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"MAN AS A CREATIVE ARTIST MAKING HIS SOUL": G. K. CHESTERTON'S DEFENCE OF FREE WILL AS PRESENTED IN HIS "THE MAN WITH TWO BEARDS" AND OTHER WRITINGS

Abstract. The article aims to present, on the basis of G. K. Chesterton's selected writings, how significant, if not crucial, the issue of free will is in his thought. References to free will in the writer's non-fiction works, including, for instance, his *Autobiography* and *The Everlasting Man*, form the background for a more detailed analysis of the issue under discussion in one of Chesterton's Father Brown stories, "The Man with Two Beards." For Chesterton, man's free will prevents them from being paralysed and enchained, guaranteeing, for instance, the culprit's potential to become reformed. The writer's article "The Mediaeval Villain," with its reflection on mediaeval mentality in the context of approaching villainy/human wickedness and free will, proves to be especially noteworthy when reading it along with the short story mentioned above. Mentions of other selected Father Brown stories featuring motifs relevant to the discussed topic also appear.

Keywords: G. K. Chesterton, free will, mediaevalism, villainy

Abstrakt. „Człowiek jako kreatywny artysta tworzący swoją duszę" – obrona wolnej woli przez G. K. Chestertona przedstawiona w „The Man with Two Beards" i innych utworach. Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie – na podstawie wybranych utworów G. K. Chestertona – jak znaczące, jeśli nie kluczowe, jest zagadnienie wolnej woli w twórczości tego pisarza. Odwołania do wolnej woli, jakie można znaleźć w jego dziełach niebeletrystycznych, na przykład w *Autobiografii* i *Wiekuistym człowieku*, stanowią tło dla bardziej szczegółowej analizy omawianego zagadnienia w jednym z opowiadań o księdzu

Brownie – „The Man with Two Beards." Chesterton ukazuje, że wolna wola człowieka zapobiega poczuciu sparaliżowania i chroni w sprawcy zbrodni potencjał nawrócenia. Artykuł Chestertona „The Mediaeval Villain," odwołujący się do średniowiecznej mentalności w kontekście ludzkiej nikczemności i zagadnienia wolnej woli, okazuje się niezwykle pomocny w analizie tego opowiadania. W artykule znajdują się również nawiązania do innych wybranych opowiadań o księdzu Brownie, w których można znaleźć motywy istotne z perspektywy podejmowanego tematu.

Słowa kluczowe: G. K. Chesterton, wolna wola, mediewalizm, nikczemność

INTRODUCTION

William Oddie in his *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy*, an epic study of Gilbert Keith Chesterton's formative years from his childhood to the publication of *Orthodoxy* (1908), complains that the writer's name seldom appears in the university syllabuses of both literature and theology departments.[1] Although Chesterton is often labelled as a literary critic, a novelist, a thinker and an essayist, to mention only some of his aspects of writings, it is indeed a pertinent question whether he can be considered a theologian. Étienne Gilson, for instance, once remarked that "[w]ith Chesterton, more than literature is at stake. Here in Toronto we value him first of all as a theologian."[2] In 2009, Aidan Nichols, the author of works on Hans Urs von Balthasar and Pope Benedict XVI, to mention just two names, published a book under the telling title *G. K. Chesterton, Theologian*. The reader may even come across such a statement as that of the Anglican D. R. Davies, who wrote that "Chesterton was not merely a theologian, he was theology."[3] However, bearing in mind all these examples of approaching Chesterton from the perspective of theology, one should note that researchers are in agreement that Chesterton cannot be called

1 William Oddie, *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 13.

2 Quoted in Ian Boyd, Introduction, *The Chesterton Review* 24, no. 4 (1998): 421.

3 Quoted in L'Abbé Yves Denis, "The Theological Background of Chesterton's Social Thought," *The Chesterton Review* 7, no. 1 (1981): 58.

