

## **Father Brown, Charity, and Christian Contributions to Critique**

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*Abstract: This essay approaches the topic of Christian poetics via a postcritical reading of the figure of Father Brown. I look to Chesterton's literary creation as an opportunity for thinking about Christian charity and its importance for the way in which literary critics practice critique. Along the way, the essay explores the meaning of the postcritical, plays with the conventions of the detective genre, and focuses on some of the recent contributions to the so-called method wars by scholars such as Bruce Robbins and Rita Felski.*

*Keywords: Christian poetics; detective fiction; Father Brown; G. K. Chesterton; postcritical reading.*

Approaching Christian poetics via one of G. K. Chesterton's literary creations may seem odd, the sort of mildly mysterious incident that features in many of the Father Brown stories. Why focus on someone who does not exist beyond the fictional page and our encounter with these stories? And why then proceed, as I am about to do, with linking the figure of Father Brown to recent debates about interpretation? One obvious answer is that any account of Christian poetics is determined by specificities of time and place, as we articulate how our interpretative practice is shaped by certain theological ideas and practice. Although reading is always a selective and personal endeavor, the insights it yields can still be meaningful and generative for others. Were this not so, those of us in departments of English would not waste our time talking about literature, which only ever offers limited vistas to the larger questions that concern us. That is a basic answer to questions about method. A fuller and hopefully more satisfying explanation of my approach will be worked out in the pages that follow, as I carry out an investigation into Father Brown, charity, and the Christian

contributions to critique. Following the well-trodden path of detective fiction, I will narrate how the material I am interested in is more closely connected than it initially seems.

Literary critics have long disagreed with one another about their methods of reading. For the most part these debates have been amicable, but this is not always the case. Over the last few years certain exchanges have become noticeably fiery and bad tempered, to the extent that Rita Felski and others have referred to them as “the method wars.”<sup>1</sup> Like so many wars, real and metaphorical, it is not always clear how we got to our current situation, nor what everyone is fighting about. Those who remember the theory wars of the late twentieth century will hear echoes of those earlier disagreements as we argue anew about how reading should proceed and what aspects of interpretation really matter. This time around, the arguments have less to do with the validity or otherwise of theory, and more to do with whether the term critique accurately describes established methods of reading and, if it does, whether this needs correcting through a postcritical turn. The meaning of that term postcritical, and our understanding of the critique on which it depends, are understood differently, and there are conflicting views, too, about whether existing practice needs revision. At stake here is the way in which we think about the shape and legitimacy of the discipline. In many respects, our current method wars repeat a longer history of discussion about critical vocabulary beginning with the prefix “post.” As with earlier arguments about terms such as postmodernism, postcolonialism, and postsecularism, a great deal of recent talk about the postcritical sees the habits of literary critics being played out in ways that can delight and frustrate participants. Despite our efforts at clarity as we talk about such terms, the experience of working on indeterminate literary texts is carried into our reading. This can entail privileging vagueness, temporality, and multivocality over the exactitude that tends to be automatically accepted as a good thing by scholars in disciplines such as analytic philosophy and mathematics. Literary critics can find themselves celebrating the mysteries of language, while also growing annoyed by the lack of a clearly defined starting point and our possible forfeiture of the ability to articulate a method of scholarship that makes sense to those outside the discipline.

Linking the word “post” with the broader difficulties accompanying all efforts at posting a message, the first section (“Envois”) of Jacques Derrida’s experimental book *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (1980, trans. 1987) explores the ambiguity of language, the extensive possibilities of form, the multitude of ways in which we read the same text, and the failure of our communicative acts to reach their intended audience. At least that could be the case, with Derrida introducing a note of uncertainty from the outset: “You might read these *envois* as the preface to a book that I have not written.”<sup>2</sup> Whether or not we do read these envois in this manner, the book is both spectacularly frustrating and a mystery that rewards those who are willing to persevere. In his careful engagement with the genre of detective stories, Derrida interrogates the capacity of that genre to deliver the certainty it is frequently thought to promise. One intertext for *The Post Card’s* investigations into the labyrinthine world of letters and communication is Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” (1844), an early piece of detective fiction. The influence of Poe’s tale on crime writers such as Chesterton is significant, which is part of the reason why I see an unlikely connection between the concerns that Derrida takes up and the reading practiced in the Father Brown stories.

