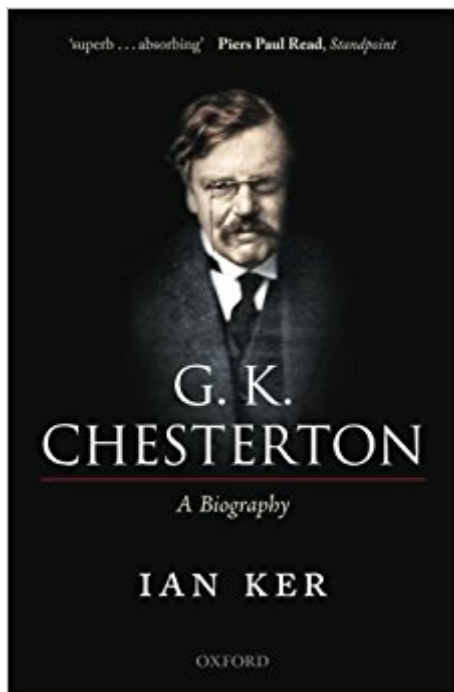


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# G. K. Chesterton: A Biography



## Synopsis

G. K. Chesterton is remembered as a brilliant creator of nonsense and satirical verse, author of the Father Brown stories and the innovative novel, *The Man who was Thursday*, and yet today he is not counted among the major English novelists and poets. However, this major new biography argues that Chesterton should be seen as the successor of the great Victorian prose writers, Carlyle, Arnold, Ruskin, and above all Newman. Chesterton's achievement as one of the great English literary critics has not hitherto been fully recognized, perhaps because his best literary criticism is of prose rather than poetry. Ian Ker remedies this neglect, paying particular attention to Chesterton's writings on the Victorians, especially Dickens. As a social and political thinker, Chesterton is contrasted here with contemporary intellectuals like Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells in his championing of democracy and the masses. Pre-eminently a controversialist, as revealed in his prolific journalistic output, he became a formidable apologist for Christianity and Catholicism, as well as a powerful satirist of anti-Catholicism. This full-length life of G. K. Chesterton is the first comprehensive biography of both the man and the writer. It draws on many unpublished letters and papers to evoke Chesterton's joyful humour, his humility and affinity to the common man, and his love of the ordinary things of life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Magisterial new biography."--*Catholic Herald*"This masterly biography has the potential to help establish Chesterton in what Ker regards as his rightful place as a major English author." --*The Independent on Sunday*"[A] tremendous biography."--*The Tablet*"A discriminating portrait that does

welcome justice to the full richness of [Chesterton's] hitherto undervalued work the need for a proper critical biography has long been acknowledged and Ker has supplied it for any true understanding of the scope of Chesterton's achievement Ker's biography will be indispensable."

--The Weekly Standard "This is a brilliant biography for a brilliant man."--Times Higher Education Supplement "Chesterton finally gets the big book he deserves a monumental study." --The National Catholic Register "Heroically researched. . . an impressive [book]. . . that conveys a powerful sense of [Chesterton's] personality."--DJ Taylor, The Independent "Magisterial.... a splendid book."--Touchstone "This is a full-length scholarly biography that will be indispensable for decades"--Church Times "Professor Ker's spirited and double-barreled attempt at a rehabilitation of his cherished subject is enjoyable in its own right, and takes in such matters as Chesterton's dialectical genius for paradox, the authority of the Father Brown stories in the detective genre, and the salience of Charles Dickens in the English canonical one."--Christopher Hitchens, The Atlantic "magnificent"--Peter Costello, The Irish Catholic ". . . detailed and compelling. . . "--Jay Parini, The Chronicle of Higher Education "[A] comprehensive biography." --The Lutheran "Spirited and ... Enjoyable." --The Atlantic "[This] terrific new biography.... gives us a portrait of the man in the full.... Any biography of this size is bound to have some elements of dry, encyclopedic chronology; but in Ker's book, they are far more the exception than the rule. On just about every page, one will find extended quotes from Chesterton, of the kind that display his personality and overall joie de vivre. The author made me rediscover my early love of Chesterton and his perspective on the world, and for that I am deeply grateful."--Michael Potemra, National Review Online "Ian Ker provides an account of the thought of Chesterton that surpasses, in its comprehensiveness, anything that has been previously written about him." --Bernard Manzo, Times Literary Supplement "Handles a complex subject with admirable lucidity. Mastering Chesterton's output is a heroic feat in itself."--Peter Washington, Literary Review "full of colossal wit, wisdom, and common sense...that is this magnificent book"--Catholic Times "There are many fine things in Ker's biography. Surely the best is found in his constant stress on the link between the comic and the serious in Chesterton." --Seven "Rewarding biography" --Tribune "Superb. . . absorbing"--Piers Paul Read, Standpoint "Reveals valuable new information." --The Times "Magisterial"--Matthew D'Ancona, The Sunday Telegraph "[A] masterful biography. Ker... has now become the most important source we have for understanding the master of paradox [Chesterton]... Ker's biography is essential, a labor of love to be sure..."--America "A big man, physically and intellectually, British Catholic author Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936) finally gets the big book he deserves.... a monumental study."--National Catholic Register "Ker is supremely capable of locating Chesterton's thought amid

