THE GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATION OF G.K. CHESTERTON:
PLACE, TOURISM AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER

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PLACE, TOURISM AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER

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As a concept geographical imagination has received attention in recent years. Concepts such as place and the Other play an important part in geographical imaginations. G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) was an English journalist, novelist and social critic who regularly discussed issues related to geographical imagination. This thesis examines geographical imagination within the context of Chesterton’s critique of imperialism, internationalism and tourism and argues that Chesterton’s thought is relevant today and of special interest to those concerned with place and the Other.

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Introduction

G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) was an English journalist, novelist, poet, and social critic. Today, he is perhaps most widely known for his *Father Brown* detective novels and his Christian apologetic works, but Chesterton’s writings are also filled with numerous references to place and identity; his essays and newspaper articles frequently dealt with issues from the local and national to the international and global. Chesterton’s first novel, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1991c [1904]), is one of his most popular works and sets the pace for his geographical thought to come. The novel takes place in London in the year 1984, when England is ruled by a monarch that is chosen from a list. London’s landscape is drab and placeless but few complained of this condition until a total cynic with a sense of humor named Auberon Quin is chosen as the monarch. Quin takes nothing seriously and decides to revive London with the color and pageantry of medieval heraldry. Each borough of London is given its own colors and crests along with patriotic songs. Quin does not take this seriously but requires his friends, the newly appointed provosts of the boroughs, to comply. This comes to haunt him, however, eight years after his inauguration as monarch. Shortly after his inauguration, Quin and his close friends are strolling the streets of Notting Hill when a young boy with a wooden sword and paper hat playfully challenges the king saying, “I am the King of the Castle” (Chesterton 1991c [1904]), 34). Quin, who was equally playful, presents the boy with a gold coin “for the war-chest of Notting Hill” (Chesterton 1991c, 34after which the boy runs home, presumably to never be seen again. Eight years later however, the ten-year-old boy is now an eighteen-year-old young man and the newly appointed provost of
Notting Hill. The boy, Adam Wayne, grows up to be a serious and naïve patriot, the antithesis of Auberon Quin. Apparently, when presented with the coin for the war chest to defend Notting Hill, Wayne takes his charge seriously and develops an unyielding sense of place for his beloved Notting Hill. As the novel progresses, Wayne rallies his neighbors and takes up arms to defend the borough from a highway project that would demolish Pump Street in Notting Hill.

*The Napoleon of Notting Hill* was Chesterton’s first novel, and it was highly geographical. It is a fantasy, but can hardly be considered farcical given the resistance many around the world give to prevent capitalist “development” and improvement. Patriotism, especially local patriotism, exemplifies Chesterton’s geographical imagination. An anti-imperialist during the great years of the “British Empire, Chesterton spent much of his time countering the arguments of British imperialists. Chesterton decried cosmopolitanism for favoring a more global sense place over local senses of place. He considered cosmopolitanism decidedly anti-patriotic. In *The Patriotic Idea* (1904), Chesterton explains his thoughts on patriotism and love of place:

> Patriotism begins the praise of the world at the nearest thing, instead of beginning it at the most distant, and thus it insures what is, perhaps, the most essential of all earthly considerations, that nothing on earth shall go without its due appreciation. Wherever there is a strangely shaped mountain upon some lonely island, wherever there is a nameless kind of fruit growing in some obscure forest, patriotism insures that this shall not go into darkness without being remembered in a song. (Chesterton 2001 [1904], 597)

Chesterton’s support of patriotism and dislike of cosmopolitanism exemplify the geographical nature of his thought. He preferred closer and thicker sentiments because they allow people to appreciate their surroundings more fully. He frequently rebuked the
English for their infatuation with the world “out there,” and their disdain for local and national attachments. Chesterton calls this infatuation “somewhere-elseness,” his phrase for the imperial geographical imagination. It is my view that much of Chesterton’s thought can be examined within the context of the geographical imagination.

John Agnew defines the geographical imagination concisely and coherently, “The world is actively spatialized, divided up, labeled, sorted out into a hierarchy of places of greater or lesser ‘importance’ by political geographers, other academics and political leaders. This process provides the geographical framing within which political elites and mass publics act in the world in pursuits of their own identities and interests” (Agnew 2003, 3). A political geographer, Agnew matches the similar phrase “geopolitical imagination” with the above definition, but the two concepts are closely related and for the purposes of this thesis the two will be treated synonymously.

In “The Little Known Englishman,” an article for his weekly column in the Illustrated London News (ILN), Chesterton described the imperial geographical imagination as thus:

There is one kindred characteristic of the English which is very subtle and easily expressed wrongly, but which plays a very great part in practical things of this kind. I know not what to call it, except perhaps, somewhere-elseness. It is a sort of distant optimism. It is a refusal to accept as final the facts immediately in front of us—a strong belief in the other side of the world, or even the other side of the moon (Chesterton, 1988[1915], 290).

In Chesterton’s view, the English had a vague love for the world “out there” yet failed to grasp the beauty of England. Chesterton’s love of place may have the air of romanticism, but he criticized geographical imaginations, such as imperial imaginations, that placed too much affection on far away places and unknown peoples. This ambiguous identification with the ends of the empire was promulgated through thin information—
“loose” hard facts. Conversely, thick information is more in depth. The English, Chesterton thought, loved consuming thin knowledge about the Empire, overlooking the thick, more substantial knowledge of England itself. This thirst for thin knowledge was largely achieved through the use of new technologies in communication, information and travel. In Chesterton’s view familiar place was an important concept and much more appealing than strange and distant places or the placeless concept of space. For the Modernists, whom Chesterton frequently debated, space and location triumphed over the concept of place. On the other hand, Chesterton believed place to be an important factor in the lives of people. Understanding place requires “thick” knowledge that cannot be readily collected or analyzed through technological innovation. Thick knowledge is needed to acquire genuine understanding of other peoples.

In this thesis I argue that Chesterton had a profound understanding of place that is still valuable today in so far as our geopolitical understanding of the Other is concerned. Perhaps Chesterton’s most prescient social thought, however, concerns globalism and globalization, of which much has been written in recent years. Chesterton criticized the forces of globalization and debated its proponents and in this way can be seen as ahead of his time. While the terms “globalization” and “globalism” did not exist in Chesterton’s time, the processes nevertheless did. In Chesterton’s time the British Empire came to stretch around the world and in doing so Britain “painted the map red.” In the process technology increased tremendously in the areas of transportation and communication. Many in his day and ours have claimed that this “shrinking” world will lead to global understanding as we are increasingly able to reach out to our neighbors. Chesterton
warned, though, that being able to easily reach other countries inevitably means that both friends and foes from other countries can reach “us” (Chesterton 1991b [1929]). Chesterton’s point is that there are both intended and unintended social consequences when implementing such a global design. According to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman design means defining “the difference between order and chaos, to sift the proper from the improper, to legitimize one pattern at the expense of all the others” (Bauman 1991, 105). It is his discussion of the unintended consequences of global design that makes Chesterton such an able social critic. In this regard Chesterton is comparable to Bauman, a Polish born English critical sociologist, who has been called “the greatest living sociologist” (Fearn 2006, 30). Like Chesterton, Bauman believes that design can have tremendous consequences for humanity (Bauman 1991, 9). Design and other aspects of modernity cause, among other things, disillusionment and disappointment. Although separated by two generations, Bauman and Chesterton both discuss the disillusionment that many face in the modern world (Fearn 2006; Franklin 2003; Chesterton 2001). Chesterton’s discussions of this disillusionment is a major focus of this thesis, especially the disillusionment that stems from attempting to understand the world “out there,” the world beyond one’s comfortable and known boundaries—the world of the Other. How one believes the Other relates to his or her own boundaries influences and is influenced by their geopolitical imagination (Agnew 2003).

The Geographical Imagination in the Literature

The concept of the geographical imagination has garnered increasing attention in recent geographic, sociological and humanities literature. These discussions range from
mentioning geographical imagination by name to discussing the concept by other names including “lay geography” (Crouch 2000); and “sense of place” (Tuan 1974; 1977). For example, Agnew uses the term “geopolitical imagination,” which is slightly more specific than “geographical imagination.” For the purpose of this thesis however, the two concepts will be considered as synonymous with each other. Chesterton’s thought on place is largely a discussion on the geographical imagination. He discussed English national versus British imperial identities. Later he critiqued internationalist identities, but in each case he looked closely at how the Other fit into the popular conceptions of place.

Discussions on the geographical imagination go back at least three decades within the geographical literature. For example, a recent treatise on the concept of an author’s geographical imagination is John S. Pipkin’s (2001) article examining the geographical thought of Henry David Thoreau. Pipkin notes that much of Thoreau’s writing is about place. Another example is Denis Cosgrove’s (1979) “John Ruskin and the Geographical Imagination,” in which the author examines the thought of the English art critic and social critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) within the context of his love for landscape. Cosgrove writes that Ruskin “wished to rid himself of a priori notions of theory in order to see, or experience directly, external phenomena and to develop an understanding from that direct or ‘lived’ experience of landscape rather than explain it scientifically” (Cosgrove 1979, 45). In his article “Place: An Experiential Perspective,” Yi-Fu Tuan (1975) examines the role of experience and imagination in the understanding and appreciation of place:
To know a place fully means both to understand it in an abstract way and to know it as one person knows another. At a high theoretical level, places are points in a spatial system. At the opposite extreme, they are strong visceral feelings. Places are seldom known at either extreme: the one is too remote from sensory experience to be real, and the other presupposes rootedness in a locality and an emotional commitment to it that are increasingly rare. (Tuan 1975, 152)

In essence, Tuan believes understanding place requires direct experience and a geographical imagination that interprets the experience. Chesterton also believed that understanding place requires a balance of experience and imagination a process Chesterton refers to as “living geography” (Chesterton 1988a[1915]). This will be discussed more fully in the chapters that follow.

David Crouch (2000) discusses a type of living geography and geographical imagination that he refers to as “embodied lay geography” (Crouch 2000). Embodied lay geography concerns the way people make geographical sense of their surroundings. As Crouch explains, “Embodiment denotes the ways in which the individual grasps the world around her/him and makes sense of it in ways that engage both mind and body” (Crouch 2000, 63). This definition of embodiment represents the flip side of Agnew’s definition of the geopolitical imagination in which, the geopolitical imagination concerns knowledge of place and space “out there” while embodiment is scaled down to include the individual and his or her experience of the Other. For the purposes of this discussion, geopolitical imagination concerns geographical beliefs about the Other that are acquired without the benefit of personal experience with the Other. The concept of embodiment, on the other hand, factors in personal visitation, but does not imply that the knowledge gained is any more “correct” than knowledge garnered from other sources. Our own
bodily experiences and situations are filtered through our geographical imaginations and may or may not be “true.”

Crouch’s explanations are useful, and comparable to Chesterton’s notion that geographical knowledge is better gained in person than through imaginative knowledge of far and exotic places and people whom one does not actually know or understand. Chesterton would add that mundane surroundings are vital when attempting to understand the Other. Crouch’s approach to acquiring geographical knowledge is particularly useful in an examination of Chesterton because he examines it within the context of leisure and tourism, topics that Chesterton regularly addressed.

Another contributor to thought on the geographical imagination is the anthropologist Arturo Escobar, who believes that place should play a more important role in geographical imaginations given the placelessness wrought in the wake of globalization. In “Place, Nature, and Culture in Discourses of Globalization” (Escobar 2003), his contribution to the book Localizing Knowledge in a Globalizing World (Mirsepassi, Basu and Weaver 2003), Escobar eruditely defends the importance of considering place in culture. Despite debate that place is narrow, fundamentalist, or constructed, Escobar believes “that place—as the experience of a particular location with some measure of groundedness, sense of boundaries, and connection to everyday life, even if its identity is constructed and never fixed—continues to be important in the lives of many people, perhaps most” (Escobar 2003, 37). Escobar’s postulation that “connection to everyday life” is important is particularly valuable to studying Chesterton and his geographical imagination. As will be shown below, Chesterton placed much emphasis on knowledge
of the Other’s everyday life. Escobar does not mention geographical imagination specifically by name, but he is, in essence, writing about this concept. Like Chesterton before him, Escobar believes that geographical notions that disregard place in the geographical imagination are less than true to life:

While it is evident that ‘local’ economies and culture are not outside the scope of capital and modernity, it also needs to be newly acknowledged that the former are not produced exclusively by the latter; this place specificity…enables a different reading of culture and economy, capitalism and modernity. The inquiry into place is of equal importance for renewing the critique of eurocentrism in the conceptualization of world regions, area studies, and cultural diversity. The marginalization of place in European social theory of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been particularly deleterious to those social formations for which place-based modes of consciousness and practices have continued to be important. This includes many contemporary societies, perhaps with the exception of those most exposed to the de-localizing, disembedding and universalizing influence of modern economy, culture and thought. The reassertion of place thus appears as an important arena for rethinking and reworking eurocentric forms of analysis. (Escobar 2001, 141)

Like Chesterton before, and Bauman today, Escobar criticizes Western thinkers and planners for eschewing place. Escobar suggests thought and design that seeks “any alternative course of action [other than place] must take into account place-based models of nature, culture, and politics” (Escobar 2001, 141). Geographical imaginations, Escobar believes, should uphold the importance of place.

Perhaps the most critically acclaimed contributions to the critical examination of place and the geographical imagination came from Edward Said. His works *Orientalism* (1979), and *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) examine the relationships between Western imperial geographical imaginations about the East and how those imaginations, in turn, influenced policies, histories, and ultimately the self-identities of numerous Eastern and Middle Eastern peoples. Place and the geographical imagination are central to Said’s
thought on Western conceptions and inventions of the other, which he refers to as “imaginative geography” (Said 2000, 181). In a discussion of his books *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, Said explained the significance geographical imaginations play in his thought:

> [W]hat especially interests me is the hold of both memory and geography on the desire for conquest and domination. Two of my books, stated that both of the books were *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, are based not only on the notion of what I call imaginative geography—the invention and construction of a geographical space called the Orient, for instance, with scant attention paid to the actuality of the geography and its inhabitants—but also on mapping, conquest, and annexation of territory both in what Conrad called the dark places of the earth and in its most densely inhabited and lived-in places like India or Palestine. (Said 2000, 181)

Said’s point is that geographical imaginations are not always innocent; in other words, they are not without effect. They are used as tools by the powerful for their own purposes, in Said’s case controlling the Orient by creating and maintaining imaginary geographies. By creating socially constructed hierarchies and relations between social spaces and places, imperialists (and Chesterton would add big business) control large territories and peoples with, using Said’s words, “scant attention paid to the actuality of the geography and its inhabitants” (Said 2000, 181). For Said, geographical imaginations
should be conceptualized within the context of existing relationships and histories:

In short what is now before us nationally, and in the full imperial panorama, is the deep, the profoundly perturbed and perturbing question of our relationship to others—other cultures, other states, other histories, other experiences, traditions, peoples, and destinies. The difficulty with the question is that there is no vantage outside the actuality of relationships between cultures, between unequal imperial and nonimperial powers, between different Others, a vantage that might allow one the epistemological privilege of somehow judging, evaluating, and interpreting free of the encumbering interests, emotions, and engagements of the ongoing relationships themselves. When we consider the connections between the United States and the rest of the world, we are so to speak of the connections, not outside and beyond them. (Said 1989, 217 italics in original)

Academically speaking, thoughts of the Other are often seen from a privileged vantage point, above and beyond the relationship, and supposedly free from bias or motive. Said contended that this in itself was a fiction and that existing relationships and histories should not be ignored. It is likely that Said and Chesterton would disagree on much. Chesterton was a white, Christian, eurocentric thinker who held each with esteem. They would agree, though, upon the importance of being truthful in our understanding of the Other by acknowledging our own positions. They would also agree on the role powerful leaders play in influencing geographical imaginations, which in turn affects the real lives of real people. One can love or loathe an Other, but the actions expressing that love or loathing affect real people even if the actors’ conceptualizations of the Other are fictional.

Summary

Geographical imaginations are not inconsequential. Chesterton believed they play an important role in the life of humanity, especially in conceptualizations of the Other. Chesterton believed false ideas of the Other were regretful and had the potential for
dangerous consequences. It can be argued that Chesterton believed misunderstandings of the Other were caused by two seemingly opposite errors: paying too little attention to the Other, and focusing too much attention on particular details of the Other. Neither gives one an accurate or well-rounded picture of other peoples and places. This balanced approach to understanding the Other makes Chesterton’s views a valuable asset to those interested in place and understanding the Other.

Three broad aspects of Chesterton’s thought on place and understanding the Other will be discussed in this thesis. The first chapter, “Imperialism and Understanding the Other,” examines Chesterton’s thought on place and the Other within the context of his anti-imperialism, in which he strongly criticized imperial representations of the Other. Chesterton differentiates between two types of representation of the Other: rhetorical and objective representation. Rhetorical representation included such things as newspaper articles and discussion of the Other. One example Chesterton uses is English distrust and lack of knowledge about the Welsh, whom Chesterton believed the English should try to understand and not merely make disfavorable presumptions about. Chesterton recommended a four-part intellectual test to help determine whether accusations about the Other are true or false and believed that much of what we believe about the Other is influenced by our fears and biases. The second type of representation has the appearance of objectivity. So-called “objective” means of representation include photographs and maps, especially the British imperial maps that “painted the map red” highlighting areas controlled by the British Empire. Chesterton was highly critical of the red colored maps and their intended purpose of “objectively” presenting as fact the possessions of the
empire. In general, Chesterton believed that maps show what cartographers want them to show. Cosgrove (2001) makes a similar point, as well as maintaining that one’s perspective above the map gives one a sense of being a god above the world looking down from a heavenly vantage point. Placing names on the maps is another seemingly objective means of gaining control over the Other that Chesterton discusses.

