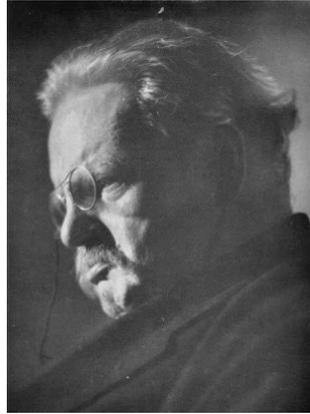


THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY

by G.K. Chesterton



THE AUTHOR

Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936) was born in Kensington, London, and attended St. Paul's School. Later, he studied both art and literature at University College, though he never completed a degree. He went on to become one of the most prolific and influential English writers of the early part of the twentieth century. He was a journalist, essayist, poet, novelist, dramatist, literary critic, and writer of short stories. His works include the novels *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904) and *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908), works of Christian apologetics such as *Heretics* (1905), the spiritual autobiography *Orthodoxy* (1908), and *The Everlasting Man* (1925), literary criticism such as *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (1906), which was credited with restoring Dickens' somewhat tarnished reputation in the English world, and, perhaps most famous of all, the *Father Brown* short stories. He also published *G.K.'s Weekly*, along with writing regularly for periodicals such as *The Illustrated London News*.

Chesterton was known for his wit, and was particularly fond of the use of paradox. He moved in the highest literary circles of his day, and was great friends with George Bernard Shaw, with whom he passionately disagreed on almost everything. Other personal acquaintances included Oscar Wilde, H.G. Wells and Hilaire Belloc. Chesterton was a large man (6'4" and almost 300 pounds), which made him an easy target for the barbs of others. His sharp wit enabled him to give as good as he got, however. He was also notoriously absent-minded and frequently got lost in the city in which he had spent his entire life; on one occasion he telegraphed his wife with the message, "Am at Market Harborough. Where ought I to be?" Politically, he criticized both Conservatives and Progressives, capitalists and socialists, espousing Distributism as a mean between the two.

Above all else, G.K. Chesterton was a committed Christian. He was appalled by the false philosophies that dominated the world in which he lived, and used his powerful pen to defend orthodox Christianity. His commitment to orthodoxy eventually led him to the Catholic Church in 1922, but his writings have led many to consider the Christian faith, including the young C.S. Lewis, who considered *The Everlasting Man* to be the best work of Christian apologetics ever written. *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Chesterton's most famous novel, is a significant part of

his Christian corpus. The book starts off like a mystery, veers toward social criticism, leads to a wild chase scene, and culminates in a symbolism-laden masque, complete with one of the most amazing surprise endings in literature. In the process, Chesterton addresses the problem of evil, the nature of God and man, and the question of order in the universe.

PLOT SUMMARY

The story begins in the London suburb of Saffron Park, an artistic colony that, despite its pretensions, had never produced any art. On an evening noted for its remarkable sunset, poet Gabriel Syme appears in Saffron Park and challenges the reigning anarchist, Lucian Gregory. Syme calls himself a poet of order, and Gregory answers that no such thing can exist - that the very nature of art is anarchy. Syme responds that anyone can miss the mark, but only the true magician can hit it, thus the orderly man is the artist, while the anarchist is dull and boring. He then goes on to accuse Gregory of not being really serious about anarchism at all. When he walks away, Gregory's sister Rosamond follows him in order to continue the conversation. Syme explains to her that a serious anarchist - the kind who throws bombs - must operate anonymously, but that Gregory is far too proud to do any such thing. She is relieved to know that her brother is safe, and the two talk on for hours. After Rosamond goes home, Gregory again confronts Syme, tells him that he has irritated him more than any other man has done, and offers to prove to him that he is a serious anarchist. After demanding a pledge of absolute secrecy, he offers to take Syme to a meeting of his anarchist club.

