DRAFT VERSION

Rome, April 11, 2019

Rome, Romance and Orthodoxy

John Wauck, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross

The title of this talk is “Rome, Romance and Orthodoxy.”

It’s always good to define one’s terms. So, I will say that, for the purposes of this talk, Rome means the city of Rome. And Orthodoxy will mean both the traditional teachings of Christianity and, sometimes, the eponymous book by Chesterton.

The relationship between these two terms - Rome and Orthodoxy - is fairly straightforward, at least in the sense that the city of Rome, as the episcopal see of St. Peter and his successors, is the visible source, touchstone and beacon of Orthodoxy.

The term “Romance,” however, can mean many things, and most of this talk will be an attempt to examine its meaning for Chesterton and its relationship with both Rome and Orthodoxy, especially what Chesterton meant by what he calls “the Romance of Orthodoxy.”

At first glance, it would seem that Rome and Romance must be closely related. And yet, on closer examination, their relationship turns out to be largely verbal.

This is because, while the term Romance does ultimately derive from the word “Rome”, it is derived in the same way that “romance” in the expression “romance languages” comes from the name of the city. It refers to the languages - the vernacular languages descended from Latin, the language of Rome - in which medieval narratives, both in prose and in verse, were first written. These narratives were called “romances” because they were written in the language of Rome, but they might just as easily have been called “vernaculars” or “low Latins”. The “Rome” in Romance really means Latin.

Fundamentally, the term Romance refers to a genre of literature - what is broadly called the chivalric romance - and, by extension to the qualities that are most characteristic of that genre.

The most famous work in this genre would be *Le Roman de la Rose* (The Romance of the Rose) which was written in two separate parts by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, around the years 1230 and 1275 respectively, corresponding - if we’re seeking a handy point of reference - almost exactly the dates of the birth and death of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Much later, in early 17th century Spain, the chivalric romances were famously satirized by Miguel de Cervantes in his novel *Don Quijote*. The most famous of these later works was *Amadis de Gaula*, which was published by Garcia Montalvo in the early 1500s, but existed in various versions already in the 1300s. It can fairly be called the first best-seller of fiction after the invention of the printing press, and its staggering popularity - it spawned dozens of sequels in various European languages - is strong support for the argument that Chesterton makes in *Orthodoxy* about the profound appeal that such works have for the human heart and imagination.

Ultimately, it is this medieval genre that has given its name to the Romantic Era, which began in the early 1800s and whose echoes were still being felt when Chesterton was born in 1874. In the year 1800, in his *Dialogue on Poetry*, Friedrich Schlegel wrote "I seek and find the romantic among the

older moderns, in Shakespeare, in Cervantes, in Italian poetry, in that age of chivalry, love and fable, from which the phenomenon and the word itself are derived."

One of the first attempts to define that period and label it as “romantic” comes in an essay by Madame De Stael, written in 1813. What is striking is that, at this very early date, a hundred years before Chesterton writes *Orthodoxy*, she perceives - perhaps even more clearly than Schlegel, who was himself a convert to Catholicism - the powerful connection between this “romantic” spirit and Christianity. She writes:

“The word *romantic* has been lately introduced in Germany, to designate that kind of poetry which is derived from the songs of the Troubadors; that which owes its birth to the union of chivalry and Christianity. If we do not admit that the empire of literature has been divided between paganism and Christianity, the north and the south, antiquity and the middle ages, chivalry and the institutions of Greece and Rome, we shall never succeed in forming a philosophical judgment of ancient and of modern taste . . . The new school . . . affirms that Christianity is the source of all modern genius.” (Madame De Stael, “*Concerning Germany*”, 1813; from *The Portable Romantic Reader*, New York: Viking Press, 1957, pp. 64, 66)

Two writers of the 1800s can help us understand what Chesterton meant by romance and why he used that term are Sir Walter Scott, author of *Ivanhoe*, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, author of *The Scarlet Letter*.

Walter Scott saw the romance and the novel as closely related but different. In his view, the events in a novel are "accommodated to the ordinary train of human events and the modern state of society". The romance, however, described by Scott as "a fictitious narrative in prose or verse," focuses our attention upon “**marvellous** and uncommon incidents". In other words, the novel deals with the ordinary, and the romance deals with the extraordinary.

