Role of minor characters in Dorothy L. Sayers' fiction between the world wars

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Role of minor characters in Dorothy L. Sayers' fiction between the world wars

by

Alzire Stephanie Conley

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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Ames, Iowa
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INTRODUCTION

No man of middle age and comfortable means, contemplating the condition of things in the early twenties, would agree that the postwar England bore much resemblance to the country he had known before the war. The old order had passed away, the halcyon days of the privileged classes. The war had cut across everything. 'Change and decay in all around I see'; it was easy for the casual observer to sum up his impressions in the words of the hymnal, and ignore the manifold evidences of stability which were present also. (Mowat 201)

World War I took a terrible toll on Great Britain. Approximately nine percent (750,000) of British men between the ages of 18 and 45 had been killed, while an additional 1.5 million British people had been wounded (Heyck 153). Many of the wounded never fully recovered from their injuries and remained invalids. This high death count resulted in a loss of competent and skilled people to work in the political, industrial, agricultural and financial arenas in Britain. Thomas William Heyck provides two examples of the impact this loss had on Britain:

... thirty-five Fellows of the Royal Society, Britain's elite scientific academy, were killed, as were fifty-five members of the Royal Institute of Chemistry. Likewise, promising businessmen, professionals, scholars, workers, and politicians perished. These were the most valuable of all of Britain's wasted resources. (153)

In addition to the lives lost, Britain's economic losses were also severe. The war necessitated that much of "Britain's industrial production ... be directed toward armaments" (Heyck 153). Both the coal and steel industries experienced war-time increases in demand, while the textile and the railway industries
experienced hardships. Agriculture experienced a deceptive growth spurt which resulted in misuse of the land. After the war the farmers, who had been responsible for feeding the massive war machine as well as the people on the home front during the war, saw their war-time gains shrinking rapidly.

On the social front, the changes were perhaps more advantageous than disastrous. Britain remained a "sharply delineated class society," but the steep income taxes and death duties which the upper classes were forced to pay helped to minimize the vast gap that had existed between upper and working class members prior to the war. Agriculture experienced a continuing depression, despite a brief respite seen during the war years, and many families who owned land were forced to sell the land to their tenant farmers. High taxes and rising prices affected both the upper and the middle classes, while low farm land prices, low food product prices, and new governmental regulations - such as one regarding minimum wages for farm workers - severely tested the abilities of the post-war farmer to survive.

High unemployment rates continued to be the norm rather than the exception. Between 1921 and 1938, "one out of every ten citizens of working age was out of a job," and during the worst years of this period, the number of unemployed jumped to "one out of five" people (Hobsbawm 208). Some industries experienced harsher unemployment rates than others: coalminers, cotton workers, pig-iron workers, steelworkers, shipbuilders and ship-repair workers (Hobsbawm 209).

Despite massive unemployment, the working class experienced an improvement in their lives due, in part, to an increase in mass goods (items such as cheaper refrigerators, bicycles, electric irons, vacuum cleaners, radios)
In addition, new governmental regulations concerning alcohol consumption and improved standards of nutrition improved both the lives and the life expectancies of working class members. Those individuals who were working benefited from an increase in trade unions and therefore received better wages and benefits.

During the war years, women experienced wider opportunities for employment as they filled positions previously held by men. These opportunities continued, albeit on a smaller scale, and women also experienced more personal freedom in other areas of their lives. Women were granted voting privileges\(^1\), and, in 1919, the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act removed "legal barriers to women's advancement in the civil service and the professions" (Heyck 155, italics his). Despite these advancements, however, many Britons still believed "that women should return to the home and leave the breadwinning to men" (Heyck 155).

Between the wars a generation gap developed in morals and manners. The pleasure-seeking younger generation wanted more personal freedom and unlimited access to entertainment. This "spirit of emancipation" affected women's (and to a lesser degree men's) fashions, obscured the lines between classes, and widened the range of allowable sexual behaviors (Mowat 212).

The years between the wars produced "writers who expressed, in one way or another, a new spirit and made the twenties an extraordinarily vital age in literature" (Mowat 216). Non-generational in nature, the new writers "were in

\(^{1}\) Under the Representation of the People Act in 1918, women over age 30 received the right to vote provided they or their husbands owned or occupied land with an annual value of £5 or over. In 1928, the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act removed these conditions and granted the vote to all women aged 21 or over provided they met a three-month residence requirement. This measure was called the "flapper vote" (Mowat 5; 343).
some degree in revolt against previous standards, ideas, styles; and particularly against a precious, artificial and ornate style of writing. Some writers showed a morbid attraction toward violence and sudden death" (Mowat 216). High-brow writers, T.S. Eliot in particular, appealed to a generation which had experienced the "despair and impotence" that accompanies war and who saw war as the creative power behind "wasted landscapes... [and the chief cause of] the futility of Western civilization" (Heyck 198-199).

Other writers appealed to the low-brow reader, whose "reading was now dominated by the detective novel" (Graves 289). Designed "as puzzles to test the reader's acuteness in following up disguised clues," thousands of detective novels were published in England (Graves 289). A few British writers (including Peter Cheyney) adopted the American hard-boiled style of detective writing, while others, Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, who "topped the bill" for the reading public in Britain, among them, remained faithful to a more classical style which appealed to readers interested in puzzle-solving (Graves 290-291).

Dorothy L. Sayers began writing the Lord Peter Wimsey detective novels in the early 1920's to make money. Always interested in puzzles and addicted to "making up wildly dramatic stories to act out" in her childhood, Sayers, who "spent much of her spare time reading crime stories," had devoured Sexton Blake books during her stay in Verneuil, especially during a 21 day confinement

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2Reginald Evelyn Peter Southouse Cheyney (1896-1951) began writing hard-boiled detective stories in the 1930's and churned out dozens of stories with various detectives at their center. In 1943 he began to write spy stories rather than detective stories.
3Edgar Allan Poe is considered the father of the classical detective story. His first story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," was written in 1841 (Cawelti 80).
4Whose Body? was published in 1923, but Sayers began writing the story as early as 1921.
5Published originally in the 1890's by Amalgamated Press in London, Sexton Blake stories were written by a number of authors (at least 120) who used pseudonyms. Changing presses over the years, the series continued with the most recent title being published in 1986. Considered "penny-dreadfuls", the stories were part of a series called "Boy's Friend." The series name
for mumps (Kenney 7; Reynolds 93, 95). In addition, Sayers, "a blood-and-thunder addict from early days," knew that there was a market for detective fiction (Brabazon 121). The idea of writing detective fiction was not a new one to Sayers; she had first considered writing novels for the Sexton Blake series during her years at Oxford, so it is natural that Lord Peter should walk into her life at the same moment she was contemplating writing a detective story (Reynolds 173).

Detective fiction, especially classical detective fiction, provides a perfect genre for Sayers to explore her world. Sayers' biographer James Brabazon commented that Sayers' powers of observation and analysis, when coupled with "her passionate intellectual curiosity and her fierce convictions about life," allowed her to insert much of herself into the Wimsey books (125). Detective fiction, especially when it stars a patronizing superhero such as Wimsey, allowed Sayers to provide a glimpse of the everyday world to her readers and to reassure them that any "disruption of the normal order of society" could be resolved (Brabazon 128; Cawelti 83).

The characters in Sayers' Wimsey novels reflect many aspects of British society in the between-the-wars period. By choosing a genre which had appeal for a mass audience, Sayers reached a wide segment of society and was able to discuss seriously some of the social concerns of her world. She is not the first writer to have done so. William W. Stowe states that "the detective fiction formula lends itself admirably to a critique of such complacent conservatism," and has been used frequently by detective writers to present readers with stories to be read for pleasure and for thought (570). According to Stowe, while genre changed at some point, and the title published in 1986 is part of the classic thrillers series. Perhaps the first author was Harry Blythe (1852-1898). Sayers believed the Sexton Blake series to be written in the Holmes' tradition. Blake and his assistant, Tinker, even had a Baker Street address (Reynolds 196).
fiction can be read and enjoyed passively, it is just as capable as high fiction of stimulating critical analysis and awareness (570-571). Detective fiction can be read as "reflecting the values and assumptions of a patriarchal, late-capitalist society . . . [or] as a symbolic representation of certain conventional social groupings" (Stowe 577-578).

By examining most of Dorothy L. Sayers' Wimsey novels, readers can discern the social themes discussed in them. *Whose Body?* (1923) offers a discussion of the advances being made in Britain in the areas of science and technology and the impact of these advances on medical practitioners. *Clouds of Witness* (1927) provides a glimpse into the life of an aristocrat -- both the male and female -- and points out the inequities of a class system. *Unnatural Death* (1927) explores the attitudes of British society towards "superfluous" females, while *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* (1928) discusses the life of the returning soldier -- an individual who, at the cessation of World War I, suddenly finds himself unneeded and displaced in society. *Strong Poison* (1930) and *Have His Carcase* (1932) continue the conversation about superfluous women and illuminate some general attitudes about marriage. The latter work also looks briefly at the world of the farmer and the agricultural situation at the end of the First World War. *Murder Must Advertise* (1933) investigates the life of the middle-class worker and the way in which their minds and their lives are affected by the improvements of material goods. Rural life, agriculture and the plight of farmers are considered in depth in *The Nine Tailors* (1934), especially in light of a cataclysmic flood (equivalent to the effect of the war on the farmer's life). *Gaudy Night* (1936) probes women in academia -- some superfluous, some constructive educators, and some hardworking women struggling to survive a
changing world. *Busman’s Honeymoon* (1937) delves into marriage, superfluous women, and rural life. Each of the Wimsey novels discusses the changing society of the 1920’s and 1930’s, and each provides a vehicle for Sayers to voice her opinion about the changes society is experiencing.

Rather than focusing on the character of the detective, traditionally the most important figure in classical detective stories, this essay selects numerous minor characters in the Wimsey novels in order to explore Sayers’ attitude towards the changes in British society. Traditionally these minor characters are representative of "the norm of middle class society suddenly disrupted by the abnormality of crime" and because these characters fear disorder and long for a return to order, they represent a more realistic picture of society than a superman hero detective of the caliber of Lord Peter Wimsey (Cawelti 96).

