

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS IN THE WORK OF  
DOROTHY L. SAYERS

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS  
IN THE WORK OF DOROTHY L. SAYERS

by  
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A thesis submitted to the  
School of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English  
Memorial University of Newfoundland

September 1993

St. John's

Newfoundland

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines all of the major works of Dorothy L. Sayers in the light of the religious concept of the Seven Deadly Sins, which has been a basic part of Christian theology since the Middle Ages. It is, essentially, a structured way of describing the various facets of the sinful nature which all men share.

After tracing the historical roots of the concept, and examining Sayers' personal familiarity with it, the thesis proceeds to review her work chronologically, beginning with her early poetry; moving through her twelve major works of fiction; and ending with the dramas, essays, and lectures written in the last years of her life.

Sayers' use of the Seven Deadly Sins in her earlier work, particularly her fiction, is not conscious or deliberate. Instead the concept provides part of the background for her characterization which is based on a Christian view of human nature as a "fallen" nature. The survey of her detective writing reveals that she considered the worst Sins to be the spiritual, or cold-hearted ones, particularly Pride (the root of all the others), and Envy.

In the dramatic and discursive works of her later years she is more direct and didactic in her discussion of Sin. The Sin of Sloth becomes a major theme in this period, yet her overall perception of the Seven Deadly Sins is consistent throughout her entire career.

The impact of Dorothy L. Sayers' work, viewed as a whole, is a powerful one. She was a gifted artist who worked in many genres and addressed many issues, but her achievement is not only a function of her creative skill and her variety and range. What she consistently communicates about Sin - the basic problem of human existence - provides a core of content which has lasting value. It evokes, as she believed artistic work should, a spiritual "response in the lively soul" (*The Zeal of Thy House* 103).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first acknowledgement must be to the members of my Advisory Committee, particularly Dr. C.J. Francis and Dr. Gildas Roberts. Both of them have set a high standard of scholarship for me, dating back even to my undergraduate days. During the past four years, they have given me extensive guidance in the writing of this dissertation. Their wise counsel and patient encouragement have been greatly appreciated. Professor Averil Gardner and Dr. Roberta Buchanan made most helpful suggestions in the final stages of the process.

I would also like to thank Dr. Betsy Epperly for the support she gave me during her term as Head of the Department of English.

My friends Telford Penfold, Margaret Miles-Cadman, Elizabeth McGrath, Jacqueline van Kleef, and Gail Edoni also made excellent suggestions. Sjaak van Kleef has been an invaluable source of long suffering assistance in my many word processing difficulties.

Dr. Barbara Reynolds has very kindly advised me on a number of matters. I have been much encouraged by the interest she has taken in my work.

Colleen Gilbert's excellent bibliography of Sayers' works has been of immense help, as has the availability of the Dorothy L. Sayers Society Archives and the collection of Sayers' manuscript material at the Wade Center of Wheaton College.

I am very thankful for the consideration and financial assistance I have received from the School of Graduate Studies, and for the final handling of the thesis by my friend Dr. Don Rideout.

Most of all, I want to thank my husband, Cliff, for his unfailing support over the six and a half years since I first began my research, and for his thorough and sacrificial proof reading of the final manuscript.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Serious authors typically pose profound questions about the meaning of life. Dorothy L. Sayers, a much more serious author than readers who know her only as a mystery writer might suppose her to be, was not content to stop with questions. Her specialty was answers. She observed the agonized search for meaning in the world around her, and, in a letter to a friend, identified two troubling questions which relate to all of human life:

The questions which people chiefly ask at the moment are two: a) Why does everything we do go wrong and pile itself up into some 'monstrous consummation'? and b) What is the meaning of all this suffering?

She went on to answer the two questions in three words:

The Christian answer to the first is, "Sin," and to the second, "Christ crucified." (letter to the Rev. Dr. J.W. Welch, 11 November 1943)

Neither of the answers was likely to appeal to the man in the street in 1943; it is even more unlikely that such answers will be applauded by secular humanists of the 1990s. But Sayers defiantly called her first book of essays Unpopular Opinions, and she made no apologies for her bluntness on the subject of Sin.<sup>1</sup>

She was totally committed to her vision of truth, but she recognized that many people did not share her perspective. Earlier in the same letter she observed that people "nowadays" don't regard themselves as "miserable sinners," but that nonetheless "they are desperately aware that something frightful is wrong with the world." Sayers strove energetically to bring into focus that sense of Sin which hovered in the peripheral vision of so many people.

From the beginning of her writing career Dorothy Sayers was concerned with religious issues. She believed that "all questions are in the end theological ones" (Wade ms. 81/199.41). Her volume of poetry Catholic Tales and Christian Songs, published in

1918 when she was twenty-five, is a clear indication of her early interest in medievalism and Christianity. At this stage she was still under the spell of Oxford even though she had finished her degree program in medieval French three years earlier. By the end of her life, in 1957, her perspective had broadened considerably, but she was still very much a scholar and medievalist. Her last decade was devoted to translating and interpreting the great medieval classic, Dante's Divine Comedy, a mammoth task, and one which, more than anything else she had undertaken, revealed the caliber of her scholarship and her religious insight.

In the middle decades of her literary career Sayers became widely known, first as a writer of detective fiction, and then as a Christian dramatist. She wrote continuously - short stories, detective novels, literary commentaries, familiar essays, religious dramas, Christian apologetics, philosophical treatises, and personal letters. Throughout it all the solidity and consistency of her religious viewpoint is apparent. Her Christianity was solidly based on orthodox tradition; her thinking was influenced by scripture, the creeds, and medieval theology. Yet the vigour and eloquence with which she presented traditional doctrines, both indirectly in her creative works and directly in her non-fiction, gave freshness and immediacy to conservative Christianity.

Many of her recurring themes, such as the importance of work and the nature of creativity, are not religious issues in the obvious sense. Nor do her fictional works appear to be religious in either tone or content. Her approach to every subject, however, is supported by a world-view which is fundamentally Christian. Her earliest published article, which appeared in The Oxford Outlook of 1919, reflects Christian theology by describing Man's nature as "fallen" ("Eros in Academe" 114). In one of her early detective novels Unnatural Death, published in 1927, the immorality of the crime is explained by commenting on the nature of Sin itself. The reverend Mr. Tredgold tells Lord Peter Wimsey that "the sin . . . lies much more in the harm it does the killer than in



anything it can do to the person who is killed," and that, "Sin is in the intention, not the deed. That is the difference between divine law and human law" (ch. 19).

In her review of G.K. Chesterton's The Scandal of Father Brown for The Sunday Times (7 April 1935) Sayers shows very clearly that her views, even on whodunits, were of a piece with her Christianity:

Are the crimes to be real sins, or are they to be the mere gestures of animated puppets? Are we to shed blood or only sawdust? . . . And is the detective to figure only as the arm of the law or as the hand of God? So far as artistic unity goes, it does not matter at all which alternative we choose, provided that we stick to it; but when we look at the whole scope of our work, we shall see that it matters a great deal. If we wipe out God from the problem we are in very real danger of wiping out man as well. Unless we are prepared to bring our murderers to the bar of Eternity, we may construct admirable jig-saw puzzles, but we shall certainly never write a 'Hamlet.' And we owe Mr. Chesterton a heavy debt in that, with very great courage in a poor and materialistic period, he planted his steps firmly upon the more difficult path, and showed us how to enlarge the boundaries of the detective story by making it deal with real death and real wickedness and real, that is to say, divine judgement.

Sayers was conscious, especially in later life, of the continuity of thought that prevailed throughout her work. In 1941 she could see the underlying principle which tied her earliest poems and novels to the works of her mature years:

And though he [the writer] may imagine for a moment that this fresh world [in his latest book] is wholly unconnected with the world he has just finished [in his previous book], yet if he looks back along the sequence of his creatures, he will find that each was in some way the outcome and fulfilment of the rest - that all his worlds belong to the one universe that is the image of his own Idea. I know it is no accident that Gaudy Night, coming towards the end of a long development in detective fiction, should be a manifestation of precisely the same theme as the play The Zeal of Thy House, which followed it and was the first of a series of creatures embodying a Christian theology. They are variations upon a hymn to the Master Maker; and now after nearly twenty years, I can hear in Whose Body? [her first novel] the notes of that tune sounding unmistakably under the tripping melody of a very different descendant; and further back still, I hear it again, in a youthful set of stanzas in Catholic Tales. . . the end is clearly there, in the beginning. (The Mind of the Maker 168-69)

One of Sayers' greatest gifts was her ability to invigorate theology and relate it to the common man. She perceived theology, not as a set of lofty abstractions, but as the spiritual basis of all human experience. She especially understood the concept of Sin,

and its philosophical and psychological implications. In a 1945 lecture on "The Faust Legend and the Idea of the Devil" she defines Sin by explaining its relationship to free will, and she identifies its root cause:

There is . . . along with the reality of God, the possibility of not-God. . . . The possibility of evil exists from the moment that a creature is made that can love and do good because it chooses and not because it is unable to do anything else. The actuality of evil exists from the moment that that choice is exercised in the wrong direction. Sin (moral evil) is the deliberate choice of the not-God. And Pride, as the Church has consistently pointed out, is the root of it. (5)

Sayers' high regard for Christian dogma was solidly based on her knowledge of and respect for the wisdom of the past. She berates the "historic sense" in criticism which "encourages us to dismiss our forebears as the mere creatures of a period environment, and therefore wholly unlike us and irrelevant to us or to present realities" (Introduction to Purgatory 45).

It was not until her study of Dante's Divine Comedy that Sayers probed directly and deeply into the medieval theology of the Seven Deadly Sins, but an awareness of these basic roots of sinfulness and of the medieval way of ordering them is apparent in her earlier work. Barbara Reynolds, Sayers' friend and biographer, has noted her interest in the concept of the Deadly Sins:

Long before she read Dante she had personified the ill doings of society in figures of the Seven Deadly Sins. They put in a brief appearance, as though for an audition for a morality play, at the end of her article "Christian Morality," and they reappear in full panoply in the talk "The Other Six Deadly Sins." . . . When Dorothy came upon [the Sins] in Dante's poem, she recognised, there drawn by a master hand, what she herself had depicted in a lesser degree. Her mind leapt in creative response. Here was the greatest Christian poet saying for her, with immense power, what she had been trying to tell people through the years of the war. (The Passionate Intellect 105)

Sayers describes the Deadly Sins as "the fundamental bad habits of mind recognized and defined by the Church as the well-heads from which all sinful behaviour ultimately springs" (Introduction to Purgatory 65). Because her mind was steeped in orthodox Christianity she - without consciously intending it - consistently presents human

shortcomings, both small and great, in terms of these seven "fundamental bad habits of mind."

She focuses especially on the seriousness and destructiveness of Pride.<sup>2</sup> All of her major characters - Peter Wimsey, Harriet Vane, William of Sens, Faustus, Judas, and Constantine - struggle with this Sin. Most of them slowly and painfully come to terms with the fact that they can experience spiritual wholeness only through allowing themselves to be humbled.

Envy and Wrath are presented in Sayers' work as root causes, not only of crime, but also of many other failures in human relationships

Sloth is the Sin she attacks most frequently in her later, largely non-fictional, works. She sees Sloth as a spiritual problem much more than a physical one, and in her speeches and essays she strongly condemns laziness of mind and carelessness in work.

Avarice, in the simplest sense, is frequently shown as a cause of crime, but Sayers also reveals that the greed for power can be even more deadly than the greed for wealth and material things, and that the commercial basis of modern society is a form of Avarice which eats away at the spiritual quality of human life.

Gluttony and Lust are the Sins that Sayers stresses least. Perhaps this is because hedonism (the broader form of Gluttony) and sexual immorality (Lust) are the vices that religious people have tended to overemphasize. She does not deny that they are serious roots of sinfulness, but she seems to suggest that they are less destructive than the other Sins.

A thorough discussion of the Seven Deadly Sins must by definition consider the Christian Virtues of which the Sins are opposites. The most important Virtues are not, however, the exact opposites of the worst Sins. Love is the greatest Virtue but it is not the specific antithesis of Pride, except in the sense that it is self-abasing while Pride is self-exalting. Faith is another of the Christian Virtues, but its direct opposite is unbelief (which includes fear and despair), a failing which is not listed among the Deadly Sins.

Faith is, nonetheless, a clear contrast to the three chief spiritual Sins in the sense that it is an outward and upward impetus, while Pride, Envy and Wrath pull inward and downward.

Aquinas recognizes that there is no need for an exact correlation between the major Virtues and the major Sins:

Virtue and vice do not originate in the same way. The virtues are caused by the subordination of the appetites to reason, or above all to the changeless good which is God. Vices, conversely, spring from the desire for transient good. There is, then, no necessity that the principal vices correspond by opposition to the principal virtues. (*Summa*, Ia2ae. 84)

Nevertheless, the seven Virtues which are the antithesis of each of the seven Sins in Dante's *Purgatory* are the spiritual qualities which define the tension between good and evil which the concept of the Deadly Sins describes.

It is universally true that Pride despises Humility; Envy is in conflict with Mercy;<sup>3</sup> Wrath allows no place to Peace; Sloth is in direct opposition to Zeal; Avarice refuses to entertain Liberality; Gluttony rejects Temperance; and Lust scorns Chastity.<sup>4</sup>

In her depiction of Sin in her fictional characters, and in her discussion of Sin in her non-fiction, Sayers recognizes the growth in Virtue which occurs when the pull of the Deadly Sins is resisted. In her later novels and in her plays the triumph of Virtue over Sin is especially evident. There is, of course, always a struggle. In an undated manuscript which appears to be notes for a speech (Wade ms. 81/199.39) Sayers speaks of the need to shape one's life deliberately to "fit it with the purpose for which the world was made," and defines true liberty as knowing the right pattern and *working* toward it: "Not doing what one likes but doing what one really *wants* at whatever cost to oneself."

Sin is easy; Virtue is hard. Both are costly. The conflict between them has always made a good story, and Dorothy L. Sayers was, first and foremost, a superb story-teller.

After reviewing the historical background of the Seven Deadly Sins (Chapter Two) and Sayers' familiarity with, and direct discussion of, the concept (Chapter Three), this

thesis will proceed to examine her work chronologically. I will show how the presentation of characters in her fiction and drama, and the development of ideas in her poetry and essays, reflect the understanding of sinfulness which is expressed in that concept.

The chronological approach I have chosen to take would, I feel, be approved by Dorothy Sayers. In March 1951 John O'London's Weekly conducted a survey on "The Way to Learn to Enjoy the Best in Books," and Dorothy Sayers was one of the writers whom they questioned. "Experts in reading as well as in writing" were asked to "give from their own experience advice to those making their early ventures into the royal kingdom of reading." Perhaps it was the wording of the question that annoyed her. For whatever reason, Sayers' response was by far the shortest and the curtest of the eight printed:

The attempt to be 'helpful' is a device of the devil, and the publication of 'autobiographical details' dissemination of poison. Here, however, are four cardinal rules for the reading of great literature:

- (1) Find out what the writer is actually saying.
- (2) Be ready to believe that he means what he says.
- (3) Read consecutively.
- (4) Practise humility.

My sequential approach conforms to rule three. I can only hope that my reading of Sayers' work obeys the three other rules as well.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Seven Deadly Sins: Historical Background

According to the most comprehensive study on the subject to date, the concept of Seven Deadly Sins has its earliest roots in pre-Christian times. Morton W. Bloomfield's The Seven Deadly Sins, sub-titled "An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature," begins by examining the pagan and Jewish background of the concept. It goes on to trace its development as a complete concept in monastic writings of late antiquity and the early medieval period, and the full flowering of its popularity in the religious and secular literature of the later Middle Ages.

What medieval theologians developed was a list of basic or root Sins which were, by the fourteenth century, given the label Deadly. The earlier and more accurate label was *Cardinal*. *Deadly* Sins suggests Sins which lead to damnation, and confusion results from the fact that such a list - of different, more heinous Sins - did actually exist although it was much less well known. However, the interchange which has existed between the two terms, combined with the popular preference for *Deadly* when the Sins appear in a literary context, makes it more practical - as Bloomfield notes in his preface - to use "the more familiar though less exact designation" (vii). The Sins in the group we are concerned with are not examples of extraordinary evil, but instead are the commonplace, fundamental Sins of the heart out of which overt sinful behaviour arises.

Although the earliest treatments of these Sins applied to monastic life, later discussions of the concept were broader, and relevant to the laity as well. The first churchmen known to have written on the subject belong to the group known as the Desert Fathers, who lived as hermits in the deserts of Egypt in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Late in the fourth century Evagrius of Pontus took up monastic seclusion in the desert region of Nitria where he was taught by St. Macarius. It was Evagrius who recorded the first known list of the chief Sins out of which the concept of the Seven Cardinal Sins developed. It is quite possible that he derived his list from that of an earlier teacher who took the concept as it existed in Gnostic tradition (a Hellenistic philosophy) and eliminated its non-Christian elements. It is also possible that "belief in the cardinal sins was well established by his time" (Bloomfield 59-60). Whatever his source, "Evagrius made the Sins a basic part of his moral teachings, and conceived of them as the basic sinful drives against which a monk had to fight" (Bloomfield 57).

Evagrius' list contains eight Sins: *Gula*, *Luxuria*, *Avaritia*, *Tristitia*, *Ira*, *Acedia*, *Vana gloria*, and *Superbia*. This arrangement differs from the Gregorian list (which appeared two centuries later) in respect to the order in which the Sins are given, and in respect to the actual Sins listed. It includes two forms of Pride (*Vana gloria* and *Superbia*), includes Sadness (*Tristitia*), and omits Envy (*Invidia*).

Evagrius, however, had a limited range of influence. The first really significant writing on the Cardinal Sins came several decades later (c. 420) from Cassian, a pupil of Evagrius. Cassian's list of eight Sins is basically the same as that of Evagrius, but he developed the concept in a number of important respects.

Cassian emphasizes that each of the eight Sins develops from the preceding one, and he uses the symbolic image of the tree and its roots (which was to become a popular way of envisioning the inter-relation between the Sins). *Superbia* was probably regarded by Cassian as the root of all the other Sins even though he deals with it at the end rather than at the beginning of his list. The Apocryphal reference to Pride as "the root of all evil" (Ecclesiasticus 10:13) encouraged such a view.

