

*Terror(ism) in Literature:
'The Man Who Was Thursday':
A Review*

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Authors either use terror as a topic or theme in order to justify the acts of the artist as revolutionist or as “terror-ist.” This paper aims to indicate the relation between terror as an essential mode in art and literature in the form of textuality with reference to *The Man Who Was Thursday*. Gilbert Keith Chesterton’s enigmatic novel, with its humorous tone and fantastic elements contending crucial arguments, stresses its paradoxical situation regarding terror(ism) in the subtitle: *A Nightmare*. Yet, the optimistic end and the function of dream to reveal the mythical essence of terror(ism) ironizes the ‘nightmare.’

Keywords: Artist as terror-ist, terror(ism), Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

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This paper aims to indicate the relation between terror as an essential mode in art and literature in the form of textuality with reference to *The Man Who Was Thursday*. Philosophical insights into the arts as terror have been elaborated thus far by several scholars with regard to the revolutionary characteristics of the arts. Literature, aesthetics, philosophy, ideology and even methodology are observed to probe into the fictions that explore terror either as a propaganda or as a rival. In other words, authors either use terror as a topic or theme in order to justify the acts of the artist as revolutionist or as “terror-ist.” Gilbert Keith Chesterton’s enigmatic novel, with its humorous tone and fantastic elements contending crucial arguments, stresses its paradoxical situation regarding terror in the subtitle: *A Nightmare*. Yet, the optimistic end and the function of dream to reveal the mythical essence of terror(ism) ironizes the ‘nightmare.’

The comparisons between art and terror(ism) from philosophical and ideological perspectives usher the dispute whether art ensues “order and peace” or calls for “chaos, and rebellion.” This recalls Nietzsche’s description of artistic production; order and chaos are two polarized forces which lead to artistic creation; art assumes the role of a bridge between Apollo and Dionysus who represent those binary oppositions.¹ The chaotic desire of the artist who turns to be “barbaric” is considered to be “as necessary as the Apollonian” and thus as necessary as order (15). Nietzsche says: “I keep my eyes fixed on both those artistic divinities of the Greeks, Apollo and Dionysus, and recognize in them the living and clear representatives of two art worlds, different in their deepest being and their highest goals” (55). Awareness of these two contravening realms, different in their ‘being’ and “goals,” is central to the comprehension of the idealized art; and philosophy of art as well as the purpose of the artistic production is, in some ways, associated with the acts of the terror-ist, having been preconceived in advance for the creation of chaos and disorder. Thus, both artist and terror-ist emerge as the challengers of reality and order not solely in life as such but also in literature as the representation of it. The aspiration for changing the *status quo*, therefore, signifies a definitional correspondence as well as a methodological affinity. Terror through literature, if we specify art as literature, is supposed to address a certain audience, assuming a particular discourse peculiar to each single work, seeking communication and exploiting metaphorical language.

¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*. Trans. Ian Johnston. Richer Resources Publications, 2012. p. 15-55.

In any sort of terror(ism), the act / product is supposed to blow against the current power and structure. The representation of the desire to disturb, disrupt or destroy that prevailing structure is an aspect attributed to both artist and terror-ist. However, the convergence of terror-ist and literary men on this issue is moulded by the diachronic progress of artistic terror-ist acts. The artistic terror-ist acts within the fashion of the so-called symbolism may provide a more lucid assessment of the figurative language of textual terror or terror in texts. Yet, the terror-ist fiction is as diverse as the approaches to terror(ism) from artistic point of view. Besides, the alterations in the nature and methods of terror(ism) created a broad framework for terror-ist fiction; the contours of this frame follows a route from Romantic terror-ism and revolutionist poet to post-9/11 terror-ist fiction proposing art and literature as an alternative to the abused forms of terror. However, some of these novelists and their critics draw attention to the philosophical convergence of men of letters and so-called terror-ists through texts (narrative or lyric) and textuality. Act of terror as an artistic expression and textual representation is supposed to blow against the current power and structure.

The literariness of terror(ism), the comprisal of terror-istic implications of literature, and their predication on sublimity unfold in manifestations in fictional and nonfictional works. The affinity between literature and terror(ism) does not remain on aesthetic grounds, nor is it peculiar to the Romantic era. Terror-ist fiction can be viewed in three phases: the early Romantics' aesthetic revolution along with French Revolution, from Romantics to 9/11 which generally issued Communist organisations, and the aftermath of 9/11 attacks. The alliance of the author and revolutionists during Romantic period can be said to have continued in case of some writers while terror-ists were also perceived as 'rivals' during the second phase. A distinction between the revolutionist and terror-ist can be noticed in this phase; despite the legitimacy of revolutionists, same sort of tendencies were regarded as simply the 'enemy' and pure 'violent' by several prominent writers. The aestheticism and appellations such as 'freedom fighter and altruist' attributed to revolutionist acts during the 19th century were not endowed to the terror-ist similarly seen as 'freedom fighter, martyr, altruist' by his community. Early 20th century writers contradicted the Romantics in this approach. However, some late 19th century authors also denounced the correspondence between the author and terror-ist. Dostoevsky is one of the leading figures who wrote terror-ist fiction but denied Romantic alliance of artist with the marginalized and revolutionist.¹ Nevertheless, the discrepancy between Sartre's perspective; "Since man cannot create, but does have the power to destroy . . . the poem will be a work of destruction" (qtd. in Scanlan, 77) and the oppositions that artist favours order and unity rather than chaos is a salient shift in the mindsets and attitudes.