The two take a cab to an obscure pub in another part of London. The fare at the pub is surprisingly good. Suddenly the table begins to spin around and falls through the floor, leading to a large subterranean cavern. A secret password (Gregory tells the guard he is Joseph Chamberlain, a radical Member of Parliament for the Liberal Party and father of the later-notorious Neville Chamberlain) gets them through a heavy door, which leads to a long corridor lined with weapons of all kinds. In the meeting room itself, the walls are lined with bombs. Syme then asks Gregory, since he has taken a vow of secrecy, what all this is about. Gregory responds that their purpose is to abolish, God, right and wrong, in fact all authority of any kind. Gregory tells Syme that he attempted to conceal his intentions by disguising himself as a bishop, a capitalist, and an army officer, but his identity was uncovered every time. Finally he sought advice from the head of the organization and was told to disguise himself as an anarchist, because then no one would take him seriously and he could say whatever he wanted. Gregory then explains to Syme that the Central Anarchist Council consists of seven men called by the days of the week; Sunday is the President. The London representative, who is called Thursday, has just died, and the London branch is to meet that night to choose his successor - a post that Gregory is confident will be his. Syme then asks Gregory to take his own oath of secrecy to promise not to reveal Syme's true identity to the anarchists. When Gregory agrees, Syme tells him that he is an undercover policeman with Scotland Yard, and that the existence of the anarchist cabal has been known to them for some time. The two have now checkmated each other, with neither one able to seek the help of his friends against the other.

When Syme is questioned by the leader of the branch, he identifies himself as a Sabbatarian, sent by Sunday to examine the London affiliate. The only order of business is to elect a new Thursday, since the former occupant of the office died from drinking chalk and water too frequently because of his conscientious concern that cows not be made to suffer by giving

milk; this despite the fact that he organized a failed bombing that might have killed dozens of people in Brighton. Gregory is immediately nominated and seconded for the post, and gives a speech accepting the nomination. The speech is deliberately innocuous to avoid revealing to Syme the true nature of the group, even going so far as to compare the anarchist cabal to the persecuted Christians hiding in the Catacombs, who had monstrous reputations despite the fact that they were really harmless. The speech is so gentle, in fact, that the members of the society begin to object and insist that they really are dangerous and hate everything good. Just as the chairman is about to call for a vote, Syme rises and delivers a passionate defense of violence and offers himself in nomination as the next Thursday. He is elected by acclamation despite the warnings of Gregory, who, because of his sworn promise is unable to give a reason for his insistence that Syme not be chosen. Syme then receives the documents identifying him as Thursday along with certain official implements and is taken immediately in a boat to the meeting of the Central Anarchist Council.

As Syme travels toward the fateful meeting, he thinks about the course of his life and how he became a detective. He was raised in a family of radicals, but they were so ridiculous (his mother was a puritanical vegetarian, his father quite willing to defend cannibalism) that his typical teenage rebellion led him to conservatism. Later, almost blinded by an anarchist explosion, he developed a ferment hatred of the breed. After years of writing pamphlets, articles, and poems against the anarchist scourge (and failing to get most of them published), he was approached on the Embankment by a policeman who understood his fears. As they talked, Syme realized that he had met a kindred spirit. When the policeman offered to take Syme to a man who could enroll him in the fight against intellectual anarchy, Syme gladly accepted. He was taken to Scotland Yard and ushered into a room in total darkness. A man in the room told him he had been accepted into the service - apparently willingness was the only criterion - and he was given a card identifying him as an officer in the Last Crusade. His work had led him to Saffron Park and his encounter with Gregory, and was now leading him down the Thames beyond Charing Cross to a meeting of the Anarchist Council.

The Secretary of the Council (Monday), a man with a twisted smile, is waiting for him on the Embankment and escorts him to the breakfast meeting of the group in Leicester Square. Sunday, the leader, has decided that the best strategy is to hide in plain sight, so they have their planning meetings on a public balcony in full earshot of the waiters and other diners, who think them a group of rich and harmless eccentrics. As Syme approaches, he hears the enormous and imposing Sunday confronting a hairy Pole named Gogol (Tuesday) for his inability to appear light-hearted and therefore harmless. We then meet Wednesday (the aristocratic Marquis de St. Eustache), Friday (the ancient and decrepit Professor de Worms), and Saturday (Dr. Bull, who always wears dark glasses). The members of the cabal are discussing how the Marquis is to deliver a bomb that will kill the President of France and the Czar of Russia when the two meet in Paris three days later. As they talk, Syme is discomfited by the fact that Sunday, no matter the course of the conversation, stares constantly right at him. Convinced by now that the huge man has discovered his identity somehow, he is strongly tempted to break his promise and call for the nearest policeman, knowing that should he do so he would be signing his own death warrant. He realizes, however, as he meditates on his dilemma, that though he fears Sunday, he is not in the least tempted to go over to the side of the anarchists. Before the plotting can reach the point of discussing details, however, Sunday suddenly stops all conversation and orders the meeting adjourned to a private room inside the hotel. When they get there, he announces that no more planning should be done that day, but instead the details should be left to the discretion of Dr.