Because the scope and depth of societal concerns discussed in Dorothy L. Sayers' Wimsey novels are extensive, it is impossible to do justice to all of them in a paper of this length and scope. Further, while it can be argued that the minor characters influence to greater or lesser degrees such considerations as plot and tone, these are not matters which will be considered here. This discussion of Britain's changing society between-the-wars is limited to the situations of farmers, ex-soldiers, and women because these groups experienced the greatest changes in the between-the-wars years. The discussion of farmers and farming includes, among others, a discussion of Henry Weldon and his agricultural problems (*HHC*) and governmental regulations and their impact on Weldon and the Bendicts (*GN*). The changes experienced by the returning soldier, George Fentiman in particular, are highlighted in *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*. The discussion of women includes Miss Climpson, an apparently superfluous
woman\textsuperscript{6} who finds the changing society stimulating in part due to her work as a detective's assistant, Lady Mary Wimsey, and several of the dons at Shrewsbury College (GN) as well as selected other individuals. Sayers' attitudes towards society in the 1920's and 1930's are mirrored in each of her minor characters. While it is impossible to say with complete certainty how Sayers felt about the changes in society, it is possible to discern her respect for farmers, her concern for the returning soldier, and to discover her belief that women should be treated equally. Her minor characters also provide a rich source for the historian.

\textsuperscript{6}While some aristocratic women might be considered superfluous, the term generally refers to middle-class spinsters who have more limited resources than do aristocratic women.
MINOR CHARACTERS IN THE WIMSEY NOVELS

Dorothy L. Sayers created numerous memorable characters within the pages of the Lord Peter Wimsey novels. Readers are introduced to nurses, architects, physicians, police officials, university dons, university students, advertising employees, servants, farmers, wives, widows, solicitors, a vicar or two, and ex-soldiers. Some of these individuals are incidental to the action, but they provide color and topical interest when Sayers reveals bits and pieces about their lives and their opinions.

A minor character, for example, allows Sayers to incorporate details about war and men involved in combat. Readers can deduce from a brief conversation between two ex-soldiers that some officers were more deserving of obedience than others and that the experiences shared during wars create a bond between men regardless of their class, although those soldiers of lower class display respect for upper class officers. Within the pages of her detective fiction novels, Sayers provides some important details about war-time Britain.

Elsewhere, the character of a housekeeper provides a glimpse into the social hierarchy of the inhabitants of a manor house and those of a country village. At the funeral of the housekeeper's employer, the housekeeper's funeral wreath was placed in a lower position on the grave than was that of a farmer's

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[7] Padgett, an ex-corporal who served with Wimsey during the war resumes his association with Wimsey during a brief conversation in *Gaudy Night* (349). Padgett has maintained contact with several members of his war outfit and he is able to share details of the lives of these men with Wimsey.

[8] Mrs. Gates in *The Nine Tailors* expresses her contempt and anger for another village woman during a conversation with Wimsey. Mrs. Gates believes her position as housekeeper to an aristocrat to be superior to that of a village farmer and therefore her wreath should have been placed in a position of higher honor than it was (159-164).
wife. Because she was employed by an aristocrat, the housekeeper failed to understand "why a small farmer's wife should give herself such airs . . . [because when she] was a girl, village people knew their place" (NT 164).

Through conversations these minor characters hold with Wimsey, Sayers conveys a sense of both the stability and the changes of life in Britain in the 1920's and 1930's. The ex-soldier's behavior towards Wimsey was correct and respectful. His first greeting, "Good-night, Major Wimsey, sir!", indicates his acknowledgment of Wimsey's superior status (GN 349). His continued use of "sir" and his obvious admiration of Wimsey, as evidenced during his conversation with Harriet Vane, reflect his acceptance of both his class status and that of Wimsey. In addition, the ex-soldier consistently refers to Vane and the other female dons in respectful terms, for example, "miss", and clearly reflects the old order, that segment of society which is unchanging and struggling to remain unchanged.

On the other hand, the housekeeper and her anger about the wreaths provide a look at the new order. Times are changing and the village woman has every right to purchase a wreath of whatever size and configuration she desires regardless of her social status within the community. Class lines were blurring, albeit slightly, in British society between-the-wars and Sayers illustrates these changes in the person of the village woman while at the same time mirroring the opinion of some Britons that class should matter.

Typically, Sayers' novels are filled with casts of minor characters who reflect entire segments of British society during the 1920's and 1930's. Many of these characters were given larger roles within the Lord Peter Wimsey novels, chief among which were farmers, ex-soldiers, and women. Farmer-characters
can be found in Clouds of Witness, Have His Carcase, Unnatural Death, Gaudy Night, The Nine Tailors, and Busman’s Honeymoon. The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club features numerous soldiers. Women characters are in every Wimsey novel, but their situation is discussed in detail especially in Gaudy Night, Strong Poison, and Unnatural Death.

Farmers

In this age of change the land was unchanging, but its fortunes declining. (Mowat 250)

In 1851, British agriculture "employed a quarter of the entire occupied population . . . by 1891 it was merely one thirteenth. By the 1930s it had become a very minor factor . . . [providing] work for only about five per cent of the occupied population" (Hobsbawm 195). Imports far exceeded home-grown produce, especially in wheat, other grains, fruits, and vegetables (Mowat 251).

This situation changed because of the war. Britain was no longer able to obtain imported foodstuffs and, in order to feed both the population at home and the population at war, more acres were planted with wheat, grains, and other crops necessary to feed Britain’s people. The increase in arable acreage, coupled with the Corn Production Act of 1917, which "guaranteed farmers against losses on wheat and oat crops during 1917-1922" and set a minimum wage provision for farm laborers, had allowed some farmers to become very rich during the war (Mowat 251). Unfortunately, this situation completely changed after the war.

Britain’s farmers provided so well for the population during the war that wheat was overproduced, dramatically reducing the price. When confronted by
these farm losses and the possibility that the government might have to actually meet its obligation to guarantee prices, Parliament passed the Corn Production Acts (Repeal) Bill in 1921, legislation which removed price guarantees (with the exception of the current year) and eliminated the minimum wage requirement (Mowat 252). Arable acreage fell once again, imports resumed, and farm wages dropped dramatically.

Gentleman-farmer character, Henry Weldon, in HHC, allows Sayers to discuss the effect of imports and government interference on the farmer. Weldon complains to Lord Peter Wimsey:

"Nothing in farming these days," grumbled Mr. Weldon. "Look at all this Russian wheat they're dumpin' in. As if things weren't bad enough already, with wages what they are, and taxes, and rates and tithe and insurance. I've got fifty acres of wheat. By the time it's harvested I daresay it'll have cost me £9 an acre. And what shall I get for it? Lucky if I get five. How this damned Government expects the farmer to carry on, I don't know. Damned if I don't feel like chucking it altogether sometimes and clearing out of this bloody country. Nothing much to stick round here for." (HHC 134)

Weldon is expressing his growing discontent and unhappiness with farming, sentiments shared by many farm owner-operators and farm laborers who "became discontented and went to the cities, where real wages remained slightly higher [than agricultural wages] and where life seemed brighter" (Havighurst 12). Other farmers emigrated to the United States or Australia. Those who remained on the land shifted their emphasis from grains to fruit and market crops (vegetables) or from grains to pasturage and livestock.

The war had a devastating effect on the land also. Again, Sayers uses Weldon to describe the condition of farm land and buildings after four years of
neglect. Bunter, sent to investigate the affairs of Weldon, discovers that on
Weldon's farm:

Many of the walls and barns are in considerable disrepair, while
the field-boundaries display frequent gaps, due to insufficient
attention to proper hedging and ditching. The drainage, also
(which, as your lordships knows, is of paramount importance in
this part of the country) is, in many places very defective. In
particular a large field (known as the 16-acre) was allowed to
remain (as [Bunter was] informed) in a water-logged condition
all winter. Arrangements for the drainage of this piece of arable
were commenced last summer, but proceeded no further than
the purchase of the necessary quantity of pantiles, the cost of
labour interfering with the progress of the work. In
consequence, this piece of land (which adjoins the washes of the
100-foot level) is at present useless and sour. (NT 261-262)

Much of the arable land was in this condition after the war. Many
farmers, especially those who were most concerned with making money, used
"cheap female labour, and neglected ditching and draining" (Graves 174). Other
farmers allowed "their fields to get full of thistles and even thornbushes" which
further decreased the yield needed to meet costs of production (Graves 175).

This lack of attention to drainage and land upkeep, coupled with the
peculiarities of the weather, is painfully described by Sayers in The Nine Tailors.
A second summer has rolled around since Mr. Venable's record-breaking change
ring, and this summer, unlike the previous summer,

... the water lay on the land all through August and September,
and the corn sprouted in the stalks, and the sodden ricks took
fire and stank horribly, and the Rector of Fenchurch St. Paul,
conducting the Harvest Festival, had to modify his favourite
sermon upon Thankfulness, for there was scarcely sound wheat
enough to lay upon the altar and no great sheaves for the aisle
windows or for binding about the stoves, as was customary.
Indeed, so late was the harvest and so dank and chill the air...
that the farmers used precious fuel, which they could ill afford, to light first for warmth and light earlier than normal in the year (NT 69, 369). Bad harvests were not uncommon, although most of them were not followed by breaking dykes and floods.

Like other Britons, farmers experienced both stability and change. Unfortunately, what remained stable were the housing conditions of the farmer, whose cottages remained cold, damp, and under equipped. Very few country farm cottages were connected to water systems or electricity or sewage-disposal systems (Mowat 255). Sayers, who spent her childhood living in a flat, marshy area, knew what sort of houses farm people occupied. Lord Peter Wimsey is forced to spend a night in a "primitive sort of place" which was all "stark and grim and all the rest of it. No creepers or little rose-grown porches" to enliven the cottage (CW 180, 91). Wimsey believed the house would remain in his nightmares for years to come because of "a huge, grim four-poster" and the "dark kitchen" where Mrs. Grimethorpe spent most of her time (CW 204-205, 218).

Such living conditions bred disease and created hardships. That farm women aged prematurely is evidenced by Mary Thoday, the wife of a tenant farmer rather than an owner-operator. Sayers describes Mary as possessing "the face of a woman who had been through trouble and awaited, with nervous anticipation, the next shock which fate might hold in store for her" (NT 122). Mary, who has "lost most of her front teeth and looked older" than her actual age, acts as nurse to her husband who has influenza (NT 122).