a theologian in the sense of professional or academic theology.[4] As John Coates summarises, Chesterton "did not, in general, use the customary language, quote the appropriate authorities or stay within the frame of reference of theological scholarship."[5] A very interesting interpretation of the issue under discussion has been offered by David Pickering, who supports the view that at the basis of Chesterton's apologetics stands natural theology.[6] Referring to Pickering's remarks on natural theology itself, one can conclude that Chesterton does "argue to, not from, [certain] Christian doctrines,"[7] deriving his argumentation from "nature," human "experience" and "reason,"[8] among others. It is also worth mentioning that, as Pickering accurately describes, Chesterton employs this framework in both fiction and non-fiction writings, across many genres and with references to many disciplines.[9]

One of the examples of issues which continuously reappear in Chesterton's oeuvre and with which theology is also preoccupied is free will. The aim of this article is to present how Chesterton implements it in selected, widely acclaimed, Father Brown stories, with a special focus on one of them: "The Man with Two Beards." The background for this analysis is based on Chesterton's non-fiction writings, including, for instance, *The Everlasting Man* and his much less known article "The Mediaeval Villain." All these references expose how significant, if not crucial, the issue of free will is in his thought.

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4 See Stratford Caldecott, "Was Chesterton a Theologian?" *The Chesterton Review* 24, no. 4 (1998): 465 and John Coates, "Chesterton and Theology," *The Chesterton Review* 37, no. 1/2 (2011): 63.

5 John Coates, "Chesterton and Theology," *The Chesterton Review* 37, no. 1/2 (2011): 63.

6 David Pickering, "Chesterton, Natural Theology, and Apologetics." *The Chesterton Review* 44, no. 3/4 (2018): 495.

7 David Pickering, "Chesterton, Natural Theology, and Apologetics." *The Chesterton Review* 44, no. 3/4 (2018): 499.

8 David Pickering, "Chesterton, Natural Theology, and Apologetics." *The Chesterton Review* 44, no. 3/4 (2018): 500.

9 David Pickering, "Chesterton, Natural Theology, and Apologetics." *The Chesterton Review* 44, no. 3/4 (2018): 495–496, 503.

1. CHESTERTON ON FREE WILL[10]

Chesterton was preoccupied by the question of free will from the very beginning of his journalistic and literary activity onwards and used it in his innumerable debates with the adherents of different philosophies. It is worth noting that the *Clarion* controversy, in which Chesterton actively engaged in 1904 and in which he dwelled upon the issue of free will, is closely reflected in *Orthodoxy* (1908) and referred to in the *Autobiography* (1936). Indeed, so vital is this problem for Chesterton that he raises it at every stage of his writings.

It is in the *Autobiography* that one can find a passage of fundamental importance relating to the *Clarion* debate and devoted to free will:

> That this stage may be understood, it must be realised what the things I was defending against Blatchford were. It was not a question of some abstract theological thesis, like the definition of the Trinity or the dogmas of Election or Effectual Grace. I was not yet so far gone in orthodoxy as to be so theological as all that. What I was defending seemed to me a plain matter of ordinary human morals. Indeed it seemed to me to raise the question of the very possibility of any morals. It was the question of Responsibility, sometimes called the question of Free Will, which Mr. Blatchford had attacked in a series of vigorous and even violent proclamations of Determinism; all apparently founded on having read a little book or pamphlet by Professor Haeckel. […] It was the secularists who drove me to theological ethics, by themselves destroying any sane or rational possibility of secular ethics. I might myself have been a secularist, so long as it meant that I could be merely responsible to secular society. It was the Determinist who told me, at the top of his voice, that I could not be responsible at all. And as I rather like being treated as a responsible

[10] The remaining part of this article, starting here and with some minor changes, formed the subchapter titled "The Defence of Free Will" in *In Search of Truth: G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown Stories as the Medium of Moral and Philosophical Reflection*, a doctoral dissertation defended by the author at the Institute of English Studies at the University of Warsaw in 2018 (pp. 156–164).

