



Dorothy L. Sayers: The Complete Stories

Dorothy L. Sayers, James Sandoe (Introduction)

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A sure treat for Dorothy L. Sayers's legions of fans, *The Complete Stories* is the ultimate collectible. This delightfully gruesome collection captures all of Sayers's short stories in one volume. The tantalizing puzzles and baffling cases will provide mystery lovers with a sumptuous feast of criminal doings and all those amusing and appalling things that happen on the way to the gallows.

Dorothy L. Sayers: The Complete Stories Details

Date : Published July 23rd 2002 by Perennial (HarperCollins)

ISBN : 9780060084615

Author : Dorothy L. Sayers , James Sandoe (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 796 pages

Genre : Mystery, Short Stories, Fiction, Classics, European Literature, British Literature



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From Reader Review Dorothy L. Sayers: The Complete Stories for online ebook

Carla says

Dorothy Sayers is a fantastic mystery writer. She presents wonderful characters with clever puzzles and often solves the mysteries with a bit of humor. In this collection I preferred the Lord Peter Wimsey mysteries. He is by far her best character. There are also several Montague Egg mysteries, although I find him less entertaining. The collection wraps up with a series of mysteries with no specific character leading them, which makes you realize why she created Lord Peter.

J.C. says

Uneven quality, but the two stories about Lord Peter as a family man, *The Haunted Policeman* and *Talboys*, are especially worth the read if you're a Wimsey fan.

Sun says

Dorothy L. Sayers was a genius and if you read this, the first complete collection of her short stories, you will see what I mean. The stories fall into three categories: those that feature the voluble Lord Peter Wimsey, those that feature eager travelling salesman Montague Egg and those that stand-alone. (In my mind, Wimsey is a younger, blonder Stephen Fry with a monocle and Egg is a clever human version of Disney's Jiminy Cricket, all eagerness and propriety.)

The stories are all mysteries, although some like "The Abominable History of the Man with the Copper Fingers" and "The Cyprian Cat" tend towards thriller, others are puzzles like "The Fascinating Problem of Uncle Meleager's Will" and there's hint of science fiction too in "The Image in the Mirror" and "The Adventurous Exploit of the Cave of Ali Baba". There's an echo of GK Chesterton in "The Vindictive Story of the Footsteps That Ran" and one of Conan Doyle in "The Piscatorial Farce of the Stolen Stomach". But Sayers isn't in any way derivative. She's ingenious. It's obvious reading through the stories that this is a writer who loved mystery fiction, who studied it and who knew how to write for the best effect - which includes building up and then neatly turning our expectations against us.

The introduction by American mystery critic James Sandoe gives a concise summary of Sayers and her life's work, but it's through reading her stories that you see how Sayers develops as a writer, moving through the more academic style of the early Wimsey stories, to the clever intricacies of plot, and then finally on to the power of a sparser style. There is only one negative about this collection - it doesn't come in hardcover to endure repeated reading!

Dennis says

There is no better mystery writer than Dorothy Sayers.

Justine Olawsky says

I think I like Dorothy Sayers better as a short story writer than as a mystery novelist. These shorts were really exceptional. Most of the stories feature the eccentricities of beloved aristocratic sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey; then, there is a good chunk of tales whose mysteries are put to rights by traveling wine salesman, Montague Egg; lastly, there are some stand-alone stories that are among the most excellent of the bunch. What a treat for this lover of the British mystery!

Pamela McLaren says

Clever, fun interesting short mysteries by a master of the genre. Her characters are a delight, the stories are devious and the final twists are amazing. A great book to read.

Brendan says

I hadn't read much Sayers before this collection. I certainly knew about the Lord Peter Whimsey stories, and I knew that she's seen as one of the grandmasters of the classical genre, but I hadn't waded into her work before. This book makes a nice survey of it. It encapsulates all the Whimsey stories that aren't novels, all the Montague Egg (traveling salesman of wine and spirits) stories, and a few others to boot. A few thoughts:

- * The Whimsey stories are generally satisfying as character studies, but not as mysteries, for me. Usually the mystery turns on some bit of tomfoolery or obscure knowledge that the reader couldn't or wouldn't happen on, but the scenarios are enjoyable and diverse.
- * By contrast, the Monty Egg stories are much closer to being "Fair Game" mysteries and are thus more enjoyable. I also like the character of the genial liquor salesman who quotes extensively from *The Salesman's Handbook*.
- * The remaining stories in the collection often work on twists in the way that stories with continuing characters cannot. These last operate much like Roald Dahl's more interesting stories, or perhaps some of the non-supernatural stories from *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*.
- * All the novels give strong insight into the British culture of the 20th century. Lord Peter's stories are consistently haunted by the war, which damaged so many of his peers (including Whimsey himself). The Egg stories also highlight the stratification of the different roles. One moment in particular worked well when Egg turns on his "lady of the house" charm for an housekeeper, realizing that the normal attitude he takes with servants won't do for this lady.
- * I was also pleased to see at least two (maybe three) references to Dr. Crippen, the renouned wife-murderer who tried to flee to America and was caught using Marconi's wireless. Ever since I read Erik Laarsen's *Thunderstruck*, I'm startled by how often I see references to Crippen. He's the Dahmer of his day (or perhaps the Scott Petersen).

A good set of stories. I look forward to reading a couple Sayers novels at some point.