Bull. The reason is that there is a traitor in their midst. Syme is convinced his name is about to be called and puts his hand on his revolver, but, to his surprise, the man named by Sunday as a traitor is Gogol, the Pole. Sunday orders him to place on the table what he has in his pocket, and Syme is astounded to see a blue card identical to the one given him by the man in the dark room. Gogol suddenly starts speaking in a cockney accent and takes off his false beard. Sunday allows him to leave unmolested, warning him that he will experience a sudden demise should he ever break his promise of secrecy.

After the meeting breaks up, the conspirators scatter to get some lunch. As Syme walks through the city, he notices that he is being followed by Professor de Worms. The old man can hardly walk, but no matter how fast Syme moves and no matter what circuitous route he follows, the Professor is there. In a disreputable pub by the waterfront, the Professor catches him again and sits down at the same table. Much to his surprise, the Professor asks him point blank if he is a policeman. Syme first tries to avoid the question, then finally tells an outright lie. The Professor then calmly tells him that *he* is one! He produces his blue card, and Syme does the same, laughing gleefully with relief. The two decide to try to stop the planned assassination by stopping Bull before he can go to France, but in the meantime they tell each other their stories. The Professor is really a 38-year-old actor named Wilks impersonating Professor de Worms, a famous German nihilist. The whole thing started as a joke when he impersonated the Professor so well that people took him for the great man himself. When the Professor objected to such foolery, Wilks denounced the real nihilist as a fraud, and the crowd believed him because he responded to every sally of the real academic with ripostes that were even more nonsensical. Soon after this successful bit of acting, he was contacted by the mysterious man in the dark room and engaged in the fight against anarchy.

In preparation for their visit to Dr. Bull, Syme and Wilks work out a finger code so they can communicate with one another during the conversation as they try to discover the secret assassination plans. When they reach the doctor's room, they begin to spin out a lengthy tale of the need to locate the Marquis because he is under police surveillance. Bull listens to them in maddening silence and with a maddening smile on his face. As always, his eyes are masked by the dark glasses he wears constantly. Finally Syme becomes impatient and simply asks Bull to remove his glasses. The doctor complies, and the two men are astounded to see a countenance containing bright and cheerful eyes - something they never would have anticipated. Bull, of course, is a detective as well, who had taken to wearing the glasses on the advice of a man in a dark room at Scotland Yard. The three quickly make for France in an effort to stop the Marquis. Realizing that they will catch up with him at Calais, they discuss how to keep him from reaching Paris, at least until the conference is over. Since all have sworn an oath, they can't simply have him arrested. Finally Syme proposes that he feign an insult and challenge the proud aristocrat to a duel. They find St. Eustache in Calais and Syme quickly picks a quarrel. The Marquis rises to the challenge, but Syme insists that the duel take place at 7:00 the following morning. He realizes that the last train for Paris leaves at 7:45, so he trusts to his swordsmanship to prevent the departure of his enemy. The Marquis, however, chooses a meadow near a railroad station for the duel to take place.

When the men and their seconds meet, the Marquis suggests that the duel end with the first touch, but Syme insists that it continue until one man is disabled and unable to fight on. Syme fights well, but the Marquis is a better fencer and draws blood at Syme's wrist. As the sound of the Paris train is heard in the distance, the fighting becomes more curious and the Marquis more

frantic and careless. Syme stabs him twice in the body, and once each in the neck and face, but draws no blood, and is soon convinced that he is fighting against the devil himself. Finally, the Marquis throws down his sword and begs Syme to pull his nose. Syme finally complies, and the nose comes off. Soon the Marquis has thrown off most of his disguise. He introduces himself as Inspector Ratcliffe, produces the by now familiar blue card, and tells the surprised detectives who have been trying to stop him that the train carries Sunday's emissaries, who are determined to kill them all. As they realize that they have been manipulated into following one another while Sunday takes over the world, they see a great mob of people coming over the hillside led by a man with a crooked smile - the Secretary.