Another Sayers' character, Catherine Freemantle-Bendict (GN), a former Oxford student and current wife of a farm owner-operator, also reflects the

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9A variation of dike, and the spelling used in Sayers' Wimsey novels.
harshness of farm life. She is described by Sayers as "drab and ill-dressed" when Harriet Vane sees Freemantle-Bendict sitting in the Junior Common Room (GN 43). When Harriet wonders, "What in Heaven's name had happened to her?", she is soon to find out (GN 43). Freemantle-Bendict describes working her "fingers to the bone for a bare living" and comments her life consists of "washing and cooking for a family and digging potatoes and feeding cattle" (GN 43). In some ways, Freemantle-Bendict feels the hardships of farm life to a greater degree than does Mary Thoday. Bemoaning the lack of music in her life, Freemantle-Bendict, who had enjoyed educational opportunities and the camaraderie of other women along with music and literature, confides to Harriet that she deplores the "hideous local sing-song" speech of her neighbors and misses most "the cultured speech. The dear old much-abused Oxford accent" (GN 46).

One of the primary changes farmers faced was a drastic reduction in the number of available laborers due to the high death count of the war. However, governmental interference also contributed to farmers' troubles in the years between-the-wars. Weldon alludes to these hardships when he mentions taxes, rates and insurance (HHC 134). Catherine Freemantle-Bendict joins Weldon in his complaints against governmental rules and regulations. In addition to grumbling about taxes, rates and insurance, Freemantle-Bendict objects to "the Milk Board and the Marketing Board" (GN 43). Set up in the 1930's ostensibly to help raise prices and help farmers find a market for their products, these marketing boards (milk, bacon, and potato) increased the amount of administrative paper-work the farmer was required to complete and file with the government. A further regulation required that any farmers selling their products "retail were obliged to pay a levy to the [appropriate] board" (Mowat
Freemantle-Bendict is justifiably angry at what she considers interference rather than assistance.

Both Weldon and the Freemantle-Bendicts also object to the Church imposed tithe land-owners were required to pay. This additional burden further strained the financial situation of many farm owner-operators. Mr. Venables (NT), vicar of Fenchurch St. Paul's, believes in the justness of the tithe when he explains to Lord Peter Wimsey that he has not "had any trouble about tithe in [his] parish. [His] farmers are very sensible . . . [and] the law is the law" (NT 233-234). Sayers apparently agrees with the Bendicts and Henry Weldon in the matter of the tithe; Mr. Venables, her creation, frequently "advance[d] people money to pay the tithe" when they were unable to meet their obligations (NT 234).

During planting and harvest seasons, farmers and farm laborers spent long hours in the fields regardless of weather conditions. Many farmers worked on "non-contiguous fields, half of them less than ten acres each" and these men were forced to spent time walking to and from the various plots of land (Mowat 256). Livestock required care and feeding regardless of the weather. Will Thoday had to walk many miles to attend to a sick animal and then walk those same miles back home (NT 356). Sick animals were also a financial burden both to the farmer and to the government. The 1920's saw four outbreaks of hoof and mouth disease, and because the government reimbursed the farmers for the loss of their livestock, these outbreaks cost Britain over £3,000,000 (Graves 175). Owner-operators were forced to personally supervise their lands if they wanted "to make farming pay" and, unlike the unsuccessful Henry Weldon, who did not personally supervise his lands, the successful farmer could not afford to be
"ignorant or careless of the agricultural aspect of farming" (HHC 198, 262). Tenant farmers were sometimes forced to pay high rents to their landlords, and often found it difficult to find housing because many farm cottages were being condemned due to their dilapidated condition.

Mechanization was slow to come to British farmers, especially those who farmed plots of less than 500 acres. Sayers' Mr. Grimethorpe, owner-operator of a bleak and grim farm, spent some time in town looking "at some machinery" which would aid his daily life and increase the profitability of his farm (CW 192). When Wimsey's car, a mechanized object, falls into a ditch, it is "forlornly hitched to the back of a farm waggon (sic)", and taken by "two stout horses" back to the village garage where Mr. Wilderspin's "son George ... a great hand with motors, having had considerable experience with farm engines" agreed to fix the car (NT 55, 47)). Despite its slow beginning, however, farm mechanization grew rapidly on the large farm in the late twenties and early thirties. The number of tractors in use on British farms increased from 16,681 in 1925 to over 40,000 in 1937, while the number of horses declined (Mowat 254).

Sayers recognized the difficulties of farm life and used her minor characters to comment about the treatment between-the-wars British farmers received. Sayers' audience can perceive that the British government needed to provide assistance to the farmers without burying them in unnecessary paperwork and that Parliament should stop redrafting legislation to avoid complying with their previous legislation. Readers can easily see that better housing, mandatory education, and improved medical services would have eased the farmers' burdens somewhat and that more governmental attention to the dyke system (and land use in general) would have ensured less destruction to
the land. Rather than allowing farming to return to pre-World War I days when imports of grain crops far exceeded home production, Sayers advocates for improvements in all areas of farm life which would allow Britain to reduce the importation of grains and advance the social position and living conditions of the between-the-wars British farmer.

Sayers provides a picture of farm life which is harsh, unfriendly, and uninviting — especially as seen in the last few pages of *The Nine Tailors*. The flood has left the land devastated, the cottages mud-filled and mildewed, and the ricks and barns damaged or completely destroyed. As Bunter comments while "gazing out on . . . the dismal strand of ooze and weed that had once been Fenchurch St. Paul . . . The odour is intensely disagreeable, my lord, and I should be inclined to consider it insanitary" (*NT* 395). Perhaps Henry Weldon has the right idea when he considers "chucking it altogether . . . and clearing out of this bloody country. Nothing much to stick round here for" (*HHC* 134).

**Ex-Soldiers**

Sayers' husband, Oswald Arthur Fleming⁹, commonly called Mac, did not return from World War I unscathed. A captain when he left the army, Mac had been "gassed and he was shell-shocked" (Brabazon 114). At the time of their marriage, neither he nor Sayers knew how Mac's war experiences would come to affect him, although early in the marriage there were concerns about Mac's

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⁹The spelling of Mac's first name seems to vary. Brabazon uses Oswald, while Barbara Reynolds states that Mac's name was Oswold. Reynolds further states that Mac adopted Atherton Fleming as a pen-name (154).
"tummy" (Brabazon 147). Although Sayers wrote The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club many years before Mac's health began to decay, the scenes detailing George Fentiman's disagreements with his wife, Sheila, marital disputes which were apparently not uncommon in Britain in the years between the wars and almost always resulted from the discontent experienced by the ex-soldier, ring uncommonly true-to-life.

[Sheila:] "...But why don't you speak to Mrs. Crickett? I'm generally out before she gets here."

[George:] "Oh, yes, I know. You needn't keep on rubbing it in about your having to go out to work. You don't suppose I enjoy it, do you? Wimsey can tell you how I feel about it."

"Don't be so silly, George. Why is it, Lord Peter, that men are so cowardly about speaking to servants?"

"It's the woman's job to speak to servants," said George, "no business of mine."

"All right -- I'll speak, and you'll have to put up with the consequences."

"There won't be any consequences, my dear, if you do it tactfully. I can't think why you want to make all this fuss." (BC 83-84, italics hers)

Many of the returning veterans suffered from "shell-shock," "a condition of alternate moods of apathy and high excitement, with very quick reaction to sudden emergencies but no capacity for concentrated thinking" (Graves 16). Other symptoms of shell-shock included nightmares, day-visions, an impaired ability to think rationally, and an addiction to alcohol. Some victims were stricken during the war, while others managed to remain symptom free until many years later. Trench warfare, the main form of combat during World War I, was "peculiarly horrifying" (Heyck 135). Men spent months living in 6 to 8 foot deep, wet, cold, filthy trenches, many of which were "overrun with rats and ... [revealed] the skeletons and rotting limbs of half-buried dead" (Heyck 136). The
soldiers as well as the citizens back home knew about the futility and impotence of trench warfare. Near Ypres, such warfare cost the British "seven thousand men a day even when they were not being attacked or attacking" (Heyck 136).

Sayers, an avid reader, would have been aware of the devastation left behind by the Great War, and her characterization of shell-shock victim George Fentiman, unemployed ex-soldier, rings eerily true to life. George is subject to muttering episodes which inevitably led to:

... his going off and wandering about in a distraught manner for several days, sometimes with partial and occasionally with complete temporary loss of memory. There was the time when he had been found dancing naked in a field among a flock of sheep, and singing to them. ... Then there was a dreadful time when George had deliberately walked into a bonfire. That was when they had been staying down in the country. George had been badly burnt, and the shock of the pain had brought him round. He never remembered afterwards why he had tried to do these things, and had only the faintest recollection of having done them at all. (BC 259)

More than shell-shock affected the returning soldier, however. Having spent time serving and fighting for their country, ex-soldiers expected to return to a Britain where employment awaited them. Unfortunately, this was not the case for many men, because approximately "a million men found that their old jobs had either disappeared or were held by someone else -- usually a woman, or a man who had escaped conscription" (Graves 17). In addition to the middle- and working-class ex-soldiers, Britain was now faced with a new class of people -- "the moneyless ex-officer" (Graves 56). Before the war most of the commissions in the army went to aristocrats and other gentlemen with money, while towards the end of the war, commissions were given "to men (known as 'temporary gentlemen') who had greater military talent than claims to gentility" (Graves 56).
These men, unlike George Fentiman, seldom had sufficient money or well-off relatives to support them and, while they remained "gentlemen," they were frequently reduced to beggar status, a sure sign the old order was changing, rather than acknowledging "the dignified necessity of suicide" (Graves 56). Sayers allows Colonel Marchbanks, a very minor character in The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club to voice her feelings about this change:

"... I think that the War has had a bad effect on some of our young men. But then, of course, all are not soldiers by training, and that makes a great difference. I certainly notice a less fine sense of honour in these days than we had when I was a boy. There were not so many excuses made then for people; there were things that were done and things that were not done. Nowadays men -- and, I am sorry to say, women too -- let themselves go in a way that is to me quite incomprehensible." (BC 335-336)

Sayers allows Dr. Penberthy, the object of this discussion, to take the honorable way out of the mess he has created, but the book's many passages concerning George Fentiman suggest that Sayers felt sympathy for the returning soldier.

