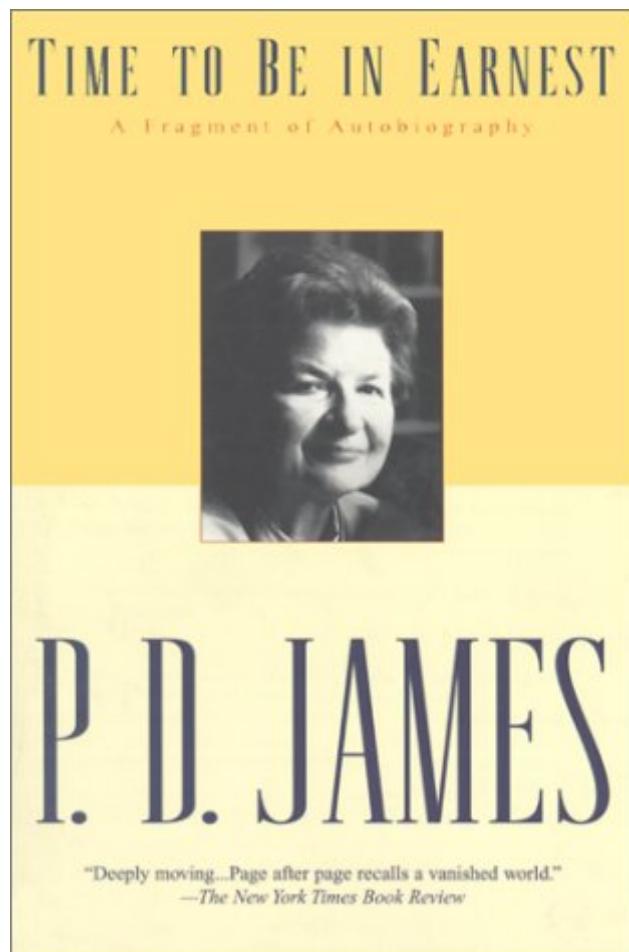


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Time To Be In Earnest



Synopsis

In 1997, P. D. James, the much loved and internationally acclaimed author of mysteries, turned seventy-seven. Taking to heart Dr. Johnson's advice that at seventy-seven it is "time to be in earnest," she decided to undertake a book unlike any she had written before: a personal memoir in the form of a diary. This enchanting and highly original volume is the result. Structured as the diary of a single year, it roams back and forth through time, illuminating James's extraordinary, sometimes painful and sometimes joyful life. Here, interwoven with reflections on her writing career and the craft of crime novels, are vivid accounts of episodes in her own past — of school days in 1920s and 1930s Cambridge . . . of the war and the tragedy of her husband's madness . . . of her determined struggle to support a family alone. She tells about the birth of her second daughter in the midst of a German buzz-bomb attack; about becoming a civil servant (and laying the groundwork for her writing career by working in the criminal justice system); about her years of public service on such bodies as the Arts Council and the BBC's Board of Governors, culminating in entry to the House of Lords. Along the way, with warmth and authority, she offers views on everything from author tours to the problems of television adaptations, from book reviewing to her obsession with Jane Austen. Written with exceptional grace, this "fragment of autobiography" has already been received with enthusiasm by British reviewers and readers. The thousands of Americans who have enjoyed P. D. James's novels will be equally charmed. Diary or memoir or both, *Time to Be in Earnest* is a delight. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

I'm a big PD James fan and was happy to discover this. It's essential PDJ, no-nonsense, no sentimentality, no tell-all or confessions. But I learned a lot more about her than I had known. She cherishes her Anglicanism and is a Tory, not Labour. Her commentary on aspects of modern life is acerbic and wonderful. She takes the BBC to task for down-market programming and up-market executive salaries. An old-fashioned Englishwoman, very talented, generous with her gifts -- she speaks everywhere and sits on committees, stays very busy, but still has produced, what, two dozen or more books? Who knew she didn't go to university, nor did her parents, it just wasn't in the cards between the wars. Neither her childhood nor marriage were of the fairy-tale variety. And she became a civil servant to support her family and ensure a steady paycheck, sticking with it for 18 years after publication of her first book. What a woman!