that of his contemporaries as well as evaluating it critically. . . . What his biography adds is a judicious critical eye that will help make the case that Chesterton is bigger than the keepers of culture have allowed."--National Review"There are some genuinely good books on Chesterton. . . But the need for a proper critical biography has long been acknowledged, and Ker has supplied it. Now, and for the foreseeable future, for any true understanding of the scope of G.K. Chesterton's achievement, which captures not only the sage but the good, gentle, generous man, Ker's biography will be indispensable." --The Weekly Standard "For the sheer life-affirming, joyful Chesterton constantly bursts through the relentless narrative and there is much to discover as well as much to enjoy in the corpulence of this book."--Recusant History"This biography is a necessity for any student of Chesterton."--Towers"Ker's biography is indispensable for anyone who admires Chesterton's work and is interested in his life."--Commonweal"Ker has produced one of those rare biographies that is full of detailed information and personal anecdotes while never losing the author's original goal. We cannot recommend this volume too highly."--The Master's Seminary Journal"Ker has done a service arranging the material of Chesterton's life in chronological order and in one place...."--Andrew Ferguson, Book Forum

Ian Ker has taught both English literature and theology in universities in the United States and Britain, where he currently teaches in the Oxford theology faculty. He is the author and editor of more than twenty books on Newman, including John Henry Newman: A Biography (1988), as well as the author of The Catholic Revival in English Literature, 1845-1961 (2003).

This biography, it seems, fits the character of the man. It is light without being dismissive. It is detailed without being oppressive. It covers all the important aspects of his life; however it does not delve too deeply into his works, whether fiction or non-fiction, although it does point out some delightful comparisons of his work with those who came before. For example, he contrasts the hero of Poe's detective stories, Dupin, with Father Brown, and points out that the difference between the two is the fact of Sherlock Holmes. It also points out what Chesterton owed to Dickens for his Father Brown writing. If you know Chesterton already, this may be a bit too light. If you are meeting him for the first time, it is the perfect book for you.

I must say that after reading this book, one does have not only a greater understanding of the man and his relationships with others, friend and foe but also the controversies which shaped much of his writing. Of course to readily understand genius is a difficult and almost impossible task. It

does give a good idea of the times and the cultural conceits of the man even though it may appear prosaic and petty at times. If you wish to have a fairly good understanding and appreciation of the man as writer and as a person, this book should be satisfying to you although its style and tone may be rather pedantic.

This is a fresh exposition on a vast subject. Chesterton wrote an enormous amount and led an active social life. This book achieves its task brilliantly by setting the context of Chesterton's writing and also referencing previous biographies in a constructive way.

Having read with great pleasure Ian Ker's biography of Newman I was looking forward to a similar experience this time. I was not disappointed. Chesterton's life surprises Chesterton's readers as much as the books he wrote.

Ian Kerr has written an excellent biography of G.K. Chesterton. It is, and most assuredly, a work that we can trust for its accuracy and fidelity regarding both the thought and life of the great Gilbert Keith Chesterton.

Ian Ker is a wonder. His biographies of G.K. Chesterton and John Henry Newman are pretty near definitive.

A very thorough and scholarly book as I would have expected from Ian Kerr. It is a book to be read slowly in order to get the full effect of this extraordinary man, - PJM

I must admit this is the best biography of G.K. Chesterton I have read. It is insightful, inspiring and entertaining. Ker does a wonderful job of infusing the wit and wisdom of Chesterton in this book.

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