



Autobiography as Mystery

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Renascence 69 (1):49-65 (2017)

Abstract

In "Autobiography as Mystery: Father Brown and the Case of G.K. Chesterton," Chene Heady argues that G.K. Chesterton's *Autobiography* complicates common scholarly assumptions about both genre and literary authorship. The popular Edwardian writer G.K. Chesterton produced an improbably vast and diffuse literary oeuvre. Chesterton's scholarly advocates have typically defending him by redefining him in more specialized and more manageable terms; he becomes either the sage-like nonfiction writer who wrote *Orthodoxy* or the mystery writer who invented Father Brown. However, Chesterton himself derided the cult of the expert, and mocked the tendency towards literary specialization as elitist. In his *Autobiography*, he refuses basic genre distinctions by insisting that the work should be read as a detective novel; the work's climax reverses the relationship between creator and creation, as Father Brown solves the mystery of G.K. Chesterton. By making this structural equation between autobiography and mystery, Chesterton asserts the fundamental identity between these hermeneutical enterprises. The *Autobiography* ultimately posits a fundamental equivalence between all the cultural practices by which we find meaning in the world around us, a premise that serves both to justify Chesterton's eclectic model of authorship and to enable him to hope for cultural unity in deeply divided interwar Britain.

Keywords

[Catholic Tradition](#) [Language and Literature](#)

Categories

[Philosophy of Religion](#)
(categorize this paper)





ISBN(s)

0034-4346

DOI

[10.5840/renascence20176914](https://doi.org/10.5840/renascence20176914)

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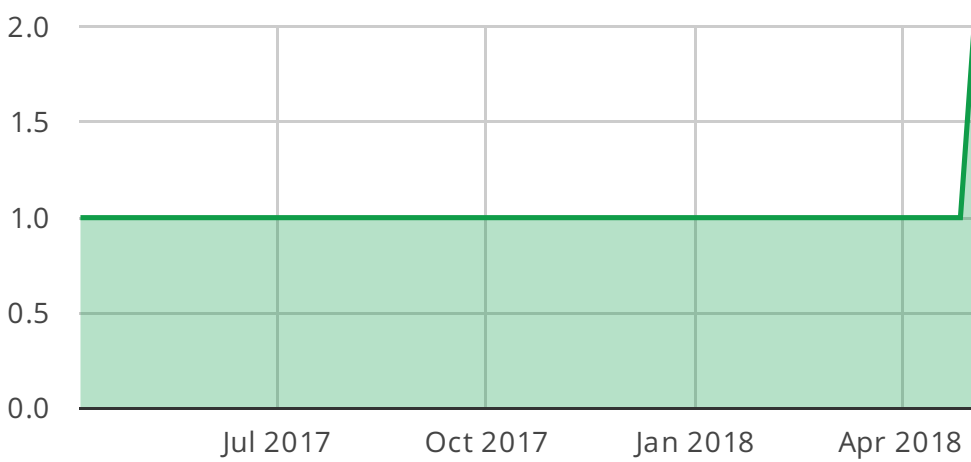
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