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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Donna L. Lubot entitled "Good Work Well Done: A Study of Dorothy L. Sayers' Detective Novels." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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GOOD WORK WELL DONE: A STUDY OF DOROTHY L. SAYERS' DETECTIVE NOVELS

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine a particular genre--the classical detective novel--and its conventions in light of the stated aims of one of its most acclaimed practitioners, Dorothy L. Sayers. General works on formula fiction were studied first as background in the genre. Next, Sayers' own essays on the genre and on aesthetics and morality were read. Finally, all the Lord Peter Wimsey series was read in order to select five representative novels. Whose Body? was chosen to represent the conventions of the genre and to introduce Sayers' detective, Peter Wimsey. Strong Poison and Have His Carcase were chosen to introduce Harriet Vane, the woman Sayers intended Peter Wimsey to marry. Gaudy Night and Busman's Honeymoon were chosen because for Sayers they represented the realization of an aesthetic dream.

This thesis was inspired by Sayers herself. In 1937, she wrote an essay on her ninth novel, in which she explored the artistic journey she had taken from Whose Body? to Gaudy Night. In this essay, also entitled "Gaudy Night," Sayers claimed to have finally written the sort of novel she always wanted to write, an amalgam of the classical detective genre with the novel of manners. She wanted to create a new type of popular fiction, one that would address itself to real

human problems. She felt the detective formula restricted an author, prevented her from writing more than a sterile, cerebral crossword puzzle. If, she thought, one could make one's central figure more human and build a believable story around him as Wilkie Collins had done in The Moonstone, then perhaps one could teach as well as entertain.

Sayers' desire to teach, to convey a message in a serious novel, was the problem. She had grown up in a Victorian family whose belief in authority was based on traditions of church and state. She absorbed her parents' values, but absorbed them subconsciously. When Sayers reached her late 20's, however, she was forced by circumstances to become a modern working woman, and was, moreover, exposed by way of college friendships to a new morality best exemplified by that part of London called Bloomsbury. Her subconscious belief in authority--intellectual and religious--clashed with her conscious beliefs in independence and male/female equality.

In the novels I have selected Sayers attempted to reconcile authority and independence by bringing her two protagonists, Harriet Vane and Peter Wimsey, together in a real as well as a symbolic marriage. Peter was the authority figure; as a classical detective he had to be superior in all things. Harriet was the modern woman, one who worked to support herself by writing detective novels. Sayers found, however,

that she was unable to reconcile the authoritarian Peter with the independent Harriet because her own belief in authority was too dominant. Despite her claims to the contrary in her essay "Gaudy Night," the marriage she worked out for her hero and heroine was completely traditional. Moreover, Sayers found that Peter, who was to become human for love of Harriet, had instead become more formulaic than before. Although Peter was not real in the novelistic sense, he had become all too real to Sayers. He was her authority figure, her judge, her constant accuser. This was the paradox. Sayers had created a fictional character that now seemed to call her every professional action into question. Therefore, she abandoned detective novels, indeed fiction altogether, in order to free herself from Peter's domination. Sayers turned instead to religious drama rewriting the stories of the Bible in contemporary languages. Through this new career, she felt able to convey her values and beliefs unhindered by the restrictions of formula and by a fictional character who, she knew, could assume an awesome life of his own.

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INTRODUCTION

The hero in a Western novel wears a white hat, shoots straight (but never first), is a man of few words and fewer emotions, and always rides off into the sunset on his loyal, white horse whom he prefers to the girl he leaves behind. The heroine in a Romance novel experiences perils that would defeat ten pure Paulines, suffers silently under the advances of the darkly handsome villain whose sexual aberrations are thrillingly (and thinly) concealed, and has complete faith in the fair-haired, classically beautiful lover who always arrives in the nick of time to carry her off to a life that will be happy ever after. The hero in a classic detective novel encounters enough serious crimes in his career to upset the statistics of several large metropolitan districts, is infinitely more prescient than the official police force, has the ability, time, and money to pursue clues and suspects with the detached dedication of a scientist, and always reaches the only possible solution from clues that only he has been able to arrange in correct and logical order.

Formula fiction has set conventions because there is an unwritten contract between the author and the reader. The reader expects certain conventions to be followed by the author, and is disappointed, perhaps even disaffected, if they are not followed. Variations on the form are, of course, permitted. Indeed, in the detective novel, they

are necessary if the reader is to be kept in suspense until the final few pages. But these modifications must occur within the accepted formulaic structure. In detective fiction that framework includes, at the very minimum, a crime serious enough to provide a large number of clues and suspects, a criminal desperate enough and intelligent enough to make the clues and suspects appear to be logical, and a detective whose mental and physical abilities are greater than the criminal's, but only slightly greater than the reader's.

Because there are such expectations on the part of the reader, because there is this unwritten contract between the reader and the author, the formula fiction writer who finds himself becoming dissatisfied with the genre alters the conventions at his peril. Whatever the reasons that lead to an author's dissatisfaction--and boredom must surely be among the most common of reasons--it seems evident that radical changes in the genre must inevitably prove destructive to the genre itself. The author is caught between two conflicting desires. He wants to retain his reader's approval; his continued allegiance supports him monetarily and psychologically. But he also wants to exercise, expand, and improve his creative abilities; he wants to be known as an artist as well as a competent craftsman.

Dorothy Leigh Sayers, who wrote the popular and critically acclaimed Wimsey series of detective novels, provides a case study of just such an author. She was a competent

craftsman, but ultimately a frustrated artist. By the time Sayers came to write Gaudy Night, her ninth full-length detective novel, she had become bored with the genre's conventions. More significantly, because of her growing religious convictions she believed that the formula itself might dangerously mislead her readers. Already disturbed by a modern tendency to look for simplistic answers to life's complicated problems, Sayers felt uncomfortable about writing stories in which her main character was just such a problem solver. Moreover, again as a result of her growing religious convictions, Sayers mistrusted any solution whose basic premise implied a belief in human perfectibility. Peter Wimsey, her perfect detective, had gradually become an embarrassment to her. Thus, her artistic dissatisfactions with the genre were compounded by religiously-inspired doubts about the detective novel's artificialities.

In addition to her beliefs about simplistic solutions, Sayers also had a religiously-inspired concept about work. Sayers was a product of that period in human history when one's work was rapidly degenerating into one's employment. As an artist she properly deplored this emerging attitude, based as it was on monetary recompense, not only because she disapproved of materialism, but, more fundamentally, because

she felt "good work well done"[1] was the sacred and necessary link between God the Creator and man the homo faber. Artistic creativity emulated God. It also honored Him by using to the full the one ability God had given man exclusively: the ability to reason logically, to use one's intellect. Mere employment, if it did not include an element of originality, broke the bond between God and man. Man was no more than an animal if he did not think, if he did not create. Sayers' Christian work ethic then, grounded as it was in an artistic link between created man and his divine Creator, informs her understanding of work that was well done. Her concept of what constituted good work is not so readily explained. She seemed to equate the words "good" and "worthy" (or at least the concepts behind them), using the illustrations that would explain their abstract meaning almost interchangeably.[2] So when she stated that good (or worthy) work was to be a "sacrament and [outward]

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[1]In 1978, the Dorothy L. Sayers Literary and Historical Society of Witham, Essex affixed a memorial tablet to the tile in St. Anne's Tower, Soho, under which Sayers' ashes are buried. The entire epitaph from which this fragment is taken reads: "In memory of Dorothy Leigh Sayers, D. Litt., Scholar and Writer, Churchwarden of this Parish 1952-1957, born 13 June 1893, died 17 December 1957, whose ashes lie beneath this tower. 'The only Christian work is good work well done.'" (Hone, p. 210)

[2]See essays by Dorothy L. Sayers entitled "Towards a Christian Aesthetic", "Creative Mind", "Problem Picture", and "Christian Morality" in Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1969).

manifestation of man's creative energy,"[3] one is unsure whether work is good in a moral, religious, or social sense, or in some combination of all three.

Sayers may have been inexact about what constituted good and worthy work; she was not at all vague about what constituted a bad and worthless life. She disapproved strongly of the post-World War I tendency towards agnosticism, towards skepticism in both religious and secular life. To her, there were clear rules to follow and those who chose to question those rules or the assumptions behind them were inviting personal--psychological and spiritual--paralysis. She also felt she knew how to alter these contemporary attitudes. An authority based on educated reason and on Christian principles of love (agape) and forgiveness needed to be reintroduced. She was an avowed elitist, believing that all men were not created equal in ability and intelligence. And as one of the educated Christian elite, Sayers' duty to God and mankind was to make her message known.

The forum in which she was to present this message was the problem. Her beliefs had evolved over the years in which she wrote the Wimsey series. When she came to write Gaudy Night, her ninth novel in that series, she had decided to use the detective genre and her main character, Peter

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[3]Dorothy L. Sayers, The Mind of the Maker (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1941), p. 218.

Wimsey, as her conduit to the public. But the detective formula seemed too rigid to allow for any inclusion of real human concerns within the context of the story, and the characters, including Peter, seemed too lifeless to carry the weight of actual human problems. Could she find a way to change the formula, to free it from some of its restrictions, without destroying the very elements in it that made it such a popular form of fiction? More to the point, could she transform her main character, her detective, and turn him into enough of a human being to carry the message she wanted him to convey? She examined the earlier novels, hoping to find that she had unconsciously given Peter some vestiges of humanity on which she could build a more realistic character.

Sayers had begun to write detective novels almost by accident, chosing that genre because at the time it was an enormously popular one, and one in which she felt she could be quickly successful. She was on her own in London, young, rather naive, and completely self-supporting. Although she had a job as copywriter at Benson's, a large and successful advertising agency, this job was neither monetarily nor emotionally satisfying to her. Her first detective novel, Whose Body?, published in 1923 while she still worked at Benson's, was successful enough to warrent continuing with what would become the Wimsey series. Nevertheless, when she looked back at Whose Body? and viewed it in the light of her growing religious convictions, she recognized that it was a

conventional detective story, employing those formulas of problem solving she had come to believe misleading to her public. She could, perhaps, be pleased by its popularity, but she was disturbed that it was mere entertainment. Moreover, Peter, who in this novel was an engaging character--it was he who accounted in large part for such success as this book enjoyed--was certainly not a realistic character. He was the formulaic detective: eccentric, intelligent, and supremely confident of his own abilities to solve a crime that baffled the police.

Neither, Sayers felt, was Whose Body? an artistic success. Fifteen years after it was published she wrote:

> Re-reading Whose Body? at this distance of time I observe, with regret, that it is conventional to the last degree, and no more like a novel than I to Hercules.[4]

Its very conventionality had prevented her from including in it any sort of message. Sayers wanted her novels to teach as well as to entertain; she wanted to present to her readers her prescription for the good and worthy life, but present it obliquely. Didactism would not be appreciated by the modern reader.