Nathaniel Hawthorne makes a similar distinction when, in his preface to *The House of Seven Gables*, writes:
“When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to **the probable and ordinary** course of man’s experience. The former - while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart - has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent of the writers own choosing or creation. If he thinks fit, also, he may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights, and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture, he will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privilege here stated, **and especially to mingle the marvellous** rather as a slight, delicate and evanescent flavour, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public. He can hardly be said, however, to commit a literary crime, even if he disregarded this caution.”
(Preface to *The House of Seven Gables*, 1851; quoted in Patrick Sheeran, “The Novels of Liam O’Flaherty: A Study in Romantic Realism” [Ph.D. Diss.] UCG 1972, p.160-69.)
Both Scott and Hawthorne point to “the ordinary” as typical of the novel and, conversely, “the marvellous” as a chief characteristic of the romance. In Chesterton, the operative word for the romance will be “wonder.”
It should be said that the connection between Christianity (and, by extension, Orthodoxy) and the Romantic spirit was recognized not only by the promoters of the Romantic movement, but also by critics like Heinrich Heine and Karl Immerman.

DRAFT

In 1833, Heine would write:
"But what was the Romantic School in Germany? It was naught else than the reawakening of the poetry of the middle ages as it manifested itself in the poems, paintings, sculptures, in the art and life of those times. This poetry, however, had been developed out of Christianity; it was a passion-flower which had blossomed from the blood of Christ . . . Mankind now recognizes the nature of that religion, and will no longer allow itself to be put off with promises of a Heaven hereafter . . . "(Heinrich Heine "*The Romantic School"*, 1833; from *The Portable Romantic Reader*, New York: Viking Press, 1957, pp. 67-68)

Seven years later, in 1840, Karl Immerman wrote:
"The Romantic school . . . was not based on the actual present, but rather generated out of a longing for something nonexistent . . . This "enlightened" century verbalized pure chivalry, Catholicism, the world of the fairy-tale, mysticism . . ."
(Karl Immerman, *Memoirs*, 1840; from *The Portable Romantic Reader*, New York: Viking Press, 1957, pp. 56-57)

Immerman's reference to the fairy tales is striking because, in *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton speaks almost as much about fairy tales as he does about romances. Here too, the connection that Chesterton sees between the spirit of children's tales and Christianity was already evident in the early Romantics. The very first book of folk-tales for children, even before the collection of the Brothers Grimm, was "Des Knaben Wunderhorn," (The Childrens' Wonderhorn? Or Magical Horn) which was published in 3 volumes from 1805 to1808, by Achim von Arnim and Klemens Maria Brentano (German, 1778-1842). Within a decade, Brentano would undergo a religious conversion - a return to the Catholic faith - and spend six years transcribing the visions of Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774-1824), which would, in our own day, form the basis for of "The Passion of the Christ" by Mel Gibson.

….

We can see, then, that - at least in an implicit sense - there is some historical precedent for Chesterton's appeal to Romance in praise of Christian Orthodoxy. Yet the way in which Chesterton makes his case is entirely unique. Indeed, we could say that he juxtaposes Romance and Orthodoxy precisely because of their apparent dissimiliarity. Orthodoxy seems safe and tame and somewhat boring, the conventional default mode, while Romance carries a connotation, as we have seen, of mystery, marvels, passion and adventure.

And what is perhaps most remarkable is Chesterton's consistent appeal to our experience of this kind of literature as a standard for what our lives can be. To be fair, this appeal is not focused solely on romances. In *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton refers, in a positive way, to many forms of literature. "penny dreadfuls," (cheap sensationalistic fiction, often serialized and dealing with crimes or mysteries) prehistoric legends, fairy tales, nursery tales, fables, old wives' tales, boys' books, serialized magazine stories and even plain old stories (God as storyteller). These works were, for him, his best education in religious matters. Of his reading as a young man, he writes:

I read the scientific and sceptical literature of my time--all of it, at least, that I could find written in English and lying about; and I read nothing else; I mean I read nothing else on any other note of philosophy. The penny dreadfuls which I also read were indeed in a healthy and heroic tradition of Christianity; but I did not know this at the time. I never read a line of Christian apologetics.

DRAFT

It should come as no surprise, then, that the first time Chesterton refers to "a romance" in *Orthodoxy* it is something he's been planning to write and it is about himself.

