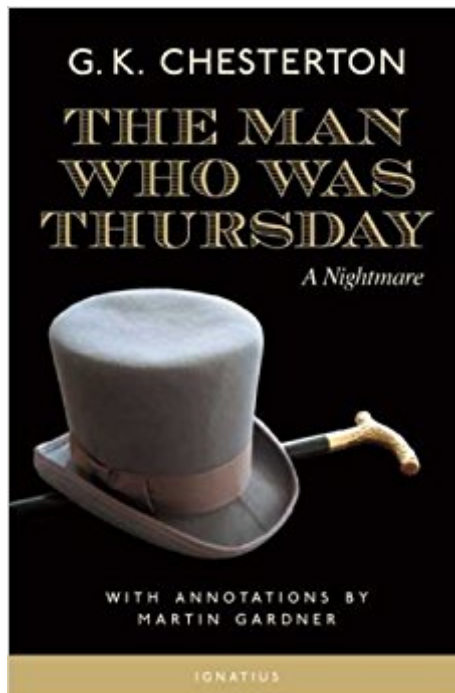




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# The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare (Annotated Edition)



## Synopsis

This edition of Chesterton's masterpiece and most famous novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, explicates and enriches the complete text with extensive footnotes, together with an introductory essay on the metaphysical meaning of Chesterton's profound allegory. Martin Gardner sees the novel's anarchists as symbols of our God-given free will, and the mysterious Sunday as representing Nature, with its strange mixture of good and evil when considered as distinct from God, as a mask hiding the transcendental face of the creator. The book also includes a bibliography listing the novel's many earlier editions and stage dramatizations, as well as numerous illustrations that further illuminate the text. Illustrated

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In an article published the day before his death, G.K. Chesterton called *The Man Who Was Thursday* "a very melodramatic sort of moonshine." Set in a phantasmagoric London where policemen are poets and anarchists camouflage themselves as, well, anarchists, his 1907 novel offers up one highly colored enigma after another. If that weren't enough, the author also throws in an elephant chase and a hot-air-balloon pursuit in which the pursuers suffer from "the persistent refusal of the balloon to follow the roads, and the still more persistent refusal of the cabmen to follow the balloon." But Chesterton is also concerned with more serious questions of honor and truth (and less serious ones, perhaps, of duels and dualism). Our hero is Gabriel Syme, a policeman who cannot reveal that his fellow poet Lucian Gregory is an anarchist. In Chesterton's agile, antic hands,

Syme is the virtual embodiment of paradox: He came of a family of cranks, in which all the oldest people had all the newest notions. One of his uncles always walked about without a hat, and another had made an unsuccessful attempt to walk about with a hat and nothing else. His father cultivated art and self-realization; his mother went in for simplicity and hygiene. Hence the child, during his tenderer years, was wholly unacquainted with any drink between the extremes of absinthe and cocoa, of both of which he had a healthy dislike.... Being surrounded with every conceivable kind of revolt from infancy, Gabriel had to revolt into something, so he revolted into the only thing left--sanity. Elected undercover into the Central European Council of anarchists, Syme must avoid discovery and save the world from any bombings in the offing. As Thursday (each anarchist takes the name of a weekday--the only quotidian thing about this fantasia) does his best to undo his new colleagues, the masks multiply. The question then becomes: Do they reveal or conceal? And who, not to mention what, can be believed? As *The Man Who Was Thursday* proceeds, it becomes a hilarious numbers game with a more serious undertone--what happens if most members of the council actually turn out to be on the side of right? Chesterton's tour de force is a thriller that is best read slowly, so as to savor his highly anarchic take on anarchy. --Kerry Fried

--This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

"A powerful picture of the loneliness and bewilderment which each of us encounters in his single-handed struggle with the universe."--C. S. Lewis --Review --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Sometimes a book will fall figuratively in your lap. My "To Read" list on Goodreads is growing faster than my "Finished" list. At some point I added G. K. Chesterton's masterpiece, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, to the list, but I don't recall why. Regardless, I was obviously in the mood for reading some early 20th century metaphysical literature chock full of allegory, metaphors, anarchists and sublime characters. (Don't we all get that urge from time to time???) Published in 1908, *The Man Who Was Thursday* begins with two men, Gabriel Syme ( a poet who believes in law and order) and Lucian Gregory, (a poet and anarchist) meeting in a garden during a party. After a lengthy discussion as to whether Man should be ruled by laws or have free will to rage against the machine, Gabriel accuses Lucian of not being a "real anarchist". Lucian counters by inviting Gabriel to a secret meeting of anarchists to prove him wrong. At this meeting Lucian is hoping to be elected to the