Like Evagrius, Cassian put the Sins of the flesh, *Luxuria* (Lust) and *Gula* (Gluttony), in the first and second positions. This is a reflection of the monastic ideal of suppressing bodily drives and achieving holiness by living on a minimum of food and by suppressing

sexual impulses. In the context of the monastic life Gluttony and Lust might appear to be the easiest Sins to avoid, since they are concerned with obvious and outward things. Yet even though these are among the first Sins to be confronted in living under monastic rule, they are associated with such basic human drives that the struggle with them is necessarily an ongoing one.

Third in Cassian's list comes *Avaritia* (Avarice), the Sin which monastics tried to defeat by ruthlessly renouncing all ownership of property. *Ira* (Anger) is fourth, a Sin which some clerics tried to eschew by increased solitude. *Tristitia* and *Acedia* come next. The former is the sort of dejection which lays hold of the mind in the long hours of the night, "the pestilence which walketh in darkness" (Psalm 91:6).<sup>5</sup> The latter attacks the monk at midday as an irritable listlessness, a loss of spiritual focus, and a general discontent.

The last two Sins of Cassian's list, *Vana gloria* (Vainglory) and *Superbia* (Pride), are Sins that we have come to think of as very similar. They were, however, clearly distinguished from each other by medieval monastics. Vainglory, the desire for praise, was a very real temptation to the devout cleric, for famous holy men were pursued by adoring pilgrims, and an elevated status within the religious community could become both the reward and the means to spiritual downfall of the earnest seeker after righteousness. Pride, or *Superbia*, on the other hand, makes a man so content within himself that he becomes independent and oblivious to the praise of others. This was seen as the most insidious and the deadliest of the Sins.

This early list of the principal Sins was widely influential in western Europe. It became popular in Gaul and from there it spread to the Celtic Church and remained a staple teaching of the Church in the British Isles. Cassian's list reappears in its original form in eighth century England in the work of St. Aldhelm of Sherborne (Eck 119). The eight-fold scheme continued to be popular there until the twelfth century, while the later seven-fold arrangement became most dominant on the continent.



It was Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604) who actually popularized the idea of a list of Sins, and presented it in the form which was to become well known among laity as well as clergy. He made a number of changes in the eight-fold list of Sins handed down from Cassian: he added *Invidia*, merged *Accidie* with *Tristitia*, and placed *Superbia* outside by itself as the root Sin of the other seven. Thus there were apparently *eight* but actually only *seven* separate Sins. Gregory also rearranged the order, practically reversing it. His sequence of seven begins with *Vana gloria* and ends with the two carnal Sins, *Gula* and *Luxuria*, to produce what came to be regarded as a descending order.

Gregory the Great also lists sub-sections of specific Sins under each of the main ones. These lists were meant to encompass the totality of sinfulness and accurately represent the nature of spiritual conflict:

The philosophizing motive of the new list is further evidenced by the attempt to arrange every vice under one or other of the seven great heads. The list is introduced into his *Moralia* as an allegorical comment on the text of the Book of Job, which describes the war-horse hearing the thunder of the captains. The war-horse is the Christian soul. The battle is the conflict with evil. The leaders of the opposing host, are the seven, each with its regiment of kindred Sins. (Hannay "The Seven Deadly Sins" 1625)

These changes and additions to the concept of the principal Sins are of great significance for they set it in a larger theological and philosophical context.

Gregory the Great's development of the concept was so widely read and appreciated that the Sins "were no longer considered primarily monastic, but became part of the general theological and devotional tradition" (Bloomfield 72). Gregory's rearrangement of the list was important because it became the standard and most authoritative scheme for representing the major Sins. In England this early Gregorian form of specific Sins is found in the writings of Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury (668-690), Archbishop Egbert of York (d.766), Alcuin (735-804), and Peter Lombard (1100-1160). Yet as early as the time of St. Peter Damian in the eleventh century, an altered form of the Gregorian list had come into use. In it the two forms of Pride were merged into one (Eck 119-20).

The list of seven Sins then became *Superbia, Ira, Invidia, Acedia, Avaritia, Gula, Luxuria*.

The initial letters of this form of the list produced a mnemonic device *siaagl*; unfortunately the double *i* and the double *a* resulted in the frequent reversal of the order in both cases, so that Envy is sometimes given before Anger, and Avarice sometimes given before Sloth. The word *saligia* was also used as a means of remembering what the Sins were. This arrangement of the Sins - *Superbia, Accidie, Luxuria, Invidia, Gula, Ira, Avaritia* - was viewed by some writers as, in fact, the authorized one (Hannay p.1625). It has the advantage of forming a word which is more memorable and pronounceable, but it is less widely accepted than the original Gregorian order.

Thomas Aquinas (1226-1274) places little importance on the formalized concept of seven Sins. He does, however, in his discussion of "Vices and Sins" (Summa Ia2ae, 71-89), acknowledge the Gregorian list and make some pertinent comments on it. Before discussing the individual Sins Aquinas deals with the concept of Original Sin in terms which indicate a close connection between it and the Seven Deadly Sins.

He explains Original Sin as a "disorder which is in an individual man . . . because he receives human nature from the first parent" - a nature which has "a propensity for sin." Though the guilt of Original Sin is removed by baptism, there is a sense in which it remains as a "disorder of the lower parts of the soul and of the body" (Summa, Ia2ae. 81). He goes on to distinguish Original Sin from actual Sin: "Actual sin is disorder in an act; original sin as a sin of nature is a kind of disordered disposition in human nature" (Ia2ae. 82). Since the Deadly (or Cardinal) Sins represent the universal tendency to commit Sin, they may be seen as overlapping with the idea of Original Sin.

It is in Question 84 of the Summa that Aquinas deals directly with the idea of "capital sins." The heading of the whole section is "one sin as the cause of another," and he states the four individual points of inquiry in this way:

1. whether or not covetousness is the 'root' of all sins;
2. whether or not pride is the 'beginning' of all sins;
3. whether or not any special sins other than pride and avarice should be called 'capital sins';
4. how many capital sins are there and what are they  
(Summa, Ia2ae. 84)

(The answers to the first two inquiries will be considered later in this chapter when Covetousness (Avarice) and Pride are examined individually.)

In answering the third point of inquiry Aquinas agrees that "a vice from which other vices rise" should be called a capital vice, especially "when the origination is according to final causality" (Summa, Ia2ae. 84). Such a capital vice is understood as "directive and in a certain sense the leader of other sins." He concludes that Avarice and Pride "are not alone in being called capital, for such also are other vices which are nearer sources to a variety of sins."

To appreciate Aquinas's discussion of the fourth point of inquiry one must understand the basic outline of his analytical method. Typically, he begins with a series of arguments on the negative side of the issue. (In this case he gives several reasons why "we should not list seven capital sins.") Then he presents his 'On the other hand' statement which always takes the positive side, then his longer 'Reply' section which considers both sides, and finally his list of concluding points. Among the arguments Aquinas raises against the Gregorian list of "seven capital sins" is the lack of correspondence between the seven Sins and the principal Virtues, and between the Sins and the principal emotions. His most significant criticism of the concept, however, questions the comprehensiveness of the list and suggests that Sins may be committed which do not come under one of the seven headings (mistakes made in ignorance, for example). In this sense, he proposes, the list may be said to be incomplete.

Nonetheless, his admission "on the other hand Gregory enumerates these seven" bows to the authority behind the tradition. His final conclusion is to accept the list with certain reservations and qualifications:

The vices listed are called 'capital' because the rise of other Sins from them is rather frequent. There is nothing to stop Sins from rising at times from other causes. Nevertheless there is some reason to state that all Sins resulting from ignorance are reducible to *acedia* (Sloth); this implies neglect in seeking out spiritual good because of the labour involved, and the ignorance capable of causing Sin springs from willful negligence. (Summa, Ia2ae. 84)

In discussing whether any Sins other than Pride and Avarice should be considered Capital Sins, Aquinas emphasizes the "final causality" of the principal Sins, a recurring idea through the Summa. He does not necessarily exclude other types of causality, but in general he presents the Capital Sins not as *efficient causes* (meaning each Sin could give rise only to a similar Sin), but as *final causes*. This means, in essence, that a root Sin can give rise to many varying manifestations of sinfulness.

By the later Middle Ages the Seven Deadly Sins were being dealt with in religious and literary works of various sorts. Early in the thirteenth century a type of penitential book emerged, which contained guidelines for a priest to use as the basis of specific questions when he examined a penitent. The earliest known specimen of this sort of manual for confessors is the Liber Penitentialis of Robert of Flamborough, which dates from the first decades of the thirteenth century. The widespread use of this work is evidenced by the fact that forty-three manuscripts of it have survived. It is divided into five books which follow the progress of the confession by giving conversations between the priest and the penitent. Mary Braswell, in The Medieval Sinner, describes the way the Seven Deadly Sins are used as the basis of the conversations:

The priest questions and instructs the penitent on the seven deadly sins, all of which this particular sinner seems to have committed at least once, though he does not often understand the exact definition of the offenses. . . . It is no mere accident that the penitent's pride, his egotism, is the first sin to be attacked by the priest. For this sin of self is the worst of all sins. Until one's self-image is lowered, he cannot feel humility, a prime objective of the confessional. (39-40)

The Ancrene Riwe (c.1200) was written for the instruction of the female religious. Like the Liber Penitentialis it uses the Seven Deadly Sins as the basis for analyzing spiritual offenses. It compares each of the Sins to a particular animal:

... go with great caution, for in this wilderness [of temptation] there are many evil beasts: the Lion of Pride, the Serpent of venomous Envy, the Unicorn of Wrath, the Bear of deadly Sloth, the Fox of Covetousness, the Sow of Gluttony, the Scorpion with its tail of stinging Lechery, that is lust. These, listed in order, are the Seven Deadly Sins. (86)

The Ancrene Riwe goes on to discuss the specific types of wrong-doing which are the offspring of the parent Sins. It also describes the way in which each Sin can be cured by the practice of its opposing Virtue: Pride is defeated by Humility; Envy, by brotherly Love; Wrath, by Patience; Sloth, by spiritual reading; Covetousness, by the cultivation of contempt for earthly things; and Avarice, by a generous heart. In this work it is the spiritual Sins which are the central focus, whereas in penitential literature written for clerics it is generally the carnal Sins which are most emphasized, particularly the Sin of Lust.

The theological importance of the concept of the Seven Deadly Sins in medieval England is widely recognized. One author observes,

Its appearance in the Saram Prymer, together with the Paternoster, Ave, Credo, and Decalogue, is evidence of its accepted and prominent position in our own country in the Middle Ages, whilst the Constitutions of Archbishop Peckham in which parish priests are directed to instruct the people four times a year in, among other things, 'the seven capital sins,' shows that the list was regarded as a convenient and comprehensive basis for instructions in the various forms of evil to which men are tempted. (Eck 120-21)

Another noteworthy aspect of the history of the concept is the insistence on the seven-fold arrangement, which is indicative of the medieval addiction to numerology. Certain numbers, particularly the number seven, held an irresistible fascination for the medieval mind. The frequent use of seven in the Bible, and its prominence in Babylonian, Greek, and Gnostic traditions account, at least in part, for the great appeal of this number from the tenth century onward. In a 1904 article "The Seven Deadly Sins," James O. Hannay observes that in western Europe "this enchantment of the seven-fold" was felt so intensely that people "set to work to order all things, human and divine, in sevens. . . . Everything was persuaded into a septad if possible, or, persuasion failing, forced by violence" (1625).

The number was not, however, applied to abstract concepts with any attempt at mathematical accuracy, in the modern sense. Bloomfield notes that "the only conclusion to which a widespread examination of the use of the number seven can lead is that this number, along with forty and a few others, was considered not exact but representative" (39). In other words, the number was used in a symbolic rather than in a literal sense.

The seven-fold arrangement of the Deadly Sins should not then be viewed as an absolute: Pride may have two or more distinctly different forms, Envy may be included under Anger, and Sloth and Sadness (*Tristitia*) may sometimes be treated separately. The literal number has a somewhat fluid quality for the Sins tend to overlap and flow into one another.

Nonetheless, the preference for the number seven for nearly all of the important groups of things reflects the medieval passion for finding recurring patterns and parallelism in both the created universe and the realm of abstract thought. Not only did theologians endeavour to clarify the nature of the principal Sins by citing scriptural teaching about sinfulness, they also sought to connect the Sins with various things in the Bible which could be taken as seven-fold: the seven demons cast out of Mary Magdalene, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, the seven beatitudes, and the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer. Intricate parallels were even developed with more remote biblical things such as the seven heads of the beast of the Apocalypse, the seven divisions of the land of Canaan, and the seven rivers of Babylon. Non-biblical parallels were sought as well. The Seven Virtues (which, like the Sins, are not presented in scripture as a group of seven) were the most popular antithesis to the Seven Sins, and the conflict between the Virtues and the Sins was elaborately and graphically portrayed in numerous theological and literary works. The Sins were sometimes seen as corresponding to the seven ages of man, beginning with *Luxuria*, the Sin of youth, and ending with *Avaritia*, the Sin of old age.\*

As we noted above, the Sins which we are concerned with were first called Cardinal Sins, and were in the earlier Middle Ages distinguished from the Deadly (or damning) Sins. The Cardinal Sins were the common sinful tendencies which everyone must struggle to subdue. In his book entitled Some Principals of Moral Theology K.E. Kirk points out that in one of the earliest accounts of the seven Sins they are spoken of, not as Sins, but as the "hidden motions of the soul out of which all kinds of sin arise" (266).

The discussion of the Seven Cardinal Sins in sermons and writings connected with the sacrament of penance caused them to become confused with another grouping of Sins which had been labeled "deadly." These were "the seven deadly sins" discussed by Tertullian in Adversus Marcion, iv. 9. In this case "deadly" can be equated with the Augustinian *crimina* for they were open or scandalous sins for which public penance was necessary: idolatry, blasphemy, homicide, adultery, fornication, false witness, and fraud. These were unrelated to the Cardinal Sins, but confusion of the two lists arose, and the term "deadly" was eventually transferred to the Cardinal Sins, even though they, logically, could not be seen as particularly heinous in their normal observable forms.

Whatever the modifying label, the idea of the Seven Sins was inexplicably fascinating to the common man. Bloomfield succinctly sums up the great popularity of the concept in the late Middle Ages:

... they [the preachers] and the confessors impressed the cardinal sins so deeply on the popular mind that the Sins came to occupy a much more important place in the lay conception of religion than their position in theology warranted. They became a vivid concept, much more vivid than the virtues or any other lists of sins. Literature and art, supplied with themes by this interest in the Sins, in turn contributed to it, keeping it alive by furnishing more and more treatments of this absorbing concept. (93)

The content of the traditional list of the Sins has been questioned on the grounds that it corresponds neither to the Ten Commandments nor to any other scriptural list of offenses, such as those in the teaching of Christ and the Pauline epistles. There are

several explanations for the appeal of this extra-scriptural catalogue of Sins over that of any found in scripture. Hannay suggests that "no one of these [scriptural lists] is meant apparently to be either complete or philosophic [whereas] the list which the Church authorized at least professed to be complete, and was certainly in its ultimate form well reasoned" (1625).

It may also be fairly argued that the Deadly Sins list was not only philosophically sound but also pragmatically sound - it was, Hannay asserts, rooted in real life:

The lives and teachings of these monks [of fourth century Egypt] can only be understood when we realize that they were experimenters in righteousness, explorers of the way of holiness. They were boldly original in their adoption of the solitary life, and they fell back on personal experience as the great test of what was helpful or dangerous to the soul bent on imitating Christ. (1625)

From their earliest conception in the time of Evagrius and Cassian to the more philosophic and popular form devised by Gregory the Great, the Seven Deadly Sins were regarded as tendencies or root causes of specific vices, rather than actual offenses in themselves. The problem of Sin is understood, as Christ expounded it, to be internal rather than external, and the essential issue is ungodliness of the heart rather than destructiveness in behaviour.

One important aspect of Gregory's teaching on the Sins concerned their accumulative nature. One Sin, he said, influences a man to commit another, as when gluttonous self-indulgence leads to lustful abandon and finally to murderous Wrath. Gregory taught that

... each new sin springing from a former sin, increases the guilt of that sin, and brings upon it heavier punishment. . . . Thus every sin looks backward and forward; it increases the penalty due to the sins of the past, and it gives birth to new sins." (Dudden, Gregory the Great 386)

As we observed above, the most commonly used listing of the Sins takes the order, *Superbia, Ira, Invidia, Acedia* (usually given as *Accidia* after the eighth century) *Avaritia, Gula, Luxuria*. The first five are often regarded as the spiritual Sins and the last two as the carnal Sins. Occasionally, however, Sloth is grouped with the last two



(Gluttony and Lust) as one of the three "Sins of the Flesh." This occurs only when Sloth is thought of in a physical rather than a spiritual sense.

The usual order is often taken to represent a descent from the most spiritually destructive Sin to the least, but such a simplistic assumption tends to distort the Church Fathers' perception of the complex inter-relationships and varying valences of the Sins. In placing them as he did St. Gregory was, in fact, putting what he saw as the two principal Sins in the key positions of first and last. He taught that each of the Cardinal Sins led to another, and that the linking often followed the sequence of the list, Wrath leading to Envy, and so on.

Dudden summarizes the teaching on the inter-relationship between the Sins found in Gregory's Moralia in Job, the work which contains his comprehensive discussion of the Cardinal Sins:

The two principal sins, according to Gregory, are Pride and Lust. These are connected closely with each other, for the revolt of the flesh from the spirit (lust) was the consequence of the revolt of the spirit from God (pride). Pride, however, is the root and origin of both lust and of every other sin (xxvi. 28, 29). Gregory has drawn up a table of Vices [with Pride at the top, and with each of the other seven Sins having from five to eight subsidiary sins listed under it], which he compares to an army led by captains, under the supreme leadership of Pride (xxx. 87, 88). . . . Of the seven capital sins, five are spiritual and two are carnal; but all of them, springing from a common origin, are intimately connected with one another, and merge into one another. Thus, vain-glory, if admitted to the heart, introduces the other five spiritual sins; while of the carnal sins, gluttony, if encouraged, ends in lust. Any one of the seven Vices will open the door to all (xxx. 89). (Dudden 386-87)

Bloomfield points out that because the Virtues and the Vices had independent origins the medieval writers had difficulty when they attempted to line up the Cardinal Virtues - Fortitude, Prudence, Temperance, and Justice, and the Theological Virtues - Faith, Hope, and Charity in balanced opposition to the principal Sins. The solution was often to offer a different list of Virtues, as the remedia to the seven Sins. The seven Virtues were frequently used in art, but in literature the Seven Deadly Sins were far more popular (Bloomfield 67).