Mallory Daniels says

I read only two of the three sections; I skipped the second section with the stories of Montague Egg as I found them boring. But the rest of the stories were very good! Dorothy Sayers has a real knack for creating an atmospheric short story that holds your interest, sometimes until the very last line. And a Lord Peter Whimsey story is always excellent!

Jac says

Lord Peter Wimsey in small doses, what could be finer?

Dorothea says

So much fun!

I was given this for Christmas and I read a story or three at bedtime every day until I was done. That's how to read this book -- enjoy it a bit at a time.

I often find that I can't get into short stories by writers whose novels I've liked -- they're good at developing the plot slowly while acquainting you with the characters in full, and short stories don't have room for all that. But I had nothing to worry about with Sayers; in fact, these stories were at times more fun than some parts of her novels. And it's not all because I was already familiar with Lord Peter Wimsey et al. through the novels, since there are plenty of excellent non-Wimsey stories in this collection too.

The stories are from three collections published during Sayers' lifetime, *Lord Peter Views the Body*, *Hangman's Holiday*, and *In the Teeth of the Evidence*. Possibly there are also stories that are not from these books, but I can't tell -- the one disappointing lack in this edition is that of a list of credits or copyrights. There is a bibliographical essay at the beginning by James Sandoe, which is useful if you're confused about the order of the Wimsey novels, but barely seems to have been written for this particular volume.

Nearly half of the stories feature Lord Peter Wimsey; the rest are either about Montague Egg (another amateur detective whose regular employment is as a traveling salesman of fine wines) or about nobody in particular. While all the stories are mysteries, this last section is mostly not detective stories -- the viewpoint character is often the criminal or the victim. A few of these stories are as much horror as mystery.

There is such a satisfyingly large number of stories that of course some of them are bad. My least favorite were "The Incredible Elopement of Lord Peter Wimsey" and "Scrawns," both of which create an atmosphere of horror through lurid descriptions of people who are ill or disabled. In the second of these, the story turns out to be a critique of this practice, but the reader is still expected to buy into the descriptions at first, and I resent being asked to do so. "The Incredible Elopement" has the added disadvantage of being set, for plot purposes, in a remote mountain village full of hopelessly superstitious and naive peasants.

However, I'll re-read most of these stories with pleasure.

Jenny says

I have yet to read anything by Sayers that I didn't at least like, and I loved this collection. The Wimsey stories are glorious, obviously, and I also really enjoyed the Montague Egg ones and the stand-alone ones. Like Sayers' other work, these were clever, creative, and well-executed. I read them a few at a time, giving myself a treat at the end of the day. Highly recommended.

Sheri Fresonke Harper says

Terrific brain teasers that feature Lord Peter Wimsey, Montague Egg, and some miscellaneous ones. It makes one appreciate how much work crime can be.

Shan says

Terrific and surprising collection of stories.

The Lord Peter Wimsey stories make up about the first 2/3 of the book. They're predictable only in that you know Wimsey is going to brilliantly put together the clues you didn't even notice and solve the puzzle, and that his reputation and position mean the authorities will give him respect and any help he might need. The situations and the puzzles themselves are wonderfully varied. Lots of fun to read these.

Then there's a section of Montague Egg stories. These were my favorites. Egg is a traveling wine and spirits salesman (they called them commercial travelers in England in those days, apparently) who runs into interesting mysteries in his travels, sometimes accidentally and sometimes when he's curious and inserts himself into a situation because "To serve the Public is the aim of every salesman worth the name." He has an appropriate rhyme from the Salesman's Handbook for every occasion. "The salesman who will use his brains will spare himself a world of pains," "Discretion plays a major part in making up the salesman's art, for truths that no one can believe are calculated to deceive," and so on. When there's nothing in the handbook, Egg will make one up for himself.

The last group of stories are one-offs, and they're much darker than the Wimseys and the Eggs. There are stories told from the murderer's point of view, stories about suspicion that does or doesn't turn out to be justified, and stories with a supernatural twist.

It's a bit like reading a lot of Sherlock Holmes stories, followed by some Wodehouse, and finished off with some, I don't know, Poe or DuMaurier or Conrad. The order is unsettling, and I'm glad I finished the book in daylight. If I read these again, I'd probably pepper the last group of stories in between some of the more cheerful fare and make sure to end on a nice light Egg story.

They're all gems, and as a bonus they give you a glimpse into England in the early twentieth century. There are train trips and motoring jaunts, public houses and inns, newspapers and The Strand magazine, flower shoes and follies. (And class privilege, poverty, bigotry, and the aftereffects of war.)

Susie says

Several of the stories at the end were quite a lot more interesting than many of the ones at the beginning. It's clear she became a much better writer.

Kristina says

For the most part lighthearted. Lord Peter is charmingly flippant, Monty Egg sincere and touching. The final collection are miscellaneous mysteries, and because they were not always told from the perspective of the detective (instead sometimes from that of the murderer or the hunted) were darker and more psychologically gripping. These last were particularly inventive, where Sayers displays her ability to keep fresh a theme no matter how many times she uses it. My particular favorite for this reason was *An Arrow O'er the House*. I was astounded at her vast knowledge throughout: of wines, medicine, herbology, and particularly classical history and literature. Despite my education in classics, she frequently went well over my head. This was my Sunday book for a long time, and I will miss it. I would love to read her novels someday.