> "I have often had a fancy for writing **a romance** about an English yachtsman who slightly miscalculated his course and discovered England under the impression that it was a new island in the South Seas. I always find, however, that I am either too busy or too lazy to write this fine work, so I may as well give it away for the purposes of philosophical illustration. There will probably be a general impression that the man who landed (armed to the teeth and talking by signs) to plant the British flag on that barbaric temple which turned out to be the Pavilion at Brighton, felt rather a fool. I am not here concerned to deny that he looked a fool. But if you imagine that he felt a fool, or at any rate that the sense of folly was his sole or his dominant emotion, then you have not studied with sufficient delicacy the rich **romantic** nature of the hero of this tale."

The story of the yachtsman is, of course, an allegory Chesterton's own discovery of Christianity. It is, he thinks, a romance, and he himself is its romantic hero. This is how Chesterton understands his own life: as a romantic adventure.

And behind his decision to write *Orthodoxy* is his conviction that most people share his basic approach to life.

> "I wish to set forth my faith as particularly answering this double spiritual need, the need for that mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar which Christendom has rightly named **romance**. … If a man prefers nothing I can give him nothing. But nearly all people I have ever met in this western society in which I live would agree to the general proposition that we need this life of practical **romance;** the combination of something that is **strange** with something that is **secure**. We need so to view the world as to combine an idea of **wonder** and an idea of **welcome**. We need to be **happy in this wonder**land without once being **merely comfortable**. It is THIS achievement of my creed that I shall chiefly pursue in these pages."

Here we see clearly what Chesterton means by Romance: that mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar… the combination of something that is strange with something secure… wonder and welcome. And it is this mixture is something that he finds cultivated in fairy tales.

> "I am not concerned - he writes - with any of the separate statutes of elfland, but with the whole spirit of its law, … **I am concerned with a certain way of looking at life, which was created in me by the fairy tales, but has since been meekly ratified by the mere facts."**

And that "way of looking at life" which Chesterton found in fairy tales involves, above all, a capacity for wonder before the real world, a sense of wonder that has been last in today's world. He wants to restore our sense of surprise before the mystery of existence.

For we do not know the answers to the most basic questions. Why does something exist instead of nothing? Why do I exist? The existence of anything at all is, in fact, a mystery. It is inexplicable,

and it raises so much wonder and so many questions of such difficulty that, if we lived in a constant state of awareness of it, we would never get anything done. We would wander around in a state of shock - amazed by the vast blueness that surrounds us with white blobs of bizarre shapes moving around randomly within it.

In order to live, we have to snap out of our wonder, we have to become jaded, inured to the essential mystery of existence. We put it in parenthesis, because it would become too much of a distraction.

But, of course, its mysteriousness is essential and important. And Chesterton does not want us to forget about it, or lose our sense of wonder. The permanence and constancy of existence shouldn't blind us to the fact that it remains shocking and inexplicable.

I observed that learned men in spectacles were talking of the actual things that happened--dawn and death and so on--as if THEY were rational and inevitable. They talked as if the fact that trees bear fruit were just as NECESSARY as the fact that two and one trees make three. But it is not. … They do really talk as if they had found not only a set of marvellous facts, but a truth connecting those facts. They do talk as if the connection of two strange things physically connected them philosophically. They feel that because one incomprehensible thing constantly follows another incomprehensible thing the two together somehow make up a comprehensible thing.

All the terms used in the science books, "law," "necessity," "order," "tendency," and so on, are really unintellectual, because they assume an inner synthesis, which we do not possess. The **only words that ever satisfied me as describing Nature are the terms used in the fairy books, "charm," "spell," "enchantment." They express the arbitrariness of the fact and its mystery**. …

This elementary wonder, however, is not a mere fancy derived from the fairy tales; on the contrary, all the fire of the fairy tales is derived from this. … **we all like astonishing tales because they touch the nerve of the ancient instinct of astonishment**. **This is proved by the fact that when we are very young children we do not need fairy tales: we only need tales**. **Mere life is interesting enough**. … **even nursery tales only echo an almost pre-natal leap of interest and amazement….**

The world was a shock, but it was not merely shocking; existence was a surprise, but it was a pleasant surprise.

The sense of wonder that characterizes Chesterton's thought is fundamentally metaphysical. It is a sense of wonder at being itself, at existence as such.