## PRIDE

In presenting Pride as the root of all the other Sins Gregory's teaching concurs with that of the other theologians who wrote on the subject (such as Augustine, Evagrius, Cassian, and Aquinas), and with the teaching of scripture on the great evil of Pride. Later, however, there was some questioning of this point because of one verse of scripture which, as rendered in the Vulgate (and later in the English Authorized Version), suggests that Avarice is the parent of all other Sins: "The love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). Aquinas's response to this dilemma is found in the passage on the Sins which we looked at earlier (Summa. Ia2ae. 84):

The desire for money is not called the root of all sins in the sense that riches are sought for their own sake as a final end, but because so often money is pursued as useful for every earthly end. . . . Riches stir desire . . . [and give] the power to commit any kind of sin. . . . Avarice, accordingly, is not called the root of all evil in the sense that some other evil may not be its root, but in the sense that it is the source of other evils.

In recent versions of the Bible the article *the* is not used before "root." The New International Version renders the phrase as "a root of all kinds of evil," a reading which concurs with the view of Aquinas.

Pride is more widely accepted as the root Sin, and biblical references to the evil of Pride are certainly weightier. It was the Sin of Lucifer: "I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:14). It represents a terrible form of self deception: "Thy terribleness hath deceived thee, and the pride of thine heart" (Jeremiah 49:16). It also defines the wicked state in which a man will not seek after or even think about God: "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts" (Psalms 10:4). Ultimately, it leads to defeat: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). The sub-divisions of Pride which are recognized by the moral theology based on Gregorian teaching include presumption, hypocrisy, obstinacy, quarrelsomeness and disobedience.

In tracing the treatment of the Seven Sins in English literature up to the fifteenth century Bloomfield shows that this view of Pride was shared by secular writers. They presented Pride as Sin of the heart (175), opposition to God (183), the root of other Sins (201, 223, 241), the king of all Vices (183), and, most importantly, that which separates man from God (142). C.S. Lewis sums up the traditional Christian view of Pride when he observes that it "leads to every other Vice; it is the complete anti-God state of mind" (Mere Christianity 109).

## ANGER

Anger or *Ira* usually occurs second or third in the list of Sins. Its sub-divisions (as given in Gregory's Moralia in Job) include suspicion, ingratitude, resentment, and mental agitation.

The Speculum Ecclesiae of St. Edmund of Pontigny is an important devotional work of the early thirteenth century which presents Pride as that which separates man from God, and Anger as that which separates him from himself. The imagery associated with Anger in early literature depicts this Sin as the antithesis of inner harmony and tranquillity; associates it with storms (Bloomfield 214), bloodstains (242), burning brands (242) and homicide (193); and depicts it as an armed man (231), two men fighting (199), and a woman with a sword menacing a monk (199).

Society in general has usually considered murder to be the worst of crimes, but the inward murderous rage which leads to the act of murder is the more *capital* or fundamental Sin. This is the point of Christ's teaching on Anger in the Sermon on the Mount:

Ye have heard it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgement; But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement. (Matthew 5:21-22)

The phrase "without a cause" implies a distinction between righteous or spiritual anger (which was not a sin) and unrighteous or carnal Anger which was one of the worst Sins. This distinction was not uncommon in medieval thought; Bloomfield has noted its occurrence in a fourteenth century sermon (165) and in Jacob's Well, a religious encyclopedia of the early fifteenth century (222-23).

## ENVY

The next Sin, Envy or *Invidia*, completes the first grouping. *Invidia* and *Ira* (which are often interchanged in the order in which they occur in the list) are both believed to arise out of Pride. They partially overlap since they both involve negative feelings towards others. Together they produce the emotion of hate.

The moral theology based on Gregory's teaching gave the sub-divisions of Envy as falsehood, calumny, evil interpretation, and contempt. It contributes to estrangement; St. Edmund accurately described *Invidia* as the Sin which separates man from his neighbour. Although Envy is generally more dispassionate than Anger it too may lead to violence. Its tragic and destructive power is apparent in the Genesis story of Cain where it is the cause of the first murder. The intensity of the Sin of Envy in its full blown form is perhaps best conveyed by the word *malice*. The writer of Proverbs holds that its extremity can surpass even that of Anger: "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" (Proverbs 27:4).

The imagery associated with Envy is similar to that used of Anger, except that it is less associated with violence, and more associated with deeper and stronger emotion. It has been represented by a serpent (Bloomfield 197), venom (233), leprosy (242), an archer (214), the bitterness of sea water (214), and a woman with spears in her eyes (231).

## SLOTH

Sloth has been, in a few instances, viewed as the chief Sin (Bloomfield 242), and even as the ruler of the other Vices (219). It tends to stand apart from the other Sins due to its passiveness. Its separation may also be due to its position in the middle of the list between two groups of three. Sloth stands in the middle for another reason as well: it can occur as a spiritual failing, as do the first three Sins (Pride, Anger, and Envy), or it can be a fleshly Sin more closely related to the last two (Gluttony and Lust). Early commentators, however, saw it primarily as a spiritual condition, especially threatening to those who had devoted themselves to the monastic life. *Acedia* (later, *Accidie*) was defined by Cassian as *taedium cordis*, weariness of the heart, a kind of spiritual dryness. Its sub-divisions included hatred of spiritual things, weakness in prayer, dullness of spirit, moral cowardice, and despair.

Clearly *Accidie* was not initially connected with "sloth" in the modern sense of physical lethargy or the avoidance of work. It was understood as inner numbness or apathy of soul. Gregory described it as a spiritual disorder in which "the mind, not being inflamed by any burning fervour, is cut off from all desire of the good" (De. Past. Cur. iii. admon. 16). In an essay on Sloth, Evelyn Waugh quotes Thomas Aquinas's profound definition of this Vice: "*tristitia de bono spirituali*, sadness in the face of spiritual good" (49). It may seem unusual to think of sadness as Sin, but Sadness (*Tristitia*) was, in fact, treated as a separate Sin in the lists of Evagrius and Cassian. Waugh describes it as a *deliberate* refusal of joy, "the condition in which a man is fully aware of the proper means of his salvation and refuses to take them because the whole apparatus of salvation fills him with tedium and disgust" (50). Sloth, then, produces a kind of spiritual inertia from which neither clergy nor laity are immune.

It was much easier for the laity, however, to interpret Sloth on the level of what was externally observable. It became very popular to talk of it as negligence in religious duties (Bloomfield 210, 217, 219, 226). The spiritual nature of *Accidia* was eventually

submerged in the idea of laziness because this more definable vice was in direct opposition to the work ethic of the rising middle classes.

The nature of Sloth, both spiritual and physical, is suggested in early literature by imagery relating it to the barrenness of the sea (Bloomfield 214), dead flesh and palsy (233), and lying in bed (199).

## AVARICE

The sub-divisions of Avarice or Covetousness were outlined in the teachings of St. Gregory as fear of loss, anxiety, worldly sorrow, callousness, dishonesty, and uncharitableness.

In the early Middle Ages Avarice was not especially emphasized, probably because there was little opportunity for individuals to amass money and material possessions. After the twelfth century, however, concern about this form of sinfulness rose sharply. There were, in fact, many arguments for Avarice being the worst of Sins, ranging from Roger Bacon's Opus majus of the thirteenth century to the encyclopedic Jacob's Well of the fifteenth century. Many believed it to be the root Sin - a clear reflection of the negative response to capitalism, even in its earliest stages (Bloomfield 91). Writers warned people to beware of the virtuous cloak of "discretion" and "foresight" that the Sin of Avarice would assume, and there were many vehement attacks on usury and business acumen as manifestations of Avarice.

Avarice was metaphorically represented by figures counting money, or holding chests or money bags. It was often viewed as the snare of old age. Its somewhat central position in the Gregorian sequence seems appropriate, for it is related to the material world more than the first three Vices are. It is less exclusively a *spiritual* Sin, but at the same time it is not a *carнал* Sin directly related to bodily appetite as are last two, Gluttony and Lust.

## GLUTTONY

Gluttony is very obviously a Sin of the flesh. The monastic emphasis on asceticism naturally led to strong disapproval of over-indulgence of the appetite for food. The spiritual life was thought to be enhanced by the rigors of a meager diet. This attitude was at least partly the result of the influence of Platonic philosophy and its view of the body as a necessary evil. Monasticism encouraged the belief that bodily desires should be suppressed as much as possible. Biblical teaching on the sanctity of the body and its ultimate redemption was often overlooked.

There is some scriptural support for the condemnation of Gluttony: "the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty" (Proverbs 23:21); and the "enemies of the cross of Christ" are those who, among other things, make a god of their belly (Philippians 3:18-19). In several instances the appetite for food is shown contributing to wrong choices with tragic results: Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit; Esau choosing the savoury "mess of Pottage" over the spiritual blessing associated with his birthright (Genesis 25:29-34). These scriptural incidents are frequently alluded to in early discussions of the Sin of Gluttony (Bloomfield 227 189).

The sub-divisions of Gluttony which Gregorian teaching established reveal, however, that the early monastics recognized the wider spiritual dimensions of this Sin. They understood the variant forms of Gluttony to be drunkenness, vain or inappropriate joy, repulsive self-indulgence, blunted sensuality, and coarseness.

Gluttony was understandably closely associated with drunkenness, but was also (a little more surprisingly) connected with the practice of swearing great oaths. Swearing, like over-eating and over-drinking, was seen as a Sin of the mouth, and all three of these excesses were associated with taverns. The imagery associated with this Sin includes bellies (Bloomfield 181), sows (329), taverns (198-99), masters of kitchens (131), and stewards of households (163).

## LUST

The medieval teaching on Lust, the other fleshly Sin, was also influenced by the Platonic and monastic emphasis on the suppression of bodily appetites. Monks took vows of celibacy for many of the same reasons that they denied themselves unnecessary food. For the laity, Lust could be narrowly defined as a sexual relationship outside of the bonds of marriage, but monastic asceticism broadened Lust to apply to all sexual activity, and promoted the idea that marriage was a necessary evil allowed by God for the propagation of mankind. Thus, sexual enjoyment, even within the bonds of marriage, was regarded by many religious people to be lustful.

Even though the sub-divisions Gregory specified under Lust include failings of a spiritual nature such as blindness of mind, hardness of heart, inconstancy, and cruelty, it was the physical aspect of human sexuality that medieval theology identified almost exclusively with this Sin. In spite of the mystical implications of the Courtly Love tradition, and in spite of the scriptural teaching on the sacred symbolism of marriage, the spiritual dimensions of the sexual relationship were not formally recognized by the medieval Church.

Of all the teaching on the Cardinal Sins developed by the Church Fathers, it is the definition of Lust which has been least palatable to later generations of Christians. In Christianity and Eros Philip Sherrard describes the attitude of certain early Christian theologians toward sexuality as "an antipathy obsessive to a degree that is scarcely less than vicious" (5). They saw the sexual instinct as tainted and impure, as "the springhead through which the tribes of evil pour into human nature" (Sherrard 5). Some medieval writers believed that sexuality was the cause of the Fall, others that it was the consequence of it. Theologians of the eastern tradition, such as St. Maximos the Confessor, believed that a generic Sin was always at work within the sexual relationship even within Christian marriage. In western Christian thought, which was dominated by St. Augustine, sexual desire was seen as one of the most evident consequences of the



Fall. Because Adam and Eve sinned "a new and destructive impulse asserted itself within them . . . [which] although it manifested itself in all spheres of life, was most evident in the disobedience of the genitals, which now lost their passivity and refused to submit to the will" (Sherrard 9).

Sherrard outlines the tortuosity of thought that resulted from Augustinian teaching on the Sin of Lust:

Marriage itself is good; but the carnal acts for which it provides an opportunity and which in a certain measure it sanctions cannot be performed without the bestial movement of fleshly lust, these acts must remain sinful and shameful even within marriage. . . . All it [marriage] can do . . . is to make it possible for those who engage in the act of coition to engage in it not to satisfy their lust but as a distasteful duty unavoidable in the begetting of children. So long as married men and women perform such an act solely for the purpose of generation, they may be excused the sin they commit. . . . To copulate for any motive other than procreation . . . is simply abominable debauchery. (10)

[Augustinian theologians] were obliged by scriptural authority to accept that the procreation of children is an end good in itself and that by becoming one flesh man and woman partake of a 'great mystery' and possess the sign of a supernatural union; yet they were persuaded that the act which determined both procreation and this *sacramentum* is tainted with evil. . . . [hence] the absurdity of attributing to God the willing of something - the procreation of children - which could be achieved only through a means that contributed to human degradation; it also compelled them to pretend that the main motive for sexual intercourse must be the wish to produce offspring. By embracing the fiction that the main motive for such intercourse both should and could in practice be reduced to one of wishing to procreate, these authors committed Christian thought in this matter to a tangle of hypocrisy from which it has not yet disentangled itself. (12)

Perhaps the ambivalence of the pictorial imagery associated with Lust is a reflection of the convoluted theology which grew up around the subject of sexuality. Lust was represented by images which suggested both strength - riding at the head of a chariot (Bloomfield 102); and weakness - a wound in the foot (149). The difficulty which medieval Christians experienced in formulating a workable theology of Lust can be appreciated and, perhaps, forgiven if we understand the complexity of the spiritual issues involved.

Although Lust was more difficult to define than the other Sins, all of them were, in fact, the subject of much discussion and controversy. There was, however, one medieval approach to the problem of Sin which achieved a transcendent and resonant sort of simplicity. The Christian mystic defined personal holiness in terms of the individual's spiritual relationship with God. For such a person the goal of life is simply to approach as closely as possible to the divine essence, and anything that provides a barrier to that approach is Sin. The Cloud of Unknowing, written by an English mystic of the fourteenth century, speaks of "deadly sin" as the fastening of the "fleshly heart" on any "delight" or "grumbling", and allowing it to "abide unreprieved . . . with a full consent." He explains how each of the Cardinal Sins are connected with a reaction against, or an attachment towards, a "man or woman" or a "bodily or worldly thing":

If it be a thing which grieveth or hath grieved thee before, there riseth in thee a painful passion and an appetite of vengeance, the which is called Anger. Or else a fell disdain and a manner of loathing of their persons, with spiteful and condemning thoughts, the which is called Envy. Or else a weariness and an unlistiness of any good occupation, bodily or ghostly, the which is called Sloth. And if it be a thing that pleaseth thee or hath pleased before, there riseth in thee a surpassing delight for to think on that thing, whatso it be. Insonauch that thou retest thee in that thought, and finally fastenest thy heart, and thy will thereto, and feedest thy fleshly heart therewith: so that thou thinkest for the time that thou covetest none other wealth, but to live ever in such peace and rest with that thing that thou thinkest upon. If this thought that thou drawest upon thee, or else receivest when it is put upon thee, and that thou retest thus in, be the worthiness of thy kind, or thy knowledge, or grace, or degree, or favour, or beauty: then it is Pride. And if it be any manner of worldly good, riches or chattels, or what man may have of be lord of: then it is Covetousness. If it be dainty meats and drinks, or any manner of delights that man may taste: then it is Gluttony. And if it be love of desire, or any manner of fleshly indulgence, favouring or flattering of any man or woman living in this life, or of thyself either: then it is Lust. (20)

Sin, then, is the feeding of the heart on that which is not God, and "deadly sin" is distinguished from "venial sin" by the heart's prolonged fastening "with a full consent" on some grief or delight, as though it were enough to satisfy the soul forever.

The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity explains the Seven Deadly Sins as the "lower elements" of the self - the passions which medieval Christians believed to be in conflict with their spiritual welfare:

... the Christian life was understood as an ongoing struggle to vanquish the passions or at least to hold them decisively in check under rational control. ... It was in this context that there first emerged lists of what would eventually be formalized as "the seven deadly sins." ... [They represent] the lingering and ever more subtle forms of the old orientation's hold on the self as it seeks to mold itself to God. (852)

The concept of the Seven Deadly Sins may be seen, then, as simply a structured way of viewing a basic aspect of Christian belief - the doctrine of Original Sin. Original Sin is synonymous with the fallen nature, or the innate corruption of the soul, out of which all sinful action arises.

The human tendency to fall into Sin typically manifests itself in a number of recognizable forms: Pride, Anger, Envy, and so on. Centuries ago devout men organized what the scriptures taught and what had been observed about sinful tendencies which resulted in wrong attitudes and behaviour. They decided to describe these basic sinful tendencies under seven headings, and the result was one of the most tenacious of religious concepts - the Seven Deadly Sins.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Sayers' Understanding of the Seven Deadly Sins

Sayers was aware of the Seven Deadly Sins from her youth. She discussed them directly on several occasions, and she unconsciously incorporated them into almost everything that she wrote. Since the concept is so rudimentary to a Christian understanding of human nature, it can be applied to Sayers' work as an organizing principle<sup>7</sup> through which we may better appreciate the continuity and cumulative impact of her wide ranging literary achievement.

Before proceeding with a chronological study of Sayers' work we must establish certain background facts. The circumstances of her early life, the religious teaching given to children of her day, and the works she studied at Oxford provide us with some indication of how her familiarity with the Deadly Sins developed. Her explicit view of sinfulness and her direct discussions of the Deadly Sins should also be examined at this point. Although these discussions came in the later years of her life, they represent (with some refinements) the view of Sin which she had held since her youth. There are no sudden changes or swerves in Sayers' philosophy: in her end is her beginning.

#### I. The Background to Sayers' Understanding of Sin

Sayers' broad view of the nature of Sin reflects the Christian understanding of sinfulness based on scripture, and on The Book of Common Prayer. The centrality of the idea of Sin in Anglican worship is apparent from the order of service for Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. "Daily throughout the year," The Book of Common Prayer decrees, "some one or more of these Sentences of the Scriptures" are to be read at the beginning of the service. All eleven of the short passages given deal with the sinfulness of man and

the importance of repentance, as these examples illustrate: "the wicked man [must turn] from his wickedness" (Ezekiel 18:27); "I acknowledge my transgressions" (Psalm 51:3); "blot out all my iniquities" (Psalm 51:9); "I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned" (Luke 15:18); "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves" (1 John 1:8). The heavy emphasis on this theme was based on the principle that spiritual health and an increasingly righteous life can develop only from a constant awareness of the seriousness of our shortcomings, a continual turning from Sin, and a continual appropriation of the forgiveness and restoration provided through Christ. The prayer of general Confession prescribed for the whole congregation makes this clear:

Almighty and most merciful Father, We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against thy holy laws, We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, And we have done those things which we ought not to have done, And there is no health in us: But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us miserable offenders; Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults, Restore thou them that are penitent . . . That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.

