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Abstract

Outlines the unpublished or obscure writings of Sayers concerning Lord Peter Wimsey held in the Wade Collection, imagining a published volume of same.

Additional Keywords

Sayers, Dorothy L.—Characters—Peter Wimsey—Minor works

The Fragmentary Lord Peter

JOE R. CHRISTOPHER

I suppose that all thorough-going bibliophiles imagine books collecting the last snippets of the works of their favorite authors (*The Laundry Lists* of C. S. Lewis, *Illegible Notes* by J. R. R. Tolkien). I have in mind a book of Dorothy L. Sayers' fragmentary writings on Lord Peter Wimsey. It would be more substantial than the two titles I have just invented, but it would not be a commercial work. Perhaps a university press (such as Kent State, which published Sayers' play *Love All*) could produce this volume. (I must confess that, after my first draft of this paper in the spring of 1990, Alzina Stone Dale came out with an essay which showed that she had thought of something like the same thing somewhat earlier—she had actually made some steps toward it, when Sayers' son died and the estate got confused for a while.)

What would go in it? First, a forty-eight page untitled, unfinished manuscript at the Wade Center, Wheaton, Illinois, that E. R. Gregory in his 1979 checklist of holdings called, in his own invented title (in brackets), "Introducing Lord Peter" ("Manuscripts in the Marion E. Wade Collection," Item C.14, p. 230). Gregory says in his note, "This is very early work. . . . Some evidence: Bunter is not mentioned; Inspector Sugg, who appears in *Whose Body?*, is a character; Lord Peter is introduced with a long paragraph of exposition, which is . . . amateurish. . . ." He conjectures, "this *may* be the very first work about [Lord Peter] that Sayers wrote."

To go beyond Gregory: the story consists of three parts. In the first (pp. 1-15), Mr. Julian Peckwater, a reporter for the *Evening Banner*, has elaborate problems with a public telephone and meets Mrs. A. P. Masterman, wife of a famous popular novelist. He goes with her to her flat to talk to her husband who has been having some sort of problems—but they find her husband's body, shot. In the second section (pp. 15-27), Peckwater manages to get his scoop to his paper, phone the proper authorities and Mrs. Masterman's sister, get a woman from the flat opposite to stay with Mrs. Masterman (and thereby gives the same scoop to another newspaper, indirectly; if my notes are correct, Sayers has managed to name both papers the *Evening Banner*); Peckwater manages also to talk to Inspector Sugg and interview the Divisional police-surgeon, and so forth. The third section (pp. 28-48) follows the other reporter, Toby Dimmock of the second *Evening Banner*, and his fiancée, Miss Clarinda Stokes, who—after supper where they get engaged—go to Lord Peter's flat to talk to Lord Peter and Chief Inspector Parker, who is visiting Wimsey. The foursome make up a variety of possibilities about Masterman's seeming suicide being murder—and then the story breaks off.

It is appropriate that Lord Peter should refer to Lewis

Carroll's *Alice* books in this fragment—in the person of the Mad Hatter (p. 45)—for the Carrollian motifs run throughout the Lord Peter saga. And thus this would make a good beginning for a volume of fragments.

The second item for this imagined book is "The Mousehole: A Detective Fantasia in Three Flats" (Gregory, Item B.12), which Gregory dates from manuscript evidence as "probably . . . written in 1927" (p. 225). Since Act I is titled "The Second-floor Flat," probably each act was to be laid in a different flat of a building—but since Sayers does not get beyond the first act, one cannot be certain. Gregory does not identify this as a Lord Peter work, but it is mentioned that his flat is on the first floor (p. 7)—no doubt meaning the second floor in American terms—and he himself enters slightly later. Also appearing is *Constable Sugg*, who is no longer the inspector of his earlier and later appearances and who does not know Lord Peter in this work.

The plot seems to be a locked-room puzzle. Mr. Edward Mortimer, a financier, and Mrs. Montague Carruthers are found asphyxiated in his bedroom with the gas jet on. The door has to be broken down to get to them; the keyhole was filled (with what is not clear) (p. 6); the window was shut and fastened (p. 12). As the play breaks off, the police are looking at the catch on the window, which seems to have had something done to it with a knife, and Lord Peter picks up and pockets something off the floor.

The most curious aspect of this work, if Gregory's dating is correct, is the appearance of Constable Sugg. Perhaps the solving of the case was going to be credited to him, thereby explaining how he became an inspector—thus the writing and the temporal setting would not be the same. Lord Peter calls Sugg a sergeant in the play (p. 9), but that presumably is outweighed by the stage direction calling him a constable. Of course, one should not take these matters too seriously. In the first, untitled fragment, Charles Parker is a chief-inspector, but in the published fiction he does not reach that rank until he is promoted during *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*.