Moreover, the formula itself contributed to what she felt was a dangerous tendency on the part of modern humanity to believe in handy solutions to complex problems. Even the well-educated, those whom Sayers looked on as natural

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[4]Dorothy L. Sayers, "Gaudy Night," The Art of the Mystery Story, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), p. 208.

leaders, were being lulled into complacency, were becoming non-thinkers and non-reasoners. Having lost their faith in traditional forms of authority as a result of World War I, but needing to believe in something outside of themselves, the educated elite had turned to science. In that discipline, demonstrable truth, facts that could be measured and quantified, allowed one to posit solutions to human problems, to advocate concrete and unequivocal answers for some very equivocal human situations. The correlation between scientific investigation and detection was clear; both reached solutions derived from facts. Fearing that her readers, especially her educated readers, might have their modern inclinations towards problem solving reinforced by the detective formula, Sayers determined to change it in order to make her stories conform to real life as she saw it. She wrote:

> These mysteries made only to be solved, these horrors which he [the reader] knows to be mere figments of the creative brain, comfort him by subtly persuading that life is a mystery which death will solve, and whose horrors will pass away as a tale that is told.[5]

There was yet another side to Sayers' dissatisfaction with the genre and its conventions. The rigid structure of the classic detective novel convinced her that even its entertainment value might soon be diluted. If the detective story remained a mere crossword puzzle, relying as it did on a finite repertoire of tricks, sooner or later its readers

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[5]Dorothy L. Sayers, ed., The Omnibus of Crime (New York: Payson and Clark, 1929), p. 9.

would begin to recognize all the devices employed by each author. Furthermore, as Sayers explained:

> It is not only that the reader gets tired after a time of a literature without bowels; in the end the writer gets tired of it too, and that is fatal.[6]

What is instantly apparent is that her use of the term "literature" embodies all the dissatisfactions of a craftsman who wishes to be known as an artist. She was profoundly unhappy with the artificialities of the genre, feeling they were responsible not only for her inability to convey her message, but also for her boredom with the structure itself. As she continued writing the books that make up the Wimsey series, her dissatisfaction grew until she could no longer turn out the same sort of novel that had made her famous. In Gaudy Night she sought to modify the formula with conventions taken from the novel of manners, a genre which used characterization to a much greater extent than did the detective story. If she could make Peter and other selected characters come alive in much the same way as characters in a novel of manners were alive, she might be able to show that human beings and their problems were not susceptible to black and white solutions. Traditionally, the novel of manners explored and defined the mores of a particular social class in order to present a certain pattern of human behavior. The characters in it conducted their fictive lives in such a way as to "prove" the moral of the story, and in that

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[6]Sayers, "Gaudy Night," p. 209.

way served as vehicles for the author's point of view. What Sayers failed to understand about this genre was that more often than not, the author's point of view was satirical. However, as with those novels written by Jane Austen, the author's seeming sarcasm had a well-understood and well-conceived goal. The writer knew ahead of time that deviations from the norm, distortions of values and mores, were to be satirized so that the ideal might be confirmed. But Sayers had not sufficiently scrutinized her own beliefs before writing Gaudy Night. She believed in authority and in personal independence, but had not yet reconciled those two principles. As a result, the novel has some serious inconsistencies, not the least of which is the one involving male/female equality.

Sayers' attempt to change the detective genre, to make of it something more intellectual, more "serious," is admirable. It shows an interest in her readers' moral, spiritual and social needs, but it also shows, it is true, an elitism bordering on contempt. She felt she was one of the chosen few who had been given the intellect and the professional position to set the world aright. She had a duty to create a type of novel that would be good work well done: worthwhile work because it would contribute to what she believed was the well-being of her readers; work well done because it would satisfy her own need to be structurally creative. She found, however, that when she had combined the two genres into what she felt was an artistic whole, the result was disappointing. She had not reached her goal because she had

failed to take into consideration the restrictions each genre imposed on the story and on her own deeply held beliefs.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to explore the changes Sayers made in the conventional detective story, using five of her full-length novels as illustrations. Whose Body? will be used to explain those conventions necessary to any classical detective novel; Strong Poison and Have His Carcase will be used to introduce Harriet Vane, the character Sayers created to help humanize Peter; and Gaudy Night and Busman's Honeymoon will be used to examine the results of Peter's metamorphosis and its effect on Sayers' stated goal of producing a new kind of novel. She tried to create a novel with bowels to it, with moral, religious, and social underpinnings in order to satisfy her own intellectual and theological standards. She hoped to raise the genre to the heights of serious literature, to make it more artistic and less formulaic. Only if she could do both things could she consider her work good and well done. Making Peter her spokesman, making him a real human being with real human problems would, she hoped, provide the bridge between the two genres she was trying to link--the detective story and the novel of manners. And the device she decided to use to effect Peter's metamorphosis was a love affair: Peter would fall in love only to be rejected by his lady. In the process of examining himself to understand why he, the celebrated detective,

the paragon that all women should idolize, was politely, almost uninterestedly refused, he would be able to propound those theories Sayers wanted included in her novels. He would have to handle universal questions of love, hate, duty, allegiance, justice, and even--though gingerly--belief in God, in order to attract the woman he loved.

Harriet Vane, the character Sayers created to act as catalyst, is remarkably like the author herself. She is an Oxford scholar, a detective story writer who wrestles with problems of characterization, a woman of modern independence and modern views on morality--and an accused murderer. Sayers thought that by opposing her two representatives of real humanity, the authoritative detective (Peter Wimsey) and the modern woman (Harriet Vane), she would be able to explore both personalities and the two life-styles they represented,find some common ground between those two ways of life, and present her conclusions for her readers' approval. That the experiment failed was as much a fault of Sayers' own ambivalence about what sort of life-style should evolve as it was the result of trying to combine two very different genres. She was by necessity a modern working woman herself. And yet her background, conservative and theological, accounted for a personal philosophy based on intellectual authority and on the traditional hierarchy of the church. Men exercised reason; women exercised emotion. Men, as symbolized by the hierarchical structure of the church, provided leadership in both their public and private lives.

Women, supposedly intellectually inferior to men, supported them with loyalty at home and deference at work. Because Sayers could not resolve her beliefs in male superiority with her feminist views, those that led her to view equality between the sexes as a desirable goal, she finally abandoned fiction. Peter had to be dominant, but if he was, Harriet had to be submissive. She could not allow the character who so resembled herself to exhibit such submission. Harriet's actions subverted those of her creator. In effect, Sayers acknowledged this fact when she left Harriet to her fictional fate of submission to Peter.

In addition, there existed a problem with the structure of the novel, a problem that also stemmed from her inability to reconcile authority and independence. She had turned to the novel of manners because she thought it afforded her a means for making the detective genre more realistic. Peter's superhuman problem solving bothered her; his actions implied a belief in finding simplistic solutions to complicated human problems. Yet, even when she used what she thought was realistic characterization to make Peter human, she found he was still restricted by the detective genre's conventions. She had needed those formulas which dictated that the detective be superior in intellect and in ratiocinative ability in order to make Peter the spokesman for her views on male supremacy. Now she found she had to abandon Peter and fiction altogether because to have continued his "life," even without Harriet, would have reinforced the very human

tendencies she wanted to protest.

Instead, she turned in the second half of her life to writing religious drama, finding in it a more congenial and less troubling vehicle for her message. Christian love could bridge the gap between superior male and inferior female. In God, there were no sexual distinctions, only in the homo faber, the human being created in His image. In religious drama she could preach her message of equality; human beings were equally created, even if as men and women they must adhere to an inequality of function. Other writers will, no doubt, examine these plays closely, for they represent that which Sayers felt was impossible to accomplish in writing fiction: good work well done. This thesis, however, will confine itself to crucial examples of Sayers detective stories, to Whose Body?, Strong Poison, Have His Carcase, Gaudy Night, and Busman's Honeymoon, exploring the changes she made in the genre in her attempt to create a new type of novel.

To her many readers who understood only that their favorite detective had been unaccountably deserted by his author, Sayers' new career seemed the height of folly. The plots they admired, the settings they loved, and the characters they had come to know intimately were of paramount importance to them. Infinitely less important were the author's hidden social and theological beliefs and her desire to produce serious literature. Since Sayers abandoned the genre and left her engaging detective forever

entombed in his aristocratic world, new generations of readers have discovered this series of meticulously crafted novels. And they, too, must feel with Margaret Hannay the sense of loss as at the death of a friend when they find that "Lord Peter Wimsey had become so nearly real that he wandered out of the detective novel altogether."[7]

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[7]Margaret P. Hannay, "Harriet's Influence on the Characterization of Lord Peter Wimsey," As Her Whimsey Took Her, ed. Margaret P. Hannay (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1979), p. 50.

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY

Dorothy Leigh Sayers was born in Oxford on 13 June 1893. She was the only child of Henry Sayers, an ordained priest in the Church of England, and Helen Mary Leigh Sayers, the daughter of a Leicestershire solicitor. Both parents were considerably past the usual age for child bearing and rearing; Henry was almost forty, and Helen was past thirty. Two other adults completed the family: Rev. Sayers' widowed mother and Helen Sayers' maiden sister, Mabel Leigh. Shortly after Dorothy's fourth birthday, the family moved to Bluntisham cum Earith in the English Fen country. As Ralph E. Hone states in his literary biography of Dorothy L. Sayers:

> The Fen country, furrowed by winter floods, became part of Dorothy's temperament. Her isolation as an only child was relieved somewhat by her studies, but her first sixteen years were virtually cloistered.[1]

This relief from isolation was more mental than physical. Her imagination was stimulated by the various languages she was taught, and by the classics that made up part of her early education. Sayers, however, was taught by governesses and tutors at home, so she had little contact

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[1]Ralph E. Hone, Dorothy L. Sayers: A Literary Biography (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1979), p. 6. Subsequent quotations taken from this book will be cited in parentheses in the text.

with other children her own age. When children did come to the rectory, they came as guests to rather formal parties, arranged by their pastor and his wife as rewards for excellence in Sunday School. One doubts that under these circumstances Dorothy learned much about interaction with her peers. These farmers' children were not her peers; the authority that derived from her father's position in the community undoubtedly acted as a restraint on the children. Moreover, Dorothy's more extensive education fostered in her an intellectual snobbery that she never lost. She learned that facility in languages could be used to bolster her own self esteem at the expense of others (Hone, p. 3). Not until she was sixteen was she placed in a position of having to compete with other children who were as well educated as she, and who, in addition, were infinitely more adept at social intercourse.

At Godolphin School, where she was sent as a boarder in January, 1909, this link between education and self esteem was reinforced. Dorothy entered school at mid-year; the other girls had already made their friendships, formed their cliques, staked out their territory. Sayers found she could excel in academics, especially in languages, and in that way gain attention from her peers. So despite frequent bouts of homesickness and actual illness that forced her finally to withdraw before completing her course work, Dorothy managed through determination and hard work to win the coveted Gilchrist Scholarship in Modern Languages, awarded

by Somerville College, Oxford.

Dorothy had learned her lesson well. Again, natural ability and a well-developed work ethic gained her academic recognition. In 1920, when Dorothy was twenty-seven, she was awarded both a B.A. and an M.A. degree in Modern Languages from Oxford University, one of the first women to be so honored. This late recognition of her academic achievements was not Sayers' fault. 1920 was the first year Oxford chose so to recognize its women scholars.

Academic achievement can bolster a person's self esteem; it can even serve as a convenient and acceptable entré into social prominence. But if that person is basically shy and socially immature as Sayers was, mistakes can be made in handling this novel and rather frightening attention. Sayers, in later life, recalled this aspect of her education with some bitterness. She was able to make friends with the women in her college; a few such as Dorothy Rowe and Muriel Jaeger remained friends for life. It seemed never to have occurred to her, however, that she could be friendly with a man in the same way as she was with women. She blamed segregation of the sexes for this, asserting that if a woman were still socially ignorant when she entered college, there would be little opportunity for redressing this imbalance. How, she asked, could a college woman

> grow wise in an atmosphere in which going to tea with a youth ranks as a thrilling dissipation, and inviting the same man twice in a term is considered too desperately exciting for all concerned. (Hone, p. 21)

One could not even go to one's professors for advice. Too often, having been educated under the same system, the women dons suffered the same handicap. Sayers wrote that when she was at Somerville:

> I should never have thought of going to one of its guardians for advice an any social difficulty. I should have feared, not unkindness or unwillingness to help, but just blank want of knowledge. "This kind of thing never happened to me," says the guide, philosopher, and friend; "to a nice girl social difficulties do not occur." That is a cowardly lie. Things do happen; it is monstrous to pretend that they do not or ought not. (Hone, p. 20)

"Things" did happen to Dorothy, the "nice girl" from the theological and intellectual family, incidents that reveal her social ineptitude, but at the same time reveal her strength of character. She made mistakes, some of them serious ones, but never did she seek to evade or escape the consequences of her actions.

