Versions of G. K. Chesterton’s fairy tale ‘Prince Wild-fire’ have appeared in print two—now three—times, but each appearance, beginning in 1993,¹ has been crucially and substantially incomplete. Both previous printings of the text—published long after Chesterton’s death—present the story’s verbal content in various states of completion, but each of those versions excised the illustrations, doodles, and other graphic decorations with which the manuscript is replete. These images are fundamental to a reader’s understanding of the fairy tale not only because they ‘illuminate’ and extend the story, but also and primarily because in many ways they are the story; that is, their composition is at least coeval—if not antecedent to—the linguistic text. As the version presented here shows, Chesterton’s method of composition was inextricably verbal and visual. Neither word nor image dominated his imagination; rather, both were fundamental aspects of Chesterton’s authorial practice. We have therefore decided in this presentation of the text to privilege the incomplete autograph manuscript found in Chesterton’s notebook (now the British Library’s G. K. Chesterton Papers Add MS 73320A), which includes Chesterton’s illuminations and reveals the author’s creative mind at work.

This manuscript draft of the story is the earliest one known to scholars.² A later set of corrected typescript proofs (Add MS 73270) contains a largely complete draft of the linguistic text.³ To allow readers to see the shape of the entire fairy tale, we have transcribed the typescript from the point at which the autograph manuscript breaks off.⁴ While offering readers a chance to see the entire text (such as it exists), our transcription focuses primarily on notebook 73320A, which presents a cohesive snapshot of Chesterton’s early compositional method. Our editorial approach has been one in which we intervene only lightly, emphasizing the gestational aspect of these drafts by retaining Chesterton’s cancellations (struck through) and insertions (silently incorporated into the manuscript transcription; set off by carets in the typescript transcription). In the typescript transcription, we have silently incorporated holograph emendations related to spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, and spacing, but we have highlighted lexical additions or subtractions and retained all uncorrected errors. In both transcriptions, we have indicated in square brackets our own interventions into the copy-text.

² The British Library’s catalogue entry for Add MS 73320A directs readers to ‘Add. 73317 D for an [even] earlier draft’ (p. 92 of the printed catalogue for the G. K. Chesterton Papers additional manuscripts 73186–73484); however, this manuscript is not a draft of ‘Prince Wild-fire’, but of Chesterton’s ‘Prince Lucio’, a distinct, yet similar and roughly contemporaneous fairy tale. Possibly working on the two tales at the same time, Chesterton himself twice conflates Wild-fire and Prince Lucio in Add MS 73320A, referring to the former as the latter on f.7v and f.10r.

³ According to the British Library’s catalogue record, this printer’s copy (Add MS 73270) was prepared in 1938 by Dorothy Collins for an expanded edition of The Coloured Lands, which was put on hold after the outbreak of World War II. Collins presumably transcribed this version from another notebook, which is not in the British Library or any other public collection. This notebook could have simply been lost, but it is also possible that Collins borrowed the notebook from Lawrence Solomon or another of Chesterton’s friends.

⁴ Readers interested in consulting a ‘clean’ version of the entire linguistic text as collated by D. J. Conlon can find his transcription in The G.K. Chesterton Quarterly, no. 7 (Summer 1998), pp. 1-6.
More important than the verbal text—versions of which have appeared in print before—is the first-time reproduction of Chesterton’s original illustrations and doodles. Chesterton’s later prominence as a writer and the tendency of some publishers and editors to privilege text over image often overshadow his early facility as an artist. By reuniting pictures and prose, we offer to readers an exciting opportunity to explore Chesterton’s visual imagination.

