The Man Who Was Thursday

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF G. K. CHESTERON

G. K. Chesterton was born and raised in London, where he went to elite private schools and then attended University College London to study art. However, after realizing that he far preferred literature, he dropped out and began working in publishing and journalism. In 1901, he married Francis Blogg, who was a major influence on his religiosity later in life. He began writing a weekly newspaper column the next year—and continued for the rest of his life. But he first rose to literary prominence for his 1904 novel *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and his landmark study of Charles Dickens's work in 1906. Two more of his most significant books, *The Man Who Was Thursday* and *Orthodoxy*, followed in 1908 and 1909, and he began writing his famous Father Brown stories in 1910. Over the next three decades, Chesterton was a widely known, well-respected, and famously eccentric mainstay in British literary circles. In addition to his journalism and fiction, he wrote extensively on politics and religion. Politically, he favored a theory called distributism—or broadly redistributing land and resources—which he viewed as a middle ground between socialism and capitalism. Anti-Semitic views also surface in some of his writings. While he grew up with only irregular exposure to religion, he became a devout Anglican during his marriage and then converted to Catholicism in 1922. Many of his late writings focused on explaining and justifying Christian doctrine. Chesterton's religious and political work deeply influenced thinkers as varied as C.S. Lewis, Jorge Luis Borges, and Mahatma Gandhi. Above all, Chesterton was famous for his chronic absentmindedness, wide circle of friends, frequent involvement in public debates, and enormous stature—he was 6'4" tall and weighed nearly 300 pounds. He died of a heart attack at his Buckinghamshire estate in 1936.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Man Who Was Thursday, which G. K. Chesterton published in 1908, was largely a response to the distinctive social and intellectual trends of its time. The novel's focus on anarchist terrorism may seem obscure to readers today, but it was actually a very serious issue for people in Chesterton's time. Starting in the 1880s, anarchists throughout Europe and North America began trying to start a revolution through what they called the "propaganda of the deed"—or, in modern-day parlance, terrorist attacks and political assassinations. Anarchists associated with this movement killed numerous heads of state over the next thirty years, including the Russian Tsar in 1881, the U.S. President in 1901, the King of Portugal in 1908, the Spanish Prime Minister in 1912, and the King of Greece in 1913. Anarchists also murdered hundreds of people in several major public bombings, and dozens more gruesome attempts failed. Thus, the central premise of *The Man Who Was Thursday*—Gabriel Syme dedicating his life to thwarting an anarchist plot to destroy society—was actually entirely realistic in Chesterton's day. But Chesterton didn't just take issue with anarchists. Instead, his work was a response to a broader modern trend toward secularism, pessimism, and political extremism on both the left and the right. Chesterton viewed philosophies like those of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer—who questioned the legitimacy of basic values like good and evil—as profoundly dangerous, and he advocated fighting them through a return to religious tradition. He also passionately opposed the Romantic and Modernist writers who are now recognized as the defining intellectuals of his era. Yet he was also friends with many of them—most notably with George Bernard Shaw. Finally, *The Man Who Was Thursday* features many new technologies, ranging from steamboats and automobiles to modern weaponry and streetlamps, which were transforming European society in his era. Yet Chesterton was suspicious of much of this technology, which he thought only further distanced humans from nature and God.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

G. K. Chesterton wrote tirelessly for most of his life and published around a hundred books in total. His other best-known novel is *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904), but he is also widely remembered for his roughly 50 stories featuring the priest-detective Father Brown. Meanwhile, his most influential religious writing includes *Orthodoxy* (1908) and *The Everlasting Man* (1925), and many of his essays are collected in the 2011 anthology *In Defense of Sanity*. Other significant spy novels from Chesterton's era include Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), which is also about anarchist terrorism, and Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903). This period also saw the creation of several popular spy and detective novel series, like Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes books, the Baroness Orczy's Scarlet Pimpernel novels, and Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple books. Chesterton's work has influenced fantasy and philosophical fiction for generations. Critics have particularly linked *The Man Who Was Thursday* to the work of Franz Kafka, like *The Trial* (1925) and *Metamorphosis* (1915), which associate modern society with a feeling of isolation and meaninglessness. Chesterton also notably influenced C.S. Lewis, who is best remembered for his writings on religion and *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-6). The most significant biographies of Chesterton include his own *Autobiography* (1936), his friend Hilaire Belloc's brief *On the*

Place of Gilbert Chesterton in English Letters (1940), and Ian Ker's major academic study *G.K. Chesterton: A Biography* (2011). Finally, Martin Gardner has put out an annotated edition of this novel, *The Annotated Thursday* (1999).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare
- **When Written:** 1907-1908
- **Where Written:** London
- **When Published:** February 1908
- **Literary Period:** Edwardian (alternatively late Victorian, anti-romanticism, anti-modernism)
- **Genre:** Detective Novel, Spy Novel, Mystery, Psychological Thriller, Philosophical Novel, Religious Allegory
- **Setting:** London, the French countryside
- **Climax:** The six detectives chase after the President and embark on a spiritual journey.
- **Antagonist:** The President, the detectives (in disguise), anarchism, pessimism, chaos
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Title Turmoil. This novel's unusual title confused many of its early readers—some reportedly assumed that it was supposed to read, "The Man Who Was Thirsty."

Subtle Subtitle. G.K. Chesterton argued that most of his readers fundamentally misinterpreted *The Man Who Was Thursday* because they didn't pay enough attention to its subtitle: *A Nightmare*. At the end of the novel, Chesterton presents a worldview in which good and evil are just two sides of the same coin, and people exhaust themselves and give up in their quest for meaning. Many readers thought he believed in this worldview, but actually, as he later explained in his biography, the novel "was meant to begin with the picture of the world at its worst and to work towards the suggestion that the picture was not so black as it was already painted." Many newer editions of the novel include Chesterton's explanation as an appendix in order to clarify this point.

PLOT SUMMARY

In G.K. Chesterton's otherworldly spy novel *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the poet, philosopher, and police detective Gabriel Syme infiltrates a vast anarchist conspiracy to save the world from its sinister plots. But when Syme learns that the other anarchist leaders are not who they seem to be, he starts questioning what his mission really meant in the first place—and who has been pulling the strings.

The novel begins in a garden in the quaint London suburb of Saffron Park, where the firebrand anarchist poet Lucian Gregory passionately lectures his friends about the evils of organized society and the beauty of destruction. When Gabriel Syme attends one of Gregory's parties, they debate whether poetry is a form of order or chaos. Syme accuses Gregory of not being serious about anarchism, and in response, Gregory offers Syme "a very entertaining evening"—but only if he promises not to tell the police.

Gregory takes Syme to a seedy pub, where their table shoots down through a secret passageway into an underground anarchist bunker full of bombs and weapons. Gregory explains that his group wants to destroy all religion, government, and morality. He's expecting the local branch to elect him to the Central Anarchist Council at its next meeting—which is in just a few minutes. Right before it starts, Syme tell Gregory that he works for the police. Gregory knows that, if he exposes Syme to the other anarchists, then Syme will expose him to the police. Instead, he lightens the tone of his election speech to try and convince Syme that his group is harmless. But this backfires: Syme challenges him in the election, gives a fiery speech promising murder and destruction, and wins easily. A tugboat carries him down the Thames to meet the rest of the Council.

A flashback explains how Syme became a detective. After growing up in a family of unstable nonconformists and witnessing a bloody anarchist attack, Syme decided to launch a "rebellion against rebellion." When a police officer approached him and asked him to join a special new anti-anarchist unit, he signed up. Notably, the unit chief insisted on meeting him in a pitch-black room—and told him that he would die a martyr.

Syme gets off the tugboat at daybreak and meets the Secretary, a menacing man who can only smile with one side of his face. The Secretary takes Syme to meet the rest of the Council in central London's Leicester Square. Since people assume that serious anarchists would never talk about anarchism publicly, the Council President has decided the group should plan their attacks in full public view, over breakfast on the balcony of a popular restaurant. Even though they know each other's real names, the Council's members use days of the week as pseudonyms. The imposing President is called Sunday, the Secretary is Monday, and Syme is now Thursday. Tuesday is an unkempt Polish malcontent named Gogol. Friday is an elderly nihilist philosopher named the Professor de Worms. Saturday is a lively young doctor named Bull, whose opaque black glasses make him seem like the wickedest of the bunch. And Wednesday, the French nobleman Marquis de St. Eustache, is planning to assassinate the Russian Czar and the French President when they meet in three days.

Syme notices Sunday staring at him throughout the breakfast. Then, Sunday calls the whole group into a private back room and announces that one of them is a traitor. Syme is certain that he's done for—until Sunday identifies Gogol as the spy and

kicks him off the Council. Relieved, Syme goes for a long walk and gets lunch. But he notices the decrepit Professor de Worms hobbling after him the whole way. Even when Syme sprints to catch a bus and intentionally gets lost in a maze of winding alleys, the Professor inexplicably catches up to him. When he finally confronts the Professor in a shady sailors' bar, the Professor admits that he's a police detective in disguise. Syme explains that he is, too. They start plotting together to stop the upcoming bombing. They develop a secret sign language and visit Dr. Bull, who's planning the attack, at his garret. But when Syme asks Bull to take off his black glasses, he realizes that Dr. Bull's shining eyes are far too innocent to be an anarchist's. Surely enough, Bull works for the police, too. The three detectives head to France to stop the bombing.

Syme hatches a plan: he challenges the Marquis to a fencing duel, then makes sure to plan it on the morning of the Marquis's train to Paris. If he misses the train, the Marquis can't carry out the assassination. The Marquis agrees to the duel, on the condition that they hold it in a field next to the train station. But he doesn't bleed or scar when Syme stabs him. Syme realizes that the Marquis is wearing a disguise—he, too, is a police detective. When the train pulls into the station, a group of anarchists wearing black masks gets off it and starts pursuing the four detectives, who borrow a peasant's cart, an elderly innkeeper's horses, and a local doctor's motorcar to escape. But somehow, the anarchists win these three men and most of the local townspeople to their side. Led by the Secretary, the anarchists corner Syme and his companions on the beach. The detectives feel like the whole universe is united against them. But then, Syme gives an impassioned speech about the value of tradition and hits the Secretary with **an antique Christian lantern**. The Secretary reveals that he's a detective, too—meaning that everybody on the Council worked for the police except the President, Sunday.

The detectives return to London, find Gogol, and confront Sunday over breakfast in Leicester Square. Sunday refuses to explain who he is or what he is doing—but he does tell them one secret: "I'm the man in the dark room, who made you all policemen." He runs away, and a long chase scene ensues. At various points, Sunday escapes using a horse-drawn cab, a firetruck, an elephant, and a hot air balloon. The detectives chase Sunday to the outskirts of London, where his balloon has crashed in a field. On their way, they realize that Sunday looked different to each of them, but they all saw him as a reflection of "the universe itself." Syme comments that, just like Sunday, reality is made of two opposite sides: "the horrible back" and "the noble face."

Before the detectives can reach Sunday, an old man with a scepter approaches them and brings them to six carriages, which carry them up a magical hill to a grand celestial gateway. Beyond the gate, they put on **new clothes** that give new meaning to their pseudonyms: the days of the week now refer to the days of creation. For example, the Secretary (Monday) wears a black robe with a white stripe, which represents God creating light on the first day, while Syme (Thursday) wears a blue outfit with an image of the sun, which represents God creating the sun and moon on the fourth day. The six detectives meet at a carnival where figures dressed in animal costumes drink and dance around a bonfire. Sunday joins them, wearing pure white, and claims to be "the Sabbath"—or "the peace of God." The detectives debate whether they can forgive Sunday for terrorizing them.

Suddenly, Lucian Gregory—the novel's only "real anarchist"—arrives. He asks the detectives if law-abiding believers like them can truly suffer in the same way as anarchists who don't believe in anything at all. But Sunday's terror proves that Christians do suffer. Gregory asks Sunday the same question, and Sunday answers by quoting the Bible: "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?"

In the novel's closing lines, Syme gradually becomes aware of his real-life surroundings again. Chesterton reveals that the detective drama has all been a fantasy—Syme has been taking a leisurely stroll through Saffron Park with Lucian Gregory the whole time.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Gabriel Syme – Gabriel Syme, the protagonist and title character of *The Man Who Was Thursday*, is a passionate but practical poet-detective who attempts to infiltrate and undermine a vast anarchist conspiracy. After growing up in a family full of crackpots and watching a brutal anarchist bombing firsthand, Syme decided to launch "a rebellion against rebellion." One day, a philosophical policeman approached him and offered him a spot in a special new anti-anarchist unit. Over the course of the novel, he talks Lucian Gregory into bringing him to a local anarchist meeting, then wins election as the new "Thursday" (the local branch's representative to the Central Committee). But once he meets the Central Committee, things start to go wrong: over several more chapters, he gradually realizes that all the other men on the Committee are also undercover detectives, and then—eventually—that the President of the Committee is the same man who hired him as a police officer. He and the other detectives try to track down the President, who leads them to a strange, utopian realm with a striking resemblance to the Christian heaven. In this realm, all is well, and Syme wears a **blue drapery outfit** with an image of a sun, which represents God creating the sun and moon on the fourth day of creation. In fact, the key to the novel lies not in Syme's quest to stop the anarchist plot, but rather in his shift from the nightmarish experience of pursuing the conspiracy to the relative comfort and security of life under God. Finally, in

the novel's last lines, Chesterton reveals that the whole story was really just a fantasy in Syme's head: all along, he has merely been chatting with Lucian Gregory about anarchy and morality, and the novel's heavenly conclusion represents him definitively choosing the side of morality.

The President/The Police Chief/Sunday – The President of the Central Anarchist Committee, who uses the nickname "Sunday," is the driving force behind the novel's entire plot. He is a quintessential criminal mastermind: he's ruthless, fearless, and full of evil schemes. He has seemingly infinite resources, limitless ambition, and absolute power over everyone around him. He plans out nearly everything in the novel's plot long before it actually happens. Physically, he's gigantic and imposing, and he has superhuman strength and agility even though he's elderly. Eventually, the protagonists learn that the President was also the police chief who met with them in a pitch-black room to hire them into the anti-anarchist corps, and that the President's Anarchist Committee was never a real group, because everyone on it thought they were working for the police. In other words, the novel is really about a false conflict between fake police and fake anarchists, which Sunday set up for Gabriel Syme and the other protagonists to participate in. When they try to figure out why, Sunday refuses to tell them and runs away. But he eventually leads them to a bizarre celestial realm, where they **don new robes** that represent the Biblical creation story. This setting closely associates Sunday with God, even though he does not actually represent God. Instead, he wears all white, which represents the peace of the seventh day of creation: the Sabbath or day of rest. When the other characters reunite with him, they feel like themselves for the first time, and their worries about anarchy entirely disappear. Thus, the President turns out to be a benevolent figure, even if the other protagonists continue to resent him at the end of the novel. He imposed serious trials and tribulations on the protagonists precisely to disprove the anarchists and atheists who say that religious people don't confront the ugly side of life and, by blindly following dogma, live their lives without any true choices or meaning.

The Secretary/Monday – "Monday," whom Gabriel Syme knows as "The Secretary," is Sunday's right-hand man and the last Central Anarchist Committee member to be unmasked as an undercover detective. He's also the first one Syme meets: after Syme is first elected as Thursday, Monday greets him and escorts him to breakfast with the rest of the Committee. Syme immediately notices Monday's strangely tiny beard and frightening smile—which only seems to work on one half of his face. Indeed, Monday's physical appearance is Syme's first direct sign of how sinister and deceptive the Anarchist Committee will be. Later, after Syme teams up with the Professor, Dr. Bull, and the Marquis to stop Sunday's attack plans, the Secretary appears to be the last remaining anarchist working against them. He leads an army of black-clad mercenaries to track them down—but when he succeeds, he reveals that he's a detective and thinks *they're* the dangerous anarchists. This revelation is particularly significant because it shows that there was never truly an anarchist conspiracy to begin with, and that Sunday duped *all* of the men on the committee. In fact, this moment marks the novel's transition from a straightforward thriller (in which the detectives are trying to stop a terrorist attack) into a philosophical quest to understand Sunday's motives. At the end of the novel, the Secretary wears a black robe with a white stripe, which represents God creating light on the first day.

Gogol/Tuesday – Gogol, or "Tuesday," is an unkempt, sullen anarchist who looks absurd in formal dress clothes (and whom Gabriel Syme compares to an overdressed, scruffy dog). At the end of the Central Anarchist Committee meeting, Sunday exposes Gogol as an undercover detective—and Gogol's Polish accent as a convincing fake. This scene drives forward the novel's plot because it gives the other detectives their first indication that other Committee members are also secret agents, and it encourages them to investigate one another. Gogol rejoins the other detectives at the end of the novel, when they return from France to go demand answers from Sunday. However, Gogol remains a minor character with little dialogue. At the end of the novel, **his special outfit** is a silver dress that represents God parting the waters on the second day of creation.

The Marquis de St. Eustache/Inspector Ratcliffe/Wednesday – The anarchist nicknamed "Wednesday" is supposedly the Marquis de St. Eustache, a wealthy and sophisticated French nobleman who shares the aristocracy's disdain for democratic government. But, like Gogol and the Professor, he really turns out to be a detective in disguise. In the first Central Anarchist Council meeting, Sunday assigns the Marquis to carry out the group's assassination plans in France, and around halfway through the novel, Gabriel Syme, the Professor, and Dr. Bull go to try and stop him. Syme hatches an absurd plan: he pulls the Marquis's nose, challenges him to a duel, and then tries to draw out the fight for long enough that the Marquis misses his train. But in the process, he realizes that the Marquis is wearing a mask—because he, too, is really a police detective in disguise. In contrast to the optimistic Dr. Bull, throughout the novel's final chapters, Ratcliffe is consistently pessimistic about Sunday's motives, human nature, and the group's chances of surviving the supposed anarchist onslaught. However, the novel's concluding scenes prove him wrong: he ascends to the heaven-like celestial realm with the rest of the detectives. Once there, he wears **a green outfit** that represents God creating the earth and plants on the third day.

The Professor de Worms/Wilks/Friday – The Central Anarchist Committee member nicknamed "Friday" appears to be the elderly German nihilist philosopher Professor de Worms. When Gabriel Syme first meets him, he is so old and

senile that he can barely get across a coherent thought or control his own body. Yet after the meeting, he manages to follow Syme around central London for several hours, even as Syme runs away from him as fast as he can. This baffles Syme until the Professor explains himself: he is really an actor and detective named Wilks, who has spent several years professionally impersonating the Professor. (However, the narrator continues to mostly call him "The Professor.") Wilks's disguise is extremely believable—in fact, he began wearing it full-time after he convinced an audience of the Professor's students and supporters that *he* was the real Professor, and the real Professor was an impostor. Ever since, Wilks has adopted many of the Professor's mannerisms even when he is not consciously in character. This breakdown in the relationship between actor and role is one of the clearest ways in which the novel asks whether people can know what their true identities really are. The Professor is the first of the other anarchists to tell Syme that he's really a detective, and the two men work together to try and sabotage Sunday's assassination plans throughout the second half of the novel. At the end of the book, Wilks wears **a purple suit** that represents God creating birds and sea creatures on the fifth day.

Dr. Bull/Saturday – Dr. Bull (nicknamed "Saturday") is one of the seven members of the Central Anarchist Committee. Like the rest, he turns out to be an undercover detective. Compared to the other men on the Council, he is young, sharp, and energetic—but he also rarely speaks. Notably, Bull's dark glasses make his true expression impossible to see and his true feelings impossible to guess. This makes him seem like the "wickedest of all" the Councilmen when Gabriel Syme first meets him. After the group's initial meeting, Sunday tasks Bull with planning the assassination of the Russian Czar and French President. Syme and the Professor visit the small garret where he lives to try and stop him. During their visit, Syme asks Bull to take off his glasses. Bull's eyes are small and shine brightly, like an innocent boy's, which makes Syme realize that Bull is actually a benevolent detective, not an evil anarchist. For the rest of the novel, Dr. Bull turns out to be the most optimistic and trusting detective in the group. In the book's closing scene, **his outfit** depicts God creating animals and humans on the sixth day of Biblical creation.

