



Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul

Barbara Reynolds

Download now

Read Online ➔

Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul

Barbara Reynolds

Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul Barbara Reynolds

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.

Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul Details

Date : Published November 13th 2002 by St. Martins Press-3pl (first published March 18th 1993)

ISBN : 9780312153533

Author : Barbara Reynolds

Format : Paperback 416 pages

Genre : Biography, Nonfiction, Mystery, Biography Memoir, History

 [Download Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul Barbara Reynolds

From Reader Review Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul for online ebook

Richard Thomas says

An interesting biography which perhaps dwells more on her earlier life than her maturity and there is in consequence an impression that the author wished to finish her off. There's not much on the decline of her marriage nor on the later Peter Wimsey books. Instead there is a great deal on her religious works. Worth reading but you are left feeling that there is more to know.

Ariel says

A close friend of mystery novelist Dorothy Sayers tells her story and ties Sayers's books to autobiographical details.

Sayers was the daughter of a country clergyman, who went to Somerville College, the second woman's college permitted at Oxford, only 45 years after it was established. She worked in the nascent advertising business, taught school, and finally settled upon writing mysteries. Like her famous creation Harriet Vane, she "lived in sin" with a man who claimed to oppose marriage on philosophical grounds but was actually testing her and then wanted to marry her. Like Harriet, she refused him. But unlike Harriet, Sayers then had a rebound affair which resulted in an illegitimate son. She concealed his existence, having him raised by others until he was of school age and she got married and could "adopt" him. She posed to him as "Cousin Dorothy," though apparently he always suspected the truth. Sayers's mystery novels were at least in part sheer moneymaking schemes, fueled by the need to support her son, and when she had made enough money through them, she quit writing mysteries, went back to her scholarly roots to study Dante, and then became quite religious and wrote about Anglican philosophy. Her marriage was not very successful as her husband appears to have resented her worldly success. He dragged his feet about the "adoption" of her son. And was in general a drag, at least from the point of view of the friend/author writing the book.

Objectivity is always an issue when a friend writes a biography, and this author is a bit of an apologist for Sayers; she puts the best possible spin on Sayers's behavior to her son and is in much sympathy with Sayers's turn to religion after the success of her mystery series whereas most of us Sayers fans regard that as a bit of a tragedy. But since I was looking for keys to the "roman a clef" aspect of her novels for my presentation to my mystery book club, the book was perfect for my purposes.

Jillian says

I really warmed to this biography. It is some years since I read (and reread several times) her detective fiction and some of her essays. I liked the way Reynolds organised this biography, working chronologically, but identifying preoccupations and developing trends and themes. She manages to maintain a distance and analysis from her privileged position of long-term friend and makes the most of her personal knowledge without losing her professional judgement. Her source material is impressive and used to good effect.

Much of the culture and values in which she lived, studied and worked is familiar to me from my intense

reading, years ago, of C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, G.K. Chesterton and T.S. Eliot. I enjoyed her links to those writers. Their arguments, philosophies and theologies are familiar and comfortable. I very much enjoyed her Idea, Energy, Power model of the Trinity.

Barbara says

What a fascinating person Dorothy L. Sayers was! This book showed her as a serious thinker from childhood. She was one of the first women to graduate from Oxford (where she met Vera Brittain). In addition to her wonderful Peter Wimsey books, she wrote theological books and did translations of the Song of Roland and Dante's Divine Comedy. Of special interest to me, she was also a musician. She played violin and viola at a professional level, as well as some piano. She sang in a Bach choir that performed the B minor Mass.

Sometimes I read a biography about an interesting person and think, well, they were a very talented person but I certainly wouldn't want to know them. (Like the Somerset Maugham bio I just finished). But this biography made me wish I could have known Sayers. She was incredibly gifted and sounded like a wonderful person. She pursued her intellectual goals until the day she died.

Lisa Dornell says

A fascinating look into the life of an equally fascinating woman. If you're a fan of Miss Sayers' books, I highly recommend this for insights into the real-life persons behind such characters as Lord Peter, Harriet Vane, and Bunter. Plus a more than unusually frank look at her personal life, her marriage, and her son. The author, Barbara Reynolds, was a friend of Miss Sayers and that, perhaps, explains the information that I haven't seen elsewhere.

J says

Dorothy Sayers was a real character. There was much more to her than a mere writer of whizzy-yet-deep detective fiction in the Golden Age. Profound theological writings, thoughts on the artist's craft, and well-received "religious" plays, stage and radio, not to mention all that advertising copy, and reams of letters to friends and strangers alike. And of course there was much more to her than a mere writer - she was a superb violinist (apparently), full of energy, full of opinion, extremely unconventional (and largely got away with it) and not without her share of illnesses and sorrows in her closest relationships (where else? Stressful "love" affairs before marriage, one of which produced a son who was brought up in a friend's unofficial foster home ignorant of his parentage for most of his childhood, then a marriage whose simple happiness lasted only as long as her husband's health...).

This biography is a little twee (to be fair, the precocious only child of a rural clergyman rather demands that treatment), and is obviously the work of a friend. However, we don't need any more narkiness, needling, condescension or biting social critique... at least not in every book we read.

Holly Beaumont says

An interesting examination of the life and works of Dorothy L. Sayers. With the revised foreword, it reads a little backwards - which is a shame, as the author has otherwise taken care over the book's structure. All I knew of Dorothy L. Sayers beforehand was that she was the author of the Lord Peter Wimsey detective stories, which have endured more in popular culture than her religious works. This biography introduced me to Dorothy L. Sayers the woman and the intellectual. She made some interesting observations about the spirituality of creativity and was clearly a woman determined to live her best, most fulfilling life.