The issue of the Clarion debate and references to Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* and *Autobiography* in the context of free will mentioned in the following two paragraphs appear in David Dooley, Introduction to *Heretics, Orthodoxy, The Blatchford Controversies* (Ignatius Press 1986), 7–20, 26–28.

> being, and not as a lunatic let out for the day, I began to look around for some spiritual asylum that was not merely a lunatic asylum.[11]

This explanation of Chesterton's conversion touches upon some crucial problems. First of all, he links the problem of free will with the problem of responsibility.[12] To deny free will means to reject responsibility. And this issue, according to Chesterton, belongs to "a plain matter of ordinary human morals." Just as the question of "human sin" may be simply observed "in the street,"[13] the question of responsibility, too, is one of the things that are considered to be "normal." In this seemingly inconspicuous part of his *Autobiography*, Chesterton makes a statement of profound significance: it is not the case "that [he] began by believing in supernormal things,"[14] but it was only the unbelievers' reasoning, abolishing "secular ethics," that made him oppose them. As Chesterton directly states, "[i]t was the secularists who drove [him] to theological ethics."

But the question of free will in Chesterton's thought has an additional, important, dimension. In *The Everlasting Man* (1925), he maintains that precisely because the Catholic faith cherishes free will, it is "a story" that is "true" and "a philosophy that is like life."[15] It is the only philosophy which preserves a "normal narrative instinct"[16] that stands at the root of the fairy

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11 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton*, in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton,* vol. 16 (Ignatius Press, 1988), 173.

12 In fact, the same association appears in, for instance, Chesterton's *St. Thomas Aquinas*, where he remarks that "Free Will, or moral responsibility of Man," is the value that "so many modern liberals would deny" and that "[u]pon this sublime and perilous liberty hang heaven and hell, and all the mysterious drama of the soul." Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton,* vol. 2 (Ignatius Press, 1986), 435.

In *All I Survey* (1933), in turn, he treats free will and responsibility, along with other things, as the indicators of the human. He agrees that "[t]he human things are free will and responsibility and authority and self-denial, because they exist only in humanity." Gilbert Keith Chesterton, '*All I Survey*': *A Book of Essays* (London: Methuen, 1933), 75.

13 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton,* vol. 1 (Ignatius Press, 1986), 217.

14 Chesterton, *The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton*, 173.

15 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 2 (Ignatius Press, 1986), 378.

16 Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, 378.

tale and which finds its full realisation in human life. "Exactly as a man in an adventure story," Chesterton writes, "has to pass various tests to save his life, so the man in this philosophy has to pass several tests and save his soul. In both there is an idea of free will operating under conditions of design; in other words, there is an aim and it is the business of a man to aim at it; we therefore watch to see whether he will hit it."[17] Significantly, this thought is also present in Chesterton's writings twenty years earlier, for it is in *Heretics* that he states that "life is always a novel" and that "[o]ur existence may cease to be a song; it may cease even to be a beautiful lament. […] But our existence is still a story."[18] It is the story for which, one can add after Chesterton, intellectual powers are insufficient because the thing it mostly needs is "will, which is in its essence divine."[19] Chesterton's assessment of the philosophies that do not respect the idea of free will and "sin against the soul of a story"[20] is particularly noteworthy and worth citing:

> There is none of them that really grasps this human notion of the tale, the test, the adventure; the ordeal of the free man. Each of them starves the story-telling instinct, so to speak, and does something to spoil human life considered as a romance; either by fatalism (pessimist or optimist) and that destiny that is the death of adventure; or by indifference and that detachment that is the death of drama; or by a fundamental scepticism that dissolves the actors into atoms; or by a materialistic limitation blocking the vista of moral consequences; or a mechanical recurrence making even moral tests monotonous; or a bottomless relativity making even practical tests insecure. There is such a thing as a human story; and there is such a thing as the divine story which is also a human story; but there is no such thing as a Hegelian story or a Monist story or a relativist story or a determinist story; for every story, yes, even a penny dreadful or a cheap novelette, has something in it that belongs to our universe and not theirs. Every short story does truly begin with creation and end with a last judgement.[21]

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17 Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, 378.