While still at Somerville pursuing her undergraduate degree, Dorothy conceived what was then known as a "pash" for Dr. Hugh Allen, Director of the Bach Choir. Of course schoolgirl passions were not unknown, especially in the cloistered atmosphere of a women's college where the only male one might consistently see was one's tutor or lecturer. Nevertheless, apparently Dorothy's feelings were particularly ill-concealed. A fellow student of Dorothy's recalls that:

> During the practices of the Verdi Requiem [sic], which we were preparing to sing in the Easter term, she [Dorothy] sat among the mezzo-contraltos and gazed at him with

> wide, adoring eyes as though she were in church worshipping her only God. (Hone, p. 18)

Quite naturally, Dorothy's friends and acquaintances teased her about Dr. Allen. But instead of withdrawing in high dudgeon, Dorothy accepted the implied criticism of her actions with good-natured self-deprecation. The summer after the incident described above she caricatured her idol in the Going-Down Play given by her graduating class, a play given in their final year by all graduates who were, it was presumed, ready to "go down" to London from Oxford.

Three years later, in 1918, Dorothy fell in love with Eric Whelpton, a young man who had returned to Oxford from the Front because ill health made him unfit for further service. He must have been a most romantic person, attractive not only to Dorothy but to other young women susceptible to his aura of wearied mystery. Whelpton, who had been born in France, was bilingual, widely traveled, privately educated, a member of the Haute Societé Protestant, and a war veteran with the rank of captain. He was also an opportunist, not above exploiting the relationship he enjoyed with this naive woman who could not hide her affection for him. In August 1919, Whelpton invited Dorothy to join him in France as his secretary. Unable to endure the English climate in his weakened condition, he had left Oxford the previous winter to take a post at École des Roches, an exclusive boys' preparatory school in Normandy. The relationship with Sayers he envisaged was strictly professional; he took pains to reassure the elder Sayers of this

in a visit to the family home. He told Rev. Sayers that Dorothy would be housed quite apart from him, that they would be likely to see each other only during office hours, and that moreover, his "affections were engaged already" (Hone, p. 33). Dorothy's parents were apparently reassured by his protestations; however reluctantly, they gave their daughter permission to take the job in France. Whether Dorothy was equally convinced remains a matter for speculation. Was she hoping that propinquity, two people bound together by work, nationality, and language, would provide the romantic spark to bring them together? Or did she believe Whelpton's reassurances were for her parents alone, polite fictions designed to smooth the way? Whatever her reasons for taking the job, there is little doubt about her reasons for returning home the next summer. Once again cold weather and trying conditions had proved too much for Whelpton. An epidemic of mumps that affected one third of the school's students and an unusually severe winter drove him away from Les Roches, France, and Dorothy. With Whelpton gone, the job held no excitement for her; she had gone to France for him, not for the job.

It is hard to assess the impact that this experience had on Sayers' life; she did not speak or write of it directly. Two immediate consequences were an apparent break with her parents, and her subsequent move to London. In November of the year she returned to England, Henry Sayers changed his will, disinheriting Dorothy and making

his wife his sole legatee. No reasons were given in the will for this change, but it followed so closely on Dorothy's return that one can speculate that displeasure with her over this misadventure was at least part of the motive. Dorothy moved to London; there she could support herself while at the same time enjoying an atmosphere that was intellectual and stimulating.

Besides actual physical consequences, there must have been psychological consequences as well. It is possible, of course, to read too much into works of fiction. Fiction is fiction, not autobiography. On the other hand, it is equally true that some authors use writing as a form of therapy, as a way of "writing out" incidents and emotions that are too painful to face except as the experiences of characters the author can control. If Sayers were one of these authors, and there is some evidence that this is so,[2] one might garner clues about her subsequent attitude from the detective stories she wrote in the next two decades. In The Nine Tailors, one of the major characters is a vicar of a Fen country parish. He is an admirable character; perhaps a little too scholarly for the parish he serves, but certainly adequate, even exemplary in the manner in

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[2]One need only consider the autobiographical aspects of The Nine Tailors and Murder Must Advertise. In addition, there is a startling physical resemblance between pictures of Sayers as she was at Somerville College and the description Sayers provides for her heroine, Harriet Vane, in Strong Poison.

which he carries out his parish duties. The portrait is written with gentle humor and much affection. If this is Henry Sayers as seen by his daughter, there is no doubt that the filial bonds are intact. Whatever bitterness there might have been at the time of the break, none was left by 1934 when The Nine Tailors was published.

Additionally, it might be profitable to speculate about the provenance of Peter Wimsey. As he appears in the series, he is a war veteran suffering from shell shock, a cosmopolitan with French relatives on his mother's side, bilingual, handsome, attractive to women, privately educated, a member of the best society. There are few characters more sympathetically drawn by their authors. If Whelpton was in any way, even superficially, responsible for some of Peter's attributes, it would seem that Sayers viewed their relationship with equanimity, if not outright affection. Moreover, the quasi-relationship between Whelpton and Peter is reinforced when Sayers introduces her heroine, Harriet Vane, in Strong Poison. Harriet and Sayers are so alike (or at least Harriet is Sayers as she might like to be perceived by others), that the parallels are unmistakable. Harriet Vane is strong, principled, independent, intelligent, practical, orphaned (can this be a reference to Sayers' financial abandonment by her father?), and a popular detective novelist. She rejects Peter's advances at first, then slowly accepts him as a friend, then as lover and husband. Sayers felt, in fact, that she

had to humanize Peter to make him worthy of Harriet who, she believed, was real from the start. Was Sayers remolding the past, fictionally reliving a relationship that she, as author, could control? Or was she using her experiences with Whelpton and other men to shape that part of her philosophy which today would be called feminist, although Sayers rejected the label during her lifetime? There were other affairs. Some three years after the abortive affair with Whelpton ended, Dorothy entered into a liason that had more serious and lasting consequences for her as a writer and as a human being.

In 1923 and 1924 Dorothy established herself in London on the fringes of Bloomsbury. She was employed by Benson's, a successful London advertising agency, in a job that allowed her to live a life of genteel poverty. Obviously Sayers did not find enough to occupy herself at Benson's, because she continued to write poetry for publication as she had done at Oxford, and she started writing detective novels. Many of her college friends were in London; they and other struggling artists made up the circle in which Dorothy moved. One member of this social group was John Cournos, a Russian born American writer struggling along at the edge of fame as were so many others. Dorothy's affair with Cournos was probably the result of two lonely people coming together. Cournos had just broken with another woman whose name was Dorothy; he was the one who was jilted. And, of course, Sayers was still smarting from her experiences

with Whelpton (Hone, p. 186).[3] From the start, Cournos made it clear that this affair was a mere interlude to him. He, like Whelpton, had affections that were engaged elsewhere; later in the same year that he and Dorothy met, Cournos married Helen Kestner Satterthwaite. For whatever reasons Dorothy agreed to such an arrangement--and its very impermanence might have been its most attractive feature--the consequences for her included conceiving and bearing an illegitimate son. She never named Cournos as the father, but it is clear from her letters to him that she believed he was (Hone, p. 45).

John Anthony Fleming (he uses the surname of the man Sayers married in the second half of the 1920's) was born on 3 January 1924. Dorothy had taken a six-months leave of absence from Benson's in September of the previous year, ostensibly to work on her second detective novel. (Whose Body?, her first, was published in October, 1923.) In actuality she was at Bournemouth awaiting the birth of her child. This necessary secrecy had one curious and perhaps telling aspect. Despite the lengths she went to in order to hide her condition at the time, and despite her absolute silence on the subject throughout her life, she openly registered her son's birth under her name and address at

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[3]Even when she was a grown (and famous) woman, the mention of the Whelpton name had the power to startle her. On 13 December 1957, four days before her death, Sayers and her friend Barbara Reynolds were Christmas shopping. In the course of the conversation Dr. Reynolds mentioned Mrs. Eric Whelpton. Sayers was visibly distressed. (Hone, p. 186).

Christchurch, a suburb of Bournemouth. There is something curiously fatalistic about this bow to legality. The law that required registration was, of course, frequently manipulated. Why did she feel it necessary to acknowledge her son legally, knowing that anyone who suspected the truth need only search the central records at Somerset House? Her subsequent relationship with her son is even harder to fathom. After his birth, Dorothy placed him with a cousin, Ivy Amy Shrimpton. Sayers supported John financially, but it was not until the child was ten that she acknowledged any personal relationship, and that only as adoptive mother. Her actions can be defended, given the particular moral restrictions of the time, restrictions she, as a minister's daughter, must surely have recognized. But it is hard to defend the spirit behind these actions, even if it is acknowledged that personal responsibility might have been the motive. Claiming her child in such a fashion may well salve the conscience of one who believed, as Sayers did, that everything that happened to her in her life was the direct result of her own actions (Hone, p. 46).[4] If she did acknowledge her responsibility to her child, it would be natural and even necessary to live with such consequences that might follow. Nevertheless, it is difficult to

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[4]In a letter written to Dr. James Welch (20 November 1943), now held by the BBC Archives, Sayers states: "... I can't think of any personal misfortunes that have befallen me which were not, in one way or another, my own fault." (Hone, p. 46).

understand how denying her child a complete family can be justified even in the name of personal responsibility. If Sayers felt that putting John up for adoption was somehow dishonorable, was somehow evading the consequences of her mistake, merely accepting financial and (false) adoptive responsibility hardly ameliorates the situation. In this matter, personal responsibility must have ended where public approbation began.

The stand, or half-stand, that Sayers took with regard to her son colored her work. In her subsequent detective novels, as in her essays on Christian morality, sins of the flesh were dismissed as being infinitely less important than others classed as "deadly" by the church. In Strong Poison, the novel that introduced Harriet Vane to her public, Sayers' heroine has lived openly with a man without benefit of marriage. Yet it is not this fact that provides the moral outlook for the plot. Rather, it is the fact that Harriet's lover was dishonest with her about his principles concerning marriage that provides the particular slant to the mystery. He has professed disbelief in the institution of marriage; Harriet reluctantly adopts the morals of the man she loves. When she later discovers that he has been merely testing her devotion to him (after a year's trial period, he magnanimously offers marriage as a reward), Harriet feels betrayed and cheapened.

Sayers' attitude toward sexual morality is further revealed in an essay she wrote entitled "The Other Six

Deadly Sins." In this essay she states:

> Perhaps the bitterest commentary on the way in which Christian doctrine has been taught in the last few centuries is the fact that to the majority of people the word "immorality" has come to mean one thing and one thing only. . . . (Hone, p. 181)

Clearly, the emphasis the Church accorded fleshly sins irritated Sayers. Forced to pick her way through a sexual mine-field filled with contradictory and sometimes misleading signposts, her uncertainties receiving either embarrassed silence (from women dons) or moralistic rigidity (from the church), Sayers was unequipped to deal with Bloomsbury morality. She succumbed to it, suffered for it, made what restitution she could under her particular circumstances, and then resolved to use what she had learned about herself and human morality in her work. In March 1924, she returned to Benson's. Now, more than ever, Sayers needed that job; she had a child to support. Moreover, perhaps due to quite understandable emotional strain, the promised second detective novel had not materialized. Clouds of Witness was not published until 1926; until that time she had to make do on her salary as copywriter and on the slim proceeds from Whose Body?.