The Narrator – Chesterton's narrator is omniscient and speaks in the third person, but mostly presents the story through the lens of Gabriel Syme's thoughts, actions, and feelings. For instance, the narrator never reveals any of the other main characters' true identities until Syme finds out about them. When the narrator does reveal hidden information about other characters, it's often intended to throw the reader off, which builds suspense later on. For instance, at the beginning of the novel, the narrator presents Lucian Gregory as the hero. The narrator also frequently uses irony and describes the environment—and especially the sky—in rich, descriptive language.

Lucian Gregory – Lucian Gregory is the charming, flamboyant anarchist poet who unwittingly helps Gabriel Syme infiltrate the Central Anarchist Council in the novel's first two chapters. In the first chapter, Gregory and Syme argue about whether poetry creates beauty through chaos or through order. In the second, Gregory takes Syme to his anarchist group's secret underground lair, where Syme persuades the congregation to choose him over Gregory to be their next representative, or "Thursday." Gregory does not reappear until the novel's very last scene, when he marches into the mysterious celestial realm wearing a black cloak and absurdly complains that people who believe in moral values do not truly suffer or fight for anything. Syme and Sunday quickly prove him wrong. Chesterton initially throws the reader off by presenting Gregory as the novel's hero. But at the very end, it becomes clear that Gregory is the novel's only true anarchist—and therefore also its only true villain. After all, his first name, Lucian, associates him with Satan, or Lucifer. Then, the novel's final paragraphs reveal that the whole story was actually Syme's extended fantasy, and that he has really been talking to Lucian Gregory the whole time. Both their conversation and Syme's fantasy about hunting down the anarchist conspiracy are metaphors for the conflict between an optimistic worldview in which everything has a purpose and good and evil exist, on the one hand, and a pessimistic view in which everything is meaningless and there's no difference between good and evil, on the other.

Rosamond Gregory – Rosamond Gregory is Lucian Gregory's sister. At the beginning of the novel, Gabriel Syme notices her beautiful red hair and chats with her for several minutes about poetry and her brother's anarchism. He thinks about her hair periodically over the course of the novel, and in its very last sentence, he watches her cut lilacs (which generally symbolize love and rebirth). Syme's romantic interest in Rosamond Gregory gives him a certain, constant goal to yearn for, which contrasts with the nightmarish moral uncertainty that plagues him throughout the rest of the novel.

Colonel Ducroix – Colonel Ducroix is a French soldier and member of the prestigious Legion of Honour who serves as one of the Marquis's "seconds" (official attendants) during his trip to France. He officiates the duel between the Marquis and Gabriel Syme, and then he helps the Marquis, Syme, Dr. Bull, and the Professor escape the Secretary's army by enlisting the help of the peasant, the innkeeper, and Dr. Renard. Like these three men, the Colonel is unfailingly honest and principled—to the point that he joins the Secretary's army after the Secretary convinces him that the detectives are really criminals on the run.

The French Peasant – The peasant is the suntanned farmer who helps Gabriel Syme, the Professor, Dr. Bull, the Marquis (Inspector Ratcliffe), and Colonel Ducroix escape the Secretary's black-clad army after Syme's duel with the Marquis.

Whereas the detectives think that the peasant is poor and miserable, Ducroix points out that he is actually wealthy because French peasants own their land. He treats the peasant as a dignified equal, and they strike an amicable deal: the peasant helps the detectives escape in their cart. Chesterton uses this comic scene to comment on how out-of-touch anarchists (and their passionate opponents) are from ordinary people's everyday struggles, as well as to suggest that society would be better off if land were distributed more equally. Later, the peasant joins the Secretary's army to help bring the detectives, whom he believes to be criminals, to justice.

The Elderly Innkeeper – The innkeeper is an elderly French man and friend of Colonel Ducroix who runs the country inn "Le Soleil d'Or." He helps Ducroix and the detectives (Gabriel Syme, the Professor, Dr. Bull, and Inspector Ratcliffe) escape the Secretary's encroaching army by lending them horses. But later, when he learns that this army works for the police and is trying to bring the detectives to justice, he gives them horses, too, and then joins them.

Dr. Renard – Dr. Renard is a respected doctor and friend of Colonel Ducroix who lives in the fictional French town of Lancy. The only honest rich man in town, Ducroix helps the detectives (Gabriel Syme, the Professor, Dr. Bull, and Inspector Ratcliffe) escape by lending them one of his three cars and **his antique lantern**. But, like the peasant and the innkeeper, he ultimately joins forces with the Secretary (including by lending them his other two cars). All three do this because they are honest men who want to see law, order, and justice prevail over the fleeing detectives, whom they believe to be criminals.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Previous Thursday – According to Lucian Gregory, the last man who served as Thursday before the events of the novel was an eccentric who accidentally poisoned himself by drinking chalky water instead of milk.

Comrade Buttons – Comrade Buttons is the chair of the local anarchist meeting that elects Gabriel Syme as Thursday (over Lucian Gregory).

The Philosophical Policeman – The philosophical policeman is the mysterious officer who approached Gabriel Syme one day on the banks of the Thames and convinced him to join the anti-anarchist detective unit.

TERMS

Saffron Park – Saffron Park is G. K. Chesterton's pseudonym for Bedford Park, the popular London artists' suburb where he once lived (and where he sets the opening and closing scenes of *The Man Who Was Thursday*).

Scotland Yard – Scotland Yard is the headquarters of London's police, and it's often used as a euphemism for the city police force itself.

Leicester Square – Leicester Square is a major public plaza in central London's West End entertainment district.

Calais – Calais is a city located at the northern tip of France on the Strait of Dover, the narrowest part of the English Channel. Boats and trains between France and England generally connect Calais to Dover.

THEMES

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ORDER, CHAOS, AND GOD

G. K. Chesterton's 1908 novel *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* follows the intrepid poet-detective Gabriel Syme's quest to save the world from a global anarchist conspiracy. Syme infiltrates the Central Anarchist Council, whose members use the days of the week as pseudonyms, and starts working to sabotage the group's plans. But gradually, he realizes that all of the other council members are *also* undercover detectives doing the exact same thing—and its President (Sunday) was the one who hired them to do it. The novel ends with an extended religious metaphor, in which the six detectives visit a heavenlike realm for a banquet and their nicknames become metaphors for the seven days of creation in the Book of Genesis.

Chesterton's novel satirizes the conflict between the orderly beauty of society and the chaotic, senseless destruction of anarchy, but he wasn't really trying to make a point about politics. Paradoxically enough, by showing six detectives relentlessly pursue one another to stop an anarchist plot that never existed, while an all-powerful mastermind orchestrates their every move, Chesterton really wanted to warn his readers *against* the kind of doubt, pessimism, and paranoia that were popular in his day. In Gabriel Syme's world, where nothing can be known for sure, it's impossible to tell the difference between friends and foes, safety and danger, or saving the world and bringing about its end. But Chesterton was a devout man, and the Christian allegory at the end of the novel suggests that faith offers readers a way out of this dilemma. Chesterton underscores this point by subtitling his novel *A Nightmare*: Syme and his companions' wild goose chase represents the moral trap that people fall into when they don't believe in a higher power or underlying order to the world.

IDENTITY

In *The Man Who Was Thursday*, nobody is who they seem to be. All of the protagonists have multiple identities, and the more sinister they seem at the outset of the novel, the more benevolent they tend to be by the end. Indeed, in the middle section of the novel, Gabriel Syme learns that one after another of his supposed anarchist rivals are actually fellow undercover detectives. For instance, Syme learns that the man he knows as Friday, or the Professor de Worms, is actually an actor named Wilks, who learned to impersonate the Professor years before. Wilks's imitation was so accurate that the Professor's fans and students decided it was realer than reality: they labeled the real Professor an impostor, forced him into exile, and replaced him with Wilks. Meanwhile, Wilks has been playing the Professor for so long that he has involuntarily adopted the Professor's mannerisms—he doesn't remember what it's like to be himself anymore.

The novel is full of puzzles like this one, in which people lose track of their identities by switching loyalties, putting on masks, contradicting themselves, or even questioning whether there's a deeper truth to identity at all. Chesterton doesn't reject the concept of identity altogether, but he does show that people's identities are often defined by forces outside their control, like the roles that they play and the way that others perceive them. Fortunately, he also suggests that people can shape or even rediscover their own identities by choosing to play the right roles—or wear the right masks. For Chesterton, this means embracing the roles pre-ordained for us by God. The six detectives and Sunday do this at the end of the novel, albeit unintentionally, when they try on **outfits** that represent the seven days of creation and feel comfortable and authentic for the first time in the whole book. As the novel puts it, they find themselves by putting on "disguises [that do] not disguise, but reveal."

TRADITION VS. MODERNITY

The Man Who Was Thursday is set around the turn of the 20th century, when major social, economic, technological, and philosophical changes were transforming life in Europe. Pessimist intellectuals were turning against democracy and the Enlightenment. The Second Industrial Revolution was making factory work the norm and technologies like steam trains and electric street lamps more widely accessible. And the majority of the population was living in cities for the first time. All of these developments set the stage for radical politics to grow, and anarchist terrorists assassinated dozens of prominent leaders and bombed countless public places between the late 1870s and the outbreak of World War I.

All of these developments figure prominently in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, and G. K. Chesterton was not particularly happy about any of them. Throughout the novel, he comically juxtaposes aspects of his contemporary European society with the earlier, more traditional, religious, and agrarian societies that he preferred. For example, in just a few pages, his protagonists fight a traditional duel while waiting to catch a steam train, debate property ownership laws for French and British peasants while running away from a mob of masked anarchists, run over a horse with an automobile, and win a shootout with the help of **an antique religious lantern**. In these and countless other situations throughout the novel, Chesterton uses humor to suggest that modern technology and cities create a hollow society and make people's lives worse by distancing them from their roots. But whereas pessimists and anarchists view this hollowness as a justification for *destroying* society, Chesterton wants to *save* it. In this sense, his tongue-in-cheek examples of old meeting new also serve as examples of how he thinks modern people can embrace history and tradition, thereby living richer, happier lives.

THE PURPOSE OF ART

Gabriel Syme, the protagonist and title character of *The Man Who Was Thursday*, is no normal detective: he's also a *poet*. Even when he's supposed to be busy saving the world, Syme spends much of his time contemplating the meaning of humanity and the beauty of the environment. In fact, G. K. Chesterton's broader interest in the nature and purpose of art is apparent from the very beginning of the novel, which describes the neighborhood of Saffron Park as "a frail but finished work of art" and then narrates a debate between Syme and Lucian Gregory about the meaning of poetry. Syme believes that poetry is a way to create meaning by imposing a linguistic structure on the world, while Gregory believes that poetry creates beauty by refusing to fit into structure—or even destroying it. But, through his rich descriptions and frequent comparisons between things in the environment and works of art, Chesterton proposes a different theory altogether: art's purpose is not to change or destroy the world, but merely to faithfully capture and communicate its beauty.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

DR. RENARD'S LANTERN

The antique lantern that Dr. Renard gives to Gabriel Syme and his companions represents Chesterton's view that modern people should cope with social and moral alienation by returning to traditional religious

beliefs. After Syme's duel with the Marquis, they and their fellow detectives try to evade the Secretary's ominous approaching army by borrowing Dr. Renard's car. But the car doesn't have a light, so Renard offers them a valuable antique lantern with a cross on it. But the lantern is built into his ceiling like a chandelier, so Renard has to partially destroy his house to give it to them. Still, this lantern allows the detectives to see their way through the night—which represents the way that Christianity offers people moral guidance.

Later, when the Secretary's army corners Syme and his companions on the beach, they start to feel like the forces of evil—or even the apocalypse—are taking over the universe. At a crucial moment in the conflict, Syme holds up the lantern to the Secretary. He points out the lantern's Christian iconography, then notes that the traditional blacksmithing processes used to create the lantern involved using flame and iron to create something both useful and beautiful. In contrast, using the same tools, anarchists "make nothing" and "only destroy." In other words, the lantern reflects the way that Chesterton thinks people can live meaningful lives and create something of value in the world when they embrace orderliness, knowledge, and above all, religious traditions. In contrast, the Secretary's horde of hollow, selfish invaders represents the way that modern society makes people's lives meaningless by destroying the moral principles and shared traditions on which they used to rely.

THE DIVINE CLOTHING

Beyond merely representing the six days of creation and the Sabbath, the special outfits that Syme, his companions, and Sunday receive at the end of the novel also symbolize their decision to trade moral relativism for religion. The novel explicitly describes the outfits' biblical symbolism: for instance, Monday's black cloak with a white stripe represents God creating light on the first day, while Syme's blue costume with a sun icon represents God creating the sun and moon on the fourth day. But when they put on these outfits, the six detectives and Sunday find that they suddenly fill clear, definitive roles in the universe.

Beforehand, when the detectives were chasing the anarchist conspiracy, everything was in question for them—they didn't know whether their mission was real, who was good and evil, or whether good and evil really existed at all. In other words, they were considering moral relativism—or the idea that there is no single set of absolute moral values in the universe. This idea was increasingly popular in Chesterton's era, especially as artists and writers spread secular values to replace waning religious ones. But Chesterton's protagonists find moral relativism to be unbearable and the moral certainty of religion to be a relief. This is why the narrator describes their new clothing as "disguises that did not disguise, but reveal"—the protagonists finally found their true identities when, rather than trying to set moral values for themselves, they accepted religion and agreed to fit into their God-given roles instead.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *The Man Who Was Thursday* published in 2011.

Chapter 1 Quotes

"The suburb of Saffron Park lay on the sunset side of London, as red and ragged as a cloud of sunset. It was built of a bright brick throughout; its skyline was fantastic, and even its ground plan was wild. [...] It had to be considered not so much as a workshop for artists, but as a frail but finished work of art. A man who stepped into its social atmosphere felt as if he had stepped into a written comedy.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Lucian Gregory

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1-2

Explanation and Analysis

Chesterton begins *The Man Who Was Thursday* with a lengthy description of Saffron Park (really Bedford Park), the attractive bohemian neighborhood where the anarchist poet Lucian Gregory lives and the novel begins. He highlights the neighborhood's red brick and compares it to the sunset—both of which are significant, because Chesterton soon associates the color red with Gregory's flowing red hair and the sunset, when light gives way to darkness, with the anarchists who seek to plunge the world into metaphorical darkness. The introduction goes on to describe the quirky people who live in the neighborhood, then concludes that it's less of a neighborhood for artists than "a frail but finished work of art" in its own right. Of course, Chesterton uses this description for *metafiction*—or to point out that he is deliberately portraying the neighborhood in a certain way for the sake of his *own* "frail but finished work of art" (this novel). This comment about art also foreshadows Gabriel Syme and Lucian Gregory's argument about the meaning of poetry, which Chesterton uses to present the major concepts (like chaos and order) around which he structures the rest of the novel.

Most importantly, like so much of the book in general, this whole introductory passage is also designed to confuse and

mislead the reader. Most of the novel does *not* take place in Saffron Park, Lucian Gregory is not its hero, and it would be a stretch to call it a "comedy." Despite its "wild" layout, Saffron Park is quaint, secure, and beautiful—it is a place of fragile order, which makes it nothing like the rest of the novel to come.

"An anarchist is an artist. The man who throws a bomb is an artist, because he prefers a great moment to everything. He sees how much more valuable is one burst of blazing light, one peal of perfect thunder, than the mere common bodies of a few shapeless policemen. An artist disregards all governments, abolishes all conventions. The poet delights in disorder only."

[...]

"The rare, strange thing is to hit the mark; the gross, obvious thing is to miss it. We feel it is epical when man with one wild arrow strikes a distant bird. Is it not also epical when man with one wild engine strikes a distant station? Chaos is dull; because in chaos the train might indeed go anywhere, to Baker Street, or to Bagdad. But man is a magician, and his whole magic is in this, that he does say Victoria, and lo! it is Victoria."

Related Characters: Lucian Gregory, Gabriel Syme (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

At one of his garden parties, Lucian Gregory argues with Gabriel Syme about the true meaning of their shared passion, poetry. While Gregory (the first quote) views it as a way to create beauty through destruction, by rejecting literary conventions and innovating with language, Syme (the second) thinks that its beauty comes through perfection and orderliness, which is the highest expression of human ingenuity. It's easy to imagine what kind of poetry each man would write: Gregory's work would be edgy, experimental free verse, while Syme would focus on perfecting conventional poetic forms like sonnets. Here, they expand on their philosophies by talking about them in the context of politics: Gregory links his poetry to his belief in anarchism, while Syme connects his own to his faith in the boring, conventional forms of government that allow people to build better, more advanced societies over time.

This tension between order and disorder, or creation and destruction, ends up becoming one of the most important motifs in this novel. For one, it is central to the conflict between anarchists and detectives. But it also represents a choice between two different ways of viewing the world: as a well-ordered machine where everything is intentional, or as a place of random chance, where little is in humans' control.

Of course, Gregory and Syme's conversation about the meaning of poetry is also really about the meaning of all art—including the novel itself. As such, their ideas suggest to the reader different ways of interpreting it. Under Gregory's view, art should shock and surprise the reader—this effect is the real meaning of the work. But for Syme, an artist should use their ingenuity and all of the tools at their disposal to say what they want in as coherent, precise, and purposeful a way as they can. Curiously enough, the novel goes back and forth between these two models of meaning-making. At the beginning, it seems logical and coherent: the protagonist has a clear mission and goes about pursuing it. But in the middle, this mission starts making less and less sense, and the novel's plot starts becoming more and more incoherent. But then, the final few chapters give it meaning and structure again, turning it into Syme's kind of art once again.

Chapter 2 Quotes

"What is it you object to? You want to abolish Government?"

"To abolish God!" said Gregory, opening the eyes of a fanatic. "We do not only want to upset a few despotisms and police regulations; that sort of anarchism does exist, but it is a mere branch of the Nonconformists. We dig deeper and we blow you higher. We wish to deny all those arbitrary distinctions of vice and virtue, honour and treachery upon which mere rebels base themselves. The silly sentimentalists of the French Revolution talked of the Rights of Man! We hate Rights and we hate Wrongs. We have abolished Right and Wrong."

Related Characters: Gabriel Syme, Lucian Gregory (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

After Lucian Gregory invites Gabriel Syme to his secret bunker, Syme asks what he and his anarchist comrades really want to accomplish. This is Gregory's response: he

and his friends want to destroy all hierarchies and all of the arbitrary moral values that hierarchies depend on. Since the anarchists do not believe in God or a deeper moral order in the universe, they conclude that nothing is better than anything else, and all value-based systems must fall. So they want to end religion and government—they view both as unearned, unjust kinds of authority. But they have no specific plans for doing this, besides carrying out random attacks, and no clear vision of the kind of world that they want to build. Thus, all that they truly believe in is opposing everyone else, and all they can even seriously hope to accomplish is senseless destruction. This is why Chesterton and his protagonist Gabriel Syme view anarchism as so threatening: it simultaneously declares that nothing is meaningful, and that nothing has a right to exist *unless* it's meaningful. This line of thinking might seem to make sense in the abstract, philosophically, but it falls apart as soon as anyone tries to translate it into action, because the only action truly consistent with it is collective suicide.

> "'You want a safe disguise, do you? You want a dress which will guarantee you harmless; a dress in which no one would ever look for a bomb?' I nodded. He suddenly lifted his lion's voice. 'Why then, dress up as an *anarchist*, you fool!' he roared so that the room shook. 'Nobody will ever expect you to do anything dangerous then.'"

Related Characters: The President/The Police Chief/Sunday, Lucian Gregory (speaker), Gabriel Syme

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Gabriel Syme asks Lucian Gregory why he goes around telling people that he's an anarchist, if his real anarchist activities are so top-secret. Gregory responds by telling this story about meeting with the President of the Central Anarchist Council, who insisted that the best disguise for an anarchist is no disguise at all: the more open someone is about believing in anarchism, the less likely anyone is to take them seriously. (The irony in this situation is that Syme *did* take Gregory seriously, Gregory *did* take the bait and try to prove his credentials by bringing Syme to the bunker, and so speaking out about anarchism ended up being a *terrible* disguise.) Of course, Chesterton was in part using this scene to make fun of the pretentious anarchist intellectuals of his time, who were often mostly interested in looking exotic and radical, rather than actually contributing to political change.