18 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *Heretics*, in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton,* vol. 1 (Ignatius Press, 1986), 143.

19 Chesterton, *Heretics*, 144.

20 Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, 378.

21 Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, 378–379.

The most serious accusation that Chesterton levels at the philosophies different from that encapsulated in the Catholic faith is that they do not follow "the story-telling instinct" and violate a story-like pattern that demands that the beginning of a story be in a different place than its ending.[22] Being unable to incorporate the notion of adventure, which is a perfectly natural consequence of free will, they display a kind of predictability and flatness. In Chesterton's view, even a popular story is in this context more attractive because it "belongs to *our* universe" (emphasis added) and is thus rooted in the reality man knows.

2. FATHER BROWN STORIES AND "THE PIVOT OF FREE WILL"[23]

Mark Knight emphasises that Chesterton rejects Nietzsche's conception of the Superman,[24] and just as the Father Brown stories do not feature the Superman figure, neither do they defend the idea of the arch-villain.[25] Flambeau, "once the most famous criminal in France,"[26] owing to Father Brown's detective (and spiritual) intervention, ends at first as "a very private detective in England"[27] and then as a husband and father of a large family. The reformed criminal becomes Father Brown's lifelong friend. Curiously enough, the man to whom the priest comes "for comfort,"[28] at the same time remaining his confessor, is none other than the "once-famous

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22 Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, 378.

23 This phrase comes from Gilbert Keith Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," in *A Miscellany of Men* (London: Methuen, 1912), 230.

24 Mark Knight, *Chesterton and Evil* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 32.

25 This is claimed by Mark Knight, who writes: "Chesterton's rejection of dualism meant that he also resisted the temptation to follow Doyle in the creation of an arch-villain. The character of Flambeau initially appears to follow in the footsteps of Moriarty […]. But rather than pursuing the Holmes/Moriarty binary, Chesterton quickly converts his great criminal to the forces of good." Knight, *Chesterton and Evil*, 43.

26 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, "The Secret of Father Brown," in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton,* vol. 13, *The Father Brown Stories: Part II* (Ignatius Press, 2005), 213.

27 Chesterton, "The Secret of Father Brown," 213.

28 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton,* vol. 13, *The Father Brown Stories: Part II* (Ignatius Press, 2005), 256.

criminal"[29] Michael Moonshine. Father Brown's genuine sympathy with reformed criminals and his deep concern for those not-yet-reformed is by no means coincidental. Just as Chesterton consciously locates a natural inclination towards evil in the Father Brown character, he also deliberately exposes the villains' capability for becoming reformed and, consequently, their potential for growing in virtue. Chesterton's belief in the existence of original sin is thus not left on its own, but it is meaningfully balanced by the concept of free will.

The issue of free will is touched upon in the Father Brown series in different stories and in different ways. It is handled in a direct way in, for instance, "The Strange Crime of John Boulnois," where Father Brown explains to Mrs Boulnois why he thinks her husband is not guilty of murder, saying: "Please do not think I mean that Boulnois could not be so wicked. Anybody can be wicked—as wicked as he chooses. We can direct our moral wills; but we can't generally change our instinctive tastes and ways of doing things. Boulnois might commit a murder, but not this murder."[30] It is interesting that on that occasion the priest distinguishes between two things: man's free will in terms of moral choice and some natural predispositions, which, following Chesterton's reasoning here, even if they cannot often be changed, do not interfere with morality as such. When discussing the problem of free will in the Father Brown cycle, one should also mention the situations in which Father Brown lets a criminal go unpunished or at least is ready to do so. Such a scene is present in "The Hammer of God," where Father Brown makes the murderer, Wilfred Bohun, decide if he will plead guilty or not: "And now come down into the village," says the priest, "and go your own way as free as the wind; for I have said my last word."[31] In "The Eye of Apollo," Father Brown stops Flambeau when he wants to catch Kalon, also a murderer: "'No; let him pass,' said Father Brown, with a strange deep sigh that seemed to come

29 Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 243.