Considering the fact that post-Romantic authors celebrate the art-terror(ism) congruity, it can be foregrounded *The Man Who Was Thursday* invites the reader to deal with the serious subject-matter rather than draw on the fantastical aspect of the work. The novel philosophizes matters such as the nature of the poet as anarchist, the mythical aspect of anarchy and terror(ism), and violation of social peace from the eyes of poets, anarchists, and policemen. Chesterton brings two poets together, one is a police

¹ See Scanlan's discussion of Dostoevsky's *Demons* in *Plotting Terror*. p. 83-101.

detective Gabriel Syme and the other is Lucien Gregory who is an anarchist poet. The loaded symbolism and satire addresses both art and politics de-sensitising the characters as well as readers. Terror(ism) in this short novel is issued as an elusive and misleading concept. Chesterton's view of anarchist degrades the conventional and official approaches to the anarchy and terror(ism); the narration rectifies terror(ism) from the earnestness ascribed to it. Chesterton questions inculcation of the idea of terror-ists' dangerousness'; the embedded disguises, symbols, and illusions in *The Man Who Was Thursday* blur the divisions between socially and officially denominated anarchist and the real pursuers of chaos. Chesterton does not see the destruction of the society in the terror-ist acts of discontented communities as it sees it in the governing body as well as the rich, untouchable society. He makes one of his characters declares this conviction: "Aristocrats were always anarchists, as you can see from the barons' wars" (69).

The Man Who Was Thursday can be reconsidered within this context with its multifarious nature both in terms of content and style. It is a detective story, a fantastic tale, a political treatise, and a thriller narrated in poetic prose, and deals with terror(ism) in relation to both art and theological doctrines. The Biblical allusions and analogies are interspersed among the existential, profane, and anarchical contentions. Chesterton's artifice lies in creating mysterious plot with a remarkably poetic language, yet his skill to make conventionally significant things look ridicule should not be overlooked. In this novel, he plays with the notions and norms welcomed by mobs, secured by governments, and consecrated by religious tenets. Through disguises, Chesterton questions our perception of reality, politically convinced plight, and orthodox either-or logic. Terror(ism) which is obscured by the enigmatic characters and farcical style of narration is the pivotal topic that is questioned and whereby broader issues are inquired into. The two characters who are both poets with opposite world views, political ideologies, and social status deliberate on and dispute about the nature of terror(ism) and literature. As the story progresses, the reader is entangled in a rather sophisticated, mysterious, and multivocal plot and philosophical contemplation. Syme is haunted by the esoteric persona of Sunday. The contrast between his face and his back unravels both the deceptiveness of good and evil and the fact that they coexist in an individual or entity. Syme says "(T)hat has been for me the mystery of Sunday, and it is also the mystery of the world" (93). Thus, deciphering the identity of the key figure Sunday, who is the leader of an anarchist group, is prerequisite to comprehend the mystery of universe, and Chesterton's fabrication of connections between anarchists and Biblical characters. Burke had elucidated sublime, the source of terror and delight, by impersonating it in Milton's Satan. However, sublimity is represented by Sunday, who is the inciter of terror, uncertainty, and the leader of the anarchist group, in Chesterton's story presents Sunday. The enigma of who he is for the characters, and what/whom he represents for the readers is inherent to its artistic merit and philosophical undertakings. The following dialogue signifies the straddling nature of human being between reality and illusion, knowledge and ignorance, and his penchant for authority and chaos:

"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" (83).

The professor's anxiety for the probability to discover who he really is foreshadows the shock and vexation to be felt at the revelation of his identity. Chesterton does not reveal what or whom Sunday represents; he only provides hints that has led to various interpretation. One of the clues is that Sunday says "I am the Sabbath" (99) upon being enquired about his identity. While other anarchists were named with the other days of the week, which presumably refers to the six days of creation, Sunday, as critics and reviewers have occasionally suggested, stands for God who rests and does not interfere human and worldly affairs although he is the 'head.' Burke's association of sublime with Satan and Chesterton's with the Supreme Being, the careless God, anticipate the manifestation and creatively manipulation of 'sublimity,' albeit both transcends beyond the aesthetic and artistic meaning of sublime.