Chesterton’s cure for failing to understanding the Other is what he calls “Living Geography” (Chesterton 2000 [1905]), experiencing other peoples in their own places rather than simply reading about them or maintaining personal biases against the Other. This concept will be presented more fully in the third chapter on travel and tourism, but suffice it to say that he believed simply visiting a place and people were not enough to understand them. The visitor must make some effort to observe or experience more the Other’s daily activities and less of the grand and exotic tourist type activities.

The second chapter examines Chesterton’s thought on understanding the Other within the context of his critique of internationalism. In the aftermath of the First World War many considered internationalism a more humane and caring alternative to the imperialism and nationalism that was thought to have prompted the war. Chesterton, however, believed internationalism was dangerous for two general reasons. First, he believed internationalism had the tendency to ignore the historical and geographical imaginations and aspirations of peoples around the world while at the same time teaching the importance of universality and universal brotherhood. Put another way, Chesterton believed that the internationalist geographical imagination saw the world in more homogeneous terms and ignored the diversity of the Other. Chesterton believed that few
would remain passive while their worlds were rearranged by internationalists bent on making the world a uniform and peaceful place. Chesterton was particularly critical of the impersonal way in which other people’s lives, histories, and boundaries were approached.

A second general belief Chesterton had of internationalism was that it was imperialism with a different name. Chesterton believed that design and capitalism were imposed upon other peoples in an imperialist manner and believed that America epitomized this new imperialism. Chesterton’s most geographical critique of internationalism, however, is his criticism of insularity and connectivity. People take comfort in technologically advanced means of travel and communication, which in turn gives them a sense of security and insularity that no one from without can harm them. Chesterton posits that this is geographically improbable. If “we” have the ability to leave our homeland and travel to the far reaches of the planet it is probable that people from those far reaches will be able to travel to “us” as well. In Chesterton’s view, there is no geographical security through technology. Technology works in both directions, from us and at us.

The final chapter of this thesis discusses Chesterton’s views on tourism and understanding the Other. As mentioned above, Chesterton believed that understanding the Other requires engaging the Other on their own terms and in their everyday settings. Chesterton posits that many who travel have false geographical knowledge of the places and people they visit because travellers prefer grandiose, well-known and exciting sites as opposed to the mundane sights of everyday life. Bauman and Chesterton agree that
travel all too frequently devolves into getting one’s money’s worth out of a trip and that travellers prefer sites that present the sights they believe are worthwhile. Chesterton and Bauman both discuss the disillusionment and disappointment that tourists encounter when the real geography does not add up to the imaginative geographies the travellers envisioned. Place becomes commodified, and the thirst for geographical knowledge is considered less important than the good time one is supposed to have at a particular site. In order to understand the Other, Chesterton recommends remaining idle, allowing the traveller to observe and “take in” the Other in a way that is mindful of place.

Goal

The goal of this thesis is to argue that Chesterton was a lay geographer deeply concerned with place and the Other. As with any work that compares the thought of thinkers from different periods and rhetorical frameworks, it is highly speculative. This is not intended to be the final word on Chesterton’s geographical thought or the work of other thinkers presented throughout this thesis. Chesterton was a prolific writer and different, equally compelling conclusions could be drawn about Chesterton’s geographical imagination. It seems apparent, though, that Chesterton appreciated place and geographical imaginations and believed they are important concepts to consider when attempting to understand other peoples, and should be included among those who value discussion of the concepts of place, geographical imagination and the Other.
Chapter 1: Imperialism and Understanding the Other

Across the path of Imperialism as interpreted in a patriotic sense there lies the most insurmountable of human obstacles, an impossibility which is more than a political and more than a financial impossibility—a psychological impossibility. An empire has all the characteristics that render national attachments impossible. It is huge, it is mostly remote, it is everywhere diverse and contradictory. Above all, it is utterly undefined and unlimited. Not to see how this frustrates genuine enthusiasm is not to know the human heart. (Chesterton 2001 [1904], 603)

Chesterton was a frequent critic of imperialism. With their ambiguous borders, he believed empires were undefined and unlimited. His writings are replete with calls to respect local and national attachments. Chesterton’s geographical imagination was parochial and national. At the turn of the twentieth-century, the height of the British Empire, Chesterton was a Little Englander who believed that England should drop its imperial pursuits. Likewise, he frequently discussed misunderstanding other peoples and places. Some of Chesterton’s staunchest criticism of imperialism involves questioning the cultural politics of knowledge and understanding the Other.

A common theme in Chesterton’s writings is understanding other peoples and places. Chesterton explored understanding the Other both generally and specifically. In a general sense, Chesterton’s writings concerned the cultural politics of understanding the Other. Cultural politics is an ambiguous concept that involves understanding how perceptions of society are formed. It is doubtful that Chesterton used the phrase “geographical imagination” or “geopolitical” imagination but much of his social criticism concerned English perceptions of society, politics, religion, and their relationship with the world, especially the world “out there,” the worlds of other people and places.
Chesterton’s more specific topics include the Irish, the French, and Americans. The English had a long history of discord with the Irish and French. In Chesterton’s time, English relations with America were amicable and maturing. Chesterton has praise and criticism for each. Generally, he discussed paths and barriers to understanding other peoples and places and the role that fads, and the media influenced perceptions of the Other. It is in this regard that Chesterton’s thought can best be described as an examination of the geographical imagination. Before the First World War and the Wilsonian internationalism that followed, Chesterton’s social thought was largely a critique of the British imperial geopolitical imagination, the idea that the British Empire was a natural and appropriate way for the world to be divided politically and geographically.

If Chesterton’s critique of the British imperial geopolitical imagination could be described in one sentence, it would be “Do not assume too much.” This was especially true in his discussions of the unequal relationships between empire and subject. Chesterton did not feel that it was foolish to try to understand other peoples, nor did he believe that it was impossible to learn from other peoples. Rather, he was critical of faddish interests in the Other and the unequal relationship between imperialist and subject. Chesterton’s views on imperial knowledge of Other do not fall within one social theory or set of social theories. The purpose of this chapter is to explore Chesterton’s critique of imperial understandings of the Other. Three strains of thought will be used in this task: humanistic geography; post-colonial theory; and critical thought on representation.
Critical thinkers use various approaches in their discussions about the knowledge of
the Other. One such approach is studying representation that focuses on the “process of
creating and inscribing meanings about our spaces and places (Duncan and Ley 1993). In
particular, hermeneutic representation critically analyzes and attempts to interpret that
knowledge by acknowledging the biases of the authors of that knowledge. As a journalist
and social critic, Chesterton was concerned with knowledge presented about other
peoples and places and believed that knowledge was accepted without much
consideration. As an opponent of imperialism he was particularly interested in the
English fascination with other peoples and places. He was especially critical of over-
simplification. In his essay “On Studying Other Nations” Chesterton writes,

It is not often that we have the picture of a people, and when we do it is generally
so perfect that we do not believe in the people, even if we admire the picture.
Most descriptions of other nations are so simple and sweeping that they cannot be
ture… Distrust the description of every nation when it can be easily described. If
a people can really be covered with an adjective, you may be certain that it is the
wrong adjective. (Chesterton 1987 [1908], 225)

Simplification is needed when discussing and learning about other peoples and
places. It is a matter of fact that research on any subject is a reduction to some extent. It
is important to keep this in mind and remember, as Chesterton contends, that people are
too complex to be represented by one “sweeping” adjective. The little that can be
discussed at one time is not the entire picture. Representations of people and their issues
are often biased. This is done innocently and intentionally. People’s histories and
collective memories are beyond easy descriptions. Tuan writes, “all scientific models of
man simplify the human capacity to know, to create, and to obfuscate. Science
simplifies, and even popular notions of other people and places are reductions of the
actual circumstances. Representations of the Other can be generous or derogatory. They can be innocent remarks or disingenuous accusations.

*Rhetorical Representations of the Other*

Many factors influence the actions of people and their interactions with their places. Likewise, various factors influence how informants present that information and even what they choose to present. Even the consumers of the knowledge have their biases. It is true of “us,” whomever “we” happen to be, and it is true of “them,” whoever “they” happen to be. Chesterton came upon such a situation after visiting Wales. He relates his experience in “The True Welsh Spirit” (Chesterton 1988b [1911]). The essence of the article is not to believe everything you hear but it also says much about interpreting representations of the Other:

> I know nothing about Wales—not even (for certain) that there is such a place. I went, indeed, a few weeks ago to a curious place full of rocks; and the people there said it was Wales. But then, other people said that these people were very sly, and that you could not believe anything they said. But, then, as I did not believe the second people who did not believe the first people, it all came back to the same comfortable condition as before, which is one of blank and disinterested nescience. (Chesterton, 1988b [1911], 153 italics in original)

Chesterton recommends four tests when determining whether or not to believe negative reports about other peoples, in this case the viability of Latin American republics. In Chesterton’s view there was both accurate and inaccurate being presented and Chesterton used the following to examine the verity of the accusations. Chesterton’s test concerns the nature of political knowledge in general and it is not necessary to thoroughly understand the accused when using the four tests because they pertain more to the informant than the accused. It should be noted that Chesterton believed it was
important to learn about other people, like the Welsh stated above, whom he believed would have a growing relationship with England for good or ill. The test is useful for determining the nature of the knowledge by looking at the informant. Chesterton recommends using the following. “(1) the Personality and Spirit of the Accuser, (2) the Apparent (or even Avowed) Motive of the Accuser, (3) the Nature of the Accusation, (4) Historical Analogy” (Chesterton 1987[1909], 288). Looking at the informant, i.e. the accuser may not directly provide an entirely accurate picture of the Other but it can help us determine if, in Chesterton’s words, the Others are “misunderstood” or “not understood.” Chesterton differentiates between the two absences of understanding. Not understanding is lacking knowledge. It is being ignorant on a subject. Comparatively, misunderstanding is more damaging. “The state of being ignorant, which is comparatively innocent, goes with a confession of ignorance, even if it is also a confession of indifference. But the man who misunderstands is the man who is mistaken in supposing that he understands” (Chesterton 1991b, 606 [1931]). Chesterton continues his discussion about the importance of knowing the Welsh:

This state of entire non-understanding (as distinct from misunderstanding) of the Welsh seems to me just now to be not only unique, but important and rather serious…If the Welsh begin to influence us without our having yet even begun to imagine them, we shall have the whole Irish business all over again; the gradual or imperfect understanding of a thing in the process of wrestling with it in the dark. The indications of such a movement in Wales (wherever it is), the suggestion of the growing influence of Welshmen (whoever they may be), is something that comes to us rather by widely distributed happenings and hints than in any theatrical example. (Chesterton 1988b [1911], 154)

One caveat to the probability of understanding the Other is that what constitutes actual and accurate knowledge varies greatly depending on one’s theory or frame of
reference. The strictness and standard of truth also play an important part in what is considered pertinent knowledge. One does not need to know every detail that influences those actions and interactions but it is important to recognize the aims and motivations of those who present knowledge because everyone has their own biases or agendas and it was for that reason Chesterton declared, “I will not abuse my neighbors till I can trust my informants” (Chesterton 1988b [1911], 197).

To understand the Other and our disagreements with the Other it is necessary to learn the biases and histories of empire and subject peoples and justly analyze the unequal imperial relationships between empire and subject. As far as judging disputes is concerned, it seems likely that Chesterton would agree with Said’s contention that it is fruitful to study “the map of interactions, the actual and often productive traffic occurring…among states, societies, groups, and identities” (Said 1994, 20). Chesterton’s four tests are specific and situational. They are not intended exclusively for studying imperial relationships but are useful for contemplating the more basic beliefs of the geopolitical imagination. This is important because as Said adds, “No one can hold this entire map in his or her head, which is why the geography of empire and the many-sided imperial experiences that created its fundamental texture should be considered first in terms of a few salient configurations” (Said 1994, 20). Said believed that one way of doing this is by delving “not only in the debate’s content but in its form, not only in what is said, but also in how it is said, by whom, where, and for whom” (Said 1994, 21). In essence, Said maintains that people should critically examine their own geopolitical imaginations. Chesterton and Said agree that it is important to understand what frame of
reference debaters are coming from. Chesterton’s four tests help in exploring “what is said…how it is said, by whom, where, and for whom.”

We make sense of knowledge of other peoples based on our collective histories, our biases and the knowledge we are provided. This can lead to accepting knowledge of the Other as genuine. Discussing the English imperial politician Arthur Balfour, Said believed that as far as Balfour was concerned, “British knowledge of Egypt is Egypt for Balfour” (Said 1979, 32).

Chesterton laid similar criticism against the English people in general, a belief shared by George Orwell who wrote, “The insularity of the English, their refusal to take foreigners seriously, is folly that has to be paid for very heavily from time to time” (Orwell 1981, 264). Chesterton believed the English in the early 20th Century were too interested in Other peoples and places without seriously attempting to understand them. He uses the phrase “somewhere-elseness” to describe what he saw as a “distant optimism” and “a strong belief in the other side of the world” (Chesterton 1988a [1915], 290). Of this ambiguous belief in the Empire’s extremities, Chesterton writes, “Men know the destiny of countries when they have never met a native, and professed love and hatred for men whom, if they saw them in the street, they could not tell Poles from Portuguese” (Chesterton 2001 [1904], 615). Again, one of the central points in Chesterton’s thought is not to assume too much. We can falsely believe that we understand other peoples and places and miss the mark entirely if our geopolitical imagination conflicts with that of the Other.
It can be argued that Chesterton believed British imperialism was founded on a false geopolitical imagination. He placed imperialism in the realm of imaginary geographies when he wrote, “the perilous illusion which is sometimes called Imperialism consists in looking on the Empire as the world—a sort of imaginative world made in our own image. It is looking in so large a looking glass that we forget that we are not looking out of a window” (Chesterton 1990b [1924], 337). Chesterton understood that the imperial view was a privileged view. It was based on an imaginary geography that views the empire as “the world,” but sees “a large mirror,” instead. (Chesterton 1990b [1924], 336-337). It is an arbitrary vantage point. It serves the purpose of perpetuating the empire and the geopolitical imaginations of those who support imperialism. Chesterton was critical of the blind acceptance of ideas with little regard for the authority or origin of that knowledge. The modern mind, Chesterton asserted, “does not inquire into the authority or even the origin of any order which it has come to regard as ordinary. It only asks to move smoothly along the grooves that have been graven for it by unknown and nameless powers—such as the powers that organise the tubes or the trams” (Chesterton 1991a [1926], 58). In other words, the geopolitical imagination and its larger context, the geographical imagination is taken for granted. Jonathan M. Smith contends that “geographical writing…appeals to certain preferences for forms of description, and…ratifies and substantiates the prejudices and preferences of its intended audience.” (Smith 1996a, 4). Within the context of seeing and thinking about the Other Chesterton’s criticism seems to run along the same lines as Smith’s idea of tropes. Chesterton writes, “[W]hen people see what they do not understand they do not even believe what they see.
They see what they expect; they see what they do understand” (Chesterton 1991b [1926], 108), their imaginative framework, their ‘tropes’ make it difficult to see things any other way.

**Objective Representations of the Other**

Geopolitical imaginations influence how people envision the world around them but it would be false to say that these imaginings are always in the mind. What is imagined is often represented by visual or verbal means and this is especially true of conceptions of the Other. As Said writes, “All cultures tend to make representations of foreign cultures the better to master or in some way control them. Yet not all cultures make representations of foreign cultures and in fact master or control them” (Said 1994, italics in original). In other words, all cultures make representations of their geographical imaginings of the Other but this does not lead all cultures to try to control the Other.

Representation can be presented through more openly subjective means such as literature and narratives or it can be presented through objective means. One seemingly objective means of presenting cultural knowledge is photography. Seeing a picture is not always believing. The subjects of the photograph are viewed from one perspective, the perspective chosen by the photographer. What sets beyond the reach of the camera is left for conjecture and interpretation. It seems Chesterton liked artificial perspective. He was a trained artist and discussed limits in the context of the framing qualities of archways. Chesterton did not, however, like the limits posed by photography. Suspicious of the perception of photographs as objective source of knowledge, Chesterton believed photographs could be willfully used to mislead (Chesterton 1988b [1913]). He quips, “A
photograph cannot lie; just as a photograph cannot get drunk, or fight a duel, or elope with a lady typewriter. A photograph cannot lie: but a photographer can mislead. And he often does” (Chesterton 1988b, 504). Photographs are one means of presenting knowledge in a seemingly objective way.

“Painting the Map Red:” Imperial Representation

Another seemingly objective means of presenting imperial knowledge is through maps. Maps can be artistic or utilitarian. Maps can even evoke a sense of wonder. Yi-Fu Tuan elaborates, “[M]any inquisitive youngsters have found their way into geography through an initial fascination with the beautiful map or globe. At least as powerful a lure is the landscape itself” (Tuan 1989, 233-241). Chesterton took notice of the lure maps played in creating and perpetuation the imperial geopolitical imagination. A critic of imperialism, Chesterton was also a critic of the knowledge of Other that was represented through imperial mapping. Imperial maps were a part of the English imperial culture. Chesterton writes, “they have invented an admirable phrase—a phrase that expresses with a searching accuracy and irony of which they are quite unconscious the nature of their political occupation. They have called it ‘painting the map red’. Like children, they are wholly concerned with the colours in an atlas” (Chesterton 2001 [1904], 615). Imperial knowledge of the Other is circular and representative in nature. Chesterton posits that to expand the empire British imperialists created the benign metaphor “painting the map red” to describe the reality of British imperial expansion. The representative nature of the map is not lost on Chesterton. He understands that the knowledge presented through maps is often accepted as objective truth. They present
both factual and moral knowledge. Factually, the map presents that the nations “painted red” are controlled by the British Empire. Factually, the word “painting” presents that the empire is growing, or at the very least that growth is desired. Through the map, subjected nations are represented as a part of the empire. Chesterton took note of the idea that the red map symbolized this sense of control and that “so long as they can paint the map red they are quite contented that the countries depicted there should retain until doomsday their own alien and inexhaustible colours of forest and field” (Chesterton 2001, [1904] 615). The British writer and imperialist Thomas Carlyle, Said contends, “speaks a language of total generality, anchored in unshakable certainties about the essence of races, peoples, [and] cultures…He speaks the lingua franca for metropolitan Britain: global, comprehensive, and with so vast a social authority as to be accessible to anyone speaking to and about the nation” (Said 1994, 102 italics in original). As Denis Cosgrove points out, the knowledge conveyed through imperial maps is culturally specific and gains an apparent authority and objectivity (Cosgrove 2001).