30 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, "The Strange Crime of John Boulnois," in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton,* vol. 12, *The Father Brown Stories: Part I* (Ignatius Press 2005), 409.

31 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, "The Hammer of God," in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton,* vol. 12, *The Father Brown Stories: Part I* (Ignatius Press 2005), 188.

from the depths of the universe. 'Let Cain pass by, for he belongs to God.'"[32] The mystery of human wickedness arising from human freedom indeed seems to be as deep as "the depths of the universe." For sure, one should note that the recurrent motif of freeing criminals, which can be defined as a clash of human and divine justice, is undoubtedly broad and would require more analysis and comment. The thing that is, however, needed for the current analysis may be summarised in Chesterton's words:

> To say that we may punish people, but not blame them, is to say that we have a right to be cruel to them, but not a right to be kind to them.
>
> For after all, blame is itself a compliment. It is a compliment because it is an appeal; and an appeal to a man as a creative artist making his soul. To say to a man, "rascal" or "villain" in ordinary society may seem abrupt; but it is also elliptical. It is an abbreviation of a sublime spiritual apostrophe for which there may be no time in our busy social life. […] [I]t is obvious, anyhow, that when we call a man a coward, we are in so doing asking him how he can be a coward when he could be a hero. When we rebuke a man for being a sinner, we imply that he has the powers of a saint.[33]

The true regard for man is thus firmly grounded on the conviction that the worst sinner may become the first saint, and it both results from and protects a belief in human free will.

It is precisely the problem of human freedom of choice between sinfulness and sanctity that is the focus of the story "The Man with Two Beards" (1925). The narration of the crime follows an illuminating discussion between Father Brown and Professor Crake, the two "sharing a harmless hobby of murder and robbery."[34] The professor represents the science of criminology, while Father Brown presents himself, wittily contrasting the professor's profession, as a follower of hagiology: "the study

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[32] Gilbert Keith Chesterton, "The Eye of Apollo," in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton,* vol. 12, *The Father Brown Stories: Part I* (Ignatius Press 2005), 201.

[33] Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *Fancies versus Fads* (Methuen, 1927), 88–89.

I owe this quote to Aidan Nichols, who in his book *G. K. Chesterton, Theologian*, in a subchapter on free will, also comments on the issue of punishing criminals. For details, see Aidan Nichols, *G. K. Chesterton, Theologian* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2009), 137–138.

[34] Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 241.

of holy things, saints and so on."[35] Immediately after the criminologist describes different types of murderers, which he does with an extremely painstaking precision, Father Brown tells a story of a murderer who does not fall into any of the categories defined by the professor. According to the priest, the criminal did not have any motive for the murder, because "[h]e was not mad, nor did he like killing. He did not hate the man he killed; he hardly knew him, and certainly had nothing to avenge on him. The other man did not possess anything that he could possibly want. The other man was not behaving in any way which the murderer wanted to stop."[36]

The account of the crime events tells the story of "a worthy, though wealthy, suburban family named Bankes"[37] who, when Father Brown introduces them, are sitting "at the breakfast table"[38] and discussing the latest news reporting the release of "a once-famous criminal, known as Michael Moonshine."[39] The family is seriously concerned by the fact that the criminal, known for "his numerous burglaries,"[40] is supposed to be living now in their neighbourhood. Importantly, Michael Moonshine, as the narrator explains, never resorted to murder during his criminal undertakings. Moonshine's appearance in the area, however, generally triggers a sense of insecurity (in Mrs Bankes, for instance) or, as in the case of the family friend Daniel Devine, some sort of excitement. Shortly after, it turns out that there has been a robbery nearby and the hostess's jewels have been stolen. On top of that, the secretary at the house is found shot in the garden. The same situation takes place at the Bankes'. The only difference is that it is the dead body of Moonshine in disguise that is found in the garden, while the Bankes' son, John, claims to have shot the burglar in self-defence. Nevertheless, the truth revealed by Father Brown is that it is John who is the burglar and the murderer, while Michael Moonshine is completely innocent of the recent crimes. Thus, the man who was suspected

35 Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 241.
36 Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 242.
37 Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 242.
38 Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 242.
39 Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 243.
40 Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 243.

most appears to be blameless, while the other one, whom nobody would have accused of anything, emerges as the merciless culprit.

