatly dressed”), independent from man (particularly economically), and opinionated (just the opposite of “very quiet”).

The bizarre real Envoy of West Irania appears. Final argument between Mary Bullar and Lady Caroline Balcombe

In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), the plot of the novel is based on a blunder, namely, the mistaken identity of an ordinary, English-speaking Cuban tourist for the real Envoy of West Irania, the country which owns the biggest ore deposits – Eremin reserves – the necessary additive to produce Durandite, a new revolutionary fuel.

⁹⁹ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 160.

¹⁰⁰ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 160.

Moreover, the real Envoy of West Irania turns out to be a strange-looking man, named “Chap 1” by Belloc, who is characterised by his blank, unsmiling expression. His face is as colourless as his voice:

“I am the West Iranian Government,” it said tonelessly. “Be off.” (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 177-179)

When Lady Caroline Balcombe and Mary Bullar realise that the wrong man has been threatened to hand in the Concession and that there has been a huge blunder, they become embroiled in a pointless fight to redress the confusion.

Late at night, Caroline Balcombe is revising papers. She wants to phone Mary Bullar. While Lady Caroline Balcombe considers her position, Callingham appears and tells her that “the real man” has turned up:

“How do you mean – the real man?”

“West Irania,” snapped Callingham. “He’s lying *perdu* somewhere in Devon. (...)”

“Then who’s Mallard?”

“Oh, Mallard?” said Callingham carelessly. “Mallard’s Mallard. That’s the great news.”

“You mean – he’s *really* called Mallard? And he really *is* from Cuba?”

“Certainly. ... And a fool,” said Callingham mildly. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 179-180)

After hearing this smashing piece of news, Lady Caroline Balcombe is thinking about two very important things, “and both connected with the saving of face.”¹⁰¹ She is in a hurry to save her own face with the Prime Minister, Mary Bullar, and the second issue, and even more important, is the saving of the face for all of them with the public. Lady Caroline Balcombe immediately thinks about the reparation, the money compensation

¹⁰¹ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 180.

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which must be given to that bachelor tourist. Not more than £1,500 a year approximately...¹⁰²

Caroline Balcombe reached out towards her books of reference and looked up the sailings. By the time she had found what she wanted she had fixed on her policy. Her mind was made up. She got Mary Bullar on the other end of the wire. ...

“... No you don’t go to bed, I’ve got news for you. I’m coming round at once. ... Decided? I should jolly well think I had decided! ... Oh, you’ll understand all right.” And she put up the receiver as one might slam a door. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 180-181)

Five minutes later, Lady Caroline is in the big room in Downing Street in front of her chief who is sitting at the massive writing table, half asleep with the long vigil. Lady Caroline shoots a volley...

“Mary, you’re a chump!”

“What?” said Mary Bullar, thoroughly awake and falling backward in her chair.

“A chump, I said. A chump. You’re a chump, Mary. You’ve got hold of the wrong man!” (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 181)

Lady Caroline fiercely shouts a spiral of recriminations by declaring she said so from the very beginning, because she had her suspicions and she warned Mary Bullar, but she did not listen to her. Lady Caroline claims that she has had to do all the work, and that she has arranged everything:

“Yes, but you wouldn’t listen to me. You never will. It’s just like you! It’s you all over. (...) Oh, I’ve seen to it all. I’ve arranged everything. I’ve had to”

¹⁰² See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 180.

(bitterly). “It’s always I who have to do everything.” (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 181-182)

Of course, Mary Bullar does not like what she is listening to, and she decides that she has to act immediately – “If Caroline followed this up Caroline would supplant her: Caroline in her turn would be Prime Minister of England. Oh, horrid thought.”¹⁰³ Mary Bullar reacts in time, and the whole crisis is solved.

Belinda Montgomery

In the village of Marlden there is a stately mansion, The Towers, by the River Avon. Sir Robert Montgomery, a respected wealthy gentleman in the County of Wiltshire, resides there. Belinda is his eighteen-year-old daughter. Horatio Maltravers is an impoverished neighbour who is in love with Belinda, but Sir Robert Montgomery wants his daughter to marry affluent Hugh Portly.¹⁰⁴ This is the core of the love conflict in *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929). The story is a Victorian tale about an apparently impossible love between Belinda and Horatio, two youngsters who are separated by the vested interests of malicious people. Such young couple succeed in marrying eventually, and Belloc presumes they will live happily ever after.

Although Sir Robert Montgomery believes that Hugh Portly is rich, the harsh reality tells us he is not. For three generations, his family has inhabited Molcombe Abbey, a towering mansion,¹⁰⁵ but all the house and property is now abandoned as security to men who act through Lawyer Fox, of Bath, who is the sole mortgagee of the vast estates and the palatial residence.¹⁰⁶ Hugh Portly has a precarious personal allowance. Such terrible economic situation makes him look for Belinda’s engagement, as Belinda’s ample dowry would reduce his debt to manageable proportions.

¹⁰³ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 182.

¹⁰⁴ Hugh Portly is later called Henry Portly. His full name is Hugh Henry Portly. See *Belinda: A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 17, 35.

¹⁰⁵ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 58-60.

¹⁰⁶ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 61.

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Belinda is the innocent girl who is inspired by “the precepts of our sublime religion.”¹⁰⁷ Belloc writes the novel from an apparently traditional Anglican perspective, even though some pungent strokes make clear he is just pretending to be a Victorian storyteller and engaged in a literary exercise for its own sake. Belloc goes on telling the reader that, when Belinda and Horatio were children, they played together and knew each other very well.¹⁰⁸ After a ball at Sir Robert’s in which Horatio participates, that very night Belinda dreams about Horatio.¹⁰⁹

Both Belinda and Horatio, separately, go for a walk on the same day and come across one another by the stream that separates both properties.¹¹⁰ The stream is flowing into the Avon; it is one of its tributaries. While they are walking and talking, they meet a woman who asks them if they have seen her Boy, a youngster wandering there with a bow and arrows for his sport.¹¹¹ The lady disappears and, later on, a bell sounds to indicate the customary tasks of the day. Belloc presents that lady as some sort of fairy, and her Boy (in capital letters) as Cupid looking for the young couple to shoot his love arrows at them. Belloc enjoyed reading aloud such scene to Maurice Baring and laughed afterwards. Belloc was aware he had written, rewritten, and polished the novel to such an extent that the book was his most precious work. Belloc likes to finish the chapter by emphasizing Horatio’s gallantry and Belinda’s rapture:

“I will accompany you,” returned Horatio, “no further than the iron gate at the entrance of the shrubbery. Permit me to remain, till then, at your side.”

The distance to be traversed was but a quarter of a mile. (...) Neither looked at each other. Neither spoke. For such we are in youth – which is the heaven of our days. But when they came to the iron gate, and must part, she halted, turned, and lifted, or half lifted, her right hand from her side. He dared for one moment to touch it. They looked into each other’s eyes, and the world

¹⁰⁷ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 2.

¹⁰⁸ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 12.

¹⁰⁹ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 19.

¹¹⁰ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 20-29.

¹¹¹ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 24-25.

was changed. He wheeled round and was gone. In the cool shade of the arching greenery as she hurried towards the sunlit grass and the great house beyond, the air, her soul, was music, and all her being had entered beatitude. (*Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* 1929: 28-29)

Belinda is a delicate girl who faints after telling her father she loves Horatio instead of Hugh Portly. In the final stages of the novel, Esmeralda, the rich Marquise de la Ferronnière, adopts Horatio and makes him her heir since she has no child.¹¹² Belinda marries Horatio and the didactic finale makes clear they will be very happy:

Such, gentle reader, were the loves of Belinda and Horatio; tried as by fire, torn asunder, rejoined, they attained at last to wedded felicity under an ancestral roof, until, after the brief accidents of this our mortality, they were united forever in Paradise. (*Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* 1929: 188)

Miss Hackman and Miss Curll

Two women are very close to Belinda, Miss Hackman and Miss Curll. The first one is Belinda's relative and companion. Miss Hackman is Sir Robert Montgomery's cousin and takes care of young Belinda with full dedication. Belloc suggests Miss Hackman is sometimes a bit of a chaperone:

Upon Horatio's entering into his estate, Belinda was still in the schoolroom. Upon her return from London, after her presentation at Court, they met in the genteel life of the county. (...) Sir Robert would upon occasion ask his old neighbour's son [Horatio] to a meal. (...) If he might beg a dance of her in one house or another and exchange a word in the company of her relative and companion (Miss Hackman), it was his sole intercourse with one who had been,

¹¹² See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 176, 177.

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as it were, of his own blood in their childish years. (*Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* 1929: 13)

Later in the novel, Miss Curll has blocked Belinda's and Horatio's love letters. After Belinda's nervous breakdown because of her unhappy love affair, Miss Hackman kindly suggests that Sir Robert not tell anyone what has happened and prepare a tour on the Continent for Belinda, as the young girl must recover her health and be away from it all.¹¹³ Miss Hackman and the Reverend Mr Atkins accompany Belinda through France and are lodged in the Château de Rosny in which Esmeralda, the Marquise de la Ferronnière, dwells...

The heat of that deep afternoon had stilled the very leaves upon the poplar trees; all was steeped in the drowsy summer haze. Above, Miss Hackman, in her room, permitted herself (what was rare with her) some relaxation in *déshabillé*. Below, in a boudoir where the finest canvasses of Boucher challenged the exquisite sensibility of Greuze, Sir Robert and the Marquise told each other all. (*Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* 1929: 169)

The devoted Miss Hackman is also present at the happy wedding of Belinda to Horatio which closes the novel.

Miss Curll, from Bath, is a gentlewoman who is in decayed circumstances at present. Miss Hackman feels she is completely adequate to take care of Belinda as a governess while Sir Robert is in London on a business errand for a fortnight. However, Miss Curll accepts money secretly from attorney Mr Fox on the condition that Belinda and Horatio must not meet, nor will any correspondence between the two be permitted.¹¹⁴ Mr Fox acts, urged on by Sir Henry Portly.¹¹⁵ Mr Fox gives Miss Curll a twenty-five-pound note and commits himself to supply a further seventy-five pounds when he

¹¹³ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 146-147.

¹¹⁴ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 67-75, 88-89.

¹¹⁵ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 136-137.

finds the mission fulfilled. Although Miss Curll is silent and promises nothing in lawyer Mr Fox's presence, when this man leaves the house she decides to cooperate with him.

Belloc inserts a remark about female curiosity, but he astutely observes that such psychological reflection is not his, but common ground of popular knowledge. Belloc understands Miss Curll's painful experiences in the past and explains why she feels compelled by a force which she is unable to withstand. She cannot help opening the letters:

It has been remarked by acute observers of the human species that the female is more prone to the vice of curiosity than the male. This impoverished gentlewoman was no exception to her sex. Her loneliness, her distant acquaintance with the wealthy, her soured memories of happier days, perhaps some faded phantasm of romance, conspired to tempt her. (*Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* 1929: 80)

Miss Curll is poor and feels resentment towards Miss Hackman because, Miss Curll thinks, Miss Hackman and Sir Robert have not rewarded her services generously enough. Miss Curll conceals Belinda's love letters and Horatio's in her cedar casket to such an extent that Belinda, when she realises there is no answer to her repeated pleas, desperately believes that Horatio does not love her any more. Horatio, on his part, feels scorned and leaves for the Continent...

That same afternoon, a little before dinner, (...) Miss Curll (...) observed a figure, not of the household, approaching at some distance down the fields from the direction of Halston.

She turned without haste to her charge.

"My dearest," she said (she was already in such terms), "You will excuse me, will you not? I shall take the air. (...)"

She kissed the charming face, and, descending, strolled out towards the iron gates of the garden (...).

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The youth, whom she met half-way across the park field on the way to the wood saluted her awkwardly and would have passed. She stopped him with a smile and asked him whither he was bound.

He told her that he bore a note from his master, Mr Horatio Maltravers, for Miss Montgomery, and that he had not been desired to await a reply.

“It is well,” answered Miss Curll graciously, “I am glad to have met you; for Miss Montgomery is at this moment reposing, and I can convey this letter to her in due time, when she shall descend from her boudoir.” With that, in a genteel gesture which marked her early training, she withdrew the folded paper from the youth’s hand, and smiling again with courteous confidence, placed it in her bosom. (...)

She regained her room. She opened a small casket of cedar wood, wherein her poor trinkets were kept. She was on the point of depositing therein the letter, unopened, when she paused, possessed by a desire which she was ashamed to admit even to her inmost soul, but weak enough to gratify. (*Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* 1929: 77-79)

Prying Miss Curll opens the letter and reads the lines “penned in the bold and hasty hand of an impassioned lover.”¹¹⁶ As time passes, Sir Robert discovers Miss Curll’s manoeuvres, and he dismisses her.¹¹⁷ Belloc does not approve of Miss Curll’s treacherous behaviour, but he thinks that this gentlewoman succumbs to temptation at the first opportunity, and that such a demeanour paves the way for subsequent wrongdoings. Nowadays, moralism is no longer fashionable, and is usually discredited in contemporary literature. Nevertheless, Belloc was a firm believer, and he could not separate his beliefs from moral rectitude. *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929) was purposefully written by Belloc in Victorian style, conforming to moral conventions, and with didactical purpose:

¹¹⁶ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1928): 81.

¹¹⁷ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1928): 134-137.

If, as the Papists monstrously pretend, an angel were deputed guardian for each of us, to defend us from evils which our own resolute wills should suffice to contest, such an imaginary being would have wept to observe the struggle in the soul of Miss Curll and its lamentable catastrophe.

(...)

So true is it that one evil deed leads to another, and that what first our conscience will hardly permit we soon repeat with shameless ease! (*Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* 1929: 80, 89)

Esmeralda, the Marquise de la Ferronnière

Belloc designs the plot so that the aristocratic Esmeralda, Marquise de la Ferronnière, comes across Sir Robert through the smooth-running events of the story. At the same time, Horatio will also meet the Marquise de la Ferronnière by chance, when the young man helps the postilions of the stagecoach in which the Marquise is travelling to avoid being robbed by highwaymen.

Horatio reaches Boulogne Harbour after crossing the English Channel.¹¹⁸ In fact he really goes nowhere, since he only wants to lose himself “in the voids of this vast world.”¹¹⁹ Horatio desperately travels away from home because he feels overwhelmed by his unhappy love affair with Belinda. He takes the road to Montrool by chance and hears the approach of a carriage arriving at a crossroads. Three robbers attack the postilions and try to open the carriage door while more ruffians join in the assault. Brave Horatio defends the stagecoach, and drives them away, although he is injured by a “bullet grazing his arm.”¹²⁰ The frightened lady within the vehicle is Esmeralda, the Marquise de la Ferronnière, who, to express her gratitude, takes Horatio to her castle until he recovers from his injuries. Belloc describes the Marquise’s aspect:

With that the door opened, and under the light now streaming upon it, the young gentleman beheld a tall figure, regal in deportment and of a full commanding

¹¹⁸ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 107.

¹¹⁹ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 108.

¹²⁰ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 110.

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presence, in no way diminished by the burden of over fifty years. Her features, of a Bourbon haughtiness, and with the full lips of this kind, were not the less handsome for their benignity and were instinct with the habit of command. They were crowned with a noble diadem of hair, now white, but as abundant as in youth, and a heavy pendant of diamonds, the natural ornament of her rank, which hung from her neck, enhanced with its magnificence a nobility which alone could support such gems. (*Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* 1929: 112)

As a servant hastens to lower the steps and the lady descends, Horatio discovers the Marquise's fine brown eyes which at this moment are filled with tender solicitude. The lady puts forth a magnificent handkerchief and binds it over Horatio's wounded arm. She insists that Horatio must enter at her side as her stagecoach will take him to his destination, even though Horatio mumbles he has no definite destination. The Marquise invites him to her Château. After supper, the Marquise introduces herself.

Of herself she spoke more freely, (...) She told him her name – de la Ferronnière; her state, the widow of the late Marquis; whom she had wed in the very year of the Bastille; her English birth. (*Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* 1929: 116)

Some pages later, the group of English travellers passing through France, headed by Sir Robert Montgomery, have an accident because one of the carts breaks down; the traverse of the vehicle is broken and wrecks the supports of the front axle. Belinda, Miss Hackman, and the Reverend Mr Atkins are in the group, but nobody is hurt. Sir Robert seeks help and walks the half-mile which separates him from the Château de Rosny, of which the mistress is the Marquise de la Ferronnière, as the stately major-domo in his

sumptuous livery tells Sir Robert.¹²¹ Sir Robert feels he has heard the name of Ferronnière before and tries to remember when.

Soon he realises the Marquise is the girl with whom he spent such a happy time when they both were very young:

[The Marquise said] “Do you remember, Robert, oh! do you remember,” she began, “that night in May when we wandered in the gardens during intervals of the dance at my mother’s villa upon the Thames at Putney? Then did we first know dimly what we now know too well.”

“I remember,” he answered with falling eyes.

“Do you remember,” she continued, “the lawn sloping down to the majestic stream, the lights upon the dark waters, and how, as you gazed upon them, you bade me with some melancholy remember that the waters flow out for ever and return no more? It was in that same night that first you called me by my name.” (*Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* 1929: 180)

Belloc inserts the philosophical concept of the fleetingness of time by using the same metaphor of the running water which will never return. A quote attributed to Heraclitus of Ephesus is *panta rhei* to express that everything flows. Belloc was likely to think about it when he wrote this passage, as he liked the classics and was well-read. In the paragraph which describes the indelible mark which Esmeralda, the Marquise de la Ferronnière, produced on him since he was young, Belloc literally states the Christian belief that the soul is immortal, a concept which the first Christians also took from Platonism.

They err who pretend that the years, though they may seem obscure, can eliminate a primal passion. The soul is immortal. If once it suffer [*sic*] the imprint of that one emotion which links time with eternity, the imperishable mark remains. The flood will return in full, unconquerable might, provoked by a

¹²¹ See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 161-164.

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tone, a scent, a glance, a name. This man so far advanced in the business of living, already conscious of the grave, had suffered a resurrection from the dead. He had heard the name of Ferronnière. (*Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* 1929: 165)

Sir Robert wants to marry Esmeralda, but the Marquise deviates the conversation craftily because she thinks it is not worth changing their lives, neither Esmeralda's nor Robert's. Later, she clarifies the meaning of her intention. Belloc characteristically comments women prefer devious replies:

Montgomery could refrain no longer.

“Esmeralda!” he exclaimed, “may we not seal those early vows of ours now at last, at once, and for ever? To you it was – to you and to none other – that my youth burnt in an incense of adoration, and to-day the same consuming worship stands unalterably true. (...)”

So spake he with the pardonable fervour of a man who for the moment was in another world.

As is the way with women, she preferred a devious reply. (*Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* 1929: 178-179)

The Marquise suggests they must not marry, since the days of happy youth will never return, and Providence had arranged their lives separated and they had followed different paths. The passing of time is a flow nobody can surmount. The Marquise feels they both must remain faithful “companions” in a “decorous relation.” Sir Robert willingly agrees:

“Let us not add to these words, my dear, my very dear,” the gracious, aged voice replied, “nor tempt that Power in Whose Omnipotence lie alike our griefs and our loves. We have been living once again, in a brief moment of reminiscence, a long-dead youth, but our habitation is now fixed in age. (...)” But the sanctity of

that friendship will be better preserved if we speak no more upon the matter which stirred us both like music – long ago; if we pursue no more that road which, a life-time since, was closed on us by Providence. We may, without peril, be companions, our lives adjoining, yet unfettered; for the rest that seeming far, that decorous relation can well sustain us, nor injure the prospect of the living, nor anger our dead, nor ape the irrecoverable days that never can return.”

“You are right,” he said. (*Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* 1929: 180-181)

Esmeralda is a discerning lady who accepts that life moves only forward and that it is impossible to come back to our far away youths successfully and without a melancholic tinge or, even worse, ruining young people’s lives. Belloc closes the novel with the happy wedding of Belinda and Horatio. Esmeralda, the Marquise de la Ferronnière, will stay in Sir Robert Montgomery’s neighbourhood, possibly in a Dower House on his estate, during long seasons, even the greater part of the year.¹²²

La Mome Bouillote

In *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929), there is a girl perpetually at the feet of Bourrot, a down-and-out French painter who will be transformed into a *great* artist thanks to Bensington, an art dealer who will become rich overnight. The languid girl, Bourrot’s faithful companion, is “La Mome Bouillote.”¹²³ She is a particular muse of this vagabond artist, although, apart from remaining on the floor by Bourrot’s feet, such mysterious girl does absolutely nothing at all. She is the contemplative woman who reassures each and every saying and brushstroke Bourrot utters or makes:

¹²² See *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929): 178.

¹²³ La Mome Bouillote, (or Môme Bouillote) is the “Girl Bouillote.” Hilaire Belloc inserted this female character in the manner of some French bohemian artists who considered a woman their source of inspiration. French actress and singer Juliette Gréco was popularly considered the muse of existentialists in the 1950s.

They [Delgairn and Pailey] found the place all right – though they could not find the Latin Quarter any more; it has gone up the hill to Montparnasse and lost its soul half-way before it got there.

(...)

Delgairn found his studio. He went with Pailey through the rusty iron gates which both so well remembered.

(...) He must excuse himself as best he could; but he was hungry to get in under that north light again, and he knocked timidly at the rattling door.

A high wild voice bade him enter. He saw before him something which made thirty years drop right off like a cloak. It was a man, very young, perhaps not more than twenty years of age (...) having on his left thumb a palette, and in his right hand a brush so big that you might think he was a painter of Walls rather than of Symbolist Art.

At the feet of this figure sat upon a little footstool a young dark girl, very hideous, very affectionate; and both met their visitors with a defiant gaze – they thought it was The Rent. (...)

I will now introduce you to something which perhaps you do not know. It is God's truth that there are such studios in Paris, or were a few years after the war, still to be had by God's starving artists for next to nothing a year, even there, with property worth millions all around: for such is Paris.

(...)

Anyhow, the poor old studio (...) cost the genius with the wild hair and the too-big brush and the daubed smock-frock – him and his companion (who, I am ashamed to say, was called “La Mome Bouillote”) the sum of sixteen English pounds a year, or two thousand of those brand new post-war francs. (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 11-14)

Both the painter and his female companion are strange creatures, down-and-out people who belong to the bohemian tribe of those so-called “artists.” Belloc suggests they

consider themselves ill-understood artists, perpetually at war against cruel and absurdly mercantilist bourgeois society.

Verecundia (or Lady Norbolt), another female character in this novel, defines the name of Bourrot in derogatory terms. The scene happens when Verecundia is preparing to go to bed, even if it is too early. Verecundia's assistants, Ardee and Elless, want to talk to her just to pass time and to entertain Verecundia a little bit. She is very happy when she sees both women enter her room:

“Young people” (and with that she lovingly glanced at Elless) “are *really* kind to take the trouble to come and talk to an old woman like me!” She put up her ear trumpet in eager expectation, and she was not disappointed.

(...)

“He’s very famous, Grannie!” roared Ardee.

“No! She’s well known, of course – famous isn’t the right word,” answered the Dowager [Verecundia] with dignity.

But Elless commanding the ear trumpet got it right.

“No, not *she*, dear Lady Norbolt – he – the man that painted the picture – Bourrot.”

“That’s French slang for a donkey,” said Lady Norbolt, reminiscent of young officers with whom she had danced at the Tuileries in her girlhood. (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 104, 106-107)

As may be seen from the preceding passage, Belloc calls the young artist Bourrot, meaning his true stupid nature very consciously. The literary artefact allows Belloc to put in Verecundia’s mouth what he himself thinks about the painter whom he considers similar to a donkey.

Bourrot and La Mome Bouillote are visited by Henry Delgairn and John Pailey who want to revisit the old Paris studio in which Delgairn lived and studied art when he

was young.¹²⁴ On seeing Bourrot, the impecunious young painter who is the current tenant, Delgairn pays the money to the rent collector so as to help this poor and quirky fellow. Thankful Bourrot gives Delgairn one of his pictures as a present, a picture Bourrot calls “L’Âme Bourgeoise.” La Mome Bouillote usually treasures and repeats in admiration his master’s words, since she is like a devoted adorer:

Bourrot murmured twice, “L’Âme Bourgeoise,” and set his teeth in anger, though his eyes were radiant with pride.

“In effect,” said the Adorer [La Mome Bouillote] nodding deeply, “L’Âme Bourgeoise.” (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 21)

Bourrot and his Adorer, La Mome Bouillote, feel oppressed by heartless bourgeois society. They think people in general, and the bourgeois in particular, take advantage of visionary artists who are the only clairvoyants who can transform the world with their relevant art treasures. Mad Bourrot has the romantic image of the artist, and he preaches that only artists see what really matters, while all the rest of the people are selfish materialistic subjects who cannot understand the essential nature of the artist’s work. La Mome Bouillote acquiesces to anything Bourrot thinks and says; she heartily agrees with the sentiment that...¹²⁵

The Bourgeois has no heart and no soul. He lives upon the blood of the artist. He cannot tell the things of Heaven from the things of Earth – and he collects rent. The Bourgeois of all Bourgeois, the Bourgeois whom the old Latin Quarter vowed to damnation, ere the Communist came to the land to steal their thunder, the Bourgeois whom the new Montparnasse is sullen against, goes nowhere in more fearful guise than in the habit of a landlord, with bloodshot eyes and slavering teeth, gnashing and howling for his rent. (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 16)

¹²⁴ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 9.

¹²⁵ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 22.

Bourrot is the Servant of the Muses and of Apollo. The Servant's Adorer, La Mome Bouillote, continuously at his feet, thinks the rent collector is "a Portent risen from Hell."¹²⁶ Delgairn and Pailey see the rent collector as just a rather fat, little Frenchman of about forty in grey clothes. Artists and artists' adorers have the characteristic of seeing what others cannot see. Some people call this a hallucination, but artists prefer to call it a penetrating vision.

The years go by, and Henry Bensington succeeds in transforming Bourrot, a quite daft painter, into a Symbolist celebrity. Bourrot has become rich and famous in only twenty months, but he is a dying man.¹²⁷ Bensington's control of the press proves rewarding, as strategic articles with snippets of Bourrot's biography; scarce photographs of him and some of his paintings, shrewd commentaries on his relevant works and techniques produce their fruit. A paragraph in the *Daily Telegraph* catches the reader's eye immediately, a column heavily highlighted in *The Howl* announces the artist's imminent death, an old photograph of Bourrot appears in *The Roar*.¹²⁸ Bensington and his partners design a strategy carefully:

All great generals study elasticity of plan, for the future can never be quite accurately predicted. The uncertain element was the exact moment at which Bourrot would die, and the boom must not begin too early. (...) He [Bensington] had received the report that forty-eight hours would see it all over. (...) Lord Borstal would see to it that there should be a huge display in his three Sunday papers, the Dirty One, the Conservative One and the Liberal One. Sir Charles Holloway would see to it that a full page should be taken up in the Labour One, the Sporting One and the Pious One, with more denunciation of all this exaggerated talk about foreign artists. (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 60)

¹²⁶ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 16.

¹²⁷ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 44.

¹²⁸ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 58, 59.

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Bensington and associates know for certain that by creating great expectations they can raise the status of the artist. They succeed in that, indeed. La Mome Bouillote, without meaning to, benefits from this business technique. Even though she has remained in the shadows for some time, Belloc makes her reappear at Bourrot's funeral. Some time before she married Bourrot in Church, she continued to love the ailing but successful painter, and people learned to appreciate her properly. Currently, La Mome Bouillote is a rich, respected woman, accepted by everybody and Belloc informs us that she will survive forty-seven years to her husband. Ironical Belloc adds that there is no danger of Bourrot moving out of his grave in the well-known Paris cemetery though:

Next morning it was as Henry Bensington had expected; the news came to him early. (...) Bourrot was dead; and he knew enough of the stiff Continental conventions *not* to come back at once to London, but to wait for the funeral, to follow it bare-headed, and to listen with bowed head to no less than fourteen interminable speeches, (...).

He had a right to be there, had Henry Bensington. He might almost have been Chief Mourner, instead of that poor little Adorer (who, by the way, had been regularly married – yes, in Church – and was received everywhere), for had he not provided, all in all, something like sixteen thousand pounds, on which the memory of Bourrot was kept alive for nearly a dozen years. And the little woman who loved him so well was kept alive for more than forty-seven (in a very small villa by the river near St Germain).

But as for Bourrot, he is in Pere la Chaise, and will there remain. (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 63-64)

Belloc liked to convince himself that this novel was mainly read by women. We do not know if his belief was just a pose he held while he was writing the book, or whether he sincerely thought his readership was principally female at the time the novel was published. The fact is that Belloc addresses women reading his book, especially

when he uses some sort of *captatio benevolentiae* on telling the reader she is a true woman of experience in worldly matters:

It must be admitted that Verecundia was glad of Ardee's support, for Ardee's grandfather, the Bishop, had been the younger brother of Lord Norbolt's father, (...). She [Ardee] was, however, of the authentic Norbolt, or rather Walburton, blood (for I need not inform a lady with your knowledge of the world, dear reader, that the family name of the Norbolts is Walburton). (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 79-80)

As the novel draws to an end, Belloc repeats his reference to the expected female readership. In this case, the literary excuse is introducing his much-cherished Christian idea of Divine Providence, although cautious Belloc apparently calls Providence a "superstition," since he is writing ironically for all women, disregarding the fact that each woman may have her own religion, or none at all:

CHAPTER XIX

You will have noticed (Lady deigning to read this book) that even during the brief bright years which have passed between your girlhood and your present young matronly days, human life was not chaotic, but followed so regular a plan that one might almost fall into the superstition of a Providence. (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 281)

Verecundia

Verecundia is Lady Norbolt, although she is familiarly called "Vurry." She is immensely rich; her fortune amounts to twenty million pounds.¹²⁹ When Bourrot was still alive Verecundia approached the Great Master and made a bid since she was interested in Bourrot's pictures. Verecundia offered £10,000 for the Masterpiece.

¹²⁹ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 308.

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Verecundia derived from the exotic regions, as her peculiar name suggests. She is of the Nordic breed and of the island race. Nevertheless, she is not of British training. His father acquired his colossal fortune through the exploitation of the Manium deposits in the Paramooka Islands of the Pacific. She is his energetic, sole daughter and heiress who has lived in London, Paris, the Riviera, and Deauville. When her father died, he left her twenty million and she managed to increase her fortune more and more:

She had the only two things needful [the first, money], the second of which is a masterful mind, though perhaps I ought to add a third – for a woman of her age – which is good health. She was as strong as a horse.

(...) She deserved her friends as much as she purchased them. (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel 1929: 78-79*)

Verecundia has two constant friends who are the Supporters of her Coat of Arms. The youngest, Ardee, is thirty-three, she has a girlish air and has not a bob. Ardee's grandfather was the younger brother of Verecundia's father-in-law. Elless is Verecundia's elder companion and penniless too, as this is the reason for her name. Belloc combines French *elle* with English *less* to form this blending. Elless is Verecundia's niece. Both Ardee and Elless are well paid for what they do; they accompany, entertain, chat with their master, and flatter her when the occasion requires. When Elless and Ardee are together they familiarly call themselves "the Two Dees,":

So there she [Elless] was supporting Verecundia, Fifteenth Marchioness, etcetera, and being supported in turn; and so was little Ardee, and between them they were called the Two Dees; and they followed Verecundia about whithersoever she went, and did all the donkey work, each in her own way. (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel 1929: 80-81*)

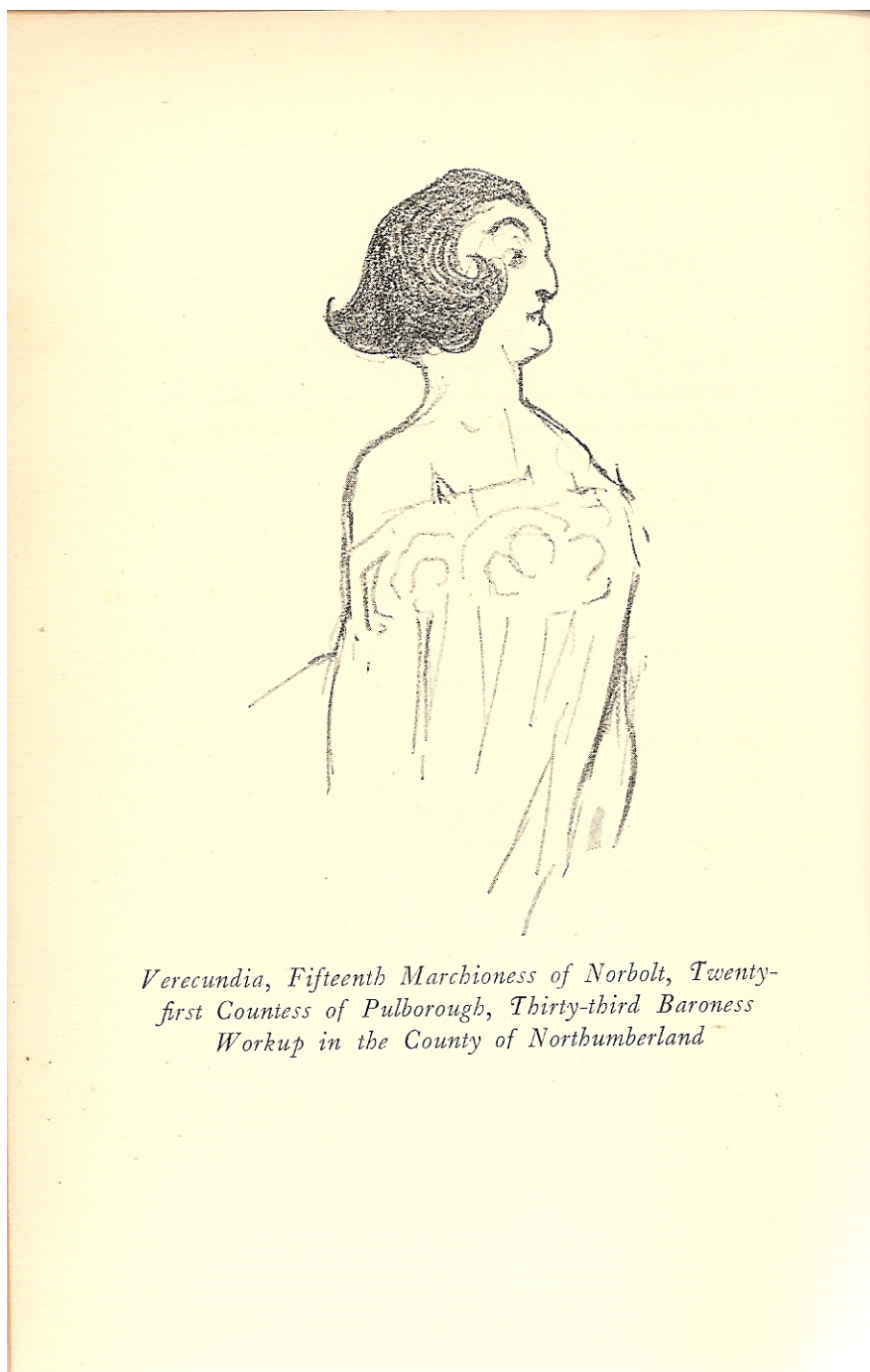


Fig. 13. Verecundia. Drawing by G.K. Chesterton. *The Missing Masterpiece, A Novel*. (London: Arrowsmith, 1929): 78.

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Verecundia is Ardee's protectress.¹³⁰ Ardee and Elless love their Grannie who is the Dowager and gives them sustenance. After quite a long talk at bedtime, Ardee and Elless kiss Verecundia good night, and ask her if she wants that unfortunate Smithson to read to her for some time:

Then she [Verecundia] shut her eyes, as very old people will sometimes do, losing her vitality in a sudden access of sleep. The Two Dees looked at each other. Ardee nodded and touched the forehead under the wig with her lips; and Elless, not to be outdone in courtesy, got at another bit of the forehead in the same way.

"Good night, darling Grannie," bellowed Ardee. "Shall I send Smithson to you?"

"Yes," said the sleepy voice, and the eyes opened for a moment. (...) Each in turn [Ardee and Elless] sought her own small room at the top of the house and bed; Ardee to dream of what it would be like to have Twenty thousand pounds like a sixpence in one's pocket; Elless, taught by experience, to pray for the crumbs that fell from the table, and to waste no energy in dreams. (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 107-108)

It is clear from this and similar passages in the novel that there seems to be a female group that shares common interests. Although sincere affection unifies these three women, and it is like the cement that keeps them united as a whole, there are also other reasons to maintain this community working. Rich Verecundia, Lady Norbolt, feels not alone, and she enjoys Ardee's and Elless's company, conversation, and guidance in her business, as she is obsessed with buying Bourrot's Masterpiece at any rate. In exchange for this, the Two Dees can go on living in the shadow of the wealthy Lady Norbolt.

Incidentally, Elless belongs to The Second Church of Christ Psychic. Belloc has a good time introducing such Elless's tendency, as he likes to laugh at what he considers a bizarre practice of esotericism or a peculiar form of false religion. Elless flatters

¹³⁰ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 222.

Verecundia by convincing her of having extraordinary psychic powers such as being able to foresee auction ultimate prices:

“What I mean is” (to Verecundia) “that I think a person like *you* will know better than anyone else what is in the mind of that odious man. You see, Verecundia, you’ve got an uncanny power of reading what is in people’s minds – everybody says so. And I’m sure if you’ll only externalize as we call it at the Second Church of Christ Psychic – call up Bensington’s face before you and his desk and all that – the right figure will appear. (...) I don’t say it’s the highest kind of gift, but you’ve got it. You remember when we bought the pendant of that woman who’d been murdered in Cannes, last year? How you got it withdrawn before the auction?” (Verecundia nodded.) “Well, it’s like that now. (...)

It was good flattery, for the rich like their flattery with vinegar, and Verecundia was impressed. She found the energy to sit forward a little, took a hand on either side in each of hers. Then she said to Ardee, nodding at Elless:

“She’s quite right.” And then said to Elless in her turn, “Yeh’re quite right.” (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 102-103)

And a brief session of Spiritism follows. Verecundia sees clearly through the wreathing mist that Henry Bensington’s mind has the large figure of £20,000.¹³¹

Verecundia is entangled in a series of events that are outside her reach. She does want to own “the Masterpiece,” but the truth is that there are three existing copies of the painting and nobody can decide which is the original one. Recapitulating the facts, we must bear in mind that thankful Bourrot gave the painting to Delgairn as a present.¹³² Bensington is an alert merchant who pretends that the painting disappeared, or was stolen, in order to increase its value.¹³³ Later Bensington gets a contract from Bourrot to

¹³¹ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 103.

¹³² See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 19.

¹³³ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 115.

buy all his pictures and promises Bourrot and La Mome Bouillote to find “L’Âme Bourgeoise,” also called “the Masterpiece,” which is the painting Bourrot gave him.¹³⁴

Some time before, Delgairn’s old son was fond of painting and could copy very well, so he painted two replicas by chance. After some time Delgairn and his son died.¹³⁵ Bensington heard about Delgairn’s eldest son and was interested in the paintings. Delgairn’s younger son, Harry Delgairn is penniless because he bought some valueless paintings on a silly purchase and desperately needs £485. Bensington offers him £500 for Bourrot’s “L’Âme Bourgeoise,” and they make a deal.¹³⁶

There is another contender in the pursuit of “L’Âme Bourgeoise.” Hardham, Duque de Emonsillado, is a strange character who is always around Verecundia to take advantage of her. He is a lazy gambler actually, and a “fly in her ointment.”¹³⁷ Hardham hates Verecundia because he thinks he had the right to climb into the London rich through Verecundia. “Instead of that Vurry [Verecundia] had thrust him off the ladder, and he was justly embittered.”¹³⁸ The Duque de Emonsillado also wants “the Masterpiece,”¹³⁹ mainly because he wants to annoy Verecundia and take revenge on her.

As time passes, Bensington manages to recover a copy of “the Masterpiece.”¹⁴⁰ Bensington buys another two copies of “the Masterpiece” at £500 each one, because he convinces their current owners, M. Henri Caen and Signor Carlo Alessandria, that both paintings are poor replicas.¹⁴¹ After other entanglements, there is a lawsuit to discern the authenticity of the two copies.¹⁴² Bensington tries to sell simultaneously a copy to Emonsillado and another copy to Verecundia for £20,000.¹⁴³ There is a trial and the Jury’s verdict is completely absurd because they pass judgement that both Lady Norbolt (Verecundia) and Emonsillado are right. In the Epilogue, Emonsillado takes his final

¹³⁴ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 47.

¹³⁵ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 29.

¹³⁶ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 54-57.

¹³⁷ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 81.

¹³⁸ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 85.

¹³⁹ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 109.

¹⁴⁰ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 174-175.

¹⁴¹ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 181, 189-190.

¹⁴² See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 217-218.

¹⁴³ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 222.

revenge on Verecundia, as he sells her his replica for £20,000. Verecundia pays for it to be at rest. At last she has the three existing copies of “the Masterpiece.”¹⁴⁴

Belloc writes a funny story of pretentious artists, wicked traders, counterfeiters, naïve individuals and a wealthy lady, Verecundia, who does not know what to do with her money and is obsessed with buying a painting that is really an absurd combination of clumsy brushstrokes, but coincidence, a merchant’s stratagems, the wish to appear posh and impress others have made it the goal of an eccentric clique. This is Belloc’s description of “L’Âme Bourgeoise,” the much-sought-after “Masterpiece,”:

In one corner was a sort of staring human eye; beneath this, criss-cross, a series of bands of a bright vermilion, but at an angle, to these another series of bands emphatically yellow; and beneath them, as a field, a sort of mauve, very sinister; below all, upon the outer edge, was something which might have been a tropical fruit or a balloon but half inflated, and this was of a tender grey. (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 21)

Belloc supplies a two paragraph “Super-Epilogue” to make the reader laugh out loud or just smile pleased at the funny story he has just finished reading...

I always like my books to have a happy ending. And in case you should miss it, I will point it out as I have done before in other books. Verecundia is happy because, though she has paid twenty thousand pounds three times over, it is no more to her than twenty thousand pence, and she has got the Masterpiece(s), and there is no rival. The Duke is happy because he has got out of an *impasse* – twenty thousand up. (...) Henry Bensington is very, very happy, because he has got plenty of money, a good digestion, and does everybody all round. (...) Ardee will be happy, and so will Elless, because Darling Verecundia is going to give each of them a nice little present. ... (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 318-319)

¹⁴⁴ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 317.

Sister Frideswied

In *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930), Sister Frideswied¹⁴⁵ is the matron of St Dives' Hostel, the dosshouse ruled by the Rev Arthur Bootle, an Anglican priest.¹⁴⁶ St Dives' is near the slope of the river-side, just walking along two narrow streets from the Embankment. Lexington was on a bench in front of the Temple trying to get some sleep when "a gentle tap upon his arm made him look up (...) Young in years, the Rev Arthur Bootle was old in charity, and he glowed at the prospect of doing a good deed."¹⁴⁷ The hostel is in a court "wherein a great building in excellent taste, without one fault, true in every line and detail to its period (the early Tudor, as I need hardly tell you) confronted them [Rev Arthur Bootle and fugitive Charles Lexington]."¹⁴⁸ The institution is a refuge of charity and religion that is in the former premises of generous benefactors, the Bohun family.¹⁴⁹ The vicar and the fugitive...

(...) proceeded through another corridor and passed through the cloisters to a room where the matron, who presided over the business side of this noble foundation, was to be discovered; Sister Frideswied by name: in the old days of her profoundly worldly career Jane Beckett. She was dressed in the simple but striking fashion (...): a wimple band of watchett, with its gampere, quartered and pricked in soslin, after the fashion of Margaret Beaufort, adorned her head and shoulders, while two ear-rolls recalled the court of the Seventh Henry; ... (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 221)¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Although this name, Frideswied, sounds German, Belloc possibly took it from the Roman Catholic Martyrology. Frithuswid or Frideswide (650-727) was an English princess and abbess who is the patron saint of Oxford University. Belloc changed that name ending into '-wied' instead of '-wide' for unknown reasons. In the novel, Sister Frideswied is also a female religious woman like Saint Frideswide, and Sister Frideswied has enough bossiness to be compared in this trait with Saint Frideswide, who was an abbess properly.

¹⁴⁶ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 213.

¹⁴⁷ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 213.

¹⁴⁸ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 219.

¹⁴⁹ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 219.

¹⁵⁰ Henry VIII suppressed all religious orders, as he was unconcerned for anything that hampered his interests. There were no Anglican monks or nuns for centuries. Nevertheless, in 1841, Anglican female religious orders restarted and, in 1866, Anglican male religious orders did the same. Belloc describes the

Sister Frideswied is casting up accounts, and she sizes Charles Lexington up in one efficient glance. She is an experienced woman after all, because Belloc literally writes that Jane Beckett had a “profoundly worldly career” before entering religious life. Blinkered as she is, she has a great command of practical psychology to deal with inmates and to control the distracted and absent Rev Arthur Bootle. She really drives the reverend undeviatingly. Sister Frideswied opens her book with plans in it in which she has carefully numbered in red and blue pencil which rooms are occupied and which are spare. Lexington is allotted number nineteen by “this rescuing angel.”¹⁵¹ Sister Frideswied adds...

“All objects that you have on your person must be left with me. They will be returned to you upon your exit. You will find the clothes proper to the Establishment in your room. Those you are wearing will be” (she glanced at him again, and instead of saying “fumigated” added) “burned. All valuables. ...”
(*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 222)

Charles Lexington is well-treated, although he must follow the strict regulations of this semi-monastic institution.¹⁵² On top of this, the Rev Arthur Bootle tells him Lord Taylor is one of the patrons of St Dives’. Lord Taylor is the banker who was one of Lexington’s father’s oldest friends.¹⁵³ Although at the beginning Lord Taylor had helped Charles Lexington,¹⁵⁴ very soon Lord Taylor became interested in the gold business and asked for a third of the profits.¹⁵⁵ Consequently, Charles Lexington soon realises that he is in a kind of prison and tries to escape from it. When the Rev Arthur Bootle is distracted, Lexington takes a one-pound note the reverend has left forgotten

peculiar religious habit of Sister Frideswied, the Anglican nun who efficiently rules St Dives’ Hostel, and keeps an eye on the Rev Arthur Bootle’s distractions. Hilaire Belloc gives so many details because he is describing the religious habit of an *Anglican* nun.