England's Baroness P.D.James wrote her first book in the early 1960's, dealing with the marital complications of a mentally ill husband and raising a young family. Employed for 30 years in the British Civil Service, she had the background for what became a series of 17 mystery novels. She brilliantly crafted the character of Inspector Adam Dalgliesh and attracted international readers. By the time she was in her late 70's she had been asked, and had declined, many times to write an autobiography. What she decided to do instead was to keep a daily diary for one year, not necessarily of her activity each day but intermingled reflections of past experiences, as well. *Time To Be In Earnest* is unusual in it's personal comments, her years of public service and eventual entry into the House of Lords, and her "obsession" with her own favorite author, Jane Austen. Each revelation is a short and personal story, an interesting view into James's thoughts and her life.

I found this book in my library yesterday and have read it almost non-stop. It is truly delightful. I like the understated way she weaves her life story. What impressed me most is her down to earth way of saying that she realized that she would have to support her family since her husband was unable to. She just did it without whining or expecting anyone to help her. Her ideas and opinions on the

health care system are right on target. Her references to other works, both hers and other authors, will keep me busy for a long time. I want to check out all of them. What I envy most is her mention of going here and there to conferences and book signings, etc on the great train system in England. I have spent some time there and know how convenient it is. Wish we had such a rail system in the U.S. Her thoughts on the writing experience are also informative. Am so glad she has written this book.

I have always loved PD James work and have waited in anticipation for each new series that would air on English TV. I think the fact that she decided to write her Auto Biography as a diary was a brilliant idea. Although she wrote this book when in her mid seventies Ms. James life was full to the brink with meetings, book launches etc. If you are unfamiliar with her books, this will at least nudge your curiosity enough to read and immerse yourself into an England that has sadly, almost dwindled away.

P.D. James has given her readers a rare glimpse into her thinking. I saw the daily events as ways to connect with what she wanted to say about her beliefs and about her very interesting and productive life. I have read all of her books and was pleased to be able to understand the author behind the mysteries which she so skillfully writes. I also enjoyed her glimpse into a world which is fading fast - a world where character was important and manners counted for a lot. Elizabeth Skoglund author of Divine Recycling: Living Above Your Circumstances

P.D. James has long been one of my favourite authors. Her cast of characters are second to none and her descriptive writing passages should be studied by all aspiring writers. She is the full package. Even her age has not slowed her down, or made her less of a writer. When I saw she had written an autobiography I was only too happy to download it. Written in 1997, the year P.D. James turned 77, "Time to be Earnest" is her quest to be an adult. She writes not just of current events, but of her past. She recounts events of her school days, of the war and living with her husband as he deals with mental illness. She writes candidly, but without looking for pity at being a single parent. This book, written in her indomitable style is a wonderful insight into what makes P.D. James tick. She is a true lady, and her strength of character shines through every page of her diary.

For PD James fans, her memoir written toward the end of her life is a delight to read. When she started writing, she used her initials instead of her first name because of the bias against female

detective fiction writers. Her masterly works are reflective of her superior intellect and subtly nuanced ethical standards. This book reveals the humanity of a sensitive but disciplined mind. I highly recommend it.

I've been intrigued by P.D James since I read her very first novel and have always wanted to know her better as a person. *A Time to Be in Earnest* provided a tantalizing look at a long and productive lifetime of a woman who encountered more than her share of challenges and dealt with them with courage and resourcefulness. While not everyone will appreciate the diary form of this autobiography, I found it to be just as unique and thought-provoking as James' fiction - and James herself. I also appreciated her thoughts about the very personal nature of memoirs in general. It's important to remember that a personal memoir is just that: personal. It reflects the writer's unique perspectives and worldview. I would recommend *A Time to Be in Earnest* to any fan of PD James!

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