The cryptic elements enable Chesterton to reverse the perceptions regarding who is an anarchist and who is an order-stricken fond of authority. The novel portends that the rich is the anarchist not the poor; the rulers are the terror-ist not the so-called bomb throwers; and eminently accentuated terror(ism) is an illusion but not real, all these actual conductors of terror being in disguise of law and order. For instance, Chesterton point to this deception: "The poor object to being governed badly. The rich object to being governed at all." This sort of protestation and reversing is ubiquitous throughout the novel. In the preface, he informs the reader that "this is a tale of those old fears, even of those emptied hells, And none but you shall understand the true thing that it tells— Of what colossal gods of shame could cow men and yet crash, Of what huge devils hid the stars, yet fell at a pistol flash" (3). The whole story of the *The Man Who Was Thursday* can be viewed as encapsulated in these metaphorical lines. The old fears suggest the traditional concerns of governing bodies against the rebellious individuals; colossal gods stand for not only the moral and religious authority but also the states which rule assuming to have the right to be the only and unchangeable authority.

Anarchy is referred with lofty and grand expressions, yet one should keep in mind which anarchy deserves to be extolled: the actual anarchy disguised under the love of order and law, or the poetic anarchy of the poor. Syme who was an advocator of order, upon infiltrating into an anarchist organisation, exclaims "Why does each thing on the earth war against each other thing? ... So that each thing that obeys law may have the glory and isolation of the anarchist" (100). The opposition between the glory and isolation of anarchy and the unspoken chaos and mediocrity of order brings a new dimension to the philosophy and theory of terror(ism). This outcry of Syme, initially enamoured of authority, endows anarchy with isolation, which is striking terror(ism) or anarchy mostly entails organisations, groups, and communities as in the case of *The Man Who Was Thursday*. The ascription of glory and isolation gives dignity to anarchy. On the other hand, it suggests that under the ostensible orderliness of authority lies tumult and chaos. This also can be seen in the self-description of Sunday as the "peace of God" (99). Conventionally, the words God and peace suggests order and authority, yet an anarchist's referring to himself as the peace of God breeds the reversal of roles and questioning of the concepts of terror(ism), anarchy, and authority. The response to this expression ponders on the controversies, contradictions, and complexities of the condition:

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 offense 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 (99).

Whether the reconciliation between evil and good, order and chaos, and the ruler and the mutinous takes place or not, Chesterton assembles all these feature in a single character. This character can be referred as Sunday, the Head of Anarchists, Nature, or God.

As to the anarchist soul of the poet embedded and the literal-mindedness of the terror-ist, *The Man Who Was Thursday* accords with Chesterton's remarks about his idea of literary works which "present such a picture of literary chaos as might be produced if the characters in every book from *Paradise Lost* to *The Pickwick Papers* broke from their covers and mingled in one mad romance."¹ In this regard, Chesterton, through this novel, not only generates 'literary chaos' but he uses his poetic licence to equate a poet to an anarchist. Chesterton's analogy is a thoroughly articulated pretension that redeems a likeness due to the free-spirited nature of a poet. While introducing the characters, the narrator says "And Mr. Lucian Gregory . . . He put the old cant of the lawlessness of art and the art of lawlessness with a certain impudent freshness which gave at least a momentary pleasure" (4). Although Gregory legitimizes the anarchist tendencies of poets the artistic embracement of terror, sublime, can hardly be embodied. Still, he illuminates the Romantic ideal of revolutionary poet. He is mentioned as the "the mere aesthete of anarchism" (34). In addition, the delight he finds in chaos enrich his imagination and creates inspiration. His rapturous attachment to anarchical ideals are rather philosophical than practical. He aestheticizes the anarchic ideal; "About order and anarchy. Here is your precious order, that lean, iron lamp, ugly and barren; and there is anarchy, rich, living, reproducing itself— there is anarchy, splendid in green and gold" (8).

In conclusion, literature functions as a mirror to the process from 19th century revolutionist-poet correspondence to post 9/11 terror(ism). Although the word terror(ism) was begun to used sparingly in the second half of the 19th century the earlier labels anarchist and revolutionist can be paralleled to the subsequent communist rebellious groups and ultimately the recent fundamentalist terror(ism) groups of post-9/11 era. The Romantic adherence to aesthetic revival of senses highly presumed multiple meanings in socio-political life, and it went hand in hand with uprisings in Europe. The relationship between the arts and terror ramified in the 20th century as terror(ism) was not a static and merely political entity but ever changing, ever evolving textuality. Yet, the post-Romantic concordance between literature and terror(ism) was also sustained in the 20th century revealed in Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, which unearths the deep-rooted alliance with its somewhat enigmatic nature.

¹ Chesterton, G.K. *The G. K. Chesterton Collection II*. 1901.

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