For the record, Lord Peter is 32 years old in this play (p. 9) and living in a flat overlooking Green Park (p. 1), the latter as in the early novels. If the "Who's Who" entry in *Unnatural Death* applies to this play, Wimsey's age of 32 puts the action of the play in 1922—which does not fit well with Sugg being an inspector in 1923 in *Whose Body?*

Another interesting aspect of this play is the sheer fact that Sayers is attempting a mystery play, and one about Lord Peter, so early in her career. The general critical view has been that she was drawn to the detective drama almost

as a by-product of her period of religious dramas, as the latter started. But this fragment shows that that is not so.

Gregory attributes two works to about 1928. These are in a messy notebook titled by Sayers "Lord Peter Wimsey — Unprofessional Sleuth." This is a forerunner to *Lord Peter Views the Body* (1928) since "The Fascinating Problem of Uncle Meleager's Will" appears in it, number 5 in the notebook but appearing third in the book. The fragmentary story, numbered 6, is "The Horrible Story of the Missing Molar" (Gregory, Item A.2.b, p. 220). In the Wade Center's numbering of the Xeroxed pages, this story appears on even numbered pages, from p. 78 (the title page of the story) to p. 90. The story does not go beyond the opening scene (equivalent to the dialogues of Holmes and Watson before the client shows up). In this case Lady Mary tells her dream about a dentist and a woman at the party gives a semi-Freudian interpretation of it as an Electra complex; Lord Peter comments that it is odd that his sister is attached to their father since he died before she was born; at this point the Hon. Freddy Arbuthnot turns the conversation to a mass killer who pulls the teeth of his victims — and the story ends.

This would make a nice item in the imagined collection — it is the equivalent to the Holmes-Watson dialogues that Ellery Queen collected in the first edition of *101 Years' Entertainment* (1941): delightful and fairly complete in itself.

The other item of about 1928 (Gregory, Item A.2.e, p. 221) is the set of notes for an undeveloped mystery novel in the back of the notebook. (These are written upside down to the previous notes.) These notes consist of a group of epigraphs about time, for chapter headings presumably, (pp. 120-121); a list of chapter titles all including the words *time* and *hour* (p. 123); a spaced set of chapter numbers, three to a page, with notes only in the first six of the twenty-four (pp. 125-132); a list of five characters with notes on the backgrounds of two of them (pp. 133-134); another list of the twenty-four chapters, identified as occurring one per hour from 7:00 p.m. on a Tuesday through 6:00 p.m. on a Wednesday, together with notes on eight characters (pp. 135-136); some miscellaneous notes on the same matter, with hours written out and some other jottings and two simple sketches. I have listed these as one goes through the notebook; but, since Sayers had turned the volume upside down and was working her way back through it, her process of writing these materials was the opposite of my listing. But it did not seem to me to matter what order my description took, since the material is not in any sort of finished form.

The point, however, is that the notes were for a Lord Peter novel, since Freddy Arbuthnot, Bunter, and the Dowager Duchess appear in one or the other of the lists of characters, and it is indicated that Wimsey knows Elizabeth Pendred, a motorcyclist. It is difficult to imagine that a publisher would be enthusiastic about these pages; but perhaps they could be reproduced directly, in Sayers' hand, and be left for a reader to puzzle over.

In 1934 Sayers wrote some sort of movie treatment or script, which evidently — from her comments — was not closely followed in the 1935 movie *The Silent Passenger*. When I was last at the Wade Center, in the summer of 1988, its newly purchased Sayers materials had not been opened up; but I hoped that this treatment was among them. Unfortunately, a phone call to Marjorie Lamp Mead, Associate Curator, on 20 May 1992, properly set up by earlier contact, indicated that it was not. Perhaps the Sayers Estate still has a copy; perhaps not. The movie, at any rate, involved the murder of a blackmailer; his body is found in a trunk of a lady he had been blackmailing when she reaches France with her husband; Lord Peter shared their compartment on the train from London, and so ends up the detective in the case. (For a description of the movie, see The Dorothy L. Sayers Society, *Bulletin*, No. 76 [April 1988], 1.) If Sayers' film treatment can be located, it belongs in this imagined collection.

About 1937 was written "The Master-key" (Gregory, Item C.22, p. 231). Again, one finds the opening of a story and again a title page (p. 1); the opening consists of a brief scene and transition, followed by part of a more elaborate scene. The first is in one of Wimsey's three clubs, where a young man — the Hon. John Hemlock — begins to brag about a conquest of his, mentioning her name. Lord Peter fights him, as a matter of principle, and loses (p. 2). After a transition, with another brief scene in which Lady Peter and her husband discuss the fight while Bunter works on his face (p. 2), the incomplete scene begins when the lady in question is murdered and Hemlock shows up to have Wimsey help him — and, soon after, so does Chief Inspector Parker; they have a lengthy conversation over breakfast (pp. 4-15).