¹⁵¹ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 222.

¹⁵² See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 224

¹⁵³ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 109.

¹⁵⁴ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 109-111.

¹⁵⁵ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 141.

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among other papers on the table. Lexington goes away from St Dives' that very night by going through his window and climbing down the wall, since he has knotted the sheets and blankets together and tied the end to one of the taps of the basin. Lexington lowers away and proves successful in the enterprise. Very soon, while the Rev Arthur Bootle and Sister Frideswied are trying to find the missing one-pound note, they discover that "the bird (if I may so call him) was flown."¹⁵⁶

Belloc describes Sister Frideswied's angry reaction against the Rev Arthur Bootle, who cowers beneath her gaze. She blames him for everything and gives him so many orders and at such speed that the reverend is unable to fulfil his duty as the occasion requires. Sister Frideswied assumes her leadership role and very commandingly designs an action plan. Surviving his female assistant's bossy attitude is a challenge for the scared ecclesiastic man:

(...) whether Charles Lexington, stumbling along the deserted streets of London by night after his escape, or the Reverend Arthur Bootle writhing under Sister Frideswied at the same moment, were the more miserable, I (being their Creator) can search into their hearts and decide. It was the Reverend Arthur Bootle who was the more miserable.

Few men can stand up to an efficient, organizing woman, and most of these men are dead. The Reverend Arthur Bootle was not one of the survivors. Sister Frideswied told him in the plainest fashion the kind of man he was: how she thought it her duty to tell him so in spite of the respect she bore for his Holy Office: how she had found him for ever bringing doubtful characters to the place (it was his second mistake in five years); (...) After this preliminary, she went on to set him a number of tasks, all of which he was prepared to fulfil eagerly, glad to be free at such a price from the dreadful agonies of her tongue.

He was to set the Police upon the trail. He was to see to it that not a word got into the Press. (...) All these things he had to do before he slept that night, and she hoped she would see him next morning by ten precisely, in order that the

¹⁵⁶ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 230.

explanation might be drawn up for the visiting trustee: and Sister Frideswied's hopes were commands. (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 232-234)

Sister Frideswied entrusts the Reverend Arthur Bootle with eight errands that must be done right then without any delay or silly excuse. Belloc sardonically writes that the Reverend Arthur Bootle is suffering his purgatory at Sister Frideswied's hands, although the patient clergyman offers it up to St Lawrence, "the Patron of the Grilled."¹⁵⁷

Clara, Duchess of Aberavon. A Noble Woman

Fate leads Charles Lexington to replace a sick man in a band of four odd musicians who are disguised as black artists. He joins up with the buskers,¹⁵⁸ and the pantomime works until Charles Lexington is forced to sing a solo at the hostelry near the racecourse by the river-side, up the Thames. Charles's performance is absolutely disastrous and, as a consequence, a tremendous row follows.¹⁵⁹ Two policemen approach, so Charles decides to set off for the horizon. After crossing part of the river, wet Charles Lexington turns inland. There appears "a Noble Woman,":

He [Charles Lexington] came soon to the beginnings of things well kept. There was a gravelled path. There were evergreens – trimmed. Beyond there appeared the hedges of great lawns and to him, Odysseus, all bent and streaming with Thames-water and eyes blurred with same, there appeared, skirting these noble lawns, and pacing majestically, if primly, her ample ways, a Noble Woman. (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 249)

Belloc plays with that idea of "a noble woman," while he repeats a well-known verse:

¹⁵⁷ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 234.

¹⁵⁸ In *The Man Who Made Gold*, Belloc uses the term "nigger minstrels." See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 264.

¹⁵⁹ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 241-246.

“A NOBLE WOMAN, something or other planned to something or other” (as Wordsworth droned), etc. A Noble Woman.

When I say noble, I mean noble. None of your true nobility. Not one of Nature’s gentlewomen. Far from it: a Parrell by birth, great-granddaughter of old Parrell, George the Fourth’s last friend, and great-great-granddaughter of Sir Thomas Parrell, Lord Mayor of London, who had begun life as a boot-black. You can’t want better lineage than that! (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 250)

Once again, Belloc repeats the social process of coming from poverty to aristocratic splendour. He mocks any kind of nobility, particularly those wealthy upstarts who forget their origins and behave as if they belonged to aristocracy by birth. The *ascenseur social* is a wonder in Belloc’s novels. The problem is, Belloc explains, that such social advancement is usually the consequence of some swindle or other.¹⁶⁰

Clara, Duchess of Aberavon is a Gatton by marriage and her cousin was Mary Brassington.¹⁶¹ Clara’s estate is called Holy Cross and she is indignant with high taxation. As she has great pity for the unfortunate, she takes advantage of them by getting their labour cheap. Lexington invents the story of wanting to commit suicide on the Thames and repenting later. The Duchess sees the opportunity to help that poor destitute and commends to him the repair of some electric and plumbing troubles which, she thinks, will cost her nothing:

¹⁶⁰ For example, Lord and Lady Mere de Beurivage shun poverty through illegal investments of money which is not theirs. Belloc creates these two characters who craftily increase their fortune and flash their status wherever they go. *The Haunted House* (1927): 107, 110, 111, 113, 114, 116-119, 140.

In *The Green Overcoat* (1912) fatuous Professor Higginson tries to take advantage of his weird kidnapping by inventing a parallel story of supernatural experiences which, he believes, will supply extra money and personal prestige in the form of conferences, publications, private donations to his university department, and social acclaim. At the end of the novel, Higginson’s dreams gravely shatter.

¹⁶¹ See *The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 250, 255. Brassington is also the surname of the owner of the coat which brings misfortune to anybody who takes it in Belloc’s *The Green Overcoat* (1912).

Women of her class and experience gauge their chances quickly. Here was the Golden Opportunity, the combination of feeling charitable and saving expense at the same time! Combination irresistible to the Clara's, Duchesses of Aberavon.

(...)

The Duchess, in common with too many of her kind, had suffered from the extravagance of labour since the glorious return of Peace. It is a blessed thing to combine charity with a saving of household expenses. (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 253, 255)

Charles Lexington repairs the Duchess' car self-starter, as he simply discovers there is a pebble under the pedal which prevents contact.¹⁶² Clara's mansion has many devices for it is a posh stately-home, with luxury rooms and modern amenities. The Kingle tap is a very advanced device and sophisticated patent, "but since Lady Amatheia¹⁶³ had just returned to residence at Holy Cross (...) it was urgent that the great Kingley tap should be turned on. It had, of course, jammed."¹⁶⁴ The tap supplies essential hot water to the Lady's rooms:

The Duchess herself accompanied him to the loft and showed him the stubborn object. She explained to him now, just below, lay her daughter's darling little sitting-room (...) with hot-water pipes running by the wall, for the use of which the release of the water was necessary. She was sure he could put it right.

Charles Lexington had been provided with all he had asked for for the task. He had a large monkey wrench; two hammers; a chisel; a screwdriver, and all such humble instruments. He did not know, alas! That when Kingley's patent tap is in this mood it needs another Kingley patent (even more expensive) to release it. Old Kingley had seen to that. There was not one of his patents that did

¹⁶² See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 259.

¹⁶³ Lady Amatheia is a repeated name, as Amatheia is also a posh character in *The Haunted House* (1927). In that novel, Amatheia was formerly Matilda, the humble costermonger who worked in the street with her husband, George Adolphus Huggins. Over time, they both became wealthy so-called aristocrats. See *The Haunted House* (1927): 107 and ff.

¹⁶⁴ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 261.

not require another, and even a third, before it would go. (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 262)

Belloc realises all appliances are manufactured within the system of non-stop consumerist society, and he tells it joyfully to the reader. “Old Kingley had seen to that,” as he was a clever chap and wanted to increase his sells at any rate. Owing to that, he had already designed more expensive patents to repair the basic ones. It was a similar process like the tenet of compatibility in computing.¹⁶⁵ Old Kingley had decided that only with his specific patents could a technician fix any breakdown. In this way, he foresaw, the consumerist maelstrom could be kept on working. Old Kingley already applied the concept of planned obsolescence. How smart he was! Belloc would be delighted in our age of continuous updating of computers and mobile devices, an updating that forces the consumer to change all his appliances again and again, since new software provides the consumer with more and more applications and wonders at a higher speed. The typical problem is that you must buy new equipment because you increasingly require more powerful hardware. All motherboard performance and random-access memory (RAM) capacity become obsolete very soon, and this makes it impossible to install the very advanced software that manufacturers promise will keep you happy and contented. Just in case you consider you are thoroughly updated, and you hope that you can relax for a while, a new unexpected requirement will appear on the horizon, since your network interface card has already become obsolete. You will have to install a new one to benefit from the higher internet connection speed that your web server kindly supplies for the new modest fee, as is the case with the current forced switchover to optical fibre.¹⁶⁶ Of course, this process is increasingly faster, since you

¹⁶⁵ In 1980s Spain, when computers were not so common in the country, some technologically-advanced high schools realised with awe the first problems of compatibility they found themselves caught between Macintosh computers (made by Apple) and other software, usually Microsoft's. Common sense suggests that this should have been thought through beforehand, as computers, like cars and other machines, only accept spares and devices from their own brand. Nevertheless, then computers had the rare lure of innovative appliances. What is now obvious was not so in those days when there were some high school teachers who considered themselves know-it-all computer specialists.

¹⁶⁶ Very recently, between 2015 and 2016, most Spanish homes in urban areas of secondary towns have been connected to a fibre-optic cable. Telecommunication companies are carrying out this process in a

cannot ‘keep up with the Joneses,’ and the speed at which the consumerist whirlwind spins gains momentum every day.

The passage in the novel does not go that far, although ironically describing the idea of how the rich are forced to spend their money because of external circumstances, that are the result of their crazy greed, is one of Belloc’s literary pleasures. In spite of Charles Lexington’s initial success in repairing several appliances, no doubt due to the shortcomings of the beginner, repairing Kingley’s patented tap is not going to be that easy. Observing a reader in *Electro-Chemistry* (Charles Lexington), the field of chemistry which Belloc brings up to the category of university speciality or perhaps invents that subject for literary purpose, trying to mend the Kingley’s patent tap as if he were a service technician produces a comic effect:

The reader in *Electro-Chemistry* to the University found himself alone. He gazed at his job doubtfully.

(...)

He began by trying to open the catch. He continued by knocking at the butterfly nut. (...) He proceeded to attempt loosening the Rawl screw, which he conceived, in a rather muddled way, would release the coil spring in the sunken socket (excuse me these further technical terms). Nothing happened.

Next, he went for the main difficulty boldly with the spanner, clasping the gun-metal periphery nut (under the lock nut, of course) in a tight grasp. It would not move. He betook him once more to the hammer and gave the handle of the jack spanner a fine ringing blow. The noise was terrific – but result there was none.

(...)

He raised the hammer once more and caught the Jack-spanner a bang even more furious than the last.

slyly compulsory form for the consumer who, the first thing he or she notices is a sudden bill rise. Although this issue is controversial, there are political and economic reasons behind this technological change which try to convince people of the advantages of the new system, irrespective of the end price for the consumer and other changes that he or she will have to make, for example, buying new equipment.

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It did the trick – it did it beyond all measure. There was not released from Kingley's patent tap that reasonable stream it should have conveyed. There poured from it a mighty river with the deafening noise of an avalanche, and all the weight of the Chiltern reservoir behind it, 200 feet above them. The container was filled in a flash; the floor was a rising pond; a stream began to cascade down the well of the back staircase, and a vision rose in his mind of what must be happening to the ceiling of the room below. (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 262- 263, 264, 265)

Seeing the disaster, Charles Lexington disguises himself as a woman the best he can, and he escapes from the house because, on top of this, two policemen have just arrived at the manor house and are looking for him due to the row at the hostelry near the Thames when Charles Lexington was compelled to sing a solo and the audience got enraged at how much he was out of tune. Although Charles Lexington cannot find suitable female shoes, he hurries out barefoot. He flies down the stairs and strides down towards the gate of the small South lodge on the main road. The doorman sees him but thinks it is an odd female guest in a hurry:

Little Anderson opened it [the door] and respectfully touched his hat to the tall lady who smiled at him so kindly in return. She seemed unduly pressed. Her lack of foot gear was strange. She took enormous strides. But little Anderson was used to the eccentricities of rich women. He had seen guests funnier than that when he had been helping once in the servants' passage outside the dining-room during one of the big dinners. He had seen Mrs Hattle in puce trousers. There was nothing toffs wouldn't do nowadays: leastways, the wimmin among'em. (*The Man Who Made Gold* 1930: 267)

Belloc has a good time commenting on the oddities of some rich women. Respectful and surprised, Anderson thinks about what Belloc possibly could think in private on

female originality, particularly if those “wimmin” (as Little Anderson said in his thoughts) were wealthy.

Mrs Boulger and Lady Caroline Balcombe

In *The Postmaster-General* (1932), the action is set in Mrs Boulger’s second administration, in 1960. Currently Mrs Boulger is the leader of the Socialist Party¹⁶⁷, but she was already Prime Minister in 1950.¹⁶⁸ Lady Caroline Balcombe is the leader of the Anarchist Party, at present in opposition.¹⁶⁹ Sarcastic Belloc tells the reader that both parties manage to come to power in due rotation. Nothing strange in this, since Belloc considered government and opposition were formed by the same kind of people. In this novel, the Balcombes’ house is in Hill Street and it is certainly a “very ugly grand new house.”¹⁷⁰

Lady Caroline Balcombe is a character who appeared for years before in Belloc’s novel *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928). Resourceful Belloc decides to bring her back to life. In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), Lady Caroline Balcombe belonged to a great family, “she was a Baugh of Woolstone by birth.”¹⁷¹ She was still young, tall, energetic and had a highly-distinguished figure:

Her whole record had been a succession of triumphs, with none of those checks and temporary eclipses which seem, with most people, to be a necessary part of Parliamentary careers. Save at the moment of Charles Balcombe’s death (a shock which withdrew her from public activities for nearly a week) there had been for over thirty years no interruption to political activities which had been of the highest service to the nation. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 55)

¹⁶⁷ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 11.

¹⁶⁸ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 94.

¹⁶⁹ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 12.

¹⁷⁰ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 43.

¹⁷¹ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 54.

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Belloc created this female character in his 1928 novel as the omniscient and very commanding Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. She has become indispensable to such an extent that Belloc sometimes replaces her name by “the Indispensable,”:

In spite of being in Opposition for so many years, she had now been attached (...) to the Communist Ministry. (...) The arrangement was a sheer public necessity, for one may honestly say that Lady Caroline had become indispensable as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 56)

(...)

The Home Secretary deposited her [Mrs Bullar] at Caroline Balcombe’s house, where the Indispensable was waiting. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 65)

Lady Caroline Balcombe, “the Indispensable,” knows that the times are changing, and she is very concerned with those female rivals who are even able to trip her up, particularly Mary Bullar, the Prime Minister. The Indispensable is aware of the fact that women have definitely entered into politics, so she must be very careful with them. This subject becomes apparent after the Indispensable realises the government, and she is also part of it, have tried to arrest the wrong man, poor Richard Mallard. Lady Caroline Balcombe is in a hurry to blame Mary Bullar for the blunder, but, first, Lady Caroline Balcombe wants to clean her image:

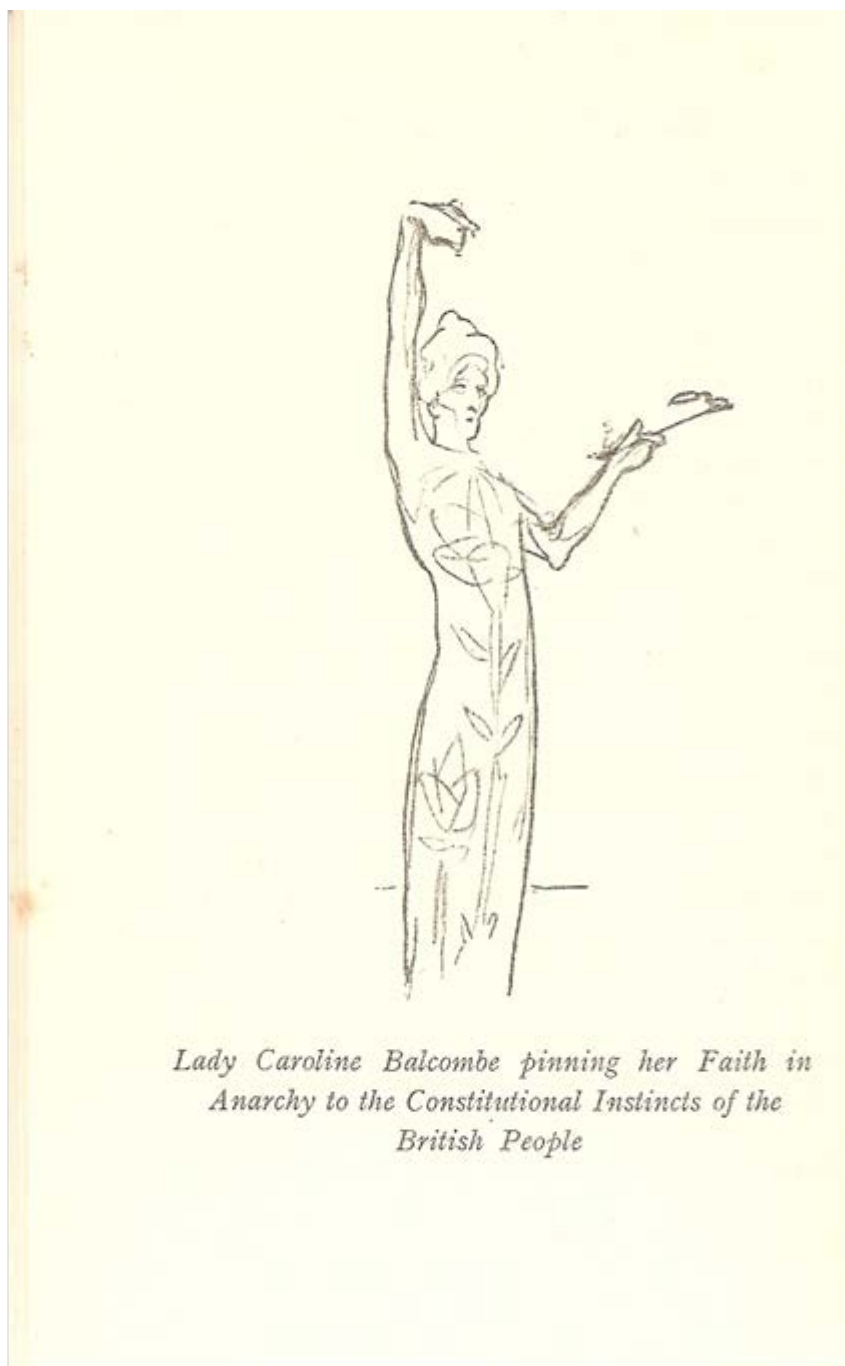


Fig. 14. Lady Caroline Balcombe. Drawing by G.K. Chesterton. *But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928 (London: Arrowsmith, 1930): 88.

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Caroline Balcombe was thinking. With the entry of her sex into public life all those years ago there had entered new forces. She was thinking of two things very important to her; and both connected with the saving of face. One was the saving of her own face with Mary Bullar, and the other was the saving of face for all of them with the public. (*But Soft: We Are Observed!* 1928: 180)

Nevertheless, in *The Postmaster-General* (1932), previous “Mrs Bullar” is transformed into “Mrs Boulger,” although female characters are reduced to a minimum. Incidentally, “boulger” is similar to “boulder,” a rounded rock. Mrs Boulger may be an experienced Mrs Bullar – perhaps a whimsical derivative of “bull” – worn out by water erosion – a metaphor of the flow of the frequent upsets of her job as Prime Minister – but her character may be set like a flint. This is just a supposition which cannot be proven, although it is much in the line of Belloc. Bullar and Boulger are common surnames, but Belloc liked to play with surnames and occasionally inserted slight spelling disfigurements.¹⁷²

Miss Rose Fairweather

Miss Rose Fairweather is James McAuley’s secretary. Wilfrid Halterton is desperately looking for the letter McAuley gave him in which there is the certitude of ample security through the promise of income related to the managership of the new TV

¹⁷² Belloc sometimes created funny names for his characters. Balmy Jane was a nickname for Arabella Slackett, the quarrelsome woman who was obsessed with the idea that Richard Mallard was the Saviour of the human race whom the malicious government had tortured and arrested. “Balmy” means precisely “pleasant,” but Balmy Jane was only mild to try to attract absent Richard Mallard, who, when he realised Balmy Jane’s true intentions, immediately ran away from her. Balmy Jane was only apparently agreeable, since she was a completely neurotic woman. See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 148, 153-154, 186-189.

Another example is Judge Sir Thingumbob Honeybubble, a repeated character in Belloc’s novels. Honeybubble matches his name because he is wise, well-balanced, agreeable, soft, and sweet, with a special ability for not committing to give needlessly cruel judgments. On the contrary, if possible, he shuns giving judgment and he prefers to leave it on the table. Contenders are usually tied. See *The Four Men: A Farrago* (1911): 128-132.

Mr Burden is literally called “Burden” because his existence becomes a heavy burden. See *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904).

Corporation. Wilfrid Halterton cannot find that precious document because sly McAuley stealthily stole the letter from Wilfrid Halterton's jacket when they were talking about the subject in a relaxed way.

Wilfrid Halterton says to himself that there is no time to be lost, since he must communicate with McAuley immediately. Once in his flat, Wilfrid Halterton phones him:

He went to the little room at the back where his private telephone stood, and when he had got on to McAuley's flat in Marble Arch House at the top of Park Lane, not half a mile off, he heard, even as the servant answered, another voice speaking which he could have sworn was that of McAuley himself.

(...)

The voice that presently did answer him clearly and directly was that of McAuley's secretary: he knew her well – an efficient gentlewoman, of like nationality with her employer, Rose Fairweather by name. That voice said, in singularly distinct tones, that J had been in for a moment, and had gone out again. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 34, 37)

Miss Fairweather obediently explains to Wilfrid Halterton that she does not know where James McAuley has gone or when he will return. Wilfrid Halterton thinks he has heard another voice near the telephone and, although he is not completely sure, he thinks he has caught some words. Wilfrid Halterton thinks this is James McAuley's voice, ordering loyal Miss Rose Fairweather to tell anybody he is not at home:

Halterton was almost positive he had heard J's voice, and that, in spite of its faintness and his inability to catch all the words, one patch of those words had been: "If it's him," and another, "You don't know when." (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 37)

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Next morning, Wilfrid Halterton sits down to his breakfast, and takes his newspaper. On the financial page, there is something that suddenly checks the wandering of his mind. There is a report that informs that the Committee appointed by the Postmaster-General has been unfavourable to Billies and favourable to Reyner's.¹⁷³ Wilfrid Halterton is the Postmaster-General, so he considers this is a kind of leakage and wonders who has talked. Wilfrid Halterton's thoughts shape a string of suppositions:

I could have told him. It was the sharp little page boy who goes in and out during the Committee meetings announcing people and taking messages. *He* had talked. He had got half-a-crown from the porter, and the porter had got a sovereign from Mr Gamble, who had received fifty pounds in five ten-pound notes in an envelope from Miss Rose Fairweather's own dainty hands when he had called there the day before at Mr McAuley's flat. Mr Gamble had gone on gaily to his newspaper, and received another twenty pounds from the Financial Editor, to whom Miss Fairweather had specially recommended him. The Financial Editor had got no money indeed, but hearty thanks when next he met his proprietor – I use that word in its fullest sense. Also, the Financial Editor had promptly sold his Billies before writing a line. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 40)

Wilfrid Halterton imagines Miss Rose Fairweather's dainty hands have taken part in the plot, too. He waits until a quarter-past-ten for James McAuley's phone call. As he cannot bear the suspense, Wilfrid himself rings up McAuley's flat near the Marble Arch. Miss Rose Fairweather's Scottish accent sounds on the phone...

Once more the clear accents of Miss Rose Fairweather, delicately balanced between the soft Glasgow and the more lapidary Edinburgh – reflecting

¹⁷³ Billies are Durrant's television shares. Durrant's and Reyner's are the two main holdings competing to obtain the government's TV concession. Television is going to be big business, and a monopoly which will be operated in connection with the Post Office. See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 12-14.

therefore perhaps, an origin in Whitburn – replied like chiselled silver. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 41)

Wilfrid Halterton obtains nothing from his phone conversation with Miss Rose Fairweather's sweet voice. The secretary comes up with excuses, and she explains that Mr McAuley is attending some business outside home. Agitated, Wilfrid Halterton, before he goes down to his office at noon, visits McAuley's flat near the Marble Arch:

Once more did the pellucid, sweetly-divided syllables of Rose Fairweather inform him that Mr McAuley had indeed rung up his flat, from the Carlton Hotel, where he had happened to be for a moment in the course of the morning, (...), and that he would have left the hotel long ago. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 42)

Belloc's adjective "pellucid" is somewhat enigmatic, apart from its biological meaning in cell morphology. The reader can guess at the meaning of this word, and "pellucid" can suggest the idea of "translucent," "crystal clear," or, as Belloc literally tells us, a very distinct utterance based on the peculiar Scottish intonation of Miss Rose Fairweather's "sweetly-divided syllables."

That very day, Wilfrid Halterton discovers from the evening papers and from the tape that there has been a sharp little fall in Billies. A new character is introduced, Charles Marry, who is Miss Rose Fairweather's kinsman and pulls strings to influence the shares' price in support of McAuley:

They [Billies] had opened well below yesterday's level, at 21s-22s. They had sunk to 20s-21s, rallied again to 22s and closed at 22½s. The rally, it may interest my readers to know, was due to the purchase of a fairly large block in the interest of a Mr Charles Marry – a relative of Miss Rose Fairweather's, whom she had herself introduced to James McAuley, and who was now devoted to the interests of that great man. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 42)

Miss Rose Fairweather discreetly paves the way for her boss through Charles Marry's connection. Yet Wilfrid Halterton, after having passed a whole day without news from his friend James McAuley, decides to take action. After some indirect, discreet remarks "dropped here and there, in the dining-room of the House and in the lobbies,"¹⁷⁴ Wilfrid Halterton is eventually aware of McAuley's whereabouts. Wilfrid Halterton uses a little trick to be successful in his phone conversation:

Wilfrid Halterton caused J to be summoned to the telephone: he used a ruse: he summoned J in the name of his secretary – "Say Miss Fairweather wants him – urgently." James McAuley, who had but just sat down and exchanged his first words with his hostess, Lady Caroline, (...) cursed under his breath, left the dinner, went out and sat down to the telephone in Balcombe's private room, with the thick door carefully shut. He lifted the receiver and said rather testily:

"Well, Miss Fairweather?"

But it was not Miss Rose Fairweather's voice that he heard in reply. It was the voice of Wilfrid Halterton. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 43)

And the conversation goes on with James McAuley's angry talk with Wilfrid Halterton. McAuley denies having given a letter to Wilfrid Halterton. Although Wilfrid Halterton has pretended to be Miss Rose Fairweather in order to be listened to by McAuley, the small trick does not work.

Miss Rose Fairweather appears no more. She is delicate, polite, and efficient, like Miss Gaylor, the young, docile, neatly-dressed secretary of Lord Delisport in *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928). Miss Gaylor listened to Richard Mallard's words behind the curtain to be a witness in favour of Lord Delisport's machinations,¹⁷⁵ whereas Miss Rose Fairweather is working hand-in-glove with her boss, malicious James McAuley, to annoy Wilfrid Halterton. Belloc describes both young women as

¹⁷⁴ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 43.

¹⁷⁵ See *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928): 158-160.

delicate, and he suggests that they are beautiful, although he never employs such adjective. Belloc follows the usual tendency to associate female secretaries with the idea of docility, delicacy, and stubborn efficiency. Miss Rose Fairweather has a sweet, ‘pellucid’ voice and “dainty hands.” Miss Gaylor is “neatly dressed,” and “self-possessed.” These and other qualities help to shape the stereotype of the female secretary, as it was presented in the twentieth century until the 1960s and 1970s. The cinema used the cliché successfully, and such an image belongs to the popular imagination of the period.

One example of the stereotyped image of a remarkable woman secretary can be found in the American TV series *Perry Mason* (1957-1966), starring the actress Barbara Hale (1922-2017) as Della Street, the loyal, attractive, and very efficient secretary of the ruthless criminal lawyer Perry Mason:

The actress reached fame with the well-known USA TV series. It was always rumoured that she had an affair with the protagonist, Raymond Burr, although it was just a rumour.

(...)

Babara Hale became a celebrity playing Della Street during several seasons, from 1957 to 1966. (...) Hale had already spent ten years at Hollywood when she was offered a secondary part in the series starring Raymond Burr. (...) “Della’s was not a great part,” Barbara Hale said in an interview. “I had six days, six lines and six changes of clothing for each programme.” However, the fact that Barbara Hale was always by Mason gave her the possibility of playing Della Street in more than thirty television films.

(...)

It is true that it was a secondary part playing a secretary, but it marked the rest of her life with her short hair and her undeniable appeal.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Pablo Scarpellini. “La fiel secretaria de Perry Mason.” *El Mundo*. 4th February 2017. [My translation]

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Other examples can be supplied that depict the image of a woman, generally young or middle-aged, very smart and well-presented, with a high command of her job, loyal, methodical, punctual, serious, and responsible.¹⁷⁷

Joan Papworthy

Lord Papworthy is the old and popular Minister for Fine Arts, or Secretary of State for Fine Arts who has an amiable, high, rich voice. He is a “cherub of a man, with his benign, round face,”¹⁷⁸ and is able to be kind and speak softly to answer the volleys of an angry MP’s rough, angry voice. Once, when the Peer went to Canada, he returned with a young wife, Joan, Lady Papworthy. Lord Papworthy’s body is chubby. Even more than that. According to his rival, Reginald Butler, the presumptuous MP and pamphleteer who is the secret lover of Joan Papworthy, Lord Papworthy is an “absurd old football of a husband.”¹⁷⁹ Lord Papworthy stays in Government in a post held for life, as he is a good turncoat and the political circumstances allow him to do so. Belloc states this piece of tomfoolery in an amusing political fantasy. In short, a mocking paragraph:

You will remember that this third tenure of the office by Lord Papworthy was at the beginning of Mrs Boulger’s first administration. One set of authorities on constitutional practice were for setting up a special rule *ad hoc* to fit the case of the Minister of Fine Arts. They suggested that the tenant of the day should change his party with each election. The other set – in my judgement the more reasonable – suggested that he should sit as a member of the Government when his own party was in power; and then, when he had passed into Opposition, should still sit as a member of the Government, though as a member of the Opposition. When his party should come in again, he should continue to hold

¹⁷⁷ Miss Money Penny is completely dedicated to her work as personal assistant of the head of MI6 in Ian Fleming’s James Bond novels and films. Although the tone of the stories is usually light and fanciful, she is a smart, kind, and responsible secretary, too.

¹⁷⁸ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 70.

¹⁷⁹ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 195.

office as a member of the Government party, then, if God granted him life, when he went into Opposition again, he should still sit once more as an Opposition member of the Ministry – and so on, until God should cease to grant him life. And as to what would happen then to the Ministry of Fine Arts – or the Minister – God only knew. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 98)

Even if Lord Papworthy is a cad, elegant, and kind, but really a scoundrel, things are favourable to him. On the contrary, Lady Papworthy is going to lose her scarce money because of her unfortunate connection with Reginald Butler, “a chartered lunatic”¹⁸⁰ and ardent poet who, he thinks, is in defence of sound morals in public life¹⁸¹ and Joan Papworthy’s lover, although that kind of love is not going to last...

As for Joan Papworthy, when she heard the front door shut below, and knew that her lover would not return, she collapsed on to the sofa and sobbed aloud. Then she rang up her brokers and found that Billies were all down the well – even deeper than she had feared. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 196)

Belloc tells us very soon that Reginald Butler’s misguided whimsies on the purity of public life were to play a very considerable part in the fortunes of many people.¹⁸² There is also a hack of poor income, Rashdell, who prints anything in his lousy weekly which nobody reads:

On such materials as this, or rather out of the fantastic rumours based upon such materials, the unfortunate Butler constructed the mass of nonsense which was to lead him to his doom.

(...)

¹⁸⁰ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 176.

¹⁸¹ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 169.

¹⁸² See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 100.

He spent something like an hour of violent inward fever casting about who would have the courage, or who (...) would be so foolish as to print that letter of his. He decided upon the quite insignificant and absurd Rashdell.

Rashdell was one of those men who, on a small private income, amuse themselves by publishing absurd little weekly sheets which nobody reads or buys, and which are of less effect upon opinion than the lightest word from anyone in an established position. Week after week would Rashdell's *Oriflamme* (idiotic title!) come out with all manner of innuendo, ... (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 174-175)

This periodical publishes Reginald Butler's accusing letter which is full of innuendoes and concoctions against high civil servants.¹⁸³ Joan Papworthy unwisely pays attention to Reginald Butler's stupidly *honest* comments on current political affairs, which emphasize some supposed bribes. Misinformed, Joan Papworthy buys Billies shares at the worst of the moments, and this will cause that she loses a huge amount of money in the long run. This will be particularly burdensome for Joan Papworthy, as she actually does not have much money. Her husband, Lord Papworthy, is overwhelmingly rich, although she will lose most of her money in such ill-advised investment. Before that impending, final catastrophe, Reginald Butler goes on sternly denouncing uncertain facts such as the news that Wilfrid Halterton has pocketed a huge bribe:

But to-day, all glorified from Joan's recent radiance, Reginald Butler had passed the limits of prudence, he had soared into the high regions wherein men reach heaven through dreadful sacrifice; and print he would.

(...)

Even Butler, though he was not very realist in these things, knew at the back of his mind that he had no evidence – no evidence in what may be called the base and paltry legal sense; but he had evidence before the high tribunal of impartial

¹⁸³ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 176.

justice. Everything combined to assure him that the rumours now universal were abominably true. Halterton had received, had pocketed (Butler used the sneering words to himself, as he fed his anger upon the affair) a huge bribe. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 172)

Little by little, crazy Reginald Butler is digging his grave. While fat, round-faced Lord Papworthy is very rich, young, and slim, Joan Papworthy has little money, and very soon she is going to be destitute. Reginald Butler suspects that print is dangerous, even so his self-conceit is more powerful than his foresight:

He [Reginald Butler] was willing to denounce, he was willing to expose, he was willing to do anything of that sort – in spoken words, (...). Mere babble. It got him all the glory he wanted, (...). But Print is a serious thing. Print is indictable. (...) It can get you into the Courts. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 171-172)

Although Reginald Butler does not like printed words, since he thinks that they are a matter for lawyers, detectives, and blackmailers, he falls into the trap by publishing his nonsense in Rashdell's flimsy weekly paper:

Reginald Butler continued to pour out his soul, lavish of detail. He was indignant, as only the flaming heart of the Mutt¹⁸⁴ can be indignant.

(...)

– and martyrdom comes galloping to Mutts. Mutts are its passion. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 169, 170)

Billies are tumbling down, but Lady Caroline, unlike Joan Papworthy, is in time to sell hers and still obtains some profit.¹⁸⁵ Billies go on falling until 16s.¹⁸⁶ On Wednesday, 11th March 1960, Reginald Butler's letter has produced rumours for three

¹⁸⁴ Belloc enjoys calling Reginald Butler "the Mutt" (the Chump) *par excellence*.

¹⁸⁵ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 151.

¹⁸⁶ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 178.

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days. Billies continue falling to 14s, and Butler is going to be prosecuted.¹⁸⁷ Simultaneously, an MP Investigation Committee is appointed,¹⁸⁸ although such board is completely biased and made of friends' friends, relatives, protégés, and the clique.¹⁸⁹ William Halterton firmly declares he did not obtain any money whatsoever while both the Leader of the Opposition and Honest Jack Williams make a statement to support William Halterton's honesty.¹⁹⁰ Of course, Reginald Butler is immediately rejected and abandoned by everybody, particularly by his former lover Joan Papworthy:

Let us go back to the unfortunate Reginald Butler as he existed in those days when the Committee first began to sit, and as the contempt of his monstrous action now exposed to the public contumely, even before the crushing weight of evidence before the Committee had begun to accumulate and the solemn declarations which were made in Parliament, had destroyed every shred of respect men might have had for him as a mere misguided enthusiast.

(...)

There was but one heart in the world to which he could turn. And in his misery, knowing well what public ordeal must be before him, he sought that private solace which only one other heart can give to the human soul in its moments of despair.

(...)

He walked, slowly, disconsolately, but still with the prospect of close communion before him, towards Lord Papworthy's house in Repton Square.

(...)

He went in, still miserable enough, was announced, and entered the familiar room. She was there. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 192)

Far from Reginald Butler's much awaited tender words of consolation, Joan Papworthy fiercely attacks him. Belloc compares Joan's volley with a jet of boiling water, a

¹⁸⁷ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 182.

¹⁸⁸ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 188.

¹⁸⁹ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 191.

¹⁹⁰ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 186, 188.

machine-gun nest or a railway accident.¹⁹¹ A relentless reprimand follows. Lady Papworthy is terribly upset at Reginald Butler's stupid demeanour and the consequences it has had on her unwise investment in Billies, the shares which have gone into freefall:

With her strong lissom body taut, just leaning forward, her arms straight and at attention, her fists clenched, each slightly behind the line of her body, with all the energy of well-moulded limbs about to spring, Joan Papworthy gave tongue.

(...)

"You stinking fool!" she said. Oh! That ever from those lips ... "Stinking! Stinking! Stinking fool! Do you know what you've done? Had you the least idea what you were doing? She put about five "s's" into "least." "Cretin!" And on that emphatic word she shot lightning from her eyes. "Oh! Get out! Do you hear? Get out! You make me sick!" (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 192, 195)

Joan Papworthy is advancing upon Reginald Butler, placing her feet in such an attacking position that she seems ready to jump on him, "the first foot already out and suggesting the crouch of the jaguar."¹⁹² Reginald Butler wails, although enraged Joan slams it home.

Belloc adds a wisely ironical paragraph on the inadequacy of Reginald Butler's social criticism:

He [Reginald Butler] was in that last hell, reached by those unbalanced men, happily so few and as I believe growing fewer, who would recklessly play the part of saviour to a political system which needs no saving, and who imagine themselves, in these our secure and dignified days, to be back in the old times of the demagogue and revolutionary. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 196)

¹⁹¹ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 192.

¹⁹² See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 195.

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Those lines are exactly the opposite of what Belloc considered the suitable medication to heal society's evils. Even if Belloc apparently rejoices in Reginald Butler's setback, Belloc was also a social reformer and critic. Of course, neither a saviour nor a demagogue, but a bit of a revolutionary was Belloc. Yet he knew ostracism is the usual price of facing the dominant group that holds power in society.

Ninny Reginald Butler resigns his seat in the House of Commons and becomes starving, as he is ready to work for nothing. Because of sheer mercy, Butler is given a half-paid place on a newspaper, to write on the current drama.¹⁹³ The final destination of wretched Reginald Butler is reminiscent of Professor Higginson's working himself to death for no pay in *The Green Overcoat*.¹⁹⁴

Joan Papworthy sobs aloud as she knows her lover will not return. Just on the next page, Belloc describes a slight change in fortune. Billies begin to crawl slowly up again, "not in time, alas! for poor Lady Papworthy!"¹⁹⁵ As the bank does not supply her with any more money she explains the situation to her husband who is really irritated:

She had been compelled to confess to the master of her house; to rouse him on the only point that ever roused him – but a point which really roused him – the point of money. (*The Postmaster-General* 1932: 197-198)

* * *

Joan Papworthy is a young woman who tries to live an independent life, even though she is not rich. She feels constrained by an old, wealthy husband "with a round, moon like face"¹⁹⁶ who is Minister for life, but who does not care about her. Stubby Lord Papworthy shows his beautiful, young wife off, and is contented with that. Joan Papworthy spends money like water while she falls in love with a nincompoop, demagogue MP, Reginald Butler, who eventually stands trial and is found guilty of libel. Lady Papworthy, Joan, disappears from this novel as soon as she has to ask her husband for money and bitterly submit to his sermon. Joan Papworthy's main problem

¹⁹³ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 225.

¹⁹⁴ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 333.

¹⁹⁵ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 197.

¹⁹⁶ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 198.

is money, in a similar way as Hilda Maple in *The Haunted House* (1927), la Mome Bouillote in *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929), Miss Curll in *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929), and opportunist Victoria Mosel in *Pongo and The Bull* (1910). Money enables these women to be independent – not least from their boring husbands – pay off remaining gambling debts, dress elegantly, relate to important people, have a high life, and live as they please. Certainly, in the case of Miss Curll, money will allow her to escape poverty, which is quite a different goal.

Just as happens in real life, Belloc's fiction makes a clear distinction between rich and poor women. He pays much more attention to this than to the alleged stereotypes of the female sex which were common in his days. The few characters of poor women who appear in Belloc's novels are either honest, hardworking staff, like Mrs Martha Randle in *The Green Overcoat* (1912), Mrs Malton in *Mr Petre* (1925), and those persons who try to shun poverty the best they can, like Miss Curll. Yet Belloc has fun creating characters of wealthy ladies who are completely aware that the high life is expensive, whereas they also know that there is a cheaper one, although it cannot be called "life." All in all, Belloc consciously designs his plots so as to restore everybody to their right and proper place, and women who try to get easy money eventually lose everything or have to pay a heavy toll for their boldness. In Belloc's fiction, there are neither men nor women who become wealthy overnight and not die in the attempt.



Fig. 15. King's Land, Shipley, near Horsham, West Sussex

Chapter Nine

Parallelisms between Belloc's England and the Contemporary *Status Quo*

On Europe and politics

There were not many basic concepts that shaped Belloc's thought and literary production, as he obsessively repeated the items of his limited catalogue to solve the problems of the modern world. He felt that the fair distribution of property, particularly of arable land, farming facilities, and small workshop businesses could transform the whole of Britain into a country of free men. He thought that the Christian faith and the egalitarian distribution of property could cope with industrial unrest since Capitalism and Socialism were different names for the same reality. Belloc was imbued with the Roman Catholic social doctrine that Cardinal Manning had explained to him and, when tackling social injustices, that permeated most of the contents that were explicit in Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*.

When he spoke about property distribution, he did it from Distributist principles, as he was never a Socialist. He abhorred the loss of freedom that Socialism implied, and he never accepted the class struggle that underlay all kinds of doctrines derived from Marxism since that concept was central to Marx's thesis. Belloc liked to be the scourge of the forces he considered the root of social evil, namely, Prussianism and the Anglo-Judaic Plutocracy. There were other groups of people and influences that he attacked repeatedly, but the emphasis was always on these two factors. He related political corruption to hidden Jewish alliances with those in power, and he unveiled the varied techniques used by politicians who were apparently adversaries, but who in actual fact were in cahoots.

Today, social injustice is also becoming a central issue in economic debate. A hundred years ago, Belloc's intuition and insight regarding the distribution of property as a necessary step in resolving social unrest was a very controversial matter since it had both supporters and detractors. Recently, Thomas Picketty has identified social inequality as the factor that can explain the current state of affairs. His thesis can be summarized in this way: the fact that capital grows at a faster pace than economic growth accounts for the increase in social inequality.¹ Later on, Picketty stated that he had been misinterpreted, and that he had tried to offer a broader explanation of his thought to put it in context. Robert Putnam complemented some of these ideas about the reasons for inequality in the United States of America, and he declared that, due to loss of productivity and legislation strongly influenced by the upper classes, the opportunities he had when he was young are not going to be the same for those who are teenagers now.²

Thomas Picketty stated that inequality has grown since President Ronald Reagan's economic policies of the 1980s, that is, the so-called "Reaganomics." This fact is comparable to the rough polarization of income that happened in globalised capitalism before the First World War (1914-1918). Nineteenth century liberals were afraid that citizens' power could limit the acquisition, exchange, and transfer of private property, although in the event the process resulted in just the opposite. The upper class has accumulated more capital in recent decades. In the United States of America, between 1979 and 2007, 1% of the population, the richest people, doubled its share of national income, while the next 19% of the population just maintained its share.

Since the 1980s, there has been a growth in the scale of capital, because huge investment funds have favoured the income of the upper class, while the lowest incomes accumulated schedule flexibility, worse labour conditions, and lower salaries. The

¹ Thomas Picketty. *Capital in The Twenty-First Century*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

² Robert Putnam is a Conservative and a Republican, although he is not afraid of writing on the issue in a straightforward manner. Avoiding tedious statistics, he explains convincingly the reality of meagre future economic possibilities for young people in the United States of America, but sees opportunities for social change too. See Robert Putnam. *Our Kids. The American Dream in Crisis*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015).

Trades Unions were defeated, and their influence decreased. Historically speaking, the working class had been the champion of egalitarianism in the twentieth century. Today, it is the middle classes that will be the protagonists – the key force in the struggle – since they have been abandoned by the thriving oligarchy of financial capitalism.³

German leadership, Western consensus, and the Financial Crisis 2007

Although Belloc loathed everything Prussia meant and admired French culture above all, present reality has placed Germany on top of European nations and everybody recognises Germany's leading role in the European Union. Nowadays, many German people ask themselves what interest they may have in boosting the European Union, as they have already what most interests them: a currency and a free-trade zone under their control. Germany is not very much interested in establishing a European leadership that, nowadays, is more necessary than ever. The way in which Germany exerts such leadership is the usual one: a bit of arrogance, and the tendency to teach lessons. Despite paying €1 out of every €3 in each European banking bailout, a country that looks out for its own interests while pretending it is doing a favour to humankind seems to be a racket.

Going back into recent European history, the Franco-German engine that De Gaulle and Adenauer started in the Élysée Treaty, on the 22nd January 1963, was the key factor in the progress of the present European Union. The current German Chancellor Angela Merkel goes on being faithful to the commitment of truth and reconciliation.⁴ On the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, on a visit to Japan, she declared she had not come to Japan to give advice and tell the Japanese what they had to do. Merkel added that she could only give testimony of what Germany did. Germany faced its past with determination and its neighbour, France, was tolerant enough. On the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, in Berlin, Merkel said that what occurred at Auschwitz concerned them all, then and the following day ... not only those days of commemoration. She stated Germans did not want any words of

³ Göran Therbon. *La desigauldad mata*. (Madrid: Alianza, 2015).

