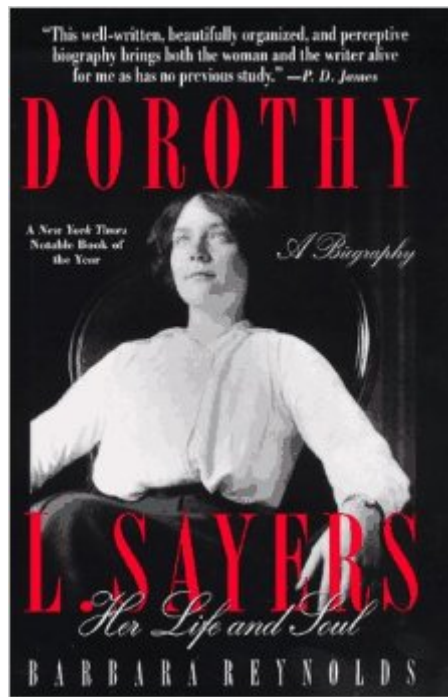


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Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life And Soul



Synopsis

Mystery writer Dorothy Sayers is loved and remembered, most notably, for the creation of sleuths Lord Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane. As this biography attests, Sayers was also one of the first women to be awarded a degree from Oxford, a playwright, and an essayist--but also a woman with personal joys and tragedies. Here, Reynolds, a close friend of Sayers, presents a convincing and balanced portrait of one of the 20th century's most brilliant, creative women. 30 b&w photos.

Book Information

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: St. Martin's Press (March 15, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0312153538

ISBN-13: 978-0312153533

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

Dorothy L. Sayers did more in her life than just create the aristocratic detective Lord Peter Wimsey. In addition to writing the Wimsey novels and short stories, she was one of the first female graduates of Oxford, a translator of Dante, a poet and a Christian apologist whose reputation at the time rivaled that of C.S. Lewis. Her longtime friend, Barbara Reynolds, draws on her memories of the woman as well as her voluminous correspondence and has written a lively account of Sayers' life. Those who admire the Wimsey novels will find their enjoyment heightened after reading this book. As I found in researching the "Annotating Dorothy L. Sayers"..., Sayers flooded her work with literary, historical and social references that represented the best of her education as well as her interests in the murderous and the macabre: Shakespeare, John Donne, Greek mythology, contemporary English music-hall acts, Gilbert & Sullivan, notorious 19th-century murders and snippets of classical Greek and Latin. To write "The Nine Tailors," which featured a church and its bell-ringers, Sayers spent two years studying campanology, and had to endure, she wrote, "incalculable hours spent in writing out sheets and sheets of changes, until I could do any method

accurately in my head. Also, I had to visualize, from the pages of instructions to ringers, both what it looked like and what it felt like to handle a bell and to acquire rope-sight." After the novel was published, she thought she had been caught out on only three small technical errors, but did well enough to be asked to serve as vice-president of the Campanological Society of Great Britain. But the books also contain much of Sayers herself.

Before reading this biography, as well as Ms. Sayers' letters which were edited by Barbara Reynolds, I could well believe that there was a good deal of Ms. Sayers in the cerebral Helen Vane character in the Lord Peter mysteries. Ms. Sayers was in the first group of women to receive a degree from Cambridge and became a well-known Christian apologist. Her mysteries contain erudite references and Latin phrases. However, Ms. Reynolds' biography establishes that Lord Peter and Ms. Sayers also share a number of characteristics, most notably exuberance. In addition to writing one of the most delectable descriptions of the male head in the English language, Ms. Sayers developed the Lord Peter character from a one-dimensional "silly ass" (it's apparently OK to casually use that descriptive word in England) to a more serious, fully-formed individual. In addition to having the resource of being a friend of Ms. Sayers, Ms. Reynolds was also given access to a number of previously unavailable letters written by Ms. Sayers. And Ms. Sayers wrote a great many letters, in addition to a prodigious body of work. This new information forms a basis for agreeing with her only--but unacknowledged--child that she did the best she could by him. He was raised in a very loving home by one of his mother's cousins who supported herself by fostering children, and was later adopted by Ms. Sayers and her husband. Ms. Sayers worked very hard to earn enough to provide for her child's financial needs. He--John Anthony Fleming-- states that from the age of six or seven he suspected that "Cousin Dorothy" was really his mother. It must have been a great source of pain to him that she felt she could not recognize him as her biological child, but when asked about this by Ms.

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