The four detectives, led by Ratcliffe and accompanied by Colonel Ducroix, one of his seconds, flee into the woods ahead of the pursuing mob. In the woods they encounter a woodcutter and hire him to take them in his cart to an inn run by a devout old soldier above the harbor town of Lancy. At the inn, *Le Soleil d'Or*, they arrange for some horses to take them to the police station on the other side of town. As they distance themselves from the mob, Ducroix suggests that they go to a friend of his, Doctor Renard, who owns an automobile. As they go toward his house, they hear horses behind them and realize that they have been betrayed by the old soldier. They get one of the doctor's three cars started just in time and speed away from the men on horseback, lighting their way with an old cross-adorned lantern formerly used for worship in a long-abandoned church. Before they can reach the police station, two cars speed toward them - Renard, too, has betrayed them. As the men in the cars fire at the fleeing detectives, they see up ahead a barricade of armed men blocking their way to the police station, led by Doctor Renard himself, who fires at them as they approach, while at the same time a mounted brigade approaches led by the innkeeper. Ducroix goes to speak to his old friend Renard, but Syme quickly drives down a side street toward the beach, finally smashing the car into a lamppost. The four get out and head for a nearby jetty, figuring that they can defend it against a small army until the police arrive. But as the mob moves inexorably toward the jetty, the police appear and begin firing at the detectives, accompanied by Colonel Ducroix. All the world seems to be on the side of the anarchists. Syme determines to sell his life dear and charges the mob. Soon his sword is broken, but he swings the lantern, striking both Ducroix and the Secretary, then flings it into the sea, crying that destroyers will never touch something that was made for the service of God. The Secretary then does a strange thing; he takes off his mask and announces that he is arresting the four friends as anarchists in the name of Scotland Yard. He produces his blue card, and the four quickly disabuse him of his mistake. They gratefully see that the common people are not anarchists after all, and offer to buy a round of drinks for the whole town. They now understand that Sunday had in fact surrounded himself with six dedicated fighters of anarchy on a council that had never really existed.

The next morning, the five detectives take a boat to Dover and from there travel to London by train, intending to confront Sunday at the next scheduled meeting of the Council. When they arrive in London, Bull runs into Gogol, and he quickly joins the other five after being informed of the nature of the situation. When they arrive at the meeting, Sunday asks them if the Czar is dead, they begin to pound him with question after question, seeking not only his identity, but also the meaning of the whole ghastly charade. After telling them that they are incapable of understanding who he is, he does confide to them that he is the man in the dark room who enlisted each of them as spies for Scotland Yard. He then jumps from the balcony and flees, with the six detectives hot on his trail. He leads them a merry chase through London, first in a cab, then on

a fire engine, then on an elephant taken from the London Zoo, and finally in a hot air balloon. All the while, he tosses to each man a piece of paper with a bizarre message:

To Bull - “What about Martin Tupper *now*?”

To Syme - “No one would regret anything in the nature of an interference by the Archdeacon more than I. I trust it will not come to that. But, for the last time, where are your goloshes? The thing is too bad, especially after what uncle said.”

To Ratcliffe - “‘Fly at once. The truth about your trouser-stretchers is known.’ - A Friend.”

To Gogol - “The word, I fancy, should be ‘pink.’”

To the Secretary - “‘When the herring runs a mile, / Let the Secretary smile; / When the herring tries to *fly*, / Let the Secretary die.’ Rustic Proverb.”

To the Professor - “‘Your beauty has not left me indifferent.’ - From *Little Snowdrop*.”

The six follow the balloon out into the countryside, arriving eventually at Sunday’s estate. The balloon crashes to earth, and they don’t know whether the President has survived the rough landing. An old man then approaches them and invites them to be his guests. Puzzled, they climb into the waiting carriages and are taken to a lovely mansion. There, they are given refreshments and told to put on specially-designed garments, each one representing the day of Creation that corresponds to the day of the week that is the code name of each man. They then come downstairs and behold a fanciful masque in progress, with the dancers representing all things natural and manmade. At one end of the hall are seven thrones on which the seven members of the Council of the Days are to sit. They take their places, and Sunday joins them in the center chair. Eventually the revelers tire of the fun and go their separate ways. Sunday then tells them that he knows of their suffering, and identifies himself as “the Sabbath, the peace of God.” They begin to bombard him with questions about the compatibility of suffering with God’s peace, but are soon interrupted by the entrance of Gregory. He is the true anarchist, the Destroyer, and here he takes on the role of Satan, the Accuser. He accuses the detectives, the representatives of law and order, of never having suffered, and they quickly contradict him. And when he turns to Sunday himself and makes the same charge, the huge man becomes larger still until he fills the room, and even the universe, and says, “Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?” At that point the Nightmare (the subtitle of the novel) ends, and Syme finds himself walking along a country lane with Gregory, but newly aware of beauty all around him and possessed of “impossible good news.”