This scene isn't just a way for Chesterton to make fun of naïve anarchists: it's also a comment on the way that identity and disguise function throughout this novel. In Chesterton's nightmare world, it becomes impossible to distinguish people's true selves from the disguises they put on, and so anarchists can get away with discussing their plans in public only because they can always claim to be joking, and nobody else sincerely believes them. In fact, the reader will eventually learn that the President and his Anarchist Council are not true anarchists at all.

> "Well," said Syme slowly, "I don't know how to tell you the truth more shortly than by saying that your expedient of dressing up as an aimless poet is not confined to you or your President. We have known the dodge for some time at Scotland Yard."
>
> Gregory tried to spring up straight, but he swayed thrice.
>
> "What do you say?" he asked in an inhuman voice.
>
> "Yes," said Syme simply, "I am a police detective. But I think I hear your friends coming."

Related Characters: Gabriel Syme, Lucian Gregory (speaker), The President/The Police Chief/Sunday

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the novel's second chapter, after Lucian Gregory leads Gabriel Syme to his anarchist sect's secret underground bunker, Syme reveals that he's actually a police detective working for Scotland Yard. Just like Lucian Gregory "dress[es] up as an aimless poet" when he's really a sinister anarchist, Syme pretends to be a curious fellow poet, when in reality, he's working undercover to infiltrate Gregory's sect.

Chesterton's novel has already presented the reader with two serious cases of mistaken identity in the first two chapters: Gregory was no innocuous charlatan, and Syme's interest in Gregory's anarchism was more than just casual. Yet, at the same time as Chesterton has misled his readers, he has also told them directly what to expect: Gregory has long publicly identified himself as a violent anarchist, while Syme made it clear from the beginning of the novel that he believes in stopping anarchist violence at any cost. Thus,

paradoxically, Chesterton has misled his readers by telling them the truth directly, then insinuating that there was a sinister secret lurking underneath the surface. Put differently, he introduced his characters by presenting them in disguise as the people they really are. Chesterton intentionally weaves similar cases of mistaken identity throughout the novel—beyond creating plot twists and suspense, this also allows him to raise questions about the very nature of identity and suggest that, in the Godless modern world, nobody can truly know who anyone else is.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ "Don't you see we've checkmated each other?" cried Syme. "I can't tell the police you are an anarchist. You can't tell the anarchists I'm a policeman. I can only watch you, knowing what you are; you can only watch me, knowing what I am. In short, it's a lonely, intellectual duel, my head against yours. I'm a policeman deprived of the help of the police. You, my poor fellow, are an anarchist deprived of the help of that law and organization which is so essential to anarchy. The one solitary difference is in your favour. You are not surrounded by inquisitive policemen; I am surrounded by inquisitive anarchists. I cannot betray you, but I might betray myself. Come, come: wait and see me betray myself. I shall do it so nicely."

Related Characters: Gabriel Syme (speaker), Lucian Gregory

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

Right before the local anarchist sect meets to elect its new leader (or "Thursday"), Gabriel Syme tells Lucian Gregory that he's really a police detective. Gregory wants to give Syme up to his fellow anarchists, but Syme warns him against it, noting that he has also promised not to give Gregory up to the police. "We've checkmated each other," Syme concludes: if one of them reports the other, then both will go down. Instead, they will have to fight a "lonely, intellectual duel"—and, as a policeman surrounded by anarchists, Syme is at a disadvantage. Fortunately for him, he is also far more cunning than Gregory: his promise to "betray myself" actually foreshadows the way that he pretends to be an even more serious anarchist than Gregory, in order to win support from the rest of the sect.

Syme and Gregory's "lonely, intellectual duel" foreshadows the drawn-out contest between policemen and anarchists that takes up the better part of the book. Of course, this duel really represents the fight between good and evil—which, for Chesterton, specifically means a contest between traditional and modern values. It's also significant that, in this scene, this duel is reduced to a clash between two solitary individuals: it's as though the essence of the law (Syme) is fighting the essence of disorder (Gregory), and both are trying to deceive the other. Syme's easy victory suggests that Chesterton saw fate as squarely on his side. Finally, this scene also foreshadows the very end of the novel, where Chesterton reveals that most of the story has been a fantasy based on an argument between Syme and Gregory.

❝ "I do not go to the Council to rebut that slander that calls us murderers; I go to earn it (loud and prolonged cheering). To the priest who says these men are the enemies of religion, to the judge who says these men are the enemies of law, to the fat parliamentarian who says these men are the enemies of order and public decency, to all these I will reply, 'You are false kings, but you are true prophets. I am come to destroy you, and to fulfil your prophecies.'"

Related Characters: Gabriel Syme (speaker), Lucian Gregory

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Readers may wonder why Gabriel Syme tells Lucian Gregory that he's a police detective right before the major anarchist meeting. But Gregory's response makes Syme's reasoning clear. Gregory is the favorite to be elected as the local anarchist branch's new leader, or "Thursday," but he changes his speech at the last minute to try and throw Syme off the scent. Instead of talking about his sinister, destructive plans, he boldly insists that anarchists like him are harmless and misunderstood. But the crowd hates his speech, and Syme takes advantage of the opportunity. He presents himself as an alternate candidate and starts giving the speech that Gregory should have given. In this passage, he promises to spread destruction and disorder on behalf of the Council, and he wins the naïve, persuadable audience's support (even though they have never met him before).

Needless to say, with this speech, Chesterton suggests that most people who join political movements like anarchism

are driven by emotion rather than logic. Syme's speech is dripping with irony: he means none of what he says, since he's secretly a police officer. He is offering himself up as a "false king" to the audience, the people he has actually "come to destroy," and whose commitment to anarchy is so superficial that he easily persuades them that he's the most serious of them all.

"Talk sense," said Syme shortly. "Into what sort of devils' parliament have you entrapped me, if it comes to that? You made me swear before I made you. Perhaps we are both doing what we think right. But what we think right is so damned different that there can be nothing between us in the way of concession. There is nothing possible between us but honour and death," and he pulled the great cloak about his shoulders and picked up the flask from the table.

Related Characters: Gabriel Syme (speaker), Lucian Gregory

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the novel's third chapter, after the local anarchist sect elects Gabriel Syme as their new Thursday (leader), Lucian Gregory calls Syme a "devil," and Syme responds with this brief speech. He has nothing against Gregory personally: their differences are just political. But they're also extreme. Specifically, their ideas of right and wrong are so different as to be incompatible. Gregory's value system (or lack thereof) tells him to destroy men like Syme, while Syme's tells him to destroy men like Gregory. This intractable opposition between creation and destruction, chaos and order, meaning and meaninglessness, or good and evil, is the foundation for everything else that happens in the novel. At least, this is how it looks from Syme's perspective, as he comes to think that he has to destroy the anarchist conspiracy in order to save the world. But, as Syme donning Thursday's cape would suggest, the lines between good and evil will often prove less clear-cut than he would like.

Chapter 4 Quotes

Gabriel Syme was not merely a detective who pretended to be a poet; he was really a poet who had become a detective. Nor was his hatred of anarchy hypocritical. He was one of those who are driven early in life into too conservative an attitude by the bewildering folly of most revolutionists. He had not attained it by any tame tradition. His respectability was spontaneous and sudden, a rebellion against rebellion.

[...]

Being surrounded with every conceivable kind of revolt from infancy Gabriel had to revolt into something so he revolted into the only thing left—sanity. But there was just enough in him of the blood of these fanatics to make even his protest for common sense a little too fierce to be sensible.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Gabriel Syme

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Chesterton dedicates his fourth chapter to fully introducing the novel's protagonist, Gabriel Syme. He emphasizes that Syme *really is* a poet—opposing anarchism isn't just a job, but rather the very core of his worldview. He grew up in a family of irresponsible crackpots, made it his life's mission to prevent such people from gaining power, and one day met a philosophical policeman who offered him a job doing just that.

While Syme's sincere belief in law, order, and sanity makes him a fitting protagonist to represent human goodness in this novel, Chesterton also hints that Syme's approach to the world is just as emotional and reactionary as the anarchists'. Namely, he describes Syme's righteousness as a form of "rebellion against rebellion." In other words, Syme didn't come to believe in law and order because he carefully analyzed the world and reached an objective conclusion about it, but rather because his experiences moved him so strongly that he ended up building his life around an irrational vendetta. In this way, there's little difference between Syme and his enemies, and Chesterton encourages his readers to start questioning Syme's true motives.

"I will tell you," said the policeman slowly. "This is the situation. The head of one of our departments, one of the most celebrated detectives in Europe, has long been of opinion that a purely intellectual conspiracy would soon threaten the very existence of civilization. He is certain that the scientific and artistic worlds are silently bound in a crusade against the Family and the State. He has, therefore, formed a special corps of policemen, policemen who are also philosophers. It is their business to watch the beginnings of this conspiracy."

Related Characters: The Philosophical Policeman (speaker), Gabriel Syme, The President/The Police Chief/Sunday

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

While brooding one day on the banks of the Thames, Gabriel Syme ran into a police officer who recruited him into his department's anti-anarchist unit. In this passage, the officer explains the unit's purpose and describes the anarchist conspiracy that Syme goes on to fight throughout the rest of the novel. He carefully distinguishes the kind of "purely intellectual" threat that anarchism poses to Europe and the globe from the other criminal threats that the police conventionally fight: anarchists want to destroy civilization itself, for purely ideological reasons, and honorable conservatives like Syme are the only ones who can defend the traditions of "Family and the State." This scene defines the stakes of Syme's crusade in the rest of the novel, and it shows the reader that he truly believes this crusade is the only way to save evil nihilist philosophers and artists from destroying the world.

Of course, the end of the novel calls the meaning of this scene into question. It turns out that Sunday—the leader of the Central Anarchist Council—is also the chief of the special anti-anarchist police unit. Thus, Syme's crusade turns out to have been a wild goose chase all along, and his obsessiveness and paranoia stand as warnings against growing too confident in one's goals and intentions.

"The outer ring—the main mass of their supporters—are merely anarchists; that is, men who believe that rules and formulas have destroyed human happiness."

[...]

"They are under no illusions; they are too intellectual to think that man upon this earth can ever be quite free of original sin and the struggle. And they mean death. When they say that mankind shall be free at last, they mean that mankind shall commit suicide. When they talk of a paradise without right or wrong, they mean the grave. They have but two objects, to destroy first humanity and then themselves."

Related Characters: The Philosophical Policeman (speaker), Gabriel Syme

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 34-35

Explanation and Analysis

The Philosophical Policeman tells Gabriel Syme how the anarchist movement has become so powerful. While most anarchists are misguided ordinary people who believe that destroying religion and government will make them happier, the movement's leaders are actually sinister elites who either desire more power for themselves or sincerely want to destroy the world. In this sense, anarchism is essentially an ideological movement: its goals are based on nihilist philosophy, and its leaders have brainwashed a large mass of followers into doing their bidding.

Still, the novel's constant focus on deception and mistaken identity may lead readers to question whether Chesterton presents this theory sincerely, or just to manipulate them. However, there's good reason to think that, even if he's exaggerating here, he actually believes in it: different characters repeat it throughout the novel, and it appears to actually be true of the anarchist characters in it. For instance, most of the attendees at the secret meeting of Lucian Gregory's underground anarchist sect were naïve fanatics, while Gregory, the closest thing to a leader in the group, truly believes that the world is meaningless, and that chaos and destruction are beautiful. Chesterton's point, then, is simple: anarchists, radical philosophers, and their allies don't have a legitimate political program. All they have is dangerous propaganda, and in the moral uncertainty of the modern world, too many ordinary people mistakenly turn to them.

That said, some readers might reach the opposite conclusion: since the novel's anarchist threat turns out to be harmless, perhaps Chesterton is really saying that people don't need to worry about it. While this line of reasoning

makes sense, the novel's protagonist, Gabriel Syme, is still plunged into a world of doubt and uncertainty until religious figures rescue him at the very end. If anything, then, Chesterton suggests that people end up following dangerous ideologies like anarchism and nihilism when they turn their backs on morality.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Syme had never thought of asking whether the monstrous man who almost filled and broke the balcony was the great President of whom the others stood in awe. He knew it was so, with an unaccountable but instantaneous certainty. Syme, indeed, was one of those men who are open to all the more nameless psychological influences in a degree a little dangerous to mental health. Utterly devoid of fear in physical dangers, he was a great deal too sensitive to the smell of spiritual evil. Twice already that night little unmeaning things had peeped out at him almost pruriently, and given him a sense of drawing nearer and nearer to the headquarters of hell. And this sense became overpowering as he drew nearer to the great President.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Gabriel Syme, The President/The Police Chief/Sunday

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42-43

Explanation and Analysis

After the local anarchist group elects Syme as Thursday, he goes to meet the rest of the Central Anarchist Council at their weekly Sunday breakfast in Leicester Square. As soon as he approaches them, he notices that one of them looms over the others like a monstrous demon, and he concludes that this man must be the legendary Council President, Sunday. Of course, the President's intimidating size represents his power—and the extraordinary opposition that Syme will face in trying to defeat him.

Curiously, however, Chesterton's narrator spends most of this paragraph describing Syme's mental state, and especially his tendency to get caught up in elaborate fantasies. This comment will mean different things to different readers. Some might view it as a sign of Syme's strong instincts, which will make him an extraordinary detective and serve him particularly well in the fight against evil. But others could see it as evidence that Syme is paranoid, delusional, and untrustworthy, and that his mission to stop an anarchist conspiracy throughout this book is actually deeply misguided.

❝ He had thought at first that they were all of common stature and costume, with the evident exception of the hairy Gogol. But as he looked at the others, he began to see in each of them exactly what he had seen in the man by the river, a demoniac detail somewhere. That lop-sided laugh, which would suddenly disfigure the fine face of his original guide, was typical of all these types. Each man had something about him, perceived perhaps at the tenth or twentieth glance, which was not normal, and which seemed hardly human. The only metaphor he could think of was this, that they all looked as men of fashion and presence would look, with the additional twist given in a false and curved mirror.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Gabriel Syme, Gogol/Tuesday, The Secretary/Monday

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44-45

Explanation and Analysis

When Gabriel Syme meets the six other members of the Central Anarchist Council, he quickly realizes that something appears to be deeply wrong with each of them. The Secretary only smiles with half of his crooked face, for instance, and this "demoniac detail" gives him away as an anarchist. Each of the men seems "hardly human" in one distinct, similar way, and Syme views this as proof that they are all sinister anarchists.

Of course, the deep irony in this passage is that all of the men at the table turn out not to be anarchists at all, but rather detectives *disguised as* anarchists—just like Syme. They have deliberately chosen their "demoniac detail[s]," which are really the key to their disguises. Thus, Syme is right to think that something is off about the men—he's just comically wrong about what it really means. By scattering this kind of misperception throughout his novel, Chesterton leaves multiple interpretations open for his readers at every turn. He challenges the reader to guess who his characters really are and, by consistently flouting their expectations, shows them how little they truly understand. In fact, he suggests that nobody can ever truly know anyone else in the modern world, as the line between people's true identities and the disguises they put on grows blurrier than ever before.

Chapter 6 Quotes

A barrel-organ in the street suddenly sprang with a jerk into a jovial tune. Syme stood up taut, as if it had been a bugle before the battle. He found himself filled with a supernatural courage that came from nowhere. The jingling music seemed full of the vivacity, the vulgarity, and the irrational valour of the poor, who in all those unclean streets were all clinging to the decencies and the charities of Christendom. [...] He did feel himself as the ambassador of all these common and kindly people in the street, who every day marched into battle to the music of the barrel-organ. And this high pride in being human had lifted him unaccountably to an infinite height above the monstrous men around him.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Gabriel Syme, The President/The Police Chief/Sunday

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

During the Central Anarchist Council breakfast, the President (Sunday) declares that he has pressing news and calls the other men to follow him into a private room. Syme believes that Sunday knows he's a spy, and he debates whether to carry forth with his mission or take the opportunity to flee. Then, he hears a barrel-organ (or crank organ) player on the street below. The music fills him with inspiration because it reminds him of the beauty of humanity—and, above all, that of the common people whose safety he is fighting for by infiltrating the anarchist conspiracy.

This scene may be insignificant in the broader scheme of the novel, but it still speaks volumes about Syme's mindset, motivations, and biases. Most of all, it points to a revealing contradiction: Syme views himself as a heroic champion for ordinary people, but he takes so much pride in this role that he ends up seeing himself as superior to everyone else. This contradiction helps explain why he goes to such great lengths to fight a conspiracy that turns out not to exist at all. It's also significant that Chesterton associates the poor and their crank-engine with "the charities of Christendom"—clearly, Syme's struggle against the anarchist conspiracy is the same fight as traditional Christian morality's struggle to defeat the heresy of modern art and philosophy. Finally, on a more straightforward note, this brief scene also shows how Chesterton believes that art can inspire people by connecting them to others and showing them the beauty in the world.

Chapter 7 Quotes

Every movement of the old man's tottering figure and vague hands, every uncertain gesture and panic-stricken pause, seemed to put it beyond question that he was helpless, that he was in the last imbecility of the body. He moved by inches, he let himself down with little gasps of caution. And yet, unless the philosophical entities called time and space have no vestige even of a practical existence, it appeared quite unquestionable that he had run after the omnibus.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), The Professor de Worms/Wilks/Friday, Gabriel Syme

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

After the Sunday morning Anarchist Council meeting, the elderly Professor de Worms begins following Gabriel Syme around London. Syme finds this incomprehensible: the Professor is infirm and a little bit senile, so he should be physically incapable of keeping up with an ordinary middle-aged man like Syme. But he does. When Syme sprints to catch a departing bus, the Professor inexplicably follows him. Syme is baffled: the paradoxes keep multiplying in this novel, which is drifting deeper and deeper into utter absurdity.

This is the scene in which the novel really becomes worthy of its subtitle, *A Nightmare*. It seems as though the Professor could only catch Syme if he bent the rules of space and time, or if he were secretly someone else entirely. Of course, one of these turns out to be true: as the reader will learn in the next chapter, the man following Syme is not the true Professor de Worms at all. But for now, the Professor's mysterious chase has Syme convinced that the anarchists know he's a spy—and even leads him to question his own sanity.

Chapter 8 Quotes

Syme had for a flash the sensation that the cosmos had turned exactly upside down, that all the trees were growing downwards and that all stars were under his feet. Then came slowly the opposite conviction. For the last twenty-four hours the cosmos had really been upside down, but now the capsized universe had come right side up again. The devil from whom he had been fleeing all day was only an elder brother of his own house, who on the other side of the table lay back and laughed at him.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Gabriel Syme, The Professor de Worms/Wilks/Friday

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

When the man who appears to be the Professor de Worms reveals to Gabriel Syme that he's really a police detective and actor named Wilks in disguise, this is how Syme reacts. On the one hand, this shows him that his assumptions were completely wrong: the Professor wasn't chasing him in order to kill him, interrogate him, or keep tabs on him for the other anarchists. Syme realizes that he cannot trust his own judgment, and this leads him to question the very nature of his quest to stop the anarchist conspiracy. But on the other hand, the Professor's revelation is also great news, because it shows Syme that he isn't alone. He has an ally, and he and the Professor can work together to stop Sunday's conspiracy.

Thus, Syme is overwhelmed with contradictory feelings. Indeed, as this passage shows, his very *reaction* "turn[s] exactly upside down," too, as he alternates between horror and relief. He has simultaneously taken a step forward and a step back: he has uncovered an important secret, but his newfound knowledge only shows him how little he really understands in the first place. Through this plot twist, Chesterton challenges the reader to try and guess what will happen next and who is really on the side of good and evil.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Syme was increasingly conscious that his new adventure had somehow a quality of cold sanity worse than the wild adventures of the past. Last night, for instance, the tall tenements had seemed to him like a tower in a dream. As he now went up the weary and perpetual steps, he was daunted and bewildered by their almost infinite series. But it was not the hot horror of a dream or of anything that might be exaggeration or delusion. Their infinity was more like the empty infinity of arithmetic, something unthinkable, yet necessary to thought. Or it was like the stunning statements of astronomy about the distance of the fixed stars. He was ascending the house of reason, a thing more hideous than unreason itself.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Gabriel Syme

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

The novel's narrator describes Gabriel Syme's thoughts as he walks up the lengthy staircase to the garret where Dr. Bull lives. Syme turns the endless stairs into a metaphor for the endless uncertainty and constant peril that plague him on his journey. When extended to infinity, the line between reason and insanity seems to blur. The night before, from across the Thames, Dr. Bull's tenement (and Syme's whole journey) seemed like an improbable dream. Now, as Syme climbs the steps, it has "a quality of cold sanity." Similarly, the stairs themselves seem perfectly ordinary and real, but their "almost infinite" height pushes the boundaries of Syme's sanity, like the concept of infinity, which is by definition "unthinkable," but is also necessary for the rest of mathematics to make sense. This is how Syme reaches the conclusion that "the house of reason [is] a thing more hideous than unreason itself"—put differently, truth turns out to be stranger than fiction.

