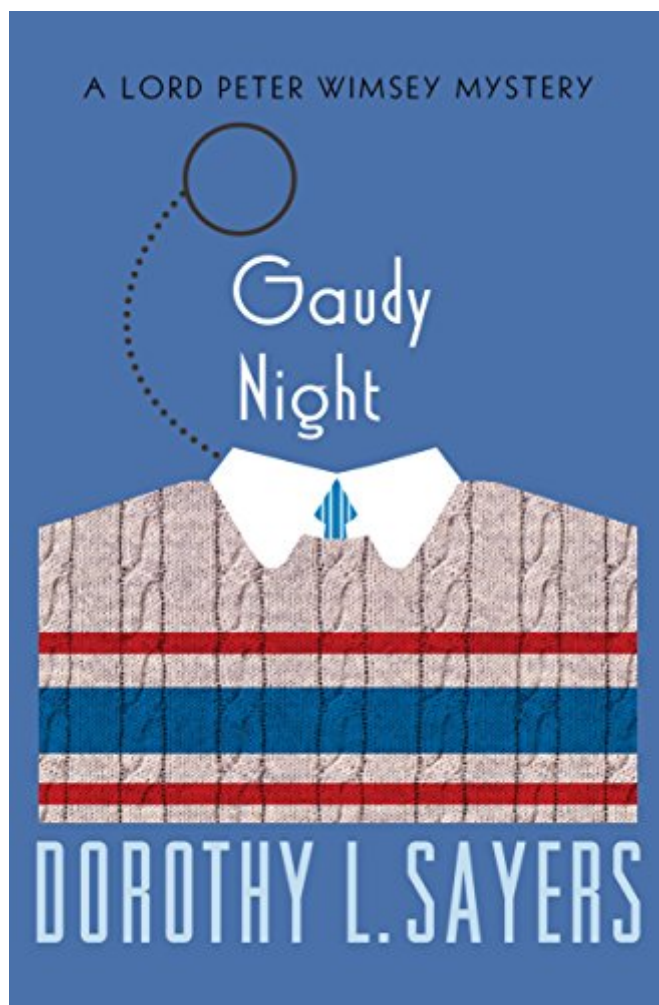


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Gaudy Night (The Lord Peter Wimsey Mysteries Book 12)



Synopsis

Back at Oxford for her reunion, Harriet Vane, Lord Peter's beloved, finds herself in mortal danger. Since she graduated from Oxford's Shrewsbury College, Harriet Vane has found fame by writing novels about ingenious murders. She also won infamy when she was accused of committing a murder herself. It took a timely intervention from the debonair Lord Peter Wimsey to save her from the gallows, and since then she has devoted her spare time to resisting his attempts to marry her. Putting aside her lingering shame from the trial, Harriet returns to Oxford for her college reunion with her head held high—only to find that her life is in danger once again. The first poison-pen letter calls her a “dirty murderess,” and those that follow are no kinder. As the threats become more frightening, she calls on Lord Peter for help. Among the dons of Oxford lurks a killer, but it will take more than a superior education to match Lord Peter and the daring Harriet. Gaudy Night is the 12th book in the Lord Peter Wimsey Mysteries, but you may enjoy the series by reading the books in any order. This ebook features an illustrated biography of Dorothy L. Sayers including rare images from the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College.

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Customer Reviews

I grew up reading Dorothy Sayers mysteries, so it's hard to be objective about them. They shaped my thinking and I continue to read and appreciate them as an adult. *Gaudy Night* stands out to me as the novel where she forced the greatest change upon her characters. Their changes were realistic and complex. There are certainly flaws in the way she went about forcing these changes, but even the flaws don't ruin the illusion that Wimsey and Vane are living, breathing humans.

This is my favorite book by Sayers (also check out *Murder Must Advertise* and *Busman's Honeymoon*). She brings depth and complexity to her characters, even minor ones; this is a top-quality novel that happens around a mystery, as opposed to a mystery novel. The book takes place primarily at a women's college within a male-dominated university, so it's fascinating from our modern perspective to see the lives of women of different social classes of that era, what the assumptions and stereotypes were and what they were fighting to achieve. Although it's clearly a novel of its time, it doesn't feel dated or slow as some books do many decades after publication.

Probably the most personal of the classic detective series she authored, *Gaudy Night* is set in a woman's college at Oxford University. Harriet Vane, with whom Lord Peter Wimsey has been love for five fruitless years, is the chief protagonist, as she is called upon by the faculty of her former college to aid in uncovering the author of nasty messages to and about members of the faculty and some students. Sayers is in her most scholarly and feminist mood and seems to build upon her own early love affair from which there emerged a child with no legal father. Various clashes of attitudes towards men and women and their proper role in society as well as the ethics of scholarship and academe are given representation with little doubt being left as to Sayers own position. The mystery of finding out who is creating the disturbing atmosphere is left to Wimsey, but, in the end, it is Harriet's actions which moves the frustrating romantic relationship between them to a new level and, at least, temporary resolution. This is among Sayers most literary works of fiction, marred somewhat for me, one who lacks a classic education, by the frequency of references to arcane works and quotations from the past. However, one cannot say that they are out of place in a work set in an Oxford college of 80 or more years ago. This is the third of the Harriet Vane series which ends with her final full Wimsey book, *Busman's Honeymoon* (1940), a nice little film starring Robert Montgomery (who plays Wimsey as rather more American middle class than British Aristocracy).

An accomplished writer of classic British detective fiction, Dorothy Sayers broke through the more restricted genre without abandoning it to create a truly rich and complex novel that is one of the greatest works of the genre. Her central detective Lord Peter Wimsey shares the stage with Harriet Vane, herself a detective novelist, whom he saved from a false charge of murder in one of Sayers' previous books. Indeed, Wimsey doesn't even appear until half-way through. The focus is on Harriet Vane's complex feelings in the wake of her brush with execution as she tries to help her old college at Oxford solve a series of mysterious attacks and embarrassing pranks. The college is the only women's college at Oxford, and the bite of the criminal activity is that it might disgrace and discredit the entire project of women's education and their claiming their rightful place as equals in the university and wider communities. The challenge in Harriet's relation with Wimsey, who desperately wants to marry her, is believing that he can surrender the privilege conferred on him not just by heritage, money, and society's structure and conventions, but also by his extraordinary intelligence and abilities. Only gradually does she come to realize that he really does want to love her equally, not dominate her in any way. A subsequent novel, "Busman's Honeymoon," shows their ultimate marriage and emerging life together (with a murder to solve thrown in as the ground on which they interact). "Gaudy Night" is brilliant in many ways--brilliantly written, peppered with an extraordinary range of allusions and references (there are websites that help identify and explain these), rivetingly plotted, and greatly enriched with characterizations of the female dons and of Harriet and Peter as well. Not only is it immensely entertaining, it richly repays subtle critical analysis, so that it is an enduring pleasure not just to read but to read over and over. This edition has many irritating typographical errors. It's a pity so excellent a novel should be treated so shabbily by its publisher. Highly recommended.

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