“Painted red,” the maps were used as a supposedly objective way of presenting aspirations of imperial conquest and seemed, to Chesterton, that expectations were that the map would stay red forever. The imperial map licensed the cultural vision (Said 1993, 48). Chesterton criticized the imperial map for creating the illusion of a unified empire. Another complaint Chesterton has with imperial maps and imperialism in general concerns the idea that the empire was limitless. In their official and unofficial rhetoric Empires present their own limits (Cosgrove 2001). All political borders have limits but through maps imperial cartographers can present those limits in an
advantageous way. Chesterton contended that even the imagination itself has limits. “The imagination is supposed to work towards the infinite; though in that sense the infinite is the opposite of the imagination. For the imagination deals with an image. And an image is in its nature a thing that has an outline and therefore a limit” (Chesterton 1988c [1936], 109). Chesterton maintained that the imperial imagination is far from limitless because imaginations have limits. People may imagine many things but what they picture in their mind is an image. Images have limits. If the thing imagined is believed to be true, then there is another limit.

One aspect of imperial imagination that Chesterton disliked was the notion of imperial unity between the various peoples of the empire. Chesterton criticized unity more heatedly after the First World War. Maps can give a sense of unity. Cosgrove writes, “This intuition of unity, visible from above, is as much imaginative as empirical” (Cosgrove 2001, 213). Chesterton criticized the British imperial belief that the empire grew and prospered as new peoples were conquered and added to the empire. Chesterton expounded upon this writing, “[I]f the citizen of an empire already containing numberless alien and incomprehensible peoples has added to his heritage another alien and incomprehensible people, no difference has really been made. A man is a citizen of that Commonwealth the nature of which he can conceive, and no other” (Chesterton 2001 [1904], 614). Chesterton notices a paradox that nearer things seem more distant because their differences are more easily discerned. Things farther seem nearer because we don’t see the differences and imagine that they are more similar. Chesterton believed that feelings of unity are more difficult to develop with an Other that is in close proximity.
The British Empire was simplified and reduced. It was the topic of official and unofficial rhetoric. For Chesterton’s unity is much more easily accepted for others that were far off. In 1924 Chesterton noted again the unity that seems apparent among the people and places. “By a paradox we find that proximity accentuates distance, because it accentuates difference. Men step over seas and horizons from one room to another” (Chesterton 1990b [1924], 334).

Geography and the Creative Power of Naming

It is a truism that whoever makes a map has power to name the map but naming seems like such a benign and arbitrary power. The word “Greenland” may suggest a warm tropical climate with fragrant gardens but Greenland is not as green as the name may suggest. Similarly Iceland is not as frigid as its name suggests. Ironically, Iceland “the land of ice” is volcanic and uses thermal power for much of its electrical and heating needs. Iceland radiates heat. Unlike Greenland or Iceland, empires are hardly places, but given a name the appearance of place is given, such as the British Empire. The name suggests the place, and permits definition of its spatial relationships with those it controls. Jonathan M. Smith states that conceiving abstract space was a part of educating gentlemen and essential to the British Empire:

The geography of position confers an extraordinary ability to divide and traverse abstracted space; the geography of possession provides an instrument for conceptualizing the content of that space in terms which are familiar, uniform, and global. Together they provide a systematic model of the earth as an intelligible object of inquiry and a practicable theater of activity. Because both images are essential to the rationalization and expansion of the British Empire that took place, we may conclude that affairs of state fell increasingly into the hands of modern geographers. (JM Smith 1996b, 97-8)
Smith argues that conceiving abstract space was a necessary skill for maintaining the British Empire. The sprawling space with various and diverse populations was conceptualized in “terms which are familiar, uniform, and global” and this gives both an “object of inquiry and a practical theater of activity.” Simply put, in the imperial imagination, empires are both things and places. One can rule, admire, discuss or think of an empire as an object or a place. As mental tools, tinted imperial maps provided a means of conceptualizing imperial space as familiar, uniform and global. Another means of achieving this is through the act of naming. Chesterton recognized that Asia is merely a name written across a map, a place in name only:

It was only by a sort of accident, I imagine, that so huge hinterland was given the same title, and “Asia” strides in such gigantic letters across half the terrestrial globe. Nobody could have the courage to call Asia a place. It would sound almost as absurd as making an appointment there, and saying, “Meet me at Asia at eight o’ clock.” Some have doubted whether, with all respect to Mr. Gandhi, there is any such thing as the nation of India; nobody supposes there is any such thing as the nation of Asia. It is something more than a continent, it is more like a world… (Chesterton 1991a [1926], 106)

In the words of Tuan, “Naming is power—the creative power to call something into being, to render the invisible visible, to impart a certain character to things” (Tuan 1991, 688). Tuan seems to agree with Chesterton’s assessment that Asia is a place in name only. Tuan writes, “The most striking evidence of the power of naming to create a seemingly coherent reality out of a congerie of disparate parts is the existence of Asia” (Tuan 1991, 689). Having created a place by naming it and placing it on the map, it then becomes an object to study (Cosgrove 2001). Tuan points out that geographer’s words have two effects: practical and perceptual. Tuan defines practical effects as the forces and steps needed to carry out the project. Perceptual effects rely on “the fact that
words—names, proper names…—can, for a start, draw attention to things: aspects of reality hitherto invisible” (Tuan 1991, 692-3). Arif Dirlik briefly describes the history of the word “Asia” and its effect on Asians:

East Asians did not realize that they lived in Asia until they saw themselves so located in maps from Europe; the term *Asia* was introduced into Chinese by Jesuits in the seventeenth century, but there is little indication that it made much of an impression on the Chinese until the nineteenth century, when world geography acquired an urgent importance in efforts to understand the new world into which China and East Asia in general were drawn inexorably. The geography of imperialism, ironically, also shaped the geography of resistance to it. (Dirlik 2003, 204)

Chesterton criticized Germany for both practical and perceptual effects in their creation and use of geographical knowledge near the end of the First World War: practically for using the map to justify their territorial claims; and perceptual for creating knowledge with maps. Chesterton writes, “It is clear at the time that everybody in Germany is now being told to say ‘Look at the map’ (Chesterton 1988a [1916], 447). He continues, “those here in question fall back upon the false lucidity of the pedant, and on their own incurable weakness for works of reference. ‘Look at the map’ is a variant of their very wooden habit of always looking at the dictionary” (Chesterton 1988a, 449). Chesterton criticized the use of maps to create and illustrate geographical knowledge, in this case, Germany’s territorial claims. However, he also criticized the German public for being too ready to accept “works of reference.” For Chesterton the responsibility lies in two directions, those who create the knowledge and those who uncritically accept that knowledge as fact. Chesterton’s cure for accepting geographical knowledge too readily is “living geography,” knowledge of landscape and people that comes from actual in person experience. To living geography Chesterton adds the importance of honestly
looking at one’s own views toward place and peoples. Chesterton believed it is important to balance the creation and experience of geographical knowledge with self-criticism that seeks to discover the historical and political character of our perceptions of the other.

*Living Geography*

Chesterton had a highly developed sense of place. He believed imperialism focused too much on the world and abstractly on places. Rather than understanding other people and places for who and what they were. Chesterton faults imperialists for readily accepting quick and easy descriptions of the colonies. Everyday experiences are often overlooked. For the self, the everyday often goes unnoticed. Observing the everyday lives of other peoples takes time and effort. For people visiting other places and people, the everyday of the visited community can also go unnoticed. Trips and vacations are, for most, special occasions. If it is easy to miss sight of the everyday activities in our own lives, it is also likely that we miss the small and mundane in the lives of other people. In the words of Birdsall, “When dealing with the intensely complex and dynamic world of the everyday, we notice the particulars of that experience” (Birdsall 1996, 621).

Chesterton believed small things were important. It might be best to say that in studying other nations he believed it was important to learn what the people found important. To learn about other places and people, Chesterton believed it was important to appreciate the everyday experiences of other people. Otherwise, all one has is a loose collection of facts. Chesterton valued the uniqueness of small places and criticized the imperial desire to see large things around the world. Instead he thought it was necessary
to experience the wonder of the ordinary:

Before long the world will be cloven with a war between the telescopists and the microscopists. The first study large things and live in a small world; the second study small things and live in a large world. It is inspiring without a doubt to whizz in a motor-car round the earth, to feel Arabia as a whirl of sand or China as a flash of rice-fields. But Arabia is not a whirl of sand and China is not a flash of rice-fields. They are ancient civilizations with strange virtues buried like treasures. If we wish to understand them it must not be as tourists or inquirers, it must be with the loyalty of children and the great patience of poets. To conquer these places is to lose them. (Chesterton 2000 [1905], 23-24)

Chesterton may win few post-colonial fans with comments about the strange virtues of Arabia and China, but he believed places worth travelling to are worth getting to know. Chesterton believed it takes time and effort to understand a place and people. Some geographers, such as David Crouch refer to this process of getting to know a place as ‘lay geography’ (Crouch 2000).

From Chesterton’s perspective, it is also a matter of scale. Geographical knowledge occurs and is found at the smaller scales from national down to human. Chesterton’s human or living scale should not be confused with geographies of the body explored in some feminist and post modernist thought. However, they share a concern for the living or human scales and experiential knowledge. Chesterton used the phrase “living geography” in his weekly essay “The English Entry into Europe” (Chesterton 1988a [1915]). Chesterton believed the geography taught in schools paled in comparison to the “real” geography English soldiers were learning as they marched through Europe in the First World War. In his view the school geography of his day, consisting largely of the memorization of lists of places and products (Martin 2005, 213), did little to promote genuine understanding of foreign people and places. Chesterton took note of the listing
for Bohemia, writing “No average reader can form any picture of a country from the fact that it has the materials for making a fez” (Chesterton 1988a [1915], 313). When separated from their living contexts lists of exports do little to inform what a people are like. To understand a country, Chesterton believed it was more useful to learn more about “the things it makes and consumes” (Chesterton 1988a, 313). The example of Bohemia and its fez market is an extreme example and few would give a second thought to their nation’s fez supply. At this point the example of fezzes may seem ridiculous, but consider replacing “fez” with a more politically charged resource like “oil” and it becomes more obvious that in the minds of many some countries are known mostly for what they export. Today school geography may be more sophisticated but it is common to associate different cultures with the products they export to us. Anthropologist, Arturo Escobar believes it is important to remember that activity occurs in places. “At stake here” he writes, “is the power analysts assign to existential versus structural factors. For phenomenologists, experience is located within relationships and between persons, and is not produced solely by objective structures or subjective intentions” (Escobar 2001, 150).

Chesterton believed it is better to look at what a people make and use rather than what they export (Chesterton 1988a [1915]). To Chesterton, acquiring geographical knowledge at a living or human scale occurs at a level which people live their everyday lives or witness the everyday lives of another people. Chesterton believed the English soldiers marching through Europe in the First World War were a part of a “living geography” (Chesterton 1988a [1915]). Soldiers engaged in wars in foreign lands may not have unbiased or accurate knowledge of the places they experience but it is likely that
they would gain some knowledge of the foreign landscape if not the people. Being a part of the landscape at a historic time such as the First World War, might not give one parallel experiences of other people’s lives, but in Chesterton’s mind it had educational value. Travels educate us about places but they also “embroil us in them” to use the words of Casey (Casey 1993, 276).

Chesterton’s belief that the entry of English soldiers into Europe made them a part of a living geography may be one example of being embroiled into place. In the following excerpt Chesterton describes living geography.

Surely it might be possible to give a general picture of a country that should leave on the mind a somewhat clearer outline of its [Bohemia’s] landscape; such an outline as I would undertake to give any child about the difference between North England and South—always supposing I could talk Czech fluently. But those thronging thousands of poor Englishmen who are now fighting for the free tradition of Europe are really seeing what countries are like: they are in the framework of a living geography, as in the framework of a living history. (Chesterton 1988a 1915], 313)

It is worth noting that Chesterton adds an important qualification. He believes it would be possible to present a basic picture of a country to a Bohemian “supposing” he could “speak Czech fluently.” Living geography is an art and does not promote precise understanding between peoples, but in Chesterton’s view, it is better than lists of facts.

There are some notable examples of lived geographies in the geographical literature. Relph states the importance of lived geography best when he writes, “I cannot imagine a more rigorous test of the veracity of what we are told than that of our own observations of landscapes and places.” He qualifies his opinion by noting that for most people reading landscapes is a skill that needs to be learned and practiced (Relph 1997, 222).
David Crouch examines living geography in the context of tourists and their interaction with place. Crouch writes “in everyday activities the individual works and reworks, figures and re-figures an account of a place. (Crouch 2000, 65). For Crouch, tourists collect knowledge of a place through their actions and interactions with place. In his description of “lived topographies” Backhaus includes the myriad of events and actions that connect people and place, including “descriptions of social, cultural, economic, legal and political experience in the broad sense, i.e., shared, lived experiences” (Backhaus 2005, xiii).

Chesterton’s view took experiential knowledge and the living landscape a step further. According to Chesterton the “everyday” is adventurous. In part, this can be attributed to his love of limits and his belief in the need of self-limitation. In his essay entitled “Tremendous Trifles” Chesterton contrasts his adventurous gathering of geographical knowledge with the large-scale technique employed by imperialists such as Kipling. Chesterton writes:

…we may, by fixing our attention almost fiercely on the facts actually before us, force them to turn into adventures; force them to give up their meaning and fulfil their mysterious purpose. The purpose of the Kipling literature is to show how many extraordinary things a man may see if he is active and strides from continent to continent like the giant in my tale. But the object of my school is to show how many extraordinary things even a lazy and ordinary man may see if he can spur himself to the single activity of seeing. (Chesterton 1955 [1909], 6)

By focusing on the living scale one can actually discover the mundane. Chesterton is proposing that sense of place can foster a sense of adventure. By favoring the local and desiring to discover “their meaning” and “purpose,” Chesterton claims the importance of place over space. Space connects “extraordinary things,” but the search for grander and
grander sites fosters boredom. However, looking more closely at humble surroundings can bring about a sense of wonder. Perhaps, Chesterton expressed this best in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (Chesterton 1991c [1904]), in which he wrote, “If you look at a thing nine hundred and ninety-nine times, you are perfectly safe; if you look at it the thousandth time, you are in frightful danger of seeing it for the first time” (Chesterton 1991c, 10). Chesterton believes that the well travelled can become bored if their travels consist of quickly moving from place to place; seeing the grand sites and moving on to other sites in other places. This is a recurring theme in Chesterton’s work and played a part in his views of internationalism and tourism that will be discussed in the proceeding chapters of this thesis. In essence, Chesterton deemed the discovery of geographical knowledge adventurous, especially knowledge of the Other. In Chesterton’s words, discovering the common and everyday is discovering “what all romantics know—that adventures happen on dull days, and not on sunny ones” (Chesterton 1991c, 11). Living geography is at the scale that allows minutiæ to be seen and come alive. In Chesterton’s opinion people are free to revel in the freedom of self-limitation. This goes against modern Western notions of liberty and Chesterton recognizes that most view “liberty as something that merely works outward” (Chesterton 1988c [1936], 109). For modern Americans, there is a belief that “no one need feel locked into place” (Tuan 1996, 6). Chesterton’s writings do not say that it is wrong to travel. It is a point of fact that Chesterton enjoyed travel. What he does advocate, however, is that paying closer attention to one’s surroundings whether the place is one’s backyard, one’s hometown, or a place that is far away from home.
Chesterton’s notion of living geography is experiential. For Chesterton material culture is difficult to interpret. Yet, symbolic materials used by a particular people can get to the heart of a people. In *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (Chesterton 1999c [1904]) Chesterton’s expatriated former president of Nicaragua, Juan del Fuego, prosaically states, “Wherever there is a field of marigolds and the red cloak of a woman, there is Nicaragua. Wherever there is a field of poppies and a yellow patch of sand, there is Nicaragua” (Chesterton 1991c 17). In Chesterton’s fictitious account Nicaragua was absorbed by the British Empire and the red and yellow of Nicaragua’s flag stir up a strong sense of place in the former president. Chesterton believed that it is difficult to understand a culture by looking solely at its material things (Chesterton 1988a [1914], 23) but it is helpful provided that one looks for the symbolic interactions between a people, place and material culture. How a people limit themselves, or have limits set for them is important in understanding people and place (Casey 2001; Tuan 1996).

Juan del Fuego exemplifies living geography. He is the last and former president of Nicaragua and lives in England, the country that amalgamated his own country. Juan del Fuego differs from the examples given so far in that he is detached from his homeland. He is “embroiled” in the landscape of London. He experiences a living geography being constantly reminded of his lost country. Everyday objects with the colors of his nation’s flag, stir up his sense of place. The English characters in the story cannot understand his passion for red and yellow. More importantly they cannot understand del Fuego’s defense of small countries. Understanding a people requires attempts to comprehend the
people’s collective imagination (Agnew 2003). In essence, it takes seeing life through the group’s perspective.

