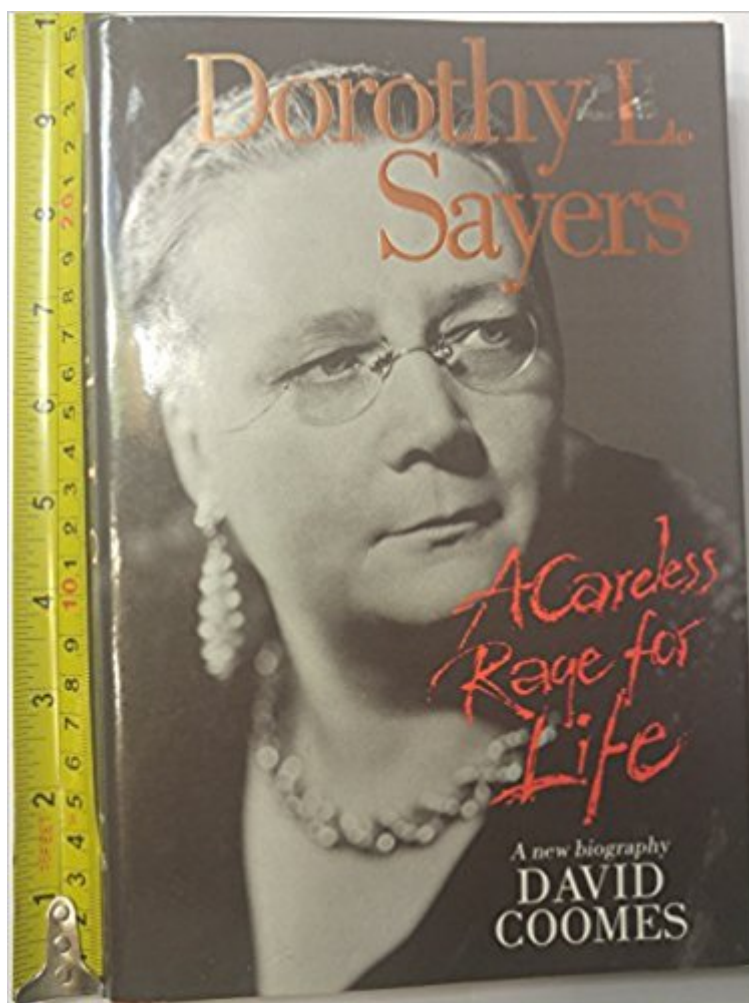


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Dorothy L. Sayers: A Careless Rage For Life



Synopsis

This biography of the novelist Dorothy Leigh Sayers - the creator of Lord Peter Wimsey and the bestselling author of a dozen detective novels - brings out the spiritual pilgrimage and struggle at the heart of Sayers' life story. The author, who draws on thousands of letters Sayers wrote, reveals her to be a complex woman. Sayers was a very private person who even hid the existence of an illegitimate child from her closest friends. She was also someone to whom faith was central and wrote many theological books as well as the famous detective novels. Her radio play on the life of Christ, "The Man Born to be King", caused a furore when it was first broadcast and went on to win acclaim. She was linked with the Inklings - the group of writers which included C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, J.R.R. Tolkien and others.

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Customer Reviews

This biography of the mystery novelist, Dante translator and Christian writer uses letters not seen before, which flesh out and unify Sayers's life and work. The production values do not pass muster. The sound ebbs and flows from tape to tape, and extraneous noises go unedited. The narrator's voice seems alternately shrill and muffled. The production problems are a significant drawback in an otherwise excellent addition to one's biographical audio section. E.F. (c)AudioFile, Portland, Maine --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Interesting anecdotes from one who knew the author and worked with her professionally. But it is

not a full biography by any means; that is not its goal.

Anyone who appreciates DLS will like this book. She was a complicated, interesting person who created dark characters hidden behind light language.

"You were right in supposing that it is a husband that I really want, because I become impatient of the beastly restrictions which 'free love' imposes. I have a careless rage for life, and secrecy tends to make me bad-tempered..." - Sayers in a letter to John Cournos after their breakup, mid-1920s

Personally, I prefer this biography to that written by Janet Hitchman; while Hitchman was one of the first to uncover certain information about Sayers' personal life - most notably her blood relationship with her adopted son - Hitchman's *SUCH A STRANGE LADY* has less meat in it. Where Hitchman drew much of her analysis of Sayers' character from her published writings (hard to say, since Hitchman's biography has neither references nor footnotes), Coomes draws more on Sayers' vast correspondence of private letters, and *does* identify his sources, without becoming boring. Coomes wisely lets Sayers' own words speak for her as much as possible, so quality writing and zest are both present. Coomes' opening chapter offers to beguile the reader - not with the predictable gambit of Lord Peter, nor even jumping to Sayers' last and next most famous project, translating Dante. Instead, we're treated to the controversy surrounding *THE MAN BORN TO BE KING*: Sayers' dramatization of the Gospels in modern idiom for the BBC, broadcast beginning in December 1941. Offstage, Sayers did battle with the Sunday Children's Hour team who were first responsible for producing the plays, then with organizations like the Lord's Day Observance Society, who worked themselves into transports of outrage based solely on rather misleading newspaper reports - without having *read* a single script. Needless to say, Sayers not only carried the day, but had the satisfaction of seeing most of the protesters slink quietly away after the first broadcast. But this is the same lady who in 1936 lectured upon "The Importance of Being Vulgar", and in a private letter in 1944 discoursed upon "the distinguishing marks of True Bedworthiness in the Male" - no milksop, she. Even when earning the equivalent of a First Class Honours with Distinction in Modern Languages at Oxford in 1916, she wasn't burying her nose in dusty academic tomes. (Women didn't actually *receive* degrees until 1920, when Sayers was one of the first.)

When Coomes, having secured the reader's attention, moves on to Sayers' youth, he draws on two of Sayers' unpublished manuscripts (*CAT O'MARY* and *MY EDWARDIAN CHILDHOOD*, autobiography with and without a veneer of fiction, respectively) as well as more mundanely available sources. She herself, having grown up as a vicar's daughter saturated in religion rather

credited Chesterton's later influence with making Christianity interesting for her. In a later chapter, we receive more insight into the solemn rituals of the Detection Club than one can get out of THE FLOATING ADMIRAL's introduction, when the members, including Chesterton and Sayers, created a mystery by writing successive chapters without revealing the planned solution. The Club's oath would have been hard luck on Leslie Charteris' vintage Simon Templar years, and positive death for Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu; those who renege are cursed solemnly with "may other Writers anticipate your Plots, may your Publishers do you down in your Contracts, may Total Strangers sue you for Libel..." :-> We get our expected and obligatory material on the creation and feeding of Lord Peter, but not merely in one large expository block, particularly when considered in light of things in her life that served as raw material. I warn the reader that as Lord Peter was abandoned by Sayers halfway through her writing career, the last of Lord Peter is seen at about the halfway point of the book. However, Sayers' own personality and character are interesting in their own sake. For those who have read other writers of Sayers' acquaintance, their interaction in correspondence is an added bonus - notably with C.S. Lewis, not merely about religion, but about her take on nuts-and-bolts authors' concerns with THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA.

This book was actually my introduction to Dorothy Sayers. Her life, her passion for excellence, her humanity and wit were inspiring. I loved this book.

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