It would appear that the Seven Deadly Sins were not often discussed in depth by Anglican theologians in the early part of this century. Perhaps this was because that particular structuring of the types of sinfulness tended to be viewed as Roman Catholic and medieval. Yet the concept was part of common knowledge in the world in which Sayers grew up. The limited number of Anglican writers who did deal with it directly showed that it was not a separate and isolated doctrine but was integrated with the teaching on Original Sin which all Anglicans received. The Ninth Article of Religion of the Anglican Church declares that "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam . . . but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam. . . ."

A book on Sin by H.S.V. Eck (1907), part of "The Oxford Library of Practical Theology" series, provides an example of the Deadly Sins being discussed at some length by an Anglican theologian of the early twentieth century. Eck explains the doctrine of

Original Sin as presented in the Ninth Article of Religion and includes the Seven Deadly Sins as part of a broad overview of the Church's teaching on Sin. He speaks of Original Sin as a disease, pointing out that "the sins which a man commits are symptoms of a disease, not the disease itself" (12). In his chapter on "The Seven Deadly Sins" Eck further clarifies the distinction between the sinful nature and overt sinful actions:

... the sins which it [i.e. the traditional list] enumerates as 'capital' or 'principal' are what we may describe as root-sins. It is in this fact that the great value of the list is to be found, as also the answer to the objection sometimes urged against it that it omits some sins the committal of which must, *ipso facto*, involve the sinner in the guilt of mortal sin. This will become clear if we take an instance: why, it might be asked, does such a sin as murder find no place in a list of so-called deadly sins? The answer is that murder is not a root sin; murder is, in fact, a symptom of some sin which underlies the commission of murder; murder springs sometimes from the capital sin of envy, sometimes from that of anger, sometimes from that of avarice, sometimes from all three. Men, unless they are maniacs, do not murder other men for the sake of murdering them, but because they are impelled to it by some root-sin which is the real disease of which their souls are sick. (121-22)

The similarity between the concept of the Deadly Sins and the concept of the sinful nature is also evident in other Anglican books of theology which mention the medieval list of Deadly Sins specifically. In The Elements of the Spiritual Life (SPCK 1933) by F.P. Harton, the seven Sins are again described in terms which suggest they reflect the sinful condition, or fallen nature, rather than denoting overt acts of Sin. Harton calls his chapter on this subject "The Capital Sins," explaining, in the course of defining the Sins, why he prefers this terminology:

Confusion is sometimes introduced into this subject by the application of the misleading appellation of "deadly" to these sins. . . . commissions of the Capital Sins may be either deadly or venial, according to circumstances. The Capital Sins are, in fact, the root forms of sin whence spring all its manifestations, either deadly or venial. (138)

These sources reflect something of the view of Sin which Dorothy Sayers must have encountered early in life. A review of some of the facts which are known about her childhood will allow us to reconstruct tentatively the way in which her view of Sin developed.

Dorothy Sayers was the only child of an Anglican rector who, from the time his daughter was four years old, held the living of Bluntisham-cum-Earith, two parishes on the southern edge of the Fens. Until the age of fifteen she was educated at home, by governesses. The rural setting itself was not stimulating in a cultural or social sense, but the family had their own cultural interests and abilities. The household included several servants, and an aunt and grandmother whom Sayers' father supported. Another aunt was a frequent visitor.

Barbara Reynolds' recent biography, which makes extensive use of letters written by Sayers herself (even some from childhood), verifies that she read and wrote very well at an early age (Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul ch. 1). Sayers' unpublished, partly autobiographical, work "Cat o' Mary" and her earlier, also unpublished, "My Edwardian Childhood" reveal her as a precocious child, who read a great deal and related to adults better than she did to other children (Brabazon ch. 2). The frequent company of adults, the influence of her father of whom she was very fond, and the general atmosphere of life in a rectory at the turn of the century ensured that Sayers became familiar with religious concepts in her early years.

Whatever her early view of Sin in a general sense, she later looked back on her childhood as a time when she was completely oblivious to the Sins *she* was guilty of. She describes childhood self-centredness in terms of six Sins (of which five are Deadly Sins):

If egotism, envy, greed, covetousness, cruelty and sloth are sins, then children possess that original sinfulness in a high degree. . . . When Katherine [perhaps Dorothy herself] in later years looked back on the childish figure that had been herself, it was with a hatred of anything so lacking in those common human virtues which were to be attained in after years at so much cost and with such desperate difficulty. . . . Strangers rightly considered her a prig. ("Cat O' Mary" quoted by Brabazon 14-15)

There are no records of what Dorothy Sayers was taught in her Confirmation Classes, but Notes of Confirmation Lectures on the Church Catechism (SPCK 1908) represents the kind of religious teaching on Sin which children of Dorothy Sayers'

generation received. The book was written by the Right Rev. R.F.L. Blunt, D.D.,<sup>8</sup> , and was recommended "for the use of clergymen and confirmation candidates."

This book divides Sin into three classes "according to [the] form in which temptation reaches us":

1. *Devil*. Sins that come directly from Satan
2. *World*. Sins that come from things and people around us.
3. *Flesh*. Sins that come from ourselves. (16-17)

There is a lengthy discussion of the Sins which occur in each of these categories. A wide variety of different Sins is covered - many which are not part of the list of Deadly Sins - but each of the traditional Seven Deadly Sins is dealt with in some depth, without being specially identified as such.

The category called "Sins from the Devil" includes Pride, which is described as the Sin through which Satan fell and through which he desires to make us fall. It is defined as "self-assertion, lifting ourselves up above others or against God," and is broken down into two parts: (a) self-exaltation because you are better than others, and (b) the pride which refuses correction. Pride is summed up as a condition of the heart which "depends on nothing outward" (17-18).

Hatred is another of the "Sins of the Devil" dealt with in the Confirmation Lectures. It is presented as a characteristic of Satan whom Christ described as "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44) and shown to encompass both Wrath and Envy (jealousy). Hatred occurs in three degrees:

Silent anger, smoldering within.  
Hasty anger, uttering itself in passionate words.  
Malicious anger, burning for and executing itself in revenge.

These, the three stages of hatred, Christ reproves (St. Matt. v. 21, 22), and each, He says, ends in spiritual death, the death of love and of life in the soul. (18-19)

The "Jealous spirit," which is another form of hatred, is compared to a "festering sore [which] rankles, spreads, kills and mortifies the heart." The young readers of these



Lectures are solemnly warned, "Strangle the first thought of jealousy; never suffer [the] shadow of envy to rest upon your soul" (19).

The category "The Poms and Vanity of this Wicked World" includes the Love of Wealth, the Love of Honour, and the Love of Pleasure. The Love of Wealth, which is essentially the Sin of Avarice, is defined here as abuse of wealth due to "loving it in [the] wrong way - forgetting [the] Giver; treating it as our own which we may employ as we please; refusing in niggard spirit to impart it to others; . . . an abuse of our possessions (e.g. . . . loving dress and money more than Christ and his Church or His favour" (24-25). (The Love of Pleasure can be worked into the Deadly Sins system too, since it would seem to come under the Sin of Gluttony which is frequently expanded to include hedonism; the Love of Honour can be taken as a form of Pride.)

The category "Sinful Lusts of the Flesh" has six sub-sections. The first two are Indolence (Sloth), which is described simply in terms of idleness and physical laziness, and Gluttony which is linked with drunkenness. Both are seen as excesses which "avenge themselves on body and mind as well as on the soul of the sinner" (32). The third Sin of the Flesh is Love of Dress - a Sin which could fit into the Deadly Sins pattern under the Sin of Pride, for here it is related to personal vanity. It is also, however, reproved as an irresponsible use of money, which connects it with the concept of Avarice in the broad sense. Impurity is another Sin of the Flesh. It is obviously the Sin of Lust, but it is dealt with very obliquely:

... all shameful acts grow out of unchaste thoughts and imaginations. . . .  
Never commit an act however secret, never read a book, never listen to talk, which you would not wish your mother to know of. . . . Never say or do anything to . . . [girls or women] which you would be ashamed of.  
(35-36)

The Sins of the Flesh also include bad temper of four types: evil temper, sullen temper, quick temper, and conceited temper. Emphasis is laid on the point that quick temper is a serious failing which should not be excused on the grounds that it is soon repented of; the seriousness of this sort of passion should not be minimized. The last Sin

of the Flesh is selfishness, the kind of self-love which totally opposes the Christian virtues of self-denial and self-sacrifice.

Each of the traditional Deadly Sins is covered in this comprehensive, though somewhat diffuse, discussion of Sin designed to prepare Anglican young people for confirmation. Others Sins are included, but the order in which the seven Sins occur and the way in which they are grouped is significantly similar to the most familiar listing of the Seven Deadly Sins. The fact that, in this context, the Seven are not seen as a discrete group and that other variations of Sin are mentioned along with them, reminds us that the Seven Deadly Sins do not compose an absolute system but instead represent a particular organized approach to the spiritual reality of sinfulness. This reality may reasonably be expressed in somewhat different arrangements without obscuring the essential nature of the concept. Gregory the Great's view that all forms of Sin are sub-categories of the Seven Deadly Sins would seem to be substantiated by the fact that most of the Sins mentioned in the Confirmation Lectures can be readily seen as variants of the seven root Sins.

Sayers' religious education may well have included instruction on the subject of Sin similar to that contained in the Confirmation Lectures. Whatever the specific sources which contributed to her knowledge of the Deadly Sins, it is clear that it had taken hold of her imagination by the time she was nineteen. In the summer vacation of 1913, between her first and second years at Oxford, she undertook to write an allegorical epic using the Seven Deadly Sins as the basis of the unifying imagery. It was intended as part of an album which she and her friends (who called themselves the Mutual Admiration Society) were planning. On 22 July 1913 she wrote to her friend Muriel Jaeger that she was working on her character Sir Omez:

He [Sir Omez] is going strong, by the way. I think I shall be able to bring back quite a bit more of him, and I have thought of a lovely incident, with a sort of vampire in it, for the canto dealing with the conquest of Lust. I wish there were a bit more variety about methods of tackling the seven deadly sins, but I think I'd better stick to them, because unless one has

some sort of scheme, one can go wandering on for ever making up adventures and fights, and that becomes wearisome. Sir Omeas is just preparing to meet Sir Maljoyous (gluttony - that is, I suppose, self-indulgence in general).

This last, parenthetical, observation indicates her insight into the broader implications of the individual Sins which she was to develop so fully in her paper on the Deadly Sins twenty-eight years later. Her desire to use the concept of the Seven Deadly Sins in an imaginative piece of writing is significant. She saw it as a means of giving shape and order to a potentially sprawling narrative, yet she was apprehensive about the artificiality which would result from too rigid a structure.

Another letter to a friend (written on 29 July 1913) refers to her projected epic:

At present I am deep in the writing of an allegorical epic, of which I have completed the first canto. I began it last vac, and as it is distinctly Christian in tone I started out to mention it to Elsie, when she asked what I had been doing. I said: "I have started work on an epic" - she said: "What on earth do you want to do that for? Nobody wants to read epics." So I felt crushed, and took my epic elsewhere.

This negative reaction may explain, at least in part, why there is no record of her continuing with the project. The attempt shows, nonetheless, that Sayers' youthful view of Sin tended to be light-hearted rather than oppressive, and that in her adolescent enthusiasm for Spenserian grandeur she recognized the dramatic and structural possibilities of the Seven Deadly Sins. She obviously felt a certain fascination for the concept and saw it as a suitable framework for work of fiction that was to be "distinctly Christian in tone."

The fictional work which Sayers later produced does not, of course, make systematic use of the Seven Deadly Sins, but they are part of her underlying assumptions about human nature. Perhaps, in this sense, she found her own way of "tackling the seven deadly sins." When she was in her fifties Sayers discovered in The Divine Comedy another form of what she had desired in her youth - a literary use of the Seven Deadly Sins which had tremendous imaginative and spiritual power. The achievement was not

her own - it was Dante's - but she identified herself with it by devoting the last years of life to research, translation, and critical writing on The Divine Comedy.

Sayers' letters referring to her proposed epic reflect the enthusiasm and drive which characterized her Oxford years. Her program of studies at Oxford undoubtedly enhanced her awareness of the medieval view of the Seven Deadly Sins. She took her degree in Modern Languages, specializing in medieval French, which, in her case, included the "Special Subject" of Anglo-Norman. Anglo-Norman was the field of expertise of her favourite tutor and life-long friend, Mildred K. Pope. Miss Pope's dedicated scholarship inspired in Sayers a lasting interest in literature of the medieval period. She developed a particular interest in several Anglo-Norman works which have a connection with the concept of the Seven Deadly Sins.

One such Anglo-Norman work was the version of the legend of Tristan and Iseult written about the middle of the twelfth century by the Anglo-Norman poet, Thomas of Britain. Passion and Lust are central to the story. Several years after studying this work under Miss Pope's instruction Sayers decided to translate it into English verse. Her version first appeared under the title "The Tristan of Thomas - A Verse Translation" in Modern Languages. It came out in two parts in sequential volumes of the journal, the first in June and the second in August of 1920. In 1929 it was published in book form under the title Tristan in Brittany.

From her introduction to the 1929 publication it is clear that Sayers was especially appreciative of the way Thomas deals with the complex issues of Love and Lust. She sees his interpretation of the passionate relationship as "a kind of half-way house between the old feudal morality and the new and artificial 'amour courtois,' which was developed to such fantastic excess by later writers" (xxx). She commends the realism and the intensity with which the story is told:

The beloved woman is no longer a chattel; but she has not yet become a cult. The fatal love between Tristan and Iseult is an absorbing passion before which every other consideration must give way; but the exasper-

ating behaviour of the lovers conforms to the ordinary human developments of that exasperating passion. . . . There is a kind of desperate beauty in this mutual passion, faithful through years of sin and unfaith on both sides, and careless of lies and shifts and incredible dishonour." (xxx-xxxi)

Sayers acknowledges here the shame and treachery which arises from such adulterous Lust and the great power it holds over its victims. Nonetheless, her use of the words "beauty", "faithful", and "careless of" attribute a certain dignity and nobility to the relationship, which reflects her reluctance to paint the Sin of Lust in blackest tones.

Another of the early medieval works which Sayers studied at Oxford<sup>10</sup> very possibly influenced her understanding of the Deadly Sins. The Anglo-Norman Les Contes moralisés, by the Franciscan Nicole Bozon, was written in the early fourteenth century, probably for the use of clergymen (Bloomfield 144). Bozon uses a moralizing method very typical of medieval exempla books. He deals with a number of the Deadly Sins directly, using biblical and historical examples to illustrate them. He indicates that the downfall of a number of Bible characters was a direct result of Pride: Pride destroys "beauty in Absalom . . . strength in Samson . . . wisdom in Solomon . . . wealth in Nebuchadnezzar . . . power in Holofernes . . . eloquence in Amon" (18). The Sin of Lust is picturesquely condemned in several passages: in one a lecherous man is compared to a rutting stag, in another the self-destructive greediness of Lust is compared to a porcupine gathering apples on his quills, and foolishly chasing a lost one, only to lose them all (88). The self-destructive nature of Sin is further emphasized in Bozon's retelling of a favourite preacher's tale illustrating Envy. In it two men are to be granted whatever they request with the stipulation that the second man will get double what the first one asks for. The first man is so envious that he ponders how to ensure that the other man will gain no advantage over him. Finally he asks that one of his eyes be removed so that the other man will lose both eyes. This story is followed by another illustration of the self-destructive nature of Envy: the Bible story of Daniel shows how those who opposed Daniel out of Envy are brought to personal ruin because of this Sin (129). Interestingly

enough, this scriptural account of Envy is one which Sayers retold in a short series of Bible stories she produced just two years before her death.<sup>11</sup>

It is very probable then that Sayers' special interest in the concept of the Seven Deadly Sins, and her views on some of the specific Sins, grew out of her exposure to the concept in her early life. Before 1940 her works do not treat the concept directly, but it has been shown that she was aware of the Seven Deadly Sins much earlier as valid representation of the negative aspect of Man's nature.

## II. Sayers' View of Sin

Dorothy Sayers' Anglican background is apparent throughout her work, particularly in the many speeches and essays in which she discusses Christian doctrine directly. In "Creed or Chaos?" (an address delivered on May 4, 1940 to the Church Tutorial Classes Association) she begins with a quotation from the Gospel of John:

And when he is come, he will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye see me no more; of judgement, because the prince of this world is judged. - St. John XVI. 8-11. (Christian Letters 31)

This lecture stresses the importance of knowing and understanding Christian doctrine, and restates the view presented in the creeds on seven main subjects. The first four of these - God, Man, Sin, and Judgement - give the basis of Sayers' understanding of Sin as it affects the relationship between God and Man.

Under the heading "God" she stresses the divinity of the Son of God who was crucified to redeem man - a doctrine which, she believes, lifts Christianity above the level of other great world religions. Because God Himself endures suffering in order to provide redemption, perfection is attained, not through a good that refuses to experience

evil (as in Buddhism), but "through the active and positive effort to wrench a real good out of a real evil" (39). Sayers asserts that

It is not enough to say that religion produces virtues and personal consolations [which exist] side by side with the very obvious evils and pains that afflict mankind. The essence of Christian theism is the belief that God the Son himself is alive and at work *within* the evil and the suffering, perpetually transforming them by the positive energy which He had with the Father before the world was made. (39)

Under the heading of "Man" Sayers describes the positive and negative elements in the Christian view of humanity: "man is disintegrated and necessarily imperfect in himself and all his works, yet closely related by a real unity of substance with an eternal perfection within and beyond him" (40).

Sayers' discussion of "Sin" points to the pessimism of the "iron determinism" which sees evil as imposed on Man from without by forces of heredity and environment. In contrast, the Christian doctrine of Sin is "a gospel of cheer and encouragement" because it teaches that there is remedy:

Today, if we could really be persuaded that we are miserable sinners - that the trouble is not outside us but inside us, and that therefore, by the grace of God, we can do something to put it right, we should receive that message as the most hopeful and heartening thing that can be imagined. (41)

Fourthly, she regards "Judgement" not as punishment for Sin but as "the inevitable consequence of man's attempt to regulate life and society on a system that runs counter to the facts of his own nature" (41). The word "nature" as used here must be understood to mean that part of the self which she earlier described as closely related with or drawn to the "eternal perfection" which is God. Sayers acknowledges as well that there is a sense in which Man's nature is "fallen," or fragmented, and thus imperfectly tuned to higher things.