George, who has relatives to help him and who is not reduced to suicide to honorably end his life, frequently expresses his dislike and ingratitude for the assistance. He informs Wimsey that he would rather "commit any damned crime to get hold of a decent income" than continue to rely on the income his wife brings into the house (BC 3). With his "[t]ummy all wrong and no money," George wonders "'[w]hat's the damn good of it, Wimsey? A man goes and fights for his country, gets his inside gassed out, and loses his job, and all they give him is the privilege of marching past the Cenotaph once a year and paying four shillings in the pound income-tax'" (BC 2).
Rather than turning to crime, however, George turns on his wife in one particularly forceful scene. Wimsey stops by to discuss the death of George's grandfather and finds George in a petulant mood. George refers to his home as a "ghastly hole" and a "poverty-stricken hovel" where he and his wife are forced "to live like pigs" and bemoans the lack of sufficient coal to make a proper fire (BC 81, 85, 82). George, grateful that Wimsey refused a drink since there is nothing in the house, snaps irritably at his wife due to her inability to speak to the charwoman about her lack of proper work habits because "'[it]'s the woman's job to speak to servants" and then, in front of Wimsey, goads her into an argument about his grandfather's and his aunt's money (BC 83).

The argument escalates when Sheila unwisely mentions the money the couple has borrowed from a money-lender, who charges exorbitant interest rates, in order to set up a tea-shop for Sheila. When the focus shifts to women, in particular the "modern girl", the conversation turns particularly nasty (BC 91). George informs Sheila that men do not like women who are:

"... always flying off to offices and clubs and parties like they are now. And if you think men like that sort of thing, I can tell you candidly; my girl, they don't They hate it."
"Does it matter? I mean, one doesn't have to bother so much about husband-hunting to-day."
"Oh, no! Husbands don't matter at all, I suppose, to you advanced women. Any man will do, as long as he's got money -------"

"Why do you say 'you' advanced women? I didn't say I felt that way about it. I don't want to go out to work -------"
"There you go. Taking everything to yourself. I know you don't want to work. I know it's only because of the damned rotten position I'm in. You needn't keep on about it. I know I'm a failure." (BC 93, italics hers)
Although there are several other ex-soldiers (Bunter, Robert Fentiman, Dr. Penberthy, Padgett) in the Wimsey series, none of them illustrates as well as George their changing situation in the years between-the-wars in Britain. Bunter, Wimsey's right-hand man and a "sergeant or something" in Wimsey's unit during the war, survived intact and even manages to nurse Wimsey through his bouts with shell-shock (*BH* 354). Fentiman's brother, Robert, was a career military officer who also survived the war. However, Robert, driven by greed and the possibility of inheriting a large sum of money, commits fraud and and must resign his commission. Dr. Penberthy, an ex-soldier, turned to crime not as a result of unemployment or shell-shock, but due to greed and the belief that he should have the money to start his own clinic. Padgett, a very minor character in *Gaudy Night*, also survived the war unscathed, but found employment difficult. His first job, that of assistant camel-hand at the zoo, resulted in a camel bite which gave Padgett blood poisoning (*GN* 115).

Ex-soldiers, particularly those affected by shell-shock or war-time gassing episodes, remained an unstable group in between-the-wars Britain. Their questionable health situation prevented many from being self-supporting, but frequently even the healthy ex-soldiers found employment opportunities beyond their grasp. Sayers' minor ex-soldier characters, most of whom were created prior to Mac's complete deterioration, demonstrate her belief that ex-soldiers were ignored and ill-treated. Through these characters, Sayers' readers can visualize how better medical attention, a disability allowance, educational funding, and jobs would have significantly improved the lives of these ex-soldiers. Rather than "marching past the Cenotaph" and paying minimal taxes, ex-soldiers should have been re-integrated into society and helped to become
productive participants rather than an unwelcome burden in between-the-wars Britain (BC 2). Sayers' audience, even without knowing how Sayers' life had been affected by her husband's war-time experiences, learns about her humanity and her belief that the men and women who fought in World War I deserved better treatment than they received at the hands of a war-weary Britain.

Women

'What,' men have asked distractedly from the beginning of time, 'what on earth do women want?' I do not know that women, as women, want anything in particular, but as human beings they want, my good men, exactly what you want yourselves: interesting occupation, reasonable freedom for their pleasures, and a sufficient emotional outlet. What form the occupation, the pleasures and the emotion may take, depends entirely upon the individual ("Are Women Human?" 138-139, italics Sayers).

Between-the-wars British women experienced changes in all aspects of their lives: clothing styles, entertainment possibilities, job/career opportunities, educational advances, legal status, and more choice about whether to marry or to remain single. Sayers created characters who illustrated both the good and bad sides of these changes.

Clothing styles and entertainment possibilities changed dramatically, in part due to the influence of American soldiers (male and female) and American tourists. Unwilling to tolerate the attitude that Britain would have lost the war without U. S. assistance and unhappy that Americans were buying British "books and art treasures . . . [and] ancient mansions [which were] transported . . . for re-
erection, stone by stone, in the states," the British "gladly welcomed gay
American fashions in dress, music, dancing and fun" (Graves 26-27).

Jazz music became increasingly popular; cocktails, despite going "directly
against British upper-class tradition, the chief ingredients being gin ([a] very-
lower class drink) and vermouth (dangerously Parisian)", were drunk by people
of both genders and of all classes; dancing was done at all hours of the day and
night; smoking in public (by women) increased; the use of lipstick, rouge, face
powder and eye make-up increased; whale-bone corsets went out of style;
American chewing gum was sold on Britain's streets; "short hair and short skirts"
were widely adopted; additional dance halls and clubs opened up; and the new
woman "allow[ed] her partner a near-sexual closeness of embrace" while dancing
(Graves 28, 29, 32). George Fentiman rails against modern "girls" whom he
considers to be "hard-mouthed, cigarette-smoking females ... pretending they're
geniuses and business women" and believes they should be satisfied to become
companions rather than "jazzing and [wearing] short skirts and pretending to
have careers. The modern girl hasn't a scrap of decent feeling or sentiment about
her" (BC 91, 92). Fentiman continues by stating that in earlier times women
became companions to older women and that these companions "had a jolly
good time" while "they learned to be decent companions to their husbands" (BC
92-93). While Fentiman longs for stability, many women welcomed the changes
and, rather than being forced to become companions, selected a wide variety of
career choices.

Sayers, like many women in the early decades of the 1900's, adopted many
of the newer social customs when she went to Oxford during World War I. Her
social activities included fancy-dress parties, tea parties, dancing lessons, boating
activities, lectures, plays, operas, and musical events (Reynolds 46, 52). Believing that "it is every woman's duty to look as nice as she can," she gave a lot of attention to her clothing (Reynolds 49). Sayers became a "new free woman" (Graves 32). Therefore, it is not surprising to find her novels filled with various types and classes of women ranging from Lady Mary Wimsey, an aristocrat, to Gladys, a "good, decent girl" who does for Alfred Thipps and his mother (WB 17). While Sayers did not necessarily champion women, she undeniably understood their peculiar place in Britain in the years between the wars.

Aristocratic Women

Sayers discussed the new style of clothing and the new entertainments in, *Murder Must Advertise* through the character of Dian de Momerie, a young woman with "money, tons of money" who is "sick of everything" (MMA 87). Dian is unable to handle the new freedoms women in Britain are experiencing. Accustomed to her money, her status, and her place in society, Dian searches in vain for something to fulfill her life. Her characterization, carefully drawn by Sayers, demonstrates the harm done to women who were considered by many Britons to be superfluous. Dressed in "slim sandals," "sheer silk stockings," "scantily clothed" in a "moonlight frock of oyster satin," Dian spends her days drinking and drugging and spends her evenings with her drug-smuggling acquaintances in a "slightly intoxicated" condition while "crash[ing] the parties of others (MMA 144, 147, 192, 69, 192, 186). The gin-drinking, make-up wearing, public-smoking Dian, constantly in search of entertainment, enjoys watching her acquaintances in "stimulating and amusing" fights and participating in car races where she is able to hold her own and even win (MMA 144). The fast life, while
popular in the between-the-wars years in Britain, is seen through the character of Dian to be unequal to the task of solving the problems of the superfluous women.

In addition to being superfluous, Dian, whose "people have shown her the door," illustrates the worst of an aristocracy which was "trying hard to preserve what it could" in a world gone awry (MMA 83; Graves 55). Other Sayers' characters illustrate both those aristocratic women who are endeavoring to maintain the status quo and also those who are moving ahead and foregoing their aristocratic status.

Helen, the Duchess of Denver, illustrates the woman struggling to hold onto the class system. Married to Lord Peter Wimsey's elder brother, Helen adheres to both the old and the new. She adopts new fashions, although to a more modest degree than does Dian, and, realizing that "one must be fashionable, though one would not, of course, be vulgarly immodest," Helen wears an evening dress which shows "the exact number of vertebrae that the occasion demanded" in accordance to a 1919 fashion called "The Dorsal Period" (MMA 187; Graves 31). Helen is consumed with appearance -- her own as well as her families'. When her son Saint George is injured in a car accident, Helen "is terribly afraid he might be disfigured for life" (GN 205).

Dressing fashionably is Helen's only concession to the changes facing the British woman. Helen believes very strongly in the idea of a rigid class structure as evidenced by her behavior when her sister-in-law Lady Mary Wimsey decides to marry Charles Parker, policeman and commoner, and when Lord Peter

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11In March 1919, a British publication, The Bystander "began a long series of jokes" about the backless nature of women's gowns (Graves 31). The publication coined the phrase "The Dorsal Period" due to women's fashions which featured ever lower backs.
Wimsey finally convinces Harriet Vane, commoner, to marry him. Prior to these two events, however, Sayers shows how Helen feels about her position in society when discussing Helen's behavior during her husband's trial for murder.

Conscious of her position as Duchess of Denver, Helen maintains control of her emotions even during the most trying of events. Gerald, the Duke and Helen's husband, is in jail awaiting trial for murder while Helen remains at home attending church and sitting in the family pew despite the possibility she will "get a bit stared at" (CW 39). She graciously remembers her guests, asking if "anybody [is] thinking of going to church" and then orders the car while chastising Lord Peter for leaving the country without leaving a forwarding address (CW 38). Helen never once forgets that she is the "Lady of the Manor". In fact, Helen is even impatient with Gerald for refusing to speak out about his location at the time of the murder, because while "we [meaning his family, acquaintances, friends, and peers] all know that he wasn't doing any harm . . . we can't expect the jurymen to understand that. The lower orders are so prejudiced" (CW 78). Helen's "duty was clear, and she would do it" regardless of the cost to her family (CW 85).