Supreme Council of Anarchists as *The Man Who Was Thursday*, one of seven men on the council, each named for a day of the week. The Council, lead by the man named Sunday, is planning to carry through with a planned assassination/bombing. What transpires next is a humorous, witty, frightening, and often philosophical look at the state of man, war, peace, God, and social order to finally reveal that nothing is as it seems. Did I mention that the subtitle of the novel is: *A Nightmare?* That's because many of the thematic discussions of the novel are pretty relevant today. Some things never change. For fans of Christian allegory or C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Papers*, this novel will please you to no end. For fans of thought-provoking philosophical discussions that will leave you endlessly pondering the book's meaning, this will please you to no end. Chesterton employs subtle and not-so-subtle metaphors that leave you guessing his ultimate goal for the novel. It's apparent right from the start: Gabriel = Law & Order. Lucian = anarchy/Free-will. Both meeting in A Garden. (I mean, c'mon!) The other members of the Council: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday et al, represent the burning questions of the time: Pessimism or optimism of Modernity; the benefits of scientific materialism; etc. And who is Sunday, the mysterious man who leads the council? But if you think it's just that easy, it's not. There are enough twists and turns, colorful characters and beautiful banter that make this *Nightmare* a wonderful experience. This is one of those books where you will be looking up words, highlighting passages and writing notes in the margins. Rare and wonderful is the novel that comes along that, after reading the last word, instantly bestows upon you the desire to read it again. *The Man Who Was Thursday* is just such a novel. While some of the events and situations may seem out of date, the novel will certainly provoke further discussion. Want to have fun? Suggest this for your next Book Club read and watch the sparks fly. 4.5 out of 5 Stars

*The Man Who Was Thursday* has a terrific, somewhat fantastic plot. The twists and turns are headed somewhere, but the writing keeps you on edge throughout. The story concerns "anarchists" setting about to do some circa 1912 mischief; or are they? The writing in this story is simply fantastic. Things like "we came out on a full-moon lit night, which ordinary circumstances would find romantic; for us, however, the landscape was more as if lit by a dead sun" make the hairs on your neck stand on end. This is the kind of writing---evocative, provocative, eloquent---that is so rare today. G.K. Chesterton's style is indeed elegant, yet follows the mannerisms of the characters active at different points of the story. He always lets us in on that part of the secret. The reading is, quite honestly, a

little winding at times; stick it out. You will learn new words! I can not recommend this book enough. I've already given out three copies and sent another to my sister-in-law for her Kindle. Whichever side of the anarchy/anti-anarchy, too-much-government/too-little-government, government-as-evil-controller/government-as-saviour you may be on, you will find comfort and kindred souls here. A masterpiece. G.K. is a master of the written word as well as of human thought and emotion; our current troubled times deserve to re-discover this great talent. I urge you to find him at [...] at once.

Chesterton once described this early work as a bit of moonshine, but a lot of readers clearly think it is more than that. If I described this as a "meditation on the human condition," you'd get the idea that the book isn't any fun --- and that's wrong, the book is a lot of fun. It is typically Chestertonian in that he can hardly get through a paragraph without thoughts and "asides" that are very thought-provoking. This was one of Kingsley Amis's favorite books --- a bit of a surprise, there! I would guess that Amis was mainly seduced by the gloriously inventive prose, but Amis himself says that he was drawn in by the completely original, Alice-in-Wonderland plot. And when you're done, you will probably be thinking about two of the main "issues" of the human condition: burning issues that are often turned into dry dust by academic philosophers: free will and the problem of evil. Aren't they related? Leaving aside natural disasters and "acts of God," how can we possibly account for the horrors of the 20th century, and the millions and millions massacred by that century's slave-drivers? The Chestertonian answer is, I suspect, the Christian answer: God would not have bothered to create a race of robots, but instead created man in His own image --- free to choose, and free to act. What follows from that, as night follows the day, is that SOME human beings will choose to do wicked and evil things. I also find it interesting that Ezra Pound and his circle positively LOATHED G. K. Chesterton, as some sort of backward bourgeois humbug. Well, time will tell. :-)

A very entertaining and stimulating read! Don't miss it, and don't miss Chesterton!

I always find Chesterton interesting and challenging, but difficult to follow. Have only read his non-fiction previously. Like his non-fiction, I'm not always entirely sure what he's getting at (this seems to be largely a parable), but many of the ideas this novel contains resonate and the ride is extremely fascinating.

This book is not as hard to explain as some people make it out to be. The phrase that summarizes this book is simply 'mind screw'. The Man who was Thursday follows Gabriel Syme, a man who gets

involved with a group of anarchists. It has some crazy twists and turns, fun characters, and above all some great lines Chesterton. But it is the type of thing that only people who love a little craziness in their fiction will enjoy.

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