This doctrinal summary presents Sin as the curable disease, or disintegration, within Man which makes him reject the "eternal perfection" for which he was created.

Closely related to this description of Sin is the one which Sayers gives in one of her unpublished manuscripts. She says Sin is our "bad workmanship" which results from building on our own design rather than God's design, as revealed in the Bible (Wade ms. 81/199.39). Both of these definitions suggest that Pride - the Sin of wanting to be God - is the essential basis of Sin.

### III. Sayers' Direct Discussion of the Seven Deadly Sins

#### a. "The Other Six Deadly Sins"

On October 23, 1941 Dorothy Sayers delivered an address to the Public Morality Council, meeting at Caxton Hall, Westminster. The topic was "The Other Six Deadly Sins."<sup>12</sup> As the title suggests, Sayers' impetus for the paper was her belief that many Christians tended to minimize or ignore six of the Deadly Sins, and to over-emphasize the Sin of Lust. She begins, characteristically, by assuming an argumentative stance, and after deprecating the Church's "hunting down" of Lust she proceeds to discuss the other six Sins.

Sayers initially makes three points about Lust. First, she argues that, even though its sinfulness is not in question, Lust should not be referred to (as it commonly is) by "a generic term like immorality," nor should it be "confused with love" (138).

Second, she declares that the Church's condemnation of Lust must be based on "sacramental" grounds. She does not develop this point or explain what she means by the term, but she seems to be suggesting that the Church must teach simply that sexual looseness is an affront to the holiness of God and the sacredness of marriage and that any reference to its inexpediency is beside the point. The Church's stand against this Sin had been supported in the past by the state's perception of Lust as a threat to social stability.



Such official disapproval of Lust was, she felt, fast disappearing because of profound changes in the structure of society which made "family solidarity" less essential to "social solidarity." Hence the Church's "campaign against Lust" must, she believes, be based on its intrinsic sinfulness.

Third, she identifies two main causes of Lust. One is "sheer exuberance of animal spirits" which can be controlled by subjection to the will if one is aware of the body's "proper place in the scheme of man's two-fold nature" (138-9). The other cause of Lust, in Sayers' opinion, is boredom and discontent. In this case attempts at direct controls are valueless, since the *root* cause is not Lust, but the "spiritual depression" which is a malaise of society in general. By this line of reasoning lustful behaviour may, in certain cases, be seen as arising not from the root Sin of Lust but from the root Sin of Sloth, the insidious *Accidie*.

After these brief observations on Lust Sayers turns to the other six Sins. She immediately distinguishes between what she describes as the warm-hearted Sins - Lust, Wrath, and Gluttony - and the cold-hearted Sins - Covetousness, Envy, Sloth, and Pride. Her reason for treating the Sins in this particular order is not immediately apparent. The only resemblance between her arrangement and the familiar Gregorian list is the placing of Lust and Pride at the extremities. On closer examination Sayers' order appears to be an ascending one, reflecting her personal view of the relative "deadliness" of the Sins.

She believed that the warm-hearted Sins, which she discusses first, were less hateful and less destructive than the cold-hearted Sins. She asserts that Christ's rebuke of the latter was stronger by far and that the organized Church has, like the Pharisees of Christ's day, taken the reverse position by condemning the warm-hearted Sins and winking at, or even condoning, the cold-hearted ones. She identifies the warm-hearted Sins as those of the common man, and the cold-hearted Sins as those of the religious, self-righteous person.

Sayers begins her analysis of Wrath by pointing out that the typical English disapproval of displays of temper is not an indication that the English are above the Sin of Wrath in the truest sense. She cautions,

... let the Englishman not be in too great a hurry to congratulate himself. He has one besetting weakness, by means of which he may very readily be led or lashed into the sin of Wrath: he is peculiarly liable to attacks of righteous indignation. While he is in one of these fits he will fling himself into a debauch of fury and commit extravagances which are not only evil but ridiculous. (140)

She paints a picture of righteous indignation cloaking itself under "a zeal for efficiency or a lofty resolution to expose scandals," and leading to "the manufacture of schism and the exploitation of wrath," and to the kind of fury which is malignant and degrading (140-41). From her vantage point in 1941 Sayers could assess the danger of the Sin of Wrath developing out of the spirit that was being encouraged by the war effort. She says,

I am ... concerned about a highly unpleasant spirit of vindictiveness that is being commended to us at this moment, camouflaged as righteous wrath and a warlike spirit. ... there is a point at which righteous indignation passes over into the deadly sin of Wrath. ... We shall have to see to it that the habit of wrath and destruction which war fastens upon us is not carried over into the peace. (141)

Wrath is a Sin of "the warm heart and quick spirit." It may be quickly repented of, but it may have already "wrought irreparable destruction" (141).

The next warm-hearted Sin is Gluttony. Sayers treats the concept in the broad sense of general self-indulgence, including in it the inordinate desire for a higher and higher standard of living, the hankering for a greater abundance of manufactured goods, and the belief that one's well-being depends on luxuries which are increasingly complicated (142). She roundly condemns what she sees as a very undesirable trend:

... the furious barrage of advertisement by which people are flattered and frightened out of a reasonable contentment into a greedy hankering after goods which they do not really need ... this fearful whirligig of industrial finance based on gluttonous consumption [which] could not be kept up for a single moment without the co-operative gluttony of the consumer. (143)

Almost ironically, one of the worst curses of this sort of Gluttony, as Sayers sees it, is that it "ends by destroying all sense of the precious, the unique, the irreplaceable" because the middle classes spend all their money buying large quantities of cheap items which are not intended to last (144).

Gluttony, like the other Sins, is the excess and perversion of something inherently good; it is the extreme and sinful form of the "free, careless, and generous mood which desires to enjoy life and to see others enjoy it" (145). Like Lust and Wrath, it is "a headless, heedless sin, that puts the good-natured person at the mercy of the cold head and the cold heart" (143).

By broadening the territory of Gluttony to include much more than the bodily appetite for food Sayers has allowed it to overlap and, to some extent, to blur into the Sin of Avarice. Such blurring is unavoidable when the Sins are understood as broad spiritual problems rather than as specific types of behaviour.

Sayers calls the three remaining Sins cold-hearted. The warm-hearted sinner is often victimized by the person who is dominated by *Avaritia* or Covetousness. This, too, is a perversion of a positive trait - "the love of real values, of which the material world has only two: the fruits of the earth and the labour of the people" (148). Sayers approves of the derogatory names like "parsimony" and "niggardliness" which were formerly assigned to this "narrow, creeping, pinched kind of sin" (145). She condemns the modern tendency to glamorize Avarice by calling it "Enterprise" and "Business Efficiency," and the modern view that "getting on in the world is the chief object in life" (146). Avarice values only what can be assessed in money. Rich people are admired simply because they are rich, and honesty is valued only when, and if, it is good business policy, and not for any intrinsic value it may have.

Sayers blames the Church for not condemning this Sin as it should:

The Church says Covetousness is a deadly sin - but does she really think so? Is she ready to found welfare societies to deal with financial immorality as she does with sexual immorality? . . . Is Dives, like Mag-

dalene, ever refused the sacraments on the grounds that he, like her, is an 'open and notorious evil-liver'? (146)

Sayers describes Envy as that state of mind which hates to see other men happy. It asks, "Why should others enjoy what I may not?" ... [it] is the great leveler ... a climber and a snob" (149). She makes an insightful comparison between Avarice and Envy: "If Avarice is the sin of the Haves against the Have-Nots, Envy is the sin of the Have-Nots against the Haves" (150).

In personal relationships Envy is characterized by cruelty, jealousy, and possessiveness, and it is devoid of admiration, respect, and gratitude. An envious state of mind is capable of resenting even acts of graciousness and love. Sayers describes this Sin using a scene from scripture:

[It] is the hatred of the gracious act, and the determination that nobody shall be allowed any kind of spontaneous pleasure in well-doing if Envy can prevent it. 'This ointment might have been sold for much and given to the poor.' Then our nostrils would not be offended by any odour of sanctity. (152)

The sixth Sin discussed in this paper is Sloth. Like the medieval theologians Sayers sees this Sin as a serious spiritual problem which has little to do with laziness in the usual sense of the word. Her description reveals Sloth as a condition of the heart:

In the world it calls itself Tolerance; but in hell it is called Despair ... it is the sin which believes nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing." (152)

She observes that this state of mind is such a familiar one in the modern world that few people would consider it to be a Sin.

Many disguises for Sloth are created by the other Sins, but beneath "the cover of a whiffling activity of body" lie "the empty heart and the empty brain and the empty soul of Acedia" (153). The empty brain is the result of "Sloth in a conspiracy with Envy to prevent people from thinking." Sloth makes us think that "stupidity is not our sin, but our misfortune" and Envy makes us think that "intelligence is despicable - a dusty,

highbrow, and commercially useless thing" (153). Here we see how two Sins may operate in conjunction to produce a particular evil.

Although Sayers devotes less time in this paper to the discussion of Sloth than she does to the other Sins, she is very strong in her condemnation of it. She sees it as potentially the most serious of all: "There are times when one is tempted to say that the great sprawling, lethargic sin of Sloth is the oldest and greatest of the sins, and the parent of all the rest" (153).

Sayers deals finally with Pride - the "sin of trying to be God" (153). This is the Sin that "turns man's virtues into deadly sins, by causing each self-sufficient Virtue to issue in its own opposite" (153). It disguises itself as the Perfectibility of Man or the doctrine of Progress. She explains that Pride is a Sin which attacks us not in the area of our weaknesses but in our strengths:

It is pre-eminently the sin of the noble mind . . . which works more evil in the world than all the deliberate Vices. Because we do not recognize pride when we see it, we stand aghast to see the havoc wrought by the triumphs of human idealism. . . . the way to hell is paved with good intentions . . . strongly and obstinately pursued, until they become self-sufficing ends in themselves and deified. (154)

Sayers relates the Christian view of Pride as the root of all the other Sins to the Greek idea of hubris as the most fearful of all wrong states of mind. Pride places man rather than God at the centre and tries to "make God an instrument in the service of man" (155). She concludes her analysis of the Deadly Sins with the solemn observation that piety is no safeguard against temptation, especially temptation to the deadliest of Sins - Pride. "For the besetting temptation of the pious man is to become the proud man: 'He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous'" (155).

b. "Christian Morality"

This essay appeared in Sayers' 1946 essay collection Unpopular Opinions, but it was written some time before. All that we know of the occasion which produced it is found in the Foreword to that volume:

... the papers called "Christian Morality," "Forgiveness" and "Living to Work" were so unpopular with the persons who commissioned them that they were suppressed before they appeared: the first because American readers would be shocked by what they understood of it. ... (7)

"Christian Morality" is essentially an accusation of "the Christian Churches" because they have departed from Christ's teaching and example and invented a "morality" based on their own rules and restrictions. The result is "the impression ... [the Churches] have contrived to give the world ... [is remarkable for] its extreme unlikeness to the impression produced by Christ" (9). Sayers suggests that the Churches have focused attention on Sins like drinking, breaking the Sabbath, and sexual immorality, but lacked the courage to drive out the avaricious sinners (the "money-changers") from their midst in the manner of Christ cleansing of the temple. She believes the Churches have lost touch with "the emphasis of Christ's morality - a morality which she defines by referring to the roots of sinfulness, the Seven Deadly Sins:

In the list of those Seven Deadly Sins which the Church officially recognises there is a Sin which is sometimes called Sloth, and sometimes Accidie. The one name is obscure to us; the other is a little misleading. It does not mean lack of hustle: it means the slow sapping of all the faculties by indifference, and by the sensation that life is pointless and meaningless, and not-worth-while. It is, in fact, the very thing which has been called the Disease of Democracy. It is the child of Covetousness, and the parent of those other two sins which the Church calls Lust and Gluttony. Covetousness breaks down the standards by which we assess our spiritual values, and causes us to look for satisfactions in this world. The next step is the sloth of mind and body, the emptiness of heart, which destroy energy and purpose and issue in that general attitude to the universe which the inter-war jazz musicians aptly name "the Blues." For the cure of the Blues, Caesar (who has his own axe to grind) prescribes the dreary frivolling which the Churches and respectable people have agreed to call "immorality," and which, in these days, is as far as possible from the rollicking enjoyment of bodily pleasures which, rightly considered, are sinful only by their excess. The mournful and medical aspect assumed by "immorality" in the present age is a sure sign that in trying to patch up

these particular sins we are patching up the symptoms instead of tackling the disease at its roots. (11-12)

Only four of the Sins are specifically referred to here. The relationship Sayers postulates between them is based on her conviction that the root Sin is far more important than its outward manifestations. She takes Covetousness as the point of origin of the other three. Covetousness and its immediate offspring Sloth are clearly the Sins which Sayers believed to be the most serious spiritual problems of contemporary society. What the Church failed to realize was that the "mournful" forms of Gluttony and Lust were symptoms rather than root causes.

The particular pattern of connections between the Sins which Sayers sets out in this essay will, of course, vary as the manifestation of Sin varies. Sayers' brief picture of the Sins is significant, however, because it shows that she was conscious, not only of the concept of the Seven Deadly Sins, but also of the characteristic interplay between the individual Sins and the complex spiritual problems which they represented.

These two papers, written in the 1940s, present Sayers' view of the Sins in the middle years of her writing career. The particularities of tone and emphasis indicate that she had chewed and digested what she had received and had developed a personal interpretation of the Seven Deadly Sins as they applied to her generation.

### c. Introduction and Notes to Dante's Purgatory

Dorothy Sayers' translation of Purgatory, the second book of The Divine Comedy, did not appear until 1955, just two years before her death. Purgatory was a work she had been intimately familiar with for well over a decade. In it Dante envisions the structure of Purgatory as a mountain up which the individual soul must progress. It is a place of ordered discipline where the ascending soul is purified. On each level of the mountain

the stain of one of the Seven Deadly Sins is removed from the soul until it is finally able to enter the "earthly Paradise" at the summit. From there the soul proceeds into the presence of God in the heavenly Paradise.

Sayers' translation of Purgatory is prefaced by a comprehensive Introduction of over sixty pages and accompanied by detailed notes and commentaries. She saw it as the "tenderest, subtlest, and most human section of the Comedy" (Introduction 9). Her specific comments on the Deadly Sins in this context contain many echoes of what she had said over ten years before in the paper "The Other Six Deadly Sins." Her central ideas are essentially the same, but they have been enriched by her study of The Divine Comedy and her analysis of the theological basis of Dante's thought.

The structure of Mount Purgatory follows the most common Gregorian arrangement of the Sins, which (as we have noted before) is frequently interpreted as showing the Sins in the order of descending importance. Sayers, in her 1941 paper, had taken the opposite approach by using an ascending order.

In her Introduction to Purgatory Sayers expresses her preference for the Gregorian label "Capital" which she believes is less misleading than "Deadly." As we noted in Chapter One, she defines the Sins as "the fundamental bad habits of mind recognized and defined by the Church as the well-heads from which all sinful behaviour ultimately springs" (65).

Augustinian theology underlies Dante's treatment of the Sins. One of the basic premises of Augustine's teaching is that evil in itself is nothing and can therefore produce nothing positive. Evil exists only as a parasite on the good which God has created. Man's impulse to love the things that please him is seen as the root of all Virtue, but it can also be "perverted, weakened, or misdirected to become the root of all sin" (66). Dante understands the first three Sins - Pride, Envy, and Wrath - to be the result of the natural love of oneself being twisted into hate by the delusion that others' harm can result in good for oneself. These three Sins, Sayers explains, are thus considered to be "Love



Perverted." The next Sin, Sloth, is seen as a deficiency of love for what is truly deserving of our love - particularly God. Sloth is thus "Love Defective." The last three Sins - Avarice, Gluttony, and Lust - are said to result from disproportionate, extreme love for things that are no more than secondary goods. Hence they are cases of "Love Excessive" (66-67).

Sayers' discussion of the individual Sins in her Introduction and in her notes to the text represents her understanding of the Seven Deadly Sins in the later years of her life. By this point her interpretation of the concept had been strongly influenced by Dante's treatment of it, but there was no radical departure from her earlier views. It was the final stage in the awareness of the Seven Deadly Sins that had been with her all her life.

On each level, or Cornice, of Dante's mountain a different Sin is systematically purged through the use of appropriate penances, meditations, and prayers. On each Cornice there is an Angel who represents the contrasting Virtue, and a benediction (one of the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount) is pronounced. In the Introduction Sayers defines Pride as "love of self perverted to hatred and contempt of one's neighbour" (67), and as "selfish indifference to others' needs and feelings" (65). In her note on the Images of Canto X she describes the form of Pride known as *Superbia* as the "head and root of all sin" which consists in "making self (instead of God) the centre about which the will and desire revolve" (147). *Vana gloria* is a more specific sort of Pride which she defines as an overweening egotism which "cannot bear to occupy any place but the first, and hates and despises all fellow-creatures out of sheer lust of domination" (147). In Pride there is therefore "intolerance of any rivalry" (204). The notes to Canto XII observe that "when Pride, the root of all sin is overcome, the conquest of the rest is easier" (162).

Humility is the Virtue which is acquired through the purging of Pride. Sayers' commentary on the Angel of Humility describes the beauty of this often underrated Virtue:

This virtue is so little prized to-day, and interpreted in so negative a sense that to understand the shimmering radiance of its angel one needs to study all the contexts in which Dante uses the words *umile*, *umilta*. . . . The connotation is always of peace, sweetness, and a kind of suspension of the heart in a delighted tranquillity. (164)

The beatitude on the Cornice of Pride is "Blessed are the poor in spirit" for to be "poor in spirit" is simply to be humble.

Envy is defined in Sayers' Introduction as "love of one's own good perverted to the wish to deprive other men of theirs" (67), and as "jealousy, resentment, or fear" (65). In her notes to Canto XIII Sayers points out that Envy differs from Pride in containing the element of fear. "The envious man is afraid of losing something by the admission of superiority in others, and therefore looks with grudging hatred upon other men's gifts and good fortune" (170). Envy also encompasses "the fear of loss through competition" (204). Sayers observes that few Sins take themselves with such savage seriousness as this one does (172).