⁴ Angela Merkel (b. Hamburg 1954) has been Chancellor of Germany since November 2005. This Christian-democrat leader is a Protestant pastor's daughter, and she represents the ethics of responsibility.

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hatred towards those people who found a new home in Germany and who looked for shelter from war and persecution. Protecting themselves from any form of anti-Semitism or ostracism was a duty that concerned all citizens, society, and state.

Albert Camus wrote “Il n’y a pas de bonheur dans la haine.”⁵ *Bild*, the popular German newspaper, started a campaign in which it invited readers to send *selfies* with a gigantic “Nein” (no) to help Greece. Schäuble, the current German Minister of Finance, faced populism by declaring that Greeks had pronounced themselves clearly, in the 2015 elections, when *Syriza* became the largest party in the Greek parliament, and ratified the agreement between Athens and the Eurogroup. Angela Merkel was not to blame, but overspending, corruption, and bad government by Greek elites, and very often by the middle classes, were the key factors that were about to bankrupt Greece.

Adenauer, Merkel, apart from Brandt and Schmidt – forerunners of Ostpolitik and the European monetary system –, Kohl and Schröder – who encouraged European unification and Agenda 2010 – never renounced Europeism. Ulrich Beck (1944-2015) was a strong critic of the *German Europe* fostered by Merkel. He believed that Germany had no need to resort to weapons to impose its will, so it is absurd to speak about the IV Reich because Germany is a new power, based on its economy, and this factor is much more flexible and mobile since Germany is present everywhere, without the need to launch its troops. This is the essential difference.

At the end of the Second World War, millions of people were too hungry and exhausted for anything other than trying to survive. However, a collective determination to build a new, more egalitarian and peaceful world was the pervading western tendency. This is why Winston Churchill, the war hero, lost the elections in July 1945, and was replaced by the Labour Party leader, Clement Attlee, even before Japan had surrendered. People did not risk their lives only to go back to the previous period of combined class privileges and poverty. They longed for better housing, education, and free universal health services. In the international consensus of the moment, the United Nations Organisation (UNO) was founded, and so began the dream of the future European Union. For a short time, it was thought that only a world government could

⁵ Albert Camus. *Les Justes*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1950).

guarantee peace, but very soon the Cold War began. Communism had great intellectual and emotional attraction in the Third World and in Eastern Europe. Yet, to a certain extent, Western consensus was strengthened because of the Cold War, as most European social-democrats were very anti-Communist.

When Spain was preparing the first democratic general elections, on the 15th June 1977, a huge variety of parties participated in the campaign. Successive general elections reduced their number, and some centre parties tried to present a synthesis of the moderate and reformist ideologies that had governed Western Europe since 1945.⁶

Today, the European dream is in crisis, and the social-democrat, post-war conception of the Welfare State is being increasingly undermined. This process began in the 1980s, with Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Neoliberals attacked expense on social rights programmes and Trades Unions' vested interests. They considered citizens must get by on their own, since programmes of social assistance transformed people into weak and dependent individuals. Social-democracy slowly lost its trait as an antidote of Communism. Neoliberalism created huge wealth for some people, at the expense of the ideal of equality that sprang up after the Second World War. Other ideologies have appeared in recent years. Right-wing populist policies provoke the desire of pure national communities to get rid of immigrants and minorities. North-American neo-conservatism is imitating old-left internationalism when the United States of America uses its military power to impose democratic order the world over.

Longing for the 1945 consensus is not a solution, but a new aspiration to social equality. International solidarity is the suitable course of action.

⁶ In Catalonia, Jordi Pujol encouraged such synthesis through the alignment of the prevailing European ideologies: Scandinavian social-democracy, social liberalism, German-inspired Christian socialism, and Christian democracy. By cleverly reading post-war changes, Jordi Pujol's goal was to connect with most of the people who wanted progress, welfare, and autonomy without frights. *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC), the party founded in 1974 by a group of people around Jordi Pujol as undisputed leader, was clearly nationalist, and had defined itself as pro-independence. CDC was also a blending of the four mentioned political tendencies transformed into secular humanism along with economic liberalism. By July 2014, corruption scandals had brought Jordi Pujol and members of his family into disrepute. On 10th July 2016, the CDC was replaced by the *European Catalan Democracy Party* (*Partido Demócrata Europeo Catalán – PDeCat*). The new party is pro-independence for Catalonia and in favour of the formation of a republic.

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The euro is unsustainable without a fiscal and banking union, along with suitable coordination of the macroeconomy that could homogenize economies so different in respect of productivity and competitiveness. Once a country is inside the Eurozone, its possible exit has a huge cost. Tsipras had to backtrack in his challenge because Merkel and Schäuble threatened to cut the money flow to Greek banks which would have produced massive devaluation of Greeks' savings. The euro can also be a source of financial instability. Austerity measures worsened the crisis in the Eurozone by increasing unemployment, reducing salaries and Welfare State financing without recent precedents.

There is a growing difference between Northern and Southern Europe, while France is in an intermediate position. Xenophobia rises in the North, with xenophobic political parties in the governments of Finland, Denmark, and Norway, and with a growing influence in The Netherlands and Germany. European solidarity, which has never existed since there is no common identity, has broken down. Former French president, François Hollande, had tried to accelerate European integration to anticipate new crises and, because of his wishes, to integrate economic institutions, as well as creating a common economic government of the Eurozone. Hollande wanted to increase Southern leadership by introducing social-democratic measures in employment and salaries to homogenize conditions in different countries. In practice, transferences from North to South would be required. Such perspective collides head-on with German supremacy that does try to harmonize fiscal policy, but not social and working benefits.

* * *

It is of no matter that corruption is analysed in one particular European country because it is a widespread, transnational phenomenon, permeating all corners of the continent. There is a report published by the OECD in 2014, within the framework of the agreement to struggle against corruption of foreign civil servants in international commercial transactions, that denies the idea that corruption is produced in developing countries owing to bribes paid by small and medium-sized enterprises to civil servants to obtain contracts and privileges. The OECD report analyses 427 investigated and sentenced cases from the 15th February 1999 (when the convention came into force)

until the 1st July 2014. In 43% of the cases, the corrupt civil servant belonged to a country with a high or very high rate of development (according to criteria established by UNO). 67% of the cases were provoked by companies with more than 250 workers. 53% of those individuals who indulged in corrupt practices have management responsibilities, 12% of these being managing directors or chief executives. Spain ratified the OECD agreement on the 3rd January 2000. Consequently, Spain included the crime of corruption in international commercial transactions in its penal code. In Spain, after the 2010 reform, any legal entity can commit criminal liability.

Spaniards have a poor opinion of their own country in respect of corruption. Sometimes, they are harsher critics than foreign observers since Spaniards tend to exaggerate their nation's shortcomings and are not concerned with the low standards of other countries. In Great Britain, there is also corruption, although it is apparently legal. In Spain, corruption tends to be cruder ("*más cutre*"). (...) It is my contention that the characteristic Spanish approach to corruption has been influenced greatly by religion.⁷ For example, in Great Britain David Cameron decided to privatise the Post Office. Its shares were put on the market at a low price. The friends of the government bought them all very cheaply, and later sold those shares very expensively so that they earned a huge lump of money overnight.⁸

⁷ Paul Preston (1946-) comes from a Liverpool family of Catholic tradition, as he said in a radio interview (see next note). After living in Spain for extensive periods of time, he is an authorized voice to ascertain the peculiar behaviour of nominally Catholic Spaniards. Although Preston did not literally say so, he insinuated that the Spanish childish, old-fashioned concept of confession was too easy a device to absolve a believer from sins (peccadilloes). The Sacrament of Penance (confession) makes it compulsory for a person who confesses to having committed a sin (corruption, in this case) to submit to returning the stolen money (satisfaction of the debt), redeeming him-/herself with amendments and saying prayers or performing some act to repair the damage caused by the sin, an act commonly known as "fulfilling one's penance."

Some Reformed churches despise the Catholic practice of confession for many reasons. The Calvinist concept of "unconditional election" implies that man can't do anything to obtain God's mercy because God has chosen from eternity *only those* who are predestined to salvation. Those not chosen are damned.

⁸ Miguel Angel Domínguez interviews Paul Preston (Liverpool 1946) on the radio programme "Cinco continentes." Radio Exterior de España, 17th July 2015. [Transcription. My translation]

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From Belloc to Brexit. Laic criticism of Catholic values

When you try to grasp the core of Belloc's thought, you cannot avoid thinking that, in politics, we have to place the human person at the centre, and we must defend him and her from political and economic conflicts. Belloc realised that consistency was out of fashion in politics, and that this process was part of the crisis since he believed that Europe had not been brave enough to recognize its Christian roots. Although Belloc considered many of his political counterparts to be wrong, he accepted them personally and did not reject them as suitable companions. Belloc shunned the controversial issues that are at the core of the present-day social criticism of Roman Catholic ethics.⁹ These topics were avoided not only by Roman Catholic authors, but by every writer in general as such matters formed the contents of a taboo except for those novelists who were not concerned with the scandal they could produce.¹⁰

Belloc was a firm believer in the transforming strength of Roman Catholic sacraments. He thought any person could undergo a process of inner religious conversion by attending religious services and by leading a saintly life. His was like a priest's gentle recommendation: come to mass, convert, accept God's transforming grace.

Some Catholics' personal honesty and sincere help to the poor are widely-accepted by unbelievers. However, the burden of tradition – also criticised from a feminist point-of-view – artistic or historical patrimony that project an image of wealth, and the stereotyped image of Roman Catholic leaders as well as the peculiar Roman Catholic dogmas and moral teaching keep secular people away from the Church. Such reservations are evident in the following:

I like this Pope Francis more and more. Those that usually read my articles know that I am not a believer and that in general I dislike the Church hierarchy. Rank and file Christians are a different thing, the same as missionaries that do their utmost to help derelicts on the planet (...)

⁹ He never dealt with Catholic rejection of homosexuality and other polemical arguments.

¹⁰ This was the case with D.H. Lawrence whose opinions earned him many enemies and caused him to endure censorship.

But the Church leadership, that unhealthy land in which, for twenty centuries, a good handful of men have worked to accumulate wealth and control relentlessly their faithful consciences and bodies brings deep uneasiness on me. (...)

[Pope Francis] has supplied us with a last joy, it has been his encyclical *Laudato si*, since the document has scared many Conservatives and made their hair stand on end. Francis has been so brave to call a spade a spade. (...) A risky bet that we share with him, all of us that believe that environmentalism is the contemporary form of very old humanism. Thanks very much, His Holiness.¹¹

Liberal Roman Catholics accept the premises of laicism and do not agree with those traditional members who long for the time when churches were full, a perception that was never exact since sociological Catholicism only existed in the minds of those nostalgic enough to mix up remote reality with their present wishes. Nowadays, many of those who declare themselves believers have abandoned Roman Catholicism, at least theoretically, as they never or only occasionally attend church services. Most of them consider that one's beliefs, like one's political options, belong to privacy. Liberal Roman Catholics agree with the principle that the catechesis must be developed in parish premises – the Protestant equivalent is Sunday school – not in the ordinary school. Yet Belloc recognised the value of religious instruction as a school subject and bravely defended the very concept of the Roman Catholic school.

It is almost certain that Belloc would not have agreed with present-day secularists. On the contrary, he would have preferred facing his enemies' opinions fiercely, or perhaps humbly, in line with the Franciscan peaceful behaviour of those who, while not renouncing their sincere beliefs, consider it to be more convenient than the meek demeanour the Gospel mentions as being an essential feature of Christ's disciples:

¹¹ Angeles Caso. *El Papa verde*. Magazine. *La Vanguardia*. 5th July 2015. 14. [My translation]

At that time Jesus said, “Father, Lord of heaven and earth! I thank you because you have shown to the unlearned what you have hidden from the wise and learned. Yes, Father, this was how you wanted it to happen.”¹²

Determination was a basic characteristic of Belloc’s political and literary activity. He was not hesitant at all and had his firm scale of values. He was never afraid of the opinions of others and was ready to debate with anybody anywhere. Belloc belonged, possibly, to the ranks of those “unlearned” who understood the things of God just as the evangelist Matthew proclaims. Above all, Belloc was firmly convinced that money was a serious obstacle to understanding God’s merciful plans.

We have to look for God on the Earth, not in Heaven. Trying to find God in Heaven would be a symptom of pride. (...) Passion for money is the root of all evils. We, Christians, have to be active in fighting against money power. If we believe in God’s mercy, this must shape our way of living as honest citizens.¹³

These words were uttered by theologian José Ignacio González Faus. The traditional popular Catholic cosmology placed God in Heaven, so González Faus’ statement seems to be a paradox. Conscious, present-day Roman Catholics do not deny this analogical truth. Nevertheless, they know they have to transform the world, the Earth, into a brotherhood according to Gospel values.

The members of the Roman Catholic Church in Britain sometimes have lived as expatriate people. They have kept the special atmosphere of illusion, effort, and the sacrifice that imply sharing a minority group. It has been a combination of family

¹² *Matthew*, 11, 25-26.

¹³ José Ignacio González Faus. “The humility of God’s love.” Lecture at Institut d’Estudis Ilerdencs (IEI), Lleida. 16th April 2015). [My translation] José Ignacio González Faus believes that God’s human face, Jesus’ real humanity, is the most suitable access to faith. González Faus is against capitalism and the idolatry of money. Consequently, according to González Faus, the Roman Catholic Church should be a community at the service of the poor. This theologian’s themes are Jesus Christ, humanity, and the poor. His Christology is concerned with a deep sense of the transcendence and ineffableness of God Himself and, at the same time, God’s indescribably agreeable love.

gathering, the celebration of an important anniversary, a special occasion on which you see how affection and solidarity flow around. The believers have been inside some form of networking to form a solid group full of meaning.

Living as expatriate people could strengthen the Roman Catholic identity and fortify the internal bonds of those scattered minority communities. Hilaire Belloc was certainly a pioneer Roman Catholic apologist, and he was particularly sensitive to the spiritual nature of the Church indeed. He glimpsed and encouraged the Church's essential distance from political power whatsoever. He never encouraged political Catholicism, nor was he so naïve and unwise to follow the vagaries of the diehard royalist group the *Action Française*, even though for some time he was a supporter of this political movement,¹⁴ because Belloc was anti-Protestant, anti-German, and was against the corruption of the parliamentary system. These three Belloc's phobias were also shared by Charles Maurras, but Maurras was not a Christian. In some aspects Belloc appeared as a completely orthodox Catholic, as he was a firm believer in the sacramental ministry of priests and their homiletic authority (of course, within the mass, not outside it). Belloc showed firm devotion to the Pope's supreme authority and bowed his head in obedience as was customary among the loyal Roman Catholics of his day, who knew for certain that *Roma locuta, causa finita*. Yet he had a feel for the unavoidable changes that the Roman Catholic Church should undergo to present the genuine doctrine of the assembly of those who believe in Jesus Christ.¹⁵ But despite all this he could not imagine the aftermath of the application of the Second Vatican

¹⁴ Pearce 2002: 195-196.

¹⁵ Cf. Carlo Maria Martini, and Umberto Eco. *¿In cosa crede chi non crede?* (Milano: Atlantide Editoriale S.p.A., 1996). This book may be defined as a collection of the opinions of believers and non-believers about ethical issues within an atmosphere of dialogue and respect. Carlo Maria Martini (1927-2012) was former archbishop of Milan. Umberto Eco (1932-2016) is so well-known that he hardly needs any introduction.

Living side by side with non-believers, just trying to remove the barriers between them, is also a fruitful source of reflection and dialogue for Roman Catholics. Cf. Ramon Prat-Pons. *Record de Déu. Pelegrinatge a la recerca de l'infinit*. (Lleida: Pagès Editors S.L., 2017).

Hilaire Belloc's *Survivals and New Arrivals* (1929) was a much tougher book which constituted his principal contribution to popular apologetics. His was a sound attempt to analyse and refute any kind of accusation to the Roman Catholic Church. Hilaire Belloc's style looks like a "ten-ton steamroller over the world's 'heresies'." (Pearce 2002: 239). Current atheism, agnosticism and indifference to Roman Catholicism would be reluctant to accept such a book, not because of its reasoning soundness, but because of its rigidity.

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Council, the present day atmosphere of secularity and the current lack of vocations to priesthood, with the consequent restoration of permanent deacons (most of them married) and the new functions assigned to pastoral associates (pastoral agents, animators of the community).

Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, made clairvoyant observations on the future of the Roman Catholic Church. He returned to Bavaria in 1969 to the University of Regensburg, as he had previously been appointed to the chair in dogmatic theology at the University of Tübingen. In a German radio station (it has been impossible to trace back which radio station was), in 1969, he commented on the crisis of the Church. His remarks are amazing, all the more so when we bear in mind that these words were uttered nearly fifty years ago:

The future of the Church can and will issue from those whose roots are deep and who live from pure fullness of their faith. It will not issue from those who accommodate themselves merely to the passing moment or from those who merely criticize others and assume that they themselves are infallible measuring rods. (...) Unselfishness, which makes men free, is attained only through the patience of small daily acts of self-denial. By this daily passion, which alone reveals to a man in how many ways he is enslaved by his own ego, by this daily passion and by it alone, a man's eyes are slowly opened. He sees only to the extent that he has lived and suffered.

If today we are scarcely able any longer to become aware of God, that is because we find it so easy to evade ourselves, to flee from the depths of our being by means of the narcotic of some pleasure or other. Thus, our own interior depths remain closed to us.

(...) We have no need of a Church that celebrates the cult of action in political prayers. (...) What will remain is the Church of Jesus Christ, the Church that believes in the God who has become man and promises us life beyond death. The kind of priest who is no more than a social worker can be replaced by the psychotherapist and other specialists; but the priest who is no

specialist, who does not stand on the [sidelines], watching the game, giving official advice, but in the name of God places himself at the disposal of man, who is beside them in their sorrows, in their joys, in their hope and in their fear, such a priest will be needed in the future.

(...) From the crisis of today the Church of tomorrow will emerge – a Church that has lost much. She will become small and will have to start afresh more or less from the beginning. She will no longer be able to inhabit many of the edifices she built in prosperity. As the number of her adherents diminishes, so it will lose many of her social privileges. (...) Undoubtedly it will discover new forms of ministry and will ordain to the priesthood approved Christians who pursue some profession. In many smaller congregations or in self-contained social groups, pastoral care will normally be provided in this fashion. Alongside this, the full-time ministry of the priesthood will be indispensable as formerly. (...)

The Church will be a more spiritual Church, not presuming upon a political mandate, flirting as little with the Left as with the Right. It will be hard going for the Church, for the process of crystallization and clarification will cost her much valuable energy. It will make her poor and cause her to become the Church of the meek. The process will be the more arduous, for sectarian narrow-mindedness as well as pompous self-will will have to be shed. One may predict that all of this will take time. (...)

But when the trial of this sifting is past, great power will flow from a more spiritualized and simplified Church. Men in a totally planned world will find themselves unspeakably lonely. If they have completely lost sight of God, they will feel the whole horror of their poverty. Then they will discover the little flock of believers as something wholly new. They will discover it as a hope that is meant for them, an answer for which they have always been searching in secret.

(...) The Church is facing very hard times. The real crisis has scarcely begun. We will have to count on terrific upheavals. But I am equally certain

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about what will remain at the end: not the Church of the political cult, which is dead already, but the Church of faith. It may well no longer be the dominant social power to the extent that she was until recently; but it will enjoy a fresh blossoming and be seen as man's home, where he will find life and hope beyond death. (Heilman 2016)¹⁶

* * *

A good community must foster values: help, sharing, and encouragement, precisely because living in a different surrounding implies putting into practice all your capacities and perhaps there are some you did not know you had. The members must be thankful to pioneers who, like Hilaire Belloc, have gone in the vanguard of the community, living in a world that is increasingly an integrated whole in which somebody has to occupy the free room that is continuously appearing in front of you as you proceed along on the way.

Belloc's ideological trajectory clashed with contemporary Man's sensitivity, much more so than is the case with present-day writers in general. The authority of the Roman Catholic Church that Belloc took for granted has been seriously criticised and opposed to the individualism that sprang from the French Revolution and that has been intensifying as years have passed. Post-modernity has stated that there is not only one truth, religious, ethical, social, or economic, but many truths, as each human being has his own truth. Pluralism has been declared to be the normal state of our age so any attempt to homogenize society will be immediately rejected.

In present-day Spain, Roman Catholics who are aware of current tendencies are against historical attempts to establish any exclusive religious truth by force.¹⁷ Belloc's zeal to defend the Roman Catholic Church was an admirable apologetic intention, impressive in its conviction, but inadequate for current sensibilities. His sound

¹⁶ Richard Heilman. "Father Joseph Ratzinger 1969 Prediction of the Future of the Church." *Roman Catholic Man*. 23rd June 2016. <www.romancatholicman.com>

Joseph A. Ratzinger's thought is developed and expanded in his book, *Faith and the Future*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009). There is also a Spanish translation: *Fe y futuro*. (Bilbao: Desclée De Brouwer, 2007).

¹⁷ In Roman Catholic European countries, educated people bear in mind the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Thirty Years' War. Beyond this, Spanish liberal writers recall the aftermath of the Carlist Wars, the Spanish Civil War, and its subsequent National(ised) Catholicism.

determination could attract some followers, but also many opponents in his time, and much more so nowadays. Reading the Biblical metaphor, one understands religion must be soothing for human wounds and not the scourge of heresiarchs.

Then the Lord passed by and sent a furious wind that split the hills and shattered the rocks, but the Lord was not in the wind. The wind stopped blowing, and then there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire, there was the soft whisper of a voice.¹⁸

Some terrible theophany¹⁹ is not God himself, because God does not force human freedom. Belloc's lonely, prophetic voice declaiming in the desert must be respectfully listened to, as it contains clear truths and foresees present-day evils. Yet his occasional furious invectives will be rejected by modern Man. Faith should not be imposed: it can only be proposed because it is not the result of logical arguments, but a grace, God's free gift. "The soft whisper of a voice" from the Biblical passage is the real, careful voice of God, inviting, persuading, and calling, never compelling.

The distribution of wealth

Brooding on Belloc's thoughts on social justice, we can conclude that he was in favour of revising our concept of the common good. Present-day society considers it normal to take advantage of what we label "public." With insolent reasoning, consciously or not, many people declare that "everybody does it" when they unlawfully use or ruin public goods, or that "what belongs to everybody does not belong to any person in particular."

For laudable reasons, Belloc was in favour of heavy taxes on huge properties while making sure that any person had his decent plot of land or small business to earn

¹⁸ *1 Kings*, 11-12. *Good News Bible*. New York: Collins/Fontana, 1976.

¹⁹ Biblical manifestation of God.

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his living.²⁰ What is more, he considered that economic growth was not the only criterion to judge positive any specific model of development.

Thinking about social issues a hundred years ago has concomitant statements with current writers who accept and enlarge on some of Belloc's principles about wealth distribution. Christian Felber (1972) is an independent Austrian writer who coined the terms "Economy for the Common Good" as a theoretical framework by which to produce alternative measures to the 'market economy' and the 'planned economy.'²¹ There is a series of items to assess the standard of economy for the common good that any economic system can reach. The final report is the criterion consumers use to choose goods accordingly. The theoretical model was implemented in October 2010 by a group of companies that participated in the project by willingly fulfilling the requirements of the economy for the common good. Recently this group has become a political movement that puts pressure on governments to transform the theoretical principles into laws.²²

Such economy for the common good cannot be applied everywhere because some countries have a long tradition of economic liberalism that bans any reform in dealing with workers. In the United States of America, if an employer realizes there are one hundred workers whose services are no longer required, he or she simply sends an email to dismiss them and, in many cases, that is the end of the story. In most small- and medium-size companies, workers do not have a works council, nor are they enrolled in trades unions. Sometimes this is the same reality in big companies, so redundancies are very fast, but the recovery of companies and their economies is also faster than in Europe. Medical insurance in the United States of America is generally very expensive and private. Consequently, around forty-five million citizens do not have it at all. The Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") was eventually passed by the Supreme Court of the

²⁰ He was not encouraging socialism, but distributism, as he specifically made a distinction between both social theories on many occasions. See Hilaire Belloc. 1912. *The Servile State*. (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1977): 12 ff.

²¹ See Christian Felber. *La economía del bien común*. (Barcelona: Deusto, 2012).

²² In 2014, there were fifteen items to assess a company's performance in terms of economy for the common good. The list is open to discussion and companies willing to implement the standard can contact the author at <www.christian-felber.at>.

United States of America on the 25th June 2015. Republicans are against this government scheme that tries to provide subsidies to sixteen million poor Americans so that they can pay their medical insurance.²³

Spanish people bring the Trades Unions into question following scandals in some organizations and the emergence of new social and political movements that accuse Trades Unions of being in cahoots with the Establishment. Big Trades Unions usually watch out for press photo-calls and publicity about a rise in salaries that has been generically agreed on. The Trades Unions must be more visible to ordinary workers, especially to connect with young and women workers.²⁴

Angry young people

The leading core of Spanish party Podemos belongs to the new middle classes. Its members are not outcast people because they are highly educated. What is more, their intellectual level is higher than present-day professional politicians in Spain. They bear in mind a particular concept of Spain, and their radical-democratic programme, with populist aspects, can evolve in different directions. What they show just now is only a sketch. The leaders pretend to occupy “the centrality of the chess set,” a space that they identify with the social majority that is in favour of decency in contrast to “the parties

²³ This is only possible when laws are designed by taking into account these principles. There are enormous differences in public services and work regulations between developed countries. For example, medicine in the United States of America is much more expensive than in Spain even if some experts would argue that doctors in the USA are better and use more sophisticated equipment. In 2014, an ultrasound scan in the USA cost five times more than in Spain. In the USA, medical insurance is not generalised as it is in many western European countries. Individual workers must pay for their expensive medical insurance. Sometimes only major companies pay for it as part of “the privilege” they grant to their workers within a scheme of collective bargaining agreement.

If you do not go to work, you are not paid, because the European concept of having time off sick does not exist, nor does the system of being on the dole.

President Obama's initial attempts to change partially the system of medical insurance failed. To many citizens of the United States of America, the European systems of Social Security and National Health, that were initially conceived by social democracy to some extent, verge on Communism. Most unskilled Spanish workers and citizens in general do not know the real social security conditions of workers in the USA, and would be surprised if, as an experiment, they were to work in the USA for some time.

The ‘Obamacare’ law was enacted on 23rd March 2010. President Donald Trump has repeatedly stated his intention to replace it. In March 2017, the Republicans in the House of Representatives failed to abolish Obamacare, but, at the time of writing, its future is uncertain.

²⁴ See an interview with María Recuero, General Secretary of USOC. Eduardo Magallón. “Hacerse valer en la trinchera.” *La Vanguardia*. 2nd August 2015.

and powers of the caste.” This majority wants the rich to pay their taxes in the knowledge that democratizing the economy is the only way to put an end to corruption. Within this line of leftish populism, the leaders state that “the political caste”²⁵ is not what makes the country work, but the people in the street. In October 2014, public addresses of Podemos leaders stated their firm belief that “normal” people constitute Spain, not those corrupt members who try to break up the country and open bank accounts in Switzerland or Andorra, whatever their party may be.

Nowadays we tend to use a kind of time-compression that makes us consider the future smaller thanks to enlarging the present. Such is the case when we try to analyse any social movement in the heat of the moment. In 2011, successive waves of social unrest went across the world and adopted the form of indignation: *indignados* (outraged people) in Spain, *Occupy Wall Street* in USA, Israeli Social Justice Protest (the Tents Protest), and student protests in Chile. Those participating objected to parties that could pay attention to their demands. The protagonists have been outside official politics, and this has been the main reason for attracting new activists. Spain is the only country that has kept such experience going on through the new party Podemos that has presented itself as an extension of the *indignados*’ social protest.²⁶

In the Arabic and Muslim world, protest movements organised themselves by means of the skilful and intelligent use of internet and social networks. Apart from abolishing authoritarian regimes, that social action also had other meanings: radical

²⁵ “The caste,” along with similar incendiary expressions, were increasingly softened as soon as Podemos’ leaders realised they needed the votes of the middle class too. In September 2015, Pedro Sánchez, the leader of the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español – PSOE) at that time, shrewdly pointed out this wise moderation of discourse and change in strategy once Podemos began to lose momentum in the surveys in comparison with another growing new party.

²⁶ John Müller. Ed. *Podemos. Deconstruyendo a Pablo Iglesias*. (Barcelona: Deusto, 2014).

Ten economists and journalists, coordinated by John Müller, analyse the political phenomenon of Podemos.

On the night of 25th May 2014, Podemos obtained 1,245,948 votes and five Euro-MPs. It became the third party in Madrid and smashed the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español – PSOE) from which nearly a third of the votes for Podemos came.

The book describes who the members of Podemos are, Jorge Verstrynge’s influence on Pablo Iglesias, the relationship between 15-M and Podemos, the communication strategy of the new party, who voted for this party, the feasibility of its economic programme, its answer to citizens’ indignation, why nobody foresaw Podemos’ appearance, and the new political map after European Parliament election in 2014.

Islamism appeared and this gave way to violence or new authoritarian regimes that replaced former ones. At the moment, only Tunisia has been free from it all.

Nevertheless, three or four years are a very short lapse of time from an historical point-of-view. It remains to be seen which analysis will be done in ten or twenty years. Observers must be pragmatic and realistic when considering the possibility of political change. Pessimism is not a useful approach, but the present is always complex and ambiguous. We must appreciate the scale of time, as we do not know which historical judgement will be applied in fifty or a hundred years.

We must bear in mind our criterion to judge political events that happened in the last one hundred or fifty years, for example, decolonization, Latin American dictatorships, the fall of the USSR, Arabic and Muslims revolutions in the 1950s, labour movements, 1968 movements, new social movements in the 1970s, and *outraged people* in their various forms. We must recover the sense of historical distance to produce a balanced approach.

The new generation does not forgive those guilty of the economic crisis and is for socio-political commitment while defending the axis family-job. The young believe that affluent people, those in office and those in the marketplace, are to blame for the present-day crisis. They do not trust traditional policy. Although they think that voting is an essential form of political participation, they are in favour of other ways of collective and social participation because politics cannot be the affair of just a few.

They urge broadening the scope of political participation. Young people think that demonstrations, proponents of new social policies, and the use of social networks are relevant.²⁷ The young revise their expectations within a downward trend, because they are convinced that making an effort is not the same as achieving one's goals. They

²⁷ Digital newspapers have sped up all sorts of offshore news. Hervé Falciani, former employee of the Swiss branch of the British private bank HSBC, revealed a very controversial list of those involved in tax evasion with the help of that bank. Around 2010, many European governments had already been informed of those that evaded taxes, but on 9th February 2015 *The Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *El Confidencial* (*elconfidencial.com*), and others, roughly formed a kind of international research association of journalists that went on publishing the consequences of the scandal. The affair was called the Lagarde List (colloquially in Spain: the Falciani List).

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still consider effort, together with rebellion, training, responsibility, and learning from your mistakes, to be basic and the best way to speed up social change.

However, they think that the social class you belong to is a fundamental element since it determines your future expectations. A huge majority bet on the very same pillars that existed prior to the crisis: education, job, home, and family. A minority believe that such trodden track is not useful because a new order must be created, but young people are unable to define the constituent elements that must shape such new order. All young people in general consider effort the fundamental ingredient when you have to study, and as a life-attitude to find your way. Rebellion is, for them, critical conscience, and the capacity to demonstrate for anything that matters. Responsibility is their reaction to what has happened in Spain, and training is their best way to get a job in the near future.²⁸

This phenomenon of rebellion is underlying recent political events in the United Kingdom, too. For instance, in the referendum on the independence of Scotland, held on the 18th September 2014, there were 15% *pro-independence voters due to the situation*, or rather those who took advantage from this political opportunity to protest against the traditional policy of austerity measures, cutbacks, Conservative Party indifference to the working class, and the transformation of the Labour Party into a centre party that has abandoned redistributive principles. They accused the Labour Party of assuming the dogmas of financial capitalism, especially the doctrine of deficit reduction at any cost, even if it implies reducing salaries and the Welfare State.

The Labour Party lost direction with Tony Blair, and has not retrieved it with either Gordon Brown or with Ed Miliband. A left-wing party is useless if it does not represent the values of the working-class. The Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrat Party safeguard the interests of the rich. Somebody must be the voice of those unemployed for whom the state reduces social benefits and leaves abandoned in the middle of the street, while politicians make every effort to rescue bankers.

²⁸ *Transparency and Fairness* was the motto under which European leaders gathered in Luxembourg, on the 28th October 2014, to establish the suitable background for the future system to promote an honest global financial system, and to fight against corruption.

Globalization has changed everything, as what is in crisis is not only the socio-economic model, but the very concept of nation-state. No matter whether Scotland, Catalonia, Flanders, or Bavaria are independent or not, if the main decisions that affect the economy of those regions are always adopted in Frankfurt, Brussels, and Washington. The theoretical sovereignty of nations is rendered baseless if the German Chancellor, currently Angela Merkel, decides on specific austerity measures, the level of reduction in salaries and public spending, the dismissal of civil servants, and the decrease of buying power. Nobody is independent any more. The name any community adopts to label itself can be only a matter of identity, not power or control. Governments should try and leave those decisions, in the taking of which there is still some level of autonomy, as firmly in the hands of the people as possible.

The main criticism regarding these new movements is the impossibility of implementing their programmes, as their proposals are too idealistic and expensive to obtain the necessary money to transform them into real alternatives. Many people are fond of magical thought, so they mix up wish and reality. They declare that their country should be this or that way and, more specifically, they have an opinion as to the configuration they would prefer for their country.

It is a species of collective letter to Santa Claus, an incorporation of those plausible wishes that dreamers can confuse with the thorough foundations of a different and better future. But just now, they are simply mere wishes. The new movements' arguments seem to be written by people in favour of magical thought. Their statements usually begin with "there are many reasons to believe that" or "everything leads us to think that." This is not the practical way of changing the *status quo*, as magical thought cannot provide the backbone of a project in which what is obsessive is placed before what is reasonable.²⁹

²⁹ Lorenzo Bernaldo-de Quirós. *Por una derecha liberal*. (Barcelona: Deusto, 2015).

Although the author comes from economic liberalism, it is surprising that some of his answers coincide with those of Podemos. However, he contends that only classical liberalism is able to become the engine of individual freedom and economic growth.

He describes the causes of Spaniards' disenchantment with politics, and the reasons that account for the rise of populist proposals. A "State for everybody" must fight against the privileges that give

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Just to the contrary, Vicenç Navarro is favourably impressed to see so many young people of the 15-M Movement who, instead of asking for a revolution, provide some alternative solutions.³⁰ He warns everybody not to believe that there are no alternatives, since this is a habitual phrase from all governments in the world, but he thinks it is false. Navarro bases his research on economic data, not on sheer suppositions. He tries to dismantle the huge ideological reasoning of Neoliberalism and Financialization that have caused much exploitation. He thinks that the basic crisis began much earlier than the 2007 economic crisis; as early as the 1980s, work income began to decrease while return on capital steadily increased. The consequence was that speculation was over production.

Studying social and labour data as a starting point was Belloc's method of analysis too:

I deal with the actual appearance of the servile state in certain laws and proposals now familiar to the industrial society of modern England. These are the patent objects (...) which lend stuff to my argument and show that it is based not upon a mere deduction, but upon an observation of things. (...)

You have private ownership; but it is not private ownership distributed in many hands and thus familiar as an institution to society as a whole. Again, you have the great majority dispossessed but at the same time citizens, that is, men politically free to act, though economically impotent. (...) there will be under

immunity to great organizations or that encourage measures that reward the rich and penalise the poor. This assertion could be backed by Podemos, too.

Bernaldo-de Quirós states there is a growing uneasiness in Spain in 2015, in spite of the fact that people have the highest levels of freedom and the highest standard of living in history. It is necessary to implement essential changes to keep freedoms and prosperity. Spain succeeded in overcoming the hardest moments of the crisis, but this is not enough. The modernization of the public sector, decreasing the State size, the modification of the electoral system, and a reduction in the government's neo-patronizing attitude are urgent tasks.

See also Lorenzo Bernaldo-de Quirós, and Jordi Sevilla. *¿Mercado o Estado? Dos visiones sobre la crisis*. (Barcelona: Deusto, 2011).

Jordi Sevilla was Minister for Public Administration (2004-2007) in José Luis Rodríguez-Zapatero's Socialist government. Bernaldo-de Quirós and Sevilla come from different ideological backgrounds, although they cooperate to provide a well-adjusted analysis.

³⁰ Vicenç Navarro-López. *Ataque a la democracia y al bienestar*. (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2015).

capitalism a conscious, direct, and planned *exploitation* of the majority (the free citizens who do not own) by the minority who are the owners. For wealth must be produced: (...) the possessors can make such terms with the non-possessors as shall make it certain that a portion of what the non-possessors have produced shall go to the possessors. (*The Servile State* 1912: 171, 108)

Navarro states that speculation spoilt goods production and caused exploitation. Belloc insists on exploitation as the unavoidable aftermath of heartless capitalism. Sometimes political measures cannot be the ultimate solution to structural evils.

Belloc's lifelong conviction that the front- and back-benches of both sides of the House of Commons were representing similar or identical interests, despite their formal labels of government and opposition, is a recurrent accusation in the media in present-day Spain. Juan Carlos Monedero, former secretary of Podemos's programme declared...

Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría [Popular Party] and Susana Díaz [President of Andalucía, PSOE] are completely equal, as to their interest in bureaucracy and political behaviour. The citizens that voted each of them are **not** equal because they do have different ideologies and beliefs.³¹

The hackneyed expression "loss of values" is a reality in many fields. In 2014, the Harvard Business School organized an exhibition in the Baker Library (a famous spot of this institution) about former lecturers from the 1940s. After the Second World War, they established this prestigious School, and they did it within a frame of values. Those were the years when Frank Folts, Georges Doriot, and others helped to set up many similar schools around the world.³² At present, Harvard has to resource to the senior professors that keep those former values to participate in some far-away programme that has been designed by this institution, for example, with some scheme

³¹ Monedero's words when he was interviewed by Risto Mejide on the television programme *Al rincón de pensar. Antena 3*. 2nd June 2015. [Transcription. My translation]

³² IESE in Spain, INSEAD in France, IMEDE in Switzerland, and KEIO in Japan.

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that requires coordinating actions, bettering internal processes, or helping young professionals to settle in. The frequent biggest mistake related to teaching activities has to do exclusively with money. Many lecturers' internal dilemma can be formulated through several questions that anguish them: How much will they pay me for this? To what extent will I get prestige if I spend my time paying attention to my students' queries when I am at the office? Younger lecturers usually consider it much more profitable to write a book, or offer lectures and speeches to well-known business people, as they think these activities make a big name for themselves and supply money and valuable networking, too. However, looking back to the time when they were undergraduates, most present-day, important senior lecturers recognise they learnt more in their tutors' offices than in classroom sessions.

Belloc's reaction to social injustice usually meant analysing it from a religious point-of-view, simply following Cardinal Manning's suggestion: "All human conflict is ultimately theological."³³ Belloc was aware that we are living in a deep, anthropological crisis that in practice denies the supremacy of the human being by reducing him to only one of his needs: consumption. Behind such attitude, there is the sheer rejection of ethics and God.

On Catholicism

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) encouraged the Church's opening-up to the modern world.

In 1959, John XXIII convoked this general meeting of Catholic bishops. This event was the beginning of a change in the official policy of the Church, a Church that until then seemed impervious to the new social proposals, innovations, and discoveries of the century. Many Roman Catholics considered the change a vital need for the Church itself: either the windows were opened to let fresh air come in,³⁴ or the Church was doomed to be lost, completely closed in on itself, and condemned to self-destruction. It was a matter of survival. As usual, opinions were divided. Confronting

³³ See Hilaire Belloc. 1925. *The Cruise of the "Nona."* (London: Penguin Books, 1958): 47-50.

³⁴ This metaphor was used literally by John XXIII in his address to announce a new council.

those who realized the urgency of such *aggiornamento* (bringing the Church up to date) were other groups that lived the moment with uneasiness within an atmosphere of distrust.

Philosophical criticism of Roman Catholicism and other Christian (and non-Christian) faiths had been challenging every kind of religious principle since the middle of the nineteenth century, criticism voiced through theories expounded in works whose authors Paul Ricoeur categorised and called *the masters of suspicion*.³⁵ These thinkers pretended to reveal what lay beneath the avowed human need to believe in God or a god.

Among the many elements that shaped the first half of the twentieth century, we could mention the Cold War, the weapons race, space discoveries, the emergence of Third World countries, the Independence of former European colonies, Existentialism and Marxist theories that were attractive to new generations, the Vietnam War (1958-1975), the sexual revolution, the demographic boom, birth control, and the sensation that the world was becoming smaller thanks to the media. As a consequence of these events and changes were two tendencies inside the Roman Catholic Church. Conservatives remained deaf and blind to what was happening in the world, while Progressives³⁶ realized with a sinking heart how the Church was unaware of and distant from “the joys and hopes of the people of that time.”³⁷ On top of this, after the Second World War (1939-1945), an important group of remarkable theologians began to put forward proposals of change and transformation to bring the Church up to date and to meet the needs of their contemporaries.

During the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Helder Camara, the Brazilian archbishop who was deeply concerned about human rights, wrote a series of letters

³⁵ Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud were considered its key members. Sometimes Feuerbach was also included.

³⁶ The distinction “Conservative-Progressive” is introduced here to distinguish between the two main tendencies inside the Roman Catholic Church. ‘Conservative’ here means traditionalist Catholics, either diehard fundamentalists or simply those who loved traditional liturgy (widespread use of Latin and immutable sacramental rituals), and the usual strict, morally-oriented teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. This is an overall simplification, no doubt, but it can be useful to explain what was and is still going on inside the Roman Catholic Church.

³⁷ This peculiar expression was used to designate the social unrest and positive aspects of those years. The literal words were repeatedly used in the Council pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*.

about his impressions. He believed that changes in the Church should be real and not just generate news of superficial, petty modifications.³⁸ Theologian Henri de Lubac foresaw catastrophe; he considered that every new scheme had been presented following the rules of formal and rigid scholastic theology and that some bishops had tried to condemn anything that did not fit in with traditional Church practice.

John XXIII was the humble, naturally good, patient man³⁹ who had bravely convoked the Second Vatican Council. Paul VI was the Progressive Cardinal Montini⁴⁰ who was elected Pope in 1963 as the successor of John XXIII. Several expert theologians who had been censored and silenced due to their avant-garde and reformist positions were restored and invited to participate in the Council.

When the Second Vatican Council finished, an excellent summary of the official position of the renewed Roman Catholic Church was issued. The book contained all the new documents that were the ultimate fruit of the Council.⁴¹ However, when one considers this statement's quintessence from a present-day perspective, fifty years after the Council finished its sessions, observers from different doctrinal positions believe that the Roman Catholic Church has not been updated or, more specifically, that most of the legacy of the Second Vatican Council has not been implemented due to several reasons.

All through the Council sessions there was conflict between those who desired a conservative Church that continued to be on the defensive, and those who longed for a Church that had to be progressive and merciful. Present-day observers realise that the conservative Church that apparently was defeated in the 1960s has, slowly but surely, been regaining new ground since then.⁴² A large section of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy did not accept the approved changes and was not ready to put into practice

³⁸ Two hundred and ninety letters describe his reflections and he believed that the leaders of the Church usually approved some courses of action without taking into account the opinion of all the faithful: priests, members from religious orders (male and female), and laypeople.

³⁹ He wrote a spiritual autobiography, *Journal of a Soul*, in which he described himself as a person who was capable of few things, wrote slowly, lazy by nature, and easily distracted in his work. John XXIII was a sincere and peaceful person who was not concerned with any personal ambition whatsoever.

⁴⁰ Former Archbishop of Milan, the largest Italian diocese.

⁴¹ *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*. (Northport, NY: Costello Pub. Co., 1996).

⁴² The coming of Pope Francis in 2013 marked a turning point in the traditionalist tendency. Pope Francis implemented brave changes in the Church and sincerely intensified the Church's merciful aspects.

overnight the new model of a more participative Church. Fundamentally, there were two factors that obstructed work towards openness to new ideas and *aggiornamento*: the constant changes that occurred at the end of the 1960s, and the fear of Marxist social and political currents.

The second half of the 20th century was a period of strong turmoil due to social, political, and economic currents that came to a boiling point and that were generally against the Establishment. We use 'Establishment' to refer to the visible dominant group, or to the elite that held political power during those years. The institutional Church that was trying to come out of dogmatism did not know how to be present and to accompany the joys and hopes of the people of this period. In many cases, the Church only mentioned them and expressed its intention to enhance human freedom and dignity as a programme of work.

Following the short interval of John Paul I, John Paul II became the new Pope in 1978. He had suffered under a communist regime most of his life and, in this new period, many Latin-American theologians who were in favour of a 'theology of liberation' were condemned. Conservative bishops were appointed to preserve the orthodoxy, and papal Curia mistook the preferential option for the poor for some sort of support of Marxism that (according to Rome) implicitly led to atheism. Bishop Marcel Lefebvre (former Archbishop of Dakar and founder of the traditionalist Society of St Pius X) was the outstanding member of the Conservative group, whereas Jacques Gaillot (Bishop of Évreux, near Paris) was Progressive and in favour of dialogue with ordinary people. Both bishops were excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church.

* * *

In frequent passages of the Bible the term "pneuma" (exhale, breeze) condenses the idea of breath, sigh, air, spirit, or wind to symbolize and represent God's presence in man, the world and the Church.⁴³ The Church is like a temple, the temple must keep its doors wide open not only to see what goes on outside the Church but also to receive inside the Church fresh air, novelty from others and from God.