*Barriers to Living Geography: Imperial Perspective of the Other*

As discussed above, Chesterton believed that visiting other lands allows more accurate geographical understanding than memorizing lists of facts. Visits can give one a better general picture of the place and its people but visits alone do not easily help us to empathize with them. In other words, visits do not inherently put us into the minds of the people we encounter. Empathy is difficult because our own thoughts, beliefs, and biases cloud the views that we have of other people. Without looking seriously at where our beliefs come from it is nearly impossible to get beyond an elementary picture of a place. Cultural politics; how we collectively perceive, present, and debate our cultural beliefs; filters our thoughts about the other. This process of filtering and reduction informs, if not creates, our perspective toward the Other. Perspective has been discussed within various contexts in the geographical literature. John Agnew writes, “All seeing and knowing is a perspective, drawn from a situated point of view” (Agnew 2003, 15). Crouch examines perspective within the context of embodied lay geographies. According to Crouch, “embodiment denotes the ways in which the individual grasps the world around her/him and makes sense of it in ways that engage both mind and body” (Crouch 2000, 63). Richard Schein adds that historical context is a necessary factor in how we view landscape. Citing Cosgrove, Schein believes “The landscape cannot be viewed as somehow independent of ‘the context of a real historical world of productive human
relations, and those between people and the world they inhabit to subsist”’ (Schein 1993, 11).

Perspective is a common theme in Chesterton’s writings. The ways journalism and government influence public perception appear regularly throughout his works. Chesterton also discussed how the loose use of language affected collective thought. These ideas may sound familiar to post-modernists and deconstructionists who challenge the origins of beliefs. Chesterton was neither a post-modernist nor a deconstructionist, but he shared their thought that outside forces influence thought. In Chesterton’s work one case is especially relevant to this discussion, the relations between Ireland and England. Chesterton believed it was crucial for the English to evaluate their perspectives when trying to understand the Irish. In the case of misunderstanding between the English and Irish Chesterton’s thought agrees with Schein and Cosgrove. The historical relations between Ireland and England, Chesterton believed, strongly affected how they perceived each other. He was doubtful that many English could understand Ireland, even if they honestly tried. For the English to understand the Ireland or the Irish, Chesterton believed, it was necessary to examine Ireland within the context of the history of their relations. Chesterton’s book *Irish Impressions* (Chesterton, 2001 [1919]) chronicles his thoughts and perceptions of his second visit to Ireland in 1917. *Irish Impressions* is much more than a travelogue with descriptions of sites. In it Chesterton discusses the complexity in understanding Ireland. It is filled with discussion of cultural politics that affect relations between England and Ireland. In the introduction to *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton* Vol. 20 (2001) Chesterton expert and professor of government at Georgetown
James V. Schall writes that *Irish Impressions* is a book “that reveals Chesterton himself while he is seeing something else” (Schall 2001, 15). Schall adds, “It is in this context of familiarity and un-familiarity that we see at its best Chesterton’s ‘philosophy of seeing’” (Schall 2001, 15).

In *Irish Impressions* Chesterton proposed that perception and perspective color the impressions that the English and Irish have of each other:

> Now it is this sensation of stemming a stream, of ten thousand things all pouring one way, labels, titles, monuments, metaphors, modes of address, assumptions in controversy, that make an Englishman in Ireland know that he is in a strange land. Nor is he merely bewildered, as among a medley of strange things. On the contrary, if he has any sense, he soon finds them united and simplified to a single impression, as if he were talking to a strange person. He cannot define it, because nobody can define a person, and nobody can define a nation. He can only see it, smell it, hear it, handle it, bump into it, fall over it, kill it, be killed for it, or be damned for doing it wrong. He must be content with these mere hints of existence; but he cannot define it…(Chesterton 2001 [1919], 171)

Chesterton was sympathetic toward the Irish. He believed it was difficult for the English to understand the Irish because of both deliberate and unknown prejudices toward the Irish. In the mind of the English visiting Ireland, he believed, the “stemming stream” of prejudices; including “labels, titles, monuments, metaphors, modes of address, [and] assumptions in controversy” get reduced to “a single impression.” This single impression formed from is experienced through the senses but still understanding can remain elusive. Chesterton believed that the most abstract grievances with a nation are the most concrete (Chesterton 2001 [1919]). Similarly Jonathan M. Smith writes, “Metaphoric representations describe the remote in terms of the immediate, the exotic in terms of the domestic, the abstract in terms of the concrete, and complex in terms of the
simple” (Smith 1996a, 11). As Chesterton points out, the prejudicial thoughts become “true” through the acts of seeing, hearing, and handling, etc.

Abstract grievances are not easily reasoned and become concrete in the mind. Relph seems to agree with this assertion when he writes, “We experience a world of subjective specifics, not one of objective generalizations, and it is not possible to situate oneself self-consciously at points between what is objective and subjective (Relph 1997, 211). Our experiences are “subjective” and “specific.” There is nothing inherently objective in how we perceive the Other. We bring our beliefs with us when we travel. Beliefs include dogmatic beliefs that we are aware of, such as openly held religious beliefs or simply passing thoughts that influence our thoughts on various subjects. Relph wisely recommends caution when trying to interpret our experiences and points to the uncertainty of experience in the post-modern world, but can be used when discussing knowledge and understandings of the “other.” Relph writes, “A major sense in teaching a geographical sense of place now is to convey what might be called cheerful suspicion. This involves careful, unprejudiced observation of places and landscapes that is neither supercilious nor cynical” (Relph 1997, 221). One way to promote understanding is by “looking sincerely at ourselves” when dealing with other people (Chesterton 1990b [1924], 393).

Conclusion

Imperialist attitudes can prevent us from looking honestly at ourselves and other people. Chesterton criticized British imperialism for ignoring England in favor of far and distant colonies. It is important to evaluate how our notions of other people and places
are formed. Chesterton believed actual visits are the best way to understand the Other but travel is not all it takes to understand the Other. This will be discussed more fully in the third chapter on travel and tourism. In the case of English and Irish relations Chesterton believed that the close proximity made visiting easy but understanding difficult. Along with visiting a place and people it is vital to try to understand them the way they understand themselves. Our own biases and prejudices keep us from gaining understanding. These biases are created and perpetuated by our geopolitical imaginations and are difficult to detect in ourselves because they are assumed and seem like common sense truth. In the years following the First World War, the world political climate veered away from imperial rhetoric. Exhausted over the horrors of war, Western nations steadily gravitated towards a more internationalist conceptualization of the world’s places and people. As will be shown, the imperial rhetoric changed to international rhetoric, but Chesterton contended that the imperial geopolitical imagination lived on in the hearts and minds of the English and in the imagination of an up-and-coming power, America.
Chapter 2: Internationalism and the Interwar Geopolitical Imagination

An anti-imperialist and Englishman during the years of the great “British Empire, Chesterton spent much of his time countering the arguments of British imperialists. Chesterton particularly disliked cosmopolitanism for favoring a more global sense place over local senses of place. He considered cosmopolitanism decidedly anti-patriotic, especially imperial cosmopolitanism that reveled in experiences of the Other but at the expense of the Other. He disliked sprawling empires, which claimed dominion over people and at the same time amalgamated various peoples into a universal idea of belonging to the British Empire. After the First World War nationalism and imperialism lost favor among many. Nationalism, it was thought, fostered bloodshed. Chesterton was an avid anti-imperialist but during the interwar years between the First and Second World Wars, Chesterton was just as critical of internationalism, the idea that there are laws that govern all nations. Many thought internationalism was more peaceful than imperialism and nationalism, which many considered bellicose and outdated forms of political identity. Chesterton desired to foster a respect of place and appreciation of difference.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine Chesterton’s critique of internationalism, especially the universal aspects of internationalism and interwar geopolitical imagination. Internationalism became a popular alternative to the negative aspects of nationalism and imperialism. This is commonly expressed in the concept of universal brotherhood. Nationalism was disfavored over universal brotherhood but the nation as an identity and political unit was not entirely disregarded. The right of national self-determination would give nations the global recognition they deserved. Three aspects of Chesterton’s critique
of internationalism will be discussed below: Universality and particularity; Impartiality; and Particularity. The first section gives a general overview of universality and particularity in the context of internationalism. The second section, “Impersonal Peace Makers” examines Chesterton’s distrust of impartiality. The third section, “Sacred Insects” discusses Chesterton’s views on the conflict between universal aspirations versus particularities, which Chesterton refers to as “sacred insects” (Chesterton 1989b [1919], 452).

**Universality and Particularity of the Interwar Imagination**

The ideas of universalism and particularity are at the very heart of the debate over the interwar geopolitical imagination of which Chesterton wrote. Feminist and political theorist, Marion Young discusses universalism in the context of citizenship. While her writing primarily concerns more domestic issues related to citizenship, her critique of universalism can also be considered within the context of interwar internationalism:

Modern political thought generally assumed that the universality of citizenship in the sense of citizenship for all implies a universality of citizenship in the sense that citizenship status transcends particularity and difference. Whatever the social or group differences among citizens, whatever their inequalities of wealth, status, and power in the everyday activities of civil society, citizenship gives everyone the same status as peers in the political public. With equality conceived as sameness, the ideal of universal citizenship carries at least two meanings in addition to the extension of citizenship to everyone: (a) universality defined as general in opposition to particular; what citizens have in common as opposed to how they differ, and (b) universality in the sense of laws and rules that say the same for all and apply to all in the same way laws and rules that are blind to individual and group differences. (Young 1995, 175)

According to Young, universality dismisses the importance of difference and focuses on commonalities. Universality also implies that laws and rules apply to everyone regardless of “their inequalities of wealth, status, and power in the everyday activities of
civil society” (Young 1995, 175). Chesterton believed that difference was important and believed that the various peoples involved would also value their differences. Chesterton insisted that the settlement after the war should promote respect for difference, rather than universality. In Chesterton’s words, “the international settlement must be a national settlement. It must take account of the special character and situation of every country, including our own country. It must seek equality in variety, not equality on uniformity” (Chesterton 1989b [1919], 407).

Chesterton criticized universal brotherhood for its generalizations of complex situations, practices and identities. During the interwar years up to his death in 1936 Chesterton regularly criticized internationalism. He disagreed with internationalism for both ideological and practical reasons and did not believe it would bring about the desired peace. Ideologically, Chesterton disliked internationalism because of its cosmopolitan nature. Chesterton valued strong national and local differences and disliked cosmopolitanism for what he saw as rootlessness. In Chesterton’s view, cosmopolitans neither understood, nor appreciated people and place. Ideologically and practically, Chesterton disliked internationalism for its universalistic outlook and the violent reactions to those outlooks. He saw internationalism as a force that lessened sense of place and local control. In this regard he saw internationalism as a new form of imperialism. In essence, Chesterton agrees with another point made by Young. There is no such thing as impartial politics, whether it is domestic or international (Young 1990). People will maintain their pet hatreds of the Other, whether that hatred is directed at people who refused to be universalists like themselves or whether the hatred is an
historically old hatred directed at specific nationalities. Chesterton wrote, “Most English internationalists seem to interpret universal brotherhood as the duty of loving Humanity and hating France. I, not being an English internationalist…am very fond of France and the French. I am capable of loving foreigners. Of course, if I were a real internationalist, I should not be allowed to love any foreigners except Germans and Americans” (Chesterton 1991b [1929], 82). It seems that according to both Young and Chesterton impartiality is a fiction. Chesterton believed this impersonal attitude toward others would make peace all the more difficult to attain.

**Impersonal Peace Makers**

As previously mentioned, Chesterton disliked universalist aspirations so prevalent in internationalism. He especially disdained the impersonal way politicians and academics study and discuss the human condition. Young refers to this impersonal outlook as impartiality, and believes it is impossible to have a genuinely impartial outlook:

> The ideal of impartiality is an idealist fiction. It is impossible to adopt an unsituated moral point of view, and if a point of view is situated, then it cannot be universal, it cannot stand apart from and understand all points of view. It is impossible to reason about substantive moral issues without understanding their substance, which always presupposes some particular social and historical context... (Young 1990, 104)

In her work *Liberalism and Empire*, Uday Sing Mehta (1999) explores the origins of the universal impartiality and discusses its beginnings in the liberal thought of John Locke and the connection between classical liberalism and imperialism. Mehta points out that Locke’s belief that society bases its identity solely on the social contract and leaves no room for placement within nature as a source of identity. Mehta adds that Locke’s thought also applies to individual identity, namely that “By rending nature,
the encounter with it, sentimentally inert, Locke denies locational attachments as having any individual significance in relation to political identity” (Mehta 1999, 129). In his critique of Wilsonianism, Chesterton takes note of the conflict in liberalism between upholding attachment to place as a human right and devaluing place as a source of conflict. In a 1910 article for *The Illustrated London News* Chesterton upbraids the tendency of becoming enraged at the plights of other peoples “without in the least knowing how it feels” to be those people “or whether the thing, in its own environment, seems” natural to those people (Chesterton 1987 [1910], 606). Young writes, agreeing with Thomas Nagel, “No one can adopt a point of view that is completely impersonal and dispassionate, completely separated from any particular context and commitments. In seeking such a notion of moral reason philosophy is utopian; as Nagel expresses it, the impartial view is a view from nowhere” (Young 1990, 103). During the interwar years, Chesterton felt similarly about the internationalist peace process. In Chesterton’s opinion any peace process would fail if it did not take into account the powerful emotional connections between place and identity. One example of Chesterton’s criticism concerns his critique of deconstructing national historio-cultural narratives:

[W]e cannot in commonsense expect to succeed by brustling about with negative novelties, and telling the English that Nelson is all nonsense, or the Scots that Wallace is a myth, or the French that Jeanne d’Arc is dead and done for, or the Americans that Bunker’s Hill is not worth bothering about, and, by thus insulting every nation, arrive at the mutual love of nations. Whether or not the thing can be done at all, it cannot be done like that. (Chesterton 1989a [1921], 180)

Chesterton believed it was futile to attempt to promote peace by deconstructing national narratives. National narratives may be venerated as truth or accepted as fiction, or accepted as a mixture of truth and legend. Historically false or not, Chesterton thought
debunking the historical veracity of national narratives was bad politics and that bad
cultural politics does not lead to good international politics. It is likely that the most
factual collective narratives are comprised of a mixture of facts and falsehoods. In large
part, working with other peoples requires understanding them as they understand
themselves. Narratives can be a large part of collective self-identity.

Castells takes a different approach in the debate over whether nations exist or not and
writes, “the incongruence between some social theory and contemporary practice come
from the fact that nationalism, and nations, have a life of their own, independent of
statehood, albeit embedded in cultural constructs and political project” He continues,
“The opposition between ‘real’ and ‘imagined’ communities is of little analytical use
beyond the laudable effort at demystifying ideologies of essentialist nationalism”
(Castells 2004, 31-32). Castells believes that it is of little help in analysis to deny the
existence of nations. A large number of people, both living and historic, believe(d) in the
existence of nations. A lengthy examination of the construction and existence of nations
is beyond the scope of this work but it is important, like Castells, to admit that people at
least think they exist and identify themselves with nations. Chesterton believed that
internationalist attempts to universalize the world overlooked the power of people’s
identities and cultures.

Sacred Insects

Chesterton believed, generally, that conflicts would arise over insensitivity toward
deeply held beliefs. Chesterton made a similar comment about the various attachments
people have toward venerated objects, institutions, and ideals. His point is that it is
difficult, if not impossible, to force others to discard deeply held beliefs. Chesterton refers to these as “sacred insects,” and it highlights Chesterton’s belief that people will not sit idly while their lives are dismantled and deconstructed before them, even if this is done in the name of ‘progress’ or ‘human-brotherhood’:

If all men gave the same moral value to the same material thing, wars might be made at least as rare as railway collisions. But one civilisation may scientifically wish to exterminate as a pest a beetle, let us say, which another regards as a sacred beetle. You cannot make a man promise never to have a vision of a divine beetle, for that is not the nature of visions. You certainly cannot forbid him to be martyred for the beetle, for that is not the nature of martyrdom. (Chesterton 1989b [1919], 452)

Chesterton alludes to the inevitable conflict between those who are objective and impartial and those who are subjective and personal. What some consider a pest to be scientifically (read objectively and impartially) exterminated may be venerated by others. To Chesterton sacred insects are more than moral attachments to material objects and symbols. He also includes other types of attachments, “The insect may be an institution, an ideal theory, or even an idealised personality—and, indeed, there are political personalities that can be most ideally magnified with a microscope. But even political insects may be sacred insects” (Chesterton 1989b [1919], 452). Chesterton’s words of caution ring true for all attempts at reform that displace those who were supposed to receive the benefits. One group’s collateral damage is another group’s sacred insect.
Contrast Chesterton’s words with those of Isaiah Bowman:

The trouble with such a philosophy is that it is based upon reason, and we are not yet reasonable creatures. Emotion still plays its dominant role in human affairs. The demagogue stands in the way of any nation giving up anything….When we put reason over against emotion, we are comparing incomparables. We seem capable of taking only one or the other. It must become the business of statesmanship as it has become avowed, if not the dominant, object of education to show men that they ought not to believe in what they desire if it is not reasonable to desire it. (Bowman 1938, 40)

According to Bowman, people can be either emotional or reasonable and it is good diplomacy to educate people about what “they ought not to believe.” By downplaying emotion, Bowman disregarded emotional attachments that are unreasonable, or that do not fit the universal aspirations Chesterton warned about with his discussion of sacred insects. What Bowman and others would have these so-called irrational and emotional people believe will be discussed in more detail in the section about American economic and cultural imperialism below. For now, though, it is important to note the impartiality Bowman suggests in teaching Others to not be so emotional and unreasonable. In the wake of similar ideas and policies that global unity is a universal aspiration, Chesterton wrote, “Human unity is a huge and overwhelming truth, in the face of which all differences of continent or country are flattened out” (Chesterton 1991b [1930], 237). In the same article Chesterton adds, “The man who forgets nationality instantly becomes less human and less European. He seems somehow to have turned into a walking abstraction, a resolution of some committee, a programme of some political movement, and to be, by some unmistakable transformation, striking chill like the touch of a fish, less of a living man” (Chesterton 1991b, 237). In Chesterton’s view, people who give in
to the statesmanship, Bowman for example, become walking abstractions, a creation of politicians, and an apparition.