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Lucian Gregory - A red-haired poet of Saffron Park who professed to be an anarchist.
- Rosamond Gregory - Lucian’s sister, she finds Syme’s perspective as a poet of order refreshing.
- Gabriel Syme - The protagonist, a poet who becomes an undercover officer for Scotland Yard in order to infiltrate and destroy a notorious anarchist coterie. He is accepted into the inner circle under the code name Thursday.

- Sunday - An enormous and imposing man who is both the President of the Central Anarchist Council and the one who brings Syme into the secret service. By the end of the novel it becomes evident that he is also a Christ figure, though Chesterton himself denied that this was the case.
- Secretary - The Secretary of the Anarchist Council, also known as Monday, has a crooked smile that makes him look cruel and ruthless. Much to Syme's surprise, he, too, is a policeman.
- Gogol - A Polish member of the Council who is also known as Tuesday. He looks like a stereotypical anarchist, but is in reality a policeman.
- Marquis de St. Eustache - An aristocrat known as Wednesday, he is in reality Inspector Ratcliffe, like the others a policeman in disguise.
- Professor de Worms - An old man, seemingly senile, who is known as Friday, but is in reality a young actor named Wilks who has been recruited by Scotland Yard to fight anarchy.
- Dr. Bull - A medical practitioner who always wears dark glasses and is also known as Saturday; a policeman as well.
- Colonel Ducroix - Serves as a second to St. Eustache in the duel, then joins forces with the detectives as they flee Sunday's minions.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“These new women would always pay to a man the extravagant compliment which no ordinary woman ever pays to him, that of listening while he is talking.” (ch.1, p.2)

“An artist is identical with an anarchist. You might transpose the words anywhere. 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.” (Gregory, ch.1, p.3)

“To abolish God! We do not only want to upset a few despotisms and police regulations; that sort of anarchism does exist, but it is 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 as we hate Wrongs. We have abolished Right and Wrong.” (Gregory, ch.2, p.10-11)

“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? Why, then, dress up as an *anarchist*, you fool! Nobody will ever expect you to do anything dangerous then.” (Sunday, ch.2, p.12)

“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 organisation which is so essential to anarchy.” (Syme, ch.3, p.14)

“I found that there was a special opening in the service for those whose fears for humanity were concerned rather with the aberrations of the scientific intellect than with the normal and excusable, though excessive, outbreaks of the human will.” (Policeman, ch. 4, p.24)

“The head of one of our departments, one of the most celebrated detectives in Europe, has long been of the opinion that a purely intellectual conspiracy would soon threaten the very existence of civilisation. He is certain that the scientific and artistic worlds are silently bound in a crusade against the Family and the State.” (Policeman, ch.4, p.24)

“We say that the most dangerous criminal now is the entirely lawless modern philosopher. Compared to him, burglars and bigamists are essentially moral men; my heart goes out to them. They accept the essential ideal of man; they simply seek it wrongly. Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property that they may more perfectly respect it. But philosophers dislike property as property; they wish to destroy the very idea of personal possession” (Policeman, ch.4, p.25)

“The moderns say we must not punish heretics. My only doubt is whether we have a right to punish anybody else.” (Syme, ch.4, p.25-26)

“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.” (Policeman, ch.4, p.26)

“I don’t know any profession of which mere willingness is the final test.” (Syme, ch.4, p.27)

“I do - martyrs. I am condemning you to death.” (Sunday, ch.4, p.27)

“Many moderns, inured to a weak worship of intellect and force, might have wavered in their allegiance under this oppression of a great personality. They might have called Sunday the super-man.” (ch.6, p.37)

“Every man knows in his heart that nothing is worth doing.” (Professor, ch.6, p.38)

“He felt towards them all that unconscious and elementary superiority that a brave man feels over powerful beasts or a wise man over powerful errors.” (ch.6, p.39)