Before we get lost in the world of detective stories, with clues that lead us down strange paths of inquiry, it is worth setting the scene for my investigation in this essay. Let me do so by detailing two specific possibilities that the term postcritical can entail. The first is a vision of literary criticism that seeks to break down our customary division of the creative and critical. There are many exemplars of this mode of writing, including my colleague John Schad.<sup>3</sup> As these *literary* critics insist, fusing the creative and the critical in a piece of writing draws on an older body of work within our discipline, one that includes the writing of French theorists such as Derrida, Hélène Cixous and Roland Barthes, but goes at least as far back as Oscar Wilde’s essay “The Critic as Artist” (1891).<sup>4</sup> This understanding of the postcritical is different, at least ostensibly, to a second understanding of the postcritical that takes its cue from the work of Rita Felski and finds itself at the center of the current method wars.<sup>5</sup> In her influential book *The Limits of Critique* (2015), Felski delineates a tradition of critical thought which seeks to expose and uncover, a mode of reading determined to get behind

and beneath a text to find out what that piece of writing represents. Felski is clear that she is seeking to understand the limits of critique, to figure out what it can and cannot accomplish, rather than dispense with such reading altogether. When she introduces the term postcritical in her final chapter, she presents it as a means of exploring other possible modes of reading while still acknowledging the “relationship to prior thought.”<sup>6</sup> Without leaving the work of critique behind, Felski treats the postcritical as a “placeholder for emerging ideas and barely glimpsed possibilities.”<sup>7</sup> In the monograph that follows, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (2019), she details some of the practical possibilities that the term postcritical might involve: attachment, attunement, relations, and resonance.<sup>8</sup> These possibilities lead Felski to a more sociologically oriented reading of literature, although she does not leave critique behind as she attends to the work texts do and examines connections between literature and readers. The postcritical, as Felski describes it, involves a broad church of interpretative possibilities rather than marking a radical break with the work of critique.

Some of us who work on the intersection of literature and religion have been especially interested in what Felski has to say. Lori Branch and I have previously written about our experience of coming to appreciate a link between the postcritical and the postsecular, and a fuller, more diverse set of investigations into such links can be found in the 2021 double special issue of *LIT: Literature Interpretation, Theory*, edited by Winter Jade Werner and John Wiehl.<sup>9</sup> I want to be careful here not to align religion and postcriticism too easily. Religion is a category of thought that Felski says very little about, and we should acknowledge that the category of religion is too complex and too contested to be tied to a single tradition of interpretation, however capacious we imagine that tradition to be. I am also aware that some of those who works on the intersection of Christianity and literature do not share my enthusiasm for Felski’s work. Still, I continue to think that her work makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of Christian poetics, both in the way it expands accounts of the critical options on offer and in its prompt to examine the practice of critique and imagine how that practice might be reshaped by the theoretical resources offered by theological practice and writing.<sup>10</sup> There are earlier precedents for reflecting on the interaction between

theology and those models of interpretation that might be grouped under the umbrella of critique. Paul Ricoeur's call in *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (1970) for a hermeneutics of suspicion and faith offers one prominent example of such a reflection, and Alan Jacobs's *A Theology of Reading: The Hermeneutics of Love* (2001) offers another.<sup>11</sup> The precedent provided by both scholars, and others like them, supports current efforts to consider how the postcritical provides a fresh opportunity to reflect on Christian poetics and ways of reading.

Part of the reason I draw on earlier thinkers for support is that some of my colleagues in literary studies remain skeptical that theology has anything to offer our discipline. That skepticism seems less pronounced now than it was at the start of my career, but it is a noticeable feature of responses to Felski, with some critics of her work warning about religion even though Felski does not dwell on the subject. Perhaps the most prominent instance of this entrenched suspicion about religion is the eminent scholar, Bruce Robbins. In his essay "Not So Well Attached" (2017) Robbins introduces the topic of religious belief to highlight the problems he thinks follow from reducing a commitment to critique. Early on, Robbins complains about a "holier-than-thou self-righteousness that Felski both accuses and, however reluctantly, also personifies."<sup>12</sup> The concern about religion emerges more explicitly later on in the essay, as Robbins turns his critical attention to Bruno Latour, introduces what he takes to be that thinker's "circuitous defense of religion," and proceeds to warn readers that "belief, unscrutinized belief, is of course where the collapse of critical distance leads."<sup>13</sup> Robbins's struggle to maintain his preferred critical distance when talking about religion is noticeable here, and it can also be seen in another essay, "Reading Bad" (2018), when he reviews Merve Emre's *Paraliterary: The Making of Bad Readers in Postwar America* (2017). The focus of Robbins's review is a defense of being able to make critical judgments, but as he makes that case, Robbins once again singles out religion amid our alleged hesitation to "call out wrongness or falseness or badness," and rails against "misplaced charity in matters of belief."<sup>14</sup>

