

Possible topics for “The Wrong Shape” papers – ENGL 1158.107 - Lennon

- The solution to this rather dreamy mystery lies with a piece of paper that is “the wrong shape”; that is, its corner is mysteriously clipped. There is much here that's the wrong shape– the “attenuated and interrupted spectre of a street,” the oddly designed house, the crooked dagger, Quinton's sleeping form. Analyze the visual motifs of this story, and show how they drive its plot and themes.

- This is one of several stories we've read in which detectives are assisted by doctors. There's Holmes's stalwart companion Dr. Watson, of course; and, as in this story, the doctor of *The Murder Of Roger Ackroyd* turns out to be the killer. What's with all the doctors? Why do they serve as good foils, and why, in the case of the Chesterton and Christie, do they make good killers?

- Chesterton was quite a devout Christian, a position he arrived at after a youthful interest in the occult; many of his writings feature Christian allegories and philosophy. Here, Father Brown (and Chesterton) indulge in a debate between eastern and western religious beliefs that at times may seem quite un-politically-correct to the present-day ear. The mysterious Hindu repeats, “I want nothing”; Brown replies, “The Christian is more modest...he wants something.” Analyze this strange argument, and analyze the story as a religious allegory.

- At one point the Doctor asks if Father Brown has ever studied medicine. He replies, “You have to know something of the mind as well as the body...we have to know something of the body as well as the mind.” What does he mean? How does it relate to the themes and plot of the story?

- One of the running themes in the Father Brown stories is a crime that at first seems to have a supernatural explanation, then proves possible to explain using rational means. Read some more of these stories and consider the philosophical reasoning behind the theme.

- Father Brown's companion in this story, Flambeau, begins life in the series as a criminal, whose exploits Father Brown usually foils. Flambeau eventually reforms and gives up his life of crime. We've read enough stories now for you to write a good essay examining the relationship between the detective/policeman and the criminal. This relationship isn't merely that between two enemies– it is generally more complex than that, and includes several levels of surprising affinity.

- Father Brown issues a rather cryptic statement here that begins, “The modern mind always mixes up two different ideas: mystery in the sense of what is marvellous, and mystery in the sense of what is complicated.” Analyze this long paragraph of dialogue, then apply it to the events of this story, and the events of other stories we've read.

- Father Brown finds that the Hindu priest's three recitations of “I want nothing” each has a different meaning. Many of the stories we've read feature things that seem to mean one thing, then prove to mean another. Analyze the techniques of misdirection and double meaning in several of the stories we've read.