The opposite Virtue to Envy is Mercy. Sayers quotes Thomas Aquinas' observation that the merciful man is the opposite of the envious man because he is saddened by his neighbour's misfortune, whereas "the envious man is saddened by his neighbour's prosperity" (186). The beatitude is "Blessed are the merciful," but Dante's *misericordes*, Sayers suggests, is broader in meaning than the English word "merciful" (used in the Authorized Version) - closer to "tender-hearted," "sympathetic," or "generous-minded" (186).

Sayers' Introduction to Purgatory defines Wrath as "love of justice perverted to revenge and spite" (67), and "ill-temper, vindictiveness or violent indignation" (65). In her notes she sums it up as "the love of revenge for injury" (204). Her commentary on the images in Canto XVI explains the blinding smoke experienced in the purgation of Wrath as an appropriate image because Wrath blinds the judgement and suffocates natural feelings and responses (192). Peace is its opposite Virtue, and "Blessed are the peacemakers" is the beatitude pronounced on this Cornice.

Sloth is defined in Sayers' Introduction as "the failure to love any good object in its proper measure, and, especially, to love God actively with all one has and is" (67). It is also described as "laziness, cowardice, lack of imagination, complacency, or irresponsibility" (65). In her note on "the Images" of Canto XVIII Sayers carefully explains the "insidious" nature of the Sin of Sloth:

It is not merely idleness of mind and laziness of body: it is that whole poisoning of the will which, beginning with indifference and an attitude of 'I couldn't care less', extends to the deliberate refusal of joy and culminates in morbid introspection and despair. One form of it which appeals very strongly to some modern minds is that acquiescence in evil and error which readily disguises itself as 'Tolerance'; another is that refusal to be moved by the contemplation of the good and beautiful which is known as 'Disillusionment', and sometimes as 'knowledge of the world'; still another is that withdrawal into an 'ivory tower' of Isolation which is the peculiar temptation of the artist and the contemplative, and is popularly called 'Escapism'. (209)

The Virtue opposed to Sloth is Zeal, and the beatitude for this Cornice is "Blessed are they that mourn." (Those who care enough to mourn are no longer oppressed by apathy.) Sayers says that this benediction "refers, not merely to the 'healing tears' of the penitents, but to the fact that depression of spirits accompanies the sin of Accidie . . . and has now been purged away" (212).

Avarice or Covetousness is defined in Sayers' Introduction as "the excessive love of money and power" (67), and as "meanness, acquisitiveness, or the determination to get on in life" (65). The image of being fettered face downward is used to represent the purging of Avarice. Sayers explains this by pointing out that the inordinate love of wealth and power is "a peculiarly earth-bound sin, looking to nothing beyond the rewards of this life" and so it is fitting that "the souls are so fettered that they can see nothing but the earth on which they once set store" (221).

She draws attention to the fact that on this Cornice of Mount Purgatory the spendthrifts are purged along with the hoarders because both have sinned by "offending, though in opposite ways, against the golden mean of a prudent Liberality" (245). Liberality is the opposing Virtue to the Sin of Avarice. The beatitude is "Blessed are

they who thirst after righteousness." (The words "hunger and" which occur in the scriptural version before the word "thirst" are omitted here because they are reserved to form the beatitude used on the Cornice of Gluttony.) To thirst for righteousness is taken to be the opposite of craving for money and material things.

Sayers defines the sixth Sin, Gluttony, as "the excessive love of pleasure" (67), and as "self-indulgence and the wanton pursuit of pleasure" (66). In her notes to Canto XXXIII she explains the vice further as "undue attention to the pleasures of the palate, whether by sheer excess in eating and drinking, or by the opposite fault of fastidiousness" (251). She elaborates further, broadening the concept to include "all over-indulgence in bodily comforts - the concentration, whether jovial or fretful, on a 'high standard of living'" (251).

Temperance is the opposite Virtue to Gluttony, and the beatitude is "Blessed are they who hunger after righteousness." As on the previous Cornice, the focus is on the strong desire for righteousness which is opposite to strong desires for the wrong things - in this case, the gratification of bodily appetites. (The Sin of the next Cornice - Lust - is, of course, related to bodily appetites as well. Again, the overlapping nature of the Sins is apparent.)

The last of the Sins, Lust, is defined as "the excessive love of persons" (67). ("Love" in this instance means attachment to, or clutching of, rather than "love" in the usual sense.) Lust, Sayers says, also involves "perversions of sexual and personal relationships, such as sadism, masochism, or possessiveness" (66). In her notes to Canto XXVI she distinguishes Lust from sexual temptation by describing it as "the heedless dallying with temptation, and the relaxed abandonment to indulgence" (276). The Virtue which is opposite to Lust is Chastity, and the beatitude is "Blessed are the pure in heart." The remainder of the scriptural quotation, "for they shall see God," is especially appropriate at this point for "the penitents who have passed through the refining fire have completed their purgation and are now ready to stand in God's presence" (286).

This summary of Sayers' interpretation of the Deadly Sins as they occur in Dante's Purgatory does not fully represent the theology of Sin developed in the work as a whole. It does, however, give us a relatively complete picture of how Sayers herself, influenced by Dante, viewed the Seven Deadly Sins. The subject held a special interest for her in the later years of her life. The basic outlines of the concept, however, were known to her from her youth, and the view of sinfulness which it represented had always been an integral part of her view of man as a spiritual being.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Concept of Sin in Sayers' Early Poetry

During the years of her adolescence, her residence at Oxford (1912-1915), and her young adulthood (1916-1923), Dorothy Sayers' published work consisted almost exclusively of poetry. There were several poems published in her school magazine The Godolphin Gazette (1909 to 1911), and a number in Oxford University publications from 1915 to 1920. Shortly after she finished her studies in 1915, she had two small volumes of poetry published: Op.I in 1916 and Catholic Tales and Christian Songs in 1918. The style of many of these poems reflects her fascination with medieval romanticism, and her ability to imitate a wide variety of traditional poetic forms. Her themes include patriotism, heroism, and mortality, but the two subjects that recur most frequently are her nostalgia for former Oxford days and her fascination with the person of Christ - especially His relationship with Judas.

Only a few of the Op.I poems are noticeably religious in their content. Those that are religious deal with Sin in a general sense, rather than with specific Sins. "Epitaph for a Young Musician" describes a young man whom "death caught," and denied the opportunity of living a full span of life. He was therefore robbed of the "occasion to transgress" and the "chance of failure." The poem implies that "perfectness" belongs only to those who die young.<sup>13</sup>

Two of the poems in Op.I deal directly with the concepts of Sin and forgiveness. The ballad "The Gates of Paradise", which is the only overtly religious poem in the volume, describes Judas journeying through the night seeking the gates of Paradise. Because of the great evil he has done he is shunned by the two thieves who were crucified with Christ, but finally befriended by a sin-laden, grey-clad man who identifies himself with Judas' sinfulness. At the gate of Paradise the man is identified as Christ himself. It is the basic theology of the atonement: no Sin is too great to be forgiven, no

sinner too far gone to be reclaimed. The poem is, in this respect, theologically sound, but it differs from the scriptural account of Judas's eternal destination. Sayers' retelling of Judas's story in later life (in The Man Born to be King) concurs with the scriptural conclusion he went to "his own place" (Acts 1:25) - implying the place of punishment which he deserved.

"The Elder Knight," the only other poem in the volume which deals with forgiveness, includes a lyrical description of the benevolence of God, who is depicted as holding the world between his knees. The imagery suggests the loving forgiveness which is summed up in the lines "Herein is all the peace of heaven: / To know we have failed and are forgiven."

The poems of Sayers' second volume, Catholic Tales and Christian Songs, are largely based on some aspect of Christ's nature. A number reflect her view of Sin. The cross, the symbol of atonement, is referred to repeatedly, and in "Justus Judex" there is a recurrence of the idea that even the heinous Sin of Judas - the betrayal of the friend who is also God Himself - is not beyond the possibility of redemption.

There are three poems in this collection which are particularly interesting in their depiction of Sin. The short untitled poem which introduces the volume begins with the epigraph, from the scriptural account of Judas's betrayal of Christ, "And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master; and kissed Him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend ..." The speaker in the poem identifies with Judas:

Jesus, if against my will  
I have wrought Thee any ill,  
And, seeking but to do Thee grace,  
Have smitten Thee upon the face,  
If my kiss for Thee be not  
Of John, but of Iscariot,  
Prithce then, good Jesus, pardon  
As Thou once did in the garden,  
Call me "Friend," and with my crime  
Build Thou Thy passion more sublime.

Here again is the idea that even a Sin like Judas's can be forgiven. The poem also describes the subtle nature of Sin: projects which we undertake with the best of intentions (at least as far as our conscious motives are concerned) - even "religious" projects like Sayers' producing a volume of Christian poems - may actually turn out to be an affront to the One we attempt to honour. Sayers may have been genuinely concerned about the offense that some of her more unorthodox poems might create, or the self-deprecatory opening may have been merely included for effect. Either way, her theology is solid: first, in showing that an overtly innocent act like the kiss of Judas can conceal a sinful heart, and, second, in suggesting that divine grace can use Sin to build something "sublime" (the *fortunate fall* concept).

Another poem which depicts Sin in a special way is the longest piece in Catholic Tales and Christian Songs, "The Mocking of Christ."<sup>14</sup> It is a satirical verse drama in the style of a medieval mystery play. Christ, in the scene before His crucifixion, is mocked and taunted by a long series of groups and individuals, representing mainly ecclesiastical Sins. The pope, emperor, and king display a greed for power. A preacher, organist, and curate show cowardice and lack of compassion for the needy. The rudimentary Sins of Pride and spiritual Sloth are revealed in other mockers. At the heart of this short drama is the theological idea that all Sins are Sins against Christ.

The fourth poem in the volume is the most striking one, and one which portrays Sin in an unusual way. Its Greek title is a quotation from the words of Jesus in John 12:32: "I will draw all men unto me."

ΠΑΝΤΑΣ ἙΛΚΥΣΩ

*Be ye therefore perfect.  
You cannot argue with the choice of the soul.*

Go, bitter Christ, grim Christ! haul if Thou wilt  
Thy bloody cross to Thine own bleak Calvary!  
When did I bid Thee suffer for my guilt  
To bind intolerable claims on me?  
I loathe Thy sacrifice; I am sick of Thee.



They say Thou reignest from the Cross. Thou dost,  
And like a tyrant. Thou dost rule by tears,  
Thou womanish Son of woman. Cease to thrust  
Thy sordid tale of sorrows in my ears,  
Jarring the music of my few, short years.

Silence! I say it is a sordid tale,  
And Thou with glamour hast bewitched us all;  
We straggle forth to gape upon a Graal,  
Sink into stinking mire, are lost and fall...  
The cup is wormwood and the drink is gall.

I am battered and broken and weary and out of heart,  
I will not listen to talk of heroic things,  
But be content to play some simple part.  
Freed from preposterous, wild imaginings...  
Men were not made to walk as priests and kings.

Thou liest, Christ, Thou liest; take it hence,  
That mirror of strange glories; I am I;  
What wouldst Thou make of me? O cruel pretense,  
Drive me not mad so with the mockery  
Of that most lovely, unattainable lie!

I hear Thy trumpets in the breaking morn,  
I hear them restless in the resonant night,  
Or sounding down the long winds over the corn  
Before Thee riding in the world's despite,  
Insolent with adventure, laughter light.

They blow aloud between love's lips and mine,  
Sing to my feasting in the minstrel's stead,  
Ring from the cup where I would pour the wine,  
Rouse the uneasy echoes about my bed...  
They will blow through my grave when I am dead.

O King, O Captain, wasted, wan with scourging,  
Strong beyond speech and wonderful with woe,  
Whither, relentless, wilt Thou still be urging  
Thy maimed and halt that have not strength to go?...  
Peace, peace, I follow. Why must we love Thee so?  
(Catholic Tales and Christian Songs 12-13)

This poem portrays the extreme tension that exists between the ideals of Christianity and the reluctance and spiritual weakness of the average Christian. The first of the two epigraphs is taken from the words of Christ in Matthew 5: 38: "Be ye therefore perfect." The remainder of the verse reads "even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

The second epigraph is interesting in light of the fact that she was, many years later, to refer to The Divine Comedy as "the drama of the soul's choice."

The tension in this poem results from the Sin of inward rebellion. It expresses the angry resistance of the soul to the compelling power of Christ. The first stanza depicts violent Anger - Anger at the sufferings of Christ which, if they were indeed endured on our behalf, place us under the most dreadful obligation to Him. The burning desire to detach oneself from these unbearable claims produces a startling outburst. The resentment reaches a dramatic extreme in the suggestion that the cross was Christ's own personal performance and that the claims of Christ are loathsome and sickening.

The angry accusations continue in the second stanza, and the conflicting imagery of strength ("tyrant") and weakness ("tears," "womanish") represents the disturbing impact that Christ's humiliation has on the speaker. It is with a "sordid tale of sorrows" that he seeks to captivate men. The complaint that Christ's domination is "Jarring the music of my few short years" reminds us of what Dante called a love of secondary good. The attraction to worldly pleasures (the hedonism represented by Gluttony and Lust) causes the speaker to resent demands of holiness and Virtue.

In the third stanza the Anger is directed toward the glamour of the heroic Christian quest which can draw people along in support of lost causes which end in disappointment and bitterness: "We . . . / Sink into stinking mire, are lost and fall ... / The cup is wormwood and the drink is gall." Self pity (a form of Pride) and false Humility come out in the fourth stanza: "I am battered and broken," I want to play just a "simple part," it's "preposterous" to cast ordinary people in the role of "priests and kings."

Yet stanza five reveals that there is a deep-seated longing to know those "strange glories." The speaker sees himself trapped by his own limitations ("I am I"), and finds it "cruel" and maddening that he should be mocked with the "lovely, unattainable lie" that he could become something glorious. The gradual revelation of this spiritual longing is the key to the carefully controlled progression in the emotional tone of the poem.

In the sixth stanza the glorious excitement of Christ's call is ungrudgingly acknowledged. The imagery is suddenly positive and vibrant: "trumpets in the breaking morn," "resonant night," "riding in the world's despite, / Insolent with adventure, laughter-light."

The seventh stanza returns to the tension between the call to Christian commitment and the desire to enjoy the pleasures of the world: "love's lips" (Lust), "feasting" and "wine" (Gluttony), a comfortable "bed" (Sloth). This time, however, the tension is different. Earlier in the poem the demands of Christ were declared "intolerable," "jarring," "preposterous," and "unattainable," but now they are haunting. The speaker's Anger has dissipated; now he is wistful. The joys of human love and feasting cannot compete with the excitement of "riding in the world's despite"; the minstrel's song cannot muffle the clear insistent call.

The final stanza unites the various threads of imagery and brings resolution to the conflict. Christ is both the suffering Saviour "wasted" and "wan with scourging," and the heroic "King" and "Captain"; he is to be pictured in the contexts of both "woe" and strength. Both sides of His identity must be acknowledged, before His demands can be accepted. The speaker still numbers himself among the "maimed and halt that have no strength to go," but he now sees that it is the very weakness of the individual that makes spiritual victory possible. If the Christ of the cross is "wonderful with woe," lack of strength is no reason for not following. There is a desperate, almost hopeless, resignation in "Peace, peace, I follow" and in the final admission of love, "Why must we love Thee so?"

This poem gets to the root of the basic tension of the Christian life: how to reconcile our human weakness and spiritual Sloth with the lofty demands of Christ. Can Man with his fallen nature hope to overcome sinful tendencies and meet the demands of a holy God?

The answer which is implied, although not fully explored, in the imagery of this poem is that it is possible because of the cross. The Greek title of the poem points to the cross as the means by which people are drawn to God. It is a quotation from John 12:32: "I will draw all men unto me," in which Jesus prophesied of His death: "If I be lifted up from the earth I will draw all men unto me." Christ's death and suffering as the only solution to the problem of Sin is an important theme which Sayers was to develop extensively in the plays and essays of her mature years.

One of the last published poems of this period is "Obsequies for Music" which appeared in The London Mercury in January 1921. It is approximately 175 lines in length, one of the longest she wrote. It is about the need to let go of the past, particularly of the Sins of the past: "And my dead Past obediently / Rose up to bury its dead" (ll.4-5). The attitude toward disappointment, failure, and Sin is a very positive and Christian one. Throughout the long poem there is a repeated Latin petition "Agnus Dei, Agnus Dei / Dona eis requiem." Release from the past is possible because of the forgiveness of Christ, the atoning Lamb of God. The poem refers to disappointing losses, "dead loves" which may represent Lust and "dead hopes" bred of vanity or Pride ("Fancy on vanity begat us all"). The "dead griefs" are at least partially the result of Sin ("But some of us you did yourself call in - / Yours was the sin"), and the "dead hatreds" are indications of the Sins Wrath and Pride ("And all pride / Set aside"). Finally "follies," "unbelief," and "doubt" are laid to rest. The poem effectively uses the sustained metaphor of burial to illustrate that there *can* be finality of release from the oppression of the past. Sayers did not view the sinfulness of human nature as an inescapable trap but as a condition from which a means of escape was provided through the Cross of Christ.

The poems of this early period provide some insights into the theology of Sin as Sayers understood it in her youth and on which she was to base much of her treatment of human frailty in her works of fiction and non-fiction.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### "Competent Delineation of Character" The Early Novels, 1923 - 1933

After several different sorts of work experience, including two enjoyable years at an Oxford publishing house, Dorothy L. Sayers found herself unemployed. She had come to the conclusion that London was the place to be if one wanted to make a mark in the world. In the fall of 1920 she took up residence there, but she was not able to get a job, and without money life was very hard. Brabazon records that she had already realized that "the detective story market was where the money lay" (82).

Her decision to try to make money by writing whodunits may have seemed like a betrayal of her intellectual potential. Identification with the interests of the common man was, however, something that Dorothy Sayers considered essential in a writer. In a later, unpublished, paper entitled "The Importance of Being Vulgar" (given in February 1936) she describes herself as "quite as vulgar as anybody who writes for Peg's Paper - only a little cleverer . . . with better literary training" (Wade ms. D.10). She condemns the "disastrous tendency" of good writers writing to please the tastes of literary cliques and leaving the common people to be served only by the bad writers. Such a situation is not only disadvantageous to the reading public, but also to the state of literature generally for the result is "a complete dry-rot." She recognizes the value of the "low-brow" person's instinctive, spontaneous response to literature, which avoids the kind of elaborate self-examination that distorts natural feelings. She concludes the paper with the observation that detective stories are actually the sort of books that both "low brow" and "high brow" readers can enjoy.