Michael Moonshine is a particularly interesting villain. The very fact that he breaks with his criminal past and becomes Father Brown's penitent and friend is undoubtedly extraordinary. In this respect, Moonshine resembles Flambeau, who also as a reformed criminal becomes Father Brown's friend. Naturally, more similarities between the two former villains could be found.[41] The most important issue here seems to be the fact that Moonshine's change was truly radical. As Father Brown reveals, "[i]t's an under-statement to say his reformation was sincere. He was one of those great penitents who manage to make more out of penitence than others can make out of virtue. I say I was his confessor; but, indeed, it was I who went to him for comfort. It did me good to be near so good a man."[42] It is also remarkable that even when Moonshine was a burglar, he was a burglar with some morals, because he

> had really shown some of the heroic rascality of Rob Roy or Robin Hood. He was worthy to be turned into legend and not merely into news. He was far too capable a burglar to be a murderer. But his terrific strength and the ease with which he knocked policemen over like ninepins, stunned people, and bound and gagged them, gave something almost like a final touch of fear or mystery to the fact that he never killed them. People almost felt that he would have been more human if he had.[43]

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41 One can notice, for instance, that the criminal past of both characters is described in a similar way: when it comes to Flambeau, the narrator talks about "a life of romantic escapes and tricks of evasion" (Chesterton, "The Secret of Father Brown," 213), while in Michael Moonshine's case the reader finds out about "his famous and daring exploits and escapes" (Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 243). The noun "adventures" is applied when the past of the culprits is mentioned: "after all his violent adventures," Flambeau "still possesse[s]" "the energy to retire" (Chesterton, "The Secret of Father Brown," 213), whereas Moonshine, as the detective Carver reflectively notices when he finds him dead, is shot "[a]fter all his adventures" (Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 254). Both characters become reformed criminals and settle down: Flambeau in a castle in Spain and Moonshine in the Bankes' neighbourhood. This symbolic movement from constant escaping and evading to settling down is by no means accidental.

42 Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 255–256.

43 Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 243.

It seems that some kind of "heroic rascality" in villains was of special interest to Chesterton. Not surprisingly, the same motif also appears when Father Brown tries to warn the not-yet-converted Flambeau against the inevitable consequences of his criminal choices. "There is still youth and honour and humour in you," says the priest to Flambeau, "don't fancy they will last in that trade."[44] And after some explanation, he summarises: "Many a man I've known started like you to be an honest outlaw, a merry robber of the rich, and ended stamped into slime."[45] Both cases of Flambeau's and Moonshine's characters demonstrate that there is some sort of inner life even in a robber, which is still operating, still at work, and which can change the direction of the human story. It seems to be this "stream of life,"[46] as Chesterton himself calls this power, that makes criminals halt on their lawless paths and then becomes the lifeblood of their growing in virtue, including becoming a saint, as in Moonshine's situation. This power is nothing less than free will itself.

Chesterton's article entitled "The Mediaeval Villain" collected in *A Miscellany of Men* (1912) can throw additional light on the questions under discussion. The starting point for writing this article was some "attempts at the whitewashing of King John,"[47] with which Chesterton "sympathize[s] […] because it is a protest against our waxwork style of history."[48] He is much against "stiff simplification" in the descriptions of historical figures and claims that "[a]nything is good that […] makes us remember that these men were once alive; that is, mixed, free, flippant, and inconsistent."[49] In Chesterton's opinion, King John "had a morality which he broke, but which we misunderstand"[50] and the reason for that can be

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44 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, "The Flying Stars," in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton,* vol. 12, *The Father Brown Stories: Part I* (Ignatius Press 2005), 101.