⁴³ *Genesis 2, 7. Jn 21, 23; 1Cor. 12, 12.*

According to this concept, the presentation of God takes on a new perspective: God cannot be closed within the limits of space and time of a particular body or a specific conception of Church. God is like air, and the best way to establish a relationship with Him is not by trying to make Him prisoner in the precinct of an orthodox and dogmatic Church, but in a sincere and free dialogue with everybody. On “opening doors and windows,” Jesus’s disciples become missionaries. Just as happened in Whitsun,⁴⁴ Catholics learn new languages and interact with people from different cultures and with different difficulties.

Contemporary religious people hardly accept the presentation of God and their Churches (including Catholics) as concepts based on strict orthodoxy and moralisation. Pope Francis recently made a statement in favour of a Church that should not “stick to its own static and immutable positions,” and that should be faithful to the Holy Spirit in a creative way instead of “trying to regulate and tame Him.” He also said that Christians ought to be “authentic missionary disciples, capable of putting a question to consciences.” To do so they must “abandon a defensive style” and honour the Holy Spirit that is actually “freshness, fantasy and novelty.” Pope Francis warned Roman Catholics against the temptation that the Church “entrenches excessively in its ideas and strength.”⁴⁵

In the transmission of faith, Roman Catholics must avoid boring concepts of a kind of faith made up of prohibitions, laws, and proselytizing doctrines. They should encourage a catechesis of proposition, an invitation to be happy and make others happy, to look for travel companions to show the world that it is worth going throughout our lives doing good, as this attitude transforms reality and even the idea of religion. A religion of rigidities wards off those who might feel attracted to it, but the religion of ‘love stronger than death’ unifies, pacifies, and spreads interest in it. There are impending problems in the Roman Catholic Church that need solution though.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Acts of the Apostles*. Chapter Two.

⁴⁵ Pope Francis made this statement in his journey to Istanbul on the 29th November 2014. *La Vanguardia*. 30th November 2014. 11. [My translation]

⁴⁶ Some of the new, unsolved challenges that the present-day Roman Catholic Church should face up to as impending tasks are: 1) rethinking the possibility of optional celibacy for the priests; 2) giving more responsibility to women in the Church (even in sacramental practice); 3) rethinking pastoral treatment of

On Education

Before going further in any comparison of the Spanish system with other European practices, we must take into account the different departure points that are the outcome of historical and social circumstances. Current percentages of state schools compared with those of religious or private institutions of education vary greatly from one country to another, so generalization and hasty conclusions may be completely wrong. Classification of schools and education terminology are also misleading because apparently similar name-tags mean completely different concepts in each country.

In Spain, religious schools have a share of 15% non-university students (from preschool to secondary education).⁴⁷ Private schools (religious institutions plus other private schools)⁴⁸ educate 32% of students. In the United Kingdom, only 5% of the schools are private, fee-paying schools (the most expensive and élitist of which are called “Public Schools”) which provide primary and secondary education to 7% of the student population. Public Schools are usually very exclusive, expensive, independent

those divorced who want to receive communion; 4) reshaping formation for the priests to avoid recent cases of scandal; 5) encouraging greater participation of laypersons in parochial life; 6) approaching birth control in a consistent manner and through common sense measures; 7) casting light on the increasing gap between the rich and the poor; 8) qualifying criticism of Neoliberalism and consumerism; 9) taking into account the importance of environmentalism; 10) using new techniques for evangelisation (particularly information and communications technology); 11) boosting ecumenism as well as fostering dialogue with other religions in order to establish a more humane world. Pope Francis has to bear the heavy burden of facing present-day challenges within the constraints of fidelity to Gospel and Roman Catholic doctrine.

⁴⁷ Spanish Roman Catholic schools (nominally religious institutions) have 1,200,200 pupils out of eight million non-university students. See general information published by *FERE Escuela Católica* 2015 and *Datos y cifras. Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte* 2015.

⁴⁸ Private education in Spain does not mean very exclusive expensive schools paid by parents, as is the case with Eton, Rugby, and other Public Schools in England and Wales. In Spain, most of those so-called ‘private schools’ are subsidised by the Spanish State through a special agreement. They are called *centros concertados*, and they include religious and secular schools. Such schools must fulfil the national syllabus (sometimes with autonomous peculiarities), and are supervised by government inspectors (from central government in Madrid, or from autonomous governments, depending on each autonomous community’s legal competence). In all state schools and private schools (religious and secular) that are *centros concertados*, there is a school council (*consejo escolar*) that supervises the school’s progress and the headmaster’s management. Private schools that are not *centros concertados* are private enterprises that have complete management freedom, so they are not obliged to have a school council.

In Spain, truly “private” schools (exclusive, fee-paying, private, independent schools) are very few and usually located in major cities. The reason for their small number is not their alleged excellent academic results, good facilities, or ideological principles, but simply economical. Most people cannot afford the fees. Of course, there is also a minority of conscientious, political activists in Spain who would like to abolish such institutions.

boarding schools that prepare students for entry into universities. Around 90% students (93% in England and Wales) attend state schools (also called community schools). Free Schools⁴⁹ and Foundation Schools⁵⁰ constitute other options. The British equivalent to the Spanish *centros concertados* are the Independent Schools. Independent Schools include private schools and state schools, although the term “public” in this case is increasingly abandoned to avoid misunderstanding, as these schools have nothing to do with exclusive fee-paying traditional “Public Schools.” Independent private schools receive subsidies from the Government, but they enjoy some degree of independence as to voluntary fees and organization. Some Roman Catholic schools are categorised as Academies. An Academy is a non-selective, state-funded school that is a self-governing, non-profit, charitable trust.⁵¹

Only 10% of primary and secondary schools in France are private schools, most of them being confessional and financed by the government. 15% of schoolchildren in France attend private primary schools, and 20% attend private secondary schools.⁵² Belgium and the Netherlands have a majority religious-school network in Europe. They have a larger percentage of semi-private schools than Spain.⁵³ In Belgium, the government fully subsidises religious schools by meeting the real cost of education.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ In the United Kingdom, Free Schools were introduced after the 2010 General Election by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. These schools are non-profit organizations subsidized by NGOs, universities, religious institutions, teachers’ companies, or other Independent Schools.

⁵⁰ Foundation Schools have more freedom to organize their syllabus and administration. They belong to their Board of Governors or to charities.

⁵¹ Spanish readers tend to relate the term “trust” to its illegal meaning: association of business firms formed to reduce competition and control prices. Just the opposite, in this case *Institución benéfica (sin ánimo de lucro)* can be the Spanish rendering of “charitable trust.”

⁵² France recognises academic freedom. Most private schools (not all) have a contract of association with the French State that subsidises them. The system is regulated by the *loi Debré de 1959*.

⁵³ Semi-private schools could be perceived as the equivalent to *centros concertados* in Spain.

⁵⁴ Many people do not know that the Spanish system of *centros concertados* (semi-private schools, chartered schools in the terminology of the United States of America) obtain allowances from the government that only account for a part of the real expenses. The rest is paid by parents through a voluntary fee system that is accepted or tolerated by education authorities. Such fees are openly criticised by left-wing parties, because they consider this monthly payment conceals illegal revenues.

Some Spanish parents who want their children to attend a *centro concertado*, complain about not having the school voucher (a system rejected in Spain), so they are obliged to apply for a place in a state school, that is, a school subsidised by the state. It is contended that this is usually the only option for humble families.

Such parents argue that the average cost of a state school vacancy is between €6,000 and €7,000, according to the *Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte* and Eurostat, although these data may be

Nowadays, the convenience of a Roman Catholic education, more specifically the subject of religious instruction as part of the syllabus, has been discussed in many European countries, leading to different solutions. The election of a model usually depends on the society in which people live.⁵⁵ The different European systems can be gathered into three groups. The confessional model is predominant in countries of Roman Catholic or Orthodox tradition, but also in Germany and Belgium. The model of religious culture – learning about religions in a way similar to those methods used in philosophy and history – is implemented in other countries. There is a third incipient model based on ethics and values, the possibility surprisingly discussed in France that is a country of traditional, secular policy, one of the unmovable principles that sprang from the foundation of the Republic.

France is the only European country without religion as a subject. Many old Spaniards, both retired teachers and ordinary people with no school-management experience whatsoever, idealise French secularist tradition. They consider religion must be out of school life altogether. Curiously enough, they usually like to draw a parallel line of similarity between religion and republicanism, being the stereotypical summary as follows.:

Public school must be secular, free and first-class.⁵⁶ The schoolmaster is like a secular priest that must preach and set an example of ethical republican values [“republican” is an intentional paradox applied to Spain, nominally a

unofficial because it is very difficult to obtain them so easily. The *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* states that the average cost of a vacancy in a *centro concertado* is only €4,000, including learning materials and extracurricular activities. (See *La Vanguardia*, 9th August 2015.)

Comparing these two costs, the logical consequence seems to be State mismanagement. Nevertheless, the whole issue is thorny and full of confronted ideological connotations. These data and their interpretation are controversial indeed. On the other side of the spectrum, there is serious criticism of *centros concertados*, particularly when they are religious schools. (Cf. Elsa García. “España figura a la cabeza de la UE en la privatización de la escuela.” *El País*. 2nd June 2014.)

⁵⁵ This is Flavio Pajer's statement. He is a LaSallian brother and Senior Lecturer at the Università Pontificia Salesiana di Roma, an expert in religious education. The debate was organised by *Junts*, the majority union of religion teachers. Barcelona, 1st July 2015.

⁵⁶ “Public school” in the continental Europe sense (not the ‘Public School’ in the United Kingdom, the exclusive, fee-paying, private, independent secondary school), or rather, the school paid by taxes (*pública* or *concertada*) and controlled by the central or autonomous governments.

constitutional monarchy]. School must be like a church in which the schoolmaster officiates a secular service to preach the new values of secular humanism in a similar way as the priest gives mass in the chapel.⁵⁷

Educated Spaniards immediately grasp the nostalgic overtone of this sentence that condenses much of the grown-ups' reaction against National Catholicism. This is roughly the feeling of some very young people who are against the system principles. Many young people were born and brought up in democratic Spain though, so they are revolting against something they did not experience first-hand.

French culture, especially the student/worker demonstrations in France in 1968, influenced very many educated people in Spain until the late-1970s when it became replaced gradually but consistently by the tenets and features of American and British culture. Many Spaniards recognised openly or in a roundabout way that they suffered from an inferiority complex when faced with French democracy, culture, and way of life. Some very old Spaniards cannot free themselves from inbred religious obsessions, and they prefer to transfer religion to politics. They would like to replace religion – which they caricature as running counter to progress and against individual freedom – with secular praxis. They attempt at such change in an old-fashioned manner by imitating the French Revolution process when the National Convention created the personification of Reason as a goddess around 20th Brumaire (10th November) 1793. They consider the IInd Spanish Republic to be a 'golden age' during which people broke free from the yoke of religion.⁵⁸

Strangely enough, some former traditionalist teachers from the Francoist period became sudden turncoats and, typically, they followed human beings' tendency to ingratiate themselves with long-term, opposing ideologies once the Spanish political situation had changed overnight. Since the 1970s, a long string of neo-converted

⁵⁷ This is my summary of what is or was, literally, said, sporadically, in schoolmasters' refresher courses and encounters.

⁵⁸ Some teachers long for the days of *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (1876-1936), Giner de los Ríos' educational project, and Ferrer Guardia's idealised aims.

schoolmasters became reformist in respect of school activities.⁵⁹ Overnight, the former authoritarian schoolmasters became benevolent, open to dialogue, and even democratic,⁶⁰ once the rote-learning and disciplinarian teachers adapted to a nominally open-school methodological system that many policy-makers considered should be the standard in the newly democratised Spain.

However, the Spanish character likes to add comic references to any social change because taunt is inherent to its sarcastic nature. In private, some old teachers were proud of their rough authoritarian measures typical of the *ancien régime*. In former days, parents usually accepted strict measures, without uncomfortable questions, since they thought teachers were always right and that efficient learning implied a few painful methods. Parents simply did not pursue relentlessly the schoolmaster at evening departure time to share opinions about their child's improvement in the previous week as is customary nowadays.

Some old teachers' boastful comments ran like this: "You simply slapped twice the first boy you caught on his face and that was it."⁶¹ Witnesses of this chat – fellow schoolmasters listening to such deserving orators – did not find anything comical in this scene. It was perfectly understood that justice was not important, since they hit the first boy they came across, not the real vandal, supposing there was one. Fear did the rest – particularly when students noticed the teacher's foul mood – as the whole classroom became instantly silent and knuckled down to work.

Some people associated such violent practices only with convents and faith-based schools, although some sulky lay-teachers in state schools punished boys physically, at random, particularly between the 1940s and 1960s. Some past pupils from

⁵⁹ Marta Mata (1926-2006) was an outstanding leader of a Catalan renovation movement in favour of secular schools. She enjoyed widespread prestige in the Schoolmasters' Organisation Rosa Sensat. She excelled at pedagogical methodology in progressive refresher courses, mainly in summer schools during the 1970s.

⁶⁰ Luc Ferry (French Minister of Education 2002-2004), in an informal encounter, declared that the good teacher is not a democrat. Although the statement may be shocking, its meaning seems to be that a teacher must be able to programme objectives and procedures according to his training, experience, and the team of teachers to which he or she belongs. The teacher should not be paying attention exclusively to his or her students' likes and dislikes or trying to ingratiate him- or herself with them.

⁶¹ This is the polite version. The scene usually included some drama techniques as to facial expression. In coterie chatting, those teacher-actors uttered these words twisting their mouths, shouting a little and getting a sore throat with haughty nuances to make clear their bad mood and due authority.

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religious schools feel resentment for ideological reasons, basically anti-clericalism, and not solely as a result of ill treatment. Such schoolchildren were usually obliged by their parents to attend such tough, discipline-oriented schools. These past pupils make funny remarks that are commonplace:

I attended a priests' school (literally "*col·legi de capellans*" in Catalan) in which everything was a sin.⁶²

The brothers marched us to church "to kill Jews."⁶³

The last sentence is reminiscent of the ailing Belloc's answer in an interview with two journalists who visited King's Land in June 1946:

It was the Dreyfus case that opened my eyes [Belloc's] to the Jew question. I'm not anti-Semite. I love 'em, poor dears. Get on very well with them... Poor darlings – it must be terrible to be born with the knowledge that you belong to the enemies of the human race.

Why [asked Kingsmill] do you say that the Jews are the enemies of the human race?

The crucifixion [replied Belloc].⁶⁴

⁶² Salvador Servià's informal statement in an interview on RAC1 radio station, 14th June 2015. Servià comes, characteristically, from a well-to-do family, the ones who preferred faith-based private schools in the 1950s, and nowadays too, although the tendency has been reversed in favour of secular, exclusive, private schools, with good facilities, or fashionable, bilingual, international centres. Servià is an outstanding sportsman and politician.

⁶³ The term "the brothers" refers to teachers from a Roman Catholic, faith-based institute of brothers (not priests) who, in the 1940s, took the boys to church on Maundy Thursday. At a moment during the religious service, the congregation made a terrible noise, crying out "kill Jews," as they considered the Jews to be responsible for Jesus Christ's crucifixion. In the 1950s, this politically incorrect action was abolished in Catholic liturgy for many reasons, but, basically, due to the series of reforms of Holy Week rites introduced by Pope Pius XII between 1949 and 1956. Yet past pupils from religious schools, and others who join in the jibe but could not know about "killing Jews" because of their age – they had not yet been born at the time – enjoy uttering nasty comments about "the brothers'" repressive education, and its moments of rollicking good fun, too.

An illuminating article on the subject is: Manuel Cuyás Gibert. "Matar jueus." *El Punt Avui*. 30th March 2013.

The former pupil's light remark and the seriousness of Belloc's reasoning explain different aspects of the same reality, the long, unjust tradition of forcing the Jewish race into the role of scapegoat.

Many anecdotes exemplify the peculiar loathing of Roman Catholic education that is immersed in a hotchpotch seasoned with accusations of paedophilia, cruel stereotypes, and ridiculous, useless, old-fashioned, strict education. However, from the 1940s to the 1960s, many Spanish parents wanted their children to attend a faith-based school because they knew for certain that boys were going to undergo 'cramming' in order to pass selective exams at a very young age. For example, by the age of ten you were expected to pass the first paper to enter *bachillerato*.

Parents and society understood and accepted that learning was neither easy nor amusing, such that on occasions it implied suffering and disappointment. This is a completely different concept of the current, ethereal belief in "a happy school" in which, some academics say – especially educationalists – children enjoy learning since the miracles of merriment suddenly appear immediately after the short motivation speech of an attractive and resourceful teacher.

UNESCO has just now stated that education through projects is the preferred trend, so that teachers are obliged to change their approaches completely. UNESCO encourages those teachers who guide students in their "discovery" of knowledge through project-based learning. Self-discovery of knowledge was already one of the abstract principles that shaped the Spanish education law of 1970.⁶⁵

Some practical senior teachers are sceptical about the amount of new pedagogical theories that flood Spanish education with poor results, since they

⁶⁴ Hesketh Pearson, and Hugh Kingsmill. *Talking of Dick Whittington*. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1947): 211.

⁶⁵ In everyday practice, this principle gave way to learning through several kinds of self-correcting cards ("*fichas*"). Some enthusiastic schoolmasters so strongly believed in the new technique that they abandoned explanations on the blackboard, problem-solving, debates, mental calculation, writing composition, repetition to memorize, drilling, and other mainstream strategies. It is recognised that those cards partially included some of these teaching-learning techniques, although everyday practice neglected them. Card-based learning was immediately implemented and lasted a few years (roughly from 1971 to 1973), since everybody observed the system failed completely.

Incidentally, in October 2017, President Donald Trump called for the withdrawal of the United States of America from UNESCO on the grounds that the Organisation had permitted the Palestinians to become members in 2011.

positively know the high rate of dropouts that have been educated by teachers that are strong supporters of new theories, but who have a poor command of the subjects they teach.⁶⁶ For example, a middle-aged teacher stared at blackboards with spelling mistakes written by language teachers, while he also observed maths teachers fumbling with their calculators to cope with easy arithmetical operations that could be solved by simple mental calculation.⁶⁷ Generally speaking, memorising has been declared useless and outdated. Educational fashions have been included in the system without checking their positive results, as those theories became a matter of belief, rather than processes leading to corroborated success. The real worth of teaching through projects is still to be seen.

No matter what experienced teachers may think privately, the fact is that young and mature practicing teachers try to transform school into something entertaining, amusing, and highly motivating, or so they say. The dream of the average teacher is a school system in which all students feel encouraged to learn, are active and participatory, do their homework, study lessons – like consulting reference books, learn at their own pace – according to their intelligence and skills, show respect for others, are not a nuisance despite their urgent need to call attention to themselves and enhance their disturbing teenage assertiveness, behave properly, and help to create an agreeable human and humane atmosphere.

Teachers usually defend their job by pretending to be in favour of alleged “new” methodology, particularly when parents (their customers) and school management want teachers to put into practice the most recent, (sometimes also weird) teaching techniques. Teachers know better and want to adapt themselves to new fashions if this is the essential toll to keep their jobs. Their scaring alternative is to be on the dole.

⁶⁶ Introduced in 1990, the General Organic Law of the System of Education (LOGSE) did not reduce essentially the number of dropouts.

⁶⁷ David Rabadà. “Educació per projectes.” *La Vanguardia*, 19th July 2015. In 2014, Irene Rigau-Oliver, Catalan Minister of Education, reshaped the requirements to become a primary school teacher. Although the debating process is still in progress, new regulations were implemented as to future teachers’ skills in mathematics, languages (Catalan, Castilian, English), postgraduate training, and even a two-year period of satisfactory teaching practice. Openly recognised or surreptitiously suggested, these steps were basic qualifying requirements to eliminate unsuitable candidates.

Grandiloquent terminology includes concepts such as “cooperative learning,” and the like, that are presented as the result of sound research and empirical assessment of educational procedures, although sometimes they are merely fashionable definitions of ancient intuitions and common-sense deductions that could be traced back to the Socratic method. However, some middle-class parents feel that their children must attend a school in which master classes are banned, and where students are immersed in constructivism, only “learning by doing.”

Two different teachers comment on some aspects of the current situation in Catalan schools. Many aspects of what they comment on can also be applied to Spanish schools in general. Their opinions differ a little and are quite illuminating as to what is behind appearances. The first teacher observes:

Many teachers admit traditional teaching no longer works. Timetables, subjects and examinations disappear. New global projects, mixed subjects come, and also new skills: team work, initiative and creativity. In our school, 5th, 6th courses of primary education and 1st, 2nd courses of ESO have been grouped into only one educational stage.

Three- and four-year-old children go to school very happy. They tell you what they do. They feel loved. As school years pass, boys begin to count the hours to get rid of schoolwork, to reach the next weekend and be free at last.

We must place the student in the centre. We must inspire hope in him! We must fight against affective absenteeism. It is impossible to educate children as if they were in an assembly line because each person is different and has specific talents.

We do not have school supervisors, nor do we have we teachers sorted out into departments, but instead we have a team of teachers in charge of each course. We do not divide teaching into differentiated subjects. On the contrary, we present contents through interdisciplinary projects. We have grouped together sixty students in one class with three teachers.

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The students pose a question they are interested in and we introduce the syllabus through it. To fulfil this project, they read, write, learn maths, history, or English.

Society changes very fast. Apart from knowledge, a person needs to have his own resources, be creative, autonomous, able to work in a team, learn continuously and upgrade. He must also be committed to the common good and create his own life plan.

The second teacher observes:

Innovation is a fashionable idea. Under the title of innovation, some people conceal many classic ideas with new presentations. There is little innovation in education. There is simply school-curricula updating that is fruit of the new demands of society, frequently through modernisation of classic, pedagogical ideas. Behind the statement “working through projects,” many different things hide. “Projects” are usually contrasted with “contents.” There is too much nominalism in all this. People speak too much and do little. Everything is quite “rethought,” actually. State-owned schools do not worry about having or not having students because these schools need not sell their services. A State-subsidized School (*escola concertada*) needs to do just the opposite. This urgency leads to the appearance of the *escola concertada* in the media, or to its taking part in a competition for a prize. If you have more demand than supply in a state-owned school, you really have a problem. In this case, people think you compete with other schools in your area, something that is completely false. In an ideal educative system, parents would not have to suffer to choose schools: all schools would be first-class.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Maite Gutiérrez. “Arranca el nuevo curso” *La Vanguardia*. 13th September 2015. [My translation] Gutiérrez interviews Minerva Porcel, primary school teacher at “Col·legi Claver,” Lleida, and Boris Mir, ESO history and music teacher at Institut-Escola “Les Vinyes,” Castellbisbal.

In the words of the first teacher, the repeated word is “project,” and the enthusiastic teacher re-names (without specifically mentioning it) Decroly's well-known method of “centres of interest.” In the second paragraph, a different teacher sceptically doubts the alleged innovation of the techniques some schools say they use.

Some theories are still fashionable, while others became extinct because this is the normal course of human events.⁶⁹ Spending valuable time and resources on useless

⁶⁹ Nobody seems to remember the rigmarole of allegedly worthy programming techniques that were time consuming in syllabuses of those brand new *Escuelas Universitarias de Formación del Profesorado de EGB* in the education system of the early 1970s. This was the new pompous name of the former *Escuela Normal de Magisterio*. Students from these colleges of education between 1975-1978, and later, were obliged to programme non-stop. Huge dossiers about “formulated operational objectives” should be submitted following literally a very long series of abstract concepts contained in a kind of dictionary that detailed the rules to write an up-to-date “programming.” There was a long and exclusive list of verbs in the infinitive (not unlike a logarithm table) that should head each operational objective.

This was a sort of fashionable activity some outstanding Spanish education authority considered the elixir of life. It was, no doubt, the translation of some USA educational handbooks that tried to transfer computing sciences steps, algorithms, to teaching ability.

In practice, such programming activities consumed the precious time Spanish students should have spent on studying other subjects that were really essential in everyday classroom teaching, for example, mathematics and languages. Some demanding pedagogy lecturers, very picky about programming, were the reason for this waste of time. In some colleges of education, programming and related topics seemed to be the only subject in the syllabus. Lecturers from other subjects patiently bore students' neglect of the rest of the curriculum.

It is amusing to recall that the “programme” already existed in Spanish secondary textbooks from the 1950s and 1960s. It was a booklet inside the main book that enumerated all the numbered lessons with their corresponding epigraphs. This small book was frequently used to raffle the topic you should be fully conversant with in oral exams, that old-fashioned ordeal.

Nevertheless, in the late 1970s colleges of education, everyday practice required that the student dissect any educational act through the detailed enumeration of each and every stage the teacher should undergo in order to teach according to the new rules.

When inspectors visited schools, they obsessively asked to see each schoolmaster's programming as a guarantee of efficient work.

Inspectors convened refresher courses for older teachers to learn programming techniques. After the inspector's brief introduction, teachers should gather in groups and programme. Then a brainstorming session followed. Some inspectors collected teachers' ideas and summary sheets, and sometime later published their own handbooks about how to programme. Certificates of attendance to these courses were granted, specifying the number of hours and other relevant details. Bureaucracy had and has far-reaching consequences for later promotion.

From 1971 onwards, Saturday morning meetings on the school premises were devoted to programming. These meetings took place at the same time as compulsory classes that had been scheduled according to the previous law, so that teachers were obliged to work on Saturday mornings. Headmasters considered the matter urgent, “just in case the inspector visited their school.” Old teachers passed the buck to younger ones because “they were more able and were up to date.” In the meantime, old teachers pretended to do some work while they spent time telling funny jokes about everything and anything.

Jibe appeared right away in palindromes that cracked new jokes: “What do you want really? A programming through objectives (*programació per objectius*), or just the objectification through programming?”

abstract theories or idealist considerations, that are too far away from real school problems, seems to be one of the traits of Spanish (also of Catalan) school teachers.

There is not only one successful teaching method. Many alleged “new” methods do not mention the huge gap between persistent schoolwork and entertaining electronic media that capture the passive spectator’s interest without demanding any effort on his or her part (TV, YouTube), or that simply interact with him in a childish competitive activity within the frisky atmosphere created by videogames.

Recently, educationalists have played with the idea of transforming schoolwork into fumbling with laptops, tablets, electronic blackboards, cell phones and adjacent gadgetry. This initiative is based on the well-meaning concept of bringing into school the very same tools from the everyday life of youth. The result has been mediocre, or just similar to the usual outcome of traditional school. Some hardworking students wonder if there is any difference between doing exercises on paper and writing them on your laptop screen or replacing physical reality by digital recordings. Playing and learning are sometimes an unbridgeable dichotomy.

There is no school methodology that can be so motivating as to compete with the allure of the playful aspect of the electronic media. Teachers’ motivation has to overcome their pupils’ fatigue throughout the thirty hours in school every week, sometimes engaged in unavoidable, dull, repetitive drills. It has to cope with moody teenagers’ instability and its consequent disruption of the steady effort school requires. These challenges are too many and too difficult to surmount.

Programming immediately became an essential criterion for the assessment of a teacher’s capacity. Then and now, ability to programme is one of the fussy papers in teachers’ competitive exams (*oposiciones*). It is also one of their certified skills to get promotion.

On the whole, programming has come here to stay. When the LOGSE came into force, new lists with programming items were compulsory, and refresher courses designed (1992-1993). César Coll-Salvador, Professor of Developmental Psychology and Education Psychology at the University of Barcelona (UB) and his team planned the new strategy.

More recent laws – the 2006 LOE and the 2013 LOMCE – failed to abolish compulsory programming procedures. Mixed abilities supplied new areas for teachers’ programming. Programming basic skills (*competències bàsiques*) and curricular change (*programació individualitzada d’adaptació curricular*) are fashionable tendencies and add wider zones of control to the present tyranny of educationalists.

Nowadays, shrewd textbook publishers freely give flash-drives with the full programming of each subject.

Although an apparently complaisant society shuns mentioning the word “effort,” this tenacious personal attitude is essential to learn efficiently. Devoted teachers have studied the problems arising from Spanish comprehensive school system and have tried to solve the uneven results obtained by students with different skill levels. Mixed abilities have been tackled by educationalists through experimental procedures to deal with the huge variety of pupils that attend comprehensive classrooms. Authorities created educational psychology counselling teams for secondary education to cope with the mixed-abilities phenomenon, although these groups of experts have not always succeeded in integrating students that fall behind in conventional groups given that the reasons for this are too divergent and usually involve psychological problems of maladjustment. In general, only very dedicated teachers with wide experience in the field and charisma can deal with unruly teenagers with special needs.⁷⁰ Every senior teacher is conscious of the huge gap that exists between recommendations in theoretical books, even though, supposedly, the outcome of much field work, and everyday practice in school.

A serious reflection on rapidly-changing Spanish education laws⁷¹ leads us to a fundamental conclusion: old things always come back with a different name. This is the

⁷⁰ Sometimes, a teacher's personal qualities and willingness surpass the worth and effectiveness of his formal qualification as a university educationalist. This is the case with Pere Pujolàs-Maset (1949-2015) who began as a foreman in a training workshop of a professional school where he taught for thirteen years. He eventually obtained his PhD in Pedagogy with a thesis on educational psychology counselling in secondary schools. A former Catholic priest, Pujolàs did not abandon the Catholic faith. He worked as a member of a counselling team in secondary education for six years and, since 2000, he has been a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the University of Girona (UdG). He has held several posts at that College of Education. Pujolàs based his action on thinkers like Lorenzo Milani, Célestin Freinet, Paulo Freire, and Emmanuel Mounier. Yet, those who knew him were aware of his personal convictions and thorough dedication to his work in many educational fields and of his Church pastoral activities. Once more, his kindness, integrity and commitment to ethical policy were much more appreciated than his degrees, research, and publications.

⁷¹ Since 1970, the Spanish parliament has passed five laws of education (four of them organic laws), as well as many decrees. A national newspaper adds two more laws (see below), so their number would be seven. Much criticised Minister of Education, José Ignacio Wert, designed the *Ley orgánica para la mejora de la calidad educativa* (LOMCE) that was eventually passed in 2013. Catalonia had already passed its own Education Act concerning issues of its competence: the *2009 Llei d'Educació de Catalunya*.

“LOMCE is the seventh law of education in the last 35 years, which proves the obsessive and age-old politicization of education in Spain. (...) LOMCE is the attempt to prevail ideologically by taking advantage of the absolute majority of the People's Party (Partido Popular – PP) in 2011.” (Editorial: “El lío de la LOMCE.” *La Vanguardia*. 16th August 2015. 20). [My translation]

nature of events, and much more so when such universal experience is applied to Spanish policy, with its antagonistic tendencies.

In those remote years, Spanish school was neither entertaining nor flooded with uplifting projects. When a boy was ten, he had to pass an entrance examination (*examen de ingreso*) to be accepted for preparation for the *bachillerato*, if he was able to. Those who failed, or who simply belonged to humble families, could attend ‘vocational’ schools after finishing compulsory primary education when they were twelve. Many of those modest students in urban areas chose elementary commercial training (*Comercio*).

Things changed overnight when the entrance examination to the *bachillerato* was abolished as part of the 1970 Education Act reforms.⁷² Spanish school became increasingly more tolerant since policy-makers tried to design a high school accessible to nearly all, and to improve, substantially, vocational training. Other partial reforms changed the scope of Spanish education in a similar way as Britain underwent a change when most Grammar Schools were abolished in the 1960s and 1970s – except in those mainly Conservative counties where they were maintained alongside fee-paying, private schools – and transformed into Comprehensive Schools.

When some Spanish children attending religious institutions became adult, they did not need to conceal their resentment; they revolted against their parents’ ideas and the strict education they had received. They were oblivious of their parents’ former intention to prepare their children for a competitive society and, with luck, a well-paid job. Headmasters of faith-based institutions knew that parents in general did not choose their schools only because of religious instruction, but for many other reasons.⁷³

⁷² The *Ley General de Educación* (Ley 14/1970) was also called colloquially *Ley Villar Palasí* after the Minister who had fostered it.

⁷³ At present, Spanish faith-based institutions are still educating boys and girls, although many of them just keep their name and loosely apply the original statement of principles: values of academic excellence, hard work, and religious instruction. Up to the 1950s, religious members – most of them lay brothers, but also some priests – were usually the only teachers in these schools. In most cases, they were the proprietors of such premises. Increasing lack of religious vocations and the shift in the aims of religious orders in other fields – such as helping disadvantaged groups on the outskirts of big cities, working in at-risk youth settings or in the third world missions – caused religious members to keep only schools management in the first stage. In the last phases of decline, many of these schools became parents’ cooperatives in a sort of franchise in which there were no religious members working. This procedure closely follows the usual steps of the French religious institutions’ withdrawal from school.

Educationalists' view on that remote period – before the 1970s – restates the obvious principle that each education system is a reflection of the society from which it springs. Such systems imitate societal values, reproduce them, and try to perpetuate them. The Spanish school of that period was authoritarian and repressive because Spanish society was also authoritarian and repressive.

Many considerations that relate to school in Spain are fruit of ideological bias. Criticism of the Spanish system from the 1970s onwards does not imply that the stricter school of previous years was more efficient. Outstanding students thrive in very different backgrounds. Remarkable leaders, businessmen, doctors, lawyers, and other professionals have come from any period of Spanish education, no matter if the system has been inextricably associated with political goals, and the nature of the concept of school discipline, authoritarian until the 1970s and increasingly permissive later, up to the current sit-tight and do-nothing in compulsory stages.⁷⁴

Individual intelligence, skills, command of foreign languages, persistent effort, and social adjustment are beyond the presumed qualities any teaching method could offer. Social environment is crucial in supplying opportunities for social status attainment, and frequently much more important than particular pedagogical strategies.

In 1981, the present writer experienced this slow but persistent secular process at St Mungo's Academy, a former Marist school in Glasgow. At that time, a Marist brother was headmaster due to a "gentlemen's agreement" on the part of the lay staff, although nobody was certain his successor would also be a member of such Catholic religious institute of brothers. Other originally Marist schools underwent a similar process. This is the case with Our Lady and St Chad Catholic Academy in Wolverhampton that became a Comprehensive School in 1978 and at present is run by lay personnel.

Many examples can be provided in present-day Catalan and Spanish nominally Catholic schools. Sometimes religious orders still run them, with a few members in the key posts. In other cases, the religious order just owns the premises. Some of these schools eventually became parents' cooperatives. Catholic schools (*Escola Cristiana* in Catalonia) make serious efforts to maintain and adapt their religious character. In many cases, the entire lay staff (working in a formerly religious school that simply has been transformed into a parents' cooperative) retains their school's former religious name because teachers consider it a valuable brand name.

⁷⁴ Regardless of politicians' reassuring statements and official statistics, everybody knows the real congested school atmosphere during the teenage stage in Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO). The problem is apparent especially in thirteen to sixteen-year-old classrooms. Spoilt children of complacent parents who belong to the upper middle class, or, just the opposite, those lower-class children coming from poor environments, notoriously do not adapt to the theoretically demanding objectives of schoolwork. The situation is very similar in Europe, taking into account the gritty information Catalan teachers obtain after a sincere conversation with counterparts from other countries. The current European Union "Comenius Programme" provides a suitable opportunity for exchanging such ideas and opinions.

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Networking, that is, establishing relationships with people who know the student's professional abilities, can be crucial to obtaining a decent job. Persuasive interaction places people in a field of mutual knowledge that makes it possible to influence listeners' beliefs and attitudes to generate changes. Putting it in sincerer, politically-incorrect words, networking is usually the ability to establish social contacts with influential people, a strategy that is at the root of social climbing and many prestigious jobs. Some schools surreptitiously foster networking in a much more decisive policy than their alleged up-to-date pedagogical methodology.

Senior schoolmasters and secondary teachers – much more so if they are retired – cannot avoid wondering if there is anything left from school. How much remains of the nominally distinctive spirit of a particular school once the student has just left it, or after ten, twenty years? Sometimes the key question is what differentiates one school from another if the variables of social class and historical period are considered constant.

In any historical period of Spanish history, some institutions, no matter if they are public or private, have been recognised as remarkable centres of education. At present, when many religious schools have involuntarily been blurring their former teaching objectives, some of these institutions have been classified as 'centres of excellence.'⁷⁵

There are other sensible, more moderate approaches to religion, both as a social phenomenon and as a school subject. In democratic Spain, Article 27 of the Constitution

⁷⁵ The Col·legi Montserrat in Vallvidrera (Barcelona) is top of the list published every year by a national newspaper with a large circulation.(*). This is a state-subsidized, religious school (*centro concertado*) founded in 1926, with 1,019 pupils and 85 teachers (2015). Dr Howard Gardner, professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, after his second visit to this centre in May 2015, declared it was an "incredible school." The school has used Gardner's methodology for thirty years. Gardner published the influential book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (1983) that was a seminal piece of work on educational strategies. Every year, around sixty Spanish and foreign schools visit the Col·legi Montserrat to learn about its methodology and innovative procedures.

(*) This annual ranking is published by *El Mundo*, a national Spanish newspaper that offers a supplement with the one hundred best schools in the country. It is an analysis of more than a thousand private and state-subsidized schools (*centros concertados*) only (such analysis does not cover state-owned public schools) taking into account twenty-seven specific items to assess them. The newspaper recognizes that there is not a final list of best schools, as this definition depends on each person's situation, perception, needs, and criteria.

of 1978 recognizes academic freedom and parents' right to choose the educational centre for their children.

In a recent debate,⁷⁶ Oriol Junqueras was in favour of not removing religious instruction from the school syllabus:

The secular state must be encouraged. I mean the secular state, not a lay policy of strict separation in which religious content is something to be concealed. Religion must not be outside school since it is such an important element for our understanding of our society. (...) In Sant Vicens dels Horts, we begin to have Muslim families whose children register in Catholic semi-private schools⁷⁷ in a very normal way.⁷⁸

Currently, there is still a majority Catholic faith (at least nominally in sociological surveys) in Spain, but other confessions such as Islam have already half a million faithful in Catalonia. Yet the real general situation is religious illiteracy. Religion is not an obsolete topic in public debate, in spite of the Church's poor decision-making when coping with this issue, as is the case with the new syllabus for the subject on Catholic religion approved by the Spanish Episcopal Conference on 24th February 2015.

Pere Micaló regrets that the present-day model is producing a decrease in the number of students who request the subject of religion. Consequently, religious illiteracy is growing.⁷⁹ Andreu Ibarz stands up for current teachers of the subject because, more often than not, they have double degrees and they are the ones who know better what is happening in classrooms.⁸⁰ All teachers know what they have to do when in a classroom with students seated in front of them; the last thing the students expect to

⁷⁶ Debate organized by religion teachers in Barcelona, 1st July 2015.

⁷⁷ State-subsidised, semi-private schools (or their USA equivalent 'charter schools') can account for the Spanish institution *escuela concertada*, a concept that does not exist in other countries.

⁷⁸ Oriol Junqueras is president of Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC). He made this statement in the Debate on 1st July 2015. [My translation]

⁷⁹ Pere Micaló is delegate of Education from the Girona bishopric.

⁸⁰ Andreu Ibarz is general manager of Blanquerna – Universitat Ramon Llull.

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do is to learn the Catechism. Carme Borbonés states that you cannot educate in matters such as commitment, sacrifice, or life and death by concealing the religious answer.⁸¹

* * *

This last epigraph, *On Education*, may be considered too long and not sufficiently justified as suitable extrapolation from Belloc's ideas on the matter. Seventeen pages constitute certainly quite a protracted epigraph, yet Belloc was always concerned with education in some way. As a young boy, he underwent the painful adaptation period at the Edgbaston Oratory, but also enjoyed his later years there when he was a veteran student. He had peculiar and arguable ideas about how little he was taught at university, although he doggedly defended Catholic school in his days as an MP. Belloc and many other Roman Catholic writers have supported the Catholic school as the suitable environment for the transmission of the faith. Nowadays, different ideas and practices inhabit the institution, and its future as a distinctive school is not secured. Sometimes social changes are imperceptible, but real, and frequently they blur former intentions. In the case of Catholic education, as Belloc envisaged it, headmasters and teachers should do their best to work consciously according to their stated principles about the transmission of the Catholic Christian faith and its indissoluble humanistic tradition.

⁸¹ Carme Borbonés is president of Càritas Catalunya.

Conclusion

Hilaire Belloc lived in England in the Edwardian period, although his life span goes further, really from 1870 to 1953. Belloc suffered a severe stroke on 30th January 1942, and from then on, he was unable to write any more, because his condition hampered all possible work. Both his life and his novels illustrate the social atmosphere of the Edwardian period insofar as it is possible to reflect the variety of habits and socially-accepted behaviours in those years. In Belloc's times, Great Britain's religions and ideologies were organized in blocks, although this is not so at present, as it is a mixture of many tendencies all put together. There is not any problem in describing some of the characteristics of a social group accordingly, since such activity cannot be considered offensive in any way. My approach to Belloc's novels deepens his inner perception of people and facts. Sometimes his attempt is like the sociologist's careful analysis of human interactions, a task which is reminiscent of Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism method. Each of Belloc's novels broadens the scope of his general discourse, which is basically concerned with power relationships, the social growth of plutocracy, the relative uselessness of parliamentary struggle, saving face, and pursuing material gain at any rate.

Belloc's discerning look on the world implies sociological distinctions, psychological nuances, and anthropological reflections, too. Above all, his is not an isolated approach which can only be applied to the Edwardian period, but a larger scrutiny which extends its scope to deal with current subject matters. This is a discursive, literature-oriented analysis, or rather, an effort to extract meaningful concepts from Belloc's novels which can cast light upon present-day issues. Inside Belloc's fiction, ordinary citizens try their best to reach a wealthy status, and once there, they naturally make every effort to enter the exclusive elite of aristocracy and peerage. Even though this is the natural tendency one can find in any society, once the thin layer of appearances is uncovered, Belloc manages to punish such daring endeavour by

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revealing the variety of tricks which made possible such social ascendance: sometimes pure chance or dirty business on other occasions. On the whole, however, through dubious investments or sheer swindle by means of the thousand crafty ways, the go-getters and the shrewd tricksters are able to plan in order to achieve their undeclared goals. Belloc enjoys illustrating the dirt from the money and its peculiar way of leading humans to doom. He liked to write specifically on “the curse of money.”

Belloc’s interpretation of the Whig Historians’ theory of history led him to criticise most of their tenets. Belloc read history at Balliol and was a historian above all. Precisely because of this, he could not help including many historical references about the ancestors of the important characters in his novels. He was accustomed to explaining the social origin of first-rate civil servants, lazy affluent aristocrats, and the like, but he also mocked the invented, false ancestry of those parvenus to the exclusive world of the rich and privileged, particularly their obsessive ridiculous tendency to show off the external signs of self-importance in the form of expensive clothes, jewels, and cars. Belloc thought that the education, keen insight, and polite forms of authentic squires could not be transferred to the vulgar, thinly-varnished coat of appearances of the nouveau rich, since money can change hands very fast, but good manners and inherited social class constitute an indelible mark, a rare kind of watermark, which distinguishes real landlords from upstarts. Belloc persistently created the same story of the parvenus’ frequent blunders, dons’ pretentious vainglory, bankrupt middle-class people who urgently need to earn money to repay gambling debts, or formerly-honest senior government officials who, when they become aware of an impending ruse, try to join that elaborate plan (or fraud) so as to make a lot of money all of a sudden.

The reasonable possession of means of subsistence, far away from the unrestrained greed which Belloc considered was characteristic of the plutocracy he thought he knew, or sometimes he exaggeratedly blamed for all sorts of poverty and social injustice, was, in his opinion, the suitable way for a society of free men. Belloc was for Distributism, and he championed such economic ideology as a possible system to create a society of smallholders. He emphasized the personal freedom of its members, as they could earn their living without depending on others. Depending on the state,

multinational company, factory owner, employer, boss, or chief of section is the customary servitude in capitalism, which is obviously a system formed by a huge mass of salaried employees.

The longing for a perfect novel about the atmosphere of aristocracy

The average reader of Belloc's novels can extract meaningful concepts from the characters and situations he creates. You need not be a learned member of a literary society or a trained member of a reading group to reconsider the subject on your own, because many characters are easily recognized when you pay attention to the frequent ticks and poses of people you know. Belloc showed his personal vision of the world all through his fourteen novels. He did so by building shrewd dialogues which evince each character's principles and goals, even if these values will be increasingly either confirmed or smashed to smithereens as the novel advances. Belloc characteristically contrasts people who do not aspire to earn money or gain influence with those who scan the horizon of the several possibilities of thriving in order to take advantage of a favourable situation to attain their ends.

He develops his stories according with the clichés which he observed in his interaction with people. Frequently he exaggerated the pronunciation traits of his characters. This is the case with their alleged local accents according to their geographical origin, as with, for example, the American girl, Isabeau Hellup (or "Bo"), their social class, as is the case with vulgar Matilda who later calls herself "Amathea, Lady Mere de Beurivage" just to upgrade her position to the category of aristocracy, or the fatuous, self-conceited Lord Hambourne, an Oxford don who turns out to be an opportunistic guy in *The Haunted House* (1927). Belloc liked to laugh at his characters when he was writing his novels, and, simultaneously, imagined his or her readers' benevolent grin, or wild laughter impossible to withstand, when they would realise the foolishness of some characters and the eventual cruelty of the denouements which Belloc tried to make similar to real-life, harsh situations.

There is a novel which Belloc could have written, and this novel would be in the style of Evelyn Waugh. Many of the aspects that Belloc includes in his novels are

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condensed and transformed in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder* (1945). Yet Evelyn Waugh was not afraid of dealing with themes that Belloc used to dodge. Belloc much admired Evelyn Waugh's ability in supplying exquisite prose, dense with clever irony. In *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904), Belloc did not have full command of the dialogue and the narration is too stiff on the whole. Belloc used sustained irony, even though his novel moved from caricature to pathos.¹ As Belloc once declared, he had just the two first chapters and the final one ready, but he was hesitating about how to proceed to finish the novel. One night he was alone in the house he felt inspired and wrote nearly all the rest in between both ends in a session that lasted seven hours non-stop. Insomnia is not usually the best lapse to produce crystal clear prose and brisk dialogue, but such was the nature of Belloc's fluctuations. Yet at the end of the novel there is a paragraph whose flavour resembles full passages of P.G. Wodehouse or Evelyn Waugh² –

The session was lagging to its end. Within a week or two the grouse would be whirring, and the chance would come for the transference of the M'Korio from the Government of the Foreign Office to that of the Colonial; the moment approached when a few men, undisturbed by the necessities or accidents of debate, could go right forward and do their best for England. (...) I have already alluded to the grouse; but a very few weeks and the shadow of the partridge would appear between Mr Barnett and the best laid of his plans. Already multitudes of the middle class were asleep upon beaches of sand. Anxiety, a mood that cannot long disturb such minds, had begun to cast a wing over Mr Barnett's clear and creative intelligence. (*Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* 1904: 242-243)

¹ See Robert Speaight. *The Life of Hilaire Belloc*. (London: Hollis and Carter, 1957): 181.