CHAPTER II

GENRE STUDY

Years later, looking back at her first novelistic attempt, Sayers blamed the conventionality of Whose Body? on her own lack of social maturity. The detective novel that introduced Lord Peter Wimsey had no life in it, she said, because its author had no experience with life. Instead, this book grew out of a college game she and her Somerville friends had played. One member of the group would announce a puzzle to be solved; the other members would contribute various solutions (Hone, p. 41). This sort of parlor game was very popular with aspiring intellectuals, allowing as it did free reign to one's imagination and reasoning faculties. It was, however, a game, not an attempt to recognize and rectify those social conditions that led to crime. But as a training exercise for detective story writers this parlor game could hardly be excelled.

For those writers who could recognize a trend when they saw it--and Sayers was only one of many such prescient authors--writing detective fiction looked as if it were going to be a very lucrative profession indeed. As Robert Graves and Alan Hodge described the decade that would be known as the Golden Age of Detective Fiction.

> Low-brow reading was now dominated by the detective novel . . . . These books were designed not as realistic accounts of crime,

> but as puzzles to test the reader's acuteness in following up disguised clues. (Hone, p. 41)

Sayers' entry in this popular fiction field was Whose Body?, the book that was published a month after she took her leave of absence from Benson's. This first in the series of Wimsey detective novels appears to follow the conventions of the genre almost slavishly. Its crime was murder, its ostensible victim was a non-entity, those clues relating to the solution of the crime were cunningly presented, a multitude of suspects were ritually considered only to be discarded, its criminal was satisfyingly villainous, and above all, its detective was intelligent, competent, and properly secretive. And yet, on further examination, one discovers that Sayers took certain liberties with the genre, liberties that classical detective genre purists might find disconcerting, perhaps even unsettling. For despite Sayers' innovations, maybe even because of them, the novel works. It is a rousing story and something more: a few, a very few, of its characters come to life.

Murder is the most prevalent crime in classical detective fiction; moreover, the murder usually takes place off-stage either before the time the story starts unfolding, or in some locale not immediately apparent to the reader. Murder is chosen, of course, for its importance. Because it is a capital offense, it provides the author with numerous opportunities for introducing

baffling clues and sinister suspects. After all, whoever commits murder will quite naturally wish to muddy the waters, leaving clues behind that are designed to obscure rather than illumine the facts. Additionally, he who murders will harbor little compassion for the hapless innocent bystander who, much to his terror, finds himself unjustly accused of this most heinous act.

But there is another reason detective story authors find murder so convenient. Dead men tell no tales. The victim has been conveniently disposed of off-stage, thus eliminating the need for playing down the role of the underdog. True, some authors skirt the problem of the too sympathetic victim by making him eminently murderable; some people are natural victims for whom no one is likely to mourn overly much. But this technique is merely a variation on the need for keeping the novel's focus on the puzzle and its solution. John G. Cawelti in his excellent study of popular fiction states:

> the victim cannot really be mourned or the possible complexities of the situation allowed to draw [the reader's] attention away from the detective and his investigation.[1]

The puzzle is the thing that most devotees of classical detective fiction relish. Blood and gore, weeping and wailing, are not appreciated.

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[1]John G. Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 81.

Sayers employs the first technique, that of off-stage murder; the victim Peter is called to see is long dead before the novel opens. An architect known to Peter's aristocratic mother has found, to his horror, a naked body in his bath. Equally horrible is the fact that this body wears pince-nez and has been recently shaven. These two anomalies, combined with the body's dirty fingernails and work-roughened hands, lead Peter to suspect that the police are guilty of jumping too quickly to the wrong conclusion. They believe they have found the body of a missing financier, and indeed, the description of the man and the appearance of the body are superficially similar. Peter, in approved amateur detective fashion, proves his hypothesis, demonstrating, of course, his superior reasoning power.

None of this, so far, departs from the conventions of the classical detective novel. Only when Peter proves that there must have been a second body, and demonstrates the reasons for this startling superfluity of victims, does Sayers depart from the formula. The second victim, it is true, has been dispatched off-stage, but he is not a non-entity, nor is he a natural target for murder. His only offense has been that he married the woman the villain had assumed was his intended mate. Moreover, the marriage that so upsets the murderer took place many years ago. Throughout the ensuing years the victim, Sir Reuben Levy, had every reason to suppose that his offense

had been forgiven since the murderer, Sir Julian Freke, had remained a close friend of the family as well as its semi-official medical adviser. The extenuating circumstances of the crime that reflect so badly on the murderer reflect positively on the victim. Sir Reuben has trusted an old friend, has believed that this friend's professed concerns for his health were based on love. Sayers develops the character of Sir Reuben most sympathetically. His wife, the former Christine Ford, is by all accounts a woman of exceptional virtue. As Peter observes after hearing the story of her marriage and subsequent life from his mother, "Lady Levy seems to have had the knack of makin' people devoted to her."[2] The loss of her husband, especially under such mysterious circumstances, is very distressing to her. Even more distressing is the ordeal she must undergo to identify his body. Again, Sir Reuben's valet affords him high marks for courtesy, simplicity, and family devotion. Mr. Pemming is his name, and he is almost fulsome in his praise of

> meals at regular hours; decent, respectable families to dinner--none of your painted women--and no valeting at night, there's much to be said for it.
> (Whose Body?, p. 49)

Any man who can hold the love and devotion of wife and valet throughout the years deserves the reader's

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[2]Dorothy L. Sayers, Whose Body? (New York: Avon Books, 1961), p. 43. Subsequent quotation taken from this edition will be cited in parentheses in the text.

sympathetic approbation. Sir Reuben is a departure from the conventional victim, a departure to be pondered and remembered. Sayers will pick up this innovation and apply it to Harriet Vane when the time comes for the heroine to be introduced.

Equally as significant is Sayers' treatment of the murderer in Whose Body?. As S. S. Van Dine states in his rules for detective fiction:

> The entire onus must rest on one pair of shoulders: the entire indignation of [the reader] must be permitted to concentrate on a single black nature.[3]

Sayers builds up aversion to the murderer, Sir Julian Freke, in keeping with the conventions. But she does it in such a way as to emphasize the moral issues of right and wrong. Consider the nature of this murderer. He is an important figure in the medical world, but not important for his dedication to healing. Rather, this cold and calculating perversion of the family doctor is a research fellow, spending his time dissecting the bodies of derelicts in order to prove that one's actions are biologically rather than morally determined. As Peter so succinctly puts it, Freke "thinks God is a secretion of the liver" (Whose Body?, p. 67). Not only is Freke morally deficient, he is guilty of intellectual dishonesty. Peter again provides

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[3]S.S. Van Dine, "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories," The Art of the Mystery Story, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), p. 191.

the judgment when he observes, "there's nothing you can't prove if your outlook is only sufficiently limited" (Whose Body?, p. 67). Freke's coldness and calculation are not confined to his profession. The motive force of his entire adult life, or at least that part of it which has passed since Christine Ford married Sir Reuben Levy, has been hatred-- not the white-hot, quickly burnt hatred of a man disappointed in love, but the ice-cold, consuming hatred of a man whose ego has been wounded. Two things have fueled that hatred: Christine's unaccountable preference for a penniless Jew, and her subsequent pleasure and satisfaction with the man and the life she chose. No thought of reconciliation with Christine is present as Freke plots Sir Reuben's murder. If anything, the act is designed to punish her for her infidelity as much as it is to rid himself of a constant irritant in the form of her husband. How secretly malevolent the man is, planning and plotting over the years, all the time maintaining a hypocritical friendship with the couple he hates. There are no extenuating circumstances to soften the reader's perception of Freke. He has hated too long and too cunningly, has used his position of trust, both public and private, to such dastardly ends, to warrant any sympathy from the reader. Indeed, he is almost insane, driven to that threshhold by a life of hate and deceit. Almost, but not quite insane. Sayers is very careful to keep him on the right side of sanity. Evil is punishable, insanity is merely pitiable.

Sir Julian Freke is the first in a series of absolute villains in Sayers' detective novels. In her most popular stories such as Murder Must Advertise, Unnatural Death, and The Nine Tailors, the villain in each piece violates some unwritten social contract. He or she is a depraved soul, finally driven by corruption to murder. Each one has violated the natural trust accorded to his public or private position, enmeshing innocent bystanders in a web of deceit and terror. For example, in Murder Must Advertise, the villain has abused his position as advertising executive to furnish high signs to an underworld mob of drug runners. His motives are part mercenary, part egotistic. And when he kills, he kills to protect and preserve his new-found material wealth. In Unnatural Death, the villain is a nurse who uses her professional skill to devise a new way to bring death, not life. Moreover, in covering her tracks, she ensnares an innocent girl in bonds of unmistakeable homosexuality. (For its time, the homosexual connection was remarkable explicit.) In The Nine Tailors, the villain is a double deserter. First he deserts his mates in war, then he deserts his wife whom, moreover, he has married bigamously. Sayers quite obviously regards dereliction of duty and misuse of trust as crimes comparable to, perhaps even greater than, the crime of murder. Just as obviously she envisions Peter as the champion of morality and justice. In pitting him against these various criminals, in allowing him that intuitive and

intellectual edge, she has put herself squarely on the side of moral responsibility. This is not, however, a completely comfortable position to hold. For in giving Peter the power to judge and condemn, Sayers has written herself into an unholy corner. Surely only God should judge; certainly only God can condemn to death. What role, then, does secular authority play? "Leave him to Heaven," and one has some very unpleasant people to endure until such time as Heaven decides to take a hand. "I sentence you to death, may God have mercy on your soul," and one faces the terrible possibility that fallible man will condemn to death an innocent victim of circumstantial evidence.

Cawelti states that "the classical detective story is more concerned with the isolation and specification of guilt than with the punishment of the criminal."[4] True. Most authors are content to follow this convention, realizing that if they do not, emotions might be aroused on the part of reader that could detract from the puzzle. They do not want to face the dilemma inherent in man's legally killing his fellow man. And, to a very large extent Sayers follows this convention in Whose Body?. Freke's deserved end is briefly noted. The reader leaves him languishing in gaol, awaiting trial. But there are also some slight indications that the author's conscience intrudes on the formula. In a conversation with his friend

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[4]Cawelti, p. 91.