When Lady Mary announces her intentions to marry a policeman, Helen feels it is her duty to express her disapproval at the misalliance between an aristocrat and a commoner, while at the same time admitting that Parker is "quiet and well behaved" at least (BH 6). Admitting defeat in preventing Lady Mary's marriage to a mere commoner, Helen saves her greatest disapproval for the Wimsey-Vane nuptials.

Helen's disapproval of Harriet Vane began during Harriet's murder trial. Accused of murdering her former live-in lover, Harriet, in Helen's eyes, is a
"wretched woman" who deserves to hang (SP 115). Faced with the engagement, however, Helen rises to the occasion and, donning her upper-crust manner, vows "to see that the thing was done properly, if it had to be done at all" (BH 4). She then proceeds to arrange a "colossal society wedding" as befitted Lord Peter's station; Helen selects the location, "the date, the parson, the guests and the music" and even provides "a copy of the new form of marriage service" for the bride and groom (BH 19, 18). Helen also selects the bridesmaids from her "own friends, as H's friends' obviously impossible," borrows a house in which to hold the reception, and even borrows "ten villas ... [as possibilities] for the honeymoon" (BH 19). Helen, like many upper-class people in 1920's and 1930's Britain, desperately wants to be and to feel superior. Helen had found her occupation: managing a large estate and being the wife of a peer. Her pleasure is the recognition her status brought to her; and her emotional outlet was her feelings of superiority.

Sayers realized that not all aristocratic women were like Helen, however, and she created aristocratic women who reflect an adaptation to the changes society experienced in Britain. Aristocratic women were no longer expected (or required) to marry well and then to manage their husbands' estates; nor did they find it necessary to become companions to elderly relatives. Job possibilities increased, though slowly because many people still believed women should stay "home and leave the bread-winning to men" (Heyck 155). In 1919, the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act removed the last barriers to many formerly male domains: the bar, the jury box, and Parliament12 (Graves 36). To reflect these

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12Interestingly enough, the first woman elected to Parliament was not England-born, but was the American-born Lady Astor (in 1919). It would be two years later before other women were elected to Parliament.
other women, Sayers created Hilary Thorpe (The Nine Tailors) and Lady Mary (several of the novels) to reflect the more emancipated, liberal woman, a role closer to Sayers' own place in society.

Hilary, only child of Sir Henry Thorpe, becomes an orphan at age fifteen and finds herself the ward of her uncle, Mr. Edward Thorpe, civil servant, who believes Wimsey's detecting hobby to be "unsuited to [Wimsey's] position in life" (NT 54, 133). Edward Thorpe feels, in fact, that "it's all wrong for [Hilary] to be going to Oxford" and thoroughly disapproves of Hilary's plans to become a writer (NT 135). According to Thorpe, people should remember who and what they are and behave accordingly, but Hilary sees life differently. Sir Henry, her father, wanted her to attend Oxford and approved of her idea to "make [her] own living" (NT 84). Sayers carefully constructs Hilary as a capable, resourceful, competent young woman who will survive whatever challenges life presents her. Sayers provides ample evidence of Hilary's abilities during a conversation, which takes place shortly after she is orphaned, between Hilary and Lord Peter. (Sayers makes sure readers realize that Hilary is intelligent and capable by having Lord Peter praise her.)

[Wimsey]: "I've heard of him; he pulled my car out of the ditch one day -- which reminds me. I ought to call and thank him personally."
[Hilary]: "That means you want to ask him questions."
"If you do see through people as clearly as that, you oughtn't to make it so brutally plain to them."
"That's what Uncle calls my unfeminine lack of tact. He says it comes of going to school and playing hockey."
"He may be right. But why worry?"
"I'm not worrying -- only, you see, Uncle Edward will have to look after me now, and he thinks it's all wrong for me to be going to Oxford ... What are you looking at? The distance from the South gateway?"
"Uncomfortably discerning woman -- yes, I was..." (NT 135, italics hers)

Wise beyond her years, Hilary impresses Wimsey with her brains and her insight. He continues to discuss the situation with her and appreciates her belief that her mother's grave was opened "within a week or so" after her death, something he "never thought about" (NT 138). Her "creative imagination" should allow Hilary to become a good writer and provide her a means to support herself, although the need to do so is eliminated when Aunt Wilbraham dies and leaves Hilary "the whole of her very considerable estate" (NT 134,339). Hilary, unhappy about the money, makes plans to do something worthwhile with it so she can continue with her original plan to support herself. After all, she needs funding for her years at Oxford, and she is wise enough to realize this.

Lady Mary also possesses wisdom, although as written by Sayers, Lady Mary has a more difficult rite of passage than does Hilary. Lady Mary spends some time in open rebellion against her family and her class. A Wimsey friend, Mrs. Pettigrew-Robinson, "never [had] liked Lady Mary; she considered her a very objectionable specimen of the modern independent woman" (CW 37). Lady Mary, a nurse in London during the War, where she was involved in a "very undignified incident connected with a Bolshevist," spent some time trying to believe herself a socialist (NT 37). A member of the Soviet Club, Lady Mary was secretary to the Propaganda Society for a time and, according to another member of the club, Lady Mary "liked being a worker" (NT 142, 143). Lady Mary even fell in love with and became engaged to a socialist who didn't "believe in those old-fashioned ideas about property . . . [and who did] believe in men and women
being equal. Why should one always be the bread-winner more than the other” (NT 159).

This sentiment allows Charles Parker, policeman and commoner, to propose to, be accepted by, and marry Lady Mary. Sayers describes in detail the ingenious solution which allows Parker to retain his pride and Lady Mary to feel an equal partner in her marriage:

... all Lady Mary's money had been handed over to her brothers in trust for little Parkers to come, the trustee having the further duty of doling out each quarter to the wife a sum precisely equal to the earnings of the husband during that period. Thus a seemly balance was maintained between the two principals; and the trifling anomaly that Chief-Inspector Parker was actually a mere pauper in comparison with small Charles Peter and still smaller Mary Lucasta, now peacefully asleep in their cots on the floor above, disturbed nobody one whit. It pleased Mary to have the management of their moderate combined income, and incidentally did her a great deal of good. She now patronized her wealthy brother with all the superiority which the worker feels over the man who merely possess money. (NT 72-73)

While this solution would not work for every marriage, Sayers certainly arrived at an equable solution in an unstable time.

Spinsters

Hilary's desire to become a self-supporting writer is facilitated by her educational possibilities and by her money. Lady Mary is able to marry for love because she, her husband, and her brothers are able to solve one of the problems of marriages between classes. However, not all British women had the chances and financial resources of these two individuals. Sayers also created female
characters from the middle and lower classes and discussed the effect of the first world war, when coupled with the changes in society, on these women.

World War I left "hardly a family [in Britain] but had lost one or more of its sons" and these losses resulted in "widows struggling to bring up fatherless children, women in their twenties, their sweethearts killed, facing the long years of spinsterhood" (Mowat 202). Those men who did return needed employment which further affected the lives of the women in Britain. Many women, whose work during the war years had been valued, were now forced from the industrial jobs they held during the war, although some other sources of employment did open up: "clerical, service and 'light industrial'" positions were available for some women (Heyck 187). Even these jobs, however, were sometimes difficult to find for the single woman forced to support herself.

Sayers' characters Miss Climpson and Miss Murchison discovered this unfortunate fact firsthand. Miss Climpson is described by Sayers as an "elderly spinster" in Strong Poison, as a "thin, middle-aged woman" in Unnatural Death, and as "sixty-odd years" old in Gaudy Night (6; 37; 259). Miss Murchison, who has "a strong, ugly, rather masculine face," is thirty-eight (SP 100, 122). Both women found themselves required to support themselves in a society which provided very few possibilities for them. Sayers does not mention Miss Climpson's life before her employment at The Cattery, but Miss Murchison, "a

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13 Miss Climpson and her job as spinster-sleuth are discussed extensively in chapter seven of Catherine Kenney's The Remarkable Case of Dorothy L. Sayers. Kenney comments that Miss Climpson and Britain's other old maids "are not really superfluous" but rather some of society's habits are superfluous (136). Kenney continues this idea and comments that Sayers' use of spinster-sleuth is "a commonsensical solution to the predicament of women" trapped in a society which does not appreciate them or their efforts (135).

14 Sayers never mentions whether or not Miss Climpson had wanted to marry, but in Gaudy Night Harriet Vane, while attempting to reach either Miss Climpson or Miss Murchison, is informed that Miss Murchison has gotten married.
business woman all her life" was suddenly unemployed after twelve years working for a financier (SP 122). Placing advertisements in newspapers and answering the advertisements others had placed in newspapers produced, in Miss Murchison's mind, the firm conviction that "[m]ost people appeared to want their secretaries young and cheap" (SP 122). She was neither.

Miss Climpson and Miss Murchison epitomize:

... the class [of women] unkindly known as 'superfluous.' There were spinsters with small fixed incomes, or no income at all; widows without family; women deserted by peripatetic husbands and living on a restricted alimony ... [who] had no resources ... There were retired and disappointed school-teachers; out-of-work actresses; courageous people who had failed with hat-shops and tea-parlours; and even a few Bright Young Things, for whom the cocktail-party and the night-club had grown boring. These women seemed to spend most of their time in answering advertisements. (SP 44)

Sayers knew about the plight of these women. She had spent some time searching for employment; she was a former teacher; she fully appreciated the difficult time women experienced in the years between-the-wars in the British job market. She, using Lord Peter Wimsey as a spokes-person, considers Britain's attitude towards women a:

... manifestation of the wasteful way in which this country is run. Look at electricity. Look at water-power. Look at the tides. Look at the sun. Millions of power units being given off into space every minute. Thousands of old maids, simply bursting with useful energy, forced by our stupid social system into hydros and hotels and communities and hostels and posts as companions ... (UD 42)

Sayers created a job for Miss Climpson; she became an employee of The Cattery. Financed by Lord Peter, Miss Climpson forms "ostensibly a typing
bureau . . . [with] three efficient female typists who did very excellent work for authors and men of science from time to time" (SP 43). The women of The Cattery were Lord Peter Wimsey's "ears and tongue . . . and . . . nose. [He used them to] ask questions which a young man could not" because everyone expects questions from a "lady with a long, woolly jumper on knitting needles and jingly things around her neck" (UD 42-43). All Cattery employees are female, and Miss Murchison soon joins their number.