² See A.N. Wilson. (1984) *Hilaire Belloc: A Biography*. (London: Gibson Square Books, 2003): 133.

When Belloc was quite old he continued to read P.G. Wodehouse, whom he considered the master of modern prose. Belloc also enjoyed Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop* (1938) very much –

It was a satire after Belloc's own heart. It is much funnier than Belloc's own novels, but it is precisely the kind of book Belloc had tried to write as a young man, with its absurd journalists, its gullible capitalist magnates, its thinly veiled portraits of contemporary figures. (Wilson 2003: 363)

Belloc's own *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), and *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929) supply characters who remind us of Evelyn Waugh's creative vein in *Scoop* (1938). Evelyn Waugh was also a satirist, but he differed in method and intention. Although he converted to Catholicism in 1930, he was not a Roman Catholic apologist in the manner of Belloc. Evelyn Waugh was outstanding at reflecting the atmosphere surrounding upper-class peoples' lives in the 1930s, their mood of absurdity and irresponsibility. He used his recollections as an unsuccessful teacher at some private schools, his journalist-work on the *Daily Express* and his wide travelling experience to write excellent, clear, scathing prose full of satiric references. Neither Belloc nor Evelyn Waugh felt comfortable in the modern world and its sense of values.

Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder (1945) was Evelyn Waugh's perceptive novel about a Roman Catholic aristocratic family. This is a non-satirical, complex story which Evelyn Waugh thought that was written to glimpse the workings of the divine purpose in a pagan world:

This novel, which is here re-issued with many small additions and some substantial cuts, lost me such esteem as I once enjoyed among my contemporaries and led me into an unfamiliar world of fan-mail and press photographers. Its theme – the operation of divine grace on a group of diverse

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but closely connected characters – was perhaps presumptuously large, but I make no apology for it. I am less happy about its form, whose more glaring defects may be blamed on the circumstances in which it was written. (Waugh 1962: 7)³

Evelyn Waugh continues to tell us that he wrote the novel during his convalescence from a minor injury while parachuting as military training, the lapse being from December 1943 to June 1944.

The novel tells the story of a young Protestant painter, Charles Ryder, who penetrates the lives of the aristocrats Lord and Lady Marchmain by means of his friendship with their younger son, Sebastian Flyte. In 1924, the two young men spend the Easter Holidays together at Brideshead, but Charles realises Sebastian drinks too much. All efforts to help Sebastian are in vain. Sebastian escapes from his family in an attempt to get rid of its restrictive heritage. Once in Oxford, Sebastian's relapses of heavy drinking are increasingly frequent while his misgivings about and estrangement from Charles are stronger. The novel describes the atmosphere of aristocracy without avoiding their religious prejudices. The action is set in a geographic itinerary which includes Venice and northern Africa. Julia, Sebastian's older sister, maintains a passionate love affair with Charles, even though both know their crush has no future. However, the mere plot of the novel does not account for its symbolic load. Evelyn Waugh wrote a book which was an insight into friendship, Catholicism, and nostalgia for past nobility:

I have read *Brideshead Revisited* at least a dozen times and have never failed to be charmed and moved. Charles Ryder, who tells the story, is seduced by Brideshead Castle and its denizens; but this seduction is merely the prelude to his improbable seduction by God. (...) It is, appropriately, a seductive book. Even the overblown metaphors move and charm. The comedy is superb, and the

³ Evelyn Waugh's "Preface" to the 1960 edition by Chapman and Hall. See *Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder*. (London: Penguin Books, 1962).

evocation of pre-war Oxford and Venice, where Ryder “drowns in honey,” is of great brilliance. This is one of those disturbing novels in which the faults do not matter.⁴

It is easy to find superficial similarities between some characters in Belloc's novels and Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945). Professor Samgrass's blunders, boring conversation,⁵ and fatuous aspirations, and Professor Higginson's pretentious endeavour in Belloc's *The Green Overcoat* (1912) are parallel. Professor Samgrass' supposed academic scholarship on old documents and antique monuments (he is a don expert in history, which is the same subject matter of Belloc's degree) can be compared to Lord Hambourne's pedantry when he tries to certify Aunt Hilda's genuine-Tudor-style home in *The Haunted House* (1927).⁶ In *The Green Overcoat* (1912), a rich widow from Chicago, Mrs Camp introduces Higginson to posh audiences.⁷ In *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), Lady Marchmain takes care of Samgrass and pampers him as she considers this Professor her pet don. Taunting Belloc creates Higginson and Hambourne as eccentric quacks on psychology, a degree Belloc usually scoffs at in his novels. Professor Samgrass in *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) is a Fellow of All Souls' College, Oxford, the very same honour which Belloc failed to achieve in his day:

He was a young history don, a short, plump man, dapper in dress, with sparse hair brushed flat on an over-large head, neat hands, small feet, and the general appearance of being too often bathed. His manner was genial and his speech idiosyncratic. We came to know him well.

It was Mr Samgrass's particular aptitude to help others with their work, but he was himself the author of several stylish little books. He was a great delver in muniment-rooms and had a sharp nose for the picturesque. Sebastian

⁴ Anthony Burgess's comment on the back cover. See *Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder*. (London: Penguin Books, 1962).

⁵ See *Brideshead Revisited* (1945): 144-146.

⁶ See *The Haunted House* (1927): 92, 103 137, 139.

⁷ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912): 174.

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spoke less than the truth when he described him as ‘someone of mummy’s’; he was someone of almost everyone’s who possessed anything to attract him. (Waugh 1962 (1945): 106)

Lady Marchmain flatters Samgrass’s academic ego, funds the don’s projects, and asks him to keep an eye on Sebastian to save him from expulsion. Samgrass tries to be well connected with the aristocracy so as to achieve his personal ambitions.

Nevertheless, these minor characters do not prevent Evelyn Waugh’s novel conveying its thoroughly serious narration, whereas Belloc’s novels are usually written as an apparently funny pastime, with frequent innuendoes and oblique references. When Waugh’s novel appeared in 1945, Belloc was seriously ill as a consequence of his stroke in 1942. Had Belloc read *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), he might probably have thought that this was the kind of novel he would have liked to write. Yet Belloc shunned psychological niceties, narrations about adultery, doubts of the faith, and the prevalence of the grace of God, which are some of the basic themes in *Brideshead Revisited* (1945).

The survival of Belloc’s literary heritage

Belloc’s novels have been criticised as stories that supply flat characters, without the essential psychological complication that could turn them into the interesting constituents of engaging fiction. Some readers perhaps think that he was obsessive and too abrupt for our current standards. His reputation may have been overshadowed by some of his controversial opinions on politicians, academics, bankers, the Jews, the posh people, the upstarts and the rich, because ours is a time of political correctness, and perhaps, of a more elaborate politeness, some would say even hypocrisy. Those who knew Belloc recognise that he wrote too fast, usually he did not write, but dictated narrations to his several secretaries at full speed. However, Belloc’s hasty technique does not mean that he did not keep precise outlines for his stories, as some friends remembered that he commented in his letters the stack of papers about projected books that took up too much space on his desktop. He was a very prolific author who wrote far too many books, one hundred and fifty-three, on a variety of subjects.

His huge output in several genres brings the concept of literary quality to the fore. The literary quality of a novel is an elusive concept that sometimes is based on the skill of an author to innovate some narrative technique or other and present a theme from a breakthrough perspective too. Nevertheless, not any novel presented by a lecturer to illustrate some literary aspect is precisely the novel you would choose for the pleasure of reading. The passing of time is another touchstone to attest the quality of fiction, although time can also send writers and novels into oblivion. Fashion can transform a novel into an overnight success, even if it is doubtful that fashion could be the only factor to enhance a story. The very nature of fashion is deceiving as a criterion to judge the quality of a novel, since a new fashion will replace the previous one. From time to time, forgotten novels are brought to life by famous literary critics' re-readings, while what we used to consider smashing successes lose momentum, because this is the nature of the never-ending succession of different aesthetic tastes, the prevailing taste of each period. A novel is like a living organism; when you re-read it some years later you shall discover new passages that you had overlooked; what is more, each reader shall grasp new shades of meaning from the same novel.

Belloc's novels are testimony of a period, basically of the Edwardian years from the inside, written by a novelist, poet, historian, journalist and professional politician, as these so many things was Belloc as a whole. University lecturers have not paid attention to Belloc's literary niceties, except those who have attacked his essays from a different point of view, as Belloc boldly exposed his Roman Catholic conception of the relations of production and social justice, while his opponents made every effort to discredit Belloc's views. It has been too easy to consider Belloc dogmatic, uncompromising and outdated; he was one of the most vociferous Catholic controversialists in the English-speaking world though, so his arguments deserve to be heard with respect. In art everything is approximate; contempt for prejudices should be revised. Fourteen novels constitute some substantial baggage to be condemned to the lumber room. The present thesis is precisely an attempt to give Belloc's novels the value they deserve and trace their hidden meanings.

Many of our handbooks are based on American university professors that have influenced literary criticism since the 1970s, and their trace has been reshaped in many publications. Catalan and Spanish lecturers on literary criticism are well aware of any innovation in their field, any allegedly new theory arriving from beyond the seas. It is interesting for my purpose to bring forward the controversial figure of Harold Bloom. Bloom contends that reading is relief of loneliness because it is a healthy pleasure from the spiritual point of view. He supplies several examples. Thus, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) is a novelistic paradigm of the sublime, either on the summit or in the abyss, as it is an original book that is a national American blending of the Book of Jonah and the Book of Job. Bloom considers that spirituality and aesthetic intensity are the foundations for judging literature in front of other political and moral values. He believes that reading is essential for personal education, since the way we currently read partially depends on our internal or external distance from universities, in which they hardly ever teach you to read for pleasure, in any of the deepest senses of the aesthetics of pleasure.⁸ Sometimes the reader discovers personally the value of literary works, without the help of university training as it does not supply tools to measure it. Undergraduates frequently wonder about where the value of an artistic or literary work lies, but usually they do not obtain any answer about it.

Bloom thinks that the ideal reader of Shakespeare was his editor, Samuel Johnson, and that the advantage of the reader of Shakespeare over the spectator is that the reader learns how to think about what was out of the text, and he remarks that very frequently supermarket literature is canonized by universities themselves.⁹ There is more life in Shakespeare's characters and in what they say than in any treaty on history of world literature. Following the reception of his works since when they were published until now may be amazing, as it allows you to observe the recognition of its worth. When we see Shakespeare's plays represented, some self-revelation is produced

⁸ Bloom describes this phenomenon in the Prologue to *How to Read and Why*. Cf. Harold Bloom. (2000) *How to Read and Why*. (New York: Touchstone Books. Simon & Schuster, 2001); Spanish edition: *Cómo leer y por qué*. (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2000); Catalan edition: *Com llegir i per què*. (Barcelona: Empúries, 2000).

⁹ Harold Bloom. *Cómo leer y por qué*. (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2000). 252, 211.

on us. Bloom considers that the ideal undergraduate at universities is the man or woman who seeks knowledge pro bono as a good in itself. In *The Western Canon* (1994), Bloom proposes the literature of the classics for pleasure, depriving it from the political and resented outlook of the pseudo-feminists, pseudo-Marxists, deconstructionists, pseudo-semiotician and New-historicists. Bloom is against Western educational systems because of their view of multicultural literature that asserts the politically correct. He likes to analyse Shakespeare by means of the elimination of political readings that tarnish his literary greatness.¹⁰

In a similar form as George Steiner, Harold Bloom focus on literature as the truly essential element, disregarding sales figures, merging of publishing houses or marketing. He explains how his own perception has changed through the years. He believes that reading is a transcendental pleasure and a source of wisdom, since we have unlimited access to information but not to wisdom. He supplies a manifesto in favour of aesthetic autonomy and against the School of Resentment, for ideology-based readings limit the scope of a text, restrict its reach. Of course, Bloom's opinions have collided with other academics, particularly Terry Eagleton, who considers him an awkward author who breaks the university orthodoxies of the moment. Nevertheless, Bloom contends that we must read carefully and passionately, even though this is an art that is increasingly vanishing. Attentive and scrupulous reading will bring about the excitement of realizing how the text displays in front of us. When it comes to read old works we must bear in mind that, as we cannot travel back in time, we must make travel those old texts to the present.

Bringing Belloc's novels to the present is a suitable occasion to take a good look at ourselves, in some sort of *catharsis*, as well as wonder about the value of such books, the work of a brilliant novelist at times, whose only shortcoming, perhaps, was generally writing very fast without revising carefully the final result. He excelled in the creation of characters, which is one of the main constituents of insightful novels. Belloc's characters are dense enough to provide diagnostic clues for self-analysis. For

¹⁰ Cf. Harold Bloom. *Shakespeare. The Invention of the Human*. (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999).

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instance, Peter Blagden's common sense and prudent behaviour to handle an odd situation that he does not fully understand is a lesson of moral endurance to cope with hardship.¹¹ The sympathetic reader will find in *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929) some compassionate feeling for the two constant lovers fighting against their cruel fate. Professor Higginson and Professor Hambourne represent the comic transfer of Professor G.G. Coulton's stubbornness in real life.¹² He was Belloc's hardest rival in controversy; in return Belloc exaggeratedly portrayed G.G. Coulton in these characters from the university atmosphere.¹³ Another academic, Charles Lexington, reader in Electro-Chemistry, Fellow and Tutor of the fictitious St. Olaf's, is victim of his own success, as his greed leads him to endure many hardships.¹⁴ Any reader, particularly if he or she belongs to the academic world, can discover his or her concealed delusions of grandeur and unutterable vanity through the fatuous behaviour of these three dons in the novels. The wealthy banker, Mr Barnett, comes to be the financial version¹⁵ of Mr Scrooge in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843). Barnett's machinations are masterly described with pungent brushstrokes in the manner of Evelyn Waugh. The list of relevant details could certainly be much longer.

Most probably no academic will teach us how to measure the value of Belloc's fiction, as Harold Bloom courageously recognises. Maybe a non-judgmental reading of Belloc can provide us with entertainment, happiness and self-knowledge. Very frequently such an effort will be a personal endeavour, based on the individual's literary perception flair. It goes without saying that Belloc cannot be compared with Shakespeare, although any perceptive reader of Belloc can obtain company in his or her hours of loneliness, pleasure, education (and wisdom too) from his humane, funny, sometimes also weird, novels.

¹¹ See *Mr Petre* (1925).

¹² The first public clash between Hilaire Belloc and G.G. Coulton was a hostile encounter and fierce argument at the Cambridge Union on 15th November 1924. (Pearce 2002: 255) Even though the character of Professor Higginson was created for *The Green Overcoat* (1912), an earlier book, Belloc's views on dons lingered all through his life. When Hilaire Belloc wrote *The Haunted House* (1927), his altercation with G.G. Coulton was in full swing.

¹³ See *The Green Overcoat* (1912) and *The Haunted House* (1927).

¹⁴ See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930).

¹⁵ See *Pongo and The Bull* (1910).

Approach to education

Life may have resulted more or less hard to anybody who remembers his or her wobbly beginnings in the adult world, once he or she has uncovered the false patina of naïve happiness which we sometimes unconsciously apply to our past times. Our recollections may be realistic or feathering, because human memory tends to select only some moments and send others into oblivion. Belloc was rejected as a fellow of All Souls' in Oxford in July 1895. A brilliant student who gained a First-Class Honours in history received his first blow, and its painful scar remained for his lifetime. Later, as an MP for Salford, Belloc struggled for Catholic schools with determination. In 1906, the very same year that Belloc entered Parliament, he was the nominee of the British Bishops for the Catholic Education Council. A long reference to current Catholic schooling is provided in this thesis, generally applying Belloc's ideas in this field, but also broadening the scope by commenting detailed information on present-day matters.

Belloc's approach to Roman Catholic education was a much more determined endeavour than what is today put into practice in our timorous environment, which is maybe the result of the twentieth century resentment against the intransigent version of Roman Catholicism. Belloc considered Catholic schools were the suitable milieu for boys and girls of this faith, much more so since they constituted a religious minority in a Protestant country. He would be bewildered at the diffuse goals of present-day Catalan and Spanish "harmless" religious and moral education. Attending a faith-based school in our country is not a guarantee of receiving authentic Christian education. The common ground of such schools should be an educational vision anchored in the Gospel and objective values which give meaning to life. At present, the reality is rather different. Teachers of many religious schools know for certain what is really happening in their centres. Nobody speaks clearly about doctrinal and moral issues. "Religious education" if any, is only a bunch of vague remarks on generic solidarity –

In other words, [somebody talks to students about] the politically correct matters which do not lead you to any personal commitment, nor to a glimmer of Christian morality. After years of attending a particular school, boys and girls

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leave without even knowing a minimum of the figure and doctrine of Jesus Christ, they have never known the word *sin*, nor do they know anything about the sacraments or the Lord's Prayer (Our Father).¹⁶

If you reduce the contents of Christian education only to a mild invitation to show kindness to people and animals, love of peace, as well as to encourage environmentalism, you water down the distinctiveness of a Christian school.¹⁷ Little by little, nearly all schools in Catalonia and Spain, no matter if they are faith-based or secular, will be the same, as they sincerely strive to promote noble humanistic feelings. The final stage of this process of mystification is that the differentiating character of each school will vanish.

Belloc, who had great respect for freedom of conscience, perhaps would grin, just feeling sorry for such tepid approach to religion, that fashionable irenicism. He would possibly consider religion teachers' gentle invitation to cultivate feelings of "generic solidarity," a deception for those who deliberately choose Catholic education. As an MP, Belloc was never afraid of a hostile or indifferent environment. Just the opposite, he expressed his position unambiguously. He tackled the problem, since he knew he represented Catholics too:

It is true, not only of myself but of every Catholic in England, that the preservation of the Catholic schools is far and away the first of the political controversies in which he may be engaged. I should not hesitate for a moment. (...) Catholics must have their rights on some general principle, and that principle is the right of the parent to have his child instructed, immersed in the

¹⁶ Daniel Arasa. "Colegios católicos light." *La Vanguardia*. 2nd October 2016. [My translation]

¹⁷ In Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), Rex Mottram is Julia's opportunistic husband who distractedly comments on the blurred sphere of beliefs and the usual ignorance of religion on the part of the average Anglican well-off class to which he thinks he belongs: "at least they [Roman Catholics] know what they believe in." This inference about the shallow, empty religious knowledge of many faithful of the established church is quite clear. Currently, this statement could also be applied to many Roman Catholics in Catalonia and other places. Maybe Evelyn Waugh was not precisely a holy man, but he was a convert to Roman Catholicism who had a prescient mind and enough literary ability to insert critical remarks on what he saw.

religion for the glory and defence of which he brought that child into the world.
(Speaight 1957: 212)

The next five paragraphs recapitulate some aspects on education which are set forth in the present work to underline Belloc's scepticism about the alleged virtues of those so-called up-to-date pedagogical methods and the current state of education.

As I mentioned in Chapter Three, Belloc considered that schools and universities "build solid character."¹⁸ When he wrote such words, he was possibly telling us just the opposite of his sincere thoughts. Belloc had a poor impression of the lectures he attended at Balliol, Oxford, since December 1893, when he was an undergraduate, although his opinions could be dramatically influenced by the bitter experience of failing to be accepted as a fellow of All Souls' in July 1895. In his novels, he liked to repeat that Professors like vanity¹⁹ and how surprising don's "supposed proud ignorance" was²⁰ –

When he abused the ignorance of dons, Belloc was not only indulging a petulant resentment. As early as 1910 he had informed the young Arnold Lunn of a don who had written, or undertaken to write, a history of the Middle Ages without ever having heard of Gregory of Tours; a don on Holy Orders who did not know that Mormons still existed in Utah; a don – a Master of his College – who had asked Maurice Baring in what language the Russians wrote their books; and yet another don who had written to the *Saturday Review* to say that 'very beautiful' in French was *beaucoup belle*. (Speaight 1957: 388-389)

Had Belloc lived at present, he would likely rant against the surreptitiously imposed model of a school based on (and only) three subjects: English language, computer sciences, and business administration, as it seems to be the core of many politicians' and current prestigious educationalists' credo when they make a statement

¹⁸ See page 162 of this thesis.

¹⁹ See *The Green Overcoat* 1912: 135.

²⁰ See page 208 of this thesis.

to ingratiate themselves with the press. School must provide formation in many other aspects, from sciences and humanities to sports and artistic education, not just those three matters that, many believe, will transform our country into a more competitive nation as to entrepreneurialism.

Even if Belloc had reckoned himself an expert in the field of economics,²¹ he would perhaps recognise that economists tend to fail to predict the future.²² Belloc was surprised at the connotations of a posh education: "... one hears many more public-school accents than there are public-school people."²³ Belloc cunningly wrote that Mrs Malton was educated in the faith precisely because she did not attend a school, as she was brought up in a very old-fashioned way on the lonely edge of an Essex march.²⁴

Current widespread advertising of both private and state-owned schools was unthinkable until the late 1980s. Some people naively believe that this trend is a positive manifestation of free competition and free trade. That change towards school marketing, apart from following the fashion, *l'air du temps*, also means new strategies to draw students, particularly those "allegedly normal-middle-class-motivated boys and girls." Perhaps it is a regrettable commercialisation of education, but also the fear to be wiped out from the group of decent schools. In recent years, some schools have become gentrified while others have become debased schools which are sheer social welfare centres.

Spanish and Catalan educational policy is always resourceful:

Education policy permits students to obtain their ESO Certificate (Compulsory Secondary Education) with two failures (...) provided that they are not simultaneously maths and language and literature. (...) The loosening to pass ESO will make possible that the rates of school drop-out do not rise even more. The toughening of the requirements to obtain the Certificate would oust Spain

²¹ See page 262 of this thesis.

²² Jean Tirole, Nobel Prize in Economics, in 2014, thinks that economists are not good at making predictions. Cf. Jean Tirole. *La economía del bien común*. (Barcelona: Taurus, 2017).

²³ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971): 215.

²⁴ See *Mr Petre* 1925: 165.

from the objective established by the European Union for the year 2020 (...) which should be 15%. Currently the Spanish rate of school drop-out is 19.7%. Only 77% Spanish students obtain their Certificate of Secondary Education at the appropriate age. (*La Vanguardia*. 3rd June 2017) [My translation]²⁵

Belloc knew that no educational system is superior to the quality of its teachers, since he valued more the dedication and knowledge of the teachers than the abstruse ideas of the programming documents. As stated some pages before, most fiction is ephemeral. Predictions on the future of education are too.

Women's rising role

Suitable education is considered the first essential step to a successful life. The need to feel like an important part of the upper-class, exclusive society, to reach your expectations of self-fulfilment, and to exert power, are condensed in Belloc's both satirical and benevolent view on the role of women. The frequent, domestic, petty sensitivities, anecdotically exemplified by the urbane legend that some women try to sweep the dirt under the carpet when their mother-in-law suddenly appears on her much-hated inspection visit, or the susceptibility of the insecure housewife who desists from cooking an unsophisticated dish, precisely because she knows her rival (mother-in-law, sister-in-law, or the woman of a visiting couple) prepares it much better, are transcended by Belloc's keen eye on women and politics.

He writes some futuristic accounts on women who are Prime Ministers, Leaders of the Opposition, and senior government officials.²⁶ Strange as it may seem, Belloc had his internal contradictions on women's suffrage, an initiative he was opposed to. His mother, Elizabeth Rayner Belloc (Parkes) and his sister, Marie Belloc Lowndes, were strong supporters of women's rights. Nevertheless, Belloc did not trust novelties and had restrictive views on the matter. He stuck to the traditional English policy until then, since he was opposed to women's voting as men voted, and called it immoral because

²⁵ See also *El País*. 18th April 2017.

²⁶ This is apparent particularly in *Pongo and The Bull* (1910) and *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928).

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he thought that bringing one's women, one's mothers and sisters into the political arena could disturb the relations between the sexes.²⁷ Substantiating this opinion would be very difficult for Belloc, particularly if he tried to convince his contemporary women who were as active and determined as the characters of the resolute working women that he created in his fiction.

Belloc is a highly perceptive writer who anticipates the access of women to leading positions, even to top rank posts. In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), Belloc introduces the character of Mrs Bullar, the Prime Minister in 1979. In real life, Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1979, and she remained there until 1990. Belloc enjoys creating feminine characters who are extremely affluent, socially-relevant, patronesses of the Arts, or genuine members of the aristocracy.²⁸ At any rate, all of them are certainly influential people. At the other end of the scale, Belloc creates self-assured, humble women who do their best to earn their living. This second group is formed by highly-trained, efficient, neatly-dressed secretaries, and hardworking, lowly landladies and housewives. All of them, secretaries, landladies, and housewives know how to deal with men, both by helping them devotedly and by controlling their follies when necessary.²⁹

Shrewd reference to Islam

The need to self-fulfilment and to exert power is associated with wealth and to each person's peculiar way to become affluent. In *The Mercy of Allah* (1922), Belloc writes an apologue about how an oriental merchant millionaire, Mahmoud, explains to his seven nephews how he became rich. Belloc went on dealing with Middle East matters, but this time from the historical point of view, in *The Crusades* (1937) in which he

²⁷ Pearce 2002: 140. Speaight 1957: 280. Wilson 2003: 171. See also <www.consolation.org.uk>.

²⁸ See *A Change in The Cabinet* (1909), *The Girondin* (1911), *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age* (1929), and *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929).

²⁹ Lothario is a society journalist who works for *The Howl* in *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929). He is a henpecked, paranoid drunkard who unconsciously writes opposing versions about the same topic. His focus on each subject varies, whimsically depending on his personal situation at the moment of writing. His opinions differ, obviously, depending on whether he is sober or drunk, and, on top of this, if his wife is present with her peculiar, bossy look on him or not.

explained that military effort and the subsequent errors which frustrated it. His words invite a reflection in the current world continuously threatened by terrorism:

Islam has not suffered this spiritual decline (as in the West); and in contrast between the religious certitudes still strong throughout the Mohammedan world, as lively in India as in Morocco, active throughout North Africa and Egypt, even inflamed through contrast and the feeling of repression in Syria – more particularly in Palestine – lies our peril (...) These lines are written in the month of January, 1937; perhaps before they appear in print the rapidly developing situation in the Near East will have marked some notable change. (...) *Nor* does it seem probable that at the end of such a change, especially if the process be prolonged, *Islam will be a loser.*” (Belloc 1937: 320-321)

Salman Rushdie added:

Of course, this [attack on the World Trade Center] is ‘about Islam.’ The question is, what exactly does that mean? For a vast number of ‘believing’ Muslim men, ‘Islam’ stands in a jumbled, half-examined way, not only for the fear of God, but also for a cluster of customs, opinions and prejudices that include (...) a more particularized loathing and fear of the prospect that their immediate surroundings could be taken over – ‘Westoxicated’ by the liberal Western-style way of life. (...) The restoration of religion to the sphere of the personal, its depoliticization, is the nettle that all Muslim societies must grasp in order to become modern. If terrorism is to be defeated, the world of Islam must take on board the secularist-humanist principles on which the modern is based, and without which Muslim countries’ freedom will remain a distant dream. (Rushdie 2001)³⁰

³⁰ Salman Rushdie. “Yes, This Is About Islam.” *The New York Times*. 2nd November 2001.

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Belloc wrote a lot about Islam, although he did not include this subject in his fiction. Yet he knew the far-reaching economic influence of the Muslim world. He thought the military failure of the crusades was not breaking the land connection between the Eastern and Western sectors of Islamic conquest. Capturing Damascus and the whole of Syria was essential to be successful in this attempt, but it was not possible. This failure changed the face of the modern world –³¹

The secularism of the West is, no doubt, much more prevalent than in Belloc's time. The general view of this war is not one between "Christendom" and "Islam," but between "terrorists" and the secularized democracies. The solution of this problem, from the "terrorist" view point, is to conquer a decadent West. The alternative view is to get rid of "terrorists" and allow to exist a form of rule in Islamic lands that conforms to modern notions of democracy, tolerance, and culture. This position can easily be looked upon as a new form of "colonialism" or even "imperialism" in which the solution to the military problem is to refashion the governments that are seen to be responsible for the problem in the first place. (Schall 2013: 57)³²

It is very difficult that modern secularists ideas could be imposed on Islam. Religious ideas do have consequences. Perhaps the answer to these ideas is not, as the secularists think, to get rid of any religion as a potential source of "fanaticism."³³ Meanwhile, Muslim high population growth and some Islamic countries' huge oil reserves puts pressure on Western countries' economic and social system. Belloc writes *The Crusades* in 1937, but he supplies a prescient guess at the meaning of the events he explains while he warns that Islam can rise once again to confront the European states. The book is published before the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, before the end of European domination of some Arabic nations through colonization, and even a decade before the state of Israel was set up in 1948. Belloc's insight is accurate:

³¹ See *The Crusades* (1937): 8.

³² James V. Schall. *Remembering Belloc*. (South Bend: St Augustine's Press, 2013)

³³ James V. Schall. *Remembering Belloc*. (South Bend: St Augustine's Press, 2013): 60.

Understanding Islam's force and success was, and is, a great intellectual, cultural, and, yes, theological mystery. Today Islam controls about one fifth of the population of the globe. (...) Some decades after the fall of Communism, when we expected to have no further "world-historical" problems, we find a remarkably vigorous and often militant Islam at our very doorsteps. (Schall 2013: 52)

Insights on economy

One of Belloc's main concerns is the handling of the economic system which, he thinks, should be modified by following the key tenets of Distributism. He considers Distributism is the application of a historical philosophy to social life. Belloc believes Roman Catholic Christianity increasingly changed the original servile base of the Roman civilization which, after the conquest and imperial expansion, enslaved the defeated. Slavery evolved under the influence of Christianity, and, in the medieval period, feudalism implied that a man was usually bound in service to one lord, although he was free in comparison to other men. Slowly, serfs became free peasants who paid a moderate rent for their farm. In this way, England was becoming a Proprietary state in the times of Henry VI (1421-1471), who proclaimed the Freehold, Franchise and Freedom Act. In *An Essay On the Restauration of Property* (1936), Belloc stated that the dissolution of the Monasteries, in the reign of Henry VIII, was the decisive event which meant a turning point in the Proprietary state, because the Acts of Dissolution required the consent of Parliament, and this process was very expensive for the king. The small class of rich men, who already had a third of the means of production, acquired another fifth part, so they almost had half of the productive land. Belloc goes on reviewing history until the laws which enabled the new capitalists seize power, the Parliamentary Reform Bill (1832), the Local Government Bill (1832), and the new Poor Law (1834). Belloc proposes his Distributist alternative, or rather, the Proprietary state which would be reached through the widespread distribution of property among the majority of families.

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England had been once a nation of free farmers. This concept is and was much in accordance with the Saxon appreciation of what has been called the ethics of work. Historically-speaking, Saxon people have perceived themselves as a nation subjugated by foreign invaders, and this impression has lingered on since the Battle of Hastings in 1066, a feeling that underlies much of their literature. Saxons have traditionally put into practice the ethics of work, a trait easily traced in Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner* (1719). Defoe studied in Dorking, a small town in Surrey not far from Shipley, the village in which King's Land, Belloc's home, was established. Daniel Defoe's novel reaches the reader as an account of actual experience. *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner* is a narration that is outstanding in its matter-of-factness, since the protagonist is resourceful and observant so as to cope with all sorts of difficulties. He is a Dissenter (Nonconformist), not a romantic, who does not waste his time in metaphysical speculation, because he believes God's matters are simple. Max Weber described several cases that cast light on some kinds of Protestant doctrine that emphasise the ethics of work:³⁴

Richard Baxter³⁵ stands out above many other writers on Puritan ethics, both because of his eminently practical and realistic attitude and, at the same time, because of the universal recognition accorded to his works, which have gone through many new editions and translations. He was a Presbyterian and an apologist of the Westminster Synod. (...) [He contended that] not leisure and enjoyment, but only activity serves to increase the glory of God, according to the manifestations of His will.

Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins. (...) Unwillingness to work is symptomatic of the lack of grace. (...) Even the wealthy shall not eat without working, for even though they do not need to

³⁴ See Max Weber. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. (London: Unwin University Books, 1967).

³⁵ Richard Baxter (1615-1691) was an English Puritan church-leader and theologian.

labour to support their own needs, there is God's commandment which they, like the poor, must obey.³⁶

Crusoe is a handyman who learns how to survive by making objects and getting the most out of everything, as he knows that what we call luck is just the meticulous attention paid to all the details. He perfects his life more and more through tough work and, in this way, he achieves God's protection. At the end of the novel, Crusoe claims the property of that remote island. He is its rightful owner according to English law, because he spent twenty-eight years there, in continuous residence, and has patiently waited two more to reach the compulsory thirty years to claim ownership of the land. Of course, there are several possible interpretations of Defoe's novel, but the relationship between legal ownership of the land and personal freedom is obviously there.

Bello's insights on economy supply hints for the transposition of his ideas to current events, especially when it comes to consider relevant aspects of the present-day economic crisis and banking policy. John K. Galbraith, the Harvard economist, contended that financial memory lasts twenty years. When this lapse of time finishes, everybody forgets past misery and executives are ready to make the same mistakes as before. Economic crisis is the most depressing phase in the evolution of economic recession. The crisis, that began in 2007, is similar to what happened to Latin America in the 1980s. British and American banks supplied huge loans to Latin American countries through oil liquidity. These countries could not repay their debt, and President Ronald Reagan, through his Secretary of the Treasury, conceived the Brady Plan as a way to help these countries and their banks. The United States of America co-signed the loans made by banks and created a new market instrument, Brady Bonds.

Throughout 2015, in Spain, the process of bank restructuring continued inexorably. The Banco Bilbao, Vizcaya, Argentaria (BBVA), CaixaBank, and Banco Santander controlled 48% of business. The first six Banks accumulated a 75% share of the market. You may argue that financial crisis boosted this course of events, but the

³⁶ Max Weber. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. (London: Unwin University Books, 1967): 155, 156, 157, 159-160.

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process has been due to the sheer will of the most important banks. Daring analysts foresee that, in five years' time, only three banks will be fully operative; the rest will have been absorbed or will have a small specific area of business. When the 2007 crisis began, everybody blamed the major banks for the catastrophe and proposed measures to limit their dimension and operative capacity. Everything has finished the other way round, with more bank concentration and fewer operators. Galbraith reminded us that disaster is forgotten very fast. When the same circumstances or other similar ones come back, with few years in between, new generations will hail them as an innovative discovery. Galbraith used generational terms when he wrote about that.³⁷

Loss of memory is frequent in business and in real life. Learning from one's mistakes is the fashionable technique to change our course of action to reach success eventually, although it usually does not work in finance when executives make the same mistake repeatedly, as Galbraith reminds us. Belloc included the story of a man who became permanently puzzled since he could not remember who he was. Peter Blagden is "Mr Petre" for more than three-quarters of the novel until his friend, Buffy Thompson, recognises him in St James' Street in London:

There was a duality in his vision [Blagden's] of this last few months that made him shudder as though his present memory, revived and sane, was living side by side with that vile period in which he was himself and yet not himself. (...)

He travelled along each episode. He saw step by step the prodigious increase of fortune, and in spite of his weakness he could have laughed aloud. (*Mr Petre* 1925: 159-160)

Not a victim of any bank restructuring process, but the lucky winner of the prize of sheer coincidence and human stupidity, Peter Blagden enjoys his fortune.

In real life, the crisis has taught that politics is always behind the economy, except when the economy needs help. Financial innovation has always been before necessary regulation. During the economic crisis, governments' resentment against the

³⁷ John K. Galbraith. *A Short Story of Financial Euphoria*. (London: Penguin, 1994).

financial industry has grown. Neoliberals abused Galbraith for years because he unveiled the nakedness of the vain emperor. He used to say that high financial executives live as much on rigour as on irrationality. In this way, business is made, and executives fall into excess too, especially when there is not suitable regulation.

The Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) has had its headquarters in London since 1992. In 2015, this bank became concerned about tax increases and growing regulations. Consequently, it has threatened the government by announcing it will move its Head Office to a country in Asia. The bank employs 48,000 people in Great Britain and 166,000 in the world. The then-Prime Minister David Cameron hoped such a move would not take place because he contended that London and New York be the great financial capital centres of the world. Cameron felt that the new British government had to be favourable to business by not increasing taxes; in this way, he hoped to maintain the United Kingdom's pre-eminence as an attractive spot for international investors. Just the opposite, the Labour Party has promised to increase taxes for incomes bigger than €120,000 per year, another special tax for manor houses, penalties for non-let buildings, income control, a freeze on prices for gas and electricity, and a possible re-nationalisation of the railways. Apart from such Conservative Party and Labour Party measures, in the 2017 referendum on the United Kingdom's permanence in the European Union, the British people voted to leave, a result known as "Brexit."³⁸

Suitable regulation to control capitalist greediness in the form of the nationalisation of the railways is introduced by Belloc as the normal consequence of a landslide victory. The idea is paradoxically astonishing given the time it was included, that is, in 1910:

³⁸ In the penultimate General Election in the United Kingdom on 7th May 2015, results showed that previous surveys were wrong. The Labour Party was defeated, and *little England*, afraid of uncertain changes, voted for David Cameron who obtained a majority of 330 out of 650 seats in the House of Commons. In Scotland, the Scottish National Party (SNP) won 56 of the total 59 MPs. Other parties were greatly reduced, and some nearly wiped off the map. There was another General Election on 8th June 2017.

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It was now over eighteen months since the last general election had given him and the National party a normal majority of over 80. The Parliament had got into its stride; the first of his great measures – the nationalisation of the South-Eastern and Chatham and Dover Railways – the first of the great economic experiments – had not only triumphantly passed into law but was working with complete success. (*Pongo and The Bull* 1910: 3)

At present, social division is not only marked by income and property, but also between those who will have steady jobs and those who will not. Welfare states protect us from starving and illness thanks to subsidies and public health services, although Neoliberal policies consider these benefits excessive and cut them back. Unstable workers increase in number because economic orthodoxy states that if you are sure in your job you are not going to make an effort, so it tries to spread job insecurity to the utmost. Yet there are companies that prefer to retain talents, as they know that lack of job security reduces productivity because unstable workers do not train themselves. Piketty stated that if social inequality grows too much, it can bring about the collapse of the whole system.

The economic situation modifies job opportunities and subsequent wealth distribution. Brooding on Spanish recent history, the peculiar situation of jobs in Spain, currently with an unemployment rate of over 16.38%,³⁹ can be explained by the factors that have created jobs since the 1980s when recovery was produced in particular sectors, except for tourism that is the only field that maintained high regularity. The 1980s were years of widespread modernisation within the Spanish economy; the public sector was the main employer creating new jobs such as teachers, civil servants, and health employees. The 1990s were in full swing thanks to the building sector and real estate. When these sectors failed, the crisis began, as job creation was based on two very weak

³⁹ 2006 – 8.26%;
2012 – 25.77%;
2015 (April) – 22.7% (Eurostat);
2016 – 20% Encuesta de Población Activa (EPA) (Labour Force Survey);
2017 (second quarter) – 17.22% (27th July 2017);
2017 (third quarter) – 16.38% (26th October 2017).

pillars. Spain had partially abandoned previous industrialization, unintentionally fostered the service sector, and, consequently, has since paid a heavy toll.

Some people in power think that economic growth consists in producing and consuming more and more to concentrate wealth in a few at the expense of degrading the planet. The digital revolution allows anybody to reproduce infinitely what the market considers successful that is concentrated in the world's famous chosen few. Respected creators in each community disappear, those that could earn a living from their art. Working and living does not consist in producing more and more expensively. There is another way of living apart from accumulating products we do not need. If the productivity profits during the last forty years had been invested in reducing working hours instead of in spending more, the present-day working timetable would be fifteen hours. We would have half of what we have now, but the other half is precisely what we do not need.

The Western world has emphasised economic growth as the ultimate rate of prosperity, no matter the consequences on the environment and human development. Consumerism is like a whirling movement that disturbs man and alienates him through the impending greed to accumulate everything he does not need, while promising him ethereal happiness. After reading Belloc, we realise that the world would be better if his creed were operable.

Some brand-new parties propose a basic income that would allow everybody to remain above the poverty threshold.⁴⁰ It sounds both good and unfeasible. Such a system would free us from starving obsession and would let us self-fulfil in art, friendship, and cooperation. Some authors of this theory honestly admit they had been conceiving it on a guaranteed income on the shoulders of unstable workers who continue to do the roughest work.⁴¹ One question remains. If nobody was afraid of being hungry, who would wash up? Those in favour of a basic-income for everybody response should remember how, when public health services and public pensions

⁴⁰ For example, Podemos in Spain, although in May 2015 this measure was eliminated from its programme. Some leaders of those parties are followers of American, analytical, Marxist sociologists, and political scientists.

⁴¹ Erik O. Wright. *Envisioning Real Utopias*. (New York: Verso, 2010).

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systems were proposed, reactionary people thought nobody would work anymore. At present, the welfare state is instituted in many advanced countries.

Belloc never speaks about a basic income. His outlook was more realistic and based on human effort, not on a State, patronizing subsidy. He proposed a society of small owners, the ideal of peasant ownership for every man in Sussex having three acres and a cow. This was the natural economic condition of man. Men always work harder and more readily when they work on that which belongs to them; they learn to love the soil that yields in response to the labour of their hands.

Ah! But if a man is part of and is rooted in one steadfast piece of earth, which has nourished him and given him his being, and if he can on his side lend it glory and do it service (I thought), it will be a friend to him for ever. (*The Four Men: A Farrago* 1911: 161)

Far from the strictly economic issues, Belloc's novels try to condense the multifarious gallery of characters which he built from his rich experience. Belloc was a man of the world, as happy wandering about the hills and fields around King's Land in West Sussex as travelling endlessly through Europe with some friends or alone and crossing the Atlantic to the United States of America to lecture at Fordham University. When he had to put pen to paper he loved to write witty dialogues instead of long, detailed, psychological descriptions. Some characters are ordinary people who feel entangled in a mess which they do not understand, and which drags them to unexpected situations. In *Mr Petre* (1925), Peter Blagden is a man coming back from the United States of America who has lost his memory and, after many vicissitudes, becomes a wealthy citizen by sheer chance. Peter Blagden recovers his memory on page 152 from a novel that has 192 pages, so most of the story becomes a nightmare for him. In *But Soft: We Are Observed!* (1928), Richard Mallard is a Cuban English-speaking tourist who is confused with a ministerial plenipotentiary. Anything he says and does is the origin of a new entanglement which keeps him continuously escaping. The runaway is finally redeemed on page 180 of a novel that has 189 pages.

Belloc feels at ease presenting a world of appearances, the lure of luxury and money, the flattering attitude of the parasites who surround wealthy people and expect to obtain some advantage of their sycophantic behaviour. Nevertheless, at the end of the novels, Nemesis appears and exerts justice. In his first novel, *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904), the denouement is more tragic though, as the protagonist dies of a stroke because of the displeasure caused by a terrible outburst at a meeting with sly Mr Barnett. Belloc transformed such stern finale in his next novels, as he changed this initial grave tone into a lighter and more satirical flow which he considered more suitable for telling the seemingly-funny stories which he regarded to be adequate means for expressing his anti-capitalist trend. Belloc knew that readers would be more tolerant of his comic novels than of his daring Distributist essays.

Jewish characters

After the English Reformation, recusants lived under government control and Roman Catholics formed scattered communities that tried to feel self-protective. Throughout the most testing times, particularly during Elizabeth I's reign, concealing a Roman Catholic priest was usually punished with the death penalty. The Roman Catholic Relief Act 1829 removed all penal laws against the Catholics. In 1850, Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman (1802-1865) organised dioceses, parishes and the Roman Catholic hierarchy was restored:

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Roman Church in England was still composed, very largely, of three distinct groups: there were the Old Catholic families, few in number, who for the most part resented their Church being taken over by a lot of ex-Anglican clergymen [the converts after Cardinal Newman's Oxford Movement]; there were the Irish immigrants in cities like Birmingham and Liverpool; and there were the converts. (Wilson 2003: 248)

Belloc was very kind to people, even to those who were his ideological adversaries. George Bernard Shaw enjoyed his friendship and liked to argue with Belloc and G.K.

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Chesterton in public debates. Belloc very much enjoyed discussing controversial questions with anybody, particularly with H.G. Wells and the unbeatable Professor G.G. Coulton, who “professed a strong love for the Middle Ages, but who was opposed to their idealization by Catholic historians.”⁴² Seen in the distance, the virulence of their mutual verbal attacks would make us smile sympathetically. Belloc was opposed to some Jews only because of their hidden economic power, and he tried to strike the crest of plutocracy, not the whole lineage because of any racial prejudice. He was too aware of the gloomy perspectives in the Europe of the 1930s to fall into the trap of those fashionable totalitarian doctrinaires. Nevertheless, *The Jews* (1922) dissects his suspicion of them:

He wrote that book [*The Jews*] partly to lay the latent anti-Semitism in his own bosom; partly to clear his head, partly to set out, as dispassionately as possible, an analysis of a major and crucial dangerous phenomenon, to which liberal opinion in England was wilfully blinding itself. (Wilson 2003: 265)

When Belloc was eighty, with ailments, and the poor memory of an elderly person, he still had his young man’s days’ ghosts haunting him. He remembered the Dreyfus case, although Belloc declared he was not an anti-Semite since he had very good relationships with the “poor darlings.”⁴³ Roughly thirty years before, Belloc clarified his position in a letter:

There is not in the whole mass of my written books and articles, there is not in any one of my lectures (many of which have been delivered to Jewish bodies by special request because of the interest I have taken) there is not, I say in any one of the great mass of writings and statements extending now over twenty years, a single line in which a Jew has been attacked as a Jew or in which the vast majority of their race, suffering and poor, has received, I will not say an insult

⁴² Speaight 1957: 416.