Written toward the end of Chesterton’s time at St Paul’s School, ‘Prince Wild-fire’ tells the story of a boy born out of place. Into the pacific ‘Palace of Rest’ comes the ‘restless’ Prince Wild-fire disturbing and upsetting everything in his wake. His restlessness soon leads him to climb the palace walls and begin a quest to help ‘a dark-eyed little girl’ escape the cruelties of her grandmother, an amateur witch. Wild-fire helps the girl—in Jack and Jill fashion—fetch a bucket of water from the top of a hill and finish her chores; however, the witch returns early and confronts him, foolishly revealing the only thing that can harm her is a sword at the top of Goblins’ Hill. After fetching the sword, Wild-fire returns, but the witch magically flies the house away. Hopeless and restless, Wild-fire wanders after them, and, descending down a steep slope, he finds a ruined, slanting city outside of which lies a skeleton. Here (f.13v) the text abruptly breaks off, but, fascinatingly, full-page illustrations and borders continue intermittently for another twenty-two pages. One would expect a correspondence between these images and the ending represented in the later typescript, but this is not the case. Only four (of twelve) illustrations that come after the text breaks off in notebook 73320A seem to relate to the story’s later ending. In both the illustrations and the typescript, Wild-fire has to cross a grass field that turns into a horde of evil steeple-hat creatures (f.22r, ts pp.79–80) in order to reach a village of houses with steeple-hats (f.20r, ts. p.82) where he uses his sword to search a church, find Gertrude, and defeat the witch. However, in notebook 73320A
there are several additional scenes that do not appear in the later typescript: Wild-fire climbing a steep slope (f.18r), fighting his way through living tombstones (f.21r), standing triumphant upon a group of enemies (f.23r), and possibly an additional—or at least expanded—episode of Wild-fire wandering through a dark, mysterious wood (f.24r). In other words, this notebook seems to show Chesterton’s imagination in a gestational state: playfully chasing after imaginative possibilities.

We know that the story predates March 1892 because Chesterton began writing other stories and essays in the unfilled borders and blank leaves between illustrations, and one of these pencilled pieces corresponds to a talk given at the Junior Debating Club (JDC) on the 26th of March (and published in The Debator shortly thereafter) discussing ‘the lack of the moral’ in the aesthetic school of poetry, particularly Swinburne and William Morris (f.19r). Meanwhile, in the dedication to Lawrence Solomon, Chesterton calls his story ‘this nonsense’ and asserts that it is ‘a trifle better / Than the Nonsense he had the honour of compiling / previously on the same subject’ (f.1r). This previous ‘nonsense’ is most likely a reference to an earlier notebook (BL Add Ms 73318A) also dedicated to Lawrence Solomon and likely finished before September 1891, containing three complete fairy-tales: ‘The Wild Goose Chase’, ‘The Taming of the Nightmare’ and ‘The Queen of the Evening Star’. Thus, Chesterton seems to have worked on this version of ‘Prince Wild-fire’ sometime between September 1891 and March 1892, possibly during the Christmas holidays when he would have had the time and distance from his friends ‘to work alone’ (f.1v).

Lawrence Solomon was a good friend and an original member of Chesterton’s beloved JDC, but he stood just outside Chesterton’s innermost circle of Edmund Clerihew Bentley and Lucian Oldershaw. It is, therefore, slightly surprising that Chesterton dedicated so many stories to him. Chesterton’s dedication of the three earlier fairy tales to Lawrence Solomon reads:
To Lawrence Solomon, J.D.C. who, though a critic, is still enough of a critic to be fond of Fairy Tales. This nonsense is affectionately dedicated by Another Baby.

Solomon was the JDC’s librarian and known in the group for his wide reading and astute appreciation of literature. Chesterton’s favourite epithet for him at the time was ‘the critic’, and the two shared a passion for fairy tales and playful nonsense. Lawrence Solomon’s name appears several other times in the ‘Prince Wildfire’ notebook: once as the Pied Piper of Hamlin (f.43r), and once as ‘the brave, dogged wise little critic, with subdued manner and thoughtful, happy eyes’ (f.45v). Indeed, his name haunts the notebook all the way to the end as it concludes with several draft letters addressed ‘Dear Lawrence’ (probably written during a trip to Italy sometime after Chesterton left St Paul’s). Along with his brother Maurice, Lawrence Solomon is probably best known as one of Chesterton’s Jewish friends, gestured to in the *Autobiography* and by scholars to exonerate Chesterton from the charge of anti-Semitism. However, the fact that Chesterton dedicated so many of his earliest stories to Lawrence Solomon suggests that in Chesterton’s final year of school Solomon may have had a more significant impact on Chesterton’s formation than has yet been recognised. At the very least, it would appear that Chesterton highly valued Solomon’s opinion as a critic of literature and fellow lover of fairy tales and nonsense.