As with Hilary Thorpe, Sayers ensures that everyone realized the capabilities and intelligence level of these two women. When Miss Climpson is sent on a job, she purchases new underwear because "it is necessary that every detail of my equipment should be suitable to my (supposed!) position in life. I have been careful to wash the garments through, so that they do not look too new, as this might have a suspicious appearance!! (UD 44, italics hers). While conversing with a potential witness, Miss Climpson "seize[s] the opening [the witness provides] with a swiftness which would have done credit to Napoleon" (UD 54). When the questioning appears to go astray, Miss Climpson skillfully brings it back on topic in order to fulfill "her mission in life" (UD 58).

Miss Climpson's educational background is revealed in her references to literature (Shakespeare, whom she quotes in a letter to Lord Peter, Thomas Hardy, and Milton) and history (the Renaissance, "the Great Plague in Florence", George Washington, and life in India) (UD 61, 62, 188; SP 180, 174, 180). Miss Climpson is an avid reader and student of life and people. Her interest in spiritualism, although a forbidden subject according to her church, demonstrates her keen interest in all aspects of life and further increases her ability to read people and situations (SP 163).
"An active woman," Miss Climpson uses her logical mind to think out a plan of action when she is trying to stage an accidental meeting with the nurse of an elderly woman with whom Lord Peter is interested \( \textit{UID 264; SP 156} \). She then uses that same capable mind to devise a method of gaining access to another suspect's apartment \( \textit{UID 263} \). When Mr. Parker comes calling on an undercover Miss Climpson, she easily and smoothly passes him off as her "nephew Adolphus" \( \textit{UID 196} \). Raised by a father who believed "a woman should never need to know anything about money matters," Miss Climpson has educated herself to cope with finances, business matters, and the changes society is experiencing in between-the-wars Britain \( \textit{UID 41, italics hers} \).

Miss Murchison, like Hilary Thorpe and Miss Climpson, is carefully created by Sayers, who again ensures that everyone will realize Miss Murchison is capable and competent. Non-judgmental and capable, Miss Murchison, despite the slight risk of a jail sentence, willingly learns the fine art of lockpicking in order to fulfill an assignment for Lord Peter. She then devises a logical and practical plan allowing her to use her newly acquired skills and complete her mission. When her activities are questioned, she quickly manufactures a lie about what she was looking for and then artfully giggles a little to reinforce the lie.

Having noticed "that some papers [she] had left just inside [her] typewriter cover had been disturbed," she concludes (correctly) that her employer, a murder suspect, had used her typewriter \( \textit{SP 125} \). She provides Lord Peter with this information and further provides him additional information about the suspect which resulted from her years spent observing the workings of her financier employer, who had introduced her to the workings of
the financial world. When the murder suspect receives a phone call from another member of the financial world, Miss Murchison, who "knew something about" the latter person, was able to deduce the murder suspect's involvement in a trust fraud (SP 112).

When Miss Climpson, who has successfully completed her mission and located the missing will, sends the document to Miss Murchison's employer (the murder suspect), the latter woman devises yet another plan to gain access to her employers office in the hopes of catching him hiding the document. Her powers of observation allow her to notice "a curious dark line at the edge of the paneling" which she later looks for, discovers, opens, and then proceeds to read all the documents inside the safe so she can make a full and complete report to Lord Peter (SP 197). Sayers leaves no doubt that Miss Murchison is an able member of The Cattery and is as competent as most of the male characters in the Wimsey novels.

Working Women

Sayers creates other working women within the pages of the Lord Peter Wimsey novels. Readers are introduced to nurses, both murderous and non-murderous ones such as Mary Whittaker (UD), Nurse Philliter (UD), and Miss Booth (SP), and artists such as Marjorie Phelps, who "made figurines in porcelain for a living" (SP 71). While the nurses are working in an occupation traditionally female-held, Marjorie Phelps is working in a field of her own choosing as is Phoebe Tucker, a classmate of Harriet Vane when both were at Shrewsbury College (GN).
When she attended the Gaudy celebration at her college, Vane is cornered by another classmate, Miss Mollison, who is employed in a "female" occupation -- she is a teacher. Despairing of ever escaping from hearing about Miss Mollison's teaching life, Vane "with a heart-lifting surge of thankfulness . . . saw Phoebe Tucker" (GN 13). Tucker, a former history student, had married an archaeologist with whom she "dug up bones and stones and pottery in forgotten corners of the globe, and wrote pamphlets and lectured to learned societies" (GN 13). She and her husband had three children who spent much of their time with their grandparents while Tucker and her husband pursue archaeology. A personification of the "new woman," Tucker discusses her work with Vane with an intelligence that most women would not have possessed prior to the changes in education and the freedom which World War I brought to British society.

Tucker seems to have it all: a satisfying job, a happy marriage, and three "quite intelligent" children (GN 14). In addition, she has discovered how to mingle all three aspects of her life in a very satisfying manner. Unlike her mother's generation which "always get so agitated about germs and dirt," Tucker ignores the possible hazards and takes her children to the various digs which she and her husband are investigating (GN 14). She is not sheltering her children, but is educating them and allowing them to explore their world to the fullest.

In contrast to Phoebe Tucker, Sheila Fentiman works "as cashier in a fashionable tea-shop" much to her own and her husband's discomfort (BC 80). Shell-shocked and gassed during the war, George Fentiman is unable to retain jobs due to his precarious health. Sheila is therefore required to work outside the home in an effort to feed and house the couple. She and George have numerous arguments about this situation, but neither individual is able to change the
situation. Sheila and George reflect the segment of between-the-wars British society that would like conditions to stabilize and stop changing. They both would rather life return to pre-World War I conditions so that she might stay at home raising their children while George supported the family.

Other working women within the Wimsey novels include the female staff at Pym's Publicity, an advertising agency which includes typists Miss Rossiter and Miss Parton, head charwoman Mrs. Crump, and Miss Metyard, the only female copywriter, who "could write about practically anything" (MMA 34). These working women are described sympathetically by Sayers as capable, intelligent people who are very efficient at their respective jobs. Sayers allows Miss Metyard to be the only Pym's staff member who sees beyond Wimsey's disguise as Death Bredon and tells the typists that "he isn't Mr. Bredon, he's Lord Peter Wimsey" (MMA 340). In addition, Miss Metyard is the only staff member who deduces that Tallboy is a murderer, and, having finally "made up her mind to speak to" him, tells him that she believes Bredon and Wimsey are "the same person" and that he (Tallboy) "had better get out in time" (MMA 335). Miss Metyard has proved to be as intelligent, as observant, and as capable as Wimsey in deducing the truth of a situation.

**Academic Women**

Educational opportunities changed for women in the between-the-wars years in Britain. Immediately after the war, the student population at Britain's universities increased dramatically, in part due to returning servicemen (Mowat 210). These numbers stabilized by 1925-26, but the larger proportion of the
population remained male despite the fact that in 1919, women were admitted as full members of Oxford, even though the Bishop of London believed "that they were 'all' destined to become the wives of some good man" - he meant each" (Graves 35, italics his). Cambridge "refused to admit women to university membership, but in 1921 passed 'Graces' which granted degree titles [but not degrees] to women graduates" (Grave 36). It would not be until 1976 that Cambridge granted actual degrees to women graduates (Mowat 211).

Sayers, whose own years at Oxford had been very happy, created numerous and varied characters to haunt the halls of Shrewsbury. Whether they reflect her nostalgia for university life or are an actual representation of female dons in the years 1920-1930, these characters provide a glimpse of another segment of Britain's society -- the academic woman.

The academic woman needed to tread gingerly in a world which was peopled predominately by males who had little desire to share their ivory tower with women. Sayers emphasizes this information in her description of the current Warden at Shrewsbury, Dr. Margaret Baring. "A magnificent figure-head on all public occasions," Dr. Baring was able to "soothe with tact the wounded breasts of crusty and affronted male dons" when the occasion required (GN 10). Sayers continues to illustrate that men felt university life should remain their

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15Robert Graves gave the 1919 date, while Charles Loch Mowat said degrees were granted to women in 1920 and Barbara Reynolds gives 14 October 1920 as the date on which Sayers received her official degree (97).

16Catherine Kenney discusses the possibility that Sayers' picture of university life was more nostalgic than realistic and disagrees with that viewpoint. Kenney points to a passage in chapter one of *Gaudy Night* where readers are first introduced to the faculty: "The procession came into sight beneath the archway; a small crocodile-walk of elderly people, dressed with the incongruous brilliance of a more sumptuous era, and moving with the slovenly dignity characteristic of university functions in England ... the female dons adopted a reverential attitude suggestive of a prayer meeting" (GN 11-12). Kenney believes this picture is not only accurate, but finds it unsentimental (107).
domain when she has Dean Martin tell Harriet Vane that she thinks "'It's perfectly noble of them [men] to let us come trampling over their University at all, bless their hearts. They've been used to being lords and masters for hundreds of years and they want a bit of time to get used to the change'" (GN 52-53).

Treading carefully is not the answer for these women, however. Dr. Baring, who considers it necessary to struggle to gain an education in "a world terrified with unrest," believes that both genders must develop "the love of learning for its own sake" (GN 26). She sometimes errs on the side of caution and does not act as decisively as she could. When Wimsey wants her to allow him to question the individual he believes to be guilty of vandalism and attempted murder, Dr. Baring prefers to await further proof -- a move which places Miss de Vine's life in grave jeopardy (GN 397).

While these actions on the part of the Warden may be perceived as admitting that women are not as good at decision-making as men might be, Sayers realizes that not all men would jump into action without sufficient evidence. When the poison pen writes letters to the Vice-Chancellor of the university (a male), "the University proved to be as solid as [Shrewsbury] College; having let the women in, it was not prepared to let them down" (GN 435). Informed by the Warden that "steps were being taken," the Vice-Chancellor, realizing everything was under control, was content to let the women at the college handle the situation (GN 435).

In addition to housing "a magnificent figure-head," Shrewsbury College is peopled with numerous other individuals (GN 10). Several of the more interesting dons at Shrewsbury are Miss de Vine, Miss Lydgate, Miss Hillyard, and Dean Letitia Martin. These women, as characterized by Sayers, illustrate
vastly different types. Despite their differences, however, they all share a love of education.