And it seemed to me that existence was itself so very eccentric a legacy that I could not complain of not understanding the limitations of the vision when I did not understand the vision they limited.

…

DRAFT

Here too Chesterton conveys the eccentricity of Being through the lens of literature, specifically the literature of his boyhood.

I have said that stories of magic alone can express my sense that life is not only a pleasure but a kind of eccentric privilege. I may express this other feeling of cosmic cosiness by allusion to another book always read in boyhood, "Robinson Crusoe," which I read about this time, and which owes its eternal vivacity to the fact that it celebrates the poetry of limits, nay, even the wild romance of prudence. Crusoe is a man on a small rock with a few comforts just snatched from the sea: the best thing in the book is simply the list of things saved from the wreck. The greatest of poems is an inventory. Every kitchen tool becomes ideal because Crusoe might have dropped it in the sea. It is a good exercise, in empty or ugly hours of the day, to look at anything, the coal-scuttle or the book-case, and think how happy one could be to have brought it out of the sinking ship on to the solitary island. But it is a better exercise still to remember how all things have had this hair-breadth escape: everything has been saved from a wreck. Every man has had one horrible adventure: as a hidden untimely birth he had not been, as infants that never see the light. Men spoke much in my boyhood of restricted or ruined men of genius: and it was common to say that many a man was a Great Might-Have-Been. To me it is a more solid and startling fact that any man in the street is a Great Might-Not-Have-Been.

It was this profoundly metaphysical dimension to Chesterton's thought that led Etienne Gilson to say that Chesterton's book on St. Thomas Aquinas was the best introduction to the thought of St. Thomas he had ever read. In his relentless focus on existence and his sense of wonder, even in his love of fairy tales, Chesterton shows himself to be an heir to the very first philosophers.

In the first book of the Metaphysics, Aristotle seems to be talking about Chesterton when he observes: "**it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize**; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters, e.g. about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and of the stars, and about the genesis of the universe. And a man who is puzzled and **wonders** thinks himself ignorant (whence even the **lover of myth is in a sense a lover of Wisdom, for the myth is composed of wonders**);"
…
Book 1, part 2 metaphysics of Aristotle

Obviously, in Aristotle's thought, the myths perform the same function as romances and fairy tales in Chesterton. They are tales full of wonders. With his journalistic prose style and his paradoxes, Chesterton managed to make deep philosophy points intelligible to non-academic readers.

There is one important difference, though, between Aristotle and Chesterton. In Aristotle's view, growth in knowledge ends up eventually evaporating the sense of wonder that one experiences at the beginning of the philosophical journey. You might almost say that, for Aristotle, the goal of philosophy is to get rid of wonder.

"Yet the acquisition of it [wisdom] - he writes - must in a sense end in something which

DRAFT

is the opposite of our original inquiries. For all men begin, as we
said, by **wondering** that things are as they are, as they do about self-moving
marionettes, or about the solstices or the incommensurability of the
diagonal of a square with the side; for it seems **wonderful** to all
who have not yet seen the reason, that there is a thing which cannot
be measured even by the smallest unit. But we must end in the contrary
and, according to the proverb, the better state, as is the case in
these instances too when men learn the cause; for there is nothing
which would surprise a geometer so much as if the diagonal turned
out to be commensurable."

For Chesterton, on the contrary, that sense of wonder never goes away because wisdom for him is not simply the knowledge of causes, but knowledge of a story and of a story-teller.

I had always vaguely felt facts to be miracles in the sense that they are wonderful: now I began to think them miracles in the stricter sense that they were WILFUL. I mean that they were, or might be, repeated exercises of some will. In short, I had always believed that the world involved magic: now I thought that perhaps it involved a magician. And this pointed a profound emotion always present and sub-conscious; that this world of ours has some purpose; and if there is a purpose, there is a person. I had always felt life first as a story: and if there is a story there is a story-teller.

Thus, Chesterton's logic takes him from the sense of wonder to the sense of a story, and from there he arrives at the author, who is God. Chesterton's path to theism is, we could say, a literary one. Indeed, he sees God himself in literary terms - as an author, a poet and a playwright.