Of course, Syme's reflection speaks not only to his immediate circumstances, but also to the novel's broader engagement with the notions of truth, falsehood, identity, and deception. The cases of mistaken identity that abound in this novel almost always depend on the truth being stranger than fiction. (For instance, the Professor is really an actor who impersonated the real Professor so well that his students stopped believing it was him.) And this blurred line between truth and fiction makes it nearly impossible for Syme and the reader to tell what is and isn't real. Ultimately, these insane twists of fate are Chesterton's way of arguing that, without a well-defined worldview (like the clear picture of good and evil provided by religion), people will never truly be able to make sense of themselves or the world around them.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ He felt a strange and vivid value in all the earth around him, in the grass under his feet; he felt the love of life in all living things. He could almost fancy that he heard the grass growing; he could almost fancy that even as he stood fresh flowers were springing up and breaking into blossom in the meadow—flowers blood-red and burning gold and blue, fulfilling the whole pageant of the spring. And whenever his eyes strayed for a flash from the calm, staring, hypnotic eyes of the Marquis, they saw the little tuft of almond tree against the skyline. He had the feeling that if by some miracle he escaped he would be ready to sit for ever before that almond tree, desiring nothing else in the world.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Gabriel Syme, The Marquis de St. Eustache/Inspector Ratcliffe/Wednesday

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

Syme stops to smell the roses during his duel with the Marquis: while fighting, he thinks about the wondrous beauty of the meadow surrounding him. He decides that *this* is what makes life worth living (and civilization worth fighting for). Of course, this is part of a pattern: in adrenaline-filled, life-or-death situations, Syme repeatedly has poetic insights that inspire him to continue on with his quest. For instance, during his breakfast with the Central Anarchist Council, he fell in love with beautiful crank organ music at just the moment when he realized that Sunday might have discovered that he's a spy, and this music motivated him to continue fighting the anarchist conspiracy.

On the surface, Syme's insight means exactly what it sounds like: the world is so beautiful that the anarchist conspiracy to destroy it must not succeed. Anarchists and nihilists might not be able to intellectually *prove* that the world is valuable, but Syme knows it instinctively. Indeed, the novel consistently links this kind of insight with poetry, which also suggests that art is one way that people capture and communicate this beauty.

But on a deeper level, it's also significant that Chesterton links Syme's insight specifically with *nature* in this passage. This scene is already preoccupied with technology, modernity, and tradition: Syme challenges the Marquis to fight a traditional duel, with swords, to prevent him from catching a train and bombing an important ceremony. In other words, this scene is already about using traditions to stop modernist nihilism. Arguably, nature is the most traditional form of beauty that exists at all: just as the crank organ music represented working-class traditions (as opposed to elitist modernism) in Chapter 6, the meadow now represents the beauty of the natural world as created by God (and as opposed to the artificial world of human society).

> "Can you think of anything more like Sunday than this, that he should put all his powerful enemies on the Supreme Council, and then take care that it was not supreme? I tell you he has bought every trust, he has captured every cable, he has control of every railway line—especially of that railway line!" and he pointed a shaking finger towards the small wayside station. "The whole movement was controlled by him; half the world was ready to rise for him. But there were just five people, perhaps, who would have resisted him ... and the old devil put them on the Supreme Council, to waste their time in watching each other. Idiots that we are, he planned the whole of our idiocies!"

Related Characters: The Marquis de St. Eustache/Inspector Ratcliffe/Wednesday (speaker), The President/The Police Chief/Sunday

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103-104

Explanation and Analysis

Syme and the Marquis give up on their duel, and then the Marquis admits that he, too, is a detective working for the police. His real name is Inspector Ratcliffe. This means that at least five of the original Council members—Syme, Gogol, the Professor, Dr. Bull, and the Marquis—were really policemen. The detectives start to speculate about what this means and whether the Council President (Sunday) knew about their true identities. Ratcliffe offers this analysis: he thinks that Sunday is orchestrating everything from behind the scenes and has deliberately brought his five "powerful enemies" (the detectives) onto the Council in order to divide and conquer them. (This is partially true, but not for the reasons Ratcliffe thinks.)

Ratcliffe's theory is clearly paranoid, but it's also entirely plausible—and totally consistent with everything that has happened in this wild and unpredictable novel so far. Indeed, in the grand scheme of things, it may even be the most likely explanation. Thus, Chesterton again offers the reader a particularly strange state of affairs in which nothing makes sense and nothing can be known for sure—besides the fact that nothing is quite what it seems. Again, his message is clear: once people let paranoia and nihilism take hold, they can no longer make sense of the world or live coherent lives.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Was he wearing a mask? Was anyone wearing a mask? Was anyone anything? This wood of witchery in which men's faces turned black and white by turns, in which their figures first swelled into sunlight and then faded into formless night, this mere chaos of chiaroscuro (after the clear daylight outside) seemed to Syme a perfect symbol of the world in which he had been moving for three days. [...] Was not everything, after all, like this bewildering woodland, this dance of dark and light? Everything only a glimpse, the glimpse always unforeseen, and always forgotten. For Gabriel Syme had found in the heart of that sun-splashed wood what many modern painters had found there. He had found the thing which the modern people call Impressionism, which is another name for that final scepticism which can find no floor to the universe.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Gabriel Syme, The Marquis de St. Eustache/Inspector Ratcliffe/Wednesday

Related Themes:

Page Number: 107-108

Explanation and Analysis

Again, life-and-death situations set off Syme's poetic sensibilities: as he and his fellow detectives flee the army of black-masked anarchists through the woods, he notices how the sunlight dances through the leaves and makes it difficult to tell who is wearing a black mask and who isn't. He starts to contemplate the meaning of light, dark, and identity. Of course, his sensation that light and dark are indistinguishable really means that it's no longer possible to say who is good and who is evil. This has happened over and over again throughout the book, as characters who seemed to be anarchists (the Professor, Dr. Bull, and the Marquis) turned out to really be police officers.

In fact, this is the passage in which Chesterton most clearly explains his analysis of identity and truth. The key is when he compares Syme's new, relativistic perspective to impressionist art and philosophical skepticism. Impressionism was the French artistic movement, led by painters like Monet, who tried to capture the way people actually perceive the world, and not the way things in the world really were. Whereas Chesterton thought that art should capture the world's beauty, impressionists distorted it. Similarly, skeptical philosophers are those who believe that people can't know anything because they can't know with certainty that the world really exists, or that their perceptions accurately reflect it. Chesterton saw these two trends as the most significant threats to traditional art, science, and philosophy, because they undermined the basic assumption that people can know fundamental truths about the world. The doubt, paranoia, and mistaken identity that recur throughout the novel are Chesterton's way of showing that it's impossible for anyone who accepts skepticism to live a meaningful human life.

❝ "You've got that eternal idiotic idea that if anarchy came it would come from the poor. Why should it? The poor have been rebels, but they have never been anarchists: they have more interest than anyone else in there being some decent government. The poor man really has a stake in the country. The rich man hasn't; he can go away to New Guinea in a yacht. The poor have sometimes objected to being governed badly; the rich have always objected to being governed at all. Aristocrats were always anarchists, as you can see from the barons' wars."

Related Characters: The Marquis de St. Eustache/Inspector Ratcliffe/Wednesday (speaker), Gabriel Syme

Related Themes:

Page Number: 108-109

Explanation and Analysis

As the detectives flee the masked anarchist army in the forest, they speculate about whether the local villagers will join their side or Sunday's. Syme confidently declares that the government can put down a revolt by "mere mobs" of anarchists, but then Inspector Ratcliffe responds with this speech. Sunday's henchmen are millionaires, he insists; true anarchists are not the masses but the elites. Some common people may mistakenly believe that dismantling the government will serve their interests, but the only people who truly stand to gain from anarchism are the ultrarich, who already have enough power to do nearly anything they want—except when the government stops them.

This perspective helps explain Chesterton's steadfast opposition to anarchism, nihilism, and other forms of modernism. He argues that its power comes from deception (and he uses this novel's plot to demonstrate it). Just like all of the novel's characters are detectives masquerading as anarchists, true anarchists turn out to be self-interested elites masquerading as populists. Chesterton's skepticism about anarchism also gives useful context to his lifelong interest in politics. Specifically, he viewed a system called distributism, which proposes broadly redistributing land and property throughout society, as a better alternative to

both capitalism and socialism.

Chapter 12 Quotes

"The next instant the automobile had come with a catastrophic jar against an iron object. The instant after that four men had crawled out from under a chaos of metal, and a tall lean lamp-post that had stood up straight on the edge of the marine parade stood out, bent and twisted, like the branch of a broken tree.

"Well, we smashed something," said the Professor, with a faint smile. "That's some comfort."

"You're becoming an anarchist," said Syme, dusting his clothes with his instinct of daintiness.

"Everyone is," said Ratcliffe.

Related Characters: The Narrator, The Professor de Worms/Wilks/Friday, Gabriel Syme (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

During their escape from the encroaching anarchist army, the detectives crash Dr. Renard's car into a lamppost and have this tongue-and-cheek exchange about their situation. Notably, both the car and the lamppost represent modernity, as both were relatively recent inventions when Chesterton published this book, so the car crashing into the lamppost is really a metaphor for the failures and contradictions of modern technology—which, Chesterton suggests, only distances humankind further from truth, God, and happiness.

While the detectives are only joking about becoming anarchists, their joke points to a deeper truth: at this point in the novel, it's increasingly difficult to tell who the real villains are, and the detectives increasingly abandon their political principles and moral values for the sake of survival. In particular, this chapter represents the ultimate confrontation between order and anarchy—but nobody knows who is on which side. In fact, both the detectives and the Secretary's army thought they were saving the world from anarchism. In a way, then, the detectives really *are* the anarchists—if it weren't for them, there would have been no anarchist conspiracy to fight.

"Oddly enough I am not quite hopeless. There is one insane little hope that I cannot get out of my mind. The power of this whole planet is against us, yet I cannot help wondering whether this one silly little hope is hopeless yet."

"In what or whom is your hope?" asked Syme with curiosity.

"In a man I never saw," said the other, looking at the leaden sea.

"I know whom you mean," said Syme in a low voice, "the man in the dark room."

Related Characters: The Marquis de St. Eustache/Inspector Ratcliffe/Wednesday, Gabriel Syme (speaker), The President/The Police Chief/Sunday

Related Themes:

Page Number: 125-126

Explanation and Analysis

As the Secretary's black-clad army approaches them on the beach, the detectives start to accept that the anarchist horde will inevitably overwhelm them. But Inspector Ratcliffe declares that he still has "one insane little hope" left: "the man in the dark room," or the police chief who hired all of them into the anti-anarchist unit. Of course, none of them have ever seen him, and he hasn't made an appearance since the beginning of the novel. But his existence *does* indicate that there's a greater power backing the detectives: they know that *someone* has a plan for them, even if they don't fully understand it. In other words, they have to have *faith*.

This is what makes this scene such an important turning point in the novel: it's the moment at which the detectives realize that their only chance of saving themselves is by having faith in some greater power, who can give meaning to the world and their struggle. Needless to say, Chesterton soon expands on this idea to suggest that *Christian* faith is specifically the key to living a meaningful life in the modern world. Of course, at the end of the novel, the reader learns that the police chief was really the Godlike Sunday all along. This gives new meaning to this scene: in reality, the police chief *did* end up saving the detectives.

"Do you see this lantern?" cried Syme in a terrible voice. "Do you see the cross carved on it, and the flame inside? You did not make it. You did not light it. Better men than you, men who could believe and obey, twisted the entrails of iron and preserved the legend of fire. There is not a street you walk on, there is not a thread you wear, that was not made as this lantern was, by denying your philosophy of dirt and rats. You can make nothing. You can only destroy. You will destroy mankind; you will destroy the world. Let that suffice you. Yet this one old Christian lantern you shall not destroy. It shall go where your empire of apes will never have the wit to find it."

Related Characters: Gabriel Syme (speaker), The Secretary/Monday

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

When the Secretary finally corners Syme and his companions on the jetty, they start to feel that all is lost. Syme desperately pulls out his only remaining weapon, Dr. Renard's antique lantern, which is decorated with Christian religious motifs. And to his own astonishment, it works. His speech about the value of tradition, labor, and creation shows the Secretary, who is also a police detective, that they are really on the same side. And symbolically, this moment represents Christian tradition taking its rightful role back from the Godless modern nihilism that has run amok throughout the novel. Nihilism's cardinal sin, Syme argues, is that it tries to overturn thousands of years of tradition in a single fell swoop. Unlike the modern streetlights scattered around London, the lantern actually means something: someone actually put thought, effort, and care into creating it, and failing to see its value means denigrating this labor—and all the other labor that has gone into making everything else valuable in the world.

Chapter 13 Quotes

"I confess that I should feel a bit afraid of asking Sunday who he really is."

"Why?" asked the Secretary; "for fear of bombs?"

"No," said the Professor, "for fear he might tell me."

Related Characters: The Professor de Worms/Wilks/Friday, The Secretary/Monday (speaker), The President/The Police Chief/Sunday

Related Themes:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

After the confrontation between Syme and the Secretary, the six members of the Central Anarchist Council realize that none of them were ever actually anarchists. They were all detectives trying to infiltrate the anarchist conspiracy. And yet they were also the conspirators, because they all carried out parts of Sunday's plot in order not to blow their cover. Perhaps Sunday truly was trying to turn them against each other, or perhaps he was just trying to teach them a lesson. Perhaps Sunday wanted to make them carry out the bombing to prove a point, or perhaps there was never a bomb in the first place. In short, all the detectives truly know is that they don't know anything—and that the only person who *does* is Sunday. So they set off to ask him, and on their way, they have this exchange.

The Professor admits that he's afraid to learn the truth about Sunday and his plans. After all, every time he and Syme have learned something new in the novel so far, they have proven themselves wrong, and their quest has made less and less sense. Meeting Sunday would mean finally undercovering the truth, but since the truth has always been so painful and disillusioning, the Professor wonders whether it may be better to never learn it at all. Chesterton's point is clear: when people join the pessimistic world of modern philosophy and radical politics, where basic moral truths about identity and the universe fall apart, they often come to find endless doubt and uncertainty more acceptable than confronting the truth.

"I tell you this, that you will have found out the truth of the last tree and the topmost cloud before the truth about me. You will understand the sea, and I shall be still a riddle; you shall know what the stars are, and not know what I am. Since the beginning of the world all men have hunted me like a wolf—kings and sages, and poets and law-givers, all the churches, and all the philosophers. But I have never been caught yet, and the skies will fall in the time I turn to bay. I have given them a good run for their money, and I will now."

Related Characters: The President/The Police Chief/Sunday (speaker), Gabriel Syme

Related Themes:

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

After returning to London, the detectives finally confront Sunday and demand to know who he is. This is his response: even if the detectives learn everything there is to know about the world, they will never be able to know him. In fact, he continues, people have always failed to do so. He clarifies that he was also the police chief, then runs away.

Sunday's speech strongly suggests that he represents God (or Jesus Christ). Still, Chesterton never says so definitively, and the novel's final chapter is consistent with many other interpretations—for instance, Sunday could also conceivably represent truth, beauty, poetry, identity, power, or the origins of the universe. But it's still useful and interesting to ask what it means for the novel as a whole if Sunday has turned out to be God or Jesus all along. This would mean that Syme and his companions' long hunt for the anarchist conspiracy was really a roundabout quest for what is, in Chesterton's view, the only viable alternative to nihilism and skepticism: faith in God.

> When the herring runs a mile,
> Let the Secretary smile;
> When the herring tries to *fly*,
> Let the Secretary die.
>
> Rustic Proverb

Related Characters: The President/The Police Chief/Sunday (speaker), The Secretary/Monday

Related Themes:

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

During the novel's third and final chase scene, as the detectives try to catch up with Sunday—who's both elusive and astonishingly athletic—Sunday repeatedly throws crumpled-up notes back at them. Most of these notes are nonsensical: for instance, his note to Gogol just says "The word, I fancy, should be 'pink.'" There's no context.

But this short poem, which is Sunday's note to the Secretary, *does* seem to have a clear meaning. "The herring runs a mile" because the detectives are chasing after the President; in the next chapter, the detectives will "*fly*" off to another world, which represents the Christian vision of the afterlife (and so "the Secretary [will] die"). Thus, this short poem foreshadows the last two chapters of the novel.

But Sunday's note is also significant for another reason: the word "herring." All of the notes are *red herrings*—or false clues deliberately designed to mislead the reader—except for this one, in which Chesterton points out and makes fun of exactly what he has been doing. In fact, the novel is full of red herrings, from the introductory scene in which the narrator announces that Lucian Gregory will be the story's hero to the countless instances where people who appear to be Syme's enemies turn out to really be his allies. Arguably, the whole plot is also one giant red herring: there is no anarchist conspiracy at all, but the *idea* of a conspiracy is really just a plot device that allows Chesterton to present his religious allegory.

Chapter 14 Quotes

> "Have you noticed an odd thing," he said, "about all your descriptions? Each man of you finds Sunday quite different, yet each man of you can only find one thing to compare him to—the universe itself. Bull finds him like the earth in spring, Gogol like the sun at noonday. The Secretary is reminded of the shapeless protoplasm, and the Inspector of the carelessness of virgin forests. The Professor says he is like a changing landscape. This is queer, but it is queerer still that I also have had my odd notion about the President, and I also find that I think of Sunday as I think of the whole world."

Related Characters: Gabriel Syme (speaker), The President/The Police Chief/Sunday, Gogol/Tuesday, The Secretary/Monday, The Marquis de St. Eustache/Inspector Ratcliffe/Wednesday, The Professor de Worms/Wilks/Friday

Related Themes:

Page Number: 144

Explanation and Analysis

As they pursue Sunday past the limits of London, the detectives all describe their unusual impressions of him. Once they finish, Syme points out that each of them might as well have been describing a different man: they presented totally incompatible descriptions. The only thing they all mention is that they see Sunday as vast and unfathomable, like "the universe itself." This makes some sense: Sunday is full of contradictions, and he played a series of incompatible roles in the detectives' lives. Most importantly, he invented a secret anarchist plot, then hired them to sabotage it.

Like a funhouse mirror, Sunday projects a version of each man's distinctive worldview back to him. Optimistic Dr. Bull sees Sunday as inspiring and energetic, for instance, while the melancholy Secretary sees him as "gross and sad." The detectives' many different opinions of Sunday reflect the many contradictory ways that people can understand the universe and the divine—even if they share the same fundamental beliefs and principles. Unlike ordinary human beings, gods can be paradoxical or take on multiple contradictory identities. And so Sunday, who is both the detectives' worst enemy and their greatest benefactor, can mean many different things to many different people.

"Listen to me," cried Syme with extraordinary emphasis. "Shall I tell you the secret of the whole world? It is that we have only known the back of the world. We see everything from behind, and it looks brutal. That is not a tree, but the back of a tree. That is not a cloud, but the back of a cloud. Cannot you see that everything is stooping and hiding a face? If we could only get round in front—"

Related Characters: Gabriel Syme (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

Gabriel Syme remembers the first time he saw Sunday in person, on the balcony at breakfast in Leicester Square. Initially, he stood down below in the square and looked up at Sunday's back. In this context, Sunday seemed dangerous and evil. But later, when Syme actually joined the other men on the balcony, Sunday seemed to be shining with benevolence. Syme concludes that Sunday is really a contradictory man with a "horrible back" but a "noble face." After all, Sunday was both the horrible man who set in motion the anarchist conspiracy and the noble man who hired the six detectives to stop it. It's impossible to understand one side of him without the other, Syme suggests—just as it's impossible to understand the evil in the world without also taking stock of the good.