Initially, Sayers may have chosen to write detective fiction out of practical necessity, but her arguments in defense of the genre are much more than an attempt to justify herself. Her sincere regard for detective fiction was first expressed in the introductions

which she wrote for several anthologies of detective stories which she compiled and edited, beginning in 1928. A number of papers and articles, which she produced in the 1930s, further revealed her exceptional insight into the nature, history, and value of the genre.

Among her unpublished manuscripts there is a paper called "The Modern Detective Story" which Sayers presented to the Sesame Imperial Club on 27 October 1937. In it she describes the popular detective story as "cleaner" than the more serious forms of literature in the sense that it offers exercise to the brain but puts no strain on the emotions. It teaches that Virtue can be more exciting and sympathetic than Vice, and gives to its hero, the detective, an almost symbolic grandeur as a champion who overthrows evil.

In the same paper she also points out that there are certain limitations in the form. The detective story of the late 30s had become so streamlined that it appeared detached and artificial. Sayers suggests that the detective writer was usually a "journeyman of letters" instead of a real novelist who would see plot, not as a pattern controlling the characters, but as a pattern emerging from the characters and settings, which are seen "in relation to the world and eternity." Both the characters and the places must possess "an independent life beyond the confines of the plot" (Wade ms. D.11).

Sayers greatly admired G.K. Chesterton because he had brought the detective story back in contact with the great spiritual issues, by handling human passion seriously. Chesterton's detective, Father Brown, characteristically looked for his clues in the heart of man. Such an approach would, Sayers believed, allow the detective story to achieve "a higher level of writing, and a more *competent delineation of character*" (emphasis added) (Introduction Great Short Stories ..., First Series 38).

Characterization was one of Sayers' greatest strengths as a fiction writer, and it was an area in which she grew steadily more competent. A number of the reviews of her early novels comment on the excellence of her characterization (Youngberg, Dorothy L.

Sayers: A Reference Guide 2-9). She observed in 1928 that the characters appearing in detective fiction were becoming more complex and life-like:

Just at present . . . the fashion in detective fiction is to have characters credible and lively; not conventional, but, on the other hand, not too profoundly studied - people who live more or less on the Punch level of emotion. A little more psychological complexity is allowed than formerly. . . . The automata - the embodied vices and virtues . . . are all disappearing from the intellectual branch of the art, to be replaced by figures having more in common with humanity. (Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror 41.)

A whodunit enters the domain of the serious novel when it does not limit itself to characters which are stereotyped or simply functional in the plot. Sayers steered the genre in that direction by arguing (in her many essays on detective fiction) for the need for "figures having more in common with humanity" and by creating such characters herself.

Characters appear true to life when we recognize traits in them which we are aware of in ourselves. E.M. Forster, in Aspects of the Novel, suggests that a novelist's characters have natures which are determined by "what he [the novelist] guesses about other people, and about himself," according to the function of the novelist which is "to reveal the hidden life at its source" (44-45).

The "hidden life" refers to what an individual *is*, rather than what he *does*. Forster commends the novel as an art form which allows us to know what human beings are really like. Sayers, like most writers of fiction, based her characterization on what she guessed about the inner lives of other people and what she knew about herself. As an orthodox Christian she believed that human nature was a fallen nature and that evil tendencies appeared in certain recognizable forms: Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, and Lust.

This is not to say that Sayers always envisioned Sin in this seven-fold pattern, or that she deliberately sought to portray specific Sins in the characters she created. It is useful, nevertheless, to examine the relationship between her characterization and this organized

conception of sinfulness. Her characters are credible because they have inner lives which are recognizable to the reader. Most recognizable of all are the universal evil tendencies, the Seven Deadly Sins.

In the ten years from 1923 to 1932 Sayers produced eight novels and a number of short stories. During the same period she also compiled two volumes of stories by various writers entitled Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror (the first of which was quoted from above).<sup>15</sup> She introduced each of these anthologies with a substantial essay on the history and critical theory related to the stories she included; her emphasis was particularly on "stories of detection." By the end of this ten-year period she had become one of the leading writers of the very popular whodunit genre. Between 1922 and 1934 virtually all of her published work was directly related to detective fiction.

In the 1920s detective novels were pouring off the presses. Many of them were little more than intellectual puzzles, with contrived plots based on certain prescribed formulas. Although Sayers fraternized with her fellow mystery writers and adapted herself to many of the popular conventions of the genre, her writing of detective fiction was never stiff or repetitive. Each of her first eight novels is different from the others structurally and thematically. Many of the familiar ingredients of detective stories make an appearance, but most of them are used only once in the course of the eight books: the long, explanatory letter of confession by the villain (Whose Body?); the presumed murder which turns out to be a suicide (Clouds of Witness); difficulty in establishing motive and method even though the murderer is known (Unnatural Death); rigor mortis complexities and legal intricacies (The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club); highly specialized scientific evidence which leads to the uncovering of a nearly perfect crime (The Documents in the Case); the immune poisoner (Strong Poison); multiple suspects and train timetables (The Five Red Herrings); and complications arising from suspicious alibis and mistaken assumptions about time of death (Have His Carcase).



Sayers' novels were best sellers because she was a skillful and careful craftsman who never failed to entertain. She particularly appreciated Chesterton's observation that "the whole story exists for the moment of surprise" (quoted in her 1922 article, "A School of Detective Yarns Needed"). Her detective puzzles were intricate to the right degree and the solutions were clear and satisfying. Part of Sayers' early appeal to readers was her ability to vary her approach, and use classic whodunit techniques deftly and sparingly. Skillful characterization, however, was an important ingredient in her success. This feature, which delighted her first readers in the 1920s, is still in the last decades of the century the quality of her work which keeps a third generation of readers returning again and again to books whose plots have long since become cliché.

In the Introduction to Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror in 1928, the phrase used in the title of this chapter occurs in an important passage on villains and heroes:

As the detective ceases to be impenetrable and infallible and becomes a man touched with the feeling of our infirmities, so the rigid technique of the art necessarily expands a little. . . . To make the transition from the detached to the human point of view is one of the writer's hardest tasks. It is especially hard when the murderer has been made human and sympathetic. A real person has then to be brought to the gallows. . . . The modern detective story is compelled to achieve a higher level of writing, and a more *competent delineation of character*. As the villain is allowed more good streaks in his composition, so the detective must achieve a tenderer human feeling beneath his frivolity or machine-like efficiency. (emphasis added) (37-38)

This development toward greater humanity in both villain and detective is clearly observable in Sayers' first eight novels. The villains in the first four novels are memorable characters. Sayers draws their outlines firmly, revealing the Deadly Sins which motivate them. Yet they are not truly complex characters: they do not have many "good streaks."

Julian Freke (the murderer in Whose Body?) may seem to be motivated by compassion when he provides free treatment to an emotionally disturbed Russian child. There are clear implications, however, that his motivations are selfish rather than

altruistic: he finds the child "very interesting," and in the same context he is described as having an "inhuman face", and eyes that were "not the cool and kindly eyes of the family doctor, [but] the brooding eyes of the inspired scientist" (ch. 11). Freke believes in biological determinism - that people have no real choice about what they become. It is significant that Sayers used as her first villain a man so opposed to herself in his view of moral issues. The idea of Sin was meaningless to him. Lord Peter discovers, from the book Freke wrote entitled *The Psychological Bases of the Conscience*, what he really thought about the concept of evil. Freke had written, "The knowledge of good and evil is an observed phenomenon, attendant upon certain conditions of the brain cells, which is removable" (Ch. 8).

In Sayers' second book, Clouds of Witness, there is no villain in the conventional sense since the presumed murder is finally revealed to be a suicide. Attention has been focused on the dead man, Denis Cathcart, who, although far from a criminal, is a very unpleasant individual for whom the reader develops little sympathy. Important facts about his life and character are withheld, however. The central mystery of Clouds of Witness is Cathcart himself, for until the last chapters we know nothing about his inner life. The great emotional turmoil which destroyed him is the key to the whole plot. Yet, presented as it is in a single passionate letter - which comes very late in the novel, and seems a rather contrived sort of explanation - it fails to afford him any real depth of character.

Mary Whittaker, the nurse who murders her aunt in Unnatural Death, is Sayers' most consistently evil character; there is no glimmer of goodness associated with her. This is another instance in which Sayers uses the technique of withholding information about the central character. She does not allow the detectives, or the reader, to meet Miss Whittaker in person (except when she is in disguise) until the very end of the book, at which point the full revelation of her evil has a staggering effect.

In the fourth book, The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club, the criminal is again a medical person - a doctor who murders a patient. This character, Penberthy, is introduced in person early in the book, and is observed in a number of contexts. He is not as undeveloped a character as the other early villains, but is given a few of what Sayers calls "good streaks" in his nature.

The next four books were all written after the introductory essay in which Sayers recommended more complexity of character in villains, and they suggest that she was attempting to practise what she preached. In two of these books the criminal is much more human. The murderer who goes to the gallows at the end of The Documents in the Case is so well drawn that, although the verdict is just, we cannot fail to feel a degree of pity. In The Five Red Herrings the crime turns out to be a case of manslaughter rather than murder, and the man who committed it is not a villain at all, but a genuinely likeable individual.

The increase in verisimilitude<sup>4</sup>, not only in the villains, but in the characters generally, means, of course, that we meet characters who, like people in real life, are seldom totally good or totally evil. It is not only the villains in Sayers' novels who illustrate the Sins. Even likeable and predominantly virtuous characters struggle with tendencies toward Pride, Envy, and Wrath. And even though the overt behaviour of most of the main characters is not obviously evil, their inner struggles with certain Sins create many of the important conflicts in the novels.

An interesting moral contrast is often set up by Sayers' emphasis on the opposing Virtues, particularly in recurring characters such as Inspector Parker, Bunter (Wimsey's valet), and Miss Climpson (his eccentric assistant). The Virtues are also prominent in the clergymen who appear in many of her novels.

The effect of the Deadly Sins in Sayers' first eight novels may be brought into focus by looking at examples of each of the Sins. The occurrence of the Sins in these novels does not, of course, follow a tidy pattern. Some of the Sins are more prominent than

others, simply because of the nature of murder mysteries. Many of the Sins occur in clusters and are so intertwined that it is impossible to tell which is the root Sin. And even the very ugly Sins of the most evil characters also occur in incipient forms in characters who are essentially good.

We will examine the occurrence of the Deadly Sins in the order which Sayers used in her 1941 paper - a personal arrangement rather than one of the traditional ones. It is an ascending order, with Pride, the most Deadly of all, coming last.

## LUST

The presentation of Lust in Sayers' novels is many-faceted. Sexuality is sometimes depicted in a way which seems inconsistent with the Christian morality which underlies Sayers' work. There are several factors which contribute to this apparent ambivalence: Sayers' use of central characters who took a secular rather than a Christian view of sexual issues; her disapproval of the Churches' overemphasis on the Sin of Lust; and the discrepancy between her personal definition of Lust and the most obvious Christian definition of sexual Sin.

Sayers' view (expressed in her paper on "The Other Six Deadly Sins") that the evil of Lust has been over-emphasized by the Church and society generally has, very possibly, some bearing on the fact that her early novels do not depict Lust (in the sense of sexual intimacy outside the bonds of marriage) as a serious problem. In Clouds of Witness Wimsey's brother Gerald, the Duke of Denver, is nearly condemned for murder because he gallantly withholds the information that would give him a vindicating alibi: at the time of the victim's death he was miles from the scene, committing adultery with a woman who has a violently jealous husband. Gerald's affair, when it finally becomes known, is not revealed to his wife, or to the general public (the acquittal being won through a totally different sort of evidence). The adultery seems to be regarded more as a

misdemeanor than as a serious Sin by all those who do know of it - Lord Peter, Inspector Parker, and the very respectable lawyers Mr. Murbles and Sir Impey Biggs. It seems that this was the sort of Sin that the upper classes could indulge in with impunity. Lord Peter appreciates the decency with which his brother treated the woman - even to the point of being prepared to go to the gallows rather than risk her life by allowing her to provide his alibi. Even Peter himself, however, tends to view this oppressed and beautiful woman as fair game, in a sexual sense: the sight of her stirs "sixteen generations of feudal privilege" in him (ch. IV). This sounds suspiciously like the abuse of persons and relationships which Sayers later identified as the Sin of Lust, but in this context she expresses neither approval or disapproval. Perhaps Sayers included the incident to make her hero and his brother appear more human. She clearly felt no inclination to make moral judgements on what she saw as relatively benign, warm-hearted Sins.

Harriet Vane's physical and emotional relationship with Philip Boyes, a man to whom she was not legally married (Strong Poison), is another example of the sort of relationship which the Church identifies with the Sin of Lust. Sayers implies, however, that Harriet's motivations were no more lustful than those of a person entering a marriage relationship. Indeed, Harriet seemed, initially, to view her relationship as a wholehearted commitment which was the equivalent of marriage to those, like Boyes, who denied the validity of legalizing such relationships. The general public, who became aware of the situation because of the murder trial, might attribute Harriet's unmarried involvement with Boyes to sensuality, but the author's account of the situation leaves little room for this interpretation. Instead she paints Harriet as a person of moral integrity who acted in good faith, and whose tragedy was precipitated by no worse frailty than the naiveté which caused her to trust a man who was not worthy of her love.

Lord Peter Wimsey's sexual behaviour is even more difficult to evaluate from a Christian perspective because Sayers tried to have it both ways. She wanted the hero of her novels to have the popular appeal of a sexually experienced man of the world, yet she

increasingly developed him as a person of high moral standards who valued and respected women as people, and who kept his passions well under control.

In a sense she succeeded in having it both ways by her use of temporal and spatial distancing. Lord Peter's passionate encounters all seem to have happened long ago and far away. The novels contain multiple references to his affairs with women, but they are always vague and never contained within the time frame of the novels. Most appear to have occurred on the Continent, which was generally assumed to have more relaxed sexual standards. Peter tells Harriet he has had "several" lovers (Strong Poison ch. IV). One of these women, a Viennese singer, is twice mentioned specifically: in Gaudy Night (ch. VIII) and in Busman's Honeymoon (ch. XIV).

The "Biographical Note" - attached to later editions of the novels and supposedly written by Peter's uncle, Paul Delagardie - mentions Peter being placed, at the age of seventeen, "in trustworthy hands in Paris". After being sexually educated by this French mistress, he went on to have relationships with a number of women, none of whom "ever found cause to complain of Peter's treatment." From this we are apparently to conclude that he behaved as a gentleman should, both in bed and out. There was at least one period, according to this "Biographical Note," when Peter was unhappy about the sexual freedom he had enjoyed. Just before the War he fell in love with a girl named Barbara, and his approach to women and love changed quite drastically:

[He] instantly forgot everything he had ever been taught. [This means, presumably, the sexual instruction given by Uncle Paul and the French courtesan.] He treated that girl as if she was made of gossamer, and me [Uncle Paul] as a hardened old monster of depravity who had made him unfit to touch her delicate purity.

Sayers does not actually take sides in her account of this clash of moral standards, but her "Biographical Note" does go on to describe Peter's being jilted by Barbara, and agreeing with Uncle Paul that he had been a fool and learned a lesson. It is not clear what "the lesson" is. Perhaps Sayers means to suggest, by Barbara's betrayal and Peter's

disillusionment, that the notion of a strictly *sexual* purity is a distortion of reality and humanity.

During the next few years Peter's life is described by his uncle as being sexually liberated in a discreet way:

He was wealthy and could do as he chose, and it gave me a certain amount of sardonic entertainment to watch the efforts of post-war feminine London to capture him. 'It can't,' said one solicitous matron, 'be good for poor Peter to live like a hermit.' 'Madame,' said I, 'if he did, it wouldn't be.' No; from that point of view he gave me no anxiety. ("Biographical Note")

Sayers has established Uncle Paul's own salacious tendencies so firmly that there can be no doubt about what he means by not living "like a hermit."

How are we to interpret this account of Peter Wimsey's sexual behaviour? Some critics have speculated that Uncle Paul may have been stretching the truth in order to present Peter 'in his own image' (Sidelights on Sayers IV, 27 and XX, 21). This line of thought seems to be either naive or over-ingenious. Uncle Paul is fictional. Sayers deliberately created his character, and she allows the shadow of his promiscuous influence to fall over the character of Lord Peter. He is a man who wholeheartedly approves of activities that Christians identify with the Sin of Lust, and Sayers sets him up as Lord Peter's mentor.

There seems to be a note of irony, however, in the cynical world view Uncle Paul expresses in the "Biographical Note." It is difficult to believe that Sayers seriously condones his approach to sexuality. Nonetheless, the tolerant attitude in her early novels toward sexual involvement outside marriage seems somewhat inconsistent in a writer who respected the traditional Christian morality.

A closer look at some of Sayers' direct comments on Lust may shed some light on the problem. In her 1941 paper on the Deadly Sins she declares that "if the Church is to continue her campaign against Lust she must do so on her own - that is, on sacramental - grounds" (138). This suggests that sexual involvement outside marriage is wrong

because, and only because, it is an affront to the sanctity of marriage, as the Church sees it, in which sexuality makes man and wife "one flesh." The implication is that the sinfulness of Lust can only be perceived by those who hold a Christian view of human sexuality. Perhaps those who do not acknowledge the sanctity of marriage cannot be expected to value sexual abstinence before marriage. Of all the Deadly Sins, Lust seems to be the one in which the actual sinfulness is least perceptible to the secular mind.

Quasi-religious notions and secular values reside side by side in the mind of Lord Peter Wimsey. On the subject of sexuality Sayers allowed his views to reflect the influence of secular society more than that of traditional Christianity.

Another reason for Sayers' broadmindedness on the subject of Lust was mentioned above - she was reacting against the over-emphasis of this particular Sin by the Church and by 'respectable' society. Very possibly she downplays Lust in order to bring into sharper focus the Sins which she considered more spiritually destructive. In her paper on the Sins she deplores the fact that "to the majority of people the word 'immorality' has come to mean one thing only" ("The Other Six Deadly Sins" Christian Letters 138). Such a use of the word allows the seriousness of the other, more spiritual, Sins to be passed over:

A man may be greedy and selfish; spiteful, cruel, jealous, and unjust; violent and brutal; grasping, unscrupulous and a liar; stubborn and arrogant; stupid, morose, and dead to every noble instinct - and still we are ready to say of him that he is not an immoral man. (138)

Sexual immorality seemed to be the only sort that counted. Such a view was totally incompatible with Sayers' comprehensive understanding of Sin.