And the root phrase for all Christian theism was this, that God was a creator, as an artist is a creator. A poet is so separate from his poem that he himself speaks of it as a little thing he has "thrown off." Even in giving it forth he has flung it away. …

It was the prime philosophic principle of Christianity that this divorce in the divine act of making (such as severs the poet from the poem or the mother from the new-born child) was the true description of the act whereby the absolute energy made the world. According to most philosophers, God in making the world enslaved it. According to Christianity, in making it, He set it free. God had written, not so much a poem, but rather a play; a play he had planned as perfect, but which had necessarily been left to human actors and stage-managers, who had since made a great mess of it.

For Chesterton, these human actors are the most mysterious part of God's creation. We should be amazed, surprised and astonished not only by the created order - animals, plants, the sun, the moon and the stars - but also, indeed above all, by ourselves.

"We have all read in scientific books, and, indeed, in all romances, the story of the man who has forgotten his name. This man walks about the streets and can see and appreciate everything; only he cannot remember who he is. Well, every man is that man in the story. Every man has forgotten who he is. One may understand the cosmos, but never the ego; the

DRAFT

self more distant than any star. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God; but thou shalt not know thyself. We are all under the same mental calamity; we have all forgotten our names. We have all forgotten what we really are. All that we call common sense and rationality and practicality and positivism only means that for certain dead levels of our life we forget that we have forgotten. All that we call spirit and art and ecstacy only means that for one awful instant we remember that we forget.

As has been noted, along with wonder at the mystery of existence, another key element in the romantic view of life is the sense of adventure and freedom, of strong passions and emotions.

[W]hat we need is not
the cold acceptance of the world as a compromise, but some way in which
we can heartily hate and heartily love it. We do not want joy and anger
to neutralize each other and produce a surly contentment; we want a
fiercer delight and a fiercer discontent. We have to feel the universe
at once as an ogre's castle, to be stormed, and yet as our own cottage,
to which we can return at evening. - Flag of the World

Chesterton saw clearly the world of determinist rationalism, which he describes as a "cosmic prison," - and however spacious in may seem, in the end, it is a closed system, a prison surrounded by barbed wire like any other - would destroy the possibility of any real drama in life.

In fairyland there had been a real law; a law that could be broken, for
the definition of a law is something that can be broken. But the
machinery of this cosmic prison was something that could not be broken;
for we ourselves were only a part of its machinery. We were either
unable to do things or we were destined to do them. The idea of the
mystical condition quite disappeared; one can neither have the firmness
of keeping laws nor the fun of breaking them.

This determinism drains the drama from our moral life - it takes away the intensity of the virtues and the vices.

[M]ild rationalist modesty does not cleanse the soul with fire
and make it clear like crystal; it does not (like a strict and
searching humility) make a man as a little child, who can sit at the
feet of the grass. It does not make him look up and see marvels; for
Alice must grow small if she is to be Alice in Wonderland. Thus it
loses both the poetry of being proud and the poetry of being humble.
Christianity sought by this same strange expedient to save both of
them.
…

Here again, we can see how Chesterton even conceived of the moral life in terms of poetry and theatrical spectacle.

[T]he Church
not only kept seemingly inconsistent things side by side, but, what was
more, allowed them to break out in a sort of artistic violence
otherwise possible only to anarchists. Meekness grew more dramatic than
madness. Historic Christianity rose into a high and strange COUP DE

> **THEATRE of morality--things that are to virtue what the crimes of Nero are to vice. The spirits of indignation and of charity took terrible and attractive forms, ranging from that monkish fierceness that scourged like a dog the first and greatest of the Plantagenets, to the sublime pity of St. Catherine, who, in the official shambles, kissed the bloody head of the criminal. Poetry could be acted as well as composed.**

For Chesterton, the beauty of fairy tales and of orthodoxy lies in their recognition of risks and perils.

If our life is ever really as beautiful as a fairy-tale, we shall have to remember that all the beauty of a fairy-tale lies in this: that the prince has a wonder which just stops short of being fear. If he is afraid of the giant, there is an end of him; but also if he is not astonished at the giant, there is an end of the fairy-tale. The whole point depends upon his being at once humble enough to wonder, and haughty enough to defy. So our attitude to the giant of the world must not merely be increasing delicacy or increasing contempt: it must be one particular proportion of the two--which is exactly right. We must have in us enough reverence for all things outside us to make us tread fearfully on the grass. We must also have enough disdain for all things outside us, to make us, on due occasion, spit at the stars. Yet these two things (if we are to be good or happy) must be combined, not in any combination, but in one particular combination. **The perfect happiness of men on the earth (if it ever comes) will not be a flat and solid thing, like the satisfaction of animals. It will be an exact and perilous balance; like that of a desperate romance. Man must have just enough faith in himself to have adventures, and just enough doubt of himself to enjoy them.**

The sense of real danger lends the possibility of adventure and dramatic beauty to life.