Miss Lydgate is scatter-brained, other-worldly, generous, kind, and scholarly. Non-judgmental, Miss Lydgate "embraced the irregularities of other people in a wide, unquestioning charity" which allowed her to find the best in all people (GN 14). Crime and criminals, when they come to her attention, prompt her to "knit puzzled brows and think how utterly wretched the offenders must have been before they could do so dreadful a thing" (GN 14). Miss Lydgate, who "sometimes wonder[s] whether [she is] a scholar at all," finds many of the daily details of life difficult to manage (GN 38). Her research is faultless, which, in fact, becomes a trial to both her and her publishers as she is constantly searching for every detail of her research in order to tell the complete truth. She admits to Vane that she gets "muddled" when trying to write down her thoughts, and that she realizes that "the printers will be rather angry" when she presents them with the latest draft of her manuscript (GN 38). During a brief vacation break, Miss Lydgate managed "in a few short weeks to make havoc of her proofs" because of a professor whose name she cannot remember who pointed out several inaccuracies in her paper to her (GN 224). Sayers, via Wimsey, states that "Miss Lydgate is a very great and a very rare person" (GN 447).

Miss Lydgate, who possesses a soul of kindness, is an academic first and a generous human second. Miss de Vine, on the other hand, is first and always an academic. Sayers almost condemns Miss de Vine's strict adherence to academic honesty. Described as "a fighter ... a soldier knowing no personal loyalties, whose sole allegiance was to the fact," Miss de Vine is a formidable woman (GN 17). Vane see de Vine as "a scholar of a kind very unlike Miss Lydgate ... and
still more *grotesquely* unlike anything that [she] could ever become" (GN 17, italics mine). The use of *grotesquely* instantly alerts readers to the importance of Miss de Vine to the plot and certainly provides interest and intrigue to her character. Sayers does not completely condemn Miss de Vine, but gives her a human element, such as when she becomes "suddenly human" and worries, "Is my hair tidy?" (GN 20).

For the most part, however, Vane (and Sayers) see Miss de Vine as a woman who embraces academic life due to "a powerful spiritual call, over-riding other possible tendencies and desires" (GN 124). Miss Lydgate considers Miss de Vine to be "one of the *real* scholars" who cannot and should not be forced to handle interpersonal relationships (GN 16, italics hers). With a broken engagement behind her, Miss de Vine admits the truth of Miss Lydgate's assessment of her character when she tells Vane that she (Miss de Vine) realized that she was better suited for "impersonal job" than for personal relationships which she describes in terms of cannibalism (GN 175).

Sayers once again almost condemns Miss de Vine when readers learn about the male professor who not only failed to re-write his thesis when faced with contradictory information but also stole and suppressed the letter which contained the contradictory information (GN 341-342). Miss de Vine felt honor bound to report the situation knowing that he would be ruined. When reporting the facts of the story to her fellow dons and Wimsey at Shrewsbury, Miss de Vine appears calm, cool, and completely detached from the situation. She had no further information about the man, nor did she seem to care to learn what had happened to him. Sayers paints a harsh picture of Miss de Vine, which is only partially amended when readers learn that, when confronted with the man's wife
and learning of his suicide, Miss de Vine regrets not her "original action, which was unavoidable, but for the sequel" (GN 446). She admits that perhaps she should "have made it her business to see what became of that unhappy man and his wife" (GN 447).

Shrewsbury is also inhabited by some level-headed, sensible, rational and intelligent women who each possess a sense of humor. Dean Letitia Martin best embodies this individual. Dean Martin, who wears a "filthy old bomazine" gown for all academic occasions which require it, cannot wait to get rid of it and "show off [her] party frock" (GN 19). She performs her duty of "tagging after old Professor Boniface who's ninety-seven and practically gaga, and screaming in his deaf ear till [she's] almost dead", then emphatically declares she must "have some proper tea" (GN 20, italics hers).

When Harriet Vane is called to Oxford to help solve the riddle of the poison pen letters and the acts of vandalism, Dean Martin wisely realizes that Vane "had better not tell [her] too much about what [Vane] think[s]" in case one of the dons is the poison pen (GN 89). In addition, Dean Martin quickly understands when Vane explains that good spelling does not necessarily indicate an educated person, nor does bad spelling indicate an uneducated person (GN 90). Sayers further offers proof of Dean Martin's abilities when the Dean asks Vane:

"And what becomes of the mutilated newspapers"
"This won't do," said Harriet; "you're being a great deal too sharp about this. That's just one of the things I was wondering about."
(GN 91, italics hers)

When the library is vandalized, Dean Martin comments, "What idiots we were not to expect it. Of course, the obvious thing?" (GN 112, italics hers). Dean
Martin is not a fool. She realizes her own limitations and recognizes the limitations of the other dons and of the students. She admits that the university tries to "weed out" those students who do not belong in university, but it does not always succeed (GN 156). She wisely and, in a no nonsense style, tells a student who is over-studying, to stop being "a little juggins. All work and no play is simply silly" (GN 237). Further, she tells the student to "chuck that perishing old Ducange and Meyer-Lübke or whoever it is and go away and play" (GN 237).

Dean Letitia Martin, in addition to being the epitome of good sense and rationality, exhibits a humorous side. She constantly refers to the students with nicknames such as "tiresome little cuckoos" and "juggins" and refers to the dons as "a flock of hens" (GN 156, 237, 196, italics hers). She and Vane once "disgraced themselves badly" when listening to Dr. Threep's shirt-front pop during a dinner (GN 266). Not daring to "catch the Dean's eye," Vane "could never properly recall" how the dinner ended, but does remember finding "herself in the Dean's room, helpless between mirth and alarm" (GN 267). Dean Martin provides a picture of a well-balanced academic and further presents a contrast to the extreme personalities of Miss de Vine and Miss Lydgate.

Shrewsbury's walls also contain students, and, like the dons, these women represent a wide range of types. Sayers introduces readers to Miss Cattermole, who came to university because her parents believed "every woman ought to have a University education, even if she married" and who only wants to become a cook (GN 154). Cattermole's parents are enlightened and awake to the changes in society, but they neglected to consider the personality of their daughter.
Cattermole's nearest neighbor, Miss Briggs, wants to be at Oxford and takes her studies seriously. She finds playing nurse-maid to Cattermole "a very heavy and thankless task" which "take[s] such a time" (GN 143). Readers also meet Miss Newland, an over-achiever and daughter of "a very minor civil servant" whose "daughter's career means everything to" (GN 258). Unfortunately, Newland, afraid she will not live up to the expectations of her parents, her dons, and her classmates, attempts suicide (GN 251).

Women like Miss de Vine and Miss Lydgate are able to teach and do research because university rules changed during the years between-the-wars and full university privileges were granted to women. These women were able to educate others like Harriet Vane, novelist, Phoebe Tucker, archeologist, Betty Armstrong, dog breeder, Dorothy Collins, business woman, Trimmer, mental health specialist, and Miss Cattermole, future cook, because the rules changed and because society was making a place for these women and their career choices. These women benefited from the freedoms granted to women in the years between-the-wars.

The dons discuss the changes which Shrewsbury's current students are enjoying. Miss Lydgate fears that the women "don't get enough sleep at night. What with young men and motor-cars and parties, their lives are so much fuller than they were before the War" (GN 39). Another conversation discloses the information that the current students "sneer at restrictions and demand freedom, till something annoying happens; then they demand angrily what has become of the discipline" (GN 101). The dons recognize that the between-the-wars students are not interested in responsibility, but prefer to take "up with their young men" (GN 101). As Dean Martin comments, "Drat their young men. In my day, we
simply thirsted for responsibility" (GN 101). Sayers' descriptions of the inhabitants of Shrewsbury and her discussion of the problems, concerns, issues, and struggles of these women provides a glimpse into academe, a microcosm of the larger society.

Sayers' female minor characters demonstrate her understanding of the peculiar position occupied by women in between-the-wars Britain. Changes were happening at a very rapid pace and affected women at all levels of society. Readers of the Wimsey novels can see how Sayers feels about both aristocratic and non-aristocratic women by the manner in which she draws her minor characters. While Sayers' depiction of Helen is unflattering, her portrait of Dian de Momerie reflects her opinion that truly superfluous women who refuse to become useful and productive members of society deserve their fate. While Helen is a snob, Dian is completely useless. Sayers' attitude may be considered harsh, but it reflects the attitude of many people during the 1920's and 1930's. As the lower classes achieved small improvements and successes in their status and class position, many of these people ceased to revere the superfluous upper class people.

Hilary Thorpe and Lady Mary Wimsey retain Sayers' good opinion because they both participate more fully in society than do either Helen or Dian. Lady Mary, especially during her Socialist period, reflects Sayers' belief that the class system is inequitable and needs modification or elimination. Further proof of Sayers' disdain for the class system lies in the marriage of equality which she creates for Lady Mary and Chief Inspector Parker. Readers can discover that Sayers appreciates equality of both class and gender.
In addition, readers can perceive Sayers' attitude about the so-called superfluous woman. Spinsters, those unmarried females found in all social classes who did not work for a living, were deemed to be superfluous by a society in which women far out-numbered the men. Reluctant to support the belief that women were as capable as men, British society relegated these women to lives of boredom and inactivity. Sayers communicates to her audience her belief that women are excellent detectives, publishable authors, qualified educators, and creative copywriters. Sayers' minor female characters (with a few exceptions) demonstrate their capabilities and their intelligence. While her early female characters are generally married or nurses, Sayers' later female characters clearly mirror society's changing attitude about women and their place in society. Sayers, like Hilary Thorpe's father, believes that women should be educated and then use their education and experience to lead productive, useful, and happy lives.
CONCLUSION

William W. Stowe, in his essay "Convention and Ideology in Detective Fiction," comments that "detective fiction can be shown to reflect or embody the assumptions and values of the society that produced it" (577). Dorothy L. Sayers knew intimately the problems, concerns, and cares of women, farmers, and ex-soldiers. Her Wimsey novels are filled with small, but pertinent, details about these groups of people -- details which provided a platform to discuss the problems the government added to already over-burdened lives, details which illustrated the situation of the soldier returning from fighting for his country, and details which illuminated the hardships experienced by many women who were raised expecting to marry, but who would not be able to do so because of the high death count of the First World War.