Detective Parker, Peter concentrates on his attitude towards Freke, seeking reassurance that the game is worth the prize. Having sailed happily and successfully through a maze of clues and suspects, he now must prove his thesis by accusing a man of murder whom he finds personally agreeable. But Peter ceases being charmed by the game, the crossword puzzle so necessary to the classical detective story, when he realizes that "somebody is going to be hurt" (Whose Body?, p. 121). That word "hurt" is, of course, a euphemism for "killed," but neither Peter nor his creator is quite ready to face the problem so baldly. Parker provides some balm for Peter's embryonic conscience, managing at the same time to unleash a stinging indictment of the amateur detective in general:

> "Yes, yes, I know," said the detective, "but that's because you're thinking about your attitude. You want to be consistent, you want to look pretty, you want to swagger debonairly through a tragedy of human sorrows and things. But that's childish. If you've any duty to society in the way of finding out the truth about murders, you must do it in any attitude that comes handy. You want to be elegant and detached? That's all right, if you find the truth out that way, but it hasn't any value in itself, you know. You want to look dignified and consistent--what's that got to do with it? You want to hunt down a murderer for the sport of the thing and then shake hands with him and say, 'Well played--hard luck--you shall have your revenge tomorrow!' Well, you can't do it like that. Life's not a football match. You want to be a sportsman. You can't be a sportsman. You're a responsible person."
>
> (Whose Body?, p. 121)

Peter drops the subject with a muttered imprecation about Parker's Puritan conscience, and there, for the time being,

the matter rests. But within this peroration by Parker lurks the crux of Sayers' dissatisfaction with the genre. Life is not a football match. Human beings are responsible for their actions, and for this very reason they must formulate some philosophy that will ease them over the rough spots of moral dilemmas. Later, Sayers will use these rudiments of a questioning conscience as the cornerstone in her plan to make Peter a human being. The philosophy she finally embraces for her own life will be, in large part, considered and tested quite publicly in a series of novels. Peter will become, at one and the same time, Sayers' sounding board and spokesman. And Peter, the rational detective, will eventually be able to weep as the criminal he has brought to justice is hanged, but this display of human emotion will in no way deter him from practising the very profession that leads to hanging. Peter, and Sayers, will chose the side of secular justice and human responsibility, but the struggle to reach this philosophy will not be easy. For another voice will one day intrude, the voice of one who, because she has experienced the consequences of fallible human judgment, because she has been the wrongly accused defendant in a murder trial, will be able to consider this moral dilemma from the emotional, rather than the rational side. Harriet Vane will one day plead the cause of extenuating circumstances only to be told that if Peter chooses her philosophy he must abandon detection altogether. Two voices, one author, one

very real moral dilemma, all are part of the impetus behind Sayers' wish to combine the detective genre with the novel of manners. She felt, and she wrote, that the way she could accomplish the meld would be to make Peter human, to make him less the puzzle solver, more the man to whom duty, as espoused by Parker in this first Wimsey novel, was the only end that justified the means.

CHAPTER III

HARRIET VANE

With the exception of that one rather tentative, ultimately abortive foray into actual human emotion, Peter, in Whose Body?, is entirely formulaic. As if in illustration of Peter's more superhuman (or inhuman) characteristics, one disgruntled critic, Q. D. Leavis, accuses Sayers, with good reason, of reviving (or prolonging) Bertie Woosterism. Leavis charges, "Miss Sayers has overstepped the limits of what even a best-seller's public can be expected to swallow without suspicion."[1] Peter, at least in the early books, is probably too perfectly competent. What is worse, he is flippant about matters that even in detective novels should be treated with some dignity. When he greets Detective Parker with:

> We both have got a body in the bath,
> We both have got a body in the bath--
> For in spite of all temptations,
> To go in for cheap sensations
> We insist upon a body in the bath--
> (Whose Body?, p. 20)

Sayers sacrifices consistent characterization of Parker--a Puritanical Parker should not have let that ditty pass without comment--for questionable comedic effect. The spirit of the Going-Down Play, of undergraduate high-jinks, is all too evident.

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[1]Hannay, "Harriet's Influence," Whimsey, p. 38.

Sayers' use of the Bertie Wooster tradition also demonstrates an uneven understanding of British aristocracy. It is doubtful that such affected language as Peter assumes whenever he is forced to converse with the lower classes actually is representative of the post-World War I aristocrat. In a conversation with Mr. Thripps, the architect in whose bath the body is found, Peter combines the snobbery of a Colonel Blimp with the vacuity of a Bertie Wooster. He assures Thripp that finding the body

> . . . must have been uncommonly distressin'
> . . . especially coming like that before breakfast. Hate anything tiresome happenin' before breakfast. Takes a man at such a confounded disadvantage, what?
> (Whose Body?, p. 12)

Peter's only really dignified moments are spent unraveling the puzzle. Still, except for that brief moment of questioning conscience, the human consequences of crime are effectively buried under a maze of clues. Perhaps Peter's conventionality contributed to Sayers' denigration of this novel. Certainly, if the main character is almost wholly formulaic, so too will be the novel.

Whatever Sayers' reasons were for labeling Whose Body? conventional, she undoubtedly was becoming bored with her detective. After Whose Body? she wrote three more full-length novels and a series of short stories in which, she later admitted, Peter "remained static except for a repertory

of tricks and attitudes."[2] Discouraged, she contemplated ending the series by marrying Peter off and getting rid of him.[3] However, in the process of providing a suitable wife for Peter she found herself again becoming interested in changing the detective formula by merging it with the novel of manners. What is more important, she found herself engaged in a private battle between her own principles of public duty and private integrity. And although this battle was inwardly fought, the evidence of it can be found in the novels she wrote in the 1930's.

Sayers had long admired the work of Wilkie Collins. She thought The Moonstone the very epitome of the novel of manners. Indeed, she planned at various times in her life to write his biography, and although she never finished researching his life, Sayers left enough notes in rough draft form to enable E. R. Gregory to publish what work she had done.[4] In her Introduction to The Omnibus of Crime, published in 1929, Sayers wrote about this novel:

> The instances in which the love-story is an integral part of the plot are extremely rare. One very beautiful example occurs in The Moonstone. Here the entire plot hangs on the love of two women for Franklin Blake. Both Rachel

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[2]Sayers, "Gaudy Night," p. 210.

[3]Sayers, "Gaudy Night," p. 210.

[4]E. R. Gregory, ed., Dorothy L. Sayers: Wilkie Collins: A Critical Biographical Study (Toledo, Ohio: The Friends of the University of Toledo Libraries, 1977).

> Verinder and Rosanna Spearman know that he took the diamond, and the whole mystery arises from their efforts to shield him. Their conduct is, in both cases, completely natural and right, and the characters are so finely conceived as to be entirely convincing.[5]

She determined to emulate Collins even though she clearly recognized the inherent risks. Few detective story writers had been able to keep a balance between romance and mystery. As Sayers explained:

> This is the whole difficulty about allowing real human beings into a detective-story. At some point or other, either their emotions make hay of the detective interest, or the detective interest gets hold of them and makes their emotions look like pasteboard.[6]

Still, Sayers felt that if she could incorporate a believable romance into the action of the detective mystery, she would come close to writing the sort of novel she admired. She reasoned that if Peter fell in love with a woman who rejected him for the very reasons that made him so formulaic--superhuman competence and sub-human detachment from the human consequences of crime--he would have to examine his actions and attitudes, and then change them to win his bride. Through this device, an introduction of real human emotion based on love and self-examination, Peter would become more really human, less the conventional automaton Sayers perceived him to be.

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[5]Sayers, Omnibus, p. 39.

[6]Sayers, Omnibus, p. 40.

What Sayers did not realize, however, was how deeply ingrained and how ill-considered were her own convictions of personal and public responsibility. The Peter that emerged in the early novels was, for all his Gallic private amours, the quintessential British Victorian. He was possessed of a public sense of right and wrong. Discretion in love, absolute integrity in duty, the responsibility to uphold publicly, or perhaps even advance, the laws of state were of paramount importance. In short, he had been trained to empire, secure in the knowledge that the British system was the best of all possible social and political systems. That part of Sayers that derived from her own Victorian upbringing held the same convictions. And yet, during her years spent on the outskirts of Bloomsbury she had been exposed to a new morality, one that claimed private ethics were all that mattered. If the public, judging only from appearances, condemned a person's actions, that public judgment could be discounted, although it could not always be escaped. Thus, her curious actions concerning her illegitimate son. Torn between the conviction that the public had a right to condemn her immoral behavior, and the equally felt conviction that a person was accountable only to himself (and God), Sayers tried to find an equitable compromise. In reality, of course, what she did was no compromise at all. It was a capitulation to the need to keep up appearances, with a small sop thrown to conscience in the form of monetary support. In like manner, the compromise she thought

to effect between Harriet's heart and Peter's mind by humanizing Peter also failed.

When, in Strong Poison, published in 1930, Sayers introduced the woman who would become Peter's wife, she--consciously or unconsciously?--gave Harriet Vane Bloomsbury principles without, however, realizing just how antithetical these principles might be to the ones already demonstrated by Peter. She hoped for conflict, of course, or how else could she make Peter grow to a semblance of humanity? But since she deliberately set out to express that conflict of heart and mind in terms of feminist views about male/female equality,[7] she found herself faced with a problem with logic. There was no way she could reconcile two sets of principles that were mutually opposed; there was no way she could make equal the persons who held those conflicting principles.

In the first and second Harriet Vane novels--Strong Poison and Have His Carcase (1932)--the inherently destructive nature of the conflict is not much in evidence. Since these two books were written with the express purpose of doing away with Peter, Sayers did not have to grapple with the problem of her own two conflicting beliefs. Not until Gaudy Night (1936), did Sayers decide to prolong the series, so not until then did the problem of equality arise. A full discussion of Gaudy Night will be undertaken in chapter IV.

Strong Poison provides the personal background of the

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[7]Sayers, "Gaudy Night," p. 212.

two protagonists out of which the conflict eventually arises. As the novel opens, Harriet Vane is in gaol, accused of murdering her ex-lover, Philip Boyes. Her only defense is curious; only one juror believes her account of the relationship between the two lovers, a belief that results in a hung jury. Peter, who is in the courtroom out of boredom, falls instantly in love and vows to clear her name absolutely. He, too, believes her story, acknowledging that a woman who has been tricked into an illicit relationship will, on discovering the truth, not hate, but pity and scorn her erstwhile duplicitous mate.

In this novel Harriet demonstrates her mettle, proving by her courage that she is a fit bride for the hero, Peter. But Peter, regrettably, is still very much the formulaic detective, dashing after clues and suspects in hopes of discovering the one clue that will free Harriet from gaol. Periodically, he lays his evidence and heart at her feet, only to be dismissed as an insufferable remembrance of an episode Harriet would rather forget.

Harriet's actions are entirely consistent with her character. She knows that her reasons for living with and eventually for breaking with Philip Boyes were honorable. It was laughable to think that she could have possibly poisoned her ex-lover in a fit of jealous pique. When Philip's true nature is revealed through his

insulting proposal of marriage, all feeling for him has vanished. As she tells Peter:

> I didn't like having matrimony offered me as a bad-conduct prize . . . . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I thought Philip had made both himself and me riduculous, and the minute I say that--well, the whole thing simply shut down--flop![8]

If the public, in the form of judge, jury, and public prosecutor, wishes to condemn her to death, Harriet quite understands their reasons:

> . . . I feel it's like one book I wrote, in which I invented such a perfectly watertight crime that I couldn't devise any way for my detective to prove it, and had to fall back on the murderer's confession.
> (Strong Poison, pp. 35, 36)

She knows that public justice will, from time to time, miscarry, simply because those who judge publicly cannot allow themselves to consider the complexities of human motivation. The law has a provision about reasonable doubt, it is true, but as the presiding judge makes abundantly clear, such doubt should stem from tangible fact, not intangible motive. The judge tells the jury in his summing-up speech:

> Sir Impey Biggs [defense attorney], in his able and eloquent speech, has put it to you that she had very little motive for such a murder, but I am bound to tell you that murders are very often committed for what seem to be most inadequate

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[8]Dorothy L. Sayers, Strong Poison (New York: Avon Books, 1967), p. 37. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited in parentheses in the text.

> motives--if, indeed, any motive can be called adequate for such a crime.
> (Strong Poison, p. 25)

Harriet is not happy about being the victim of circumstantial evidence, but neither is she bitter about it.