Whether material objects or creations of political culture, there are countless sacred insects in the world to which people hold various levels of attachment. Even modernity has its sacred insect in scientism, the seemingly infallible belief in science and progress. Chesterton was a regular critic of both. In the context of peoples and agency, Chesterton believed it was important to appreciate diverse senses of place and he had a special fondness for nations. As mentioned above, Chesterton thought that “international intervention must fail if it can only be impartial in the sense of impersonal” (Chesterton 1990b [1923], 209). With his warning about sacred insects, Chesterton points out that the world and its people are complex. When one sacred insect is eradicated, there may be predictable and unpredictable reactions by those who venerate that insect. Chesterton gives notice that conflict is likely when people feel their lives are being turned upside down by an Other with an agenda. More generally speaking though, Chesterton believed that nations, being comprised of humans, are complex and objective policies can lead to backlashes. Sometimes these backlashes take the form of restructuring place in the wake
of change, as Escobar explains:

There has been, it would seem, a certain discursive excess in the critique of bounded notions of culture that has made many researchers turn attention away from the fact that next to the delocalizing effects of translocal forms of power there are also, even if as a reaction to the latter, effects of boundary and ground making linked to places. People continue to construct some sort of boundaries around their places, however, permeable, and to be grounded in local socio-natural practices, no matter how changing and hybridized those grounds and practices might turn out to be. To capture the place of specificity of the production of place and culture thus becomes the other side of the necessary reconceptualization of culture as deterritorialized and transnationally produced. (Escobar 2001, 147)

Escobar points out the important role place plays in the lives of people, even if place is hybridized and ‘inauthentic’.

Sometimes, however, violent reactions occur and Arendt pointed out that “Péguy in France and Chesterton in England knew instinctively that they lived in a world of hollow pretense and that its stability was the greatest pretense of all” (Arendt 1951, 147). Universal aspirations become less believable when people must be forced against their wills into living up to them. This echoes Chesterton’s words from above that “The principle of ‘the self-determination of all peoples’ must obviously mean permitting every people to settle its own affairs—and not settling every people’s affairs for it” (Chesterton 1989 [1919], 428). Chesterton believed it would more likely turn out to be the latter case and not the former.

From the discussion above it may seem that Chesterton was only concerned with the protection and comparison of high culture. Chesterton respected the rights of maintaining high culture but given his admiration for the less powerful people in society he believed there was much to be learned and appreciated in low culture. Three selections below
highlight Chesterton’s respect for low culture and his love for the ordinary, commonplace aspects of daily life. In the case of Chesterton, low culture does not mean mass consumer culture. Chesterton advocates diversity and not the standardization of culture so prevalent in consumer culture today. Chesterton admires vulgar culture in part because of its place centeredness and the fact that so few people get much out of higher forms of art and literature. For Chesterton this variety in low culture, whether it is common everyday actions or cheap entertainment, has strong connections to place:

Any number of modern poets have written about ancient ruins still haunted by dog-headed Anubis or great green-eyed Pasht. They seldom expressed much sympathy for the human inhabitants of those vanished cities. But, in the case of the vanished cities, at least the inhabitants did inhabit. They worked, wedded, dined, and slept in their own town, and were often attached to it by a high religion of patriotism. (Chesterton 1991a [1926], 138)

Chesterton contends that some of the modern poetry of his day left the people out of their verse about ancient ruins. Vulgar culture, however, is more human for Chesterton, and place and people go hand in hand. So, the beauty of ancient ruins is not that they were centers of high culture but that they were places in which people lived and places that people loved. Place and people interact in the mind of Chesterton and he believed that it is possible to learn much about other people and places through the study of their low culture. Chesterton exemplifies this respect for vulgarity and sensitivity to the differences and contributions of different social classes, by stating that “trash is a good aid to truth” (Chesterton 1991a [1926], 118). He elaborates that when studying different people from different periods and places the less fashionable people are a valuable resource. As with the insects discussed above, Chesterton believes there is something sacred about the vulgar entertainment of less cultured people, “Owing to the lamentable
contempt with which mankind has treated its splendid and sacred accumulations of trash, it is always a doubtful question how far any successful cause was a popular cause...We cannot judge these things merely through the eyes of people of good judgment (Chesterton 1991a, 118). By mentioning that we cannot always judge through “people of good judgment” Chesterton shows that that popular opinion includes more than what is handed down through literature and history. This also applies to his suspicious views toward the intelligentsia and powerful elites and their opinions about particular causes, the causes they create, and the policies they propose to fix those causes. Castells seems to share Chesterton's view in his statement that “With the exception of a small elite of globalpolitans...people all over the world resent the loss of control over their lives, over their environment, over their jobs, over their economies, over their governments, over their countries, and, ultimately, over the fate of the Earth (Castells 2004, 72 italics in original).

Insularity and Connectivity

[P]ower can be insular or it can be international; but it cannot be both...If it remains at peace it must tolerate war; and if it works for peace it must risk war. But it cannot have the neutrality of the North Pole without being as remote as the North Pole, and we may add as cold as the North Pole. And it cannot impose a Pax Romana without fighting like the Romans. (Chesterton 1989a [1920], 63)

There are only too many signs that nations are settling back into a spiritual isolation, which is, unfortunately, not the same as a political security. In fact, such an isolation is most insecure. There never was a time when there was more need for England to understand Europe; to understand the real meaning of the revival of Italy, the transformation of Russia, the great central religious quarrel in France, the growing promise of Spain. (Chesterton 1991b [1929], 141-142)
During the interwar years Chesterton wrote prolifically on the diverging concepts of insularity and connectivity. Insularity being apart from other peoples and connectivity being able to reach and contact other peoples and places were both viewed as means of achieving world peace and understanding, but Chesterton believed that insularity and connectivity were incompatible. In the first epigraph above Chesterton uses the North Pole as a metaphor for insularity. The North Pole is remote, yes, but metaphorically speaking its insularity is not based entirely on its remoteness. Its coldness equally contributes to its insularity. In terms of relations with the Other, peace can be sought through a combination of geographical isolation (remoteness) and coldness (political/cultural isolation). Conversely, it was believed by many contemporaries that internationalism was a means of acquiring peace and understanding. In Chesterton’s view the two notions were opposites; he compares them to setting the Monroe Doctrine (Isolation) against the League of Nations (Internationalism) (Chesterton 1989a [1920], ). In the second epigraph above Chesterton expresses his regret that the nations of the world were beginning to isolate themselves spiritually. Chesterton points out that this spiritual isolation is not the same as political security (Chesterton 1991b [1929]). Geopolitical imaginations differ and they are not all equal.

Chesterton was concerned with security, preventing war and promoting peace, but he also desired to expose ambivalence in geopolitical imaginations. He opposed ambivalent attitudes that he believed were developing within the English geopolitical imagination. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has written much on modernity and the ambivalence associated with it. He is especially concerned with globalization and its effects on
society. In his work *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Bauman 1991), Bauman discusses the confusion and uncertainty that affects humanity as numerous local and worldwide plans fail to bring the desired results:

Modern existence is both haunted and stirred into restless action by modern consciousness; and modern consciousness is the suspicion or awareness of the inconclusiveness of extant order; a consciousness prompted and moved by the premonition of inadequacy, nay non-viability, of the order-designing, ambivalence-elimination project. (Bauman 1991, 9)

This, in turn, affects notions of understanding self and the Other. At the heart of this, Chesterton posits, is confusion over what is actually wanted. In the context of relations with other peoples, Chesterton asserts that it is impossible to acquire peace and understanding by retreating into a cold isolationism and at the same time promote peace by venturing forth with a warm internationalism. As discussed above, Chesterton thought that internationalism was far from being warm and cordial, but his point here is that the two geopolitical imaginations conflict: “And the reason is that they claim to bridge the deepest divisions of mankind while there is a deeper division in their own minds. They were not quite sure what they wanted; but as a matter of fact they wanted two incompatible things. They are not the less contrary because they can both be called peace” (Chesterton 1989a [1920], 63). It can be argued that the competing ideas for insularity and connectivity of which Chesterton writes are not, indeed, mutually exclusive parts of a single plan for peace and understanding but rather two separate competing discourses. It is conceivable, though, that there would be those who long for the safety of isolation and the perceived friendliness of internationalism. It is this ambivalent attitude that Chesterton criticizes in the two epigraphs above. Chesterton’s admonishment of
what he considered an ambivalent English geopolitical imagination highlights the confusion that develops as historical circumstances change. The interwar period was certainly a time of change and confusion.

It is important to critically examine our geopolitical imaginations to discover if we, collectively and individually, hold to ambivalent or mutually exclusive views of our own place in the world and our relations with the Other. Chesterton was neither an internationalist pinning his hopes for peace on increasing interdependency between nations, nor was he an isolationist who desired to forget about the rest of the world and let the world forget about England. He believed holding up either as ideals was impractical, if not impossible. England, he maintained, had interfered in world affairs, for good or ill, for far too long to allow it to be forgotten. The communication and transportation technology that many internationalists desired to use to connect with the world made isolation unlikely. In his view, it was impossible to at the same time increase connections and at the same time remain isolated. Even without increasing international connections, Chesterton believed England could not make the world forget England by trying to drift off into insularity:

[I]t is nonsense to suppose that England can be forgotten. And only if England is forgotten can England safely forget. Our Empire, our most necessary and national communications, are entangled with others in every quarter of the world, and not least in the quarter called Europe. Does anybody in his senses suppose that Gibraltar and Cyprus “and Malta and Gallipoli and the entry into Egypt will remain totally unaffected by whatever happens in Europe, by whatever nations rise or fall, by whatever new empires wax or wane?...With modern conditions and communications, the headquarters of our system are necessarily much less inaccessible. (Chesterton 1991b [1929], 140)
Bowman echoes Chesterton’s sentiment that isolation is impossible: “In international relations it is still a sound principle that the European situation vitally affects the rest of the world. There is no reality to a policy of isolation for a nation of significant size anywhere in the world today” (Bowman 1923, 56). Similarly, Chesterton argued that “whatever happens in Europe” affects the much of the world.

In his 1942 work, Democratic Ideals and Reality, Halford Mackinder makes a similar point with the caveat that, “every system is now a closed system,” and he continues, “you can alter nothing without altering the balance of everything…there are no more desert shores on which the jetsam of incomplete thought can rest undisturbed” (Mackinder 1962, 200). This attests to the three thinkers’ shared belief that the world was becoming increasingly connected, for good or ill. Bowman, an idealistic American geographer and internationalist, favored increasing America’s role in world affairs. Chesterton, an idealistic English nationalist, believed that first England and then America played too large a role in world affairs. Mackinder, an English imperialist, supported the maintenance of Empire. With regard to isolation and interconnectivity, Chesterton noted that England was becoming more and more connected to the world whether it was embraced or discouraged. At the end of the excerpt above, Chesterton makes this point more clearly: “With modern conditions and communications, the headquarters of our system are necessarily much less inaccessible” (Chesterton 1991b [1929], 140). In other words, national security could not be achieved through isolation because England was too connected to the world through its history and technology to remain isolated. Likewise, he believed internationalism which openly favored increased connections would fail to
facilitate peace. Connecting geographically with the Other does not inherently permit one to understand what is dear to the Other. One case in point is the “sacred insects” discussed earlier.

In the context of understanding the Other in times of change, Bauman makes a similar point:

What is now required is some understanding of the weaknesses, as well as strengths, of the ways in which we view each other, our ways of thinking and acting and the environments that we all inhabit. In this process of rethinking, established ways of viewing the world may find themselves questioned by new sets of circumstances that call for new ways of thinking. To some this may be a threat and to others an opportunity for indulgence. Yet there is an urgency given by those conditions and this requires a willingness to change: no more, of course, that humankind has changed so many times before in the course of its history. (Bauman and May 2001, 124)

Circumstances may merit changes in geopolitical imaginations; changing circumstances give opportunity to reflect upon the verity of our imaginations.

Understanding ourselves and our Others is important, but as Bauman points out in the statement above, “to some this may be a threat and to others an opportunity for indulgence.” Reflection and re-examination can bring about changes in geopolitical examination. This opens the way for newer and unforeseen opportunities either to understand the Other in a positive way or to take advantage of the Other. Bauman takes
note that modernity is a time of change:

The modern mind was born together with the idea that *the world can be changed*. Modernity is about rejecting the world as it has been thus far and the resolution to change it. The modern way of being consists in compulsive, obsessive change: in the refutation of what ‘merely is’ in the name of what could, and by the same token ought, to be put in its place. (Bauman 2004, 23)

Elsewhere, Bauman examines the importance of design in modernity. One could argue that design is a key influence in geopolitical imaginations. Likewise, as designs change, our views of self and the Other also change. It can thus be helpful to examine design and cultural tolerance together.

* Cultural Tolerance in the Age of Design

According to Bauman one reason there is so much change is the pervasiveness of design as an ideal. It can also be argued that Chesterton suggested a similar thought with his discussion of sacred insects. Design, by its very nature, is limiting. Choices must be made about what will either facilitate the design or obstruct the design. Bauman believes, “The modern state was a designing power, and designing meant to define the difference between order and chaos, to sift the proper from the improper, to legitimize one pattern at the expense of all others. All in all, it promoted some patterns and set to eliminate all others. All in all, it promoted similarity and uniformity” (Bauman 1991, 105).

Elsewhere, Bauman refers to this predilection for change as “Modernization – a compulsive, obsessive and addictive ‘reinventing’ of the world and of the fashion of its human habitation – is *synonymous* with the ‘modern way of life’” (Bauman 2005a, 87).

Another idea that is prevalent in modern life is the attempt to conquer distance, in essence shortening the time it takes to travel, communicate or provide goods and
services. Shortening distance is arguably among the most geographical design concepts of modernity. Giddens takes a more cautious approach to modernity, design, and distance. As shown above, Chesterton noted the desire to flatten the world, “Human unity is a huge and overwhelming truth, in the face of which all differences of continent or country are flattened out” (Chesterton 1991b [1930], 237). Giddens writes:

Modernity expropriates – that is undeniable. Time-space distanciation and the deskilling effects of abstract systems are the two most important influences. Even if distance and powerlessness do not inevitably go together, the emergence of globalised connections, together with high consequence risks, represent parameters of social life over which the situated individual has relatively little control. (Giddens 1991, 192)

Giddens points out that interconnectivity along with “high consequence risks” are beyond the control of most individuals. Chesterton argues that loss of control is in large part attributable to the shortening of distance made possible by technology.

In 1929 Chesterton expressed his conviction that the modern world was too invasive. “What is the matter” he writes, “is that it is too much with us; too much with everybody. It will not leave a man long enough by himself for him to discover that he is himself” (Chesterton 1991b [1929], 210). Chesterton was a supporter of humanity, and he believed that technology and the modern penchant for design were detrimental to humanity. By stating that the world “is too much with us” and “will not leave man long enough by himself” Chesterton shows an uncharacteristic pessimism that humanity suffers from the intrusion of technology and design. Contrast this with his view twenty-five years earlier: Chesterton seems much more hopeful in the resilience of people to go on about their lives in spite of the increasingly global reaching communications and information technologies. Chesterton writes, “under all this vast illusion of the
cosmopolitan planet, with its empires and its Reuter’s agency, the real life of man goes on concerned with this tree or that temple, with this harvest or that drinking-song, totally uncomprehended, totally untouched” (Chesterton 2000 [1905], 24). In the earlier statement Chesterton states his belief that in performing less sophisticated actions including religion, agriculture, and recreation humanity was above the influence of Modernity. Later, it seems, Chesterton is lamenting Modernity’s obtrusiveness, what he sees as a concerted effort to control (read: design) the affairs of humanity.

Technology, in the modern spirit of design, was a source of a sense of security. Chesterton, ever concerned with the human factor, admonished those who would take comfort in such technology. Chesterton pointed out that technology does not take only “us” exclusively to our chosen destinations. The same technology also allows the Other to fly to us whether we like it or not:

It seems to entertain the extraordinary idea that if an English aeroplane can get quickly to Paris it will improve the English understanding of the psychology of Parisians. It is doubtful; though some will blame the Parisian psychology, some the English understanding. But, anyhow, they talk a great deal about the English aeroplane getting quickly to Paris; they talk less about the Paris aeroplane getting quickly to London. In short, the New Imperialists cannot have it both ways. They cannot tell us every morning that we live in a world of flying thunderbolts, flashing to and fro between the ends of the earth; and then suddenly begin to talk as if we were safe in some quiet and secret place, a million miles from everywhere, where no foe could ever follow and no stranger come. (Chesterton 1991[b] 1929], 140)

In Chesterton’s view, the shortening of time and distance made life, not more secure, but less secure. The “New Imperialists,” he warns, paint a picture of security through the technological shortening of time and distance. More thought is given to the ability to travel from England to the world than to the ability of the world to travel to England.
Chesterton posits that it is naïve to have an over inflated sense of security in this when the world can also come to “us.” Design and technology, by promoting uniformity and creating and eliminating patterns (Bauman 1991b) increases the risk that enemies and strangers may come (Chesterton 1991b [1929]). Chesterton posits that putting faith in technology makes it easy to forget that there are strange things and strangers beyond our borders, or as Tuan phrased it, “People in modern times have grown so confident of their mental and physical powers that they may lose the very idea of the strange—of the existence of things totally beyond human comprehension and control” (Tuan 1986, 16).