Sayers knew firsthand the living conditions experienced by farmers. Her childhood in the country provided an introduction to the ramshackle cottages which had no electricity, only a fireplace for heat and cooking, and no indoor plumbing. Her description of the Grimethorpe's home as "all so jolly stark and grim" and her description of the devastation left by the flood in The Nine Tailors are examples of the realism that underpins the Wimsey tales. Through her detective fiction she also echoes a widely-held belief that more governmental concern for the condition of the dykes, dams, sluice gates, and bridges would have prevented floods and the loss of life.

Sayers reflects society's concern for the farmers and for the situation of agriculture in part in Henry Weldon's tirade against governmental and church interference. Weldon speaks out against the importation of Russian wheat and
expresses understanding for farmers who "feel like chucking it altogether sometimes and clearing out of this bloody country" (HHC 134). Using Henry Weldon's voice, Sayers also discusses the high land taxes farmers were forced to pay and the exorbitant costs of insurance. When coupled with the new governmental marketing boards, these taxes and insurance costs demonstrate the numerous difficulties experienced by farmers. Through Catherine Freemantle-Bendict's bitter and resigned attitude towards "the Milk Board and the Marketing Board," Sayers mirrors the prevailing attitude about the hardships these regulations placed on the farmer (GN 43).

Weldon's and Freemantle-Bendict's complaints about the church tithe indicates that Sayers sympathized with the farmer over the church, surprisingly because her father was a vicar. Sayers presents the other side of the argument through Mr. Venables, vicar of Fenchurch St. Paul's, who explains his belief that the tithe is not only fair, but is the duty of every law-abiding citizen of England. Readers might perhaps wonder on which side of the argument Sayers falls until they notice that Mr. Venables might not sincerely believe what he preaches. He says "'the law is the law. Oh, on the matter of tithe I assure you I am adamant,'" but Mrs. Venables reminds him that "'if you didn't so often advance people money to pay the tithe with'" he might hear more of his parishioners agreeing with Weldon and Freemantle-Bendict (NT 234). Mr. Venables clearly reflects Sayers' opinion about the tithe — it is a necessary evil, but perhaps it should be re-evaluated to bring it more in light with the opinion of many land-owners.

Just as she illustrated that farmers experienced a harsh and unrewarding life through some characters in the Wimsey novels, Sayers' books demonstrate a widely held belief that the ex-soldier was unfairly treated in the years between-
the-wars. George Fentiman's story becomes the story of many soldiers who returned from fighting for their country and found that their country had no place for them. Fentiman allows Sayers to voice her concerns about these citizen/soldiers and to comment that society has not provided sufficiently for them.

Many ex-soldiers returned to England ready for a new society, but instead they found that society, in particular their elders, had no room for them. Sayers illustrates this point by having Colonel Marchbanks comment "that the War has had a bad effect on some of our young men" voicing his belief in the unsuitability of young men to survive in between-the-wars Britain because "nowadays men let themselves go in a way that is to me quite incomprehensible" *(BC 335)*. Colonel Marchbanks reflects society's lack of respect for those very people who so recently were busy protecting Britain.

Catherine Kenney comments that Sayers "habitually uses humor to make a point" and this certainly appears the case with regard to academic women *(37)*. In an early passage in *Gaudy Night*, Dean Martin can be seen to remark that male academics are "perfectly noble" when they allow females into their university *(52)*. She continues to say that men are

"...used to being lords and masters... and they want a bit of time to get used to change. Why, it takes a man months and *months* to reconcile himself to a new hat. And *just* when you're preparing to send it to the jumble sale, he says, 'That's rather a nice hat you've got on, where did you get it?' And you say, 'My dear Henry, it's the one I had last year and you said made me look like an organ-grinder's monkey.'" *(GN 53, italics hers)*

Dean Martin finds humor in being asked to escort a ninety-seven year old, deaf, "gaga" male don around during the Gaudy events, and she and Harriet
both are excessively amused by the phenomenon of popping shirt fronts on male visitors to Shrewsbury (GN 20). Her humor, as brought out by Sayers' characterization of Dean Martin's character, allows readers to see the absurdities of male dons teaching until they are long past being coherent while female dons must walk carefully and avoid antagonizing their male counterparts.

In addition to using humor, Sayers soberly examines the situation of female academics. Dean Martin, while deploring the attitude and behaviors of the "new girls" cloistered behind the walls of Shrewsbury College, recognizes the benefits these "new girls" and the dons enjoy due to the changes experienced in between-the-wars Britain. Using Gaudy Night and Dean Martin as a platform, Sayers voices her keen appreciation for the value of a university education.

Phoebe Tucker, a history major and classmate of Harriet Vane's, embodies the very best of an educated woman. Married and the mother of three children, Tucker is able to participate fully in her husband's work because she learned how to reason while at Shrewsbury College. Tucker's training in history affords her the ability to appreciate the digs and the treasures her husband unearths, while at the same time allowing her to keep her husband's prose readable and polite by "toning down his adjectives and putting in deprecatory footnotes. I mean, Lambard may be a perverse old idiot, but it's more dignified not to say so in so many words" (GN 13). Her university education, coupled with society's grudging approval of working women, makes it possible for Tucker to lecture with her husband and to write pamphlets and papers about their finds.

Perhaps Catherine Freemantle-Bendict, a farmer's wife, best provides Sayers a vehicle to illustrate the benefits of education for both genders. By her own admission, Freemantle-Bendict, who "once was a scholar", spends her days
"washing and cooking for a family and digging potatoes and feeding cattle" and attending to the myriad governmental regulations and forms (GN 45, 44).

Freemantle-Bendict fears that her husband is slightly resentful of her education and feels additional pressure to make her life more comfortable because once she had things which he cannot provide for her. Sayers wants readers to recognize that had he been educated, this resentment would not exist.

Non-academic women also experienced hardships dealing with a society conflicted about the issue of women. Sayers' use of Miss Climpson illustrates her belief that no women are superfluous and that all women want a chance to work, earn money, and lead productive lives. This viewpoint is evidenced in two long passages: one in *Strong Poison* and one in *Unnatural Death*. Never a champion of women or women's causes, Sayers never-the-less does exhibit her belief that Britain's attitude towards women was "wasteful" and "stupid", as well as "unkind". Spinsters of all ages would surely have applauded Sayers for providing them such a public forum in which to air their grievances. Sayers carefully described Miss Climpson, Miss Murchison, Hilary Thorpe, and Lady Mary Wimsey as wise, intelligent, observant women who should be respected.

Catherine Kenney argues that "Sayers's books reveal much about English society, including many of its weaknesses, but they are essentially comedies of manners, faithfully recording and basically accepting what they see, rather than biting social satire that seeks to change the world" (15). This opinion reflects the long-held belief that detective fiction generally affirms rather than questions social structures and mores within any given society. Certainly Sayers wrote the Wimsey novels for money and certainly her novels are not biting Swiftian social satire. However, her novels reveal both the good and bad of English society and
critique existing social structures and mores. Thus, Sayers' work illustrates Stowe's argument that "the detective fiction formula lends itself admirably to a critique of such complacent conservatism" (the belief that British society should resume its pre-war class-conscious status) (570).

While some historians believe that class lines blurred slightly during the between-the-wars period, Sayers illustrates in the Wimsey novels that the gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" remained largely intact. When Sayers' character Helen Wimsey, Duchess of Denver, worries about her appearance, her son's face after his accident, and the suitability of her sister-in-law marrying a common policeman, she demonstrates the excessive concern about appearance which many of the British upper class members continued to exhibit between the wars. Similarly, when Dian de Momerie complains that she is bored with everything including her money, the reader sees how little the changes in society have affected the British upper class.

In direct contrast to the upper class, Sayers offers middle and lower class society members whose concerns are more directly related to survival. Dr. Penberthy in BC, an ex-soldier physician, illustrates the middle-class individual who is comfortable, but who is not satisfied and wants more -- more money and more power. George and Sheila Fentiman, middle class Sayers' characters, constantly bemoan their lack of money to purchase "suitable" housing and whiskey for visitors. However, these two have sufficient funds to afford a servant who cleans and brings in the coal. While the Fentiman's desire for "suitable" housing is more basic than Helen Wimsey's concern about her spine, the real "have-nots" best demonstrate the gap between the upper and the lower class.
Will and Mary Thoday and the Grimethorpes provide excellent windows into the life of the lower class. Both families live in sub-standard housing and experience illness and deprivation. Their clothes are shabby and insufficient in quantity and quality, and their food supply is small and simple. Neither family owns the land on which they live, although Will "used to farm his own land till these bad times set in" (NT 112). Sayers further emphasizes the gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" through the affair between the Duke of Denver and his tenant's wife, Mrs. Grimethorpe.

While dramatizing the class differences, Sayers' Wimsey novels also posit possible solutions to some of the social problems of the period. Sayers' female characters experience many of the same social changes affecting women in Britain, and she displays her understanding of society's increasing acceptance of working women. The early Wimsey novels generally favor marriage or domestic service for women, while the later novels mirror the new roles which women filled in Britain as writers, librarians, teachers, artists, heads of colleges and lawyers. Sayers' women characters range from Mrs. Grimethorpe, who wants to escape her "overly brutal" husband, to Hilary Thorpe, who wants to support herself, and these characters illustrate the new woman who wants to be independent and self-supporting (CW 216). Other female characters in the Wimsey novels include an archeologist, a copywriter, several small business owners, a scientist, a future chef, several secretaries, and an accountant. Perhaps her most carefully illustrated solution to the women question appears in the character of Miss Climpson, who becomes Wimsey's "Friday" when she takes up sleuthing as her occupation. By providing a way for a commoner and an
aristocrat to marry, Sayers reflects the slight blurring of class lines British society is undergoing.

As "comedies of manners," the minor characters in the Wimsey novels demonstrate Sayers' interest in the existing social structures and mirror popular sentiments of people in between-the-wars Britain. Stowe asserts that because detective fiction can be read "in a critical way," it can be used "to recognize [the] authors' understanding of cultural and political issues" if readers make the same demands upon the text that they "make on 'high' fiction and to seek in popular authors the kinds of critical awareness we value in so-called serious novelists" (700-701). He further argues that detective fiction, like any "popular art," can also function to endorse a value system (590). While Sayers' detective novels certainly entertain people, they also provide a window through which her audience may view a society struggling to adapt to the many changes brought by the flood tides of the First World War.

17Murder Must Advertise contains a discussion about the financial arrangements which create harmony in the Mary Wimsey/Charles Parker marriage.
REFERENCES