Syme uses Sunday's "horrible back" and "noble face" as a metaphor for the world in general: everything has both good and evil aspects, he argues, and truly understanding the world requires considering the good and the evil together. Rather than seeing the coexistence of good and evil as a paradox or contradiction, Chesterton suggests, we should see them as complements, or even two sides of the same coin. Syme argues that he and his fellow detectives have only been paying attention to the world's evil backside—meaning that they have been overly pessimistic. This is why they see evil conspiracies everywhere: they have only been looking for evil, and they have missed the good.

But Syme's metaphor also takes on a different meaning in the context of the novel's final chapters. The front and back of the world are not just the positives and negatives, but also two different kinds of knowledge. Seeing the back of something means just seeing its outline, but missing important details. In contrast, viewing it from the front means seeing it squarely and understanding what it truly means. Of course, it's telling that Syme starts talking about seeing the world from the front at the same time as the book starts taking on its serious religious overtones. Chesterton's point is obvious: the truest way to know the world is through religious faith and insight.

The six adventurers had passed through many adventures, but not one had carried them so utterly off their feet as this last adventure of comfort. They had all become inured to things going roughly; but things suddenly going smoothly swamped them. They could not even feebly imagine what the carriages were; it was enough for them to know that they were carriages, and carriages with cushions. They could not conceive who the old man was who had led them; but it was quite enough that he had certainly led them to the carriages.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 147-148

Explanation and Analysis

When they finally approach Sunday's balloon, exhausted and bruised, the six detectives come across an old man with a scepter, who leads them to several luxurious carriages. Without fully understanding the situation, the detectives agree to follow the man, and they notice that the carriages are extraordinarily comfortable.

Of course, readers are likely to understand what the detectives do not: the man with the scepter is death, and the carriages are taking the detectives to heaven. Even if the men may not believe in God, God clearly believes in them—and they'll change their minds soon enough. In Chesterton's elaborate allegory, after futilely looking for meaning in the human world for so long, the detectives will

finally have a chance to embrace God. They will find their sense of meaning and purpose in the divine world, where it has always belonged. This is why things start to go more smoothly, instead of more chaotically, for the first time at this stage in the novel. Throughout most of the book, every plot twist made the detectives *less* comfortable and their circumstances *less* clear, because they tried to solve all of their problems through reason alone. They couldn't make sense of paradoxes and contradictions because they lacked an overarching religious worldview. But now they have one, and they immediately understand that it will give them the certainty and solace that they have been looking for.

❝ But though he affected to despise the mummery, he felt a curious freedom and naturalness in his movements as the blue and gold garment fell about him; and when he found that he had to wear a sword, it stirred a boyish dream. As he passed out of the room he flung the folds across his shoulder with a gesture, his sword stood out at an angle, and he had all the swagger of a troubadour. For these disguises did not disguise, but reveal.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Gabriel Syme

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

When Syme reaches the heavenly realm where the book concludes, his attendant gives him a beautiful blue-gold outfit that represents Thursday (the fourth day of creation, when God created the sun and the moon). Suddenly, everything seems to have fallen perfectly in place: Syme feels freer than he ever has before, and all of the doubts that plagued him throughout the novel disappear. Needless to say, Chesterton uses this scene to suggest that, if modern life and philosophy takes away people's sense of inherent meaning, then the best way for them to get it back is by reconnecting with God. This, he thinks, can help people identify and fulfill their rightful place in the world.

The final line in this passage (and chapter) is particularly important: Chesterton writes that "these disguises did not disguise, but reveal." Of course, he has preoccupied himself with disguises throughout the novel: each character has spent much of their lives pretending to be someone else, and often, they took so strongly to their disguises that they forgot who they really were. In other words, their disguises not only covered up the truth, but changed it entirely. Yet, with these heavenly disguises at the end of the novel, the situation is entirely different: these disguises capture and reveal the truth about the people who wear them. In short, Chesterton suggests that finding one's authentic self doesn't necessarily have to mean shedding one's disguise and revealing what's underneath. Instead, it can just be about embracing the best disguise—or one's rightful, God-given place in the world.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ "Who and what are you?"

"I am the Sabbath," said the other without moving. "I am the peace of God."

The Secretary started up, and stood crushing his costly robe in his hand.

"I know what you mean," he cried, "and it is exactly that that I cannot forgive you. I know you are contentment, optimism, what do they call the thing, an ultimate reconciliation. Well, I am not reconciled. If you were the man in the dark room, why were you also Sunday, an offence to the sunlight? If you were from the first our father and our friend, why were you also our greatest enemy? We wept, we fled in terror; the iron entered into our souls—and you are the peace of God! Oh, I can forgive God His anger, though it destroyed nations; but I cannot forgive Him His peace."

Related Characters: The Secretary/Monday, The Narrator, The President/The Police Chief/Sunday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 154-155

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's last chapter, the six detectives and Sunday all assemble in heaven, each wearing a distinctive outfit that represents one of the seven days in the traditional Christian creation story. Sunday explains that he represents the Sabbath, the day of rest, but the Secretary takes issue with this: he does not understand how Sunday could claim to promote peace and reconciliation when he was both the head anarchist and the head policeman. Through this contradiction, the Secretary suggests, Sunday only created tumult and conflict. What the Secretary is really asking is why God would put innocent people like him through such incoherent, mind-bending trials.

Of course, the answer to this question is that God threw the detectives into a web of contradictions and paradoxes in order to bring them back to their faith. He showed them that they couldn't make sense of the world without religion, and this made it possible for them to believe once again—and finally achieve true spiritual peace. Syme's life story shows why he needed this: he was a surly rebel long before he became a philosophical policeman, and it was only his failure in the police that truly showed him his own limits and led him to embrace religion. Of course, the same may be true of the novel's readers: in the modern world, Chesterton suggests, it's easy to think that we have all the answers, and it's difficult to base our lives on faith until we realize that we truly don't.

❝ Syme sprang to his feet, shaking from head to foot. "I see everything," he cried, "everything that there is. Why does each thing on the earth war against each other thing? Why does each small thing in the world have to fight against the world itself? Why does a fly have to fight the whole universe? Why does a dandelion have to fight the whole universe? For the same reason that I had to be alone in the dreadful Council of the Days. So that each thing that obeys law may have the glory and isolation of the anarchist. So that each man fighting for order may be as brave and good a man as the dynamiter. So that the real lie of Satan may be flung back in the face of this blasphemer, so that by tears and torture we may earn the right to say to this man, 'You lie!' No agonies can be too great to buy the right to say to this accuser, 'We also have suffered.'"

Related Characters: Gabriel Syme (speaker), Lucian Gregory

Related Themes:

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's closing scene, Lucian Gregory—the red-haired poet who turns out to be the only true anarchist in the whole book—joins Syme, Sunday, and the other detectives in their spiritual realm and makes the case for anarchism one final time. He complains that people like Syme never truly have to work or suffer, because they simply follow the rules, whereas true anarchists actually do meaningful work because they break the rules.

Syme replies with this passionate speech: preserving order requires at least as much energy, creativity, and ingenuity as destroying it. The forces of law and order must still confront an ambiguous universe and choose which side to fight for; and once they do, they have to overcome the indifferent and malicious people who surround them. They may be fighting for a greater cause, but usually, they're still utterly alone when they do it. So doing so requires bravery, faith, and above all, a commitment to principle. This is what separates men like Syme from men like Gregory: unlike anarchists, the crusaders of truth actually know what they're fighting for.

This is the great moral lesson of Syme and the other detectives' suffering throughout the book: fighting for justice and morality requires profound self-sacrifice. It can feel lonely, intimidating, or even futile, as nothing but one's own faith can prove that one is on the right track. And yet, Chesterton insists, it is the only thing truly worth doing.

❝ "Have you," he cried in a dreadful voice, "have you ever suffered?"

As he gazed, the great face grew to an awful size, grew larger than the colossal mask of Memnon, which had made him scream as a child. It grew larger and larger, filling the whole sky; then everything went black. Only in the blackness before it entirely destroyed his brain he seemed to hear a distant voice saying a commonplace text that he had heard somewhere, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?"

Related Characters: Lucian Gregory, The Narrator, The President/The Police Chief/Sunday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

After Lucian Gregory challenges Gabriel Syme to prove that people who fight for order and justice are as brave as the anarchists who try to destroy it, he turns his attention to Sunday. This passage shows what transpires. After expanding his face to unlikely proportions, Sunday replies by quoting Jesus: "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?"

In the Gospel of Matthew, just before Jesus dies on the cross, James and John ask to sit with him in privileged positions. Jesus asks them if they can drink of the same cup as him—a metaphor for withstanding the same horrible suffering he was about to endure. Without understanding the question, they say yes. Thus, when Sunday repeats this quote to Gregory, he is pointing out that Gregory neither understands his suffering nor can ever match it. Gregory's anarchism is born of naivety, he suggests, not sincere

suffering or wisdom. Needless to say, Gregory does not fully understand: appropriately enough for an atheist anarchist, he just associates the quote with "a commonplace text," but doesn't know the specific context.

Of course, this passage strongly associates Sunday with Jesus. This suggests another interpretation of the novel's plot: Sunday has appeared on earth and set up an elaborate anarchist conspiracy in order to show the novel's detective characters how much they do not understand and, eventually, persuade them to return to religion. Sunday is so awe-inspiring and powerful because he is literally the Messiah, and anyone who doesn't recognize his greatness—like Lucian Gregory, the devil—is hopelessly stupid and childish. After all, this is why Sunday's transformation makes Gregory cry out and "entirely destroy[s] his brain."

> [Syme] could only remember that gradually and naturally he knew that he was and had been walking along a country lane with an easy and conversational companion. That companion had been a part of his recent drama; it was the red-haired poet Gregory. They were walking like old friends, and were in the middle of a conversation about some triviality. But Syme could only feel an unnatural buoyancy in his body and a crystal simplicity in his mind that seemed to be superior to everything that he said or did. He felt he was in possession of some impossible good news, which made every other thing a triviality, but an adorable triviality.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Gabriel Syme, Lucian Gregory

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

At the very end of the novel, Chesterton offers his readers one final, daring plot twist. Gabriel Syme comes to and realizes that he's "walking along a country lane" with Lucian Gregory. He feels that his fateful encounter with Sunday was terrifyingly and gloriously real, but he's also absolutely certain that it wasn't. So the reader learns that none of what happened from the second chapter onward was real—instead, it was all an elaborate fantasy taking place in Gabriel Syme's head. The whole time, he has merely been strolling around Saffron Park with Lucian Gregory.

Thus, Chesterton uses his novel's conclusion to undermine its entire plot. Not only does this give the reader one last, satisfying surprise, but it also indicates how Chesterton intends the novel to be read: as a nightmare and an allegory. Syme and his companions' dizzying chase represents the human condition without God. In such a world, people must try and make sense of an elusive and contradictory world without the benefit of any deeper knowledge about its origins, structure, or purpose. At the end of the novel, they find God—and, with Him, eternal peace. This newfound faith explains Syme's feeling of "unnatural buoyancy" and "crystal simplicity." He may have considered embracing darkness and anarchy over the course of his conversation with Lucian Gregory, but after imagining the consequences of doing so, he has recognized and come back to the Christian truth.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: THE TWO POETS OF SAFFRON PARK

The novel begins in Saffron Park, a redbrick suburb west of London, whose charming architecture and quirky residents make it look like "a frail but finished work of art." This artwork's hero is the anarchist poet Lucian Gregory, who spends his evenings lecturing a group of friends in his garden. Even the "emancipated" women worship him. His strange combination of curly, feminine dark red hair with a brutish, protruding chin helps him attract attention.

In this opening passage, it may seem like Chesterton is just setting the scene for the rest of the novel. But in reality, his quaint portrait of the gorgeous sunset in charming Saffron Park and his description of Lucian Gregory as the novel's hero are designed to give the reader misleading expectations and contribute to their surprise when the novel descends into a gloomy nightmare and Gregory turns out to be a relatively minor character. Indeed, this opening scene makes Chesterton's taste for paradox clear, from the contradiction between Lucian Gregory's beautiful, feminine hair and ugly, masculine chin, to that between his anarchy and the attractive, orderly neighborhood where he lives.

One evening, after a spectacular but perturbing sunset, a new poet—the meek-looking Gabriel Syme—visits one of Lucian Gregory's gatherings. The two men start arguing about the meaning of poetry. Syme views poetry as a way of imposing order on the world, but Gregory believes that poetry (like anarchy) means destroying order in the name of beauty. Gregory finds order boring—he compares it to a predictable train that goes exactly where it's supposed to. But Syme argues that this train actually represents humanity's victory over chaos and meaninglessness. Gregory celebrates revolt and rebellion, which Syme compares to seasickness.

Syme and Gregory's argument about poetry speaks to the purpose of all art—including this novel. Chesterton uses this debate to introduce the binary oppositions at the heart of this book: order versus chaos, creation versus destruction, faith versus skepticism, and meaning versus meaninglessness. Throughout the story, Syme and his allies believe that they are saving the world by stopping anarchists from destroying it, while anarchists believe that this destruction is the only way to truly improve society and make life worth living. Of course, Chesterton chooses Syme's side in the end.

Gabriel Syme even suggests that Lucian Gregory isn't serious about anarchism. This infuriates Gregory, but Syme just calmly walks away. Rosamond Gregory, Lucian's sister, approaches Syme. She asks if her brother is really an anarchist and would really set off bombs. Syme says no: Lucian Gregory usually "says more than he means," and bombing "has to be done anonymously." Syme and Rosamond Gregory sit in the corner of the garden, and he talks at her for several minutes, full of sincere passion. When he stands back up, he realizes that everyone else has left. He leaves, too. The narrator explains that Syme won't stop thinking about Rosamond Gregory and her red hair during the rest of his "mad adventures," even though he won't see her again until they're all over.

Syme speculates that Gregory isn't really a serious anarchist because his radical ideology obviously contradicts his comfortable middle-class life. Of course, the novel's paradoxes and contradictions, even in its first few pages, should prepare the reader for Chesterton to break all of their expectations. Meanwhile, Syme's attraction to Rosamond Gregory suggests that his belief in order and predictability doesn't prevent him from feeling or acting on strong passions. In other words, Chesterton uses Syme's romance to show how choosing order over chaos doesn't necessarily mean living a dull, predictable life.

Outside, Gabriel Syme notices a man in a hat and trench coat waiting for him in the shadows behind a street lamp. It's Lucian Gregory. He says that Syme is only the second man to have ever truly irritated him, then declares that he will take action to show that he's serious about anarchism. He invites Syme to "a very entertaining evening," on the condition that Syme not tell anyone—especially not the police. Syme calls Gregory's offer "far too idiotic to be declined" and promises to keep his secret. They leave in a cab.

When Lucian Gregory stands in the shadows, this represents the metaphorical darkness of his anarchist beliefs. He rejects the idea that there is any inherent meaning or goodness (light) anywhere in the world, and particularly in the modern, technologically advanced world of the 20th century (which is represented by the street lamp). Gregory's promise of "a very entertaining evening" and Syme's characterization of this offer as "idiotic" both foreshadow the next chapter's events. But Syme's claim ends up being literally true, whereas Gregory's is only true ironically, for reasons that he completely fails to understand.

CHAPTER 2: THE SECRET OF GABRIEL SYME

Lucian Gregory and Gabriel Syme reach a dingy pub. As a joke, Syme asks the waiter for lobster and champagne—but the waiter actually brings it to him, and it's delicious. Syme tells Gregory that he feels like he's in a dream. In response, Gregory calls himself and his fellow anarchists "the most modest men that ever lived on earth." Syme lights up a cigar, and then the table starts to rotate. Suddenly, it drops through the floor into the basement. Syme is unfazed.

Syme's luxurious meal again shows that, in this novel, nothing is really what it seems. Whereas Gregory is a political radical who lives in luxury, the pub is a luxurious establishment masquerading as an ordinary, working-class one. Gregory clearly recognizes this when he calls anarchists "modest"—he's pointing out that the pub's outward appearance, like his own lifestyle, is really just a disguise. These disguises raise an important question, which recurs throughout the novel. Are anarchism, modernism, and their philosophical counterparts mass movements or elite ones? They certainly claim to be defending common people against elites, but whose interests do they really serve?

Gregory leads Syme down a corridor to a dimly-lit iron door. He knocks five times and identifies himself as "Mr. Joseph Chamberlain," and the door opens. The men head down a series of other passageways, where the walls are lined with guns and other weapons. At last, they reach a strange, spherical steel room, which is filled with bombs and benches. They sit, and Gregory asks whether Syme still doubts his seriousness as an anarchist.

The underground bunker shows that Lucian Gregory really is *serious about anarchism. But Joseph Chamberlain was a prominent British politician who switched sides from radical liberalism to radical conservatism during his career, so the anarchists' passcode suggests that they may* not *really be as serious as they appear. Indeed, Gregory's pride at showing Syme his bunker suggests that he might be more interested in attention and pride than genuine political change. So does his decision to tell Syme his secret—one that not even his own sister knows—in the first place.*

Syme has two questions for Gregory. First, he asks, what do the anarchists want? "To abolish God!" Gregory replies fanatically—his group wants to destroy all of the "arbitrary distinctions" between right and wrong. Second, Syme asks why Gregory talks so openly about anarchism with his friends in Saffron Park, if his real operations are so top-secret. Gregory smiles and reveals that his friends don't think he's serious about anarchism, either. In the past, he tried disguising himself as a priest, a millionaire, and a soldier, but none of the disguises were convincing. So he visited the President of the Central Anarchist Council, who told him to disguise himself as an *anarchist*—because nobody thinks they actually pose any threat.

While Gregory's political position may seem dangerously vague, it does reflect what real anarchists wanted to do in Chesterton's era: destroy anything they could. Gregory points out the close link between nihilist philosophy (which opposes religion and rejects moral values as "arbitrary distinctions") and anarchist politics (which tries to destroy all forms of power, which it views as illegitimate). Both are essentially based on the premise that, if order and structure are arbitrary, then it's better to embrace chaos and meaninglessness. Finally, Gregory's disguise once again points to the differences between how people appear and their true identities: he can only play his true self in public because everyone else assumes that he's being inauthentic.

Gregory explains that the Central Anarchist Council's seven members use the days of the week as pseudonyms. The leader is Sunday, and Thursday—the head of the London branch—has just died. In fact, the branch will elect Thursday's successor tonight, and Gregory is certain that they'll choose him. Once they do, Gregory explains with glee, he'll take his official uniform—a sword, revolver, sandwich case, flask, and cloak—and go to the river, where a boat will whisk him away to glory.

Gregory's explanation finally gives the reader a hint to the novel's title: the rest of the story will somehow revolve around who becomes Thursday and what they do on the Central Anarchist Council. Yet Gregory's excitement about winning the election and Thursday's theatrical supervillain disguise once again suggest that anarchists are more interested in personal gain, glory, and pride than making a positive political change.

Syme declares that he's starting to like Gregory—but only "because [he's] such an ass." Noting that he's promised not to tell Gregory's secret to the police, Syme asks Gregory to promise not to tell *his own* secret to the other anarchists. Gregory agrees, and Syme reveals his secret: he's a police detective working for Scotland Yard. And he can already hear the other anarchists walking down the corridor.

Chesterton adds in another plot twist based on mistaken identity—and readers should prepare for many more to come. Syme's comment sounds like a joke, but it's actually literal: Lucian Gregory is so foolish and self-absorbed that he accidentally helped the police infiltrate the Central Anarchist Council.

CHAPTER 3: THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY

After Gabriel Syme reveals that he works for the police, Lucian Gregory grabs a revolver and holds him at gunpoint. But Syme reminds Gregory that they've "checkmated each other"—neither can reveal what they know about the other. Gregory puts down the gun, warning Syme against breaking his promise.

The men have "checkmated each other" because, if Gregory reveals that Syme is a detective, then Syme will turn Gregory in to the police—and vice versa. Clearly, then, Syme isn't just going after Lucian Gregory: he's targeting other anarchists who have far more power and influence.

The other anarchists enter. A short man named Comrade Buttons asks Gregory whether Syme is one of the delegates, and which branch he represents. Syme claims to be representing Sunday, and the anarchists agree to give him a seat at the meeting. Gregory paces around the room and realizes that, if he gives away Syme's identity, then Syme will just turn him in to the police. He decides that the group should give Syme as little information as possible, so he calls for the meeting to start.