From the fragment available, the story was probably to turn on the question of who had a key to the lady's flat. Certainly Hemlock, in the discussion, indicates that the lady (a motion-picture actress, p. 10) had him return his key after the news of the fight got about, even though her name was not repeated in the stories (pp. 9, 12-15); since the door was broken open (if I am reading the manuscript correctly, p. 10), this implies that the killer did not have a key — but the title of the story suggests Sayers was going to play games with the whole question of the key(s). The likeliest twist — although it is not necessarily what Sayers would have done — is to have the door broken open by someone other than the killer several hours after the actress died — someone who then fled, leaving a false impression of the killer having broken open the door.

The private life of Lord and Lady Peter is interesting in this story. They are living in Hudley Square (p. 3), and they certainly seem to have no children. Parker mentions to Wimsey that his sister, Parker's wife, is pregnant with their third child (p. 9). The Wimseys have a large number of servants; besides Bunter the valet, there is a footman named William (whose actual name is Emmanuel Griffin); Mr. Meredith, the butler; Miss Pippette, the upper house-

maid; an unnamed personal maid for Lady Peter; Mrs. Trapp, the housekeeper; Mrs. Honeyfield, the cook; Lydice, the second housemaid; Irene, the kitchenmaid; and Mr. Alfred Farley, the chauffeur (all on pp. 4-5). In this catalogue — handled in a dramatic fashion in the story — Sayers seems to be setting up the household for future stories. (More details on some of these persons are available in the "Thrones, Dominations" manuscript — for example, that Mr. Meredith is one of Bunter's brothers, called by his Christian name to distinguish him from Bunter.)

And thus it is appropriate to turn to "Thrones, Dominations," which probably was written after 1937 (Gregory, Item B.19, p. 227). There is little need to add to Gregory's description of the manuscript or, basically, James Brabazon's three paragraphs on the story in his biography of Sayers (p. 157). As Gregory said, there are 117 pages, and they consist of a number of scenes (in the first part of the novel, one gathers from Brabazon); several of the scenes exist in variant forms. (A mystery reader may remember that P. D. James, in an interview, said that she wrote her novels by scenes, after she had a framework developed, working on whichever scene fit her mood at the time [Bakerman 56].) As I indicated, the 35,000 letters and other manuscript pages that the Wade Center acquired from the Sayers estate and opened in February 1989, were not available for me for this essay; but, since the earlier purchase by the Wade Center was supposed to have the detective fiction material, I did not expect there to be much more material of Lord Peter, in contrast to, say, letters which refer to him. However, Brabazon refers in his biography to a plot diagram for "Thrones, Dominations" — and I had hoped the Wade Center would have it. But Mead said in our phone conversation that they had a carbon of a letter in which Sayers mentions the diagram — but not the diagram itself. This diagram, wherever it is at the moment, should give a better idea of how the available scenes relate to the whole book, if they could be published together.

What Brabazon does not say is that the theme of this novel seems to deal with the question of power or control in marriage. Lord Peter has never used force to win women. Harriet learns from his Uncle Paul; the other couple whom Brabazon mentions have a marriage in which the man is excessively uxorious and thus under his wife's control. Probably the plot was going to lead to a situation in which Lord Peter has to turn down Harriet on something important she wanted.

There are some other themes to the manuscript — for example, the need felt by Wimsey's brother for Lord Peter to have children (sons) to provide for a collateral line. (The Duke of Denver's one son wants to learn to fly.) Also, in a tour of the Wimsey's home insisted on by the Countess of Severn-and-Thames (Lord Peter's godmother, one version of the episode reveals), it is shown that Harriet has, in Virginia Woolf's phrase, "a room of one's own." Finally, some emphasis is put on Lord Peter's concerns with the real estate he owns in London — his renters, the types of

buildings, and so forth. This may just be characterization, but it ties to his brother's concerns about the country estate.

In the manuscript as it exists, there are a number of references to the death of George V in 1936; but, despite Gregory's inclusion of the accession of Edward VIII in his description, there are no reference to Edward that, at any rate, I find. However, Edward VIII is obviously important in the theme of uxoriousness in marriage (or before it): whatever the references or lack of them, the significance of the king that gave up his throne for a woman is immense. That contrasts with the Duke of Denver's and Lord Peter's concerns for their respective land holdings. In short, as with *Gaudy Night*, Sayers was developing a novelistic work, more concerned with meaning than with mystery *per se*.

Perhaps "Thrones, Dominations" will never be available in this collection I envision; perhaps, for obvious commercial reasons, some good mystery writer will complete it. This has been done before. Ed McBain finished Craig Rice's *The April Robin Murders* (1958); more recently, but less successfully so far as the seams are concerned, Robert B. Parker finished Raymond Chandler's *Poodle Springs* (1989). At any rate, if the manuscript of "Thrones, Dominations" could be included, it would be basic to the collection.