According to the dedication, ‘Prince Wild-fire’ is ‘a medley mixed […] of Grimm, Gargantua, Gulliver, Orlando and Don Quixote’ (f.1v). The most obvious connection between these stories and ‘Prince Wildfire’ is the quest or journey, a motif that is particularly prominent in Chesterton’s juvenilia and one that remained dear to him throughout his literary career (e.g. *The Man Who Was Thursday*, *The Flying Inn*, and the introduction to *The Everlasting Man*). The narrator is self-consciously ironic, and thus at least partially in the satirical tradition of Rabelais, Swift
and Cervantes, although Chesterton also had numerous Victorian fairytale models near to hand. Andrew Lang’s *Prince Prigio*, first published in 1889, has a light, playful tone and tells the story of a prince cursed with being too clever, and W. M. Thackeray’s ‘The Rose and the Ring’ also gently mocks fairytale conventions while narrating the comic misadventures of Prince Giglio. Chesterton’s efforts to balance a light tone with serious content is perhaps most reminiscent of the fairy tales of George MacDonald, an author he later claimed ‘made a difference to [his] whole existence’.5

Like the fairy tale’s verbal text, Chesterton’s illustrations draw from numerous models. They at once embody the easy, comic line of *Punch*-affiliated artists such as Cruikshank, Doyle, Leech, and Thackeray and mimic the elaborate page-designs of the ‘book beautiful’ as exemplified by the works of Morris’ Kelmscott Press, founded in 1890. This clashing of ostensibly disparate decorative styles mirrors the text’s melding of whimsical and high-serious modes and echoes graphic precursors in which word and image contrast rhetorically. One might think of Cruikshank’s Hogarthian etchings for Grimms’ fairy tales (1823, 1826) or Walter Crane and G. P. Jacomb-Hood’s arts-and-crafts designs for some of the more wry stories in Wilde’s *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888). Unlike these examples, Chesterton’s prose and pictures, executed by the same hand, consciously and strategically mix genres in the service of a larger artistic vision. The cartoonish quality of some figures intentionally tempers the otherwise solemn, elaborate borders. For example, one can find on a single pen-and-ink-decorated page (f.2r) realistic and densely cross-hatched Gothic arches cohabitating with two figures—Gertrude and Wild-fire—whose facial features Chesterton renders in sparse outline.

Chesterton was well versed in the visual expression of 19th-century romance. His father had exposed him from an early age to the fantastic tales and ‘lavish illustrations’ of Victorian

children’s literature, as well as to the art and letterpress of adult books by Scott, Browning, Swinburne, Dickens, and Tennyson.\textsuperscript{6} Whereas much of the illustration that he encountered as a child took the form of steel or wood engravings, the increasing use of photomechanical methods of printing—halftone and line block—had liberated fin-de-siècle illustrators, who could rely on these processes to accurately and rapidly reproduce their work. Aubrey Beardsley famously exploited this freedom to produce his florid black-and-white designs, and it is notable that Beardsley’s and Chesterton’s artistic careers are cotemporaneous. While Beardsley’s parodic and grotesque drawings differ considerably from Chesterton’s more cartoonish designs—at times reminiscent of Edward Lear or Max Beerbohm—the styles of both artists are marked by fluid lines and share fundamentally autodidactic origins. Encouraged by his parents to pursue a career as a professional artist, Chesterton enrolled at the Slade School of Art in the fall of 1892, but his style, developed early, remained largely unaffected by his formal training, the bulk of which was spent not in art classes, but in ‘sit[ting] about and discuss[ing] the theory of art, life, and politics, or attend[ing] other lectures’ besides those on art.\textsuperscript{7} Chesterton resisted the reigning Impressionist dogma at Slade, ultimately rejecting a career as an artist in favour of one as a writer. However, he continued to draw in a style consistent with his juvenile, pre-Slade period from which his ‘Prince Wild-fire’ illustrations come.