“If heaven were his throne and earth his footstool, I swear that I would pull him down.” (Syme, ch.8, p.51)

“Two is not twice one; two is two thousand times one. That is why, in spite of a hundred disadvantages, the world will always return to monogamy.” (ch.8, p.54)

“He had proved that the destructive principle in the universe was God; hence he insisted on the need for a furious and incessant energy, rending all things in pieces. Energy, he said, was the All.” (Professor, ch.8, p.54)

“I tell you, you can say what you like, that fellow sold himself to the devil; he can be in six places at once.” (Bull, ch.9, p.66)

“He remembered them clearly and in order as mere delusions of the nerves - how the fear of the Professor had been the fear of the tyrannic accidents of nightmare, and how the fear of the Doctor had been the fear of the airless vacuum of science. The first was the old fear that any miracle might happen, the second the more hopeless modern fear that no miracle can ever happen. But he saw that these fears were fancies, for he found himself in the presence of the great fact of the fear of death, with its coarse and pitiless common sense.” (ch.10, p.73)

“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.” (Marquis, ch.10, p.78)

“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.” (ch.11, p.81)

“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 any one 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.” (Marquis, ch.11, p.82)

“I also am holding hard on to the thing I never saw.” (Professor, ch.12, p.95)

“You want to know what I am, do you? Bull, you are a man of science. Grub in the roots of those trees and find out the truth about them. Syme, you are a poet. Stare at those morning clouds, and tell me or any one the truth about morning clouds. But 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 still be 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 philosophies.” (Sunday, ch.13, p.100)

“I don’t think of Sunday on principle any more than I stare at the sun at noonday.” (Gogol, ch.14, p.108)

“I’m a Buddhist, I suppose; and Buddhism is not a creed, it is a doubt. My poor dear Bull, I do not believe that you really have a face. I have not faith enough to believe in matter.” (Professor, ch.14, p.109)

“Have you noticed an odd thing 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.” (Syme, ch.14, p.109)

“His face frightened me, as it did every one; but not because it was brutal, nor because it was evil. On the contrary, it frightened me because it was so beautiful, because it was so good.” (Syme, ch.14, p.110)

“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.” (Syme, ch.14, p.110)

“These disguises did not disguise, but reveal.” (ch.14, p.114)

“He was draped plainly, in a pure and terrible white, and his hair was like a silver flame on his forehead.” (ch.15, p.116)

“I am the Sabbath. I am the peace of God.” (Sunday, ch.15, p.117)

“I can forgive God His anger, though it destroyed nations; but I cannot forgive Him His peace.” (Secretary, ch.15, p.117)

“You are right. I am a destroyer. I would destroy the world if I could.” (Gregory, ch.15, p.118)

“The only crime of Government is that it governs. The unpardonable sin of the supreme power is that it is supreme I could forgive you everything, you that rule all mankind, if I could feel for once that you had suffered for one hour a real agony such as I.” (Gregory, ch.15, p.119)

“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.’” (Syme, ch.15, p.119)

“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?’” (ch.15, p.119)

“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.” (ch.15, p.120)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. The subtitle of G.K. Chesterton’s *The Man Who Was Thursday* is *A Nightmare*. What is the significance of this subtitle? Does the suggestion that the story records a dream distance the narrative from reality or express a connection to a deeper reality? If it is a dream, why a *nightmare*?
2. On the day before he died, G.K. Chesterton wrote a newspaper column in which he said this about *The Man Who Was Thursday*: “I was not intended to describe the real world as it was, or as I thought it was, even when my thoughts were considerably less settled than they are now. It was intended to describe the world of wild doubt and despair which the pessimists were generally describing at that date; with just a gleam of hope in some double meaning of the doubt, which event he pessimists felt in some fitful fashion.” What evidence in the novel can you find to support Chesterton’s interpretation of his own work? Be sure to cite specifics.
3. Critics have compared G.K. Chesterton’s *The Man Who Was Thursday* with the book of Job in the Bible. Both center on a man who pursues God in search of an answer to the problem of evil. In fact, Chesterton alludes to the book of Job when he has Sunday say in chapter 13, “You want to know what I am, do you? Bull, you are a man of science. Grub in the roots of those trees and find out the truth about them. Syme, you are a poet. Stare at those morning clouds, and tell me or any one the truth about morning clouds. But 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 still be a riddle; you shall know what the stars are, and not know what I am.” What significant aspects of the novel relate to the book of Job? Consider both the questions that are asked and the answers that are given, or in some cases not given, in the two books.