Now betting and such sports are only the stunted and twisted shapes of the original instinct of man for adventure and romance, of which much has been said in these pages. And the perils, rewards, punishments, and fulfilments of an adventure must be real, or the adventure is only a shifting and heartless nightmare. If I bet I must be made to pay, or there is no poetry in betting. If I challenge I must be made to fight, or there is no poetry in challenging.

Nowhere is the sense of risk and danger clearer - nowhere are the stakes higher - than in Christian marriage.

For the purpose even of the wildest romance results must be real; results must be irrevocable. Christian marriage is the great example of a real and irrevocable result; and that is why it is the chief subject and centre of all our romantic writing.

DRAFT

For all of his talk about romance and fairy tales, in the end, Chesterton makes clear that the crucial factor is that the Christian sees existence and life as a narrative, and not as a system. And what sets a narrative apart from the pre-programmed system or an impersonal process is that narratives involve free decisions. And this narrative character is common to all the various sorts of literature that Chesterton mentions - from fairy tales to penny dreadfuls.

VIII. THE ROMANCE OF ORTHODOXY

To say that all will be well anyhow is a comprehensible remark: but it cannot be called the blast of a trumpet. Europe ought rather to emphasize possible perdition; and Europe always has emphasized it. Here its highest religion is at one with all its cheapest romances. To the Buddhist or the eastern fatalist existence is a science or a plan, which must end up in a certain way. But to a Christian existence is a STORY, which may end up in any way. In a thrilling novel (that purely Christian product) the hero is not eaten by cannibals; but it is essential to the existence of the thrill that he MIGHT be eaten by cannibals. The hero must (so to speak) be an eatable hero. So Christian morals have always said to the man, not that he would lose his soul, but that he must take care that he didn't. In Christian morals, in short, it is wicked to call a man "damned": but it is strictly religious and philosophic to call him damnable.

All Christianity concentrates on the man at the cross-roads. The vast and shallow philosophies, the huge syntheses of humbug, all talk about ages and evolution and ultimate developments. The true philosophy is concerned with the instant. Will a man take this road or that?--that is the only thing to think about, if you enjoy thinking. The aeons are easy enough to think about, any one can think about them. The instant is really awful: and it is because our religion has intensely felt the instant, that it has in literature dealt much with battle and in theology dealt much with hell. It is full of DANGER, like a boy's book: it is at an immortal crisis. There is a great deal of real similarity between popular fiction and the religion of the western people. If you say that popular fiction is vulgar and tawdry, you only say what the dreary and well-informed say also about the images in the Catholic churches. Life (according to the faith) is very like a serial story in a magazine: life ends with the promise (or menace) "to be continued in our next." Also, with a noble vulgarity, life imitates the serial and leaves off at the exciting moment. For death is distinctly an exciting moment.

But the point is that a story is exciting because it has in it so strong an element of will, of what theology calls free-will. You cannot finish a sum how you like. But you can finish a story how you like. When somebody discovered the Differential Calculus there was only one Differential Calculus he could discover. But when Shakespeare killed Romeo he might have married him to Juliet's old nurse if he had felt inclined. And Christendom has excelled in the narrative romance exactly because it has insisted on the theological free-will.