Peter's actions, unfortunately, are entirely inconsistent with his character. How can an unemotional, detached, playboy detective fall so violently and suddenly in love with a woman he sees only from a distance, and only that one time? That he does so, that this sudden passion leads him to such quixotic action, is so out of character that Sayers can supply only the slim motivation of love at first sight. Peter replies to Harriet when she questions his reasons for loving her:

> Why? Oh, well-I thought you'd be rather an attractive person to marry. That's all. I mean, I sort of took a fancy to you. I can't tell you why. There's no rule about it, you know.
> (Strong Poison, pp. 37, 38)

Moreover, the Peter who had been so cynical about humanity, cheerfully assuming that anyone could do murder for any number of highly unaccountable reasons--"most of us have dozens of reasons for murderin' all sorts of inoffensive people" (Whose Body?, p. 117)--who had at one time suspected his own brother and sister of murder (Clouds of Witness, 1926), is hardly consistent with the Peter who flatly denies the evidence, telling Parker:

> There isn't one [a flaw] in the evidence. It's damnably knife-proof. There's nothing wrong about it at all, except that the girl's innocent.
> (Strong Poison, p. 27)

Perhaps the only reason that the reader does not believe Sayers has produced another instance in which she "overstepped the limits of what even a best-seller's public can be expected to swallow without suspicion," is the utter vulnerability displayed by Harriet. She is so honest about her own chances for survival, so nearly despairing, and yet so courageous that, almost in defiance, the reader allows his belief in her character to influence his faith in Peter's protestations of love and loyalty. Then too, the mystery itself is well done. It is intriguing and convoluted, its solution dramatic and absolutely inevitable when all the facts are revealed. Moreover, the real murderer is a Sayers specialty. He is a solicitor who has lost the estate he was charged with preserving, thus becoming another in a long line of criminals who is guilty of dereliction of public trust. And, of course, representing another Sayers specialty, the innocent victim of circumstances, Harriet Vane, is central to this novel besides being sympathetically drawn. So, except for the nagging doubt that Peter's sudden passion is inadequately motivated, the love interest does not "make hay of the detective interest." Neither, however, is it in any danger of doing so, for this is a classical detective novel, only slightly intruded upon by a decorous, and largely unbelievable, romance. The same integration that Collins achieved in The Moonstone was that which Sayers sought to accomplish between detective fiction and the novel

of manners. This integration cannot be perceived in Strong Poison.

Nor, but for different reasons, can that integration be found in her next Harriet Vane novel, Have His Carcase. In this story the love interest almost makes hay of the detective interest because both are carelessly drawn. Probably when the novel was first published the mystery was more exciting. But because it turns on a device too frequently used since (the victim is a hemophiliac, so the vital clue--warm, flowing blood--obscures rather than illuminates the time of the crime), today's readers are not much mystified. And while it is not fair to hold Sayers accountable for what was, after all, an innovative use of medical knowledge, the fact remains that the story's plot lacks punch. Perhaps this is so because the murderer is merely a rather nasty momma's boy fearful of losing his expected inheritance, rather than the arch villain so usually employed by Sayers. He is ridiculous and pathetic, not sinister like all those smoothly sinister villains Sayers had used to such good effect. Perhaps too, the victim is at fault. He is by birth a Russian, and Sayers is not at her best doing foreigners. She tends to reinforce all the stereotypes dear to the heart of the insular British. Additionally, because the victim is something of a gigolo, Sayers could not work herself up to the white heat of indignation she reserved for public miscreants who "did in" innocents. Sexual habits were not one of her great concerns; Harriet's love affair,

for example, was never a moral issue, nor were the numerous affairs indulged in off-stage by Peter.

Harriet and Peter's relationship almost intrudes on this lackluster plot because it too is one of unpleasant emotion. The reader is treated to a series of spats designed, it is true, to delineate Harriet's inferiority complex and Peter's growing frustration over a seemingly dead-end love affair, but viewing domestic fights for whatever reasons is still unappetizing fare. Because Sayers neglects to hint at even a semblance of future reconciliation, the reader is not even able to enjoy a sense of anticipation that the two will finally resolve their differences and agree to marry. Rather, he is forced to witness a painful relationship that is going nowhere. Perhaps Sayers recognized the sterility of both the puzzle and the love interest because her next two novels and one book of short stories were once again pure detective stories, with Peter playing the lone detective hand. Not until 1936, the year she published Gaudy Night, did Sayers again take up the saga of Harriet and Peter. In that novel she resolved to find a device for ending their personal difficulties, a device that would not only allow Harriet to marry Peter, but would also provide the author with a bridge between the classical detective formula and the novel of manners.

CHAPTER IV

HARRIET AND PETER

Gaudy Night, the tenth novel in the Wimsey series of detective stories, again takes up the vexing problem of Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane's courtship. Five years and three novels had intervened since Have His Carcase had been published, but Sayers still had not found the perfect device for effecting a union between hero and heroine. She had, however, learned something about characterization. Believing that a skilled and consistent writer conceives of a character fully grown and possessed of a reasonable--if hidden--history, as she so conjectured in an essay entitled "Creative Mind," Sayers searched her previous stories for "allusions to [that] unwritten past,"[1] and was gratified to find that she had unwittingly given Peter "embryonic buds of a character of sorts."[2] In an essay entitled "Gaudy Night" (1937), Sayers explained the process she used to improve the characterization of Peter. She discovered that he

> had not been the complete silly ass; he had only played the silly ass, which was not the same thing. He had had shell-shock and a vaguely embittered love affair; he had a mother and a friend and a sketchy sort of brother and sister; he had literary and

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[1]Dorothy L. Sayers, "Creative Mind," Unpopular Opinions (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1946), p. 54.

[2]Sayers, "Gaudy Night," p. 211.

> musical tastes, and a few well-defined opinions and feelings; and a little tidying-up of dates and places would put his worldly affairs in order.[3]

But the "tidying-up" Sayers did in Gaudy Night was a purely mechanical task, involving little more than a particularly interesting challenge to a detective writer's normal skills. Sayers could introduce references to Peter's new-found personality in Gaudy Night in much the same way as she planted false clues and red-herrings in all her detective novels. Such sleight-of-hand, used to positive purpose, was, no doubt, a refreshing change of pace for her. Plotting characterization was more interesting than plotting action.

But changing Peter to this extent, providing him with a credible past on which a consistent future could be based, is not quite the same thing as humanizing him. And yet in her essay, "Gaudy Night," Sayers stated that, "[Harriet] had been a human being from the start, and I had humanized Peter for her benefit . . . ."[4] Sayers was mistaken. What she had actually done was to neutralize some of Peter's more excessive Bertie Woosterisms, especially those which were reflected in his speech. In Gaudy Night, Sayers added full "ings" to the endings of Peter's words and replaced his "ain'ts" with standard English negatives. Moreover, she de-emphasized Peter's flippancies, allowing his more serious

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[3]Sayers, "Gaudy Night," p. 211.

[4]Sayers, "Gaudy Night," p. 212.

side to emerge. But these changes in speech patterns and mannerisms were merely indications of equally changing times. By the mid-1930's, the rise of Socialism and Communism had convinced real aristocrats (and those who pretended to be aristocratic) that it was no longer prudent to set themselves apart linguistically from the masses. And the type of witticisms Peter indulged in throughout the roaring 20's were hardly appropriate in the threatened 30's.

Sayers may have succeeded in bringing her characterization of Peter in line with contemporary reality, but Peter himself was no more realistic for her efforts. In Gaudy Night he is just as much the formulaic detective as he had been in Whose Body?, Sayers first novel. If anything, Peter is more unbelievable, more unreal. In Gaudy Night Peter is an Oxford Scholar, holding an undergraduate First in History as well as a Master of Arts degree in that same field. In Whose Body? he is merely a collector of incunabula. In Gaudy Night Peter travels frequently to Europe on behalf of the Foreign Office as an ad hoc diplomat. In Whose Body? the nearest he comes to officialdom is a visit to the flat of his friend Detective Parker. In Gaudy Night Peter exhibits unusual expertise in the martial arts. In Whose Body? he is athletically inclined (witness the ease with which he clambers out of a narrow bathroom window to tread the gabled roofs), but he confines his violent propensities

to the steely grab of the murderer's wrist.[5]

Sayers confused fictional realism with reality because to her Peter was real. As she wrote in her essay, "Gaudy Night," "[Peter's] affairs are more real to me than my own. . . ."[6] A character in a novel can be called "realistic" if all--or even some--of his mannerisms and personality traits can be recognized in actual human beings, but the character himself is not real. Moreover his creator should always be aware that he is not, lest objectivity be lost. Peter, moreover, was not even realistic; he was a fictional throwback to a more romantic age with overtones of modern beliefs in scientific, observable, deductible fact.

Just as Sayers believed Peter was humanized in Gaudy Night, so she believed she had in that novel finally found a way to fuse the detective genre and the novel of manners. If detective plot and love affair could turn on the same theme, a theme, moreover, of universal importance, Sayers felt she might be able to transcend the limitations of pure formula, and finally give her readers a literature with "bowels" to it. But Sayers also realized that all elements of the story would have to be integrated around that theme,

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[5]See also Sayers' Murder Must Advertise for Peter's skills at cricket and at diving into shallow pools from great heights.

[6]Sayers, "Gaudy Night," p. 220.

not just detective plot and love interest. She would have to be very careful to devise a setting that reinforced the theme, and to create minor characters that could be used as foils for both the crime and love affair. In her essay, "Gaudy Night," Sayers discussed the difficult task she had chosen for herself:

> On the intellectual platform, alone of all others, Harriet could stand free and equal with Peter, since in that sphere she had never been false to her own standards. By choosing a plot that should exhibit intellectual integrity as the one great permanent value in an emotionally unstable world I should be saying the thing that, in a confused way, I had been wanting to say all my life.[7]

The setting Sayers invented was that of a woman's college closely patterned after Somerville, Sayers' own alma mater. Sayers called her fictional college Shrewsbury, a name that had implications for detective plot, love interest, and theme. Behind their cloistered walls women dons could live lives of quiet reason, of pursuit of pure knowledge, secure in the conviction that all their more basic needs save one were automatically provided. Domestic tasks were performed by scouts, women from the town who left their own families in lodgings in order to serve their more intellectual sisters. In effect, the dons were elevated to "husbandhood," served by "wives" who catered to their every want but sex. Sayers' heroine, Harriet Vane, entered this cloistered world in a

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[7]Sayers, "Gaudy Night," p. 213.

state of personal crisis. All her experiences since leaving college (the same college, Shrewsbury) had been bad ones. She had been accused of murder and had been cleared of that charge, but her self-confidence had been shaken by the actions that had led her to be so accused. She thought herself unfit for love because she had once been deceived by it. Peter's frequent proposals of marriage were odious to her; they merely served to remind her of loathsome inadequacies in her own character. She knew she needed time to find emotional balance and hoped that Shrewsbury might serve as her sanctuary from the real world, might allow her to forget emotion in an atmosphere that promised intellectual calm. Harriet thinks

> if only one could come back to this quiet place, where only intellectual achievement counted; if one could work here steadily and obscurely at some close-knit piece of reasoning...one might be able to forget the wreck and chaos of the past, or see it, at any rate, in a truer proportion.[8]

But reality intrudes upon even these hallowed halls of learning when Harriet finds in the sleeve of her academic gown a very nasty anonymous note referring, she believes, to her unsavory past. She leaves Shrewsbury and her Gaudy (reunion), convinced that escape into intellectual pursuit is, for her at least, impossible.