Chesterton adds more layers of deception, manipulation, and mistaken identity to the plot: Syme manipulates the other anarchists into including him in the meeting, while Gregory tries to manipulate them in order to protect the Council leadership from Syme's investigation. Needless to say, only one of them will succeed—and so far, Syme has outsmarted Gregory at every turn.

Comrade Buttons, the meeting's chairman, gives a speech about the previous Thursday, a man who once organized a failed bombing attempt and died from replacing his milk with chalky water (which he viewed as a more humane alternative). It's time to choose a new Thursday. One of the other men nominates Gregory, and Buttons asks Gregory to make a speech.

Comrade Buttons's speech suggests that, despite Lucian Gregory's high-minded praise for the Council, the previous Thursday was really a pathetic crackpot. Of course, this points to how absurd and misguided the anarchists' political program is in general. But this doesn't make them any less dangerous.

Gregory decides to try and sound as literary and ambiguous as he can, to throw Syme off the scent. He says that the public misunderstands and persecutes anarchists, when they're really meek and harmless—just like the Romans did to Christians. But one of the men, Comrade Witherspoon, loudly objects, "I'm not meek!" Gregory claims that the man really *is* meek, and the group is based on love and brotherhood, but Witherspoon continues to heckle him in disagreement.

Gregory is so certain that he will be elected that he speaks only to Syme. Of course, his belief that he can change Syme's mind is naïve, as he has already shown Syme his weapons and told him about his group's plans "to abolish God!" And Gregory's plan also backfires in another way: it alienates his audience, who (like Comrade Witherspoon) enjoy feeling like evil, rebellious villains.

After Gregory's speech, Syme stands to object to Gregory's candidacy. He declares that Gregory's moralistic ideas about truth, honesty, and virtue are not fit for an anarchist, and that the group should choose a stronger, more ferocious Thursday instead. Gregory calls Syme a hypocrite, but Syme claims that he's only doing his duty and repeats that a merciful, amiable man like Gregory should not be Thursday. Syme proposes himself as an alternate candidate, and the other men cheer and nominate him. Infuriated, Gregory nearly reveals that Syme works for the police. Instead, he simply begs the group not to elect Syme—but the group ignores him and does it anyway.

Gregory's blunder fits right into Syme's true plan: getting himself elected as Thursday and going after the Central Anarchist Council. Thus, Syme outsmarts Gregory for a second time by once again taking on a new persona. Since he recognizes that the other anarchists are naïve and easily manipulable, he knows how to win their support. Curiously, the reader has met Syme the poet and Syme the agitator, but never the real Syme. The next chapter will finally give them a chance to understand his true intentions and motives.

After Syme is elected as Thursday, Gregory privately calls Syme "a devil" and accuses him of entrapping him. But Syme replies that both of them are simply doing what they view as the right thing. Comrade Buttons leads Syme to a door that opens directly onto the river, and Syme goes to board the tugboat that's waiting for him. Before he leaves, he thanks Gregory for keeping his word—including by giving him the "very entertaining evening" he promised.

It's ironic that Gregory calls Syme a "devil" because, allegorically speaking, Syme clearly represents good and Gregory clearly represents evil. (In fact, their first names—Gabriel and Lucian—link them to the archangel Gabriel and Lucifer, respectively.) While Gregory views his conflict with Syme in personal terms, Syme views it in purely ideological ones. He has nothing against Gregory as an individual; they are just pursuing two different, incompatible visions of how they think the world should be. Yet this response of Syme's is also partially facetious, because he knows that Gregory claims not to believe in good or evil at all. In other words, Syme is pointing out that it's impossible to believe in no *values at all—anarchists worship power and destruction, so they can never legitimately claim to be against* all *moral values.*

CHAPTER 4: THE TALE OF A DETECTIVE

Gabriel Syme really is a poet, and his hatred for anarchists really is sincere. It comes from "a rebellion against rebellion"—his family was full of insufferable, nonconformist cranks, and he once witnessed a terrible bombing. He began to see anarchists as a dangerous horde of brutes, and he resolved to dedicate his life to fighting them.

Syme's childhood explains his profession: he thinks that the best way to stop the forces of evil is by using their own tactics to undermine them. But in this way, he's just as passionate and emotional as the anarchists he wants to stop. Of course, his attitude also parallels Chesterton's goals in his work: he wants to rebel against the literary and philosophical rebels (like romantics and modernists) who dominated the intellectual scene of his time.

One night, Syme was walking down the riverbank, brooding about anarchists, when a policeman noticed his shabby clothes and stopped him. Syme complained that policemen are not only cruel but *calm* about their cruelty. But the policeman replied that this is "the calm of organized resistance" against evil. He revealed that he is a "philosophical policeman" who works to protect civilization against intellectual conspiracies. Instead of unjustly brutalizing the poor, like most policemen, he fights the worst kind of criminal: "the entirely lawless modern philosopher." Syme agreed: ordinary criminals are willing to live in society, if only they can have more money or property for themselves. But anarchists are far worse because they want to destroy society itself.

Syme hates anarchists, but this doesn't mean that he believes in preserving society just the way it is. Where anarchists try to destroy *things they don't like, reformists like Syme want to* improve *them. Indeed, Syme recognizes that modern governments are often designed to sustain inequality, and that the police often do more harm than good. Yet the "philosophical policeman" is different—he belongs to what people would recognize today as an anti-terrorism unit. Indeed, the distinction between normal criminals and "lawless modern philosopher[s]" is similar to the difference between criminals (who try to improve their standing in society through unethical behavior) and terrorists (who try to undermine the very foundations of society for everyone).*

The officer asked Syme to join the police and fight the organized anarchist army, which is preparing to strike. Most of the army's soldiers are ordinary anarchists who think that humanity would be happier without laws and society, but its leaders are dangerous ideologues who think humanity should collectively commit suicide. Syme agreed to join. The officer led him to Scotland Yard to meet the anti-anarchist unit's chief, an enormous man who holds meetings anonymously in a pitch-black room. Syme told the chief that he didn't have experience, but the chief replied that nobody does, since the job is to be a martyr. He hired Syme, but told him that he would die on the job. Syme cleaned up his clothing, hair, and beard, then got to work.

Modern readers might see the threat of an anarchist conspiracy as an innovative plot twist, but actually, it was just a familiar reality for readers in the early 20th century. Chesterton communicates his skepticism about the anarchist movement's true aims through the philosophical policeman: while the masses who joined the movement might have mistakenly seen it as a pathway to a better society, he suggests, its leaders were really selfish misanthropists. In other words, just like the novel's plot, anarchist politics is based on deception and mistaken identity. But Syme's meeting with the police chief might lead readers to wonder if the same isn't true of anti-anarchists, too. The chief's size, dramatic flair, and penchant for secrecy are all important details that foreshadow the moment when his identity is revealed, near the end of the novel.

Back in the present, after being elected as Thursday, Syme boards the tugboat under a bleak, moonlit sky. He feels like he's on a foreign planet, embarking on a wild medieval adventure. All night, the tugboat works its way down the Thames. At daybreak, it reaches an embankment with steep stairs, and Syme disembarks.

From Syme's sense of adventure to the weather, this passage's tone couldn't be more different from the opening scene's—in which the crazed anarchist Lucian Gregory chatted calmly with his friends in beautiful, sunlit Saffron Park. Of course, these juxtapositions are intentional: they're yet another reminder that things are usually not what they seem. One of the novel's villains (Gregory) first appeared as a hero, and here, its main hero (Syme) dresses up as a villain.

CHAPTER 5: THE FEAST OF FEAR

After getting off the tugboat, Gabriel Syme climbs the embankment's steps and encounters a mysterious man (the Secretary) standing at the top. The man is dressed conventionally and sports a tiny beard at the bottom of his long face. He is also completely motionless, so Syme isn't sure if they're supposed to meet. Then, the man cracks a strange smile, but only on half of his face, and tells Syme that they will go to meet Sunday for breakfast on a balcony overlooking Leicester Square. Sunday has decided that the safest place to meet is completely in the open, because nobody believes that people who talk publicly about anarchism would ever actually be anarchists.

Chesterton describes the Secretary in a way that instantly relates him to, but contrasts him with, Lucian Gregory. Both men have unusual chins and strange hair, but Gregory's wild, flowing red locks speak to his calling as a poet, while the Secretary's clean little beard suggests that he's more of a cold-blooded political operative. And his bizarre half-smile is the only sign of his sinister intentions. Finally, Sunday's decision to meet in the most public place imaginable is consistent with Lucian Gregory's habit of telling all his affluent friends about his bombing plans. It again reminds the reader that, in this novel's world of paradoxes, disguises are often really disguises, but sometimes they're really the truth.

Leicester Square looks like an exotic foreign plaza. Gabriel Syme notices a group of extravagantly-dressed men chatting boisterously over breakfast on a balcony. He immediately identifies Sunday as the gigantic man facing away from the plaza. As he climbs the stairs and approaches the balcony, Syme feels that he's approaching "the headquarters of hell." He takes his seat and glances at Sunday's huge, imposing face. The other men look ordinary, except for one: Tuesday (or Gogol), a melancholy Pole whose white collar and satin tie contrast absurdly with his messy, doglike brown hair. Sunday complains that Tuesday's sour attitude makes him stand out.

It's significant that Leicester Square, one of London's most significant central plazas, looks foreign and out of place to Syme at the moment when he finally reaches the heart of the anarchist conspiracy. It's also significant that the anarchists' conversation looks rambunctious and disorderly—even though, unlike most stereotypical anarchists, they have a clear structure and obvious leader. Sunday looks appropriately sinister and imposing for the role he plays—but the novel's constant disguises and mistaken identities should remind the reader not to trust appearances. Similarly, Gogol stands out for failing to look natural in his extravagant disguise, but this doesn't necessarily mean that he's not in disguise at all.

Gabriel Syme notices that something seems to be wrong with *all* of the men: they seem "not normal" and "hardly human." Monday, the Council Secretary who met Syme on the embankment, has an emaciated face and tortured eyes, in addition to his twisted smile. Wednesday, the wealthy Marquis de St. Eustache, looks too at home in his luxurious clothes, like a sinister tyrant. Friday, the Professor de Worms, is a senile old man who seems to be decaying from his very corruption. And Saturday, a confident, stocky young doctor named Bull, wears opaque black glasses that make his true expression impossible to see. He seems like "the wickedest of all those wicked men."

Each anarchist has one or two clear traits that give them away as deviant misanthropes. This fits with the novel's constant focus on identity and disguise: the anarchists all look like aliens thinly disguised as ordinary humans. Of course, time will show that they aren't really anarchists disguised as normal people, but rather something else entirely, disguised as anarchists. While the anarchists appear to come from all walks of life, in reality, they all share one key trait: they are all social and economic elites. This points to Chesterton's suspicion that anarchism is really a plot for the wealthy and powerful to undermine the government and secede from democracy.

CHAPTER 6: THE EXPOSURE

In some ways, the six men before Gabriel Syme seem perfectly normal. But in others, they seem twisted and extreme, as though they belong "on the borderland of things"—just like their beliefs. They discuss their terrible plots with a frightening ease: in three days, Wednesday will try to bomb a meeting between the Russian Czar and the French President. While this worries Syme, he's actually more worried about something else: Sunday is staring directly at him. Syme feels like Sunday knows that he's a spy.

Syme struggles to fit in with the men who surround him. He can't decide what their outward appearance says about their inward nature: are they ordinary people with extremist beliefs, or monsters who have somehow learned to seem outwardly human? His sensation of teetering on the edge of reality is not just a comment on the other men, but also, as readers will eventually learn, a key turning point in the novel's plot. This conversation gives him a clear mission—stopping Wednesday's bombing—and will soon plunge him into the new, even gloomier world where he will go on to spend the rest of the novel.

Syme considers reporting the six ringleaders to the police, but he also remembers his promise to Lucian Gregory. So he ends up stuck "in a vertigo of moral indecision." He's sure that Sunday would kill him if he discovered him spying, but he also thinks that perhaps he could get all six men arrested before they had a chance. While the anarchists might have persuaded a lesser man to join their plots, Syme never considers it for a second—he fears Sunday, but he doesn't admire him. The ringleaders eat voraciously as they discuss whether to carry out the attack with a knife or dynamite.

Syme's "vertigo of moral indecision" comes from being stuck between two different ethical principles: he wants to keep his promise (even if it was to a criminal), but he also wants to bring the anarchists to justice and stop their attack. Clearly, Syme is fundamentally a man of principle—but his involvement with the anarchists makes it difficult for him to seriously follow or even make sense of his principles. In fact, Chesterton uses Syme's "vertigo of moral indecision" to communicate a broader message: modern philosophy, literature, and political movements turn the world into senseless chaos by destroying traditional morality.

Suddenly, Sunday stands and breaks his silence. In a strangely timid voice, he asks the others to follow him to a private room for some "very particular" news. Syme decides that it's time: either Sunday is going to kill him, or he's going to turn the men in. A crank organ playing in the square reminds Syme about the beauty of humanity, and he decides that he's willing to risk his life to save the world.

To Syme, the contrast between Sunday's gigantic stature and his gentle voice only makes him seem more ominous and unpredictable than before. Whereas anarchists want to destroy the world because they don't see anything valuable in it, the crank organ music shows Syme exactly what's valuable and beautiful in the world. It's telling that Chesterton chooses a crank organ, an instrument of the masses, to inspire Syme. Clearly, Chesterton is trying to suggest that society's beauty and vitality come from traditional, working-class art and popular culture—and that the guardians of law and order really represent these working classes' interests, even though anarchists also claim to.

Syme follows the conspirators into a dark room, where Gogol complains that Sunday is a hypocrite for holding meetings in secret. Sunday asks the men to sit down and reveals that he has "simple and shocking" news: the group can no longer openly discuss its plans because one of them is a traitor. That man, Sunday declares, is Gogol. Gogol pulls out two guns, and three men grab him. Syme sinks into his chair with an overwhelming sense of relief.

Syme was frightened because he thought that Sunday had found him out, but it turns out that he isn't the only spy on the Council. But in addition to creating suspense and showing off Chesterton's talent as an author, this daring plot twist also foreshadows the next several chapters, in which the other anarchists' identities also come under further scrutiny.

CHAPTER 7: THE UNACCOUNTABLE CONDUCT OF PROFESSOR DE WORMS

Sunday disarms Gogol, sits him down, and makes him pull a blue card out of his pocket. Syme realizes that it's the same blue card that *he* received when he joined the police. Gogol sheds his fake Polish accent, removes his wig, and leaves—but not until Sunday promises him that he will be brutally murdered if he tells anyone about the conspiracy. Sunday declares that he has to go lead a charity meeting, but Saturday will finish putting together the group's assassination plans, and they will reconvene in a week for breakfast. Monday objects: he thinks the whole group should debate the plans together. But Sunday angrily points out that a spy could still be listening in, then storms out of the room. The other men don't seem to understand Sunday's comment, but Syme does, and he's petrified. The men part ways.

In yet another case of mistaken identity, once again, things are not what they seem: Gogol looked out of place in the group not because he was an avowed anarchist who couldn't pull off being disguised as an ordinary man, but rather because he was a spy trying too hard to look like an anarchist. It's telling that the notoriously brutal Sunday lets Gogol go free with merely a threat, then heads off to a charity meeting. It's difficult to tell whether Chesterton is making fun of anarchists and philanthropists, foreshadowing later developments in the plot, or just playing with his readers' expectations because he knows that he can. (Most likely, it's all three.) Of course, when Sunday mentions other spies, this shows Syme that he isn't necessarily off the hook.

Syme walks through Leicester Square and it starts to snow. He sees a wax doll in a barbershop window, then notices the filthy, snow-covered Professor de Worms staring intently at it. He wonders whether the Professor is enamored with the doll, or simply stuck in some kind of trance. Syme goes to lunch a few blocks away, and he's relieved to finally be free from the anarchists. But on his way out of the restaurant, he sees the Professor seated near the window, drinking milk. Syme dashes outside. He wonders if the Professor is following him, but takes relief in knowing that he can always outrun the old man.

The senile Professor seems not to fully understand what he's doing—he may even mistakenly think that the doll is a real person. In fact, when the Professor stares at the doll, they momentarily resemble one another: both are motionless, empty shells of a human being. Further, when the Professor shows up at the restaurant, he appears not to even notice Syme. From Syme's perspective, it's unfathomable that someone as out of touch with the rest of humanity as the Professor could have power over the fate of society.

Syme walks briskly to Fleet Street, about a mile, then pops into a tea shop for a coffee. The Professor staggers in right after him and orders milk. Syme drops his walking-stick in surprise, but the Professor doesn't seem to notice. Syme leaves his coffee and sprints to the nearest bus. He boards, sits, and turns around—and then sees the Professor get on after him. Syme is baffled: the Professor can barely walk, so he couldn't possibly have caught up to the bus, unless he bent the rules of space and time. Syme sprints off the bus and tries to get lost in the tangle of alleys near Fleet Street. But even after making dozens of random turns, he still hears the Professor following him close.

Beneath this chase scene lies Syme's worry that the Professor might know that he's a spy and be following him to kill or capture him. Yet the Professor's actions are baffling because his behavior at the morning meeting made it clear that he's capable of neither the physical nor cognitive challenges associated with following Syme around London. By this point, Chesterton has trained his readers to expect surprises—so clearly, the Professor is not really who he appears to be.

Syme pops out onto the main avenue near St. Paul's Cathedral. He watches the muted sunset behind the snow-covered cathedral dome and decides to confront his pursuer. He turns around and watches the Professor hobble toward him—and then right past him, without acknowledging him or blinking an eye. Syme gesticulates and yells at the old man, then turns to run straight across the square. The Professor follows him. He continues speeding around central London for some time, until he reaches a dreary sailors' bar by the river. The Professor walks in and orders milk.

Syme's attempt to get the Professor's attention fails—the Professor continues to follow him robotically, and Syme still has no idea how the Professor is physically capable of keeping up with him. It's telling that their encounter happens in front of one of London's most significant churches: the setting sun behind the dome is a metaphor for the decline of religion in European life. Of course, this chase represents Syme's general feeling that an invisible, sinister force is pursuing him for reasons that he can't fully understand. Chesterton closely associates this feeling with the modern world. This feeling also explains why Chesterton subtitled this novel A Nightmare.

CHAPTER 8: THE PROFESSOR EXPLAINS

In the pub, the Professor de Worms sits down right across from Gabriel Syme. Syme downs his beer and wonders what the Professor de Worms could possibly be doing. He wonders if it may be some kind of innocuous welcome ritual. But then, the Professor looks straight at him and asks, "Are you a policeman?" Syme is taken aback, but the Professor says that he looks like a policeman. Syme asks why and jokes that perhaps the Professor means it metaphorically, but the Professor asks again and again: "Are you a detective?" Syme says no. At the Professor's request, Syme even swears on his own grave that he's not a policeman.

At last, the Professor actually speaks directly to Syme. But the Professor's question appears to confirm Syme's worst fears: the other anarchists, it seems, already know that Syme is a spy. And if this is true, since Syme still can't explain how the Professor managed to follow him all around the city, he must simply admit that the anarchists outsmarted him. Fortunately, as readers will soon learn, it isn't *true—Chesterton is just throwing even more plot twists at them.*

"That's a pity," replies the Professor, "because I am." He jokes that he should arrest Syme, then pulls out a blue police card. Syme feels like the world is upside down—but then realizes that this is a good thing, because it means that the anarchists probably aren't onto him. He breaks out into laughter and pulls out his own blue card, but the Professor warns him to keep a low profile. The Professor jovially knocks his milk off the table, then reveals that he's really 38 years old and in disguise. The Professor explains that he didn't know that Gogol was on their side, and he was just as frightened as Syme when Sunday confronted them.

The deception and mistaken identity continue—as with Syme and Gogol, a character who seemed like a sinister villain turns out to actually be another hero. Thus, there is more good in the world than Syme thought: he was wrong about the Professor, but his error also means that he no longer has to work alone. Of course, the Professor's disguise explains how he managed to follow Syme around London. But it also forces the reader to reconsider their interpretation of the previous chapter: the Professor wasn't trying to trap Syme, but rather just to enlist his help.