4. In the first chapter of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the anarchist poet Lucian Gregory identifies art with anarchy when he says, "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." To what extent is the author here criticizing the artistic fashions of the beginning of the twentieth century? Has he given an accurate description of such movements as Abstract Expressionism, Surrealism, or stream-of-consciousness narrative? What does Chesterton believe about the social consequences of such approaches to art?
5. In chapter two of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Gregory describes his brand of anarchy in the following words: "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 as we hate Wrongs. We have abolished Right and Wrong." They wish, in fact, to abolish God. To what extent is Chesterton mounting a critique of the nihilism popularized by the writings of Nietzsche and others at the turn of the century? Does the book provide a satisfactory answer to nihilism? If so, how?
6. In chapter two of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Sunday gives this advice: "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? Why, then, dress up as an *anarchist*, you fool! Nobody will ever expect you to do anything dangerous then." This "hide in plain sight" approach was utilized by Irish Republican Army terrorist Michael Collins in his fight against the British. Do you consider this good advice for someone who is trying to keep his activities from the scrutiny of others? Why or why not?
7. G.K. Chesterton was a master of paradox. Choose three examples of paradoxical statements in *The Man Who Was Thursday* and explain what deeper truth is contained in the author's seemingly contradictory statements. Relate these to the larger themes of the novel.
8. Like Oscar Wilde, G.K. Chesterton loved to take linguistic commonplaces and turn them inside-out in the service of social criticism. Choose three examples of such inverted cliches from *The Man Who Was Thursday* and explain the deeper truths he is trying to communicate. Be sure to relate each one to the larger themes of the novel.
9. G.K. Chesterton and George Bernard Shaw were good friends, though they rarely agreed on anything. Compare and contrast the views of the nature of crime found in G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* and George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara*, then assess each biblically. Is lawless philosophy or poverty the root of criminal behavior? Be sure to evaluate the arguments of the two authors as well as their conclusions.

10. In chapter four of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Syme says, "The moderns say we must not punish heretics. My only doubt is whether we have a right to punish anybody else." What does he mean by this? Do you agree? To what extent is this an accurate critique of modern society? To what extent is the idea expressed here biblical?
11. In chapter four of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the man in the dark room tells Syme that martyrdom is the only profession for which the sole qualification is willingness. He then tells Syme that he is condemning him to death. Relate the words spoken by the man in the dark room, whom we later discover is Sunday himself, to the instructions Jesus gives his followers. Is Chesterton saying the same thing Jesus is saying? Why or why not?
12. In chapter nine of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Syme is faced with death and examines his own fears. The narrator tells us, "The first was the old fear that any miracle might happen, the second the more hopeless modern fear that no miracle can ever happen. But he saw that these fears were fancies, for he found himself in the presence of the great fact of the fear of death, with its coarse and pitiless common sense." Evaluate the summation of pre-modern versus modern worldviews found in this statement. Why do both find their roots in the fear of death? Be sure to incorporate Scripture into your analysis.
13. In chapter eleven of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Syme passes through a sunlit wood and it reminds him of an Impressionist painting. He goes on to describe Impressionism as "another name for that final scepticism which can find no floor to the universe." Evaluate this assessment of Impressionist art and the philosophy behind it. Do you agree or disagree? Use your knowledge of the Impressionist movement and its leading artists to support your conclusion.
14. In chapter eleven of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Ratcliffe argues that anarchy is a philosophy characteristic of the rich rather than the poor because "The poor have sometimes objected to being governed badly; the rich have always objected to being governed at all." Use your knowledge of nineteenth-century revolutionary and anarchist movements to evaluate Ratcliffe's assertion. Be sure to cite specific historical figures and organizations in doing so.
15. Discuss G.K. Chesterton's assertions concerning the necessity of suffering and alienation in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, and evaluate them in the light of Scripture. To what extent is his approach to suffering biblical?
16. In G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the author often uses foreshadowing to hint at the identity of Sunday prior to the final great revelation at the end of the novel. Choose three examples of this foreshadowing and show how the context in which they are found makes them seem ironic, so that their true significance is only revealed at the end.