Sayers has Harriet return to Shrewsbury, however, in

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[8]Dorothy L. Sayers, Gaudy Night (New York: Avon Books, 1968), p. 20. Subsequent references taken from this novel will be cited in parentheses in the text.

order to investigate a series of petty crimes. There is no murder in this detective story because Sayers thought it might be awkward to have police tramping around a woman's college, especially in light of her stated intentions to put "Harriet back on a footing of equality with her lover."[9] Harriet, Sayers thought, had to play the role of detective to prove her reasoning abilities were equal to Peter's and to those of the police. Only in that way could she recover her self-esteem. There is, moreover, no victim of the crime unless the reader can somehow envisage an entire college, its buildings and its inmates as a corporate victim. Instead, Harriet again becomes the victim, but this time as the butt of her own psychological fears. Unable to reconcile marriage to Peter with her own need to regain self-esteem through independence, Harriet comes to believe that the minor crime wave at Shrewsbury is the result of mental imbalance brought on by celibacy. She suspects all the dons in turn, seeing in their life an unnatural suppression of femininity. Faced as she is by the frankly sexual nature of some of the graffiti and anonymous notes, Harriet jumps to the conclusion that celibacy can cause insanity. Again Sayers departs in Gaudy Night from her usual practices. Her skills had always been well in evidence in the characterization of her criminals. With the exception of the murderer in Have His Carcase, they had all been sinister, absolutely depraved, but never insane. In this novel, however, insanity is the reason

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[9]Sayers, "Gaudy Night," p. 212.

for the crimes, an insanity brought on not, as Sayers puts it in her essay "Gaudy Night," "by intellect starved by emotion, but [by] emotion uncontrolled by intellect."[10] Setting and detective plot had been well integrated, Sayers thought. However, the minor characters, too, had to conform to her wishes for integration.

Of all the minor characters in the novel, three in particular stand out. All three are women dons; all three represent various degrees of academic "ivory-towerism." The first of these, and certainly the most engaging of them, is also the most impractical. Miss Lydgate is an English tutor whose room "was festooned with proofs of her forthcoming work on the Prosodic elements in English verse from Beowulf to Bridges" (Gaudy Night, p. 37). Her forthcoming work provides Harriet with a useful excuse to visit Shrewsbury and stay there for some length of time. Miss Lydgate is hopelessly incompetent to deal with galleys and page-proofs, indeed:

> It was only when a section [of the ms.] had advanced to page-proof condition that Miss Lydgate became fully convinced of the necessity of transferring large paragraphs of argument from one chapter to another.
> (Gaudy Night, p. 37)

Harriet, who has had experience in the practical aspects of publishing, agrees to act as Miss Lydgate's editor. Besides giving Harriet a reason for being at Shrewsbury, Miss Lydgate and her manuscript provide a vital clue that leads to the

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[10]Sayers, "Gaudy Night," p. 214.

final solution. Because she had rebuked a male scholar in print for inexact scholarship, Miss Lydgate's manuscript is found one morning scattered about and splashed quite thoroughly with red ink. It is a clue Harriet should have been able to decipher but did not because of her preconceptions about intellectual women and celibacy.

The second prominent minor character is Dean Martin, the don who sends for Harriet and who begs her to live at Shrewsbury in order to investigate the crimes. Infinitely more practical than Miss Lydgate, though still inclined to make light of the troubling situation at Shrewsbury, Dean Martin represents normalcy to Harriet who is beset on all sides by self-doubt and suspicion of others. Fortunately for Harriet's sanity and for the reader's elucidation, the Dean is soon cleared of complicity in the crime wave. Thereafter she acts as Harriet's Watson. Various theories may be tried out on her, various suspects discussed, but because the Dean is the one really sensible academic in the entire story, her judgment about clues and suspects is not questioned by Harriet (or the reader). The Dean's good character, then allows Sayers to consider in turn likely and unlikely suspects, raising doubts and then dispelling them. In the process the real culprit is "cleared," so that the solution, when it comes, is all the more surprising.

The third, and most important, of the three dons is Miss de Vine. Her name alone gives the reader pause. Are her actions to be accorded divine sanction or is the reader to be

all the more suspicious of her on the grounds that overselling is highly suspect? For despite her inclination to hold herself apart from the other dons, to refrain from intellectual or personal discussion, it is Miss de Vine who advises Harriet against marriage with Peter, saying that a union "between two independent and equally irritable intelligences seems to me to be reckless to the point of insanity" (Gaudy Night, p. 376). This cannot be Sayers' point of view; she wants Peter and Harriet to marry. Therefore, Sayers made Miss de Vine the inflexible character she is, and the one who most embodies the principles of pure intelligence. She did this in order to illustrate one of the two extremes of personality discussed in the story, pure intellect and pure emotion. Further highlighting Miss de Vine's intellectual beliefs, Sayers accords her the dubious honor of being the catalyst for the crime wave at Shrewsbury. Her professional (public) principles of intellectual integrity had led her, some years before, to accuse and condemn another scholar (male) of false research. The man had subsequently committed suicide, leaving his wife and children to fend for themselves. Understandably embittered, his widow had taken a job as scout at Shrewsbury in order to gain revenge on those she considered responsible for her husband's death. Over the years she had grown more and more incensed with the sort of life the dons led, a life she saw as unnatural. These intellectual women were, Annie the scout thought, guilty of usurping male prerogatives of leadership. Annie

believed women should pursue only their traditional roles of wife and mother, leaving men to fulfill theirs as sole providers.

Harriet, then, had before her an example of an educated and principled woman who did not have the human decency to consider the consequences of her actions. Miss de Vine had not inquired as to the scholar's fate, nor had she interested herself in the future life of his family. Her strong sense of academic (public) duty had led to someone else's private misery. But Harriet also had before her an example of an uneducated, violently emotional woman who did not have the intelligence to assess the true cause of her misfortune. Annie lived only for her family, for private happiness, not caring or not knowing that personal integrity cannot be separated from public honesty. Now that these two extremes of mind and heart were clearly illustrated in the actions of Miss de Vine and Annie, Harriet realized that each ideal could be dangerous unless it were leavened by the other. Her future life with Peter, she now knew, must somehow be built on a compromise between Peter's sense of public duty and her own principles of private human concern.

This compromise between mind and heart was the "thing" Sayers "had been wanting to say all her life." Moreover, she felt that this same compromise was symbolic of the new type of novel she wanted to create. The detective genre's reliance on facts and puzzle solving (mind) had been fused, Sayers thought, with the more real human emotions (heart)

of the novel of manners. But had she really modified the detective formula? Had she actually tempered Peter's scientific detachment with a consideration of the consequences of detecting? As with her views about Peter's new humanity, Sayers was mistaken. Once again her lack of objectivity was at fault. She had reasoned that if Harriet, who stood for "heart," became the detective and solved the crime, then the more inhuman, coldly scientific aspects of detection could be avoided. Moreover, Sayers thought that if Harriet became Peter's equal in detective ability, she would be his equal in all things. But it was Peter who actually solved the crime, because Sayers, influenced by her Victorian and theological background, did not really believe in male/female equality. She had to preserve Peter's superiority as detective and man; Peter had to remain the formulaic detective to "prove" Sayers' subconscious beliefs in male supremacy. Peter's intelligence must be superior to Harriet's more emotional personality. So it was Peter who confronted the villain with the evidence that only he had been able to fathom. As Cawelti states in Adventure, Mystery and Romance:

> In story after story, when the solution is finally revealed to us, we find that the detective immediately established the right line of investigation by making a correct inference from the conflicting and confusing testimony that had baffled everybody else.[11]

Peter did not need to conduct the investigation; Harriet acted for him, acted as his substitute for officialdom just

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[11]Cawelti, p. 83.

as Detective Parker had done the physical investigating in Whose Body?. Harriet assembled all the clues in a little notebook which she then meekly turned over to Peter. At the denouement, therefore, Harriet was as much astonished by the indentity of the criminal as were the admiring dons who gathered to hear Peter's brilliant deductions. Harriet was too blinded by emotion, too locked into her preconceptions about women and intelligence to be able to see the crimes (and the criminal) for what they were. She thought that women who led purely intellectual lives might be in danger of smothering their natural instincts, those instincts that led most women to become wives and mothers. As Sayers states in her essay "Gaudy Night":

> I had Harriet...seeing (as she supposed) that the celibate intellectual life rendered one liable to insanity in its ugliest form.[12]

In addition to Peter's dominance as the problem solver, there is evidence throughout Gaudy Night that Sayers intended him to be superior as a man over Harriet and all the women dons. All of the latter are in some way affected by Peter's charm; one middle-aged woman don even falls in love with him. When Peter is invited to dinner by Harriet and the Shrewsbury dons, his ratiocinative superiority over them is emphasized in the scene. He and the Warden (Chancellor) of Shrewsbury engage in a bit of academic one-upmanship. Not many people, male or female, have been able to best this woman. Peter,

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[12]Sayers, "Gaudy Night," p. 215.

of course, does. He cannot match her knowledge of philosophy, and is smart enough not to try to do so. Instead, he cleverly turns the conversation to the Warden's one physical defect, tone deafness, a defect Peter had detected from the Warden's slight monotone. Thus, Peter emerges the superior in reasoning ability, in deduction.

Harriet, too, must bow to his male superiority. In one scene, Peter and Harriet go punting on the river. As they prepare to push their punt out onto the river, they are observed by a pair of Shrewsbury undergraduates. Sayers had Harriet cater to Peter's sense of male vanity and physical prowess:

> It amused Harriet to let [Peter] take charge of her parcel, hand her ceremoniously into the punt and arrange the cushions for her. . . . (Gaudy Night, p. 240)

It is a small incident, but one that is indicative of Sayers' attitude towards her detective. He must excel in all things.

At another point in the story, Peter buys Harriet a dog collar so she might be protected from any attempt to strangle her. The two of them joke about its significance, Peter denying any implications of ownership. However, when he recounts to Harriet the conversation he has had with the shop proprietor, there is little doubt about Sayers' meaning:

> "The man was very much interested," Peter observed, "in my bull-terrior bitch. Extremely plucky animal, but reckless and obstinate fighter. Personally, he said, he preferred greyhounds. He told me where I could get my name and address put on the collar, but I said that could wait."
> (Gaudy Night, p. 319)

Harriet is "plucky," but "reckless" and "obstinate." She is an emotional "animal" who must be protected and controlled by Peter's superior will. Significantly, Peter makes Harriet promise to wear the collar at night. It is during those hours that a man and a women may come together in private. Heretofore, Peter has dominated Harriet as detective; now he dominates her also as lover.

What, then, of the life Sayers plotted for her hero and heroine, a life she thought would be based on an equality of ability? One can only conclude that Sayers had merely affixed a veneer of feminism onto the solid oak of traditional male superiority. A year later, when Busman's Honeymoon was published (1937), Sayers completed the process she had begun in Gaudy Night. Harriet, the capable and independent modern woman, must succumb to Peter's leadership. Once again, the hero and heroine, now married and supposedly pursuing their life of principled compromise, find themselves faced with a crime. A man is killed in the manor house they have purchased as their honeymoon retreat. With every appearance of felicity, Peter consults Harriet about her preferences. Will she go or will she stay to help solve the mystery? Nowhere is there an indication, of course, that Peter will not stay. It is his job, his duty, to find the murderer. Harriet elects to stay even though the thought of living in the house is abhorrent to her. She fears that if she allows herself to succumb to emotional irrationality, Peter will doubt her wifely loyalty. As he points out, what

does it matter that a man has died in the house? He, Peter, has lived all his life in a ducal manor in which scores of ancestors have died. Of course, not any of them were murdered, but the principle is the same. Harriet's overwhelming sense of loyalty to Peter has further, and more serious, implications. When she inadvertently reveals to Peter information she has received in confidence from a friend, information, moreover, that could indict her friend for the murder, Harriet is shocked and dismayed to find Peter willing, even eager, to go to the police with the story. It is his duty as a citizen to assist the police just as it was Miss de Vine's academic duty to expose the dishonest scholar. It is a matter of principle to fulfill one's duty, and the consequences to others cannot be considered. No matter that the accusation against Harriet's friend is based solely on circumstantial evidence. No matter that Harriet, who knows from personal experience how it feels to be falsely accused, begs Peter to reconsider his actions. Peter's principles are the ones she must adhere to if she is to be the loyal wife.