Even though three of them were policemen, the Professor laments, they still couldn't have taken on Sunday—who, they both agree, is frightening and must be stopped. They also both agree that they have to stop the bombing in Paris—and that to do so, they must find Dr. Bull, who is planning it. Fortunately, the Professor knows where he is, and he will lead Syme there. They go out into the grey night and walk to the riverbank, where the Professor points to Dr. Bull's window in a high-rise tenement across the river. At just that moment, the light goes out, indicating that Dr. Bull has gone to bed.

Syme and the Professor agree that their most important priority is to stop Sunday and prevent the bombing. Over the next several chapters, this goal will serve as the driving force behind the novel's plot. When Syme and the Professor look out at Dr. Bull's tenement, this is the third time that Chesterton associates nighttime scenes on the banks of the River Thames with the fight between good and evil. (The first two were Syme's encounter with the philosophical policeman and the scene in which he was elected as Thursday.) When Dr. Bull's light goes out, this extends the same metaphor: again, darkness represents the sinister anarchist plot that threatens civilization. But this plot is also distant and incomprehensible, and it seems to be getting further away (and making less sense) the deeper Syme digs into it.

Syme and the policeman disguised as the Professor go to a dingy old inn for dinner. The food is excellent, and the men exchange stories. Syme explains how he got involved in the police, and then the other man explains that he's really an actor named Wilks. There is a real Professor de Worms, a nihilist philosopher from Germany. In fact, Wilks once met the real Professor, then put on a show impersonating him. But his impersonation was so good that the audience thought that he really *was* the Professor, and that the real Professor was imitating *him*. The audience called the two Professors into the same room to debate who was real and who was fake. They chose Wilks, even though he spent the whole debate inventing fake philosophers. Afterwards, a police officer arrested Wilks on the street—and the chief hired him into the anti-anarchy campaign.

This scene takes the novel's motif of truth, falsehood, and mistaken identity to a new extreme: Wilks impersonated the real Professor so believably that fiction prevailed over reality. The audience effectively took the real Professor's identity away from him and handed it over to Wilks. Chesterton uses this plot point to suggest that people's identities really depend on how other people view them. It's also significant that the Professor is a nihilist philosopher and Wilks is an actor. Chesterton is suggesting that, when people give up on basic beliefs about morality and truth in the modern world, all meaning falls apart. After all, if anyone can pass for anyone else, then nobody is really anyone at all.

CHAPTER 9: THE MAN IN SPECTACLES

Even though Wilks has revealed his true identity, he still drinks his wine slowly and sorrowfully, like the Professor. But he admits that he really *is* worried about something. Wilks asks if Syme plays the piano, and Syme says yes. Wilks replies that this solves his problem: if Syme has nimble fingers, then he'll be able to learn Wilks's secret sign language, which they can use to communicate when they visit Dr. Bull tomorrow. Wilks explains the basics of the language, but Syme enjoys the challenge so much that he starts inventing signs for all sorts of complex, unnecessary words. He stays up late practicing the language.

Wilks's behavior shows that, by impersonating the Professor for so long, in many ways he has really become *the Professor. Chesterton suggests that, when people often put on disguises to hide their true identity, they often turn into the very disguise they were using. Meanwhile, the secret language is just another kind of disguise. Syme's enthusiasm for it points to his lifelong affinity for mysteries, deception, and intrigue—which should encourage the reader to also question his elaborate theories about anarchism.*

When he wakes up in the morning, Syme trusts the Professor entirely, but he dreads the dangers he knows they must face together. When Syme asks the Professor how he invented the secret language, the Professor doesn't answer, and Syme starts to worry that the Professor isn't really on his side. But then, he realizes that the Professor is sending him a secret message with his hands: "I will only talk like this." They eat a quick breakfast on the street, then hustle across the river to Dr. Bull's building. They climb the endless steps up to Dr. Bull's tiny garret, where they find him writing at his table. Dr. Bull reminds Syme of the French Revolution, or of death itself. Syme and the Professor enter and sit with Dr. Bull at his table.

Syme's paranoia about the Professor's identity is understandable: so many of the people he has met on his journey so far have not truly been who they appeared to be. But it turns out to be unfounded. In fact, Chesterton is really using Syme's paranoia to once again warn the reader about the dangers of modern skepticism about truth: if we see falsehood and deception all around us, then we can never truly be certain about anything. Syme associates Dr. Bull with death and the French Revolution for the same reason: both represent a breakdown in order (whether social or biological) that leads to chaos.

The Professor very slowly tells Dr. Bull that he has important news about their plans in Paris—but it's a long story. Compared to the Professor's lethargy, Dr. Bull's liveliness conveys "a sense of unbearable reality." The Professor says that the full story is Syme's, and he secretly signs to Syme that he's out of ideas. Syme tells Dr. Bull that he met a detective, got him drunk, and learned that the police are planning to arrest the Marquis. But Dr. Bull continues smiling and staring, his expression unchanged.

Syme gets caught between the Professor's tedious lies and Dr. Bull's "sense of unbearable reality." This functions as a metaphor for Syme's psychological state throughout the novel: he loses track of what's true and what isn't, and he ends up deceiving others for what he believes to be the sake of the greater good. After all, Dr. Bull's frozen, obviously fake smile suggests that he's hiding something, too.

Syme starts signing to the Professor that he's had an important, poetic intuition—but the Professor tells him not to say anything, then starts ignoring him. Syme speaks anyway: he asks Dr. Bull to take his glasses off. The Professor stares at Syme in shock, and without a word, Dr. Bull removes his glasses. The hazel, starlike eyes behind them make him look like a common, innocent young boy. Syme announces that Dr. Bull can't possibly be an anarchist, and he shows Dr. Bull his blue policeman's card. The Professor reluctantly pulls out his own blue card—and then Dr. Bull starts laughing and does the same.

Clearly, there's a pattern forming. Dr. Bull, too, is really with Syme, not against him. It's significant that Syme associates his intuitions about Bull with poetry: whereas his logical theories lead him astray, his artistic instincts point him to the truth. This suggests that, for Chesterton, the analytical reasoning of science might actually be less reliable than the spontaneous emotions of art. Finally, Dr. Bull's glasses are a concise metaphor for Chesterton's attitude about good and evil: Bull disguised the shining beauty and benevolence of his eyes as evil by covering them up with dark glasses.

Syme, the Professor, and Dr. Bull descend to the street. They point out that, between them and Gogol, *most* of the men on the council were actually police. Dr. Bull explains that, when he became a detective, he looked too honest and innocent to go undercover, until a higher-up in the police gave him the devilish, smoky glasses. In fact, this higher-up was the chief who hired them all—and he figured this out in the pitch-black room, without ever seeing Dr. Bull's face.

Syme and the Professor win another ally in their fight against anarchism. It's puzzling that the mysterious police chief would hire multiple detectives to infiltrate the Central Anarchist Council without telling them about one another—and that he would know how to make Dr. Bull look evil without ever seeing his face. It's understandable that readers may start to question the chief's true identity and motives.

The men reach the rail station, where Dr. Bull arranges their tickets. In a short time, they're on a boat to France. Dr. Bull explains that he had to send the Marquis with the bomb, because the President (Sunday) was following him around and watching him. The men agree that they should get Dr. Bull arrested once they reach Calais, but then they realize that they have all sworn never to turn in the anarchists to the police. They conclude that it will be the three of them against the Secretary, the Marquis, and—worst of all—the President.

While it's relatively insignificant to the plot, thematically, it's quite notable that Sunday successfully manipulated Dr. Bull into giving the Marquis the bomb. This shows that the anarchist conspiracy actually couldn't have succeeded without the detectives' help. In other words, the forces of good unwittingly became the forces of evil. Yet they still decide to keep their promises to not give up the anarchists, which shows that they still believe that they should hold themselves to higher moral standards than their sinister anarchist counterparts.

Syme concludes that the men must stop the Marquis from leaving Calais, but without denouncing, detaining, or kidnapping him. He starts talking about the Syme and St. Eustache family history, and the other men think he's crazy. But then he clarifies: he will challenge the Marquis to a duel. The men disembark the boat and walk down the seashore to a café where they see the Marquis sitting.

Modern readers may not know that, when this novel was published in the early 1900s, dueling was already uncommon in France. Thus, Syme's proposal involves a conscious throwback to outdated aristocratic traditions—the same traditions that the Marquis's wealth and title also represent. Chesterton will use this duel as a way to present (and mock) different ideas about the place of tradition in the modern world.

CHAPTER 10: THE DUEL

Syme, Dr. Bull, and the Professor sit and share a bottle of wine at the café in Calais. Syme gets drunk and writes out a witty script for how he'd like his conversation with the Marquis to go. When the other men say that he's being ridiculous, since the Marquis will never say the lines he's planned, he jokingly replies that he'll have to say them all himself. Syme stands and gazes at the Marquis, who looks barbaric but regal in his festive spring suit.

Syme's drunkenness and taste for comedy suggest that he may not be taking his mission to stop the end of the world quite as seriously as he did at the beginning of the novel. The other detectives are right to question why he writes out a script for his conversation with the Marquis. But in the context of the novel, this script is very significant: Syme is writing fiction, *an alternate but idealized version of reality. Of course, this speaks to Chesterton's goals in writing this novel. When Syme approaches him, the Marquis now takes on all of the sinister, devilish traits that Syme once associated with the Professor and Dr. Bull.*

Syme approaches the Marquis, tries to pull on his nose, and then starts insisting that the Marquis has insulted his aunt by making disparaging comments about the band. The Marquis's companions call this absurd and point out that Syme is attacking the Marquis for no reason. But the Marquis proposes a duel, just like Syme hoped.

The novel descends deeper and deeper into absurdity: Syme's attack on the Marquis is nonsensical on purpose, but it still achieves his intended goals. This suggests an explanation for Syme's drunkenness and fiction-writing: he truly is proposing a duel about nothing, and he recognizes that he has entered an illogical, unpredictable universe where he will ultimately be at the mercy of greater, darker forces.

Syme walks back to his table, where he tells the Professor and Dr. Bull that they have to insist on scheduling the duel for the next morning, after the Marquis's train leaves for Paris. Syme predicts that the Marquis will propose to duel in a field near a train station, hoping to win the duel quickly and catch the train. In fact, this is exactly what he proposes.

Syme's wildly elaborate plot succeeds once again. Through the unusual juxtaposition of a traditional duel and a modern train, Chesterton mocks his own preoccupation with how people can preserve traditions in a modern world defined by accelerating economic and technological change. This scene also recalls Syme and Lucian Gregory's argument at the very beginning of the novel, when Syme cited trains as a prime example of how poetry's true purpose is to create order and progress.

In the morning, Syme meets the well-dressed Marquis for their duel in a lush, flowery meadow next to a train station. Colonel Ducroix, the Marquis's representative, proposes that the duel should end after the first major injury. But, as Syme's representative, Dr. Bull insists that the duel must continue until one of the men disables the other. The men take their swords, remove their coats, and start fighting. Syme remembers how he feared the Professor and Dr. Bull before realizing they were policemen—but this doesn't compare to the fear of death he feels now. As he fights, he contemplates the beauty of nature.

Syme carries out his elaborate, unnecessarily dangerous plan to stop the Marquis's attack. In fact, Syme even seems to enjoy putting his life at risk, which raises the question of whether his primary motivation is really just to stop the anarchists. Meanwhile, Syme's meditation on nature is similar to his reflection on the crank-organ music during the Anarchist Council meeting in Leicester Square: it reminds him that there is something worth fighting for in the world (namely, beauty).

The Marquis glances over at the railway line, then starts fighting with renewed fury. Syme knows that the train must be coming. The Marquis overexerts himself, and Syme parries his sword and nicks him, but the Marquis doesn't seem affected at all. A minute later, he stabs the Marquis in the neck and again in the cheek—but there's no blood or scar. Syme starts to worry that the Marquis has some devilish supernatural power, and he starts contemplating humanity's poetic beauty again. He hears the train approaching and stopping in the station.

Just like when Gogol clearly didn't fit into the Anarchist Council and when the Professor inexplicably kept up with Syme during their chase around London, when the Marquis gets stabbed and turns out completely fine, this strongly hints that he's hiding something. At this point in the novel, it would scarcely be surprising if he weren't really who he claims to be. As the duel nears its end, Chesterton emphasizes the contrast between the approaching train and Syme's poetic flight of fancy. This is a metaphor for the tension at the heart of this book between tradition, beauty, and art, on the one hand, and science, modernity, and violence, on the other.

The Marquis suddenly drops his sword and asks Syme to just pull his nose, like he originally wanted, and end the duel. Dr. Bull and Ducroix agree that this is improper, but for some incomprehensible reason, Syme does it. The Marquis's nose breaks off—it's made of paper. Next, the Marquis tears off his own left eyebrow and hands it to Ducroix, who is horrified to realize that he was supporting a cheater who wore padding to a duel.

Chesterton layers absurdity upon absurdity and misconception upon misconception: at first, Syme viewed the nose-pulling as a way to get his duel, but now, it turns out that the duel was all a roundabout way for the Marquis to avoid nose-pulling. The Marquis's mask explains why Syme's sword never injured him. The paper mask also represents the novel's obsession with deception and disguise even more literally than the other disguises Syme has encountered so far. Finally, the Colonel Ducroix's reaction is a reminder that traditional concepts of morality and honor are central to duels (and the whole world of aristocratic politics that they represent).

The Marquis insists that he must make his train, but Dr. Bull and Syme declare that he won't be taking it. The Professor announces that the Marquis will set off a bomb if he boards the train. But the Marquis insists that he could catch *any* train to Paris, and he needed that specific train in order to *catch him*. Nobody understands, so he clarifies: if he misses the train, then Sunday wins. He tears off the rest of his disguise and reveals that he's actually a policeman named Inspector Ratcliffe. Dr. Bull explains the situation to the Marquis's henchmen, and Ducroix concludes that they must join the fight against anarchy.

The pattern of mistaken identity repeats itself once again. The Marquis wasn't taking the train to set off the bomb: he was taking it to stop Sunday *from setting off the bomb. So once again, because of mistaken identity, Syme and his allies were actually doing evil when they thought they were doing good. Ducroix's reaction shows that ordinary, honorable people recognize the threat of anarchy, too. While Ducroix is a minor character in the novel as a whole, his steadfast morality makes him an important counterweight to the nihilism and indifference of the book's anarchist characters.*

Syme is baffled to learn that nearly all the councilmen were police. But the Marquis thinks that Sunday chose them on purpose, to keep them busy fighting each other. The Marquis also thinks that Sunday is coming their way, in the crowd that just disembarked from the train. Worse still, the policemen are all isolated in a remote meadow, so Sunday and Monday can easily get rid of them. Dr. Bull and Syme look at the crowd through a pair of binoculars—they notice that a few men are wearing black disguises, and one only has half a smile.

The more Syme learns, the less he understands. The truth is far more mysterious and incomprehensible than the convenient story that he told himself at the beginning of the novel—that the other men were evil anarchists who must be stopped. But, once again, Syme and his allies don't have the time to work out what is really happening, because there's an imminent threat on the horizon. Since Chesterton continually associates darkness with evil, the black disguises identify the men as anarchists. But since disguises are often deceptive in this novel, readers can never know for sure.

CHAPTER 11: THE CRIMINALS CHASE THE POLICE

Syme looks at the masked men through the binoculars and sees that none of them is the President. Inspector Ratcliffe suggests that the President is already carrying out his attack, then leads the others away into the woods. The masked men follow them, but are nearly impossible to pick out in the tumult of broken sunlight shining through the treetops. With his straw hat, Ratcliffe looks like he's wearing a mask, too, and this makes Syme question whether anyone is really who they appear to be at all. After all, Syme's enemies (the Professor, Dr. Bull, and the Marquis) have all turned out to be his friends. And they could turn back into enemies again at any moment. Perhaps nothing in the world really means anything at all.

The novel descends into the second of its three chase scenes. Just as in the others, it's difficult for readers to know who is truly chasing whom, but the chase provides an occasion for the characters to reflect on the novel's main philosophical concerns. Here, the broken sunlight and Ratcliffe's hat complement Syme's meditation on the nature of identity and disguise. Ratcliffe explicitly states what Chesterton has been hinting at all along: in the modern world, it's difficult to tell reality from illusion—especially when it comes to identity, for which there often isn't a deeper truth at all. No matter how good their intentions, people often can't tell whether they're really on the side of good or evil. Of course, Chesterton will soon offer a caveat to this picture: none of this has to be true if we put our faith in a higher power.

Syme asks where they're going, and Ratcliffe replies that they're heading for a seaside town named Lancy, where the anarchists don't have much support. Like most true anarchists, Ratcliffe explains, Sunday's henchmen are powerful millionaires who don't want the government to rule over them. The group runs into a suntanned French peasant—the kind of man Syme thinks would never be an anarchist. But Colonel Ducroix points out that, in France, peasants actually own their land, and he respectfully negotiates with the man to get a ride in his cart.

Ratcliffe's comments about anarchist millionaires and the group's encounter with the peasant both bring the novel back to a key question: who really benefits from anarchism? Even though anarchists claim to be liberating the masses from government tyranny, Ratcliffe suggests, anarchism actually only benefits the rich, who would see their power increase even more under a society without government. In a way, Chesterton views an anarchist society as an extreme form of capitalism. Indeed, he uses the French peasant to show how even common people can have dignified lives when they actually own property. Later in life, he would go on to condense these insights into a philosophical system that he called distributism. (In short, he believed that redistributing property and land more equally was the best way to improve society.)

The peasant brings the group out of the woods to an inn near Lancy. They watch the anarchist army following them, but growing thinner over time. When they reach their destination, Ducroix arranges for the elderly innkeeper to bring them drinks and horses, which will allow them to reach the nearest police station. As soon as the men ride away, the black-clad anarchist army reaches the inn.

Like Ducroix and the peasant, the innkeeper doesn't hesitate to do what's right. All three men belong to an older, more traditional, more honorable world, where people still followed higher moral values. In contrast, the anarchists represent the moral emptiness of the modern world, where power and self-interest reign.

CHAPTER 12: THE EARTH IN ANARCHY

Thanks to their horses, Syme and his companions finally outrun the anarchists. They reach the town of Lancy at sunset and seek out Dr. Renard, the only honest rich man in town, who is Colonel Ducroix's friend and owns a car. But Dr. Bull objects that the anarchists might catch them if they stop. Then, the men hear the thunder of hooves behind them, and they realize that the anarchists have taken the rest of the innkeeper's horses. The men rush to Dr. Renard's hilltop house. At first, Dr. Renard doesn't believe that anarchists are really coming after them, but then he sees the black army charging up the hill. One horseman rides far ahead of the rest: the Secretary.

The chase continues. At the beginning of this scene, the forces of good are clearly outrunning the forces of evil because noble people like the peasant, the innkeeper, and Dr. Renard recognize their goodness and help them out. The world seems to be in order. But then, the anarchists start to catch up and the situation starts to change. Chesterton deliberately undermines the appealing idea that good is handily defeating evil. It's telling that this army is led by the Secretary, the first of the anarchists Syme met at the beginning of the novel. His fight with the forces of darkness appears to have come full circle.

Dr. Renard barely drives his cars, so by the time the men get one of them up and running, night has already fallen. As Syme tries to start it, the Secretary catches up to the group and stations his horse right in front of the car. Suddenly, the car lurches forward, knocks the Secretary off his horse, and runs him over. The men drive off into the night. To light their way, Colonel Ducroix holds up **an antique lantern** with a cross on it (which Dr. Renard yanked out of his ceiling as a personal favor). On their way towards the police station, Ratcliffe and Dr. Bull disagree about which side the town would support in a fight.

In this novel, modern technology usually represents moral ambiguity and godless depravity, so the fact that Dr. Renard seldom uses his cars suggests that he truly is an ethical man. Yet, when the car runs over the horse, the detectives seem to be on the wrong side of the clash between tradition and modernity. Unlike the car, Renard's lantern clearly represents tradition and Christianity. In fact, it's a metaphor for the divine light, or God's presence and guidance in everyday life.

The Professor hears the sound of Dr. Renard's other two cars, which are speeding at them, full of anarchists. A bullet whizzes by the men as they debate whether they will survive and whether the townspeople are secretly working with the anarchists. Ratcliffe points out that a mob has blocked the road ahead. The men stop the car to reevaluate their plans, until Dr. Bull realizes that Dr. Renard himself is leading the crowd. Dr. Bull runs over to thank Dr. Renard—who starts shooting at him. Dr. Bull returns to the car and admits that he has no idea what's happening. He doesn't think Dr. Renard could possibly be working for the anarchists. Colonel Ducroix expresses his astonishment and approaches Dr. Renard to investigate. Dr. Renard raises his pistol, but does not shoot.

