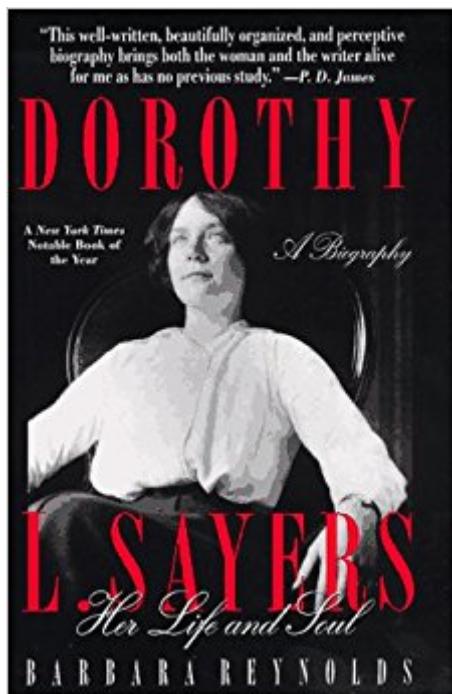


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# Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life And Soul



## **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**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Sayers, The Passionate Intellect of Reynolds's earlier book, is revealed as a more exciting person in this biography, published in observance of the centenary of the writer's birth. As the author of sophisticated mysteries featuring Lord Peter Wimsey, aristocratic detective, and feminist Harriet Vane, Sayers gained fame during the 1920s; she was also among the first women to earn a degree from Oxford, and when she died in 1957 at the age of 64 she was involved in translating Dante's Divine Comedy. She was religious as well as scholarly and expressed her Christian beliefs in stage and radio dramas. Sayers had a sense of humor and countless interests, from music to motorcycling. But she also suffered from failed love affairs and from secretly bearing a son out of wedlock in the intolerant moral climate of her day. Excerpts from her correspondence and publications illuminate Reynolds's discerning depiction of this intriguing woman. Photos. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Another ``interim report'' on the life (1893-1957) of the creator of Lord Peter Wimsey and reluctant Christian apologist, by a longtime friend, completer of Sayers's translation of Dante and author of *The Passionate Intellect: Dorothy L. Sayers' Encounter with Dante* (1989- -not reviewed). The problem all Sayers's biographers face is to reconcile her early career as a pioneer and leading theorist of the formal detective story with the religious plays, essays, and lectures to which she committed her last 15 years. In the absence of a collected edition of Sayers's letters, Reynolds still tries to make Sayers speak for herself whenever possible by quoting letters, conversations, and passages from her voluminous writings. The result is a view of the writer that Sayers herself would likely have approved of: as a generous, fiercely intelligent woman whose cardinal passion, her intellectual ardor, led her from Oxford to the hand-to-mouth London bohemianism that spawned the inimitably foppish Wimsey and then, quite logically, to a defense of the writer's imagination (*The Mind of the Maker*) that set forth Sayers's understanding of the Trinity. Despite some stiffness in the early chapters, and a disinclination to criticize her subject even mildly, Reynolds captures the ardent nature that sustained Sayers through her unrequited love affairs, her pregnancy without marriage, her lifelong support of the son she never publicly acknowledged, and the writing she felt certain from the beginning was her vocation. It isn't until the popular Wimsey books are behind, though, that Reynolds's matching passion comes out--she calls *The Mind of the Maker* and *The Man Born to Be King* Sayers's ``two greatest works''--and the biography comes into its own, even though only a few years of Sayers's life remain before Reynolds encounters the preemptive shadow of her own earlier book. Best, then, on the later years--the years of her own friendship with Sayers--that Reynolds has already described so sympathetically. Fans of Lord Peter may feel let down. (Thirty b&w photographs) -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The story of a remarkable woman who began her career as a writer writing advertisements, progressed to mysteries (Creating Lord Peter Whimsey), concluding with religious writings and finally completing a landmark translation of Dante's "Inferno". It is the story of an amazing woman, who always insisted on the inclusion of the "L" when her name was written, took a similar firm stand on the progression of her career and her life. Frequently writers who see themselves as classic academics or gifted word smiths who have been forced to support themselves early in their careers by writing advertisements or mysteries call this work a prostitution of their gifts. Not so Sayers, er...Dorothy L. Sayers. She believed she could not reach the highlights of "The Man Who Would Be King" or the translation of Dante without the former work of creating the Guinness Toucan ad or

gallant Lord Peter Whimsey. She believed the gift of creativity, the act of creation in each of us is a gift of God. Her book, *Mind of the Maker*, states this proposition clearly. Dorothy L. Sayers was a gifted, unique individual who sought, and I think successfully found, an understanding of her gifts and channeled those gifts into very meaningful contributions to an understanding of our relationship with God.

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. Reynolds shortly before his death, he had become reconciled to the situation. He appears to have been a child to be proud of--earning a scholarship to Cambridge and graduating with a First degree. I highly recommend this biography.

This is a great biography of an extraordinary writer, one who was of the same intellectual calibre as G K Chesterton - in fact she was perhaps a better writer because she gave more thought to what she wrote rather than letting it all pour out day by day (!) Reynolds knew Sayers well in her later years, and so can give a first-hand picture of the real person. She also relies on innumerable letters from Sayers and to Sayers, and material that has been handed on through conversations with

Sayers' friends. There's so much good stuff in this book that I was disappointed to find I'd come to the end (not always easy to see in advance with a Kindle version). Sayers' thinking about writing, creativity, living, and Christianity was always on the button, and plenty of it is extracted in this book. Thank goodness for Kindle highlights!

This is a fascinating and complete biography of Sayers, with plenty of notes on sources and thorough citation. Barbara Reynolds is an exceptionally good writer herself and had the additional advantage of knowing Sayers personally. My interest never flagged, and I learned much that I had not previously read anywhere.

She was a fascinating woman who spoke to her times and reaches across the years to ours. I did a performance of her reading the lecture "Are Women Human" as a part of our Women's Leadership Conference and all were amazed (at her words). If you really want to see a power house woman of her times, if you know who the Inklings were, if you are interested in England of that period - get this book. Parts are an easy read and parts will keep you up late trying to digest.

A wonderful biography of a phenomenal thinker, writer, many faceted woman. This biography has many circuits of thoughts and ideas to reflect on. I re-read parts of this book from time to time just to integrate ideas found in other great works of literature, philosophy, drama, theology.

Well written bio by a friend and writer who knew DLS and worked with her. But it fell just short for me in unlocking the life of DLS--can't pin down the reason. Still, well worth reading about this fascinating woman.

Fascinating book about a fascinating person. I have to follow up the author's assertion that Sayers was not anti-Semitic. I had read to the contrary.

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