One of the jumping off points for Robbins's concern about misplaced charity is a comment he cites from Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski, in their introduction to *Critique and Postcritique*

(2017), about the difficulty critique has with understanding spiritual belief and practice. Robbins reads this comment as “as a heavily camouflaged” call for critics to keep their “hands off sacraments and beliefs!”<sup>15</sup> I am not convinced that Robbins reads the editors of *Critique and Postcritique* correctly on this point, nor do I think that Robbins’s larger worry about religious immunity to criticism is merited. There are, of course, some parties in Christianity and other world religions that seek to keep belief out of critical reach, but for the most part, this way of thinking is the exception rather than the rule. As I look at the history of Christianity, I find communities of faith continually questioning and reimagining their beliefs, even though the process is sometimes interrupted by conspicuous instances in which the openness to new possibilities is arrested prematurely or met with violence. I suspect that Robbins would respond by saying that I read religious history through rose-tinted spectacles. It is not an unreasonable objection, albeit one that is impossible to adjudicate in this essay. But regardless of which of us is closer to the truth on this point, I think we agree that religious beliefs, like all other types of conviction, should remain open to criticism. That is why I find it strange that Robbins should seek to augment his criticism of Felski by turning to Latour and accusing him of suspending an investigation into religion. In *Rejoicing: Or the Torments of Religious Speech* (2002, trans. 2013), Latour is explicit about his own critique of double click religion—i.e., accounts of God that position their subject as unmediated and beyond further discussion—and I see nothing in either Latour or Felski that makes me suspect they are trying to render religion immune from scrutiny.<sup>16</sup>

While I appreciate Robbins’s commitment to truth and his desire to out injustice and falsehood wherever it may exist, I find it harder to understand why the postcritical should get in the way. Robbins is particularly worried about charity. Whereas I see critique as being quick to judgment and too self-assured in its efforts to stand back from the subjects it finds fault with, Robbins seems to worry that “a disposition to judge leniently and hopefully of the character, aims, and destinies of others, to make allowance for their apparent faults and shortcomings” (O.E.D.) compromises scholarly truth telling. I appreciate that I am the one in danger of being uncharitable here, but I find

it difficult to understand why being more circumspect about truth telling—our own or others—is a problem. It feels ironic to be the one making this point. As a Christian, there have been occasions on which I have been reminded, and had to remind other believers, that a religious commitment to truth is not compromised by charity. Jacobs notes that the worry about charitable interpretation compromising truth telling sometimes comes from “theologians whose training encourages them to think of the chief task of hermeneutics as the avoidance of error.” As he goes on to point out: “Avoiding error is a good thing, but it is probably not central to hermeneutics.”<sup>17</sup> Judgment, rather than the avoidance of error, is more important to the truth telling aspect of hermeneutics, but even that is not the whole story. If the historic failures of the Church have taught me anything, it is that those of us who express faith, and those who do not, would benefit from being less confident that we are in full possession of truth. That lack of assurance does not have to stop us from trying to tell the truth, nor does it need to get in the way of taking issue with what others might say. It does, though, invite us to think, deeply and repeatedly, about how we might modify the critique we practice, and how Christian virtues such as charity might play their part in helping us go about this.