Chesterton was a long time critic of German imperialism. It is likely that Chesterton was concerned with the possibility of Germany reasserting its force and terrorizing Europe once more. This is exactly what happened. Germany regrouped after the First World War under Hitler and built up its military and air power was the means Germany used to attack Great Britain. Air technology, which in Chesterton’s time was praised for shortening time and distance, was used against England by Germany. What flies out can also fly back. In the passage above, Chesterton points out the danger of taking comfort in insularity while the world is becoming more geographically connected. Chesterton hoped that England would be more vigilant and not sink into idleness by putting too much trust in technology and design.

Bauman observes that the feeling of security was a precept of Modernity, and “Being swept away and buffeted by forces residing in mysterious and impenetrable ‘faraway’ places, resolutely unpredictable and out of control, is for the modern mind a novel experience” (Bauman 2003, 128). Being “swept away” by forces from ‘faraway places’
brings Chesterton’s words to mind. It is naïve to take comfort and security as if we were “safe in some quiet and secret place, a million miles from everywhere, where no foe could ever follow and no stranger come” (Chesterton 1991b [1929], 140). Bauman continues and points out that “Modernity, after all, meant life conducted under the aegis of man-made order as well as progressive taming and rational management of human conditions” (Bauman 2003, 128). Feeling secure and geographically remote was a symptom of Modernity of which Chesterton desired to cure the English and the world as well. In the context of tolerating the Other, Bauman believes “Cultural tolerance is often exercised at a distance. When that is threatened a rhetoric of invasion and purity is often thinly disguised by another that proclaims the right of all people to live their life as they wish – as long as it is in their “own country” (Bauman and May, 133). It is common to tolerate Others and their distinct cultural ways as long as they are “at a distance” and we can feel that we, quoting Chesterton, “are millions of miles away from everywhere” (Chesterton 1991b [1929], 140).

According to Bauman and Chesterton it is easier to tolerate the Other when they are at a distance. Chesterton was critical of taking comfort in transportation technology, but he was also critical of taking comfort in long distance communications technology. At a distance it is easy to tolerate an Other:

There is no more deadly delusion, none more full of quite practical peril, than this notion that trains and wires have created a real understanding between the nations. Do you think that Chinamen will love you because you can write a Chinese telegram? Chinamen (and very right they are) will not love you until you can write a Chinese love-letter. The world has not shrunk at all. It is not one iota more easy at this moment to understand the Cannibal Islands. It is only more easy at this moment to look at them and misunderstand them. (Chesterton 1987 [1908], 100)
It is worth noting that tolerance and understanding are two entirely different concepts.

Tolerance involves putting up with or supporting an Other. Understanding entails mutual toleration that is re-enforced with knowledge about the Other. Chesterton refused to hail transportation technology as a hallmark of security because, as shown above, real and potential enemies can utilize the same technology. Technology and design are tools to help people, but whether one believes they are being helped or hurt by them depends much on many factors including their historical circumstances. In the words of Bauman:

> People tend to live in peace and refrain from resorting to violence when they can address their complaints and grudges to a power whose incorruptibility and fairness they can trust. But on our fast and chaotically globalizing planet such a power is conspicuous only by its absence…Such power is present inside the boundaries of politically sovereign states—but the most painful damage, targeted or ‘collateral,’ is delivered nowadays from that ‘outer space’ outside all boundaries, from that ‘no-man’s’ land,’ Wild West-style land, where there is no ‘right’ without ‘might’; only the stronger sit in judgment, and only the weaker are punished for their deeds. In our globalizing world, power no longer resides with politics. Coercive power—economic and military—has broken its political shackles and roams free over the planetary space. (Bauman 2005b, 393)

**Fragmentation: Design and Uneven Development**

As discussed above, Chesterton believed that design and planning alone would not bring unity to the different peoples of the world. Chesterton criticized his friend H.G. Wells and others who advocated the formation of a world-state. At the most Chesterton believed that “In our efforts to get a world-state, we are only likely to get half-a-dozen world-states, with half-a-dozen world-philosophies” (Chesterton 1989a [1921], 181). Chesterton believed that local and national affections were much more resilient to even get that far. Fragmentation is an inevitable consequence of unification. Bauman points out that one of the self-proclaimed purposes of the modern state was to promote
uniformity (Bauman 1991b, 105). However, he also believes that modernity, the age of order and design, “prides itself on the fragmentation of the world as its foremost achievement. Fragmentation is the prime source of its strength. The world that falls apart into plethora of problems is a manageable world” (Bauman 1991b, 13). Giddens appears to concur, writing “Modernity fragments; it also unites. On the level of the individual right up to that of planetary systems as a whole, tendencies towards dispersal vie with those promoting integration” (Giddens 1991, 192).

Chesterton also believed fragmentation would occur and early in his writing career presented his views that modern innovations in travel do not make it easier to understand the Other but only to more easily see the Other (Chesterton 1987b [1908]). The First World War and events such as the creation of the League of Nations did little to alter his opinion.

As anyone who has read much Chesterton knows, he had a deep affinity for humanity. He was much more suspicious, though, of human nature. Chesterton had two reasons for doubting the ability to unify all of the Others of the world. First, he disagreed with Modernity’s notion of progress. He believed that design did not, nor could it, unify people. People resent being controlled (Castells 2004). As discussed above, Chesterton described the venerated aspects of people’s lives as sacred insects. Second, he doubted the benevolence of world leaders whom Chesterton feared were concerned more with opening up financial markets than promoting global charity:

Unfortunately, such things as the League of Nations generally attract and engage the attention of the very people who have not the remotest notion of what these national and local differences are all about. At the highest they are international idealists; at the lowest they are cosmopolitan financiers. Very often they are
doing the dirty work of the second in the rather dismal disguise of the first.  
(Chesterton 1990b [1923], 207)

Chesterton believed that the designers behind such international bodies as the League of Nations were less concerned with promoting local and national concerns. As discussed throughout this thesis, Chesterton believed that the local and national levels were the most important to the everyday lives of the most people. If Chesterton could be said to have amicably criticized international idealism, he loathed international finance. Any examination of Chesterton’s critique of progress and design would be incomplete without a discussion of his negative views toward international business. This economic aspect of Chesterton’s critique of American international finance will be presented in more detail in the section that follows.

The power to design is, in essence, the power to fragment. In looking closely at the growth and decline of cities Bauman writes something that could equally be said of power and fragmentation in international relations, “From the point of view of spatial administration, modernisation means the monopolisation of the cartographic rights. Monopoly is however impossible to obtain in a palimpsest-like city, built of the layers of successive accidents of history” (Bauman 1999, 117). Bowman believes that to wield international power wisely it is important to understand the palimpsest-like nature of place and history:

The geography of power is an element in our present-day world situation. Exploration has made possible successive epochs of redistribution of power. Offsetting such redistribution is the inertia of both population and plant…The more artificial the situation, the greater the state of tension. There has come into being at last a delicate world net of relationships sensitive to impulse from every quarter and requiring many types of expert knowledge. (Bowman 1934, 209-10)
Indeed, it is important to understand how policies enacted in one place affect other places. “Successive epochs” of power shifts which Bowman cites as a possibility thanks to the “geography of power” can be considered within the context of the palimpsest of which Bauman writes. In Bauman’s view history is layered with attempts to monopolize geopolitical imaginations, or as Bauman refers it “cartographic rights.” Monopolizing cartographic rights fails, though, because of the complexity of layered histories of the people and places. Fragmentation results despite efforts to unify and in some ways as a result of unification. Global designs fail because the global cannot overcome locality, or as Escobar writes, “When a border is eliminated, it reappears somewhere else” (Escobar 2001, 139). People who live in the places and are attached to those places may have a better understanding of the history and needs of their areas. In Chesterton’s words:

The only purely popular government is local, and founded on local knowledge. The citizens can rule the city because they know the city…All Irishmen may know roughly the same sort of things about Ireland; but it is absurd to say they all know the same things about Iceland, when they may include a scholar steeped in Icelandic sagas or a sailor who has been to Iceland (Chesterton 1990a [1922], 216).

Chesterton did not argue here that everyone, Irish or otherwise, knew everything about their homelands. His point is that, in his view, people come closer to knowing their own needs of their communities than the leaders who implement cookie-cutter approaches to development. Esteva and Prakash explain this convincingly, writing that “Global proposals are necessarily parochial: they inevitably express the specific vision and interests of a small group of people, even when they are supposedly formulated in the interest of humanity…” (Esteva and Prakash 2004, 415).

American Cultural and Economic Imperialism: Fragmentation Through Finance
It seems likely that Chesterton would agree with the idea of Esteva and Prakash that global designs are not really global and universal but parochial and self-serving. Specifically, Chesterton believed American corporations were gaining too much domination over world affairs.

America will probably be the problem of 1926 as much as Prussia was the problem of 1914. The problem will not be so much of a peril, but it will have its perilous aspect. The weight of wealth in the one case has something of the same effect as the weight of war material and war preparations in the other. It disturbs the balance of the world even when it is not being actually used against it. (Chesterton 1991a [1926], 17)

Chesterton even went so far as to compare America’s growing economic influence to Prussian expansionism, which he regularly cited as the reason for the First World War. In America’s case, however, it was not a bellicose military that worried Chesterton, but rather its open and aggressive economic expansionism. With his usual wit Chesterton compared America’s economic expansionism with the old saying that England, because it is an island, had not been invaded, “It is an old saying,” he writes “that England has not been invaded, at least for a very long time. Perhaps it would be truer to say that England has not been invaded by people whom Englishmen were allowed the satisfaction of killing” (Chesterton 1991a [1927], 285). Carr points out that the Covenant of League of Nations was flawed “not merely because it failed to cope adequately with the problem of military power, but because it ignored the problem of economic power (Carr 58-59). Carr believed “they altogether failed to recognise that the self-determination of small nations was incompatible with unbridled economic power and complete economic independence” (Carr 1943, 52).
In Chesterton’s view, America would be, in large part, that “problem of economic power” of which Carr spoke. The question remains then, if Chesterton believed American economic power was a problem comparable to Prussian military imperialism, was America’s imperialism economic in nature? Bowman believed American economic expansion was not imperialistic writing, “The American habit of thought in relation to international things is not imperialistic; it is commercial and it seeks above all commercial equality” (Bowman 1923, 56). Bowman’s denial proves that it was at least an issue. Chesterton went as far as to compare American economic expansion with Prussia, arguably Chesterton’s most dreaded “evil Other.” In Chesterton’s view, American economic sway was, in fact, imperialism. Chesterton writes, “I think that Imperialism is none the less Imperialism because it is spread by economic pressure or snobbish fashion rather than by conquest; indeed I have much more respect for the Empire that is spread by fighting than for the Empire that is spread by finance” (Chesterton 1990a [1932], 584). Chesterton opposed all forms of imperialism, but he was more critical of the imperialism imposed by markets than imperialism in pursuit of land through military conquest. It is worth noting that Chesterton includes the spread of imperialism via “snobbish fashion” as well as “economic pressure.” Using the spread of American style soda-fountains and skyscrapers as examples, Chesterton differentiated between two types of cultural dispersion:

I should answer touching the problem of soda-fountains and sky scrapers in England. Probably where these things spring up they spring up out of the American spirit; and I have never failed to defend the rights of a national spirit. But when these things spread, they spread merely by the American money; and money is not even American, for it is not even national. (Chesterton 1991a [1928], 510)
Chesterton did not criticize all things American in England. In his opinion Americans in England could build American things out of the American spirit, but what Chesterton rebuked is the dispersion of those American things, such as soda-fountains and skyscrapers. Chesterton did not hold American business exclusively responsible for the diffusion of American tastes abroad but rather that they were spread through marketing and not through American attachments to place (Chesterton 1991a, 510). Given Chesterton’s sense of place and his antipathy for big business and malleable identities this makes his critique of American economic imperialism all the more important. What people eat, what they use, and, in Chesterton’s view, what they think were becoming increasingly affected by markets and the wealthy people who control the markets. Chesterton believed that Americans and others including the English were handing themselves too easily over to American business interests:

Men may come to like being herded and guarded by big firms, as they came to like being herded and guarded by big feudal lordships. But it is a fall, and in the special case of America, it is especially a fall of the Republic. But men still talked about the Roman Empire as the Republic, even when everything was in fact becoming feudal; and similarly the Republic is still often mentioned, even in capitalist America. (Chesterton 1990a [1932], 590)

In Chesterton’s view, the wealthy were acquiring too much power over the everyday lives of people. Chesterton compares society being led and protected by corporations to feudalism. This is not the place to speculate whether America is indeed a republic or whether it has regressed into feudalism. Chesterton does go as far as to say that not say that Western society has handed its democracy over to the forces of capitalism, but he feared that it was possible and regrettable. Internationalism and Capitalism combine
unchecked by democracy, unable to control corporations and business leaders with no allegiances but their companies and their own comfort. If Bauman is correct Chesterton’s fear may have come to fruition with today’s global economy. The individual democrat, now individual consumer, has lost the ability to steer his or her own fate:

There are seemingly random, haphazard and utterly unpredictable moves and shifts and drifts of what for the lack of a more precise name are called ‘forces of globalization’. They change beyond recognition, and without warning, the familiar landscapes and cityscapes where the anchors of our durable and reliable security used to be cast. They reshuffle people and play havoc with their social identities. They may transform us, from one day to another, into refugees or ‘economic migrants’. They may withdraw our certificates of identity or invalidate the identities certified. And they remind us daily that they can do it with impunity – when they dump at our doorsteps those people who have already been rejected, forced to run for their lives or scramble away from home for the means to stay alive, robbed of their identities and self-esteem. (Bauman 2004, 128)

Chesterton was opposed to imperialists whether they were countries or companies. He believed that the rich had more control over the everyday lives of people than at any time in history (Chesterton 1991a [1926]).

As Chesterton points out, power was violent but it was also local. If Bauman is correct and people do indeed depend upon markets for a large part of their identities, we might add to Chesterton’s list of the powers the rich have over those who are not rich. This is not inherently an American issue but it supports Chesterton’s view that the wealthy were gaining a progressively strong foothold over people. Identity was, in Chesterton’s view, something to be revered and to be taken from local and national traditions. If Bauman is correct these place-related identities are increasingly peppered with consumption-related identities. It is interesting to ponder what Chesterton might think about the global reach many transnational corporations (TNCs) have over people.
He would certainly criticize their power to influence the lives and livelihoods of more
and more people. Global business is not merely a product of America but Chesterton saw
imperialistic tendencies in American business and American economic foreign policy.

Conclusion

Chesterton was neither optimistic nor pessimistic toward international affairs. In
terms of the geopolitical imagination, Chesterton believed universalism loosely
identifying oneself with the Other, was a dangerous proposition. Chesterton believed it
was impossible to feel genuinely connected to everyone on the planet, and that national
and local identities were more realistic. In Chesterton’s view the universalism prevalent
in internationalist thought was not as unbiased as many portrayed it to be. In this regard,
Chesterton agrees with Young (1990) that impartiality is impossible. Chesterton doubted
the viability of universalism in the geopolitical imagination but even more so, he doubted
the sincerity of politicians, such as Woodrow Wilson and international business leaders
whom he believed were more concerned with perpetuating a new type of imperialism,
economic imperialism. Chesterton’s sense of place plays a large part in his critique of
interwar internationalism Chesterton wanted justice, not a peace acquired at the expense
of other peoples’ lives and identities. This peace, Chesterton believed, would only begin
to be possible if people genuinely respect the Other and their attachments to place.
Similarly, Chesterton doubted world leaders would easily respect the Other or as Bauman
phrased it, “People tend to live in peace and refrain from resorting to violence when they
can address their complaints and grudges to a power whose incorruptibility and fairness
they can trust. But on our fast and chaotically globalizing planet such a power is conspicuous only by its absence” (Bauman 2005b, 393).
Chapter 3: Travel and Tourism

One recurring theme in this thesis is that Chesterton had a deep appreciation of the importance of place. As a concept, Chesterton admired other people’s attachments to place, as he felt a strong attachment to England. Chesterton held the concept of place in high regard and this influenced his support of Others and their senses of place. Likewise, Chesterton had a deep appreciation for humanity and the role of place in the human condition. Chesterton’s critique of Imperialism, presented above, was in large part a defense of an English sense of place, Chesterton’s attempt to bring England back into forefront of the English geographical imagination. In Chesterton’s view, empires were too large to even be considered as places. Chesterton’s critique of internationalism, can be viewed as a defense of the Other and the numerous and complex senses of place in the wake of Modernist and Capitalistic attempts to enforce uniformity and homogeneity. In this third and final chapter place and the Other are once again expressed as an important part of Chesterton’s geographical imagination. Here an examination of Chesterton’s thought on leisure, travel and tourism yields valuable insight into his understanding of place. Chesterton, the reflective traveller, is also an exceptional human geographer who examines the intertwining relationships of place and human. Chesterton believed it was important to critically understand both the self and the Other within the context of place.

This discussion of Chesterton’s thoughts on tourism will be divided into three overlapping categories. First, I present Chesterton’s belief in the value of idleness as a means of understanding and appreciating place and the Other. Second, I will discuss understanding the Other in the midst of increasingly homogeneous landscapes. Third, I
will examine Chesterton’s thought on why many tourists are unhappy and disillusioned with their travels. In each section Chesterton uses examples from his own time that are still prevalent today.

*Idyllic Idleness*

Leisure, travel and tourism are broad and complex subjects. For the purposes of this discussion the three will largely be discussed as one activity, experiencing place either directly for the purposes of enjoyment or for purposes other than making a living. In his first article for the *ILN* in 1905 Chesterton (1986) discusses vacation times in London. As he would do many times in his writings, Chesterton expressed a strong connection between place and leisure. Chesterton posits that idleness is the way to fully appreciate a place and its people.