Sayers' settles the question of opposing principles not by compromise but by female submission to the male's right of superiority. Peter, who must win the battle if he is to continue detecting criminals, if he is to uphold his perceived public duty, manipulates Harriet by referring to Annie, the insane (emotional) culprit in Gaudy Night. Stung by the reference, Harriet accuses herself of "emotion

uncontrolled by intellect." She concedes defeat, although she does not know that she has done so:

> Her own scorn lashed herself--the self she had only just seen. "They [women like Annie] boast of it--'My husband would do anything for me....' It's degrading. No human being ought to have such power over another."
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> . . . . . .
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> "If we disagree, we'll fight it out like gentleman. We won't stand for matrimonial blackmail."[13]

They will "fight it out like gentlemen," using reason and intelligence, not emotion, not concern for human consequences. Peter's principles must prevail because his are based on intelligence; Harriet's are based only on emotion.

A study of Busman's Honeymoon and Gaudy Night reveals Sayers' unconscious, but overriding beliefs in traditional male authority. All women, intelligent or not, educated or not, must play their roles of loving, loyal and nurturing wife and mother. Only men could lead, only men could settle philosophical issues, because only men could think rationally. And Peter, Sayers' formulaic detective, was the personification of male superiority. His authority was absolute, both as detective and as husband. Moreover, Sayers acknowledged in her essay "Gaudy Night" that Peter had become her own superior, her own leader. She wrote:

> I can now see no end to Peter this side of the grave.... He has become a permanent

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[13]Dorothy L. Sayers, Busman's Honeymoon (New York: Avon Books, 1968), p. 246.

resident in the house of my mind....
I find myself bringing all my actions
and opinions to the bar of his silent
criticism.[14]

[14]Sayers, "Gaudy Night," p. 220.

CONCLUSION

After finishing Gaudy Night, Sayers wrote in her essay on that novel that she felt she could never end the Wimsey series of detective stories. Yet, only two years later she abandoned that genre and fiction itself to write religious drama. Why this abrupt about-face? What motivated Sayers to change her career at the age of forty-five? What brought her to the realization that fiction was not the vehicle for good work well done? There are three reasons why Peter was abandoned to wander the environs of his fictional ducal estate[1], no longer the great detective whose principles of duty, both public and private, so clearly matched those of his creator.

Peter had indeed become real to Sayers; he had become her arbiter and her model for moral and intellectual authority. But Harriet, who had been a real human being from the start, represented Sayers' other self. Harriet's principles of concern for human beings were equally held by her creator. Sayers had tried to reconcile tradition and modernity, authority and independence, duty and love; she had tried to

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[1]Sayers left an unfinished manuscript (Thrones, Dominations) in which Peter appears to do no detecting at all. Rather, he plays the part of the complete aristocrat, having inherited Denver on the death of his brother. Presumably Sayers had tried to write a straight fiction novel, had found that even in the absence of formula, Peter still dominated Harriet, and gave up the novel as a bad job. The unfinished manuscript can be found in the Sayers collection at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois.

join hero and heroine in a symbolic marriage of mind and heart, hoping that her concept of intellectual integrity would serve as the bridge between intellect and emotion. Yet in Busman's Honeymoon, Peter had dominated his wife, completing the process he had begun as lover in Gaudy Night. He had reduced Harriet to the English aristocratic version of the German hausfrau. One of the final scenes in Busman's Honeymoon illustrates Sayers'--and Peter's--attitude towards Harriet. Peter takes his bride to Denver, the ducal estate, to teach her about his family line. He guides her from family portrait to family portrait, in effect presenting his wife to his ancestors. Peter's familial niceties are obviously approved by the ancestral jury; later the ghost of Denver materializes before Harriet in the library, nodding and bowing in courtly admiration. The next morning, Harriet again learns how to act as the proper wife to Peter; she accompanies him to the estate church to be stared at and remarked upon by the assembled villagers. As is his prerogative as heir presumptive, Peter is invited to read the morning lesson. Ascending to the lectern, a high vantage point from which he can survey his dependents, Peter reads these words from the fifth chapter of the book of Jeremiah:

> Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there by any that executeth judgment. . . . (Busman's Honeymoon, p. 307)

Here is Biblical reassurance for Peter's earlier doubts about

his right to judge fellow human beings (Whose Body?). As Detective Parker had told him, it was Peter's duty to exercise mature judgment. Sayers, too, believed that God had given this authority to man. She was unsure, however, whether He had extended this same obligation to woman.

There was a second reason why Sayers abandoned detective fiction. Because she needed the detective conventions--those which dictated that the detective must have superior intelligence and logic--she found that the crossword puzzle she had so despised before now became the means towards a philosophical end. Peter, her spokesman for intellectual authority, could not have his ratiocinative abilities clouded by an appeal to emotion as had been the case, for example, when Harriet questioned his decision to inform the police about Miss Twitterton. Such real concern for the consequences to humans must not be allowed to interfere with the detective's pursuit of the facts. The reader must always have before him the puzzle in order to heighten the satisfaction of a solution reached only from the facts. The detective's authority must be absolute and it must stem from factual analysis.

Similarly, emotion had to be deleted from the reader's view of the victim and of the criminal. In both instances the real, the human implications of death must not be raised. As Cawelti states:

> This seems to be an important general rule of the detective story situation. The crime must be a major one. . . , but the victim cannot

> really be mourned or the possible complexities of the situation [be] allowed to draw [the reader's] attention away from the detective and the investigation.[2]

The victim could not be mourned, nor could the criminal's fate be too realistically portrayed. Again, Cawelti states that the classical detective story must be "more concerned with the isolation and specification of guilt than with the punishment of the criminal."[3] And even though Peter, in Busman's Honeymoon, cries in Harriet's arms as the criminal is executed, he does his crying at home, in private. Publicly, he still adheres to his right to judge and to condemn.

And yet it was this very inability to transcend the requirements of the detective story because she needed them to maintain her detective's authority that led Sayers to abandon finally detective, indeed any form of fiction. Even if she had been able personally, psychologically, to reconcile Peter's and Harriet's opposing principles--public duty vs. human consideration, authority vs. independence-- Sayers could not do so in her novels. Her detective, as the conventions dictated, must be omnipotent, the reader must believe his authority absolute. But formulaic fiction was not great literature and Sayers wanted, above all, to write great literature. Despite her claim that she had succeeded

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[2]Cawelti, p. 81.

[3]Cawelti, p. 91.

in doing so in Gaudy Night, she knew she had not. Why, if Sayers thought this novel the artistic success she called it, did she feel the necessity to write an article defending the novel? "Gaudy Night," the essay on her ninth book, was certainly a defense of it. In that article she wrote a reply to critics who queried the book's worth:

> I had not the honesty to say that I thought it sold because it was a good book. I think it sold because it was a sincere book upon a subject about which I really had something to say. Readers seem to like books which tell them how other people live [i.e., novel of manners] ....[4]

But liking a book is not the same thing as esteeming its message. And given Sayers' elitist views about the common people's ability to perceive a moral when they say it, popularity, to her, indicated a lack of worth. The formula had eclipsed the message. Her readers liked Peter, but they did not see him as an authoritarian role model. Peter had stood, in Sayers' mind, for that part of her which believed that a human must live his life in accordance with intellectual values. She disapproved of a democracy of the masses, believing that only the few who were well educated were equipped to judge issues that affected all lives.

Yet she also realized that education, intelligence, and reason must be tempered with a realistic assessment of one's limitations. In 1938, the year Busman's Honeymoon was published, Sayers had before her an awesome example of authority

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[4]Sayers, "Gaudy Night," p. 218.

turned totalitarian. Educated and reasonable people were advocating fascism, even German Nazism, because they, like she, feared for the future of a leaderless democratic world. But they, unlike Sayers, did not have before them the one example of authoritarianism that could not, Sayers believed, degenerate into totalitarianism. Christian principles of love and forgiveness could ensure, at least, a benevolent authority. True Christians, true realists--and Sayers thought herself one of this group--knew that all "human situations were subject to the law of human nature, whose evil is at all times rooted in its good, and whose good can only redeem, but not abolish, its evil".[5] And yet this Christian message of moderation in all things was being lost. On the one hand, there were people who, like the Nazis, saw all others as wholly evil. They elevated themselves to a position Sayers believed could only be held by God. Only God could judge in real life, because only He was omniscient. On the other hand, there were people who, like the relativists, saw no man as evil. Their excessive belief in man's capacity to progress towards some secular Utopia blinded them to the reality of human nature.

Those other people, moreover, who needed to understand the message of Christian moderation, those who would be led, were being misled by the very men who should be Christianity's most lucid advocates. The clergy, Sayers thought,

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[5]Sayers, The Mind of the Maker, p. 191.

was preaching a morality based only on physical appetite. Sex and the devil were one and the same. A dangerous corollary to this one-sided view of morality was, Sayers felt, that any person who practised sexual morality could and did get away with all sorts of other immoralities. In an essay entitled "The Other Six Deadly Sins," Sayers excoriated the man who was

> greedy and selfish; spiteful, cruel, jealous and unjust; violent and brutal; grasping, unscrupulous and a liar; stubborn and arrogant; stupid, morose and dead to every noble instinct (Hone, p. 131)

but who would only be called immoral if he were also a fornicator or an adulterer.

How could Sayers counteract the clergy's misguided concentration on sex; how could she lead the people back to a realization of the true Christian message of a divine love that tempered human arrogance? She had proven her literary skills at characterization. Peter and Harriet had been perceived as real human beings with real human problems. Could she use this aptitude to make Biblical characters come alive? If she could take the great stories of the Bible and make them live through contemporary setting and realistic characterization, perhaps she then could convey her message and, in doing so, finally fulfill her need to create good work well done.

Peter had indeed become real, much too real for his creator to countenance. She saw him now as both a constant reproach and as a constant irritant. As Sayers' spokesman

for an authority based on intellect and ability, Peter had to maintain his superiority in all things. Sayers could not stand far enough back from her own beliefs, could not be objective about their consequences for her own life. She had, in effect, placed herself in the same position Harriet was in at the end of Gaudy Night. Peter's necessary authority dictated Harriet's submission of her own intellect and abilities. The irony could not have been lost on Sayers. She had "proved" in Gaudy Night and in Busman's Honeymoon that men were the only natural leaders because only men could reason without being distracted by emotion. Yet she had created Peter, she had endowed him with all his superiorities, only to be trapped by the implications of her own creation.

Peter had proved to be a disturbance in another way. His character, no more real now than before, but just as limited by the exigencies of the detective formula, was representative of the type of human being Sayers deplored. Peter was a superior problem solver; no problem was too comlicated for him. All he needed was to detect the true facts and, aided by his ratiocinative facility, fit the pieces of the puzzle together to find the one and only logical solution. Nowhere in Peter's make-up was there room for human imperfectibility, and Sayers could not, in good (Christian) conscience, allow that sort of view to be perpetuated.

Despite her skill at characterization, Peter remained the formulaic detective. His creator, Dorothy L. Sayers,

had, after ten full-length novels and numerous short stories, come to realize the limitations formula fiction imposed on her. She had attempted to create a new type of novel, but had not been successful because the detective conventions had proved to be too pervasive. But the genre made her, if not wealthy, at least comfortable enough to allow a change of career in mid-life. More important, through writing the Wimsey series she had clarified her own values, values that would continue to guide her actions for the rest of her life and that would make her one of the most well-known Christian humanists of her age.

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