The anarchist army didn't just take Renard's cars from him: they convinced him to join them. Dr. Bull thinks that Renard is deliberately leading the crowd astray, but he turns out to be too optimistic. So once again, the world turns on its head in a split second: suddenly, nothing means what it used to anymore. After all, throughout this chapter, the detectives constantly debate whether the townspeople are truly democrats or anarchists. This debate is a metaphor for the novel's deeper questions about human nature: are people inherently good or evil? At this point in the chase scene, at which even upstanding citizens like Dr. Renard are joining the anarchists, it appears that the answer is that people are evil. But only time will tell if this is Chesterton's actual belief, or just another twisted case of mistaken identity.

Syme wants to ram the car into the crowd, Dr. Bull wants to wait, and the Professor wants to go back. But the rest of the army is fast catching up on horseback—led by the innkeeper. So Syme veers the car down a steep road toward the sea—and crashes into a lamppost. The men crawl out of the car, grab swords, and jump down onto the beach. Syme leads them down a jetty, where they will try to defend their position until the police arrive.

Syme, Bull, and the Professor represent three different ways that the forces of good can fight the forces of evil: confrontation, retreat, or reappraisal. Of course, readers must consider these options in the context of the novel so far, which has consistently shown that people aren't always really on the side of this battle that they think they are. Indeed, when the innkeeper joins the army, readers must choose between two explanations: either the innkeeper wasn't really as honorable and traditional as he seemed, or else he actually thinks the anarchist army is in the right. Finally, the car striking the lamppost is a significant metaphor: modern technology crashes into and disables itself. Of course, this expresses Chesterton's skepticism about this technology, which he thought didn't solve all the problems it claimed to.

When they turn around, the men see "a dark and roaring stream of humanity" following them onto the beach. Even the peasant who carted them to the inn is in the crowd. "We are the last of humankind," laments Ratcliffe. The Professor quotes a verse about the end of the world from Alexander Pope's *Dunciad*. The men see policemen rushing out of the station, joining the crowd, and preparing to shoot at them. Ratcliffe predicts that they will all die soon, but says that he has one last hope: "the man in the dark room."

The detectives feel like "the last of humankind" because, with the "dark and roaring" anarchist army approaching them, it seems like humanity itself has gone over to the dark side—and the detectives are the last remaining defenders of morality and the common good. Ratcliffe's comment about the police chief (who, ironically for the leader of the forces of good, met them in a "dark room") reminds the reader that, even though the forces of evil seem incomprehensibly powerful, the forces of good also have an unfathomably powerful ally on their side. Needless to say, the police chief is a character foil for Sunday, and in the following chapters, the reader will see this comparison go even deeper.

Then, the men realize that even Colonel Ducroix has joined the crowd. He is standing at the shore with the masked Secretary. When Syme starts walking toward him, he starts shooting and shatters Syme's sword. Syme approaches him and knocks him down, then holds up Dr. Renard's **lantern**, which he says represents the beauty of tradition and society. Anarchists can never create something so glorious, Syme declares—only destroy it. He hits the Secretary in the face with the lantern, then throws it into the ocean. The Secretary stands, removes his mask, and declares, "I arrest you in the name of the law." He pulls out a blue card and explains that he's a detective working for Scotland Yard. Dr. Bull explains that he and his companions are detectives, too.

The pattern continues: anarchists are really detectives, and both sides in the conflict view themselves as the protagonists in the battle of good against evil. The supposed horde of evil anarchists turns out to actually be a citizens' army seeking to uphold honor, morality, and justice. So yet again, the novel shows that appearances are deceiving, and people are really more benevolent than they seem. It's especially significant that Syme ends the war using Dr. Renard's antique lantern—a piece of art covered in Christian symbolism. Clearly, this represents Chesterton's belief that following Christian traditions is the key to upholding morality and saving society from evils like modernism, nihilism, capitalism, and anarchism.

CHAPTER 13: THE PURSUIT OF THE PRESIDENT

Ducroix forgives the five detectives for dragging him into a pointless battle and takes them to board their boat back to England. On their way, they try to figure out what "Sunday's little game" was really about. Fortunately, their next council meeting is tomorrow. After a pleasant journey, they spend the night near Leicester Square. On his evening walk, Dr. Bull runs into Gogol. The group explains that they're *all* police spies, and they have a drink.

The mystery of the anarchist conspiracy is more confusing than ever, but oddly enough, it also seems less sinister than ever. Like the other conflicts in the last six chapters, the conflict between the detectives and the Secretary's army resolves with no clear winner and loser, because everyone realizes that they were on the same side all along. The detectives now know that they don't actually have to save the world from a shady conspiracy—instead, they just have to figure out how they got duped for so long into believing in such a conspiracy.

In the morning, the six policemen meet Sunday on the same balcony overlooking Leicester Square. Sunday greets them jovially and asks if they killed the Czar. The Secretary demands to know who Sunday is and what they have all been doing. Sunday declares that the others "are a set of highly well-intentioned young jackasses," and that they will never know who he is, even if they learn everything else in the universe. He climbs over the balcony railing, dangles off of it, and reveals: "I'm the man in the dark room, who made you all policemen."

The detectives return to the scene of the crime, the balcony in Leicester Square where they originally planned the bombing. Last time they were here, all six of them sincerely believed that they were both joining and sabotaging an anarchist conspiracy—which turned out never to have existed. When they confront Sunday, he doesn't give them any clear answers about the true meaning of their quest, but he does reveal that he is also the police chief. Readers may have been able to predict this from the striking similarity in the way Syme described the police chief and Sunday. But this information is likely to only baffle the reader further: what is Sunday's real agenda?

The President drops down off the balcony into the square, runs off, and gets in a horse-drawn cab. The six detectives speed off after him in three other cabs. When Syme assembles a crowd by yelling "Stop thief!," the President's cabman slows down to avoid drawing attention. So the President takes the whip himself and starts lashing the horse to go faster. When he's right ahead of Syme's cab, he turns around and throws a wad of paper at Syme. It's two nonsense letters, one for Dr. Bull and one for Syme.

The novel's third and final chase scene begins—but Syme and the other detectives don't even fully understand what they're chasing. Sunday seems to have supernatural strength, speed, and agility, especially for such a giant, fat man. Again, this shows that he's no ordinary man—there's far more to him than meets the eye. His letters are also utterly incomprehensible: they add to the mystery at the heart of the novel, but not to the detectives' (or the reader's) hopes of ever resolving it.

When the traffic stops to wait for a firetruck to pass, the President runs out of his cab and jumps onto the firetruck. The detectives' cabs speed after it, and the President tosses another note back to them—this time it's for Ratcliffe, mocking his "trouser-stretchers." When the firetruck passes a series of high railings, the President jumps off the firetruck and over one of them. Syme follows. Behind the railing is an ordinary house, which Syme thinks might be the President's. There are "devilish" roaring and screaming noises coming from it. The other detectives follow Syme over the fence and onto a footpath.

The chase grows more absurd and incomprehensible, but it's also the protagonists' only shot at understanding the true meaning of their own detective work. It's notable that, in the last two chase scenes—the Professor chasing Syme and the Secretary's mob chasing the detectives—the protagonists were being pursued. Only now have they become the pursuers. Indeed, so far in the novel, they have had at least a vague sense of purpose: to stop the anarchist conspiracy, and to avoid dying in the process. They have not needed to chase another goal. But now, they've learned that the conspiracy doesn't even exist, and the sinister menace that was chasing them was a product of their own imaginations all along.

Soon, Dr. Bull realizes that they're at the zoo. A zookeeper passes by and asks if they've found the mad elephant who ran away with a large, elegantly-dressed old gentleman—the President. Soon enough, the President passes right in front of them, riding the elephant through a mass of people and out the zoo gate. The detectives follow, and Syme contemplates the absurdity of nature's animals on the way. When the men are in cabs, the President throws Gogol a wad of paper—it consists of 33 blank sheets and one which says: "The word, I fancy, should be 'pink.'"

With the zoo and the elephant, the novel veers even further into absurdity. With his Godlike power over the world and its creatures, Sunday seems to be daring the detectives—and Chesterton the reader—to guess what's really going on, and what any of his clues really mean. It's also telling that, in past moments of poetic inspiration, Syme has contemplated the beauty of nature and its animals, but now, all he can think about is how strange they are. Without his anti-anarchist crusade to give him meaning and direction, he starts losing his sense that there are wonderful things worth fighting for in the world.

The detectives chase the President's elephant through central London for a long time, until they finally lose him. A few minutes later, they encounter the elephant alone, without the President. A random official hands the Secretary a note from the President: it's a short rhyming poem about death, herrings, and flying. Then, the detectives see a hot air balloon taking off with the President inside. He throws down one last note, this time for the Professor, commenting on his beauty. The detectives chase after the balloon.

The President continues to outsmart the detectives. All the while, he finds the time to write them clever, confusing notes. Of course, these notes are Chesterton's way of mocking the clues and false leads that he has shown Syme and the other detectives follow, fruitlessly, throughout the novel. But at last, one of Sunday's notes seems to make sense: his poem to the Secretary points out that the other notes have been red herrings (misleading clues), foreshadows himself flying away, and predicts the death scene that will come in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 14: THE SIX PHILOSOPHERS

The detectives chase the President's balloon several miles through fields on the outskirts of London. Syme ruins his suit in the process. Under the beautiful sunset, the men debate whether the President really was the man who hired them. Dr. Bull admits that he hopes the President gets down from the balloon safely, because he admires the President's boundless energy. But the Secretary says that Sunday laughed at his woes and seemed like a "gross and sad" lump of jelly when they first met. Ratcliffe describes Sunday as ordinary, exceptionally neat, but absentminded—an especially dangerous trait in an evil person. Gogol says he doesn't think about Sunday at all. And the Professor says that Sunday's face is "too large and loose"—it seems to constantly change, and it makes him "doubt whether there are any faces" at all.

Without any clear answers from Sunday, the detectives debate what their journey has really meant and who Sunday really is. All of them give different answers, and these answers all closely reflect their own personal beliefs and concerns. For instance, Dr. Bull is the most optimistic man in the group, so it's scarcely surprising that he admires Sunday and wishes him well. The Professor's description of Sunday is particularly notable: he seems to recognize that Sunday has no consistent self or personality at all. In doing so, he again explicitly points out how this novel constantly subverts simple, ordinary concepts of identity.

Syme remarks that each of the detectives described Sunday differently, but all compared him with "the universe itself." Syme remembers seeing Sunday's back for the first time in Leicester Square—he looked like a beast pretending to be a man. But when he came onto the balcony, Sunday's face seemed to shine with goodness, like an angel or god. Syme has no idea which is the true Sunday: "the horrible back" or "the noble face." During their cab chase, Syme started suspecting that Sunday's real face was the back of his head. "The secret of the whole world," Syme concludes, is that people see the back of things but not their true faces.

Syme's analysis of the other detectives' ideas about Sunday suggests that the man really does have some kind of divine, Godlike power. This raises important questions for the reader: does Sunday represent God himself, or God's representative in the world (the Messiah)? Syme's comments about Sunday's "horrible back" and "noble face" point to the contradiction between Sunday's role as the police chief (the height of goodness) and the lead anarchist plotter (the height of evil). Of course, this duality supports the theory that Sunday is somehow divine. But when Syme applies this same analysis to the universe itself, he seems to be saying that he and the other detectives have been missing a crucial aspect of things by focusing on stopping the anarchist plot. They have seen "the horrible back" but not "the noble face"—in other words, they have been steadfast pessimists. Perhaps their encounter with Sunday will show them some true goodness in the world besides their own will to stop its destruction.

The detectives watch Sunday's balloon sink down into the forest. Gogol announces that the President is dead, but the Secretary, the Professor, and Dr. Bull disagree. Syme leads them toward the balloon. A large, old man with a scepter approaches them and announces, "my master has a carriage waiting for you." He insists that the detectives already know who the master is. Syme notices that the old man's clothes are the exact same color as the sky and countryside, and feels like he's in a fairytale. The man leads the detectives to a nearby road, where they find six carriages and six attendants waiting for them. They are confused but comforted.

Chesterton again throws the reader for a loop by completely changing the novel's content and tone. Suddenly, the hunt for Sunday is over, and the uncertainty that has plagued the detectives throughout the whole novel magically disappears. Instead, they embark on an entirely different kind of journey. Indeed, by shedding their worries and embracing the next stage of their journey, they are finally doing what Syme has just called for: taking comfort in the "noble face" of the universe. But the man who represents this "noble face," judging by his scepter, appears to be death.

The carriages take the men up a long hill. Syme sees hedges and elm trees on the way. But later, the men realize that they each saw different things that reminded them of their childhoods. The carriages reach a vast gate, where a different old man says that each of the detectives should go to their personal room for refreshments. Syme climbs a staircase and finds an apartment that was clearly made just for him. But when he looks at himself in the mirror, he scarcely recognizes himself: he's covered with blood and his clothes are torn apart.

Whether or not the detectives have literally died, they're clearly heading to the afterlife, at least metaphorically. Their personalized visions and special apartments, like their different perceptions about Thursday, show how this process will look different for each of them—each must remake their own identity by reconsidering the life they have lived. Yet, when Syme fails to recognize himself in the mirror, this shows how people's identities can change so much that they no longer recognize themselves. In other words, people aren't necessarily the most reliable judges of who they really are.

Syme's attendant brings him wine, pheasant, and **clothes for the evening's ball**: a blue drapery outfit with a sun on it, which represents Thursday. The attendant gives Syme a Bible and points him to the chapter in Genesis that says that God created the sun and moon on Thursday. Syme is confused, but he puts the costume on anyway. When he does, he feels liberated and empowered. His new disguise "did not disguise, but reveal."

By this point, the novel is chock full of religious symbolism, which clearly suggests that Christianity is what has saved the detectives from the world of doubt and uncertainty where they used to live. While they spent most of the book trying to fight a shady conspiracy to destroy the universe, now they enter a new realm where, as the Book of Genesis suggests, they will finally have the chance to create something new. And while Syme's beautiful new disguise once again suggests that people may not have a true identity lurking beneath the disguises that they wear, it also offers a solution to the problem. It shows that finding one's true self does not have to mean rejecting and taking off the disguises that hide it—instead, it can just mean waiting for the disguise that fits best.

CHAPTER 15: THE ACCUSER

Syme walks down a corridor and passes the Secretary, who is dressed in **an elegant black robe** with a white stripe running down the middle. Syme realizes that this outfit represents the first day, when God created light. It perfectly fits the Secretary's harsh but energetic philosopher's personality. Similarly, Syme's own clothes fit his personality as a poet. Next, Syme encounters Ratcliffe, whose green garment represents the third day (when God created the earth and plants).

The Book of Genesis gives a new meaning to the seven main characters' names: they now represent the six days that God spent creating the universe (and the seventh day, on which God rested). Each of their outfits clearly associates them with one of these days, and together, they represent the whole process of creation. Thus, Chesterton finally resolves the novel's longstanding conflict between order (creation) and chaos (destruction). After spending nearly the whole book mired in confusion and trying to overcome chaos, the detectives finally achieve order—but only thanks to divine intervention.

Syme, the Secretary, and Ratcliffe pass through a gateway and into a vast garden. It's full of dancing men who are dressed as "every shape in Nature," from animals and trees to lampposts and ships. They find a set of seven chairs, where Gogol, Dr. Bull, and the Professor are already waiting for them. **Gogol's silver dress** represents the separation of the waters on the second day, while the Professor's purple dress is covered in fish and birds to represent the creation of those creatures on the fifth day. Dr. Bull's red-gold outfit, which represents the sixth day, depicts animals and a human man.

The six detectives come together and see that they represent the six days of creation. In this last chapter, Chesterton's religious symbolism grows more and more overt: the dancing men represent the broad variety of God's creation, from the animals and plants that He created at the beginning of the universe to the modern technologies that He allowed humans to develop. So far, Chesterton has presented humankind's blind faith in technology as dangerous and naïve, but this scene suggests that technology can fit smoothly into the broader scheme of the universe when people recognize that it doesn't make them superior to God.

The carnival cheers on the six men when they sit. Sunday is not there, and the Secretary comments that he may be "dead in a field," but then he appears and takes his seat. He wears **an outfit of "pure and terrible white."** The carnival dancers continue for a long time, until they start separating into couples gathering around giant pots of wine and ale, which brew beneath the bonfire that roars on top of a great house. But the bonfire eventually goes out and the revelers start disappearing into the house.

Sunday's "pure and terrible white" outfit associates him with divinity itself. But since he sits next to the other six men, he doesn't appear to truly represent God. The rest of this chapter will suggest an alternative explanation: he represents the Messiah, God incarnate on earth, who is charged with bringing salvation to humankind.

At last, Sunday speaks. He explains that he appeared to the other men in the dark, as a commanding voice, to send them to war. "I am the Sabbath," he announces: "I am the peace of God." But the Secretary objects. He cannot forgive Sunday, he says, because he doesn't understand how Sunday could be both the dark and the light, his friend and his enemy, a source of terror and a source of peace. The other detectives express the same doubt (besides Dr. Bull, who is happy and falls asleep). Sunday stays silent for a long time, then declares that someone else still has to complain, too.

When Sunday identifies himself, he once again raises more questions than he answers. Readers may sympathize with the Secretary's doubt: why would "the peace of God" send the detectives to fight a pointless battle against a nonexistent anarchist enemy? The answer to this question lies in this very scene: Sunday has shown the detectives "the peace of God" by leading them down the road to faith. In the process, he has helped them defeat the overwhelming doubt and uncertainty that plagued them throughout the entire novel. But the only way he could do this was by bringing them to a point of utter spiritual desperation, at which nothing made sense any longer. At this point, they finally saw the paradox inherent in their struggle against meaninglessness, and they recognized that the only way out of this paradox was through faith.

A black-clad swordsman approaches the group: Lucian Gregory. Gabriel Syme gasps and calls Gregory "the real anarchist." Half-awake, Dr. Bull mumbles that Satan has come. Gregory declares that he wants to destroy the whole world and hates everything—including, above all, Gabriel Syme. But Syme replies that he doesn't hate Gregory. Gregory complains that the other men haven't truly suffered or lived life, because they represent law and the government. In response, Syme passionately explains that the forces of law and order *also* suffer. Their fight for good gives them the same "glory and isolation" as anarchists.

Lucian Gregory is "the real anarchist" because he's the only anarchist character in the novel who wasn't actually a detective in disguise. In this scene, he plays the role of the devil, challenging God's power and the detectives' faith. (His name, Lucian—like Lucifer—foreshadowed this role.) Gregory repeats his argument from the beginning of the book: he thinks that people can only truly create beauty and leave a mark on the world by destroying things, because he views upholding morality and creating things as just fulfilling someone else's (God's) plan. But Syme holds up the events of the entire novel as evidence that fighting for God, justice, and morality is *challenging, significant, and dangerous. Chesterton's message is clear: there's nothing braver or more noble than serving God.*

Finally, Gregory asks Sunday if he has ever suffered. Sunday's face grows to enormous proportions, then disappears into darkness. Syme hears, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?" And then he comes to. It isn't sudden, like waking up from a dream. Instead, Syme gradually realizes that he's walking down a country road with Lucian Gregory. Dawn breaks, and the sky's colors and the light breeze are impossibly beautiful. Syme notices that he's in Saffron Park, and he comes to Gregory's garden, where he sees Rosamond Gregory cutting flowers.

Sunday's response to Gregory, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?," is a quote from the Gospel of Matthew. This is Jesus's way of telling James and John that they cannot possibly imagine (or match up to) the profound suffering that he is soon to endure on behalf of humankind. Sunday's message is clear: he has *suffered, and Gregory will never understand him. This line also strongly suggests that Sunday has represented the Messiah all along. Then, Chesterton ends the novel with another characteristic plot twist: the whole story was a fantasy. Gabriel Syme was imagining the whole thing during a leisurely walk (and conversation about anarchism) with Lucian Gregory. But the fantasy worked: it reminded him that goodness and beauty* do *exist in the universe and that the best way to partake of them is through faith.*

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