If we are going to pursue a mode of critical inquiry that is more charitable to others, it may seem another odd choice on my part to look at detective fiction for an example of what this might involve. As Felski reminds us, “the parallels between critics and detectives have often been noted. Both pride themselves on their sharp-eyed gaze and powers of intellection; both decodes signs, decipher clues, and brood over intractable puzzles.”<sup>18</sup> Many of the best-known protagonists in the genre, from Poe’s Dupin to golden-age detectives like Hercule Poirot, possess a level of self-confidence that borders on arrogance, and the closed world that classic proponents of the genre prefer encourages a quasi-omniscient reading of the evidence by detectives who fit everything together and resolve the puzzle. Furthermore, Felski details the extensive analogies “between detection and critique as styles of suspicious reading that blend interpretation with moral judgment.”<sup>19</sup> Detective fiction is full of experts who rely on their authoritative knowledge to judge others. Yet there are exceptions to this pattern, including Father Brown. Almost everyone who

writes about Chesterton's stories recognizes how the detective priest is constructed as an antitype to Sherlock Holmes. Holmes insists on the authority of his own knowledge, evidenced through the multiple monographs he has written, whereas Father Brown defers to the authority of the church and does not boast about his intellectual achievements. Holmes is the dedicated expert on crime, albeit one who operates outside official channels, whereas Father Brown stumbles across crimes in the course of his priestly duties. And Holmes's scientific method involves dispassionate observation and deduction, whereas Father Brown's preferred starting point involves empathizing with criminals and imagining how and why they carry out crimes.

While Father Brown's contrast with Holmes seems to have been deliberate from the start, Chesterton comments on their differences explicitly later in the sequence of stories, through the introduction and epilogue to *The Secret of Father Brown* (1927). In the bookends to that collection of tales, the character of Grandison Chace refers to Holmes as the epitome of a certain type of detective before observing to Father Brown that "there is in many ways, a marked difference between your own method of approach and that of those other thinkers, whether fictitious or actual."<sup>20</sup> Father Brown's subsequent conversation with Chace is revealing. At first, Chace wonders whether Father Brown's refusal to follow in the footsteps of his peers is part of an occultic secret, a way of reading crime that resists method. Chace is quickly corrected, though, with an explanation from Father Brown that is no more interested than Latour or Robbins in a model of interpretation immune to criticism or incapable of being put into words. Father Brown goes on to explain that his method involves trying to put himself in the position of the criminal: "I had thought out exactly how a thing like that could be done, and in what style or state of mind a man could really do it. And when I was quite sure that I felt exactly like the murderer myself, of course I knew who it was."<sup>21</sup> Initially, Chace thinks that Father Brown is advocating a model of sympathy or psychological reconstruction, but Father Brown insists that his identification with the criminal is more than "a figure of speech."<sup>22</sup> Father Brown's insistence on this point is presumably prompted by a recognition of the distance between persons that sympathy continues to depend upon, and his caution may also anticipate



some of the problems that Audrey Jaffe outlines when she writes about how the Victorian “scene of sympathy in effect effaces both its participants, substituting for them images, or fantasies, of social and cultural identity.”<sup>23</sup> Aware of the limits of sympathy, Father Brown argues that his “method” is more like “a religious exercise” in which he tries “to get inside the murderer.”<sup>24</sup> Even then, Father Brown does not find the description of a religious exercise entirely adequate. Following the main stories in the collection, the epilogue finds Father Brown reflecting again and recounting that “when I tried to imagine the state of mind in which such a thing might be done, I always realized that I might have done it.”<sup>25</sup>

Father Brown’s understanding of sin, through hearing the confession of others but also and perhaps more significantly through the confession of his own thoughts, is the basis of a charitable disposition towards the faults he sees around him. When Chace wonders whether Father Brown is overly tolerant of other people’s wrongdoing, Father Brown insists that he recognizes both the seriousness of sin and the hope of it being addressed. His comments in the epilogue to Chace on this point are a refrain of an earlier conversation with Lady Outram in “The Chief Mourner of Marner.” A little while after Lady Outram chides Father Brown for his inaction and apparent lack of Christian charity, Father Brown returns to the topic of charity and insists on a basic difference between his “Christian” understanding and the “human charity” that Lady Outram and others have been working with. Father Brown declares: “Go on your own primrose path pardoning all your favourite vices and being generous to your fashionable crimes; and leave us in the darkness, vampires of the night, to console those who really need consolation; who do things really indefensible, things that neither the world nor they themselves can defend; and none but a priest will pardon.”<sup>26</sup>