45 Chesterton, "The Flying Stars," 101.

46 Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 230.

47 Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 228.

48 Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 228.

49 Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 229.

Chesterton adds: "It gives the mind a healthy kick to know that Alfred had fits, that Charles I prevented enclosures, that Rufus was really interested in architecture, that Henry VIII was really interested in theology." Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 229.

50 Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 229.

defined as the question of free will: so natural for the mediaevals and so obscure for the moderns. Chesterton thus writes:

> The mediaeval mind turned centrally upon the pivot of Free Will. In their social system the mediaevals were too much *parti-per-pale*, as their heralds would say, too rigidly cut up by fences and quarterings of guild or degree. But in their moral philosophy they always thought of man as standing free and doubtful at the cross-roads in a forest. While they clad and bound the body and (to some extent) the mind too stiffly and quaintly for our taste, they had a much stronger sense than we have of the freedom of the soul. For them the soul always hung poised like an eagle in the heavens of liberty. Many of the things that strike a modern as most fantastic came from their keen sense of the power of choice.[51]

It is characteristic here that Chesterton does not only speak of free will as such. Referring to "the pivot of Free Will," he talks about free will as about the central point. And, as a matter of fact, for Chesterton, it really is the central point around which mediaeval thinking revolved and from which the moderns try to escape. He recapitulates: "[s]o strongly did they [the mediaevals] hold that the pivot of Will should turn freely, which now is rusted, and sticks."[52]

The whole question of cherishing free will by the mediaevals and defying it by the moderns has one profound consequence. The mediaeval people treated the villain (Chesterton is still discussing the example of King John) as "a man of mixed passions like themselves, who was allowing his evil passions to have much too good a time of it. They might have spoken of him as a man in considerable danger of going to hell; but they would not have talked of him as if he had come from there."[53] The mediaeval culprit was, therefore, still on his way, even if it was widely felt that it was a way leading to hell. There was still some hope for his improvement; he was in some process that might have had different outcomes. The people of a mediaeval culture "would not really have been […] surprised if he had shaved his head in humiliation, given all his goods to the poor, embraced the lepers

51 Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 230.

52 Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 233.

53 Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 231.

in a lazar-house, and been canonized as a saint in heaven."[54] In the modern mentality, on the contrary, this mediaeval villain would be shown "as a kind of degenerate"[55] and would be inevitably doomed and have no future.

At this point, it is worth turning to yet another issue that appears in the Father Brown stories. In "The Mediaeval Villain," Chesterton points to the forces by which the mediaeval sense of freedom came to be "darkened,"[56] which in his view were "[t]he Calvinism of the seventeenth century and the physical science of the nineteenth."[57] Interestingly enough, "The Doom of the Darnaways," which is another Father Brown story discussing the concept of free will, so eloquently framed by the light and darkness dichotomy, precisely refers to two types of deterministic power: magical (suggesting religious) and scientific.[58] As a matter of fact, Father Brown treats the two forces as actually one and the same thing, calling them "two tunnels of subterranean superstition that both end in the dark."[59] The priest explains:

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54 Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 233.

55 Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 232.

56 Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 231.

57 Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 231.

The argument goes as follows: "This sense of the stream of life in a man that may turn either way can be felt through all their popular ethics in legend, chronicle, and ballad. It is a feeling which has been weakened among us by two heavy intellectual forces. The Calvinism of the seventeenth century and the physical science of the nineteenth, whatever other truths they may have taught, have *darkened* this liberty with *a sense of doom*" (emphasis added). Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 230–231.

It is definitely worth emphasising how literally in "The Doom of the Darnaways" Chesterton applies precisely the motif of the dark in the description of the Darnaways' house (both outside and inside) and the characters' clothes. For further details, see Szymczak-Kordulasińska, *G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown Stories: The Priest Detective in Search of Truth* (Jagielloński Instytut Wydawniczy 2025), 175–176.

