

Thieves

Business



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

G. K. Chesterton, in one of his many stories exploring crime wrote: " Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property that they may more perfectly respect it." Chesterton, a late nineteenth century English poet, philosopher, dramatist, journalist, orator, theologian, biographer, and literary critic, is most famous for his fifty three short stories which he called the ' Father Brown Mysteries.

' These detective stories describe the adventures of a Catholic priest whose knowledge of human nature reveals criminal motivations and techniques. These stories differ from others of the era because Father Brown cares as much about the character of the criminals as he does about the details of the mystery. Unlike Sherlock Holmes, Brown recognizes the value of human interactions as he leads criminals to confess their sins before going to jail and encourages them to repent of their evil. As a clergy man, the intricacies of the crime are secondary to the criminal's place in society. Though the quote is not from a Father Brown story, it reflects similar values in the author's worldview. The use of the word ' respect' is interesting because one of its meanings is ' to esteem'.

By saying that thieves esteem the material value of property, Chesterton suggests that they do not value the historical, artistic, or nostalgic worth. The human connections which give value to, for example, a hat owned by Napoleon or a bed slept in by George Washington, far outweigh the value of the object itself. Like Charles Dickens' Fagin, who prizes a box of precious trinkets (which he will melt down) over the lives of those who stole the contents for him, the thief admires the value of the material, not the craftsmanship or the human effort involved in acquiring it. If thieves respect

only the substantial value of an object, they do not truly esteem the larger values of the society which created it. By making the property their own through theft, Chesterton is correct in recognizing the thief's crude esteem which places him beyond normal human connections.