While Father Brown’s charitable version of critique is appealing, it is not straightforward. One difficulty with these stories, that I have come to appreciate through the experience of teaching them to different groups of students, is that when his pearls of wisdom stop being arresting for readers—because we are predisposed against Father Brown from the start, or because our growing familiarity with his practice strips his judgments of an ability to surprise us—the stories can start to

sound pious. Readers who find it difficult to look beyond the problems that have marred the priesthood so conspicuously in recent years are likely to find that piety especially grating. Caution is needed, then, in looking to Father Brown as a model for charitable critique. Chesterton seems to have recognized this. Although Father Brown's approach to "faultfinding," to use Robbins's preferred phrase, involves charity, the priest is reticent in his conversations with Chace about being associated too closely with any particular method, including, presumably, the more generous version of critique I favor here.<sup>27</sup> Father Brown fears that theological intricacies will be lost if his practice is turned into a formula, but his reticence also follows from the realization that all of our claims sound hollow when they are separated from lived experience. Support for Father Brown's description of his religious practice gains strength in the epilogue to *The Secrets of Father Brown* when Flambeau, a former criminal who periodically helps the priest after turning away from his life of crime, steps out of the shadows and cites his own transformation as proof that Father Brown's pronouncements bear real world fruit.

The conversion of Flambeau is important for other reasons, too. Father Brown "arrests his [Flambeau's] wickedness by liberating him into the possibility that he could be good," but this is a possibility rather than a certainty.<sup>28</sup> Several of Chesterton's tales hint at the possibility of a criminal's change rather than confirming that it happens, and the transformation of Flambeau is a prominent reminder of how frequently roles are reversed in the Father Brown canon. These reversals are especially apparent in the first and arguably the best collection of the stories, *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911). In the opening tale, "The Blue Cross," the priest commits petty crimes in his pursuit of the master criminal, Flambeau; in the second, "The Secret Garden," the Chief of Police, Aristede Valentin, turns out to be the murderer, and subsequent tales narrate Flambeau's gradual move away from a life of crime. Chesterton's use of reversals is part of his broader love of paradox, and in the context of a genre concerned with faultfinding, the reversals serve to undermine any certainty we might have of who belongs on which side of the line. Thus, when Father Brown talks about his capacity to understand evil and identify with criminals, the stories provide an

accompanying body of evidence that sees some characters fall into a state of grace and others fall from it. The fact that Valentin's fall takes place in a biblically resonant tale named "The Secret Garden" offers a further reminder that sin is part of the human condition rather than the mark of a select number of individuals. In the topsy-turvy world of the Father Brown stories, those tasked with finding fault are discouraged from thinking that the fault always resides with someone else. On those occasions when Father Brown becomes too sweeping in his diagnosis of criminals' motivation, such as when he cites Valentin's hatred of religion as the reason behind his murder of Julius K. Brayne, the text further testifies to the limits of all faultfinding by suggesting that even Father Brown can get it wrong.

Father Brown's lived experience reminds us of the impossibility of anyone consistently living up to a more charitable model of critique. The need to come to terms with our failures, again and again, is why a genuinely Christian poetics must be at least as willing to cast its critical eye inward as it is to root out the faults of others. Developing a capacity for acknowledging our own shortcomings may not be unique to those who identify as people of faith, or even the most important aspect of Christian charity. Detailing Louis Althusser's refusal "to exonerate himself from suspicion," Felski notes how, "in his wake, various critics have brooded over the inevitable guilt of reading, calling for a scrupulous inventory of one's own interpretative sins." She continues:

But why, we might wonder, must reading always be a matter of guilt and innocence, crime and complicity. Such wording suggests a secular spin on Christian doctrine: we are all stained by the original sin of interpretation. Guilt no longer accrues to specific words, thoughts, or actions but is held to be intrinsic and inescapable—an existential state imposed by the fallen condition of language. Critique first sniffs out the guilt of others, only to engage, finally, in an anguished flurry of breast-beating and self-incrimination, a relentless rooting out of concealed motives and impure thoughts. *Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*—except that, in contrast to Christian theology, there is no hope of final salvation!<sup>29</sup>

I am not convinced that most secular critics return to the language of confession so readily but pausing on that question may well prove to be a red herring. More important is how Felski prompts us to see that a Christian understanding of charity should be more ambitious than tolerating faults or acknowledging our own complicity in sin. After all, the word charity goes beyond a disposition to judge leniently. It speaks of a Christian love that is complex: comprising leniency, humility, a willingness to indict ourselves as much as those around us, and so much else.