> Of one thing I am quite absolutely convinced, that the very idlest kind of holiday is the very best. *By being idle you are mixing with the inmost life of the place where you are; by doing nothing you are doing everything. The local atmosphere finds you unresisting and fills you, while all the others have filled themselves with the stuff of guide-books and the cheerless east wind of culture.* Above all, refuse—refuse with passion—to see any places of interest. (Chesterton 1986 [1905], 36 italics added)

For Chesterton, visiting new places should include more than racing to see as many places and things as possible. Seeing “places of interest” is an activity, but in Chesterton’s view it is less likely to give one a firm appreciation of place. Rather, it gives one memories of things and activities, not the actual places. Chesterton derides the
use of guidebooks which he criticized for being planned out:

If you violently decline to see the Castle of Edinburgh, you will have your reward, a delight reserved for the very few: you will see Edinburgh. If you deny the very existence of the Morgue, the Madeleine, and the Louvre, the Luxembourg, the Tuileries, the Eiffel Tower, and the tomb of Napoleon, in the calm of that sacred clearance you will suddenly see Paris. (Chesterton 1986 [1905], 36)

As will be discussed below, Chesterton did not regard all architecture and monuments with disdain but he believed that seeing popular sites did not give one the fullest understanding or appreciation of place. Chesterton stressed place over the activities conducted in that place, especially when visiting a place. In other words, Chesterton considered repose a more effective way of understanding and appreciating place than activity. This view of place is shared at least in part by a number of geographers, including Tuan who writes, “Place is a pause in movement” (Tuan 1977, 138). Crouch explains the value of encountering places in a casual, rather than pre-determined manner “To wander, to turn, to bend, during a visit to a heritage site, a beach and so on, to be still, is to encounter space through different senses, to be aware of space surrounding rather than as detached, ‘out there,’ ‘over there,’ in the spectacle” (Crouch 2005, 31).

Through idleness, Chesterton believed tourists can witness the mundane daily activities of the Other. Abstaining from the grandiose, Chesterton believed that it is possible to gain understanding about the Other and the importance of place in the Other’s life.
Chesterton writes:

It is the common life of the people in a foreign place which is really a wonder and delight to the eyes. It is the ordinary things that astonish us in France and Germany. *The extraordinary things we know quite well already. They have been thoroughly explained to us...The man who refuses to be moved out of seat in a Parisian café to see the Musée de Cluny is paying the grandest tribute to the French people.* It is the same, of course, with the foreigner in England. There is no need for a Frenchman to look earnestly at Westminster Abbey as a piece of English architecture. It is not a piece of English architecture. But a hansom cab is a piece of English architecture. It is a thing produced by the peculiar poetry of our English cities. It has never, for some mysterious reason, really been domesticated abroad. (Chesterton 1986 [1905], 37 italics added)

Chesterton proposed that it is not, indeed, the special, the large, the amusing features that define a place and its people but rather their everyday activities and their context within place.

As with the discussion of internationalism and the Other above, Bauman’s work is useful for examining Chesterton’s thought on leisure, travel and tourism and their relationship to place. Each believed that tourists, in their respective times, spend too much time moving from site to site. In an interview with tourism expert Adrian Franklin (2003) Bauman contends that today’s tourists spend much of their time moving from site to site. Given Chesterton’s frequent critiques of placelessness, Bauman’s and Chesterton’s thought on travel prove an interesting comparison.

As an example, it might prove helpful to use some of my own personal experiences in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where I lived for over three years as a soldier. The city’s most widely known landmark is Pike’s Peak. From most points within the city it is possible to view Pike’s Peak. The mountain contributes to the character of the town and
some of the area businesses, such as the coffee shop Pike’s Perk, have names inspired by the mountain. The mountain is a symbol of Colorado Springs and contributes to the city’s sense of place. Tourists visit from all over Colorado and America to see the peak. It is possible to ascend the peak by either road, cog railway or, for the hardy, by way of several foot paths. Pike’s Peak is beautiful, especially in the cooler months when it is still capped in white. All this aside, though, it would be a stretch to claim that seeing Pike’s Peak or climbing its heights could inform one about the lives of the residents of Colorado Springs. A large military presence is just one thing a casual observer might notice about Colorado Springs besides Pike’s Peak. Fort Carson (Army) and Peterson Air Force Base are just two of the military installations in or near Colorado Springs. The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) is located in Cheyenne Mountain to the south of the city. Generally speaking, the local residents are friendly toward the military and many service members choose to remain in area when their commitments to the military are over.

If one were inclined to follow Chesterton’s example, one would not be too quick to rush up Pike’s Peak if they were interested in learning more about the local flavor and atmosphere of the city. During my entire time there I did not visit the summit one time. Perhaps I was an unwitting Chestertonian, but I preferred seeing it from the city rather than vice versa. I preferred my regular haunts, the book stores and coffee shops in and around town where I enjoyed watching people, locals and tourists alike. Often I would try to guess who was a tourist and who was a local. Crouch writes, "It is through the practice of shared body-space that space becomes transformed as social, not only by
mental reflection on another’s presence, but by a shared feeling of bodily activity” (Crouch, Aronsson, Wahlstrom 2001, 260). In my view at the time, the mountain seemed more of an individual conquest than a shared experience. Climbing it was beyond my perceived ability or interest. Driving the narrow road in my small under-powered car seemed equally daunting. The cog railway is a beautiful excursion up and down the mountain, so I have been told, but cost around $20 at the time. This was money that could go toward books, coffee and people watching, and I could see the peak for free. I preferred the familiar scenery of downtown Colorado Springs. This is not to say, though, that Pike’s Peak is insignificant to local residents. It is an icon that many feel attachment to, but it seems common that locals in areas with significant landscapes fail visit those landscapes. For example, I have friends and family in Delaware who rarely visit the beaches there. When my parents and I visit Delaware, the beach is our primary destination. Our concept of place is strongly attached to the beaches there. Our friends and family there have homes, jobs and relationships there that do not involve the beach.

In my own opinion, I was more than a tourist in Colorado Springs but I was not quite local either. Despite this ambiguity, I developed a strong sense of attachment toward downtown Colorado Springs during my time there. Spaces that were unfamiliar at first became more and more familiar. From the beginning, though, it would be wrong to say everything new was unfamiliar. Crouch writes, “Our ‘familiar’ everyday and the unfamiliar spaces the tourist encounters may have more complicated entanglements where spaces, practices and identities, the material and the metaphorical, may merge and happen in mutually more complex ways than the familiar polarization of life in and out of
tourism suggest” (Crouch, Aronsson and Wahlstrom 2001, 264). In other words, tourism and visits to new places are not entirely new experiences. There are mixtures of familiar with the unfamiliar and vice versa.

Experiencing Otherness in the Age of Uniformity

As Crouch points out, the familiar and unfamiliar encounters share the common factor of occurring “in a place” whether that place “is a town park, a field, a historic site or a theme park, a pub, club, mountain range or beach” (Crouch 2000, 65). Crouch adds “They may be aware of people round them. They feel the ground…They turn around, touch a friend, sit on the ground. There is an atmosphere in the place. (Crouch 2000, 65).

Each place has its atmosphere and activities and Chesterton urged people to indulge in the atmosphere by remaining idle and noticing the everyday, familiar activities of the Other. Rather than seeing the iconic and grandiose sites of foreign places, Chesterton favored seeing what was familiar and everyday to the local people. Some of those activities will be familiar to anyone in one form or another. People eat, for example, but what they eat, how they eat, and when they eat differs from culture to culture. There is familiar mixed in with the unfamiliar. In Chesterton’s view, visiting famous sites amounts to nothing more than seeing things that you already know about. On the other hand, according to Chesterton, witnessing the banal activities of daily existence is a better way to experience the Other by learning what is unfamiliar to the visitor yet familiar to the local.

Bauman also discusses the intricacies of tourism within the context of familiarity and unfamiliarity. Using cities as an example, Bauman takes note of the varying degrees to
which tourists desire familiar and unfamiliar experiences. As with Chesterton, Bauman’s thoughts are intrinsically related to place. Bauman refers to the desire for the adventurous and the unfamiliar as “mixophilia” and the desire for the cautious and familiar as “mixophobia.” Bauman says,

…the city environment continuously generates a curious blend of mixophilia and mixophobia. There is mixophobia – the fear of the rough areas, of no go areas, of proximity of alien characters, obtrusiveness of alien customs. And there is mixophilia – sincere curiosity of the fascinating secrets which all otherness holds and the desire to learn them, to know and to see at close quarters how other people live, what they think. (Franklin 2003, 216)

Considering Chesterton’s appeal to tourists to avoid the most popular sites in order to appreciate the more local custom, it is fair to include Chesterton among the “mixophiles.” Once again, though, it should be noted that Chesterton did not seek the exotic and grand. He wanted to experience the common lives of local peoples. There is one aspect of Bauman’s idea of mixophilia, however that many choose to openly avoid, namely, what Bauman refers to as “rough areas.” For the mixophile, rough areas may include places such as dark allies, under passes and other areas that pose the risk of physical attack. For the mixophobe, however, a no go area might be any area that poses unfamiliar conditions.

In Bauman’s words, “The world is divided up into those places where tourists are carefully ushered into and through, and those places they are prevented from seeing. Tourists only flow into certain places” (Franklin 2003, 207). Slums and derelict areas are places only the most dedicated and fearless (or naïve) mixophile may want to visit.
Placelessness of Commercial Landscapes and Comfort in Travel

Personal safety is not the only factor that influences the comfort of visitors and where they choose to go. Each traveler has levels at which he or she feels comfortable with difference. Above, Bauman includes “proximity of alien characters” and “obtrusiveness of alien customs” as factors that the mixophobe traveler may avoid. Given this predisposition to avoid difference, many travelers feel comfortable where they are less likely to confront difference. For good or ill, placeless landscapes are a crutch that many travelers depend on for comfort when traveling. Both Bauman and Chesterton cite urban placelessness as a factor that contributes to experiencing and not experiencing the Other. Chesterton views placelessness and uniformity negatively while Bauman seems to view it more optimistically. Both, however, believe that it is becoming more difficult to view the Other in urban areas. Chesterton writes:

[T]ravel, in the true sense, has become impossible in the large urban or urbanised districts. There are twenty ways of going everywhere, and there is nowhere to go. There are a hundred improved means of communication, and there is nothing to communicate. A traveller in simpler times travelled with two legitimate and even estimable objects: first to see strange things in the places he went to: and second to boast about the country he came from. Both these admirable arts are bound to suffer neglect and negation under existing conditions, when the place he finds is exactly like the place he leaves. All such places are alike, plastered with the same advertisements, blocked up with the same big shops, selling the same newspapers, attending the same school. (Chesterton 1991a [1926], 174-175)

In Chesterton’s view, the homogeneity of the landscapes prevents travellers from experiencing the Other, or in Chesterton’s words seeing “strange things in places.” Chesterton blames uniformity of modern business for this state of placelessness and the lack of adventure that results for travellers. Bauman agrees with Chesterton that it is difficult to experience the Other abroad and writes, “Paradoxically, the chance of meeting
the other (I mean genuinely meeting, not mis-meeting) may be greater when you stay at
home in the big cities than when you go a thousand miles away in order to land up in a
Holiday Inn (Franklin 2003, 216 parentheses in original). In Bauman’s opinion, though,
the similarity of places is not entirely negative. One stands less of a chance of
experiencing the Other abroad in urban areas but at home “People meet in the same
shops, in the same cinemas, on the same street, in the same discotheque – at work and at
leisure, in the public realm and privately. They talk to each other, exchange views, they
get to know each other and respect each other’s otherness. Soon they stop noticing the
colour of skin. It doesn’t matter any more” (Franklin 2003, 216). Concerning travel
abroad, however, Bauman points out, like Chesterton, that the purpose of travel is less
about seeing strange and different things. Mixophilia gave way increasingly to
mixophobia. Both state the leveling influence of consumerism. In Chesterton’s words
above “All such places are alike, plastered with the same advertisements, blocked up with
the same big shops, selling the same newspapers, attending the same schools”
(Chesterton 1991a [1926], 175). In Bauman’s view, this may have some benefits in
promoting racial acceptance at home but abroad the traveller, now consumer, experiences
the Other as a financial transaction. The adventure of meeting the Other gives way to
comfort through familiarity. There is some adventure but not too much. As Bauman puts
it, “Planet-wide chains of Holiday Inns or Sheratons are there not to bring the far away
life closer, but to supply an extraterritorial enclave, the reassuring sameness amidst
variety – impermeable and invulnerable, immune to the local idiosyncrasies or allowing
its strictly measured volume – only as much of (tamed) idiosyncrasy as is un-
intimidating, comfortable” (Franklin 2003, 212-213). Chesterton would agree that travel has taken on too much of the spirit of commercialism (Chesterton 1991a, 175). Bauman takes note of the fact that for many the goals of travel and tourism have changed in the wake of commercialism. Experiencing the Other while traveling is done on the traveler’s own terms in increments that are agreeable to the traveler. Bauman conveys a similar view to Chesterton’s view above:

This is hardly a fulfilment of the nineteenth century ambition to travel to learn, travel to understand, travel to get in touch with alien people and to embrace and imbibe and assimilate the untold riches stored in their heads, in their timeless cultural lore…Rather, the opposite, really. One meets the natives in the shops at the other side of the counter, in the restaurants bringing dishes from the kitchen. Or you watch the natives as a spectacle – selling their ‘otherness’ to tourists, making their living by selling their culture as spectacle. Hardly a ‘contact between civilisations’, let alone an exchange between cultures. (Franklin 2003, 213)

Chesterton did not believe that to experience the Other it is necessary to prevent all traces of the familiar but in his opinion, it was better for there to be more Other than familiar (Chesterton 1991a). In an earlier article Chesterton expressed his attitude that “if I am to consider the world I like to consider all sorts that make a world. If I am to survey the world from China to Peru, I like Peru to be very Peruvian and China to be unmistakably Chinese (Chesterton 1990b [1924], 333-334). In today’s climate this might seem harsh to Chinese and Peruvians who might enjoy the foreign elements in their landscape. Chesterton is not denying rights to people to choose how they develop their landscapes, but rather criticizng the commercialization of landscapes. Chesterton considered experiencing a foreign landscape as the Other experiences it a compliment to the people (Chesterton 1986). Chesterton desired to prevent what Bauman states as going
“hundreds and thousands of miles, in order to find yourself in cosily familiar surroundings, comfortably secure because familiar, with a few ‘local touches’ sprinkled over it to justify the expenditure” (Franklin 2003, 213). Chesterton does not believe it is ethically wrong to experience other cultures nor does he assert that Westerners should be the only ones who pleasantly experience the Other. Even with his criticism of placeless commercial landscapes he also leaves room for choice and different ways of experiencing the Other:

I do not insist that nobody must be allowed to eat Brussels sprouts except in Brussels. I do not demand that everyone who likes Jerusalem artichokes should take staff and scrip and make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. I do not say that Turkish delight should delight none but Turks or travellers in Turkey…Some of these are merely names; and some of them do still carry with them something of the savour and the pride of nations. But in England, in those exquisitely English centers, the old provincial towns, we did manage to produce good things whose very glory was in being provincial. (Chesterton 1991a [1926], 174)

Chesterton had a strong sense of place with regard to England and took pride in English traditions, but he also believed there was room for cultural exchange. The above quotation points out that Chesterton’s provinciality was not narrow minded toward others and their traditions, in this case food. Indeed, Chesterton valued otherness and was critical of commercialism. If some foods “still carry…something of the savour and the pride of nations” (Chesterton 1991a [1926], 174) as Chesterton contended, there are many commercially available consumables, both at home and abroad, that are not national treasures. Chesterton placed those treasures and tradition in general in high esteem. Chesterton would have tourists experience the things that are locally revered, rather than what Bauman says many do when they “drink the same beer” they drink at home and diminish their curiosity toward the Other (Franklin 2003, 215).
The Disappointed Tourist

In the previous section Chesterton and Bauman are presented as advocating otherness and discouraging too much familiarity in travel. This is only one aspect of travel and tourism that Chesterton and Bauman, and other thinkers, explore. It would be an eerie trip if one arrived at a place that was exactly like the place they left, and it would be very unlikely.

If, as Bauman points out above, tourists “sprinkle” in unfamiliar sites to “justify the expenditure” (Franklin 2003, 213) of even traveling in the first place, why then might many tourists suffer disappointment when visiting grand sites they don’t see everyday? In his essay “The Loss of the Creature,” Walker Percy (1975) contends that the sites tourists see are not all that unfamiliar, and when visiting places such as the Grand Canyon and Mexico city in his examples, people judge what they see based on impressions they have before they even take the trip. Stories, photographs, and tales from past visitors all influence whether people perceive actually seeing the Grand Canyon positively or as disappointing. If the sunlight does not shine just like it did in the postcard then the real sight is deemed unauthentic and even something as grand as the Grand Canyon fails to meet expectations.

In “The Philosophy of Sight-Seeing” a chapter of The New Jerusalem (2001,[1920]), a reflection on his trip to Palestine, Chesterton discussed disappointed tourists who were unimpressed with the size of the sites they visited. The following example involves a
soldier who was dissatisfied with the Great Pyramid.

A humorous soldier told me that he came from Derbyshire, and that he did [not] think much of the Pyramid because it was not so tall as the Peak. I pointed out to him that he was really offering the tallest possible tribute to a work of man in comparing it to a mountain; even if he thought it was a rather small mountain. I suggested that it was a rather large tombstone. (Chesterton 2001, 240)

Realizing the magnitude of effort involved in such a man-made object, Chesterton found wonder in the Pyramid. The soldier, however, was disappointed with the Pyramid’s size. It is possible that something similar to Percy’s example of the Grand Canyon played a part in the soldier’s disappointment with the Pyramid: Chesterton went on to discuss tourists who were disappointed with the Sphinx. Chesterton takes note that there is much about sites that are grand if tourists pay attention to the details. In Chesterton’s words, “It is true, as I have suggested, that after all the Sphinx is larger than I am; and on the same principle the painted saints are saintlier than I am, and the patient pilgrims more constant than I am. But it is also true…that even those who think the Sphinx small generally do not notice the small things about it” (Chesterton 2001 [1920], 249). Chesterton faults these tourists for not being reflective and discovering “what is interesting about their own disappointment” (Chesterton 2001, 249). Chesterton values self-reflection as a tool for travelers to help them understand why they feel the way they do about the sites they visit. Chesterton calls for self-reflection but would rather avoid self-centeredness. Chesterton points out above that the Sphinx is larger than he is and, in his view, that is a feat of human craftsmanship.