58 Suggestively, it is Father Brown, a Catholic priest, who is most interested in dispelling the magical superstition affecting the Darnaways. And he succeeds.

For a longer discussion concerning this short story, in the context of the motif of light and darkness and also free will, see Szymczak-Kordulasińska, *G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown Stories*, 174–181. Also in other places in this monograph, I mention, often in passing, the issue of free will. See, for instance, Szymczak-Kordulasińska, *G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown Stories*, 23, 32, 141, 145.

59 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, "The Doom of the Darnaways," in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton,* vol. 13, *The Father Brown Stories: Part II* (Ignatius Press 2005), 185.

> I don't see a pin to choose between your scientific superstition and the other magical superstition. They both seem to end in turning people into paralytics, who can't move their own legs or arms or save their own lives or souls. The rhyme said it was the doom of the Darnaways to be killed, and the scientific textbook says it is the doom of the Darnaways to kill themselves. Both ways they seem to be slaves.[60]

"The Doom of the Darnaways" thus offers another presentation of the same problem that emerges in "The Man with Two Beards." The conviction that man is inevitably bound by determinism, no matter of what kind it is, leaves man enslaved and paralysed, while the mediaeval ideal of free will, which is deeply rooted in Thomistic philosophy, lets people free and makes them capable of "sav[ing] their own lives or souls."[61]

How meaningful and ungenerous then, in the context provided above, is Professor Crake's categorisation of murderers from the beginning of "The Man with Two Beards." Father Brown seems to respond to this painstaking classification at the end of the story, saying that "there are no good or bad social types or trades. Any man can be a murderer like poor John; any man, even the same man, can be a saint like poor Michael."[62] This echoes Chesterton's words from "The Mediaeval Villain," where he writes: "We think of bad men as […] a separate and incurable kind of people."[63] For Father Brown (and for Chesterton) "a world where every one was piebald"[64] and where nobody had the slightest doubt that the ideal of free will is real was much more attractive. The very fact that Michael Moonshine "didn't want the old disguise [that he had put on as a burglar] any more, but he wasn't frightened of it" and "he would have felt it false to destroy the false beard"[65] proves that the former criminal fully lived a life of a free man. And so does Flambeau, who in the epilogue story tellingly titled "The Secret of Flambeau" honestly admits to having had a criminal

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60 Chesterton, "The Doom of the Darnaways," 185.

61 Chesterton, "The Doom of the Darnaways," 185.

62 Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 259.

63 Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 231.

64 Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 232.

65 Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 259.

past. As Grandison Chace remarks, Flambeau does it "of [his] own *free will*"[66] (emphasis added).

The moment when Father Brown discovers that it is Michael Moonshine who is dead is both deeply poignant and emblematic. On a symbolic level, the mediaeval villain is killed by the modern criminal; free will is murdered by the will which is capriciously free. This situation accurately reflects a contemporary phenomenon that Chesterton strenuously opposed: a blind progress which vehemently rejects the ancient and abundant past. He summarises in "The Mediaeval Villain":

> [w]e move on because we are not allowed to move back. But the really ragged prophets, the real revolutionists who held high language in the palaces of kings, they did not confine themselves to saying, "Onward, Christian soldiers," still less, "Onward, Futurist soldiers"; what they said to high emperors and to whole empires was, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?"[67]

Indeed, John Bankes, a man of business belonging to a family whose house can be described as "full of faded fashions, rather than historic customs; of the order and ornament that is just recent enough to be recognised as dead,"[68] does go "onward." As Father Brown says, his motor-car "will go far, as well as fast."[69] Unfortunately, in the priest's prediction, "it will not return."[70]

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66 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, "The Secret of Flambeau," in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton,* vol. 13, *The Father Brown Stories: Part II* (Ignatius Press, 2005), 378; emphasis added.

67 Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain," 234.

68 Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 249.

69 Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 257.

70 Chesterton, "The Man with Two Beards," 257.

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