The notebook contains 21 total drawings that have a clear and direct relationship to the manuscript. Of those, three are simple cartouches (f. 3v, f.4r, and f.5r) that decorate but do not interpret the text. Interspersed among the manuscript leaves are an additional two pages with drawings: an unrelated sheet of sketches and doodles (f.13v), which demonstrates the kind of doodling that characterises most of Chesterton’s notebooks,

\textsuperscript{7} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 14–15.
and another nascent pencil sketch (f.19v) that might be a study for the full-page illustration on f.18r. The 18 (or 19) illustrations that directly interpret the text employ a variety of materials and methods. Some are pencil sketches to which Chesterton likely intended to return in order to apply an auxiliary wash. For example, f.24r—in whose undecorated centre is the manuscript of another text—is an illuminated border drawn in pencil that could be depicting the ‘broken forests of bare, wintry trees’ described on f.11v. In another, full-page watercolour illustration depicting roughly the same scene (f.25r), one can detect some of the pencil lines of the original sketch over which Chesterton applied a watercolour wash in various shades of black and brown ink. Other illustrations, particularly those earlier in the manuscript, are pen-and-ink drawings that appear to be finished designs. For instance, the illustration (f.11r) depicting the moment in which Prince Wild-fire witnesses the witch’s cottage ‘flying far away over the mountain’ (described on f.9v) is a pen-and-ink drawing whose pencil draught is partly visible. From these examples alone, we can see that Chesterton’s method of composition—at least in this manuscript—was to draw his designs in pencil and then complete them in pen or with an auxiliary wash.

Beyond revealing the methods by which he created his illustrations, these examples demonstrate the relationships between word and image that Chesterton favoured. As we have seen, most of the illustrations engage in what Lorraine Janzen Kooistra calls the ‘quotation strategy in image/text relations’, in which the ‘artist produces a picture which is a visual double for the word in much the same way that literary critics copy a section of the work under investigation into their own texts’.8 The process of depicting linguistic content in a visual medium always changes the meaning of the text—even if only through concretisation or amplification—but quotational illustration

differs from other modes like impression or parody (for which Beardsley was notorious) by dint of its attempt to render its source material faithfully. For example, the full-page illustration on f.9r accurately represents Chesterton’s prose description of the prince’s seeing ‘on the highest peak of the hill [...] the hilt and blade of the magic sword [...] gleaming in the fitful moonlight’ (f.8r). So, too, does the full-page pen-and-ink illustration on f.15r faithfully depict the prince’s discovery of a ‘shattered and sinking wreck of an old city’, in which he sees a church spire ‘sloping like the Tower of Pisa’ and the ‘white gleam of a skeleton’ (f.13r).

While generally conventional in their relationships with the verbal text, Chesterton’s illustrations greatly enrich the experience of reading ‘Prince Wild-fire’. Not only are the drawings accomplished and fascinating accompaniments to the text, but their serio-comic style also encapsulates and amplifies the story’s simultaneously ironic and sincere tone. More important, the illustrated manuscript reveals—as do his notebooks more generally—the method by which Chesterton composed his texts. That is, we do an injustice to his work when we divorce text from image because Chesterton’s thoughts were perpetually shuttling between the visual and the verbal. The page of doodles (f.13v) nestled within these manuscript leaves illustrates particularly well Chesterton’s prodigious graphomania (*graph* here implying both the pictorial and verbal); whether creating *ex nihilo* from a blank page, finding relief from the labour of composition, or just unleashing his expansive imagination, Chesterton found great utility in moving from drawing to writing—and vice versa. Alzine Stone Dale provides a poignant description of this process as manifested in Chesterton’s Slade notebooks, in which he ‘behave[d] as he had always done at school: he scribbled on his drawings and drew all over his lecture notes’. 9 In the ‘Prince Wild-fire’ notebook, we see that the drawings actually precede much of the prose. The page-borders with empty text boxes (for

example, f.17r) suggest that Chesterton composed the fairy tale through a form of storyboarding, which also explains why the prose, failing to consume as much space as Chesterton expected, lags behind its corresponding pictures.

Author and illuminator, Chesterton disrupts the typically subsequent and subservient role of illustration. ‘Prince Wild-fire’ demands, in its unassuming way, that we rethink our approach to the verbal texts of authors with rich visual vocabularies. In that spirit, we present a restored version of this enchanting yet elusive tale.