The traveller witnesses sites whether they are natural sites such as the Grand Canyon or man-made objects such as the Great Pyramid or the Sphinx. In his example about the
Sphinx discussed above Chesterton spoke with a soldier who believed the Sphinx was small. Chesterton compared the size of the Sphinx to himself, pointing out that the Sphinx was much bigger than himself. Chesterton would have travelers try to understand why they are dissatisfied with sites because in Chesterton’s words, “The real lesson the enlightened traveller should learn [is] the lesson about himself” (Chesterton 2001, 248).

By way of comparison and learning lessons about themselves travellers, in essence, realize that in viewing sights, they are not entirely removed from them but are embodied with the site. Chesterton took a similar view by comparing himself with the Sphinx and stating that travellers ought to learn lessons about themselves within the context of the sites they visit. Crouch writes,

Tourist sites, destinations, cultures and places are (at least in part) made significant through the way we encounter them, and the encounter happens in an embodied way. Cultures, places, memories, actions, and times are embodied. We live places not only culturally, but bodily. Thus tourists’ subjectivities become not merely separate reflections upon things, ideas and other ‘everyday life’ but practical involvement. (Crouch, Aronsson and Wahlstrom 2001, 259 parentheses in original)

Recognizing the embodied character of tourist/site relationships is indeed a lesson.

Like Chesterton, Crouch and others take note of the fact that people are not entirely removed from the sites they view, but are involved practically, as well. In realizing his or her embodiment, a tourist realizes the body influences how sites are encountered and perceived. As Crouch phrases it, “Culture and its artifacts and relations are encountered bodily, not merely in sensation but intersubjectively, expressively and poetically” (Crouch, Aronsson, and Wahlstrom 2001, 259). Understanding embodiment allows a
traveller to have more realistic expectations from the sites they visit. Self reflection, then, is helpful in understanding the Other.

It is important to understand ourselves and how “we” as travellers fit into the reality of the Other we are experiencing (Crouch, Aronsson and Wahlstrom 2001, 265). In other words, before it is important to realize that in criticizing sites, or in criticizing the Other people are often comparing the Other to their ideals but not in fact to how they live. In Chesterton’s words, “the mistake of critics is not that they criticise the world; it is that they never criticise themselves. They compare the alien with the ideal; but they do not at the same time compare themselves with the ideal; rather they identify themselves with the ideal” (Chesterton 2001 [1920], 240). According to Chesterton, compare the Other with an ideal but do not compare themselves with that same ideal. Instead they identify themselves with the ideal without actually taking the time to prove it to themselves. In the above statement Chesterton refers to critics in general but the more specific subject of his chapter is sight-seeing. Bauman believes that tourists have a ‘pure relationship’ with the sites they view.

‘pure’ meaning that it has no other purpose than the consumption of pleasurable sensation and that once the satisfaction wanes, it wilts and fades as well – and so you move to another relationship, hopefully as ‘pure’ as the last one. The world of pure relationships is a huge collection of grazing grounds, and living in such a world is shaped after the pattern of wandering from one succulent and fragrant meadow to another. (Franklin 2003, 208)

This pure relationship between consumer and the consumable is an unfortunate aspect stemming from consumer society. In this view, the Other is neither an ideal nor idyllic. It is simply one more thing to be bought, consumed and then discarded for a new adventure that will be equally disappointing. The tourists, of whom Bauman discusses,
are not aware of their embodiment or of the dissimilarities between themselves and their ideals of place and the Other. They consume their fill of the sites and move on. Bauman refers to this as “grazing behavior” (Franklin 2003, 208) and explains that like sheep grazing on grass until it is all gone, tourists “eat what they came for” and “find the supply of tasty tidbits fast running dry (Franklin 2003, 208). By disregarding the notion of embodiment and self-criticism this “pure relationship” fails to gain a full appreciation of place. As consumer, the tourist does not realize the nuances of place. Sense of place falls victim to sense of satisfaction.

As discussed throughout this thesis Chesterton held the concept of place in high regard, but in his view the English had little respect for the concept of place or other people’s senses of place. Like the grazing tourists whom Bauman critiques, Chesterton believed that educated English did not make the effort to understand place. In his view, they had a superficial enjoyment of place but did not appreciate sites for things the Other appreciates:

Incidentally, I may remark, it is the educated Englishman who is the idolater. *It is he who only reverences the place, and does not reverence the reverence for the place*. It is he who is supremely concerned about whether a mere object is old or new, or whether a mere ornament is gold or gilt. In other words, it is he who values the visible things rather than the invisible; for no sane man can doubt that invisible things are very vivid to the priests and pilgrims of these shrines. In the midst of emotions that have moved the whole world out its course, girt about with crowds who will die or do murder for definition, the educated English gentleman in his blindness bows down to wood or stone. For the only thing wrong about that admirable man is that he is blind about himself. (Chesterton 2001 [1920], 242 italics added)

Once again, Chesterton is critical of tourists, in this case the educated English, for their lack of self reflection. Chesterton goes as far as to separate two types of reverence
for place. The educated Englishman, like Bauman’s grazing tourist, reverences the place, but only for what is visible, i.e. consumable. The grazer goes from sight to sight enjoying the views while they remain palatable, but “as they eat what they came for they find the supply of tasty tidbits fast running dry” (Franklin 2003, 208). Chesterton’s Englishman concerns himself with material aspects of the landscape and does not have an emotional attachment toward the sites he visits. Bauman’s grazer may have a diminishing emotional attachment to visited sites but neither traveler has an appreciation for the Other’s attachment to those places. As Chesterton phrased it, by admonishing the traveller who “only reverences the place, and does not reverence the reverence for the place” (Chesterton 2001, 242). This is perhaps Chesterton’s strongest defense of place as a concept if “reverencing the reverence” can be thought of as Chesterton’s admiration for senses of place.

Given Chesterton’s criticism of educated travellers who do not appreciate the Other’s sense of place, it may come as no surprise that Chesterton disliked museums as a tourist destination and as a means of gaining knowledge of place. First, Chesterton criticized the eclectic nature of museums. Secondly, Chesterton criticized the way in which visitors were directed from one exhibit to another:

[W]e have passed from the age of monuments to the age of museums. We have been afflicted with the modern idea of collecting all sorts of totally different things, with totally different types of interest, including a good many of no apparent interest at all, and stuffing them all into one building, that the stranger may stray among a hundred distracting monuments or the pilgrim be lost among a hundred hostile shrines. When the traveller saw the statue of the hero, he did not see written on the pedestal: “This way to the Collection of Tropical Fungi,” in which he possible felt no interest at all. When the pilgrim found his way to the shrine, he did not find that the priest was eagerly waving him on to a glass case filled with the specimens of local earth-worms. (Chesterton 1991b, [1931] 478)
Regarding the first of Chesterton’s criticisms, with his strong appreciation of place, Chesterton objected to mixed collections from numerous places being exhibited in one building as if it was just natural for them to be together. For Chesterton, this eclecticism was rootless. Tuan takes note of this rootlessness, “The museum reflects a habit of mind opposed to one that perceives place to be rooted, sacred, and inviolable. The museum, after all, consists wholly of displaced objects. Treasures and oddities are torn from their cultural matrices in different parts of the world and put on pedestals in an alien environment” (Tuan 1977, 194). In one of his articles called “A Visit to Holland” written in 1922, Chesterton (1989a) writes that before visiting Holland he knew little of it except what he saw of it in paintings in the National Gallery in London. Chesterton quipped “It is odd…that we should make such a patriotic claim for a place full of foreign pictures” (Chesterton 1989a, 364).

Chesterton’s second criticism is the way in which museum visitors are directed from exhibit to exhibit by way of signs or verbal directions. This brings to mind Bauman’s grazing tourists who move from place to place as they get bored with each successive site. In Chesterton’s critique, though, the visitor is told to move on. Bauman’s tourist might, in probability, choose to stay at a particular site or at the very least, in the same town as the site. Chesterton’s museum visitor may leave when the museum closes, and sooner if the museums pathways are open for successive streams of visitors. In Chesterton’s view, this situation differs from visiting monuments, in which the visitor can linger and enjoy a particular monument and its setting within the natural and cultural landscape at his or her own pace. Rather than being directed from site to site as in the
case with museums, Chesterton believes monuments were often meant to be seen accidentally by passers-by (Chesterton 1991b, [1931]). “It was meant for the passer-by, perhaps in the hope that he would not merely pass by; perhaps in the hope that he would pause, and possibly even meditate. But he would be meditating not only on something that he had never seen before, but on something that he had never expected to see” (Chesterton 1991b [1931], 477). In this example, the visitors are both peripatetic but Chesterton believed monuments can offer more in the way of surprise. A visitor may round a corner or see a monument in the distance that he or she did not expect to see. It may be a rare occasion indeed to suddenly discover that you are in the middle of a museum.

Conclusion

According to Chesterton, museums were canned collections with little hope for adventure. In his view, when museums did offer something exciting it was all too often something that was not related to the place or not related to other items in the museum. Chesterton’s strong appreciation of place as a concept colored his criticism of museums, trends in travel and tourism in general. Chesterton was in many ways a supporter of idleness as a means of gathering understanding and admiration of place and the Other. Chesterton promoted idleness as means of experiencing other peoples and their place. This love of idleness is also apparent in Chesterton’s preference for monuments over museums. Chesterton’s fictional tourists may delight in the unexpected appearance of the monument, but the travellers who go to see things they have knowledge of, such as the Sphinx or Great Pyramid, face disappoint if it is felt that their long journey was not worth
the time, money and effort to make the trip, or as Bauman phrased it “destinations worth
the costs of travel lose their allure fast, often faster than it takes to reach them” (Bauman
2001, 109). The disappointed traveller, in Chesterton’s view, is often the one who is in
too much of a hurry to see things he or she has heard about, seeing site after site without
considering them within their geographical or historical contexts. More importantly,
Chesterton believed, the disappointed traveller is one who does not learn about himself.
Chesterton criticized modernity for its embrace of space. More importantly, though, he critiqued those who embraced modernity’s mantra of further and faster while at the same time taking security in technology. Chesterton pointed out that travel technology works in two directions. If ‘our’ people can leave ‘our’ homeland and travel across the globe quickly other people likely have similar options to come to our homeland. In the years between the two world wars, Chesterton admonished the English who cheered the excitement of speedy travel, the conquering of space, yet at the same time took refuge in the insularity of place. England had not been invaded. This was true, but in the years shortly after his death in 1936, Chesterton’s beloved England was attacked by German bombers. Chesterton’s warning came true. The “aeroplane” was not simply a contraption for English travel. Under Hitler’s Germany it became a weapon intent on destroying England as a nation. America learned a similar lesson on September 11, 2001, that passenger jets, normally used for travel, can also be used as weapons of terror and destruction. Seen in this light, Chesterton’s warning to interwar England foreshadowed America’s situation today. Technology is not simply for the privileged, but can also be used as a weapon against them.

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years between the two world wars, Chesterton admonished the English who cheered the excitement of speedy travel, the conquering of space, yet at the same time took refuge in the insularity of place. England had not been invaded. This was true, but in the years shortly after his death in 1936, Chesterton’s beloved England was bombed by German bombers. Chesterton’s warning came true. The “aeroplane” was not simply a contraption for English travel. Under Hitler’s Germany it became a weapon intent on destroying England as a nation. America learned a similar lesson on September 11, 2001 when America woke up and learned that the planes that passenger jets, normally used for travel, can also be used as weapons of terror and destruction.

Chesterton had a profound appreciation for place, and consequently place played a central role in his geographical imagination. His career spanned the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, a time of momentous geopolitical change. At its height at the turn of the century, the British Empire declined in the aftermath of the First World War and consequently internationalism grew in popularity. Imperialism, with its decadent love for distant places, gave way to internationalism and a sense of placelessness. Geopolitical imaginations shifted to the point that place became to be less popular than space. Transportation technologies made travel quicker and electronic communications made the world even more connected. Increasingly, Westerners began to view the world as though it could be crossed as easily as scanning one’s eyes across a map of the world. This idea began with imperialism and the red covered maps of the British; it continued with internationalism and views that the world is one universal brotherhood; and it continues today with real and imagined notions of globalization.
One of the most significant changes in geographical imagination arose out of the unparalleled destruction of the First World War. Hoping to avoid a repeat of that carnage, many took a dim view of imperialism and nationalistic sentiments that were seen as a cause of the First World War. Many who disfavored imperialism and nationalism considered internationalism a peaceful alternative to the violence of imperialism and nationalism, but Chesterton viewed this as a veiled attempt to eliminate the Other by making the world and its people more homogeneous by conforming to Modernist ideologies disfavoring place for space. In Chesterton’s opinion big-business, especially American, was more concerned with opening markets and finance than understanding the Other. According to Chesterton, America was the new imperial power in the world and would increase its control and influence over the affairs of the world. He deemed this as dangerous to world security as Prussian military expansionism, which he decried for causing the First World War, and feared it would result in another world-wide war. Chesterton’s fears that the world was coming under increasing control by corporations is expressed well in the thought of the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who argues that humanity is losing control over its daily lives. Democracy has been exchanged for consumerism. In his critique of imperialism Chesterton criticized imperial meddling in the affairs of the Other. If Bauman is correct, and Chesterton’s fears have been realized, then globalpolitans (Castells 2004) are the new meddlers and the whole of humanity is their Other.

As a critic of imperial and international geopolitical imaginations, place played a prominent role in Chesterton’s thought. Chesterton was an Englishman at heart and
identified strongly with English history and heritage, yet he eschewed narrow parochialism while at the same time wishing other peoples the opportunities to identify themselves with place in their own unique ways. The purpose of this thesis has been to document and examine Chesterton’s criticism of imperial and international geopolitical imaginations and how Chesterton believed the Western, especially English, geopolitical imaginations over-simplified the Other. Through the lens of the imperial geopolitical imagination the Other was an exotic subject to be controlled. In the case of the imperial English, as Chesterton posits, the Other was a source of pride. Chesterton frequently criticized the English for placing their hopes, their geographical imaginations if you will, “out there” while ignoring England itself as a place worthy of admiration. During the interwar years and the rise of internationalist geopolitical imaginations, the Other was still admired from a distance, as in the case of imperialism, with the difference that the Other was viewed also as a brother. Chesterton believed universal brotherhood was political fiction, and that universalism was possible only by disregarding “sacred insects” (Chesterton 1989b [1919]), things revered by the Other.

Understanding the Other takes time and effort. Chesterton criticized imperial and internationalist understandings of the Other for making broad generalizations and reducing them to a few easily phrased adjectives (Chesterton 1987 [1908]), but he was equally critical of tourists for not caring to learn about the Other. Chesterton (1986 [1905]) believed travel to be an important means of understanding other people and places, but he believed travellers spend too much of their time seeking popular sites and ignoring the mundane, banal everyday lives of the local people in the places they visit.
Chesterton believed this was a great disservice to both the traveller and the local people. Bauman (Franklin, 2003) makes a similar point that today’s travellers move from site to site “grazing” and never getting fulfilled with their travels. Chesterton believed it was a compliment to the Other to forego popular sites to witness the everyday lives of the people. Chesterton (1955 [1909]) made a similar point to Bauman’s in his essay Tremendous Trifles in which two men meet a fairy and make opposite wishes. One chooses to be a giant so he can easily walk the planet admiring the earth’s large and grandiose sites, but he soon becomes bored. The other, like Chesterton, chooses to be small so that he could appreciate the tremendous details in the everyday. The world has a scarcity of magnificent sites, otherwise they would not be grand, but merely common. There are significantly more mundane sites, including the everyday lives of ourselves and our neighbors, and the everyday lives of the Other, whether they are nearby or half a world away. In Chesterton’s story the first traveller resembles Bauman’s grazing tourist, constantly on the move from place to place to see as many “big” things as possible. The second traveller looks at the world as through a microscope and sees wondrous detail (Chesterton 1955 [1909]). Chesterton’s lesson to the traveller is twofold: first, appreciate your home. Chesterton would have everyone develop a sense of place appreciating their own lives as well as the lives and places of the Other.

In other, perhaps more profound, ways Chesterton’s geographical imagination was parochial and nationalistic. He was first and foremost an Englishman and he regularly lamented the fact that the English found it unpopular to identify themselves as English. His geographical imagination, however, did not stop with England and this raises an
important point: Geographical imagination goes beyond issues of identity. Perhaps, more importantly, it concerns ideas about how the world’s social and political units relate spatially to one another. It is within this context that Chesterton’s social thought is highly geographical. Chesterton’s geographical imagination left plenty of room for other people’s imaginations. In his amicable way, Chesterton encouraged genuinely understanding the Other but opposed taking them for granted. In this sense Chesterton was a romantic, admiring the complexity and diversity of humanity. Taking note of Chesterton’s romantic notions of humanity would not give one his complete story. Chesterton was also a critical thinker who critiqued the role that the powerful, whether they be governments or corporations, played in shaping people’s views of the Other. Chesterton was both a great defender and critic of the geographical imagination, whose thought lived up to the words of Relph that “[A] major task in teaching a geographical sense of place…is to convey what might be called cheerful suspicion. This involves careful, unprejudiced observation of places and landscapes that is neither supercilious nor cynical” (Relph 1997, 221). In my view, Chesterton is the exemplar of this type of thinker, and it is my contention that he should be included among other great geographical thinkers who value sense of place.
Works Cited