17. Evaluate the treatment of the problem of evil found in G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*. To what extent is his treatment of this great philosophical and theological problem biblical? Be sure to use quotations from the novel and from Scripture to support your conclusion.
18. In the closing chapter of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the six detectives appear dressed as the six days of Creation. What is the significance of this scene? What do you believe Chesterton is trying to say? Support your conclusion with evidence from the rest of the novel.
19. In the closing chapter of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the six detectives appear dressed as the six days of creation. How does the day assigned to each man fit his personality? Match what you know about the six detectives with the significance of the day to which he is assigned.
20. In a newspaper column written the day before he died, G.K. Chesterton explicitly denied that Sunday in his novel *The Man Who Was Thursday* was "meant for a serious description of the Deity." Do you believe him? Why or why not? Cite evidence from the novel to support your conclusion.
21. In G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the author has incorporated a number of significant ideas. What do you consider the main lesson the novel is intended to teach? Support your answer with specific incidents and quotations from the book.
22. In G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, what is the significance of Sunday being both the chief detective and the chief anarchist? What point might the author be making about God through this characterization?
23. During the chase scene near the end of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Sunday throws bits of paper containing messages to the pursuing detectives. Do these notes have any meaning at all? Does each message have some particular meaning for the recipient? If they are meaningless gibberish, why does the author include them in the story?
24. What are the chief dangers posed to society as expressed in G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*? Do you agree that the author's targets are genuine threats? Why or why not? Cite specific quotations from the book to support your assessment of its social criticism.
25. In G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the author attacks the ideas underlying the anarchist activities occurring in various places in Europe near the turn of the twentieth century (remember that the act of an anarchist started World War I six years after the book was published). Consider the activity of terrorists in the world today. Do the anarchists of a century ago share the same philosophies as today's terrorists? If not, how are they different? Be sure to address philosophies and not simply the nature of the activities themselves.

26. Consider the juxtaposition of order and chaos in G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*. On the human level, detectives are opposed to anarchists. On a higher level, Sunday is both the chief detective and the head of the Central Anarchist Council. What does Chesterton mean by these juxtapositions? Does he view human order as the remedy for humanly-engineered chaos? The divine order of Creation as the truth standing above the anarchy that results from man-made philosophy? God as the author of both order and chaos, or of an order that is so complex as to appear chaotic from man's perspective? All of the above? Defend your choice with specifics from the novel.
27. When Gabriel Syme is trying to pass himself off as an anarchist in G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, he says, "Society is the enemy of humanity." Such an idea was common among the writers of the Romantic Movement, who believed that man was ultimately good, but was perverted by the forces of society (see a version of this "noble savage" idea in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*). Chesterton argues that such a view of human nature leads inevitably to people running around throwing bombs. Evaluate the Romantic view of man from Scripture as well as discussing Chesterton's assessment of it in the novel.
28. G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* clearly opposes anarchy, but what is its approach to reason? Consider how the author treats reason in the novel. Be sure to take account of both the positive and negative aspects of the ways it is presented. How does Chesterton "put reason in its place"?
29. Psalm 15:4 tells us that the Lord honors the man "who keeps his oath even when it hurts." Promise-keeping plays an important role in G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*. Why does the author emphasize again and again the struggle faced by Gabriel Syme to keep his promise not to reveal the anarchists to the police and the importance of him doing so? Connect this struggle to the larger themes of the novel and evaluate Chesterton's point biblically.
30. Critic Martin Gardner, when commenting on G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, argues that Sunday represents Nature, which incorporates in itself both great cruelty and great beauty. Do you agree? Use specific quotations from the novel either to support or refute Gardner's contention.
31. Chapter fifteen of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* is titled "The Accuser." The title draws an analogy between Satan, the Accuser of the Brethren in Scripture, and the anarchist Lucian Gregory. What connections exist between the two, and for what purpose does Chesterton draw the analogy? Relate your conclusions to the major themes of the novel.

32. In chapter fourteen of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Syme says, "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?" Compare and contrast this statement with Plato's Analogy of the Cave in *The Republic*. Are the two authors saying the same thing about reality, or is Chesterton's assertion more grounded in theism? Support your conclusion with quotations from both books.
33. Near the end of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the narrator tells us that "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." Discuss the implications of this description of the Gospel. How did Syme's experiences in the book lead him to this point? What is the author telling us about the impact of the Gospel on the life of one who knows and believes it?