At this point, I am finished with the Sayers manuscripts available in the Wade Center during my August 1988 visit. The next fragmentary Lord Peter work that should be included is the series of eleven World War II fictional epistles published in *The Spectator* in 1939 and 1940 as "The Wimsey Papers" (Gilbert, nos. C102, C104, C107-09, C111-12, C114-17, pp. 182-83). They give advice from various members of the Wimsey saga on how to do wartime activities. They break off abruptly, with the promise of more on an irregular basis — but there were no more.

What else should this volume contain? I hold off on one item for a paragraph, and mention the letters and historical inventions — perhaps these should be inserted by their dates of publication amid the other works, perhaps they should be put in an appendix. The two major works among these are the twenty-eight-page pamphlet, *Papers Relating to the Family of Wimsey*, privately printed in 1936 and written by Sayers and others (Gilbert A23, pp. 81-83), and the fifteen-page pamphlet, *An Account of Lord Mortimer Wimsey, Hermit of the Wash*, privately printed in 1937 and by Sayers alone (Gilbert A27, p. 89). The material in these two pamphlets is available in *The Wimsey Family*, by C. W. Scott-Giles (1977), but it would be nice to have the original items published publicly. The lesser items in this category are "Songs for Voyce and Lute" by Roger Wimsey — this one reprinted in Scott-Giles (Gilbert A66, p. 130); the biographical notice for Lord Peter, which differs slightly from the one printed in some of the novels, found in an anthology, *Sluths*, edited by Kenneth Macgowan (Gilbert B45.1, p. 167); a letter from Lord Charles Wimsey of 1654, which

appears in Sayers' "The Late Provost's Ghost Stories" in *The Eaton College Chronicle* in 1937 (Gilbert C72, p. 179); and "The Wimsey Chin," a letter to *The Times* as if by Matthew Wimsey, also in 1937 (Gilbert C81, p. 179). There may be a few more minor items. Certainly, I remember some sonnets that are tied to the zodiac and were supposed to be written by a Wimsey; one or two, if I remember correctly, appeared in the *Bulletin* of the Dorothy L. Sayers Society. But that citation is not important, for Mead tells me that the Wade Center has the manuscript of six of these and a typescript of all twelve. This paragraph at least covers the majority of these materials.

The final item — of more interest than these historical essays, letters, and verses — is what I believe was Sayers' final writing about Lord Peter. On 1 January 1954 over the B.B.C. as a "Sherlock Holmes Centenary Birthday Tribute," Lord Peter (played by Dennis Arundell) praised Holmes and, in Colleen Gilbert's summary, "remembered when he as a boy consulted Holmes about a lost kitten" (Gilbert E45, p. 213). Surely Sayers wrote this — I cannot imagine her allowing anyone to "ghost" it — and thus it becomes her last writing on Wimsey and, unlike most of the items I have considered, it is complete. Unfortunately, Mead reports that the manuscript is not at the Wade. Did Gilbert see the manuscript or just a summary of the radio broadcast? If the item still exists, what more could one want for the closing of such a volume?

I have played this paper as a wished-for collection, and

indeed I would like to see such a collection made; but I hope my survey is also valuable as a catalogue of the minor works about Lord Peter which have not been really investigated by critics. Will they replay this study? Who knows? That is why one investigates them. I do suggest that they will be interesting, as minor works often are and as some of my comments have, I hope, suggested. Fragments raise the question of why Sayers did not complete them. Other works — the wartime letters, for example — help fill out details of the fictional world Sayers created. But this is going beyond my purpose, which was mainly to present a survey, not a critique.

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RECYCLING TOLKIEN & NARNIA CALENDARS

Many people like to collect the Tolkien Calendars, among others, and display the one for the current year. For the sake of variety, and for looking again at past calendars — if the artist in question pleases your personal taste: here is a table from 1972 to 2010 showing which calendar years have the same beginning dates and thus are interchangeable. The days of the week indicate on which day of the week the years in that column began or will begin. Years in the same column are interchangeable. Enjoy your past calendars by reusing them in matching years.

— Glen GoodKnight

REGULAR YEARS							Leap Years						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
1978	1973	1974	1975	1981	1982*	1977	1984*	1996	1980	1992	1976	1988	1972
1989	1979	1985	1986	1987	1993	1983*			2008		2004		2000
1995	1990	1991	1997	1998	1999	1994							
2001	2002	2003		2009	2010	2005							
2006	2007												

Those years with an * also saw Narnia Calendars produced, illustrated by Michael Hague: 1982 *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, 1983 *Prince Caspian*, and 1984 *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (No other Narnia Calendars were produced).