DRAFT

In the end, Chesterton offers a culminating vision of the relationship between Romance and Orthodoxy. It is a vision of the Catholic Church to which he did not yet belong, for we must recall that when Chesterton wrote about the Romance of Orthodoxy, he was not yet a Roman Catholic. Nevertheless, the Church he describes in this passage can only be the Catholic Church:

This is the thrilling romance of Orthodoxy. People have fallen into a foolish habit of speaking of orthodoxy as something heavy, humdrum, and safe. There never was anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy. … **The orthodox Church never took the tame course or accepted the conventions; the orthodox Church was never respectable. It would have been easier to have accepted the earthly power of the Arians. It would have been easy, in the Calvinistic seventeenth century, to fall into the bottomless pit of predestination.** … **To have fallen into any of those open traps of error and exaggeration which fashion after fashion and sect after sect set along the historic path of Christendom--that would indeed have been simple. It is always simple to fall; there are an infinity of angles at which one falls, only one at which one stands. To have fallen into any one of the fads from Gnosticism to Christian Science would indeed have been obvious and tame. But to have avoided them all has been one whirling adventure; and in my vision the heavenly chariot flies thundering through the ages, the dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect.**

Earlier I Don Quijote and Miguel de Cervantes's satire of chivalric romance.
Chesterton is, in a way, Don Quijote. Like Don Quijote, he takes his cues for happiness from books, specifically romances. He seeks a life that resembles those books. Chesterton claims that it is possible to live this way, while Cervantes, in *Don Quijote*, seems to demonstrate that it is foolish to try.

But Chesterton thinks that the Christian faith gives us a chance to succeed where Don Quijote failed. Don Quijote took his romances too literally. Chesterton wants to imitate their spirit. Don Quijote tries to imitate them to the letter.

Sancho Panza and Don Quijote all rolled in to one person.

Recall that Chesterton thinks that the true romantic spirit does not require extravagant chivalric adventures. He believes that life itself - if we see it properly, with truly "orthodox" Christian eyes - is adventure enough.

"I am not concerned - he writes - with any of the separate statutes of elfland, but with the whole spirit of its law, … **I am concerned with a certain way of looking at life, which was created in me by the fairy tales, but has since been meekly ratified by the mere facts."**

Don Quijote was too concerned with the specific rules and regulations of the chivalric code.
….

DRAFT

In 1912, Max Beerbohm wrote A Christmas Garland, in which he parodied various contemporary English writers, imagining how they would write about Christmas. The parody of Chesterton is called some damnable errors about Christmas.

“Mr. Shaw and his friends seem to me to miss the basic principle that lies at the root of all things human and divine. By the way, not all things that are divine are human. But all things that are human are divine. But to return to Christmas.” - Max Beerbohm, Some Damnable Errors about Christmas

“This brings me to the second fallacy. I refer to the belief that "Christmas comes but once a year." Perhaps it does, according to the calendar—a quaint and interesting compilation, but of little or no practical value to anybody. It is not the calendar, but the Spirit of Man that regulates the recurrence of feasts and fasts. Spiritually, Christmas Day recurs exactly seven times a week. When we have frankly acknowledged this, and acted on this, we shall begin to realise the Day's mystical and terrific beauty. **For it is only every-day things that reveal themselves to us in all their wonder and their splendour.** A man who happens one day to be knocked down by a motor-bus merely utters a curse and instructs his solicitor, but a man who has been knocked down by a motor-bus every day of the year will have begun to feel that he is taking part in an august and soul-cleansing ritual.” Beerbohm

“I look for the time when we shall wish one another a Merry Christmas every morning; when roast turkey and plum-pudding shall be the staple of our daily dinner, and the holly shall never be taken down from the walls, and everyone will always be kissing everyone else under the mistletoe.” Beerbohm

As it happens, the fantasy that Beerbohm invents for his parody has in a nominal sense come true, because the word that denoted a feast day for the pagan Romans - feria - has become, for Christians, the word for every ordinary day of the week.

In Italian, this produces the paradox that, as Beerbohm seems to have intuited, Chesterton would have loved: workdays are *giorni feriali*, but vacations are *le ferie*.

I say that this is only nominally true because, sadly, the reality is that the word feria has lost its pagan festal sense. Nevertheless, it remains true that when we speak of an ordinary weekday as a feria, we are calling it a feast day. In that sense, for the Christian, every day is a feast day.

Here in this university it seems only fitting to close with words of Saint Josemaria Escriva, who, in his own way, sought a way to live the heroic life of romance, sought to discover the marvelous, the elusive *quid divinum*, and who, like Chesterton and unlike poor Don Quijote, found it in the midst of ordinary daily life: “The Christian vocation consists in making heroic verse out of the prose of each day.” (“La vocacion cristiana consiste en hacer endecasilabos de la prosa de cada dia” *Conversaciones*, 116, 2.)

DRAFT