⁴³ Pearce 2002: 276.

from my pen or my tongue, but anything which could be construed even as dislike.⁴⁴

Belloc creates three Jewish characters in his novels. Mr Barnett is the only Jewish character in Belloc's fiction who represents an avaricious creditor that later becomes an affluent banker.⁴⁵ He appears in the first novel, *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904), yet Belloc "kills" this character in his fourth novel, *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), at the end of which Mr Barnett dies after having lost a good deal of money. Belloc indirectly suggests that Mr Barnett dies through grief over his loss.⁴⁶ Another Jew, Mr Samuel Montague, is just a wretched pawnbroker who lives like a poor beggar. He is continuously harassed by the police in *The Green Overcoat* (1912). The third character, Arthur Lawson, in *The Postmaster-General* (1932), after a life of suffering and sacrifice, becomes the chief of the great banking house Schwartz. Arthur Lawson helps cheated Wilfrid Halterton to recover his money.⁴⁷

During the Second World War, Belloc affirmed that there were vested interests in the apparently peaceful relationship between English people and the Jews:

Between the two Eliots, there had grown up a whole literary generation who were unashamedly hostile to the Jews. Buchan, Kipling and Rupert Brooke all loathed and feared them. Belloc, by contrast, who had employed a Jewess as a

⁴⁴ Letter, dated 6th September 1924.

⁴⁵ Mr Barnett is originally an obscure German creditor who later becomes a banker. Belloc knew some historical details of the City that he transformed into plots at his convenience. For example, Barings Bank (Baring Brothers) (1762-1995) was the first "merchant bank" based in London. The bank was founded by Francis Baring, from Bremen, in Germany. Francis Baring was German and so is Mr Barnett. Apart from Belloc's characteristic hate of bankers, things became even worse when those bankers were German, or "Prussian", as he used to say with disdain.

In *Pongo and The Bull* (1910), Belloc writes that people like to call Mr Barnett or Lord Lambeth "the Peabody Yid." (See *Pongo and The Bull* (1910): 14-15). Belloc surely knew that there was an American merchant, George Peabody, in 1838 London, who started the business which originated J.S. Morgan and Co., a merchant bank in London and New York. Belloc consciously added "Yid." This adjective – a short form of "Yiddish," the historical language of the Ashkenazi Jews, and signifying "Jewish" – is not used by chance, but to emphasize offensive slang on the matter. Belloc characteristically liked to hammer the point home.

⁴⁶ See *Pongo and The Bull* (1910): 305.

⁴⁷ See *The Postmaster-General* (1932): 285.

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secretary since 1908 [Miss Ruby Goldsmith],⁴⁸ claimed, to the end of his life, to have good personal relations with his Jewish friends. [As Jane Soames Nickerson,⁴⁹ Belloc's secretary at that time, wrote down on 6th October 1941 from Belloc's statement] 'As for me, I get on famously with them.' (...) 'English people used to boast all day long that England had no Jewish problem because they were so just, so kind, so God knows what: but the real reason was the strong Anglo-Judaic alliance all over the world.' (Wilson 2003: 195)

A man of convictions

In everyday life, Belloc practised an old-fashioned courtesy, too stiff in his way of greeting people, but such was his peculiar way of accepting everybody and dealing with them warmly. Even on his eightieth birthday...

He greeted everyone with grave Gallic politeness, shaking hands and bowing slightly. He was always punctilious in such matters. But, in a moment when he was not surrounded, he asked testily: 'Who are all these people?' Someone answered: 'Your friends. Mr Belloc.' 'Nonsense! Who invited them?' 'I think most of them just came, Mr Belloc.'⁵⁰

At the beginning of Belloc's career as a writer, educated and usually sceptic members of good society were amused by his diehard defence of Catholicism, since they considered his novels entertaining and some essays witty. Their reception increasingly changed, because most of them found Belloc's ideas unacceptable and offensive in the long run. Finally, the members of high society forgot him.

Belloc was a man of this world, not of the other. He was realistic in his apologetic endeavour, a brave defender of the Roman Catholic Church in England, not

⁴⁸ Pearce 2002: 165, 199, 209. In the dedication of *The Jews* (1922), Belloc wrote: "To Miss Ruby Goldsmith, my secretary for many years at King's Land, and the best and most intimate of our Jewish friends, to whom my family and I will always owe a deep debt of gratitude."

⁴⁹ There is a brief biographical reference in the press obituary of Jane Soames Nickerson. "Jane S. Nickerson, 87, Writer and Historian." *The New York Times*. 13th January 1988.

⁵⁰ *The Listener*, 8th October 1953. Quoted in Pearce 2002: 279.

as a pious Christian huddled in the chapel corner mumbling his prayers, but as a competent arguer ready for debate. Of course, he attended Mass daily if possible, but he was a believer not prone to multiple religious devotions in the traditional sense. Yet he said his prayers every night, usually remembering his beloved deceased wife, Elodie. He frequently recited the Rosary, as was the Catholic custom during the first half of the twentieth century,⁵¹ and learned to love the Virgin Mary since he was young. He considered Christianity was meaningful, and he did not allow atheists and agnostics to feel more intelligent than him. He wanted to prove that you could be a believer and live in the twentieth century without letting them look down on you as if you were a cretin. He knew he lived in a pluralistic society in which there were diverse worldviews, so, as a different person, he wanted to treat others with respect and be treated by them in the same way. Belloc was sceptical about his feelings, even his religious feelings. He had moments of despair until the end of his life, yet his scepticism was defeated by his faith which, he thought, was a free gift from God. Belloc was aware that we are the hollow men in the waste land, even though the faith can supply sound hope and sense of life.⁵²

Belloc knew that he was a Catholic always, not just during Mass time, so he tried to unify life and beliefs. He knew that if you do not live as you say that you believe, you will eventually begin to live differently, slowly relaxing your beliefs according to your new relaxed life. Some people maintain religious rituals for particular moments in their lives, such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals.⁵³ They are not firm

⁵¹ Belloc neither concealed his religious fervour nor was afraid of other people's mockery of his religion:

South Salford was, at the election of 1906, what would now be called a marginal constituency. (...) Playing on popular prejudice, they [the Conservatives] adopted the slogan 'Don't vote for a Frenchman and a Catholic.' Facing with such an affront to his faith and to the blood of his father, Belloc decided to come out fighting. (...) Disregarding their advice [of the local Catholic clergy], he rose to address the packed audience as follows: 'Gentlemen, I am a Catholic. (...) This (taking his beads out of his pocket) is a rosary. As far as possible, I kneel down and tell these beads every day. If you reject me on account of my religion, I shall thank God that He has spared me the indignity of being your representative.' For a few seemingly endless moments there was a hush of utter astonishment – followed by a thunderclap of applause. (Pearce 2002: 103-104).

⁵² The sentence "the hollow men in the waste land" is a metaphorical use of the combined titles of T.S. Eliot's poems *The Hollow Men* (1925), and *The Waste Land* (1922). T.S. Eliot. *Collected Poems 1909-1962*. (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991).

⁵³ Louis Évely (1910-1985), the former Belgian priest and prolific Roman Catholic writer anecdotally commented most alleged believers only went to church on these three occasions. See *A Religion for Our Time*. (London: Burns and Oates, 1969).

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believers, perhaps they are not sure of what they believe in, sometimes they like religious connotations, or they are sympathetic to the modernist religion (a religion of good feelings, but without dogmas). For example, George Orwell began to attend church for some time in 1932 because he became friends with the Anglican curate, Mr Parker:

Hayes...is one of the most godforsaken places I have ever struck. The population seems to be entirely made up of clerks who frequent tin-roofed chapels on Sundays and for the rest bolt themselves within doors. My sole friend is the curate – High Anglican but not a creeping Jesus and a very good fellow. Of course, it means that I have to go to Church, which is an arduous job here, as the service is so popish that I don't know my way about it and feel an awful BF when I see everyone bowing and crossing themselves all around me and can't follow suit.⁵⁴

(...)

I take in the *Church Times* regularly now and like it more every week. I do so like to see that there is life in the old dog yet – I mean in the poor old C. of E. I shall have to go to Holy Communion soon, hypocritical tho' it is, because my curate friend is bound to think it funny if I always go to Church but never communicate.⁵⁵

Unlike good willing Orwell, Belloc's religious beliefs were sincere and sound, but simple. He felt deeply committed to God and consistently put into practice the consequences of his Catholic faith.

He believed that Latin culture and the Roman Catholic Church had shaped Europe. The Church restored and transformed the old Roman order which had been partially destroyed by the Germanic tribes from the North. As stated by Thomism,

⁵⁴ Sonia Orwell, and Ian Angus. *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968): Vol. 1. 81.

⁵⁵ Sonia Orwell, and Ian Angus. *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968): Vol. 1. 103.

Belloc believed that grace perfects nature. Consequently, the heritage of the classic world had been renewed by faith. He thought that free peasantry was the normal situation in Europe for centuries, although the English-speaking world had been deceived as to its past and its present by the new Protestant Establishment which began in 1689. Belloc considered the Protestant Reformation as the rich's uprising against the poor, since the religious zeal of a group of heretics served the interests of English landlords and merchants who, with the help of Henry VIII's vested interests, abolished the old Roman Catholic order. Belloc contradicted the historical interpretation that the Reformation was the work of well-meaning people who looked for freedom and democracy after releasing England from the medieval Roman Catholic dark superstitions. The power of money and the new capitalism were behind the Reformation, along with the banking system that enslaved the whole of Europe through its insatiable greed.⁵⁶

The elderly Belloc did not like the modern world, deprived of beauty, dull, grey and anonymous. When he was walking, he frequently contemplated the natural grace of English and French little villages with their churches and belfries, that were not yet spoiled by industrialisation. Rural, peaceful landscape carried him away to the realities of faith:

[Belloc] once wrote that the French are blessed by the capacity to criticize themselves and to surmount their own criticism. Be that as it may, Hilaire Belloc rarely criticized the Church. He loved her altogether too much. He never answered personal attacks by fellow Catholics. It would have been, he said, a sin against his own body. Times change, and today a Catholic writer can make a good living attacking his own Mother. But Hilaire Belloc, coupled in memory always with his great friend G.K. Chesterton, made the defence of the Faith the main business of his life. (Wilhelmsen 1989: 95)

⁵⁶ Frederick D. Wilhelmsen. "Hilaire Belloc: Defender of the Faith." (Millbrook, NY: *The Catholic Writer: The Proceedings of the Whethersfield Institute* 2, 1989): 83-95.

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Some plots in Belloc's novels are fantastic and share elements of science fiction. The crucible and little furnace, Bower's patent, which Henry Bolter uses in *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930) does not exist in the real world, but such appliance makes possible Belloc's bringing into present the medieval myth of alchemy – the transmutation of metals – as something feasible. Belloc's idea that increasing the amount of gold suddenly can bring disaster into the financial world is not too far away from real, unbelievable events, such as Slovakian Adolf Burger's story told in his book *Des Teufels Werkstatt* (1997)⁵⁷ about the real Nazi attempt to flood Great Britain, in 1944, with £130 million pounds in perfectly counterfeited English bank notes so as to devastate British economy.⁵⁸

Hilaire Belloc did not like the kind of society that he observed around him, so he wrote non-stop to modify its selfishness and cruelty. To some extent, Hilaire Belloc resembles Ignatius J. Reilly, the misunderstood protagonist of *A Confederacy of Dunces* (1980), who writes persistently about his view of a utopian medieval world in hundreds of notebooks.⁵⁹ Ignatius J Reilly has to look for a job to pay a debt, an idea which was frequent in Belloc's fiction, in which many characters undergo bizarre experiences because they must pay a debt urgently. In John Kennedy Toole's novel, the protagonist, Ignatius J Reilly, is a maladjusted person with anachronistic tastes. Conversely, Hilaire Belloc was very sociable to the point of gregariousness. Much more realistic than Ignatius J Reilly, Belloc supplied suitable hints to change economic reality based on Catholic corporatism that was partially reminiscent of some medieval ideas too.

One of the *leit motifs* in Belloc's novels is the unbridled struggle to become rich and climb up the social ladder, usually through the purchase of a peerage. Nevertheless, Tom Wolfe, in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987), exemplified the case in which money

⁵⁷ English translation *The Devil's Workshop*. (London: Frontline Books, 2009).

⁵⁸ The whole plan was not implemented. Part of the money was used to pay spies; Nazi chiefs took another part and the rest was thrown into the water. The banknotes were so perfect that the Bank of England had to withdraw them over a period of twenty years.

⁵⁹ John Kennedy Toole. (1980) *A Confederacy of Dunces*. (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1987).

Walker Percy was astonished at the excellent quality of this novel which won the 1981 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. The novel had been previously rejected by Simon and Schuster, since these publishers believed that the book dealt with no distinctive theme. They thought it was a void account. Walker Percy succeeded in getting the book published.

and fame is not enough to safeguard an individual, particularly when some circumstances are very adverse.⁶⁰ Social hypocrisy and a game of appearances provoke that social conventions become wobbly and increasingly change according to the convenience of the moment. Whereas Belloc set his novels roughly in the Edwardian period (no matter the publishing dates of his latest novels), Tom Wolfe wrote *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987) on the 1980s New York society. Belloc creates the character of Lothario in *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929), who is a fickle journalist very fond of drink, actually quite similar to Peter Fallow in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987), who is an alcoholic journalist of the tabloid *City Light*. Lothario is a henpecked journalist, a chronicler of society, who pretends to be an expert in the world of works of art. He signs the wonderful Social Paragraphs in Lord Borstal's paper (also a tabloid) *The Howl*, under the daily caption of "Among the Smart."⁶¹ Lothario is the non-de-plume of Archibald who is henpecked by Olivia and a heavy drinker.⁶² Belloc describes two "Lotharios" actually, but it is not clear for the reader if they are two different journalists who work as a team by using the same name of "Lothario," or whether it is only the same person who leads a double life. The reader may be bemused by Belloc's suggestion of one Lothario who lives in "Golders Green" (a traditionally Jewish area) and the "Northern stars," contrasted with the other Lothario who is "abominably slattern" and lives "at the back of Fleet Street" (the street with connotations of national press):

There dwells in Golders Green, under the Northern stars, a little man, close on fifty, who dresses carefully but with great strain, for he is very poor: sad in the face, clean-shaven, save for a little drooping moustache; a teetotaller from youth, and possessed of a small library – very little hair, but what there is nicely parted and oiled.

(...)

⁶⁰ Tom Wolfe. (1987) *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. (New York: Picador, 2008).

⁶¹ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 66.

⁶² See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 230.

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The other half of Lothario is quite another kettle of fish. He is a hirsute personage, about thirty-five years old and looking any age; abominably slattern. He has a very short little anyhow goat beard, the hair of his head anyhow, a nose already large but getting larger towards the end, and rounded: where also it is red. He is careless about his clothes (...) bibulous of eye – having an enormous capacity for liquor of any kind; (...) He has a room high up off a court at the back of Fleet Street (...) He prefers beer to spirits – but nothing comes amiss to his gullet.

And the two together, I say, are Lothario, half and half. Between them they furnish those paragraphs by which we are kept in touch with our Betters. (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 65, 66, 68.)

The captions that Belloc inserts below G.K. Chesterton's drawings provide details about Lothario's weird personality:

Dual Nature of Lothario, Society Journalist [The drawing represents Lothario in two halves combined into the same person; a vertical imaginary line divides the two opposite images of Lothario, the dishevelled drunkard and the clean shaven, restrained, blended into one only man] (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 67)

(...)

Alcoholic influence exerted upon one half of Lothario, resulting in literary creation by same (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 225)

(...)

Marital influence exercised upon the other half of Lothario, resulting in literary creation by same (*The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* 1929: 229)

In *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987), Peter Fallow is an opportunist who wants to revive his decaying journalist career by demanding justice for a poor black teenager who has been knocked down by a wealthy white driver's lover, Maria Ruskin. The

owner of the car and Maria Ruskin's lover in turn is Sherman McCoy, a wealthy stockbroker who is with her when the accident takes place. Tom Wolfe also creates the character of Abe Weiss, the district attorney who wants to move up in his judicial career and pretends to be very interested in arresting McCoy. Abe Weiss knows that his ambitious assistant, lawyer Larry Kramer, will do his best to help him. In a very similar way to Belloc's peculiar dexterity at entangling his plots, Tom Wolfe manages to offer a denouement in which nearly everybody fails to achieve his ambitions, even though the secondary characters obtain consolation prizes. Sadly enough, Tommy Killian, McCoy's lawyer, recognizes that Henry Lamb, the black young boy who was knocked down by McCoy's car, has been completely forgotten and died from injuries. Tom Wolfe tells the reader all those details about the end of the story in a kind of "Epilogue" through a fictional article in *The New York Times*. Sometimes Belloc also liked to round his novels out with this literary resource. In *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929), Belloc included an "Epilogue"⁶³ and a "Super-Epilogue."⁶⁴

Human dignity

Strange as Belloc's stories may seem, what his novels and essays tried to convey essentially was the all-important dignity of all persons. Belloc praised honesty and detested the modern world's one hundred ways of enslaving men, particularly the economic slavery which he described in *The Servile State* (1912) and *The Crisis of Civilization* (1937). He believed that a return to the Faith was the answer to the social crisis. Belloc struggled for defending individual human rights. Anthony Lester mentions four human rights which are endangered at present, and form the basic nucleus of human dignity: equality, free speech, privacy, and the rule of law.⁶⁵ Anthony Lester is not an aesthete, he is a lawyer and legislator, with broad experience in the field of human rights, who looks for effective remedies for violations of human rights in British

⁶³ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 313.

⁶⁴ See *The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel* (1929): 318.

⁶⁵ These are the main chapters in his book. Cf. Anthony Lester. *Five ideas to Fight For: How Our Freedom Is Under Threat and Why It Matters*. (London: Oneworld Publications, 2016).

courts. This is his definition of human rights and his warning about our unconscious surrender to the lure of internet:

What are human rights?

We must strive to protect the basic rights we all enjoy because of our shared humanity. They include the right to life, the right not to be tortured or subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the right not to be enslaved, the right to a fair trial, to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, to freedom of expression, to respect for private and family life, the right to marry, the right to private property, to education, to take part in free and secret elections, and to enjoy these rights without discrimination. They are the bedrock of a democracy based on the rule of law and our common humanity and dignity. They call special protection against undue interference and abuse by elected politicians or public officials.

Human rights are not the gift of governments. They are our birth right. Some believe human rights are part of natural law and religious teachings; for others are fruits of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment; for pragmatists, they are the basic freedoms of the individual. Philosophers and theologians reflect about origins and sources of fundamental rights. I am neither a philosopher nor a theologian. What matters to me is whether they are observed in practice and whether there are effective remedies for victims when they are breached. (Lester 2016: 16-17)

(...)

When George Orwell published *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1949, warning against dictatorship under ‘Big Brother,’ he had in mind the totalitarian regimes of Hitler and Stalin and the risk of state power destroying free societies. That was long before the internet brought new opportunities for free expression across borders; long before private companies feasted on profits from harvesting our personal data; and long before the internet gave new surveillance capabilities to the friends and enemies of open society.

Search engines, email providers and social networking sites gather their customers' private data in enormous quantities. Many internet companies offer their services ostensibly for free – because they can sell our personal data to make money through advertising. We traded away our privacy without realising what we were giving up. Through analysis of buying patterns, a US retailer, Target, infamously predicted that one of its teenage customers was pregnant. It sent coupons for maternity wear through the letterbox – before she had broken the news to her parents. (Lester 2016: 162)⁶⁶

Belloc agreed that human rights stem from our birth right and they are also fruit of the Enlightenment, as the convinced militant republican that he was, very conscious of the conquests of the French Revolution, would contend. Even though he was not a philosopher nor a theologian, he considered that men and women are endowed with human rights because such is their dignity as sons of God. Belloc thought that the other person is always unfathomable, for the dignity of the human person cannot be reduced to something controllable, and this is the mystery, the connection with the transcendence.⁶⁷ His conversations with Cardinal Manning infused this conviction in him.

⁶⁶ Anthony Lester. *Five ideas to Fight For: How Our Freedom Is Under Threat and Why It Matters*. (London: Oneworld Publications, 2016).

⁶⁷ Belloc's sense of transcendence was not the only coincidence with Iván Illich (1926-2002). The contradictions that Belloc found in capitalist practice have contact points with the ideas of that Austrian former Catholic priest whose books were widely known in the 1970s, but that were consigned to oblivion during the neoliberal wave of the 1980s. His thought has been revised recently, after the aftermath of the recent economic crisis though. He believed that there is something in our way to conceive economic growth that ends up achieving the opposite effects of those that were proposed at the beginning (well-being, employment and equality) as the means ran wild on the way, and they became ends in themselves. Currently being free equates to adapt yourself to the technological system, but Illich was wary of educational systems, as he contended that, as soon as a certain threshold is exceeded, the fact of passing exams and obtaining accreditations make you forget the original goal of learning and the intended equal opportunity. He remarked the coincidence between those who do better and those who come from a favourable social level, as society creates states that, only by the fact of belonging to them, bestow you exaggerated social authority. Modernity aimed at a more habitable and equitable society, but it has created new hierarchies, since the preponderance of economy has transformed everything into merchandise (formal schooling too). There is the idea that all the problems of the modern world (inequality, environmental degradation, and others) can be solved with more economic growth. Illich (also Belloc) contended that what we understand as development must be limited. Of course, Illich's

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In Belloc's time, telecommunications were not so sophisticated as these days. He did enjoy talking on the telephone, as the lure of that modern appliance in that time attracted him very much. He used to run to the phone at any time he could reach one. Yet Belloc would be aghast at our dependence on internet services, particularly the use of social networks. Internet has produced changes in our behaviour patterns, basically the customary neurotic addiction to instant messaging and chatting with everyone. Previously, our world was limited by radio and television sets or local magazines. Young generations do not have such limitations and all of us have focused the camera on ourselves much more than ever before, so our identity is exposed in a way without precedent, and the ultimate result is that you lose your privacy in exchange for nothing. This phenomenon places brands in a new position in consumers' lives.

The uncomfortable wisdom of Hilaire Belloc

Belloc was aware that happiness is based on the good proportion between what we wish and what we achieve. He knew you should be realistic to set yourself achievable objectives and cultivate good humour. Belloc enjoyed funny anecdotes, singing old French and Sussex tunes, his friends' conversation, just having a glass of French wine or port to go with, and sailing on the "Nona" with two bosom friends in agreeable conversation about serious and light matters.

The kernel of happiness is universal as it is based on the subjective appreciation of life as a whole: we are happy when we like the life we live.⁶⁸ A happy person is usually an individual with a well-balanced personality who has a project of life in which health, love, job, culture, and social relationships are satisfactory. Happiness depends on the result between what you dream and what you achieve. Accordingly, you must manage your own desire so as to obtain a good proportion between what you wish and what you achieve. Being happy depends largely on you. You should not ask of life too many things, you should have principles based on love, understanding and honesty,

utopian, even anarchist, ideas faced considerable opposition in broad sectors of society. Cf. Humberto Beck. *Otra modernidad es posible. El pensamiento de Iván Illich*. Barcelona: Malpaso Ediciones, 2017.

⁶⁸ Dr Ruut Veenhoven is a sociologist of the University of Rotterdam who has condensed the essence of happiness in these words. Veenhoven heads the project *World Database of Happiness*.

accept yourself and make the most of life. You should look around with admiration, just trying to reach the essence of what you regard. You should look into yourself too and know yourself to be consistent with your principles and try to look for the positive aspect in everything. Happiness is neither a moment nor a mood, but a persistent attitude. Of course, having enough money to meet your needs is essential to feel calm, although being rich does not mean being happier. The rich also commit suicide.⁶⁹

In his old age, and in spite of his medical condition, Belloc really knew who he was and what he had been all through his life. He slowly overcame his fits of rage and bad mood, since he increasingly transformed himself from being a lively cantankerous into a more peaceful, calm old man. He wanted to “occupy” his age, as he “wanted to feel it in all its ripeness to find out truly who [he] was able to ‘become’, [then]. (...)” This was the “moment to express [himself] freely, at last.”⁷⁰ Existentialism proposed that human existence was previous and most important than essence, or rather, that men and women define themselves through what they do *with* and *in* their lives much more than through their human nature, their essence. In this case, *essence* does not necessarily mean any metaphysical or ontological concept, but simply your biological inheritance or intellectual gifts. Belloc filled his life with his family, beliefs and literary activity. Being a writer shaped much of his character, resolute, argumentative, opinionated. He possessed a rich imagination that allowed him to write fourteen novels, as well as several short stories and children’s books. He loved entertaining readers without renouncing his principles. On a personal level, Belloc did not expect that everybody treated him well all the days, all the time. He knew he was not the centre of the world, so he did not intend that everybody was depending on him; he was ready for frustration and accepted it when it came around the corner.

⁶⁹ National Center for Register-based Research. University of Aarhus. Denmark. “Risk of suicide in relation to income level in people admitted to hospital with mental illness: nested case-control study.” London: *The British Medical Journal*, 10th February 2001.

⁷⁰ Núria Casado-Gual. (2016) *Prime Time*. Lleida, 2017. 30 <www.agingstudies.eu/page/art-and-artistic-research>

In this play, Gina Guasch, a soap-opera producer in her forties, recognises Glòria Aran, a seventy-year-old television star, is an “idealistic woman.” Gina has been recently diagnosed with a degenerative disease and she exclaims in all sincerity: “The doctors say (...) the younger you are the faster [the disease] moves. Right now, Glòria, you can’t imagine how much I wish I was as old as you are.” See *Prime Time* (2017): 26-27.

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Belloc was too conscious of his lonely role as defender of the Church such that he usually kept a melancholic face when he was alone as his friends noticed. He had a project of life and was faithful to his Roman Catholic tenets, so his life was unified in his internal consistency, he achieved that rare stable feeling that you have when you are true to your principles. Belloc was never rich, although he was actually too generous when he occasionally had money and made expensive gifts to his friends without thinking too much about his meagre financial resources. He assumed Elodie's death after the initial period of desperation, bravely accepted the death of his two sons, his eldest child, Louis, reported missing at the end of the First World War, and Peter, who died of septicaemia and pneumonia while he was in his battalion of the Marines in April 1941. Belloc had to endure his daughter Elizabeth's bohemian lifestyle away from home and frequently starving. Nobody knew where she was (sometimes in Switzerland) or whether she could earn her living, in spite of drawing perfectly all right. On top of this, Belloc had to accept his son Hilary's estrangement from him. Hilary was his second child. After leaving Balliol, he went to California where he did well in engineering.⁷¹ When, in 1925, Hilaire Belloc's old mother died, only Eleanor, of his four children, was in England when it happened,⁷²:

Belloc, on the other hand, before he was sixty, could feel his children slipping away from him. One child was dead; three were abroad. In their own fashion, they all loved him, but he was not certain of their love, and he was quite sensitive enough to know that his insatiable demandingness drove them away. (Wilson 2003: 311)

Hilaire Belloc learned to be increasingly alone, but he accepted his situation since he knew such was the nature of life and kept the faith which gave him transcendent meaning. His faith was not based on any childish need of consolation to bear suffering, but on complete certainty of the loving Providence of God which guided and protected

⁷¹ Speaight 1957: 506. Wilson 2003: 311-312.

⁷² Wilson 2003: 310.

him.⁷³ His eldest daughter, Eleanor and her husband, Reginald Jebb, took care of him in old age. Hilaire Belloc was wanderer, restless, and argumentative, but also happy in his own way:

He enjoyed controversy, because he knew he was good at it. But his reason for fighting was simple. He believed that he was right. He believed that there was only one 'household' where 'the human spirit has roof and hearth. Outside it, is the Night.' (Wilson 2003: 308)

Belloc thought that Europe should remain loyal to its Christian heritage and that political ethics should bear in mind Christian values. He was clever enough to understand that Europe, as a whole, was a land of pluralism with strong secular tendencies in which not everybody shared his views.⁷⁴ Yet he was brave enough to show his cards, avoid double language and hackneyed, politically-correct, empty sentences. As A.N. Wilson so perceptively stated:

⁷³ Christian mystic and theologian Julian of Norwich (c.1342 – c.1416) supplies the image of the love of God which is joyful and compassionate, something which was in contrast to medieval theology that emphasized that sin offends God and robs him of his honour. Medieval theology demanded tough penance to repair God's honour and to obtain pardon. In this way, the goodness and love of creation were placed in a second term. Yet God shows solidarity with human suffering, as He is God not of the dead but of the living. God loves us to show solidarity with those who suffer. (Marta Trepat. "El goig de la celebració." Lleida: IREL. 10th November 2016) [My translation]

⁷⁴ Present-day atmosphere attempts the Roman Catholic Church to passing its doctrine over in silence or that the Church should accommodate its tenets to those that shape current humanism. Something similar occurs with other Christian churches, Protestant denominations, particularly if they have some vitality. Although the secular world appreciates Christian solidarity, laicism rejects evangelization, since sometimes laicism considers such activity sheer indoctrination. Nevertheless, Belloc knew for certain that sincere Christianity did not supply a comfortable situation to its faithful. Even so, he contended that Europe should find its essence in Christian principles or it would eventually be disintegrated:

They [English critics] disliked his [Belloc's] uncompromisingness, his disparaging view of English political systems and (often the same thing) English humbug, as English food and English religion. They were made uneasy by his combination of political radicalism (he was the only non-socialist journalist in London who supported the General Strike of 1926) and Catholicism, which was of a very French kind – at once off-hand and belligerent. They disliked his lapidary style and his elegance. (...)

In his prose works, Belloc found only one acceptable collective, and that is the Catholic Church, which he believed to provide hearth and home for the human spirit. (A.N. Wilson. "Introduction." Hilaire Belloc. (1954) *Complete Verse*. London: Pimlico, 1991).

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The wisdom of Belloc cannot endure, for it was too obviously right. It is only by his folly that he will be remembered. Most of his astonishingly varied and prolific output of books has been forgotten today. It is because of their truth that we cannot bear to read them. (...) [They] are crammed with wisdom. But it is an intolerable, pessimistic wisdom; the wisdom of a man who says 'I told you so' after the horse has bolted, and who is not entirely sorry to point out that the stable door, far from being better closed, was warped and torn from its hinges years ago. (Wilson 1984: v)

Appendices: Summaries of the novels

Appendix #1

Emmanuel Burden, Merchant of Thames St. in the City of London, Exporter of Hardware. A Record of his Lineage, Speculations, Last Days and Death (1904)

Belloc presents Mr Burden as a real person and a good friend of his. Mr Burden is an honest man, a hard worker of considerable wealth, since he is a merchant completely concentrated on his business. He is an old-fashioned Liberal who distrusts financial speculation, just in the same way as his brave friend Mr Abbot, a vessel owner. Mr Burden is Justice of the Peace in the County of Surrey. He married Eliza and inherited a shop in Thames Street where the couple lived. They have three children, two girls, Ermytrude and Gwinnys, and a boy, Cosmo. Cosmo is nervous and irritable due to his childhood poor health, although Public School and university have made him a man. While yet an undergraduate, Cosmo fell in love with Hermione, Mr Capes' daughter. As Cosmo wanted to break up, Mr Capes asks for a compensation of £750 for his injured, cheated daughter. Mr Capes blackmails Cosmo through the compromising love letters Cosmo sent to Hermione formerly. Mr Harbury helps Cosmo to obtain a credit to pay Capes and introduces him to Mr Barnett.

Mr Barnett's Haymarket Bank is ruined due to a venomous article, although Mr Barnett airs he has discovered a prospective big business in an African investment: the M'Korio Delta, in West Africa, near Cameroon. It is supposed there might be gold in that far-away swamp. Mr Barnett is allegedly a great international financier, an intriguing individual with a permanent smile. He is a Jew of German origin who, at the time, lives in London and seems to control everything in the world of finance. Gossiping tongues accuse Mr Barnett of having bought the London press. Mr Barnett establishes an alliance with Mr Abbot, the ship-owner, and Mr Burden, the hardware merchant and importer. Initially, Mr Burden is firmly convinced the M'Korio Delta

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contains almost infinite possibilities, even though Cosmo wisely sees the risks of all colonial experiments. Mr Burden asks for advice to Lord Benthorpe who pretends to be rich, but who, towards 1895, was deprived of all resources whatsoever. Benthorpe suggests Mr Barnett, Mr Harbury, Mr Burden, and he himself must form a syndicate. The four businessmen gather at The Plantagenet Club, at Pall Mall and agree on gathering £100,000 to cope with the African joint venture. Mr Barnett tells Mr Burden they must attract Mr Abbott to their venture, but Mr Burden does not give an answer.

Cosmo is elegant, thrifty, and under an indefatigable calm while his father's health gets worse. Mr Burden increasingly begins to feel the strange and persistent suspicion that the M'Korio business is not going to be successful. He is more frequently ill, and incapable of understanding what is happening around him.

As soon as the new corporation offices in Broad Street are opened, in one day the capital is subscribed, even many times over. The whole business is a speculative bubble which serves to enrich Mr Barnett exclusively. Stocks soar and sink successively, while Mr Burden is astounded at these fluctuations and is possessed by sadness continually. He falls ill, but recovers after a long rest and some drugs.

Mr Abbot's cargo to Barcelona fails, so he loses £15,000 in fifteen days. Mr Abbot has the mania of reactionary hatred and suspicion. He is eventually convinced there is a definite conspiracy against him and his freight business. He is very suspicious and writes an infuriated letter to Mr Burden who feels deeply hurt. Mr Burden tries to visit Mr Abbot in his office, but Mr Abbot refuses to meet him.

At a meeting with Mr Barnett, Mr Harbury, Lord Benthorpe and Cosmo, Mr Burden loses control, and a terrible outburst follows in which Mr Burden denounces them as swindlers and thieves. Mr Burden abandons the gathering and, on the way home, suffers a stroke. Mr Burden dies and Cosmo inherits his wealth.

Appendix #2

Mr Clutterbuck's Election (1908)

Percy Clutterbuck lives in Croydon. One evening in the summer of 1902, Mr Boyle visits him and proposes an eggs business that forms part of the army supplies in the Second Boer War (1899-1902). To secure his share in the business, Clutterbuck sends a £500 cheque to Boyle, but he receives no answer, as Boyle has just died. Suddenly, the enemy in South Africa lays down their arms, and the Government decides to compensate army food suppliers, although Clutterbuck only receives £45,000 for the £50,000 he had previously invested. Yet Clutterbuck invests again in the once-discredited property of Curricant Docks and, thanks to the Government's new plans for such port, he earns a lot of money. After several wise investments, Clutterbuck's wealth increases up to £90,000 in 1911.

Clutterbuck is client of Barnett's and Sons Bank. Mr Barnett of the previous novel, *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant...* (1904), continues to do business successfully, and has a finger in every pie. Mr Barnett paid for his peerage, and now has become Lord Lambeth and the Duke of Battersea. He continues to be the nasty, sly businessman of repulsive aspect who controls everything and takes advantage of any situation.

Although Clutterbuck is ill with pneumonia, his Confidential Clerk buys Congoes (shares and investments) misunderstanding his master's instructions. All in all, his investments go well, and Clutterbuck reaches £200,000, so he becomes widely-known everywhere. He buys a house in Purley Street, with seven acres of ground. The Clutterbucks are invited by Mary Smith, the widow of Mr Barttelot Smith. She is "a leader of London," and an intimate friend of the Prime Minister. William Bailey is her brother. Mary Smith suggests that young Irish Charlie Fitzgerald should be Mr Clutterbuck's brand-new secretary. Fitzgerald suggests Clutterbuck enter politics by subscribing a sum of money to the National Party. Clutterbuck receives an official letter that states the borough of Mickelton in North London will be vacant in a few weeks' time. They ask him to accept the Prospective National Candidature for this constituency,

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but first he must pass the exam of the Mickleton Committee. In spite of difficulties during the exam, Clutterbuck is admitted as candidate.

Unexpectedly, the Trades Union call for a strike at Podger's Wharf to defend an employee who has been bullied by Mr Harman, barge and transport master. Once at the main election campaign meeting, Clutterbuck speaks about free trade, the taxation of rice, and several current political issues, while the audience does not pay attention and is feverishly singing songs in favour of the incarcerated fishmonger. Chaos goes on and on, while Clutterbuck begins to have a sore throat.

Lord Henfield is the Opposition candidate. His wife is very good on the door-to-door campaign. Things start to go wrong for tired Clutterbuck. Mr Stephens is an inoffensive plutocrat who invites the Clutterbucks home at Borger's End. This fact is noticed by Mr Clay, another Tory Home Ruler who, at the time, is the head of the National Party. Mr Clay is bitterly resented by the honour shown to his rival.

The fatal day of elections arrives, 19th November 1911. Clutterbuck is very nervous; he has hardly slept, and has eaten nearly nothing for breakfast at the Stephens'. It is raining. He visits some polling stations here and there in Stephens's car and, eventually, stops at Kipling Crescent. There is a previously-arranged "accidental" crossing of the cars of the opposing leaders for the same constituency who gentlemanly shake hands while the photograph is taken. From the total 19,123 votes reckoned, Clutterbuck is elected by the overwhelming majority of 1,028. After being congratulated for his success, Clutterbuck sends another £1,000 cheque to the Party. For several weeks, the Clutterbucks' house is filled with a perpetual attendance of friends, either to enjoy their company or to congratulate him on his recent political success.

Nobby is Charlie Fitzgerald's cousin. Nobby is broke and sometimes feels drunk enough to gossip. He tells how John Higgins was usually paying £5,000 to remain in Parliament. Clutterbuck calls on Bozzy Delacourt's, but Bozzy is at the Party's office in Peter Street. However, Clutterbuck hands in an envelope with a four line note and a cheque for £3,000. On 15th December 1911, Charlie Fitzgerald visits the Prime Minister, calling for Mr Clutterbuck to appear in the New Year's Honours List. Charlie Fitzgerald is a relative of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister, with a kind smile, tells

Fitzgerald that they have thought about it all, but the appointment has to be postponed. On Monday 1st January 1912, Clutterbuck realizes he is not in *The Times*' list of new Baronets, Knights of the Orders of Bath, or Victoria. Clutterbuck is almost in tears, and he goes to London to see about his delayed mention in the Honours List, but gets nothing more than elusive words, kind smiles, and diffuse understanding. Clutterbuck begins not to understand what is happening, in a similar process as the bewilderment of Emmanuel Burden, the protagonist of Belloc's previous novel.

Mary Smiths' brother, William Bailey, is a dogmatic stupid fellow with reasoning inconsistency and mad behaviour that are obvious to everybody. He is going to be Clutterbuck's ruin in the long run. William Bailey is obsessed with the Jews, as he believes that they are all conspirators. He thinks M. de Blowitz, a fervent Catholic, is also a supporter of the Synagogue. Bailey's mental illness advances with his advancing age, although his large private income of £4,000-a-year allows him to have a dangerous independence. William Bailey had a nonsensical, absurd career, as his lack of persistency drove him to begin to read for several university degrees that he never completed. He had odd jobs, and took many posts too, but was completely incompetent and never finished anything he started. Crazy Bailey advises Clutterbuck to try the Anapootra Ruby Mines. Bemused, Clutterbuck tells about such mines to Fitzgerald who knows nothing about such ventures, and he tries to investigate in order to unravel the mess. Even if fickle William Bailey plotted the profiteering, Fitzgerald disrupts that fraud in just one day, after speaking about it to the kind Duke of Battersea (Mr Barnett).

Suddenly, a petition is to be lodged disputing the validity of Clutterbuck's election. Distressed, Clutterbuck feels anxious about his past, as on one occasion he gave a bag of sovereigns to the Bogey Man and somebody maliciously has interpreted that fact as a sort of bribery. William Bailey advises Clutterbuck to go to a good agency in Fetter Lane. Detective Bevan works there, and he finds out who was behind that strange petition: Hewlett (in Mafeking Avenue) and Seale (in a small street off the Crescent) were the movers. Fitzgerald also discovers why Clutterbuck was not included in the list of honours; the people in Peter Street simply had too many names to be included, so Clutterbuck had been postponed.

The Court hears the Mickleton election petition. Within three weeks of the poll, a large number of electors receive a benefit at the hands of one virtually acting for the candidate of the borough, so Clutterbuck's election for Mickleton is finally declared invalid. Clutterbuck wants retaliation, but Bailey advises him to frighten politicians by going on about the mines. Bailey daringly tells Clutterbuck to make a speech at the Jubilee Hall with the title "The great meeting of protest by the ex-Member from Mickleton on the Anapootra Ruby Mines Scandal!" The Duke of Battersea hires detective Bevan to follow Bailey, although Bevan mistakenly goes after Zachary Hemmings (Bailey's servant). Bailey cautiously had seen somebody shadowing Zachary as far as the top of Bond Street. Bevan wrongly informs the Duke of Battersea that Bailey uses the false name of Zachary Hemmings. When the Duke of Battersea faces Bailey and blames him for what he did under the false name of Zachary Hemmings, Bailey does not reply. Bailey is a cad, and he does not warn the Duke of his error. The Duke of Battersea is certain the protest meeting will not be held.

Bailey pretends to rent Mr Clay's big meeting space, then suddenly cancels the contract to renew it immediately. Bailey does it to irritate the Duke of Battersea, his agent, and the wobbly clerk at the enquiry desk. When the rent is finally denied on the excuse that urgent repairs must be done, and workmen are on the way, Bailey threatens to sue for damages. Meanwhile, Fitzgerald drives Mr Clutterbuck to London for the protest meeting, but they get lost as it is snowing. They can reach their inn at Stow-in-the-Wold, so they fail to attend the gathering. Over 5,000 men are present at the meeting and impatiently waiting; they are shouting and riotous. Confusion breaks out and they start fighting each other. The police enter the Hall. Next morning Clutterbuck encounters Bailey and is heart-broken after hearing his realistic account.

Bailey visits his relative, the Prime Minister, and suggests creating some honour for Clutterbuck "in recognition (he makes it up as he goes along) of his active services and labours in connection with the Royal Caterham Valley Institute." The Premier agrees, and the honour appears on the Empire Day list, after Easter. The unfortunate Mr Clutterbuck generously gives good money again, and the first stone of the Institute is laid. At last, he receives his high reward.

Appendix #3

A Change in The Cabinet (1909)

It is March 1915. Sir T. Charles Repton is a solicitor and the Warden of the Court of Dowry. His wife is Maria. He is a baronet, and a solid master of finance. His full title is Lord Repton of Giggleswick. Dowry Offices are behind Scotland Yard. He hears about George Mulross Demaine, an obscure MP, who is decidedly supported by most influential people to reach a significant position in an imminent ministerial reshuffle. Charles Repton has Caryll's Ganglia painfully irritated which is going to have considerable consequences because these ganglia have an important effect upon self-control. On one occasion, the enraged Repton has a row on a bus, and behaves like a bully. Repton only tells the truth when his Caryll's Ganglia do not work properly. Repton is ill with *Veracititis*, and sometimes is out of his senses. Once, at home, he started abruptly to shout out of the window, recriminating this or that to everybody who happened to be passing by along the street. Repton's restlessness deeply anguishes Maria. He is a member of the government, but some people think he has gone mad and that it is about time he should be removed. Dolly is the Prime Minister; he is 54. He wants to give Repton a peerage.

The reason for the title of the novel comes from the slanderous rumours spread by malicious people and sensasionalist newspapers about Charles Repton's presumed madness. The Prime Minister is afraid that a change in the cabinet is impending and essential to bring things back to normal, as Repton is an outstanding public figure who has recently been belittled due to his strange mental condition. Some influential patrons want to promote the inept George Mulross Demaine to replace honest Repton.

Bingham is the redoubtable, impervious Repton's partner in Van Diemens business. This is the company that is going to develop all the North-eastern littoral of Australia by means of a huge railway line. Very soon *The Moon* and *The Capon*, two London evening newspapers, begin to attack Repton for being connected with Van Diemens. Ole Man Benson is the Chief Equaliser of huge investments at the Durango

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Investment Company and other societies. His real name is Theocritus Chepstow Benson and his main investment is Popocatepelts, a dam construction in Mexico that is eventually bankrupted. As years passed by, apparently rich Ole Man Benson becomes George Mulross Demaine's father-in-law.

In 1913, Demaine is languishing in London due to lack of money. Mary Smith has arranged his marriage to Studie, Ole Man Benson's daughter, but Ole Man Benson is currently nearly bankrupt, and he even thinks about selling his house, because he is penniless. Ole Man Benson cannot supply the previously-abundant annual allowance. Demaine is a complete fiasco as an MP, since he is unable to present questions properly in the House of Commons; his voice is wobbly and imperceptible. He is a disgraced fellow, with continuous bad luck, who stumbles over any stool, chair, and piece of furniture, or smashes expensive glasses of pure crystal glassware. Yet the First Lord of the Admiralty is George's second uncle, and George's mother's half-sister's husband is Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mary Smith is a widow and a kind of good fairy, a powerful woman who always "plumps across the scene and is perceived to be a friend, a confidant, the cousin, the sister-in-law of at least three quarters of what counts in England." Mary Smith's cousin is William Bailey, an eccentric, wealthy, and middle-aged celibate who appeared in Belloc's previous novel *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908). The Prime Minister, Dolly, is also Mary Smith's cousin. Mary considers George Demaine her *protégé*. As time goes by, Demaine becomes increasingly well-known in the press. Mary is thinking about the prospective vacancy of the Warden of the Court of Dowry which is the post Charles Repton holds at the time. She wants to promote George Demaine to this post in the future.