Jacobs explores the multidimensional nature of charity at length in his important book on the hermeneutics of love, and although his study offers an appropriate conclusion to my short essay here, it is not exactly where I want to leave things. The aspect of charity that Father Brown insists on most strongly in his conversation with Lady Outram has to do with redemption: “We alone are left to deliver them from despair when your human charity deserts them.”<sup>30</sup> That hope of redemption includes the potential transformation of individuals, on both sides of all faultfinding, but it involves more than that. The Christian hope of redemption seeks to address the larger causes of structural injustice and pursue a world in which all things are made new. If a charitable critique is going to be Christian in the manner described by Father Brown, it requires us to imagine differently, to see what does not currently exist or does not seem likely rather than just noticing that which is hidden. For literary critics to glimpse this sort of redemptive hope, we need to find a place for the imaginative possibilities of literary creation in our methods of reading alongside more obviously analytical efforts to perceive the world as it truly is. If Felski’s writing on the postcritical is valuable for thinking about Christian poetics, as I believe it to be, then so is the first meaning of the postcritical I spoke about at the start of this essay, with its determination to fuse the creative and the critical and see where this may lead. The ability of critique to penetrate appearances and see things as they allegedly are needs accompanying by a creative willingness to imagine the world differently and see things as they could be.

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<sup>1</sup> Rita Felski, "Introduction," *New Literary History* 45.2 (2014), v (v-xi). Felski is not the only critic to describe things in this way, and the "method wars" she spoke about back in 2014 have only become more intense in the years that have followed.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 3.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, John Schad's *Someone Called Derrida* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2007). *Someone Called Derrida* is not the most recent instance of Schad's postcriticism, but I highlight it here because of the text's engagement with Derrida's *The Post Card*.

<sup>4</sup> Those interested in knowing more about this first understanding of the postcritical might consult Stephen Benson and Clare Connors, eds., *Creative Criticism: An Anthology and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), the *Beyond Criticism* book series published by Boiler House Press, and some of the work being published by Punctum Books.

<sup>5</sup> For a helpful attempt to mediate between different viewpoints without succumbing to the language of violence and condemnation, see Jessica Swoboda, "How We Argue," *Textual Practice* (forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 173. For a thoughtful reading of Felski that also usefully maps a wide range of contributions to current thinking about the postcritical, see Tobias Skiveren, "Postcritique and the Problem of the Lay Reader," *New Literary History* 53.1 (2022): 161-80.

<sup>7</sup> Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, 173.

<sup>8</sup> See Rita Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Lori Branch and Mark Knight, "Why the Postsecular Matters: Literary Studies and the Rise of the Novel," *Christianity and Literature* 67.3 (2018), 493-510; *LIT: Literature, Interpretation, Theory* 32.1-2 (2021).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the special forum in *Religion & Literature* 48.2 (2016) in response to *The Limits of the Critique*. Felski offers a short response to the other contributors at the end of this forum, and the response is one of the rare occasions where she comments explicitly on her reading of religion. See "Entanglement and Animosity: Religion and Literary Studies" (189-95).

<sup>11</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); Alan Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading: The Hermeneutics of Love* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Robbins, "Not So Well Attached," *PMLA* 132.2 (2017), 371 (371-76).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce Robbins, "Reading Bad," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, January 21, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* Robbins is referring to the introduction to Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski, eds., *Critique and Postcritique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Bruno Latour, *Rejoicing: Or The Torments of Religious Speech*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading*, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, 85.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>20</sup> G. K. Chesterton, "The Secret of Father Brown," in *The Secret of Father Brown* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1974), 10.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>24</sup> Chesterton, "The Secret of Father Brown," 13.

<sup>25</sup> Chesterton, "The Secret of Flambeau," in *The Secret of Father Brown*, 170.

<sup>26</sup> Chesterton, "The Chief Mourner of Marne," in *The Secret of Father Brown*, 168-69.

<sup>27</sup> "I myself have a fondness for faultfinding." Robbins, "Not So Well Attached," 371.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Hurley, *G. K. Chesterton* (Tavistock: Northcote, 2012), 22.

<sup>29</sup> Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, 113-14.

<sup>30</sup> Chesterton, "The Chief Mourner of Marne," 168.