"The literature of power... does not tell us anything we didn't know before but it works upon the great emotional forces which are in us already, and by suggestion and illusion and by the splendour of noble sound it stirs us up to respond to its stimulus, so that we really feel greater, wiser, more enthusiastic and altogether bigger people, just in the same way that great music does." Dorothy. L. Sayers

Karlyne Landrum says

I've had this sitting on my desk for review for several months now because I wanted to take the time to make insightful comments and justify my 5 star rating. But if I wait for that time, I'll never get the rest of my garden planted or dinner made or kids played with. So, therefore, all I'll say is that this book makes me sad that I never knew Dorothy L. Sayers in the flesh and extremely happy that I know her through her books!

Ruth says

Really, just so good. I'm on the lookout for other good bios of Sayers, so if any of you have any on your radar, please speak up.

Matthew Mitchell says

Fascinating study of a fascinating woman. This books is well-researched, carefully written and sympathetic to its subject.

I would say that it is also comprehensive, but I found myself wanting more information about Sayers' days in advertising (the background for "Murder Must Advertise") and her friendships with the Inklings C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien (not much shared here, made me wonder if there isn't much to the story or if it was laid out).

There are sections where I felt we were given too much information--I don't feel it's necessary or beneficial to have her sexual history and dirty laundry aired for the whole world. I wish I had skipped those chapters.

All in all, however, it is a workmanlike portrait of a unique woman, a gift to the church. DLS is one of my all time favorite authors. Lord Peter Wimsey is my all time favorite detective (yes, more than Sherlock Holmes),

and the love story that evolves between Peter and Harriet Vane is the greatest love story in English literature (or, at least, my favorite). So, it's a pleasure to now know much more about Dorothy L. Sayers, her life and soul. Recommended.

Chris Harrison says

Not a great read, unless you are a fan.

I have never read any of DLS's books. They may be good, I don't know and this Biography is no help. It's one of those that is simply a Time-Line narrative, bereft of insight. It's the 'she did this, on this date, then went to see this person'. A waste of nearly £8 for me. I deleted the book at 20%. It told me nothing and quite frankly, extensive quotes from letters is just lazy.

Colin Mitchell says

A well written and easy to read book of Sayers life and writing as may be expected by an academic, Dr. Barbara Reynolds, who had become a friend of Sayers after the war. A strange life, quite inhibited sexually, with her having an illegitimate son who spent his life with Sayers aunt Ivy who fostered him. Sayers parents were always kept in the dark and possibly never knew his background. Her father appears to have supported her to quite late in life. The final section of the book is taken up with her religious writing and the translation of Dante, this seemed to be her life after the war and as her marital relationship deteriorated. Well worth a read by any Sayers fans.

Kim says

Dorothy L Sayers was a poet, novelist, playwright, philosopher and translator and she makes a fine subject for a biography. Barbara Reynolds knew Sayers well, edited collections of her letters and completed her translation of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* and she makes a most suitable biographer.

The biography relies heavily on Sayers' letters. This is a good thing, because the letters are marvellous: she wrote them from childhood till the end of her life and they are clever, witty and full of insight into Sayers the woman and Sayers the writer. I read the first volume of the letters - *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers: 1899-1936: The Making of a Detective Novelist*- shortly before commencing this book, so the letters of that period of Sayers' life were still fresh in my mind. For this reason I learned less from the early part of the biography than I otherwise would have. I prefer the letters to the biography - no one could write about Sayers' life quite as well as she did herself! However, I learned more about Sayers' life after 1936 and in particular about her religious-themed plays and other writings. That part of the biography has instilled in me the desire to read the second volume of Sayers' letters - *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers: 1937-1943, From Novelist to Playwright*- and some of her other works, notably *The Mind of the Maker*.

If I have any criticism of Reynolds' work, it is that I wish that she had a wider range of sources at her disposal. I particularly wish that she had related more about Sayers' son and his attitude towards his mother. But that's a relatively minor criticism in the scheme of things. Reynolds' biography of Sayers is well-written, well-organised and interesting. It confirms for my long-held view that Dorothy L Sayers is someone I would

invite to one of those dinner parties I sometimes imagine: a dinner party to which I invite my favourite writers throughout the ages, just so that I could ask questions and listen to them talk. And it's pretty clear from Sayers' own writings and from this biography that Sayers would have plenty to say for herself. I, on the other and, would probably be too intimidated by her intellect and force of personality to say anything at all!

If you love Sayers' novels, then you will certainly find this biography worth reading.

Hilary (A Wytch's Book Review) says

A biography of one of my favourite authors written by one who knew her, reading this gave me a great background understanding of Dorothy L Sayers and I am glad to have read it! I will re-read the Wimsey books with a greater understanding now.

Margaret says

Upon rereading all of the Lord Peter Wimsey novels, I decided that it was high time I read a biography of their author, Dorothy L. Sayers. I chose Barbara Reynolds's biography because it had gotten good reviews and because I knew that Reynolds was a friend of Sayers (whose translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* Reynolds completed after Sayers died). After reading Reynolds's book, I think that Reynolds's closeness to Sayers was both a help and a hindrance to the biography.

Reynolds's narrative of Sayers's life is well-researched, working and quoting from many of Sayers's lively letters (I must track some of those down soon too). Her analyses of Sayers's work are thoughtful; I was particularly interested in the chapters about Sayers's religious writings, as I haven't read any of them. Presumably as a result of her friendship with Sayers, Reynolds is hesitant to criticize and is perhaps too defensive of Sayers at times; however, overall, Reynolds gives a vivid and perceptive portrait of Sayers's intense personality. I'd like to read other biographies of Sayers to see how they compare, but I'd certainly recommend this one.