Incidentally George Demaine is assaulted and robbed in London's underground, but his captors let him free. He escapes, and hides himself by mistake in a ship, the *Lily*, whose captain is Higgins. When he is discovered, the crew want to expel and land him at Parham. After some odd adventures, Demaine manages to escape from the ship where he is kept as a stowaway and prisoner by the captain. He swims towards the shore, and comes across Carolus Merry Armiger's country house in Parham in which William

Bailey is staying some days. Bailey helps him to escape from the police who are looking for a dangerous rascal called *Stappy the Clinker*.

The Prime Minister, in his dreams, is afraid of some new horror proceeding from Repton, let loose since the police complain that Repton has been shouting insults through the window. Repton is kept at home to avoid further incidents. *The Times* informed that Repton had influenza and could not speak at the Great Wycliffite Congress. Edward, the Prime Minister's secretary, succeeds in stopping *The Capon* and *The Moon* from reporting about Repton's fit of anger. Dolly, the Prime Minister, finally, finds relief on learning that Demaine has been found. The story George Demaine tells Dolly about his sudden demise has nothing to do with the real events, since it is a watered-down version of Demaine's continuous blunders.

On Wednesday, 3rd June 1915, the eminent doctor Scipio Knickerbocker cures Repton of his strange condition by simply clearing Caryll's Ganglia's obstructed ducts. Repton's ganglia now work perfectly and restore his habitual self-control and due caution. Just the opposite of what Dolly had been told, Repton unexpectedly feels all right, as his health is excellent. The sharp contrast between the able, honest Repton and the incapable, helpless Demaine is apparent at the end of the novel.

In a parliamentary session, Demaine must answer a question in Question Time as one necessary condition to demonstrate he is qualified for his new post of Warden of the Court of Dowry. Demaine is unable to answer the question whose answer has been furnished for him by Mr Sorrel on a neatly typewritten sheet, a text Demaine has just learned by heart. Following Demaine's useless and wobbly answer – he gives no answer at all, actually – a backbencher booms in protest against the Government's outrageous failure to explain the reasons for the sinking of the ship that should have been the central matter everybody was expecting to be explained in Demaine's disastrous intervention.

Immediately after Demaine's failure, Repton makes a speech to defend the honour of the few members of the House of Commons who are really worthy of their posts. His speech goes on by reviewing the poor capabilities of most of the members of the House of Lords, and he blames them for the current state of affairs since scarcely

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5% of the Members own their peerage due to real merit, hard work, or outstanding qualification. Repton says all the rest have been appointed for unworthy reasons, mainly because of hereditary right, kinship, friendship, or external influence. He bravely declares falsehood has been thrown on those who obtained their posts because of personal merit.

Honest Repton is deservedly promoted to the House of Lords, while helpless Demaine is appointed the new Warden of the Court of Dowry owing to Mary Smith's surreptitious peddling of political favours and cunning Machiavellian manoeuvres.

Appendix #4

Pongo and The Bull (1910)

The title of the novel is both metaphorical and ironical. By sheer chance Pongo (Mr Pennybunt), the Leader of the Opposition, sees a bullfight in Tarascon (France) when he is looking for an American financier who can help the current British government to obtain an essential loan for the British Empire to better Indian living conditions. Pongo is not very impressed by this bullfight that is the first he has seen in his life since he finds it a bit disappointing. Yet these facts are premonitory of a future transcendental event since at the end of the story a new incident with a bull prevents Pongo from reaching the Parliament in time for the crucial session on the Indian loan because he is attacked by that fierce animal while walking through the country and has to take refuge in a shade for too many hours. Such delay will precipitate events and is part of the fate on Pongo's political future. The novel transforms this apparently dull incident into a metaphor of the unexpected turns in political life.

Dolly is Prime Minister of Britain in 1925. He is 66 years old and is happily married to a wealthy woman, thirty years younger, Margaret De Villon, "Peggy," who is almost the adopted daughter of the Duke of Battersea (the ineffably crafty Mr Barnett of the three previous novels) and the bosom friend of Victoria Mosel. Predictably, Mary Smith is Margaret De Villon's confidant. Margaret De Villon is the daughter of a French nobleman who naturalised forty years ago, when she was just a baby. The Duke of Battersea has now become the most respected of British financiers. He is Lord Lambeth, a title he has held since the beginning of the century, although currently people call him Peabody Yid (the alert Jew). He is Mary Smith constant and firm friend. Aunt Rebecca is the Duchess of Battersea. Dolly's late marriage forbade slanderous tongues to say that Peggy had made her husband. Mary Smith acted as a matchmaker, as she decided it was about time Dolly should marry Peggy. Peggy trusted Mary's political judgement more thoroughly than her husband did.

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Mr Pennybunt is the Leader of the Opposition whom people call Pongo. Young Ludlow is his chief Whip. Dolly and Pongo are discussing about the famine and a very violent outbreak in India just strolling down the avenue at Habberton, an invented village in Somersetshire. G. Quinlan Smith is a very aged and important American banker who is exceedingly rich and the uncle of Mary Smith's dead American husband. Yet Quinlan Smith is stone deaf. He is nearly seventy years old and loves to collect objects connected with the late Disraeli, once Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

In the elections of 1918, Peggy discovered the "Straights" (the Socialist party). The straight supported the National party that had a general programme of armament and of Imperial policy. Dolly was now Premier by their support. Peggy made the Straights the instrument of her husband's continued success.

Dolly is very welcome at the Duke of Battersea's. After long talk the duke secures the Indian Loan and the commission appertaining thereunto. The Duke of Battersea has an old usurer's heart that continues to be glad within him. Hesitating Dolly is angry because his country is being bullied by money-lenders like the Duke of Battersea. Mary Smith decides to help Dolly by speaking with her uncle, Quinlan Smith, about the Indian loan. Dolly phones Pongo to tell him Battersea will not work. Dolly does not want anybody to know about his regular encounters with Pongo so as to keep up appearances.

Three art thieves are in their annual tour in the south of France in September 1925. They steal some objects at the villa of Les Charmetes, not far from Nice, but later have a car accident. Les Charmettes belongs to the Duke of Battersea. The police arrest two of the thieves while one escapes.

Quinlan has been obsessed for a long time with finding an old silver teaspoon that belonged to Disraeli. Quinlan believes that this antique object is somewhere in France, so he is now travelling by the Riviera Express. As the train pulls out at Villefranche-sur-Mer (on the French Riviera) a stout woman shows him a little Rat-tailed English Silver Teaspoon, but Quinlan does not agree on the price. At Mentone, the lady gets off the train and Quinlan pops after her. The lady shows the inscription on

the spoon which proved Disraeli had used it when he once had tea at Les Charmettes. They both enter a house on the outskirts of the town.

Six gendarmes fall sprawling into the house and arrest them in the den. The stout woman turns out to be a man, Jean Jacques Bertot, the thief escaped at Les Charmettes, disguised as a woman. Both prisoners are put into Tarascon's prison. Once in the prison cell, Quinlan is about to sleep when he meets in a pocket the silver spoon which had been the true begetter of these vile adventures.

Meanwhile, Dolly desperately tries to find Quinlan since he is the ultimate guarantee of obtaining that badly needed loan. Mary Smith manages to discover Quinlan is in France. Dolly visits Pongo and tells him Quinlan is in the Riviera and must be found at once. Pongo immediately leaves for France to look for Quinlan. Quinlan is taken to the Juge d'Instruction of Tarascon and accused of facts that are thoroughly false, as he is supposed to be a different person from who he really is. Quinlan is not the thief who was disguised as a woman and tried to sell Disraeli's silver tea spoon, but a series of coincidences provide evidence against him.

Pongo is waiting for a train at the station of Tarascon and is bored since he has to remain in the station for three hours doing nothing. He sees a poster that announces a bullfight and goes there. He finds it a bit disappointing. While returning to the station he sees six men led by four policemen. Pongo recognizes Quinlan Smith among the prisoners. The cops arrest Pongo too for shouting at them claiming Quinlan should be free. When everybody realizes the full mess Pongo and Quinlan are immediately released.

Pongo and Quinlan take the train to Paris. Previously Quinlan manages to retrieve the silver spoon and is satisfied. Pongo thinks this the suitable moment to ask for the loan and Quinlan agrees. Everybody is going to meet for a party in cosy but historic Habberton. Dolly is worried about old Battersea, his fool of a wife, the Straights and the impending election. Mary Smith reassures Dolly. She advises Dolly to get up at the House and slang Pongo without mentioning other details that the House would not let him speak about, for example Pongo's short legs or about Pongo's father who was a dentist. Nevertheless, on a Sunday morning Dolly and Pongo arrange their programme

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very clearly, they agree on the plan at the House: they will pretend everything is happening by chance but everything is going to be planned beforehand.

The little railway station of Winckley is the station for Habberton. Mary Smith has a house there. Pongo is walking in the nice morning through Habberton wood and Longcombe to Winckley. A bull is looking at him with stupid ferocity and attacks him. Pongo takes refuge in a little shed and has to remain there for many hours so loses his train. Some rustics free Pongo from the bull and lead him to Mary Smith's. When Pongo finally reaches the Parliament, he is exhausted, miserable and unkempt.

Dolly wants to make his statement and insist that the government should have a free hand to do what it liked with the money, but his speech is a failure. After Dolly's two-hour speech, Mr Moss, from the Straights (socialists), takes his turn and sneeres nearly all the time. Moss claimed that at least half the money voted was to be allocated to relief works. When shabby Pongo appears after a very long delay only he and five MPs support Dolly. A deafening cheer announces Dolly's defeat. Pongo's political career is ruined.

A month later the general election gives a huge majority in Dolly's favour against the forecast and the new majority repudiates the relief works. The money theoretically supplied for the Indian Loan goes to military uses and the Duke of Battersea loses a good deal more money and eventually dies.

Appendix #5

The Girondin (1911)

The novel reflects the political atmosphere of the moment in which local revolutionary assemblies are afraid of the impending Austrian counter-revolutionary army under the Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel's command during the Revolutionary Wars. Jacobin committees pass resolutions to cope with the predictable foreign invasion that wants to crush the ongoing French revolutionary process. Any person suspected of loyalty to the *Ancien Régime* or simply royalist must be arrested at once.

The title of the novel comes from Georges Boutroux's region, the valley of the Gironde, the region of Bordeaux, "a military race," according to Belloc. Young Georges Boutroux does not identify himself with any of the republican factions, as he literally says: "I am neither with one set of the dogs nor with the other." His uncle, M. Boutroux, is a moderate citizen without any republican link who lives in the middle of the political Girondins, federalist republicans who belonged to the rich provincial bourgeoisie from coastal ports.

It is 8th August 1792. M. Boutroux is 68 years old. He is a wine merchant in Bordeaux. His nephew and only heir is Georges Boutroux who is 20 years old. M. Boutroux is a liberal of the Third Estate, for the King (as far as the king does his duty) who thinks his nephew, Georges, is connected with the local Jacobins. M. Boutroux is not a sanctimonious hypocritical, he reads Voltaire before going to bed. Kind Old Nicholas is the building porter.

The Republican attempt is becoming some kind of religion with traits of fanaticism. Georges and Miltiades walk to a political meeting. 300 men are already in the hall for a strict Jacobin Section's meeting which within two days is to raise Paris in arms to storm the palace and conquer the executive power throughout the whole country. Everybody agrees on a list of men to respond to the call, in case of necessity. Georges speaks up and tries to protect his uncle's house from a probable mob attack

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because revolutionaries think perhaps any Austrian plot is prepared at M. Boutroux's. Georges also gives a handful of dirty bank notes to the cause of the revolution.

A luxurious coach arrives at the square and their postilions are attacked by the mob, as the populace believe it must belong to any aristocrat. The two ladies inside are friends of George's aunt decayed gentry of Laborde, down the river. Their coach is respected and given free way. The President of the Section and a group of people go to M. Boutroux's and ask him a list of the people who had gathered at home all the day through. They warn him two sentinels will be at his door until next day. One of them is Miltiades. Later Georges tries to enter home, but Miltiades prevents it. Then, after a long dialogue, both men fight and Miltiades dies. The other hurt sentinel escapes. Old Nicholas helps injured Georges with food and gives him all his own money.

Georges escapes on a boat by crossing the Garone. His long flight will lead him to be conscripted by force into the revolutionary army and dies by an accident with an artillery cart going down a steep hill that falls over him and causes serious injuries. This circumstance is certainly a fatal coincidence. Unromantic reasons, not any heroic combat, kill Georges at the Battle of Valmy.

Thursday, 9th August 1792. An old peasant carries Georges on his oxen cart to the nearest village. The innkeeper says M. Boutroux's nephew was a spy, a man in pay of the Austrians. George's stealthily escapes and convinces an eighteen-year postilion to let him carry the post to Mirambeau by giving him 100 livres. It is raining while the coach passes Etaudiers. The passenger in the chaise complains when Georges is wrong at a junction. Georges pretends to be mad and speaks in a mixture of ghost and prophet's language to puzzle and frighten the lawyer who is certainly scared.

In the morning, Georges disappears into the wood with two horses and sets them free. He disguises himself as a charcoal burner by turning his clothes inside out and using ashes of a small fire to smear his face and hands. Isabel, an eighteen-year-old girl, asks him for a charcoal sack. George manages to steal the sack from a sleeping giant man. People call Isabel Joyeuse or Joïse as a nickname. Georges carries the sack to the girl of the small white farmhouse. There is a restrained affectionate dialogue between them who fall in love. Isabel conceals Georges in a little hut near the house for seven

days until she informs him several men from the village are hunting for a man. She takes him to a more secure spot.

Joyeuse tells Georges she has a place of safety for him and a plan, but right then her eyes are filled with tears. They reach a house and a “too neat” woman called Perrin opens the door. Joyeuse is her foster-daughter. Georges washes, shaves and wears some new clothes in the house, although Joyeuse suddenly disappears. Even if Georges is despaired he must go with that woman’s son or find himself a prisoner since he has no other alternative because that lady knows Georges is going to be arrested by Jacobin militiamen. Mme Perrin traps unsuspecting Georges who is acting in good faith and cunningly forces him to enrol in the revolutionary army instead of her son. A rustic drives a cart with George on it and says his name is “Perrin.” The military patrol they reach accept Georges as “Perrin.” The sergeant does not mind at all who is the man they have got because he does not care about the recruit’s real name.

Georges is classified as a cavalry man, a hussar. A politician from Paris is the new military commander. As many military chiefs escaped the politician rearranges all military ranks as he wishes. Generally, each rank steps up a notch. Georges former sergeant nominates Perrin (Georges) a sergeant. The sergeant is now a lieutenant, lieutenant Hammard, and so on. Georges immediately realizes everything is a complete disaster because the army is trained awkwardly fast. The account is realistic enough: the French army is badly instructed, poorly equipped, starving and many times on the brink of rebellion. Ill soldiers are abandoned, deserters are frequent and there is dirt all around. Some men fall dead, a man hides himself in a side lane in the hope of escaping what was to come. Civilians hate the army.

On coming back to barracks, a police official and his legal secretary are waiting for Georges. They ask him if he is from Chiersac, as they are on the track of a common murder who murdered Miltiades and escaped through that district. Could sergeant Perrin inform the police? Georges tells them he knows a witness who can inform them much better and describes a man from Blaye, the old man of the ox-cart who betrayed him. Before sleeping, Georges says to himself: “God knows I have never hurt any that acted justly by me.”

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Sergeant Georges and another four soldiers are ordered to requisition five horses from The Spinster de La Roche. The fact occupies the full chapter eighteen. It is a surprising story full of realism with a scent of romanticism and philosophical insight on the true nature of things, the moments of fleeting happiness, ephemeral passionate love, uncertain glory, tenuous vanity and ruthless brevity of live. The dialogue between young soldier Georges and the wise woman contains soft maternal reminiscences on the lady's part and Georges' respectful remote admiration for the mature woman. The lady regrets the absurdity of war and useless sacrifice of young men for dubious revolutionary ideas. Georges leaves the farm in pensive mood.

It is September. The cavalry detachment reaches Orleans and Chateaufort. They are told Verdun had fallen. The regiment goes eastward. Less than 700 sabres arrive at St. Didier. Boutroux loves his horse, Pascal, and feels sorry for him. The cavalry wants to join Kellermann's army at Vitry. They go across Longchamp and join the "twenty thousand and more which Kellermann was leading to join Dumouriez." They reach Dommartin.

The book is memorable for many aspects, but especially because of the realistic description of battle scenes at the end of the story. For an hour, there is a furious cannonade. Another violent cannonade follows while the infantry and the hussars form into a column. They take shelter to the leeward of a great windmill. Georges Boutroux finds everything incomprehensible. At about five the slow dropping of the cannonade becomes more and more marked until it fades away. A bugler, a little drummer and a soldier from a horse proclaim it has been a great victory and there is a Republic. Exhausted soldiers bemusedly realise the new Republic does not change things much, because paradoxically thirsty soldiers cannot have the wine they easily got when the Republic had not arrived yet.

Georges Boutroux has lost the medal Joyeuse gave him, a fact that brings some bad omen. A battery is ungoverned and runs down a steep street. Boutroux old horse, Pascal, and part of the smashed cannon cart fall on his leg and groin. Georges Boutroux is seriously injured. He is taken to hospital and the doctor who comes to see his injury thinks nothing can be done. Boutroux suffers from his terrible pain, unable to speak to

anybody, as he is surrounded by injured and dead soldiers. The attendant provides him with an opiate draught. Full of pain and distress, Georges asks to see a priest. After delayed silences and some few words to ask about the weather Georges dies.

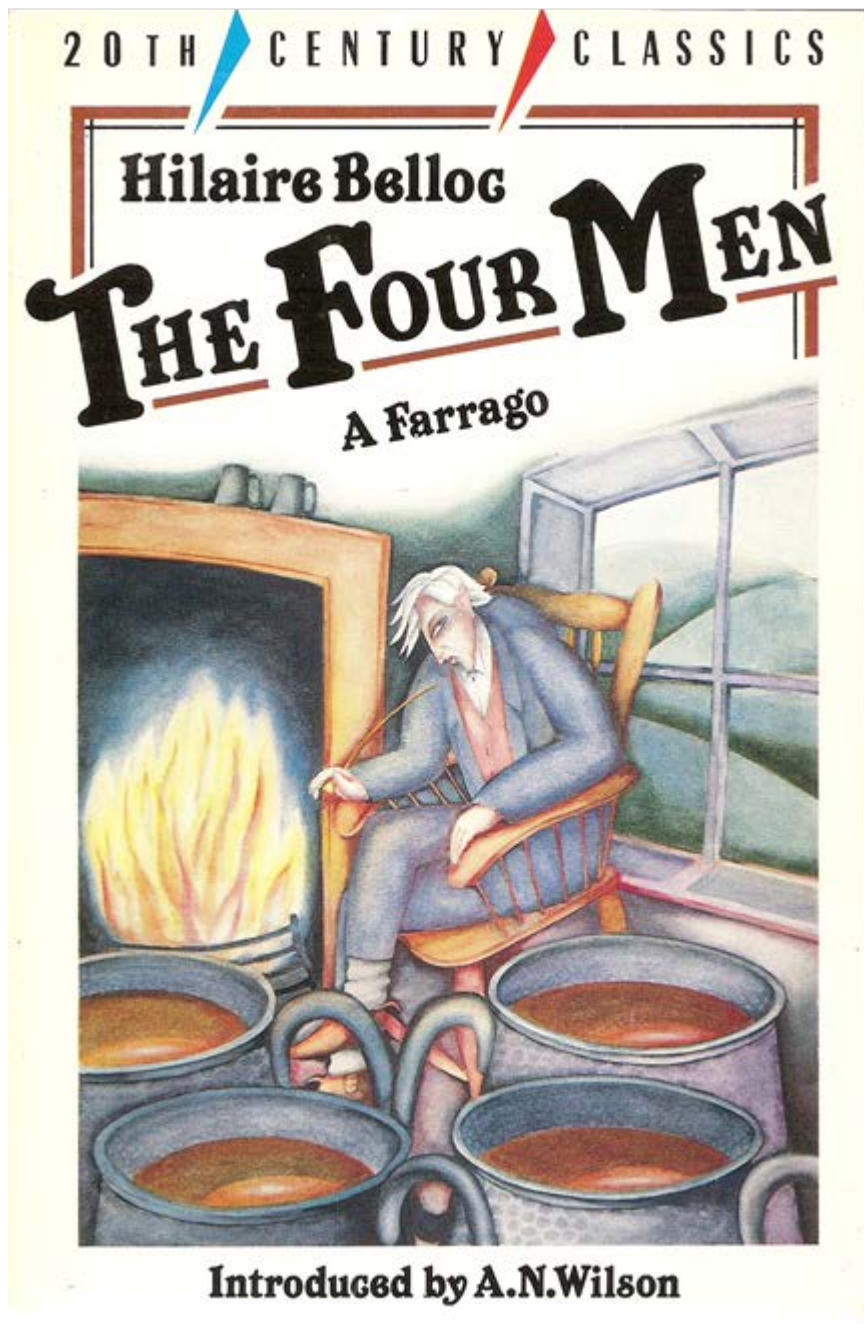


Fig. 16. Front cover. Hilaire Belloc. *The Four Men: A Farrago* 1911 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984)

Appendix #6

The Four Men: A Farrago (1911)

The narration is told by Myself, an omniscient storyteller who is not the author himself. Another character, Grizzlebeard certainly is more similar to Belloc's temperament. The Preface is dedicated to "Dear Sussex." The book begins on the evening of 29th October 1902 and finishes on 2nd November 1902, so it covers five days. The author frequently describes the four men's journey as a spiritual activity that is soaked in some peculiar atmosphere of respect, as if it was a sacred course of action reminiscent of Catholic connotations. He presents nature, certain actions and geographic locations as elements that assume a sacramental character, hence their sanctifying function. However, the serious tone is combined with long walks, entertaining conversation, animated songs, frequently remembering local legends and traditional anecdotes around pints of beer and frugal food that fortify cheerful friendship.

30th October 1902. The protagonist wants to travel by quoting Homer. He longs as he journeys to see once more the smoke going up from his own land, and after that to die. He likes to see the sight of his own country that is the most blessed thing in this world because there is nothing else that remains.

As he is sitting in the "George" at Robertsbridge a companion appears whom he decides to call Grizzlebeard. The protagonist also chooses his own name, Myself. They decide to take the road westward to reach the valley of Arun together and gather any company they could find. The Sailor joins when they pass Brightling village. They observe there are two remarkable things in Sussex, the spaniel and the sheep. Soon they meet the Poet who joins them because they are going to the place where the sun goes down and they could discover what makes it so glorious. The four men reach Heathfield in which they listen to the legend of St. Dunstan who defeated the Devil with the tongs which that saint bishop pulled all hot from the forge fire.

They arrive at Irkfield and pass Fletching. They go into the wood till they find a little hut that the Sailor opens with his own key. When Myself asks how the Sailor

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managed to have a key to the door the Sailor's answer is simply: "Why not?" In the novel things happen without logical explanations or just through mythical paths. For example, "a troll ensnared by a fairy" is the reason why the Sailor has tea, sugar, milk and bread for free. The Sailor adds that man usually starts racing, careering, bounding and flying with the Money-Devil after him. Myself affirms men's great felicity seems to be the doing and undoing of any task whatsoever, for example "the digging of holes and the filling of them up again." At the end of such conversation they fall asleep.

31st October 1902. They pass a stream, The Mole, and reach Tilgate and Pease Pottage. Myself tells St. Leonard's legend. Later they go along Shelley Plain while Myself supplies a mythical explanation for Sussex geographical names: the reason is that Adam and Eve inhabited in their regained Paradise which was precisely placed in Sussex. So, they created names of a sort that should give fools to think, because they invented names that meant just the opposite of what they described.

The Sailor sings a song which is still native to this land. Grizzlebeard says singing was forbidden nearly everywhere and provides an exaggeratedly amusing description of the punishments for singing. The Sailor sings a song on the Pelagian Heresy and the other three join in the chorus while half the inhabitants of that hill are standing around. The sailor makes a speech and leaves five shillings upon the table so as the crowd may have their beer.

They go on southward towards Henfield. Grizzlebeard reminds them it was All Halloween. Then he tells about the legends about little people who dance this night in the meadows and undergrowth. At Henley, they ask the mistress of the inn to fry bacon and supply bread and ale for the four of them. Grizzlebeard and Myself discuss about the ultimate purpose of the existence of animals. Myself leads the men to his little house not a mile across the water-meadows in which Myself lits a fire in the chimney and everybody becomes optimistic and lively. They eat bread and cheese and drink Steyning ale. When Myself's companions are sleeping, he goes out to contemplate nature: the moon stands over Chanctonbury, the stars are brilliant and the river Adur slips at low tide towards the sea. Finally, Myself goes to bed and sleep comes at last to him too, but because it is All Halloween dead friends visit him in dreams.

1st November 1902. It is All-Hallows and the four men go south. They go into the town of Steyning, enter an inn and have cold meat and ale in the smoking room where they meet a scraggy person, a being of an unpleasant sort. The four men begin to talk about what being rich is like and the things they could do if they were wealthy. The strange fellow pretends to listen to them with a nasty face and sometimes asks a question in a low metallic voice full of dirty satisfaction. That hunchback gives the Sailor his own card that reads: “Mr Deusipsenotavit, / Brook’s.”

On the way, they comment on an old rhyme: “Buried on Monday, buried for health, / Buried on Tuesday, buried for wealth; ...” Myself considers Grizzlebeard a true believer. It stops raining and they go along the road under Chanctonbury. While walking, they talk of all those things men talk of, “because men were made for speech and for companionship.”

They arrive at Washington Inn and the Sailor is very satisfied with the good quality of the ale there, which is a suitable occasion to make a speech in which he mentions Alexander the Great, Charlemagne, St Offa of Swinestead in Mercia, Orlando, Gastos, Clemens, Artaxerxes, Paulus, Ramon, Praxiteles, Zeno, Periscopolos and many others, along with some philosophical schools like the Epicurean, the Stoic and the Hegelian. Grizzlebeard wants Myself to go on telling the story of Cadwalla, the first king of Sussex to learn the true faith, the leader who conquered and annexed the Isle of Wight.

The author likes to include anacronisms and witty interpolated stories that supply funny situations. Grizzlebeard tells “Golier” is the tune to which all Sussex songs have been set since the beginning of time. He enjoys singing such tune to tell how Kentish men usurped Sussex Royal Hymn so the King of Sussex sent a letter of complaint to the King of Kent. Grizzlebeard is delighted to tell the account of “The Battle of Battle”. He does so in a boastful and sly tone that spices and pervades one of the most humorous episode in the novel: “Sussex men brought ash-plants with them (...) and were still tying up their shoe-laces at the bridge or arguing with the little old man in green corduroy who kept the level-crossing over the railway.” Paradoxically the Poet is more realistic, as he asks twice for clarification: “I should like to hear the

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Kentish version of this tale. (...) It is possible the men of Kent would tell a different story!”

They go to Storrington and enter an inn, The White Horse. A tall gentleman, Master Battie of the Kennels, a nephew of Sir John Fowler, has been hunting the fox and eager to talk. He tells them about his adventures with a courageous red horse, a rebellious and fast animal. Then the four men take the Amberley road, they long for the River Arun Valley. When they reach the spot, they look at the river a little while and bless it. They pass the great chalk pit to the railway and come into the Bridge Inn which lies just on the side of the crossing of Arun. They enter Mr Duke’s parlour at the Bridge Inn and they tell in turn the story of the first love each of them had.

They arrive at Houghton and go down the sharp dip of Bignor, and up the sharp bank of Sutton. The Poet and the Sailor argue about the qualities and adequacy of their own versifying abilities. They reach the Cricketers’ Arms and Myself tells the full story about what the great Judge Mr Justice Honeybubble said and did when he harangued men of Ducton in the Cricketers’ Arms twenty years before, when Myself was a boy. Myself has his beer free because he is the storyteller as it is the custom of the County.

They go along the road about two miles and find another inn. Grizzlebeard argues about philosophical concepts with a stranger, a measly sort of fellow in a cloak. They talk about dichotomies, teleological, ontological, time as a process or as a dimension, and Monism. To finish such dull conversation, the Sailor invites the other two to continue their walk, as when men are at these matters they chain themselves down for hours.

The author refers to a traditional Catholic saying uttered and expanded by the Sailor’s mouth. He says there are several kinds of baptism and finishes in an amusing allusion to beer: there are four kinds of baptism, by water, by blood, by desire and the fourth kind is of beer. Grizzlebeard, the Sailor and Myself seem to be learned Catholics as they can discuss about Synods, Decisions of the Holy Office, Oecumenical Councils and the Councils of Nicea, Constance and Trent.

The Sailor tells the story of Peter the Politician, an account of how a man tried to sell his soul to the Devil but finally he did not, because the Head Devil could not offer a definite price due to the circumstances of the market.

The four men want to make a feast before separating when they come to the Hampshire border. They have an excellent meal and they are all “contented and filled.” After the meal, they fill their pipes, drink and sing “Golier.” Night comes and the four men sleep on the room floor before the fire.

2nd November 1902. Grizzlebeard is considered the leader of the group during the last days leads them to Treyford, then they take the lane through Redlands and go up to the hill of Elstead. They reach Harting. Grizzlebeard invites them to go home because he adds “the journey is done.” He also means Death, although he uses a roundabout expression “those permanent things (...) the harbours of our glittering and pleasant but dangerous and wholly changeful sea.” Myself sees the three men disappear in the mist. As Myself in solitude goes on walking in the grove above Lavington, he thinks “Youth was gone out apart; it was loved and regretted, and therefore no longer possessed.” Myself remembers it is the Day of the Dead. He puts pencil upon paper and writes a poem about how a man is part of and is rooted in one steadfast piece of earth and, in this way, he can live after death.

“Full of these thoughts and greatly relieved by their metrical expression, I went through the gathering darkness, southward across the Downs to my home.”

Appendix #7

The Green Overcoat (1912)

This is the story about the vicissitudes an overcoat had to endure. It was the leading thread that caused the main confusion. A bashful don, Higginson, is mistaken as Brassington, a wealthy man. Two felons, Jimmy and Melba, want to cash Brassington's son fifth gambling debt. Brassington is fed up of paying his son's debts and refuse to pay again. Jimmy and Melba kidnap Higginson, although the don manages to free himself and invents a story that is the outcome of his unwise pedantry and that will discredit him in the end. The novel ranges from Monday 2nd of May to Wednesday 11th of May of a not mentioned year.

Professor Higginson is a psychologist attached to the Guelph University in the town of Ormeston. He is a tall thin shy nervous bachelor. He is 57 years old. Ormeston is an imagined prosperous industrial town in the Midlands. There is a row of eighteen century buildings representing its first mercantile fortunes. Nevertheless, the first division between the rich and the poor had begun to show itself four generations before.

Higginson is at Sir John Perkin's party on Monday, 2nd of May. When she decides to leave, it is raining heavily. He cannot find his coat in the hall so he inadvertently takes another one that happens to be Mr Brassington's Green Coat. Two felons, Jimmy (James McAuley) and Melba, kidnap him and take him into an old country house. They actually think the don is Mr Brassington and want to force him to sign a cheque so as to recover the gambling debt of his son, Algernon. Both are students at Cambridge University. Jimmy's father is Sir Alexander McAuley, the renowned doctor in London.

Algernon is forty-seven, and has finished his degree at Cambridge, but he remains there because he is good at rowing. He was taken in by Jimmy and Melba and became addicted to gambling with them. Brassington considers Algernon has been wasting his time at Cambridge by leading a life of debauchery. John Brassington is an honest and wealthy leather dealer who has been Ormeston mayor, the same as his father.

After defending several good causes Brassington settled down for good into the Anti-Gambling groove.

Brassington and Kirby were also at John Perkin's party on 2nd of May talking and drinking port. Charles Kirby is a solicitor, a very patient man capable of listening to the same topic many times without losing his temper. Brassington tells Kirby repeatedly the story of his being resented due to the baronetcy grievance, since he had been promised many honours on the condition of paying £25,000. Kirby is a bachelor who is Brassington's best friend and a calm person completely devoid of superstition. On the contrary, Brassington likes to wear the same kind of overcoat as if it was a lucky charm so as each overcoat grows old it is regularly replaced by a new one of precisely the same cloth, dye and lined with the same expensive fur. When Brassington discovers the overcoat is gone he is deeply distressed, but Kirby tells he will investigate the matter and comforts him.

It is Thursday, 3rd May. Prisoner Higginson's arms are free because the two rascals want him to write down a true signature on the cheque book, as they considered the first one a fake. They have left him alone in the room that is his dungeon until the proper signature is provided. Higginson tries to find the rope knot, but it is out of reach. Fatigue makes Higginson to sleep for a while. When he wakes up he succeeds in breaking a window pane and uses a jagged piece that remained to saw the cords, although Jimmy and Melba appear again, make him sign the acknowledgment letter too and carry tied Higginson up three flights of stairs. They tell him they will let him go the moment the cheque is cleared. In the room, there is food, sherry and ginger-ale. They go away. After long nine hours Higginson can release himself from the cords, although a sturdy oak door is still locked up. He puts every piece of furniture he can find in a pile and climbs on top of them to open or break the glass of the skylight, although the scaffolding falls down and hurts him. Next day he attaches a chair to a long string of knotted sheets. After twenty times trying to smash the glass and hurting himself on the head by the chair repeated blows, he partially achieves his aim. Then he realises the great oaken door is standing ajar. He is a free man.

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Faint and bruised Higginson goes along the Midlands road northward until he can see the tall chimneys of Ormeston. When he has walked five miles he is exhausted of carrying the heavy Green Coat. He stops at a very neat shelter at the end of the electrical tramway line. He meets three men inside, two look like night-watchmen and the third looks an opportunistic destitute who has a broken nose. The three men use the word "Sir" at least eighteen times in the first three minutes of conversation. The bad [literally from the book] proletarian man with the broken nose promises Higginson to deliver the Green Coat to Lauderdale for half a crown. Lauderdale is Brassington's house at Crampton Park in Ormeston. Higginson tells the proletariat to say, if he is asked, the coat is from a certain "Mr Hitchenbrook of Cashington."

It is Thursday. Higginson lives in Quebec Street, in Ormeston. Passers-by are laughing at him, as they think he has been drinking or has gone out partying. His landlady scolds him a lot, as she is an experienced widow and there is a continuous string of lamentations and questionings. On top of it, two police officers come to investigate, as the University has moved the police on the professor's strange disappearance. Higginson tells he had been working very hard at the Bergson Society and has suffered from complete loss of memory. He feels ashamed and excuses himself to escape from the muddle; he leaves the room to wash himself.

Higginson goes on telling everybody such invented story, unfortunately every new question or detail requires more and more lies and he has to add the invented account of a strange vision. At University, everybody has heard one version or the other of Higginson's odd adventure. The Chaplain has already used Higginson's extravagant story to prepare his next Sunday sermon on the immortality of the soul. George Babcock is a malicious mocking researcher in a very bad mood, "a servant of the Devil." Long before 1890 Babcock's book had been ruined on the Continent, but currently he is a prestigious practising doctor in London. "An Atheist of course" who has made a lot of money. At present, he is the Head of the Medical School. Babcock phones a peer who owns *The Howl*, one of Hilaire Belloc's favourite invented newspapers. In the two Ormeston newspaper offices, either Conservative or Liberal, the leader writers are preparing articles on "Subliminal Consciousness and the Functions

Unco-ordinated by Self-Cognisant Co-ordination.” As a consequence, some vanity has arisen in Higginson, because he feels the approach of a little local fame that he eagerly longs for because he considers himself a worthy professor, even though he is really a stilted rather obscure provincial pedant.

Of course, the Socialist weekly paper publishes a note on the subject which despises Higginson for supporting the Bourgeois State, since that mentally slow guy is one of those so-called Christian who foolishly slanders others, although in such don’s slow-witted affirmations there is not a word of truth. Babcock phones to London once again, to the “Ancient Aristocracy of Britain” and to *The Howl*. On Friday, 6th May, this newspaper publishes a piece of news that, strangely enough, fits in Higginson’s reported vision.

On reading *The Howl*’s report Higginson feels sick. When he appears in front of his class every student seems to have read the newspaper and is aware of Higginson’s great adventure. Higginson has just finished his lecture when a timid girl asks an apparently innocent question that he interprets as a crafty innuendo on his recent adventure with underworld creatures. Ashamed Higginson tries to shun as fast as possible. Higginson can see a tinge of scorn in the faces of people in the street and feels uncomfortable, he is an embarrassed don.

All that Friday afternoon Higginson stays at home. On Saturday morning, 7th May, a vast pile of letters and the folded *The Howl* stand beside his plate. The newspaper main headline runs thus: “Professor Higginson Testifies to Supernatural Experiences. Recognition of the Dead.” Currently there are only three professors of psychology who have published books whereas Higginson has his own translated into several languages, a fact that gives him indescribable satisfaction feeling for he is a provincial man. Higginson has that curious mixture which makes this academic fellow the funny thing he is, since the enormity of his false pride jostles a very real silliness.

Babcock helps Higginson to sort out and answer some of the several piles of letters he has received and calls a shorthand writer too. Babcock only keeps the letters meaning money, offers to write, and one note with an American heading. There is also an invitation to make a speech which Babcock considers crucial. Higginson’s speech

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should take place at the Research Club, an institution that “makes men”, because all the plutocracy will attend the speech.

Meanwhile, the Man with the Broken Nose (the author transforms these adjectives into a proper noun) in his actions betrays the baseness of his moral standard. He seeks the house of a pawnshop-owner Jew, Mr Samuel (Sammy) Montague, Financer, whom he owes a great many debts. Sammy pays the Man with the Broken Nose one sovereign for the twenty-guinea Green Coat. Sammy Montague is old, short, humpbacked, greasy and with a long beard. Montague is an ancient crusading name, so the author inserts the scornful paradox of a crusading name belonging to a usurer Jew. Montague finds Brassington’s cheque-book in the Green Overcoat right-hand pocket, but he does not steal it from the coat, because Montague begins to be afraid of some curse and bad omen in this matter.

Two policemen are checking every house in the Ormeston slums to check everything is legally acquired. Police Ferguson sees some Montague’s bank notes inside an old book. He carefully takes down the number of each bank note. Ferguson tells Sammy Montague they are looking for Mr Brassington’s Green Overcoat. Montague was in prison thirty years before and Ferguson knows Montague does not want to be an inmate once again.

When the pair of cops leave Montague’s, he makes a bundle of the Green Overcoat and goes along the street until he reaches “The Pork Pie.” Montague gives James “the lounge” the bundle, as Montague is afraid something bad can happen to him if he keeps that garment with the cheque-book in its pocket. Montague has got rid of an accursed object and James may sell the bundle somewhere he likes to. James tries to sell the Green Overcoat to Lipsky, a Pole who is Montague’s son or cousin, depending on which are the bad tongues that supply the gossip. Lipsky does not want to buy the Green Overcoat, because he suspects that it is a stolen garment. Yet, on second thoughts, he accepts the bundle, although that night he cannot sleep because he is ill with fever. Monday passes. The early afternoon of Tuesday Lipsky hears a voice in his shop: it is the omniscient lawyer Mr Kirby (Mr Brassington’s best friend) who is asking for the Green Overcoat.

Mr Kirby's ample and increasing income proceeds mainly from successful investment through the firm Kirby and Blake. Kirby is devoid of avarice. Thurston is the clerk in charge of Kirby's office. Thurston announces Kirby Mr Postlethwaite wants to speak with him urgently. Postlethwaite displays the architect's plan for a house called Greystones (precisely the house Higginson was kidnapped in) and complains bitterly about Kirby's initial idea of letting it to James McAuley and his friend, Melba, for a month because, they said, they wanted to paint. Kirby advised Postlethwaite to rent the house as it had been empty and useless for a long time. Kirby accompanies Postlethwaite to see Greystone's poor state of disrepair after Jimmy and Melba's unwise initiative. Kirby picks up a scrap of paper on the floor: it is University paper with jotted notes that shows a Professor's memorandum.

Kirby likes this kind of imbroglio and amuses himself once more because he likes to work on loose ends. He slowly ponders and discovers the true events that happened at Greystones. Simultaneously Brassington discovers somebody has cashed his forged cheque for £2,000. He is suspicious of James McAuley because James had written Brassington previously a letter claiming Algernon's gambling debt.

Higginson realizes he has lost that scrap of paper with the memorandum he had taken down at the University Senate meeting. When he returns to Greystones the caretaker prevents him from further inspecting the house and tells him that Kirby is in charge of the house. When troubled Higginson goes to Kirby and Blake's office there is an amusing conversation between wobbly Higginson and shrewd Kirby. Sly Kirby knows all the tricks. After a long conversation in which Higginson tries to describe the house without giving himself away Kirby invites him to a dinner at Rockingham.

On Tuesday morning, 10th May, Kirby is sure Montague knows everything about the Green Overcoat, although Montague pretends not to know anything at all. Kirby goes to Lipsky's shop but he is not there since he is ill. On hearing Kirby's voice, he immediately rises and tells Kirby the Green Coat will be sent to him that very afternoon with no delay. Jimmy and Melba are entertaining Algernon at a dinner in a private room at Botler's, in a little street off Regent Street. It is enormously expensive, but the food is excellent. The three men are drunk, but suddenly Jimmy is wanted at the

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telephone. It is Mr Kirby's voice that orders him to take the midnight train to Ormeston since they are going to meet at the railway station to talk about that house, Greystones, Jimmy had hired. Jimmy's mood changes into panic.

Kirby is standing at midnight upon the arrival platform of the great station at Ormeston. Kirby tells him the bank discovered the cheque was just a forgery and that he and Melba have to pay for the mess they both caused at Greystones or Senior Mr Brassington will denounce them and a writ will be waiting for him at home. Kirby invites Jimmy to a dinner in London.

It is Wednesday, 5 o'clock in the afternoon at the Research Club. The audience is formed by Cabinet Ministers, fine ladies, actresses, money-lenders, black-mailers, courtesans and touts. As Higginson begins his lecture he sees Jim McAuley in the audience. Frightened Higginson escapes from the lecture room at full speed and a tremendous row follows. Jimmy manages to take Higginson to the Rockingham Hotel in which Jimmy reminds Higginson of his signing Brassington's cheque while Kirby appears.

Kirby makes the five men join to have dinner: Brassington, his son Booby (or Algernon), Higginson, Jimmy McAuley and Melba. Before dinner they all go into Kirby's private sitting-room. It is raining while Kirby introduces the topic of the lost Green Overcoat that is hanging upon a peg. Kirby informs Brassington that after his generous handout he will be in the Birthday Honours; Brassington has his Baronetcy at last. Higginson confesses why he had forged the cheque. Kirby convinces Brassington the money is irrecoverable and mentions the factors that can make him abandon any attempted legal suit against foolish Higginson. In exchange for his Baronetcy, Brassington should give £1,000 at the disposal of Professor Higginson for research work on "Subliminal Intimations of a Future Life." Nevertheless, Kirby makes clear the money will be never paid out, as it is only the suitable excuse for Brassington's Baronetcy. Higginson accepts it humbly. Fatuous Professor Higginson is compelled for many years to review the wildest books about spooks and to lecture until he is as thin as a rail, often for nothing, upon the same subject.

Appendix #8
Mr Petre (1925)

It is the 3rd of April 1953. Two years have passed since a man had seen England for the last time. He is an Englishman in American clothes, speaking with an American accent and using American locutions. Passports for Englishmen landing in England had been abolished in 1933. He has gone to America to control his investment in land which has not turned out too brilliant. This man cannot remember he has arrived on a boat train from Plymouth, but he takes the train for London without any problem.

The man has just lost his memory completely. Such amnesia will originate the central tension in the novel. Because of a strange series of coincidences and capers, Mr Peter Blagden of Harrington, an ordinary, poor gentleman, is believed to be the American motor-car magnate, Mr John Kosciusko Petre, and becomes a millionaire *malgré lui*. The bewildered man who landed from America with £63, after six crazy months in the financial market, is the owner of £3,273,764 6s. 2d. The string of stupid misunderstandings which the novel provides cause such ordinary man, Peter Blagden, to become an immensely rich successful investor in the market overnight. In spite of himself, he is on one good thing after another

The novel is a clever construct about the art of racket exposure. The book describes the working of the modern financial system (in 1913) in which a fortune can be reached out of nothing by tape, telephone and the magic of an allegedly tycoon's name. The novel has the virtues of pungent theme and swift movement since it tells quite simply the personal adventure of Peter Blagden, a man who inexplicably loses his memory, although paradoxically fate rewards him with a large lump sum of money.

The desk clerk at The Splendide Hotel writes his name as Mr John K. Petre by mistake and in this way, confusion begins. From that moment on the amnesic newcomer feels compelled to behave like other people expect from a certain "Mr Petre." Of course, he is afraid of the questions people can ask him and how he should answer them. Arthur and Batterby are two journalists who begin to follow this supposedly rich man. Arthur

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phones Celia Cyril who in turn phones "Mr Petre" and is very thankful because he had been so good to Leoanrd, her dear husband, when he was in the States. As the novel progresses the reader is aware of the respect everybody has for Mr Petre since they know his fortune is fifty million pounds.

At Celia Cyril's social gathering Marjorie Kayle is present as well as Charlie Terrard, a stockbroker without guile. The conversation goes on to Touaregs, some assets at the Stock Exchange. Charles Terrard asks Mr Petre what he thinks of them and hesitant Petre answers he shall buy. Right then everybody runs to the nearest phone to buy Touaregs. Terrified Mr Petre escapes to the peace of Hampshire countryside. From his hiding place, Mr Petre sees on the newspaper "Blazing Touaregs" about how these shares are soaring up very fast. He does some serious research in *Who's Who* and London telephone directory but cannot make clear who the real Petre was.

Distressed Mr Petre has little choice but to accept that either he must recover his past by clues and inferences from witnesses or else live on a few weeks to the end of his money, and then what can he do? *The Messenger* is the Duke's newspaper, his instrument of power. The Duke knows Mr John K. Petre is in London, so he calls Batterby and asks him why he has not informed of the news and dismisses Batterby. Yey a benefactor of Batterby arranges his meeting with Sir. Jeremiah Walton, the great editor. The Duke's secretary informs him about how J.K. Petre faces his competitor, the *Chicago Judge* for opening its mouth too wide.

John Charlbury is the partner of Charles Terrard in the firm of Blake and Balke. Charlbury is also Justice of the Peace. He wants to sell The Paddenham Site, a piece of land in the heart of London, to Petre for £800,000. Charlbury and Terrard will earn a commision from this selling. A certain minor official of the Education Department dreams about what Elementary Education lacks, especially in London, is a Central Physical and Civic Training Ground and Development Premises. Lady Gwryth and her sister have taken it up with all their might. As a result of all this the current prize of The Paddenham Site is £2,000,000. The Education Department buys it on 17th of May and Mr Petre earns £1,032,405 in the business.

Charles Terrard finds rooms in the Temple for Mr Petre under the convenient name of Henry Patten. The Branch Bank manager suggests Mr Petre investing in the Magna Development Scheme. He refuses to participate in any further operation and hastily goes away. Mr Petre does not pay attention to his revenues because he is actually fed up with everything related to money.

Henry Trefusis and his brother are the first who make the “Rotor” commercially rewarding. Both of them are sons of a Hamburg merchant but currently they are established in England. In the novel, the “Rotor” is applied to a variety of sophisticated engines that can move elevators, railway engines, heavy vehicles or large merchant vessels. Trefusis tries to settle up a public charter and a concealed, but effective, monopoly, the British Amalgamated Rotors (B.A.R.). Charlbury makes Terrard convince Petre of facing Trefusis to make him accept a joint-venture company. Pusillanimous Petre accepts and such trade agreement supplies him with an income of more than a million pounds. The inexplicable Petre leaves Trefusis completely free, because Petre never interferes and hardly appears.

Petre sees three doctors from the haughty Harley Street: Henry Brail who tells him he should see another doctor, Sir William Bland, who also redirects him to a new doctor, Sir Christopher Cayley. All in all, Mr Petre is fed up to the back teeth and deeply depressed. Just then, when he is slowly pacing St. James’s Street, he hears the familiar voice of his old friend Buffy Thompson who suddenly halts and cries: “Peter Blagden!” Right then “Mr Petre” recognizes his real name and his lifelong friend. Buffy leads Peter Blagden home. Peter Blagden sleeps for fourteen hours and slowly remembers everything his previous life had been.

The real American wealthy Mr Petre travels to Europe and, while reading a French newspaper, discovers there is an impostor who has been impersonating him and decides to press charges against him. The case is set down for the 20th October. Mr Justice Honeybubble is the judge and his verdict specifies that Mr John Kosciusko Petre cannot get any money out of Mr Blagden, and that Mr John K. Petre must bear the costs of the action. Enraged Mr Petre appeals to the House of Lords against the sentence, but after a long time the original judgment is sustained.

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At last, Peter Blagden feels freed from “the curse of money.” He runs down to Southampton and buys a boat since he wants to go off cruising with Buffy. Both of them sail into the Mediterranean spring.

Appendix #9

The Haunted House (1927)

This is a completely Edwardian novel both in the period it describes and the characters' peculiar behaviour. John Maple is beset with troubles in his failing personal life, as he battles his ambitious aunt, Hilda, who becomes the dubious heiress of John's father's former house. Some unfortunate events have caused John's momentary loss of his long-awaited legacy. Bo is John's crafty American girlfriend who will help him to recover Rackham, the family manor house.

August 1913. Rackham is a squire's house built approximately in 1627. Henry Maple is a widower with a child, John, who was born in 1900. Henry's money problems make the house and farming estate nearly bankrupt. William Maple is Henry's brother, he is a wealthy solicitor in London who married Hilda. John Maple's "Aunt Hilda" is a very ambitious woman who will be the main source of trouble. William's successive loans to Henry to keep the mansion and estate going are issued until William and Hilda decide to sell their house in London and move to Rackham. The couple convince destitute Henry to travel around the world with his son, John, to improve the boy's education. WWI keeps young John out of Rackham for five and a half years.

In 1916 Henry feels ill and on 2nd May 1918 he dies. John is the heir of the estate, although Hilda has the usufruct of the greater part as long as she lives. William Maple had left absolutely everything to her. Corton is still the old butler. Hilda has refurbished and modified Rackham to such a extent that all looks new, most abominably "aping agee." Hilda Maple re-baptises Rackham as Rackham Catchings. She invents the historical character of a certain Sir Harry Murtenshaw and calls him "The Ancestor." Hilda affirms The Ancestor is connected with Rackham Catchings as may be seen in a letter from the sixteenth century. She also tacks a ghost on to Sir Harry. John Maple looks at everything with disgust and decides to snatch back Rackham, his own estate. He is fed up with Hilda's nonsensical boastful attitude and delusions of grandeur, as she lives in a dream world of becoming socially important that will lead her to doom. The

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reason why Hilda has transformed Rackham into a bizarre mansion that is a hodgepodge of architectural and decorative styles is because she is fighting gambling debt and has lost everything except Rackham, the estate she desperately tries to sell to any affluent people.

John refuses to go to university and escapes to London to build his own life there. He is very sociable and gets in touch with everybody, either his father's acquaintances or Hilda's. Hamilcar Hellup is a wealthy American widower who is a very good friend of Hiram Jake. Hamilcar's daughter is Isabeau Hellup. John Maple meets Isabeau, "Bo," at Lady Pattle's and they fall in love. Hamilcar Hellup moves to England and Lady Pattle manages to make Hamilcar pay the Prime Minister for his peerage. Sharp Hilda tries to sell Rackham estate to affluent Hamilcar Hellup.

John Maple temporarily works as a super-cargo on a ship while he discovers he can ventriloquise. He signs a contract as the world-famed ventriloquist Lieutenant Allegri. John buys and trains two dogs to do tricks and all of them become "Don Heraldo de Madero and His Troupe of Performing Dogs." Bo suggests John to ventriloquise as a ghost once at Aunt Hilda's, as Hilda propagates the idea that The Ancestor brings about his own wandering ghost.

Lord Hambourne is an Oxford don who was a psychology expert during WWI. His students consider him a cad charlatan who is currently holding a Professorship of Psychology and is very proud of "his official quality of University Atheist." Hambourne repeatedly utters the words "Quate! Quate!" (perhaps meaning "Quite! Quite!") in a ridiculous pronunciation that looks like the cry of a tame duck. Lord Hambourne also works as a part-time journalist in Lord Toronto's newspaper *The Howl*. He comes to visit Hilda with Georges and Matilda so Hilda shows them around while commenting on The Ancestor's ghost. Bo and John shoot quick glances at each other meaning things are going well. They have a plan.

Georges Adolphus Huggins was born in a small street in 1860s. His father was a humble man who sold fruit and vegetables from a barrow. Huggins married Matilda and went on as a costermonger. Shrewd Huggins deposited other people's money, Goose Club's, in a bank and got an interest of £150. He won some more money by betting on

horse racing, then lent money at an interest rate (the profession of “private banking”) and became quite rich. He sold the humble barrow-stall, and the newly-rich couple moved to a small villa in the northern suburbs in which they changed their former appearance and customs to look like a well-to-do family. The Hugginses managed to enter the aristocracy and nobility, devising a way to have themselves called Lord and Lady Mere de Beurivage. Matilda, Georges Adolphus Huggins’s wife, transformed her name into Amatheia and became Lady Mere de Beurivage (even if many people call her “old Mother Bruvvish” because the nouveau riche couple pronounce “Beurivage” in this way). Of course, Amatheia is currently interested in buying Rackham too.

John Maple is now twenty-three and comes to Aunt Hilda’s for the weekend. John offers £20,000 for Rackham, but Hilda asks £60,000 so they argue about the matter and fail to agree. On a Sunday morning, Hilda accompanies Lord and Lady de Beurivage to church. They all want to receive the consolations of religion and consider this custom conveniently befitting of their new social status. Meanwhile, Bo and John begin the conjuration. Bo advises John to get Lord Mere de Beurivage to hear voices by using his ventriloquist skills. That afternoon John takes Lord Mere de Beurivage for a walk across the garden and makes him scared by telling the story of the ghost. Frightened Lord Mere de Beurivage hears the subdued word “house” in the thick rhododendrons.

Hilda and Lord Hellup become something more than just friends. She continuously pretends to care for her nephew’s, John Maple, financial future. The Mere de Beurivages consider they are wisely investing £60,000 in buying Rackham, Hilda’s Tudor country house, a timbered gem. At present, they own two million pounds. Simultaneously Mr Rupert de Vere of Jermyn Street is the private advancer who pesters Hilda to make her return his loans. Hilda dreads Mr Rupert’s persistent phone calls.

Little by little the frightened dwellers refer to *that* or *the thing* when they believe that they have heard some strange voice or seen any distant spectre. Yet they prefer to pass time playing bridge. Bo disguises John as a headless figure in a black cloak with the sword hilt sewn at the side. Georges Huggins, Lord Mere de Beurivage, is terribly shocked by the sudden appearance of the headless ghost; he lies in bed half-conscious

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and muttering. Busybody Lord Hambourne tells what he considers a real scoop on the phone to Carter, a serf from Lord Toronto, the owner of *The Howl*, that gossip sheet based on a hideous building off Fleet Street. Hilda makes her own phone calls to keep the press away, but it is too late and the spread news ruins the market for Rackham. An ambulance takes Georges Huggins to hospital, Amatheia shouts at Hilda in a terrible rage calling her profiteeress and blaming her for every wrong doing. Amatheia leaves for good.

Hilda admits guilt and sells the house to John at a very normal price. Lord Hellup finally stays by Hilda to offer some comfort to the desolate woman.

Appendix #10

But Soft: We Are Observed! (1928)

The American edition of this novel was entitled *Shadowed!* (1929). The novel is set in a futuristic scenario. At the beginning of the novel the author writes "...on a rather hot June day of the year 1979."

A new source of energy appears, *Eremin*. In the invented nation of West-Irania, south-west of the Caspian Sea, a fabulous deposit of Eremin was discovered in 1972. *Durandite* is another new fuel for engines, although it cannot be used commercially without the essential proportion of *Eremin*. Every western country tries to get hold of the world concession of *Eremin*. Richard Mallard, a simple Cuban English-speaking tourist is mistaken as the secret agent who knows everything about *Eremin* and the powerful person who can grant its concession.

William Mallard was an entrepreneur in Havana and had the mania of adopting on extreme old age a baby surreptitiously brought in from no one knew where. When William died, he left the boy all he had provided that some conditions were fulfilled. The will declared the boy had to be educated as an Englishman and could only get his inheritance at the age of twenty-five. Until that age he could not leave Cuba. When Richard Mallard is twenty-five, he takes the first steamer to New Orleans, then he goes to Birmingham, Richmond (a lost village of New Jersey), New York and lands on England. Several chaps, coordinated by the Distributing Centre in France (espionage headquarters) follow him on the ship he boards. Ethel Mudgson is the Distributing Agent for the M. Section (Mallard Section) the one organised by the Allied Governments to deal in this particular matter in which they pooled.

Henry Hardman is the Secretary of State for Home Affairs. Hardham's cousin is Mary Bullar, "the reigning Prime Minister." Lady Caroline Balcombe is the omniscient commanding Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Balcombe decides Palmer, an astute detective, will be in charge of meeting and watching Richard Mallard to speak to him about the Eremin concession. Palmer meets Mallard on a train and manages to make a

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list of the places Mallard tries to visit as a tourist in Britain. Balcombe proposes to arrest Mallard on some trivial ground and trusts Delisport, empire maker, newspaper owner and Marquis. In reaching Mallard, Delisport has to compete with cunning Angus Worsing of Glasgow and the Castle Glenaber.

Mrs Bullar is a strong, capable woman, hardly fifty, a most determined mouth, and steady, deciding eyes. Bullar orders Hardham either to interview Mallard or resign. After dinner, Hardham and Mallard have a private conversation in a small room. Hardham tries to ask him about the Eremin concession and the extent of his powers, although Mallard tells he does not understand anything at all. Hardham threatens Mallard the Government can exercise its full powers ruthlessly. Consequently, Mallard is frightened. Mary Bullar decides Plain Clothes Men will watch Mallard wherever he goes.

Lord Delisport manages to meet Mallard at The Titanic Hotel. After a very long fruitless talk, fed up Mallard does not provide any valuable piece of information. Delisport knows Mallard will travel to Scotland, so Delisport suspects that Mallard tries to make a deal with the Scots, but Mallard denies any connection with them. Sleuth A follows Mallard's travel. Mallard takes the 10.50 train from Euston to the Lakes, later he goes to the Highlands and comes back to Stratford-on-Avon as all tourists do. At Lancaster, Mallard stays in an inn, "The Black Horse" on the shores of Windermere. Mallard thinks nobody follows him, but he is wrong actually. Apart from Sleuth A, there is a certain Sleuth B who also follows Mallard. Sleuth B works for Angus Worsing, a remarkable share-shuffler who is on to *Eremin* too.

Mallard arrives at The Clan Tarroch Hotel. Sleuth B introduces Mallard to Angus Worsing who is old enough to be his father. Worsing asks Mallard if he is empowered to deal with the Concession of *Eremin* and if Mallard wants to sell the interests or lease them. Mallard, sick and tired of the whole affair, plays along with Worsing and pretends to be empowered to negotiate for the rights, although Mallard thinks all this business is referred to his own Cuban company, *El Pantano*. Worsing offers specific financial arrangements. Mallard travels to Glenaber, Worsing accompanies him in his magnificent car. Four sleuths run after Mallard.

Balmy Jane is the nickname of Arabella Slackett, a very lunatic woman who sticks to Mallard and is like a haunting nightmare upon him. Lord Delisport wants Mallard to sign a document by means of which Mallard settles the matter between Delisport and him. Mallard extricates himself from this mess, boards the train to Folkestone and arrives in Boulogne. However, the four sleuths appear again on the trail. Mallard is arrested by two French Gendarmes who sent him back to London.

Another supposed plenipotentiary suddenly appears, and The Red Brethren send a Delegate, the black-bearded man, to give him orders. Such Delegate has authority to offer the Concession for fifty years under an annual rental which he defines in sterling, payable on such and such dates into the Caspian Bank in the City of London. Caroline Balcombe is informed that West Irania's representative, the real man, has turned up and that Mallard is but a fool from Cuba, a modest bachelor tourist. Balcombe offers Mallard a compensation of £1,252 a year for life if he remains silent about "the Concession." Puzzled Mallard accepts.

Arabella Slackett is a born fanatic. Cannock of Cardiff is her protégé, an MP at the House of Commons. On 8th July 1979 at the house of Commons there is a fierce argument and row between Cannock of Cardiff and Mary Bullar. Cannock accuses the government of being unable to deal with the secret Envoy of West Irania in a suitable manner. Nonetheless, Mary Bullar's magnificent defence crushes Cannock. The novel finishes with Balmy Jane (Arabella Slackett's nickname) going on with one of her favourite obsessions, discovering where "the original Envoy of West Irania (or his murdered corpse) may lie concealed."

Appendix #11

Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age (1929)

In the village of Marlden, in a stately mansion, The Towers, by the River Avon, resides Sir Robert Montgomery, who is respected in the County of Wiltshire. Belinda is his eighteen-year-old daughter and is inspired by the precepts of the Established Church. Horatio Maltravers is twenty-three years old and the last descendant from a long line of squires. He lives in Halston House. The two properties, The Towers and Halston House were divided by the country road leading to Bath. Robert Montgomery is rich, Horatio Maltravers is not, because he is victim of the circumstances rather than of defect. Horatio is good at sports, can speak good French and has many other qualities. When Horatio and Belinda were young kids they played together and were very good friends.

Miss Hackman is Belinda's relative and companion of austere and resolute presence. Sir Robert gives a ball at home. Sir Hugh Portly, a man of excellent lineage has been selected for Belinda as her partner at the dance. Horatio also participates in the dance. That night Belinda dreams about Horatio.

Some days pass. Belinda and Horatio go for a walk and meet at a stream that separates both properties. They meet a woman who is looking for his Boy who wanders there with a bow and arrows "for his sport." The reader easily infers such Boy is Cupid. After such romantic encounter, Belinda and Horatio meet at this very spot every day.

Mr Carter is Sir Robert's steward. Sir Robert tells Belinda to marry one of the Montgomerys of Marlden, particularly Sir Henry Portly. By means of such prospective marriage Sir Robert is looking for Belinda's social promotion that will supply his daughter with richness. Sir Robert is enraged when Belinda tells him she loves Horatio, so Belinda faints. Miss Hackman tells Sir Robert she will call a gentlewoman, Curll, who resides in Bath, to take care of Belinda. Sir Robert tells Belinda he will accept Horatio as long as he enters a profession but forbids the lovers' daily encounters. Simultaneously, Sir Robert sends a letter to Sir Henry, Horatio's rival in the love affair, bringing Sir Henry the latest news about Belinda's infatuation with Horatio.

At the age of twenty-three, Henry inherited Molcombe Abbey. The sad reality was that all the property and house is now abandoned as security to men who act through Lawyer Fox, of Bath, who is actually the sole mortgagee of those vast estates and palatial residence. Sir Henry simply has a precarious personal allowance. Henry's father had the fatal imprudence to speculate on the Stock Exchange and lost his money. Belinda's ample dowry would reduce Sir Henry's debt to manageable proportions. When Henry receives Sir Robert's letter, he runs to ambitious Lawyer Fox and both men decide to transform that Lady Curll into their own agent. They give her a banknote as a bribe to prevent Belinda from any further encounter with Horatio and to snatch Belinda's letters to Horatio. Fox offers £25 in advance and £75 more if the mission is successfully fulfilled. Miss Curll intercepts Horatio's letters to Belinda.

Belinda is worried about not receiving any letter from Horatio. Simultaneously Horatio writes once more a message for Belinda, a terrible adieu. Heartbroken Horatio rides away on his horse "Crusader" on a very long journey. Horatio goes through Hampshire holdings, Sussex hamlets and Kentish garden till Dover where he leaves his horse to the innkeeper. He sets sail for Boulogne. Once there a carriage that is arriving by a cross-road is assaulted by six brigands. Horatio comes to help and attacks the assaulters with invincible vigour. The marquise in the carriage thanks him in English and invites Horatio to her Château to remain there until he could be healed of his wound. The marquise tells Horatio her name is "– de la Ferronnière," she is the widow of the late Marquis, although she is from English birth.

When Sir Robert Montgomery comes back home he finds his daughter far extenuated with a mysterious decline and hears her mumble the words "My Horatio." Sir Robert enquires if Miss Curll has intercepted correspondence between Mr Horatio Maltravers and Belinda. Miss Curll admits having done so. Sir Robert, who is also Justice of the Peace, tells Miss Curll to leave the house immediately and writes a letter both to Lawyer Fox and to Henry Portly. When Lawyer Fox receives the letter, he goes to Henry Portly's and they have a terrible argument in which both men strangle each other and die.

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Sir Robert takes Belinda to the Continent on a two or three-month journey that can restore his daughter's health. Miss Hackman and The Reverend Mr Caley accompany her. Once in Boulogne Sir Robert conducts the ladies to the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Belinda increasingly feels better. On the way to Montrool there is an accident with some of the coach horses. Sir Robert must go and ask for help to the nearest Château of Rosny, whose mistress is precisely the Marquise de la Ferronnière. One hot afternoon, when Horatio returns for dinner after riding out in the forest, Belinda hears his beloved voice. They meet and discover their letters had been intercepted. Sir Robert realises how mistaken he has been in formerly arranging an unwise marriage for Belinda.

Sir Robert and The Marquise prepare the bridal day for Horatio and Belinda. The Marquise has long determined to adopt Horatio and make him her heir, as The Marquise has no children. Sir Robert knows Esmeralda is the real name of The Marquise and remembers her, many years before, when they both had wandered together in the gardens of Esmeralda's mother's villa upon the Thames at Putney. Sir Robert Montgomery and Esmeralda felt mutually attracted when they were young. Although Esmeralda is living in France she is of English birth. Robert and Esmeralda act as godparents to the wedding of Horatio and Belinda that supplies the happy ending of the book.

Appendix #12

The Missing Masterpiece. A Novel (1929)

The story happens in the 1920s. A quite absurd cheap picture, due to perils and sheer chance, reaches an incredible career and finds refuge in the noblest of London's private collections. All through the novel, Bensington, one of the main characters, puts into practice his crafty illegal procedures to become a rich art dealer. He has each and every of his chums card-indexed and keeps a complete dossier of their movements and little adventures just in case he needs to bribe them into doing something they do not want to. Bensington is a master in the art of blackmailing. The author repeats this book is written for women, as he addresses a feminine reader twice. He does so perhaps to shock the readers, to indicate this is escapist fiction or simply to encourage further reading.

Henry Delgairn goes to Paris with his friend, John Pailey, to visit the old studio in which he lived and studied art when he was young. Delgairn is the squire of North Merton, a widower with two sons, Henry who is eighteen years old and John, twenty, who is a cripple. John can draw and paint very well, although he can only copy. Once in Paris, Delgairn visits the old studio in which Bourrot is the artist who lives and paints there. "La Mome Bouillote" is the girl at the feet of such allegedly great artist. Delgairn pays money to the rent collector to help poor and odd Bourrot. Grateful Bourrot gives Delgairn one of his pictures as a present. It is called "The Masterpiece" or "l'Âme Bourgeoisie." Some time later, by sheer chance, John Delgairn paints two replicas of this picture before dying at the end of the summer. His father, Henry, dies four years later.

Sir Henry Bensington is over fifty, but at twenty-three he began to deal with pictures. He has a shop in King Street, Mayfair. Bensington visits Bourrot in Paris, a painter who has become rich and famous in only twenty months, although he is very ill and about to die. Bensington tries to sell Bourrot's pictures unsuccessfully when by chance he hears about Delgairn's eldest son, John. After some Bensington's manoeuvres, young Mr Delgairn invites him to North Merton place. Young Delgairn

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has just thrown away £485 on a silly purchase so he desperately needs money. After visiting North Merton, Bensington offers £500 for Bourrot's Masterpiece and young Delgairn agrees.

As Bourrot is dying Bensington arranges some newspapers, *The Howl* and *The Roar*, to publish articles and one Bourrot's old photograph. Six other articles and essays on Bourrot are published so the British people are intoxicated with the name of this artist. All wealthy London and the parasites of Wealthy London are raving about "The Masterpiece." Verecundia is Lady Norbolt, she is immensely rich and offers £10,000 for "The Masterpiece." Hardham, Duque of Emonsillado, is a fly in Verecundia's ointment, but he hates her because he ought to have climbed into the London rich through her. Instead of that, Verecundia has thrust him off the ladder and he is justly embittered.

Bensington thinks a way of increasing "The Masterpiece's" price is to get it stolen so he commends this job to Chas Goatcher, Henry Bensington's personal agent and practically Bensington's jackal. Goatcher drinks a lot and, on his way to Bensington's errand visits three public houses. While he is absentminded and under the influence of alcohol, somebody takes the parcel that contained The Masterpiece from under his arm.

Little Ardee is Verecundia's protectress and Elless is another woman present in the house. Ardee and Elless love their Grannie who is also the Dowager. Elless belongs to the author's invented "The Second Church of Christ Psychic." Elless convinces Verecundia of her extraordinary psychic powers, as Elless believes Verecundia is able to foresee auction ultimate prices. The Duque of Emonsillado also wants The Masterpiece, but that low scoundrel, Hardham, writes Emonsillado to tell The Masterpiece has been stolen and that Verecundia wants The Masterpiece too. Emonsillado is very happy with this news. The newspapers cast the news of the theft of The Masterpiece. Chas Goatcher does not come to meet Bensington at the appointed time and runs away from his room at Munning's Rents.

Henry Bensington thinks it is all Delgairn's machination and sends two of his agents, Appleton and Ranford, to investigate the secret places at North Merton place. They bribe a handyman, Joe, to contract them as workers for the mansion. M. Henri

Caen and Signor Carlo Alessandria are two experts in pictures. Henri Caen knows “this theft-stunt in picture publicity is an old stale thing.” Caen takes the train to Whitchell Station, three miles from North Merton place while Signor Alessandria visits Harry Delgairn. Caen tells the maid at the inn he is coming to see a little French picture and offers her £100 so as she and his sister, Millie, who works in the mansion, manage to find the picture in any North Merton lumber room. Millie goes through the cupboards and finds two square parcels folded round with a yellowish piece of paper. The bundle is small and easily hidden under her coat. Caen takes the night train for Winchester just carrying the picture under his cape. When Caen is safely on the train, the carriage door opens suddenly and the Young Artist (a Bensington’s agent) jumps in. The Young Artist wants Caen to speak about his parcel, but Caen answers nothing. At Winschester they get off the train and Bensington’s agent immediately informs him he has got what Bensington was looking for. At the same time, Appleton and Ranford had sent a similar message on the phone. Consequently, there are two different messages confirming The Masterpiece has been found. Then the Young Artist leads Caen to Bensington’s office in King Street and argue about The Masterpiece, but Caen accepts Bensington’s conditions, since Bensington tells Caen his picture is not the original one but a poor replica. Caen accepts £500 for handing in the picture. Some time later the same scene is repeated with Signor Alessandria who accepts a £500 cheque.

Harry Delgairn entertains his guest, Signor Alessandria, and shows him around. Alessandria asks about where a short rise of oaken stairs lead and Harry answers they lead to a lumber room. Alessandria is intrigued and suspects the picture is concealed there. Harry offers to put up Alessandria and he accepts. At night, at one o’clock Alessandria tiptoes up to the long gallery. The handyman, who is really a Bensington’s agent, follows him at thirty feet. When Alessandria arrives home the handyman appears and proposes to make business on the picture. Both men carry pistols.

Bensington tries to solve the dilemma about which is the original picture, and which is the incredible duplicate. He makes a small hole into the top left-hand corner of the picture and another hole into the top right-hand corner of the other. He thinks such trick can serve as a reference point in the future. Mr Gabriel is a pensioner of Sir Henry

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Bensington and his faithful agent. Gabriel takes a parcel with a canvas to his small dingy shop in a by-street of Chelsea. Bensington thinks the bait is set, and there is nothing more to be done but to wait.

Two wastrels at the service of Bensington, Young Belter “Morning Coat” and Stocky Grahame “White Wainscoat” pace up and down Little Rodney Street till “Morning Coat” meets Duque of Emonsillado in the Bar of the Plantagenet Hotel. “Morning Coat” tells Emonsillado that Gabriel has found Bensington’s Bourrot. Emonsillado writes two documents, one is a receipt for the “*Âme Bourgeoise*” (The Masterpiece) canvas for three days and returnable to Mr Gabriel whenever he asks for it. The other is a note to Bensington telling him Emonsillado keeps the picture only for inspection purposes. Emonsillado offers £20,000 for it. Then Emonsillado offers also £2,000 to Gabriel to have the picture for three days. When Gabriel obtains the money and the two written documents he hands in the picture. Later on, Bensington congratulates Gabriel on his good work because Emonsillado has fallen in the trap.

Bensington tells Gabriel he wants to sell the remaining picture to a lady, as Emonsillado only wants the picture “to put poor Lady Norbolt’s (Verecundia) nose out of joint.” Bensington knows a lawsuit will follow and rehearses with Gabriel the version each of them is going to give on oath in Court. Emonsillado offers £20,000 to Bensington for the picture, but Bensington rejects the money and tells Emonsillado the picture he has is a worthless copy. Bensington writes Verecundia the Masterpiece has been recovered and he offers her such picture for £20,000. Verecundia buys it right then.

A lawsuit is brought: there is a claim for damages and a counter-claim. The case of Emonsillado vs. Norbolt (Verecundia), defendant counter-claiming. After prodigious delay the hearing is set down. Two renowned experts, Dr. Edward Mowlem and Sir Rory Hawlboy argue about Emonsillado’s picture authenticity. For some time, the battle hangs even. Then Mowlem had to recognise he had never set eyes on the original. Twenty-five years before Mowlem had already failed scandalously when he could not distinguish a counterfeit picture. Young Delgairn is unable to tell the difference between

both pictures when they are shown to him. The Jury's verdict is completely absurd, as they pass judgement both, Lady Norbolt and Emonsillado, are right.

Chas Goatcher discovers the picture he had lost when he was drunk at the snugger of a public house. He immediately phones Bensington to tell him the picture was at The Butcher's Arms. Bensington buys the picture for £15 and tries to sell it to Emonsillado, although he does not believe Goatcher's account. Bensington tells Lady Norbolt he has the original Bourrot's Masterpiece, recently found by Goatcher, and that hers is a copy made by Bourrot himself. Verecundia comes around and, after telling Bensington a number of home truths, pays £20,000 for the retrieved picture.

A social gathering is organised at Verecundia's palace to discern the authentic Masterpiece. Every important family is represented, including members of the Royalty. Vavassour is the one man in England to whose judgment universal opinion bows in all that concerns modern art. Vavassour, Dr Mowlem and Emonsillado shout their arguments and there is a big row and confusion. Caen and Alessandria look at the picture from a close-up distance and discover there are not any of the holes Bensington had made on the replicas some time before. Bensington has been crafty indeed.

In the Epilogue, Emonsillado takes his final revenge, as he sells his replica to Verecundia for £20,000. Verecundia feels relaxed at last since she has the three existing copies of The Masterpiece. In the Super-Epilogue, the author amusingly summarizes the plot and satirically explains why every character is happy at the end of the book.

Appendix #13

The Man Who Made Gold (1930)

Lexington leads a placid and uneventful life until he makes the mistake of discovering how lead can be turned into gold. A Mr Bowry volunteers to help him capitalize the discovery and this is the point of departure that precipitates events. Before Professor Lexington gets back to earth he has been a match seller on the streets of London, a third-rate actor in a minstrel show, an inmate of a charitable institution, and a plumber. This novel is a combination of insoluble mystery and mischievous humour, as it brings unending delight to readers accustomed to the author's characteristic mastery in blending laughter with this diabolic plot conveyed in an enigmatic story which tickles the reader's funny bone.

Professor Charles Lexington, M.A., is the reader in Electro-Chemistry, a Fellow and Tutor of St. Olaf's. He is thirty-five and an expert on the transmutation of metals. St. Olaf's is a well-known institution by Magistrates due to the poor psychological health of its students. Magistrates are accustomed to nervous breakdowns in their own families so they take conduct disorders for granted within academics. Magistrates have great respect for St. Olaf's, even though this college has more loonies and suicides than any other institution.

Lord Taylor is the Chairman, atheist, industrious, clear-headed and very conscientious about his works. Scientists think it is possible to produce gold at will, but Lord Taylor is afraid of the economic consequences of this industrial process and drives to London to persuade the authorities to act before the news of such discovery comes. Taylor has previously been the manager of the Manchester Branch and knows the dangers of price fluctuations, as too abundant gold will mean the chaotic plummeting of its price.

Henry Bolter is an undergraduate in his fourth year who is reading for a degree in Electro-Chemistry. He gives the impression of physical disease, so far has the misuse of some drug undermined him. The problem is Henry Bolter gets used to drinking some

sort of opiate and is slack in his work, but he never fails in the terminal examinations. By following the explanations of Wallenstein, Brozius and Helvetius about metal transmutation he succeeds in transforming a lump of lead into gold by using a crucible and little furnace of his invention. Henry Bolter performs this test in Lexington's presence. Bolter gives Lexington a small amount of the brown stuff that is the raw material for the transmutation. Bolter calls such raw material the "reagent." Once in the university laboratory, Lexington repeats the experiment on his own and it works. When Lexington returns to Bolter's rooms at the University lodgings he finds Henry Bolter is dead due to having his drug. Lexington repeats Bolter's experiment once again and it is successful too. Lexington obtains twenty-five ounces of gold. Lexington believes that he must do two things, first writing down exactly the proceeding to produce gold and, secondly "rely upon another man's advice for the first steps to be taken." That man is William Bowring.

William Bowring is near fifty and unmarried. He lives on the riverside at Hammersmith where he has a house. Bowring is a prosperous shopkeeper in Percy Street who deals in old furniture, glass and plate. There is good taste as well as good judgment in all his activities. The next week-end Lexington is dining alone with Bowring in the old house at Hammersmith. After dinner, Lexington tells Bowring he can make gold. Lexington reminds Bowring of the real feasibility of knocking one of the electrons out of a mercury atom and being able to produce a gold atom. Bowring puts forward the idea of forming some kind of society with Lexington in order to exploit the new business of making gold out of lead. Lexington proves the experiment successfully at Bowring's and both men agree on half shares in whatever they make since it will be a fifty-fifty business. At the end of the term, and with the beginning of the vacation, Lexington finds a bedroom in "Somerset or perhaps Wiltshire" with an electric fire that can allow him to plug for power; it is an inn on the main Great Western line. Lexington wants to increase this new source of income, as he wants more. Lexington and Bowring agree about increasing the gold production. Bowring knows two goldsmiths, Pelletier and Nowell who can take a perfect cast and make the least touches on it.

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However, little by little Lexington has a feeling of ill-ease and complaint in his mind. Lexington believed that his income ought to be much larger. When Lexington tells Bowring he should have two-thirds of the business, both men get enraged and there is a quarrel. Later on, while walking down the street in a bad mood, Lexington comes across Lord Taylor, the banker, who was one of his father's oldest friends. Taylor invites Lexington to have dinner at home. Taylor advises Lexington not to get mixed up with Bowring since Bowring is expanding and more stuff goes out of the shop than goes in; some people say he receives stolen goods. Lexington recognizes he is caught because he has no means of marketing to gold.

Lexington tries to analyse the brown stuff, the raw material, kept in his cylinder. When he is about to switch the Barlow Set testing machine there is a sudden explosion in a nearby wood that leaves him unconscious. Nothing remains from the precious brown material. Taylor decides to visit Bowring and insists on partnership in the gold business. Bowring pretends not to know anything at all, but disappointed Taylor says he does know Lexington has supplied Bowring with gold. Taylor informs the Home Secretary, Jack Mills, that Lexington and Bowring are making gold. Mills decides to arrest the culprit, Lexington, and keep all secret. Mills talks to Bowring and asks him to accept his nephew in Bowring's business, in this way Mills wants to keep some sort of spy in the gold business. As Bowring refuses to accept the boy Mills strikes back announcing the government is going to pass an Act making it a felony to make gold. Hammersham, who is Mills's secretary, has been observing everything from a distance.

Bowring discovers a waif, Mr, Cripps, hidden in an Italian coffer. The boy hid when he heard some noise and later tried to take something from Bowring's shop when the employee left for a moment. Bowring takes advantage of this incident and makes the waif learn by heart what happened in the conversation between Mills and Bowring. In this way Bowring obtains a full and clear piece of testimony by an aural witness in case of any future lawsuit.

Three important newspapers, *The Drum*, *The Trumpet* and *The Trombone* are opinion-mongers. Just reading *The Drum* Lexington realizes he can be arrested for producing gold. Frightened Lexington feels he is a marked man and decides to change

his identity through some transformation in clothes and look. In Wimbledon Common he dresses as a destitute but loses his money in this hurried transformation. When he walks along the Embankment a policeman scolds him. Lexington meets a pedlar and both enter Old David's, a doss-house. He pays with some coins a rich lady gave him. Next morning, they both go to a warehouse in Lambeth, and Lexington buys fifty matchboxes for two shillings. Late in the afternoon he has only received nine pence in coppers. Rev Arthur Bootle, a Christian priest, makes an encouraging sermon and at the same time offers Lexington an excellent meal, with no wine at all, only the purest water, and a clean bed. This was St. Dives' Hostel. Fed up with the strict regulations of such semi-military or monastic institution, Lexington steals a one-pound note Rev Arthur Bootle has left forgotten and escapes by climbing down the wall.

Charles Lexington accepts to replace a sick man in a band of four odd musicians who are disguised as black artists and he joins up with these buskers.¹ The morning passes all right, although when they go to have a meal at midday at the hostelry Lexington is forced to sing a solo which is a complete disaster and, as a consequence, a tremendous row follows. Two policemen approach so Lexington escapes and crosses part of the river, completely wet Lexington makes inland. There appears "a Noble Woman," the Duchess of Aberavon, who commends to Lexington the repair of some electric and plumbing troubles. He succeeds in mending several things, but suddenly a policeman comes to ask about some artful man who escaped from St. Dives' Hostel. Hurried Lexington escapes by using the wardrobe on the landing below and dresses as a lady. Lexington skirts Bolton St. Tomas, and reaches Pugginholt. He tries to phone Bowring and pay him to save himself, although while Lexington is telephoning in the Post Office, the Policemen and the Duchess's two stalwarts come into the building. The Policemen arrests Lexington. Next morning Bowring frees Lexington from the Magistrates and has breakfast with him in the "Aberavon Arms" at Pugginholt.

At Bowring's, five people gather: Lexington, the Waif, Jack Mills, Hammersham and Bowring. Bowring tells them Lexington has begun with a sort of

¹ In *The Man Who Made Gold*, Belloc uses the term "nigger minstrels." See *The Man Who Made Gold* (1930): 264.

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hallucination that he had found a way to make gold. Of course, politicians and bankers want to prevent anybody from succeeding in this enterprise. Bowring orders the Waif, Mr Crimps, to tell his own story. Mills surrenders after hearing the Waif's tale. Bowring produces a couple of typewritten sheets and brings forward a Bureau at Geneva to check the world production of gold, the *Bureau International pour le Contrôle de l'Or* (B.I.C.O).

Bowring proposes Lexington must have the laboratory, a life appointment of £5,000-a-year, tax free, and a private house in Geneva by the lake. Hammersham will be the Secretary, Taylor can have the bank, Mill's nephew can stand in with Taylor, and Bowring can have the Assay Department on commission. The group breaks up reconciled.

The B.I.C.O. is released six months later. Upon the continent, there is the usual petty national jealousy. In England, the chorus is as striking as it is nearly unanimous, for most of English newspapers flatter the outstanding implementation of the B.I.C.O. by distinguished English scientists, politicians and businessmen. Only *The Red Flag* regrets that the financial side of the new organ is independent of Parliamentary control.

Appendix #14

The Postmaster-General (1932)

Wilfrid Halterton is fifty-five years old and the Postmaster-General in Mrs Boulger's second administration in 1960. Lady Caroline Balcombe is the leader of the Anarchist Party, at present in opposition. James Haggismuir McAuley is a financier whose brother is Attorney General. Television is going to be big business, a monopoly that will be operated in connection with the Post Office. Durrant's (also called "Billies" shares in the Stock Exchange) and Reyner's are the two main competing groups to obtain the government's concession. Both companies have developed long range TV transmitters; these relays reach nearly 100 miles and allow TV to be commercially exploited. Nevertheless, the key difficulty lies in who will ultimately prove possessor of the Dow's Intensifier, which is the electronic device that can make long range television feasible. James McAuley is the finance representative for Durrant's. His purpose is obtaining the Charter.

"The Committee" (the Ministerial Commission) decides against James McAuley, but McAuley brings a note previously prepared by himself on official paper consisting of twenty typewritten lines signed by Wilfrid Halterton. Such document terms have been previously agreed on by both parts, McAuley and Halterton. The paper contains some kind of compromise. Wilfrid Halterton determinedly demands exchanging memoranda, as Wilfrid does know his signature means awarding the contract to McAuley against "The Committee's" legal opinion. Wilfrid Halterton demands, in fair exchange for his daring signature, another written statement signed by James McAuley in which Wilfrid Halterton's rights are specified, in case Wilfrid Halterton went out of office and into the City, because Wilfrid clearly asks for some balancing entry, as he had some financial problems years before and thinks that obtaining possession of documents in a roundabout way is essential to succeeding in politics. McAuley supplies a simple manuscript letter on an ordinary paper with two detailed agreements and one addendum: the managership of the TV corporation,

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£10,000 as a salary, and free of tax. McAuley signs the paper without any date. The date will be written by Wilfrid “when time comes.” Yet after the meeting, in a funny brisk movement, McAuley manages to steal this brand-new letter from Wilfrid’s jacket pocket.

Anguished Wilfrid Halterton asks for a second letter from McAuley, but McAuley cheekily denies having given him any letter at all. When Wilfrid repeatedly insists on having the letter, fed up McAuley advises Wilfrid to go home and write a draft of it, just to get rid of Wilfrid once and for all. Experienced and wise Jack Williams tells Wilfrid Halterton perhaps the letter is kept, maybe also sewn inside the lining of McAuley’s waist or jacket inside left pocket. Jack Williams says this is the usual place to conceal something you want to get ready at any time.

Jack Williams is the Home Secretary and a very good billiard player. People tend to call him “Honest Jack Williams.” On one occasion he plays against McAuley and manages to snatch the letter and the contract which previously McAuley had got. McAuley, after much thinking, believes Wilfrid Halterton was able to recover the two essential envelopes, but it really was Jack Williams the responsible for the stratagem. Jack Williams is a great strategist.

Wilfrid Halterton reads about business on the newspaper and realizes The Committee has not been favourable to Billies (Durrant’s television shares) but to Reyner’s. Jack Williams reads on the paper how Billies rise in New York and, sharp and shrewd as he is, immediately guesses at the four possibilities why Billies are but blazing. He feels there must be some machination on the part of the Postmaster-General.

Lord Papworthy went to Canada and returned with a young wife, Joan. Papworthy’s personal value and completely adequate profile, fully recognised by a gentlemen’s agreement, makes him to remain continuously in power, no matter which party is in the Government and which in Opposition. John Papworthy is either Minister of Fine Arts or a member of the Opposition, but he remains within the Government, as he stays in a post held for life.

Reginald Butler’s misguided whimsies on the purity of public life play a considerable part in the fortunes of a lot of people. Reginald Butler is “a chartered

lunatic”, an ardent young poet who is in defence of sound morals in public life and, so he thinks, Joan Papworthy’s lover. The lousy weekly *Oriflamme* publishes Reginald Butler’s accusing letter full of innuendoes and concoctions against highest civil servants. Owing to Butler’s stupid “honest” comments declaring Wilfrid Halterton has pocketed a huge bribe, misinformed Joan Papworthy buys Billies (Durrant’s shares) at the worst of the moments and loses money. While fat Lord Papworthy is immensely rich, young and slim Joan is nearly penniless.

Honest Jack Williams protected and concealed Mr Henry Gunter three times when Gunter stole money. Jack Williams always takes advantage of these facts when the occasion required. On Friday, 6th March 1960, Williams tells Gunter to copy McAuley’s letter and Wilfrid’s contract. After this Jack Williams takes photographs of Gunter’s handwriting copy and the two original documents.

Halterton and McAuley are running one after the other through the streets around Marble Arch and North Park. They try to enter the other’s flat to steal both documents, the letter and the contract, without being noticed. Sly Jack Williams meets both pursuers. Then Jack Williams asks Gunter to sell Billies at nearly 60, although Jack Williams bought them at 35 the day before. Jack Williams writes a letter to Lady Caroline Balcombe to gossip about how Halterton and McAuley quarrelled. Lady Caroline invites Halterton and McAuley to her castle, 15 miles from the northern suburbs of London, to have them nearer and discover something else. At night both men fruitlessly spy each other’s room to recover the supposedly stolen documents. They cannot find anything because such papers are far away, in Honest Jack Williams’s locked cupboard.

Eventually a Jew does justice to Wilfrid Halterton. Arthur Lawson, by birth a Jew from Lithuania, changed his name from the original Aaron Levina. His younger brother, Jacob, was run over by a car at Mile End Road in the 1930s. Wilfrid Halterton was the passenger in the car, not the chauffeur. Aaron (Arthur), who hates the world as a whole, discovered in sincerely helpful Wilfrid Halterton, who recognised complete responsibility in the accident and bore all the costs of Jacob’s recovery, the first person to rely on. Years passed, Jacob Levina entered Cambridge thanks to Halterton’s

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influence. Arthur Lawson became very wealthy while Wilfrid Halterton was slipping back in the way of money. Since the accident, Arthur Lawson and Wilfrid Halterton meet three or four times a year.

“Billies” (Durrant’s) are tumbling down, but Lady Caroline Balcombe is in time to sell hers and still get some profit. “Billies” go on falling down to 16s. Some days later “Billies” fall again to 14s. Reginald Butler’s letter produces rumours for three days, although politicians manage to keep silent Desportes’ papers about the affair. Reginald Butler is going to be prosecuted and an M.P. Investigation Committee is appointed. This Committee is completely biased and formed by friends’s friends, relatives, protégés and the clique. Wilfrid Halterton firmly declares he got no money whatsoever and the Leader of the Opposition, Honest Jack Williams supports Halterton’s honesty. Reginald Butler is accused of libel, discredited and abandoned by everybody, including his former lover, Joan Papworthy. Nincompoop Reginald Butler resigns his seat in the House of Commons, becomes starving and is ready to work for nothing. Billies slowly crawl up. Honest Jack Williams shows the photographed documents to McAuley and asks him 51% of the new Television Corporation to control it.

Arthur Lawson is currently chief of the great banking house Schwartz. Durrant’s has got the TV monopoly while embittered Halterton tells his sad story to understanding Lawson. Lawson immediately makes a plan to help Halterton. First of all, Lawson investigates who really Dow’s (Intensifier) is and buys it at once. Dow’s (Intensifier) is a fat man called F. Xavier Murphy. Lawson arranges a dinner at The Palatine. Four people are invited: Jack Williams, James McAuley, Guy des Cuoyes (Lawson’s confidant and organizer of the dinner) and another man whose name is not disclosed (but is Lawson himself). Guy announces that he has a very relevant piece of information about Dow’s Patent.

Lawson does appear at the dinner and abruptly asks for the concealed contract and letter. To the surprise of everybody Lawson says he is the owner of Dow’s Patent and that he has proofs of what McAuley and Williams did. McAuley produces both documents and hands in to Lawson.

After the dinner, Lawson politely orders Jack Williams to take a note to McAuley suggesting he (McAuley) must make Lawson allotment of a certain number of shares from the new “flotation.” Some shares must be given to Schwartz and Co. and some to Lawson himself. With that new property, Lawson assures Wilfrid Halterton of a permanent income equivalent or greater than that which Wilfrid Halterton was going to receive as the company general manager, and without having to do any work at all on Wilfrid’s part.

As soon as “Honest” Jack Williams comes home, he looks for the original documents and finds his locked cupboard empty.



Fig. 17. Hilaire Belloc, with pipe

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