The attitude of the academic community toward sexual relationships was a more complex manifestation of the same sort of narrow-mindedness which had bothered Sayers since her Oxford days. In June 1919 The Oxford Outlook had published an essay by Sayers entitled "Eros in Academe," in which she complained of two rather differen-



sexual problems confronting academic young women. The first was the loss of spontaneity and joy from the male/female relationship:

It is not that Eros is banished from Academe - far from it. We have given him a prominent glass case in the University Museum, we have measured his bow, numbered his arrows, and, neatly dissecting his limbs, have placed inaccurate labels upon them all. We have advanced indeed so far that it is no longer considered indecent to understand Love (which we now call Sex), but only to enjoy it. We may hymn to the flesh in attitudinising raptures in a public debate, but the one thing we must not - the one thing we seemingly cannot - do is to be cheerful and take it for granted. (111)

The other problem that concerned her was the dearth of practical counsel on "social [i.e. sexual] difficulties":

The thing is serious. . . . The sin is the sin which damns - willful ignorance. When I lived in Academe I should never have thought of going to one of its guardians for advice in any social difficulty. . . . "This kind of thing never happened to me," says the guide, philosopher and friend; 'to a nice girl social difficulties do not occur.' That is a cowardly lie. Things do happen; it is monstrous to pretend that they do not or ought not. . . . Academe does recognize the governing principles of life, in theory and for examination purposes, as it does anything else that can be found in a book. But it prefers not to recognize them in every-day life. (112-113)

This was the dilemma that Dorothy Sayers and her friends faced. Their male contemporaries - what was left of them after the war - pressured them to become sexually liberated, with the provision that a sexual relationship must not be expected to lead to long term personal happiness. (Hence Sayers' complaint about the exclusion of being "cheerful" and taking it "for granted"). The young women's female mentors, on the other hand, assumed that an educated woman must, by definition, be a female eunuch.

When she created Lord Peter, within a few years of writing the article on Eros, Sayers was concerned about the need for openness and honesty regarding human sexuality. The reticence on sexual matters which censorship imposed on popular literature prevented her from dealing frankly and fully with the subject, but she could be excused for creating a hero with a happy, carefree sex life as long as she set it back in the relative obscurity of his earlier career. In real life it seemed that most people had

frustrations and anxieties related to sex. The Lord Peter Wimsey of these early novels most definitely did not.

Even though Sayers sometimes in her early fiction tolerates sexual relationships which the Church would condemn, she did not deny the sinful nature of Lust. Her early novels acknowledge the destructive potential of sexual drives. The initial stage in the development of murderous evil in Julian Freke (Whose Body?) was the Sin of Lust. Freke himself identifies sexual desire as the starting point of his lust for revenge, and observes that "Of all human emotions, except perhaps those of hunger and fear, the sexual appetite produces the most violent . . . reactions" (ch. XIII).

In Sayers early novels Lust is frequently the cause of conflict and unhappiness. However, because she sees it as a "warm-hearted" Sin, the characters who are troubled by simple sexual desire (uncomplicated by more spiritual Sins) are made to appear pathetic rather than repulsive. In these people the cause of Lust takes the form of "sheer exuberance of animal spirits" ("The Other Six Deadly Sins" Christian Letters 138).

Agatha Milsom, one of the letter writers who narrates the story in The Documents in the Case, is a well drawn character even though her contribution to the central conflict is minor and her interpretation of it is distorted. Her thwarted sexuality is part of her generally neurotic personality, and she is described by another narrator, John Munting, as "a dreadful middle-aged woman with a come hither eye" (document no. 5), and as "frightfully kittenish" (document no. 28). His friend Lathom calls her a "disgusting old woman" (document no. 37). Yet Munting also recognizes the injustice of denying unattractive individuals the right to experience love and romance:

[People think] None should have passions but the young and the beautiful. . . . Gestures which delight us in the right person are so indecent when performed by the wrong person. In fact, it is only when we contemplate the loves of unpleasant people that we see the indecency of passion. . . . Grotesque characters only exist for us from the waist upward. (Document no. 37)

In Miss Milsom Sayers creates a character whose unfulfilled sexuality (combined with emotional instability) reaches tragic proportions. Her physical desires control her attitudes, twist her perceptions, lead other characters to mistaken judgements, and make a fool of her to such an extent that she loses her position. She, in fact, ends up in an asylum.

Ann Dorland in The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club is another example of a character whose problems stem from sexual desires. She is an intelligent, but rather unattractive, young woman whose unfulfilled sexuality helps to precipitate the crime. Peter views her as a "poor kid" who wanted "love affairs." Near the end of the book he contemplates what a jury might think of "this plain, sulky, inarticulate girl, who had never had any real friends, and whose clumsy tentative graspings after passion had been so obscure, so disastrous" (ch. XXI).

Yet it is clear that such craving for sexual fulfillment is not wrong in itself, only potentially so. Marjorie Phelps, a mutual friend of Ann Dorland and Lord Peter, points out that "people have a perfect right to want love affairs" ("Post Mortem" The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club). (The expression "love affairs" implies, in this context, satisfying romantic relationships.) What Ann craves, at the deepest level, is the right sort of whole relationship; hence, she is especially hurt when Penberthy, the man she hopes to marry, accuses her of being concerned solely with sexual gratification. Ann's difficulties develop because in her strong desire for a romantic relationship she allows herself to become engaged to a man whom she must have known did not truly love her. He is, in fact, only after the legacy she might inherit, and, unknown to her, he commits murder in an attempt to ensure that she does get it.

The delineation of Ann Dorland's character is especially interesting because she develops moral strength during the course of the novel. We see her involved in a struggle, from which she emerges triumphant because she does not allow her sexual desires to override her moral integrity. Against her fiance's wishes she insists on a proper

inquiry into the old general's death. Had she not done so the murder would probably have gone undetected. Her initial unattractiveness, which is connected with the sullenness caused by low self-esteem, dissipates when she is released from these feelings. Sayers draws attention to the genuine virtue which brings about Ann's victory over Lust by allowing her at the end to receive the just reward of a better husband.

This situation illustrates Aquinas's theology of Sin which Sayers discusses in her commentary on the Deadly Sins in Dante's Purgatory. It separates the various things that a person may desire and strive after into two categories: "primary good" and "secondary good." To prize something of physical or short term value above that which has spiritual and lasting value is to place a "secondary good" above a "primary one." This is Sin. Ann Dorland resists the temptation to value the "secondary good," sexual gratification, more than the "primary good," justice. In the end, as it happens, she receives the "secondary good" as well.

Sexual desire is a universal tendency which is potentially sinful. It results in the Sin of Lust when it becomes excessive, and when it usurps the position of priority which should be reserved for things of primary importance like honesty, justice, and esteem for the rights and dignity of other individuals.

There are some cases of Lust in Sayers' novels which are more tragic - cases in which the sexual longings which lead to moral decay are due to the second cause she mentions in her paper "The Other Six Deadly Sins." In these instances Lust is associated with "spiritual depression" and "disillusionment," which are in fact dimensions of the Sin of Sloth.

Denis Cathcart, in Clouds of Witness, had good looks and good connections, yet his life was one of futility and superficiality. He valued nothing but his passionate relationship with a woman who he said he "always knew would betray him some day" (ch. XVII). His lustful attachment was so intense that it destroyed both the relationship and Cathcart himself. He was so "mad with misery" that suicide was his only escape.

Mrs. Weldon, in Have His Carcase, is another tragic case in which the warm-hearted Sin of Lust leads to a futile obsession. Harriet's first impression of her is negative: she labels her a "predatory hag." The aging woman's blind infatuation with a man thirty years her junior is another instance of Lust arising out of a form of Sloth - boredom and discontent. M. Antoine, the gigolo, describes the many women like Mrs. Weldon who throng "watering places" like Wilvercombe:

These ladies come and dance and excite themselves and want love and think it is happiness. And they tell me their sorrows - me - and they have no sorrows at all, only that they are silly, selfish and lazy. Their husbands are unfaithful and their lovers run away and what do they say? Do they say I have two hands, two feet, all my faculties, I will make a life for myself? No. They say, Give me cocaine, give me the cocktail, give me the thrill, give me my gigolo, give me *l'amo-o-ur!* (Ch. XVIII)

In these two instances of Lust - in a young man and in a middle aged woman - the passionate attachments are destructive because they are so excessive. They illustrate the sort of situation Sayers was thinking of much later when she described Lust (in her commentary on Dante's Purgatory) as excessive love of persons leading to perversions of personal relationships.

Sayers' early novels also contain a number of genuinely evil characters who exhibit lustfulness. In these cases, however, Lust is not an isolated Sin. Instead it occurs within a cluster of serious vices.

Henry Weldon, the murderer in Have his Carcase, is an unpleasant person, well known to be a womanizer. He keeps a mistress in a house which he has taken in an assumed name. He believes that women exist simply for his sexual gratification, and views marriage as a trap to be avoided at all costs, yet he has the audacity to refer to his sexual arrangements as "perfectly respectable . . . a spot of domestic bliss" (ch. XIX). The coarse familiarity he shows toward Harriet puzzles her until she realizes that he expects her to be "completely promiscuous" (ch. XVIII). The shabbiness of his life style and the crudeness of his manners are signs, not so much of simple Lust, as of a generalized ugliness of soul in which Avarice, Pride, Sloth, and Lust all play a part.

A character who is sexually motivated becomes truly offensive when Lust is combined with deep-rooted Pride, and when some sort of betrayal is involved. In fact if there is any definition of sinful Lust implicit in Sayers' early novels it involves self-centredness and treachery.

In Strong Poison Philip Boyes is described by a friend as being "infatuated" with Harriet (ch. VIII), an observation which implies a strong sexual attraction. Both Eiluned Price (a friend of Harriet's) and Harriet herself describe him as completely self-centred. It was a combination of Lust and Pride that caused him to prey upon Harriet, who saw, in retrospect, that her relationship with him had been progressively demeaning. It moved from subjugation to humiliation and betrayal:

He was apt to demand things as a right. . . . Philip wasn't the sort of man to make a friend of a woman. He wanted devotion. I gave him that. I did, you know. But I couldn't stand being made a fool of. I couldn't stand being put on probation like an office-boy, to see if I was good enough to be condescended to. I quite thought he was honest when he said he didn't believe in marriage - and then it turned out that it was a test, to see whether my devotion was abject enough. Well, it wasn't. I didn't like having matrimony offered as a bad conduct prize. (Ch. IV)

Harwood Lathom, in The Documents in the Case, is another character in whom Lust occurs in the context of the kind of Pride which leads to the abuse of the trust of others. In tracing the development of the adulterous relationship between Lathom and Mrs. Harrison, Sayers believably portrays the insidious subtlety of sexual temptation. It is not Lust, however, which is at the root of the whole mess. Lathom's friend Munting realizes that Lathom's besetting Sin is Pride. He cynically reflects Lathom's egotistical perception of himself when he describes Mrs. Harrison as "the radiant prism for Lathom's brilliance" (document no. 37).

The painter, Lathom, like the writer, Philip Boyes, allows his pride in his creative ability to swell out of proportion until it becomes the Sin of Pride. When a man sees himself as an artistic genius he tends to feel justified in taking advantage of others. The way the Pride of the artist can lead to Lustful self-indulgence and betrayal of a friend's

trust is illustrated by Munting's biting accusation of Lathom, an accusation he makes *before* he is convinced that Lathom is guilty of murder:

You're behaving like an absolute swine. Harrison was damned decent to you, and you seem to think that just because you can paint better than he could, you are perfectly justified in seducing his wife and then accepting his hospitality and driving him to commit suicide. (Document no. 50)

In the delineation of Mrs. Harrison Sayers creates a Lustful character who is truly repelling to the reader. This self-centred woman coolly betrays both her husband and her lover without any apparent twinges of conscience. Her ability to disassociate herself completely from the crime she instigated, and from the suffering of her condemned lover, indicates the extent of her hardheartedness. She is the sort who preys on others to feed her own intense vanity. In her, as in Lathom, the Sins of Pride and Lust intermingle. Her letters to her lover are a repulsive mixture of naivety and perversity. The words which flow from her pen in a letter to Lathom show how self-centredness combines with sexual desire to produce the ugliest form of the Deadly Sin of Lust:

I can't believe it was sin - no one could commit a sin and be so happy. Sin doesn't exist, the conventional kind of sin, I mean. . . . [The priest] would set himself up to make silly laws for you, darling, who are big and free and splendid. . . . He said if we wouldn't do as the Gospel said, and keep good for the love of God, then . . . the Laws of Nature . . . worked out the punishment quite impartially . . . so ridiculous . . . our love is the natural thing. (Document no. 43)

Sayers' implied message is that such selfish subjectivity and ridiculous self-justification represent genuine sinfulness. Sin does exist, and so does punishment - punishment in the form of natural consequences and processes of law in this world, which is what Lathom received, and in the form of a higher order of judgement which will ultimately come to those like Mrs. Harrison who surrender to Sin so completely, yet manage to avoid facing trial in this life.

Munting's final statement underscores the fact the core of evil in whole story was not Lathom's Pride, sinful though it was, but Margaret Harrison's lustful greed:

I want to know whether Lathom knows the sort of woman he did it for. . . whether, in a ghastly disillusionment, he has realized that the only real part of her was vulgar and bad. (Document no. 52)

She was, in the words of Paul Harrison, her step-son, an "abominable woman" (document no. 53) whose wickedness was displayed outwardly as sensuality, but whose sinfulness was much deeper and more spiritual than the warm-hearted Sin of Lust.

Sayers depiction of Lust in the early years of her career as a writer consistently relates the negative potential of a sexual relationship, *not* primarily to its occurrence outside the bonds of marriage (as the Church did), but to its occurrence outside the bonds of honour, and to its occurrence in an excessive and destructive form.

The idea that true wrong-doing in respect to a sexual relationship involves betrayal can be traced to Sayers' early study of the twelfth century Tristan of Thomas. (Her own complete translation of this work was published in 1929, in the midst of her writing of these eight novels, but she had published several portions of it earlier, in 1920.) Tristan's long, clandestine and adulterous affair with Iseult of Ireland, the wife of King Mark, is presented as a commitment which he is duty bound to honour, even though the relationship is, in essence, an illicit one. Sayers comments on the strange irony of this in her Introduction to the 1920 (Modern Languages) publication of her translation. She points out that Tristan's remorse over his ill-advised marriage to a different Iseult - Iseult of Brittany - reveals the poet's unique understanding of a faithfulness in love different from and beyond that expected in marriage:

He [the poet] has grasped the tragedy which broods over the destiny of the four lovers, and far from following that fashion in courtly love-poetry which reserved nothing but ridicule and hatred for the marriage-*lie*, he calls again and again on all true lovers to decide

Whether of these four loved the best  
Or whose grief was the bitterest.

His outlook is wide and humane, and though he decides that a man's duty to his true love should over-ride his duty to his wife, he is tender to all human affection. This wonderful passage in which he analyzes Tristan's self-deceiving over the marriage with Iseult of Brittany is no less admirable in its subtlety than in its noble conclusion when, the deed being



done, the sight of Iseult of Ireland's ring brings the reasoner instantly to his senses with the cry of the heart, "*I have sinned!*" . . . Thomas really was trying to express what no one had ever expressed before. (143-44)

The text of the poem clarifies why Tristan believes that he has sinned in marrying this woman. He had purposed to use the "amorous play" he would enjoy with his wife as a cure for his obsession with his married mistress, Iseult of Ireland. Even though his passion for the first Iseult is strongly physical, it is also spiritual. As such it is taken to be of a higher order than the legal and physical bond he would form by marrying and making love to Iseult of Brittany. His inner struggle over whether he should consummate his marriage is intense and complex because his obligation to his bride is in conflict with his oath of loyalty to his lover, Queen Iseult of Ireland. Lying in bed with his wife he refuses to yield to the pressure of physical desire; his prior commitment is stronger: "I must not break / Faith to my love for my lust's sake" (ll. 615-16). Paradoxically, Tristan's adulterous relationship with a married woman is presented as a form of honourable love, while sexual intercourse with his wife would involve the Sin of Lust.

The treatment of sexuality in this twelfth century poem and the treatment of sexuality in Sayers' novels remind us that the question of what constitutes sexual Sin is a very complex one. Sayers is clear on one point, that treachery and betrayal constitute a type of spiritual Sin which is far more deadly than simple fleshly indulgence. Sexual desire often becomes compounded with the cold-hearted spiritual Sins like Pride, particularly the sort of Pride which promotes treachery. Sayers does not underestimate the sinfulness of Lust when it is so self-centred that it results in some form of betrayal. Her novels show the "carnal" or "fleshly" Sin of Lust to be most destructive when it is associated with the more Deadly, "spiritual" Sins.

## WRATH

Wrath is a common emotion. Many of its occurrences in Sayers' early fiction involve straightforward anger in response to a real or imagined injury. The Sin of Wrath is second only to Avarice as a common motive for violent crime. When the emotional response to an offense is so great that it "blinds the judgement and suffocates the natural feelings and responses so that a man does not know what he is doing" (Purgatory 192) Wrath may give rise to criminal action such as murder. Such crimes, however, are among the easiest to detect because they are not likely to have been planned with cold cunning.

Anger is a major motivation in only one of Sayers' early novels - The Five Red Herrings. In this instance the death is finally revealed to be a case of manslaughter, rather than murder, because it was the result of spontaneous rage causing an accidental, rather than an intended, death. Clearly the motive of Wrath in its simplest form was not particularly compatible with the puzzling maze of motive, method, and opportunity that Sayers liked to create in her novels.<sup>16</sup>

The detective short story, however, requires a simpler puzzle. In her first two volumes of stories (published in 1928 and 1933) Sayers occasionally uses the revenge motive, in which a brooding, colder sort of Wrath inspires a premeditated crime. The best example of a subtly planned revenge occurs in the story called "Murder at Pentecost" in the 1933 volume Hangman's Holiday. The detective in this story is the wine and spirit salesman Montague Egg. The setting is Oxford, and the Master of Pentecost College has just been murdered. Mr. Egg gets drawn into the situation by fortuitously meeting a talkative undergraduate, and a peculiar old scholar named Temple. Temple has been known to the police and the Oxford public for the previous ten years as the self-proclaimed "sword of the Lord and of Gideon" who routinely confessed to every murder committed in the country. His constant visibility in Oxford, however, gives him an

obvious alibi each time - an alibi which he always admits when asked directly of his whereabouts. He has progressively built up a reputation for insanity and harmlessness. Nevertheless, Mr. Egg perceptively sees through the clever alibi he established for the time of day of the current crime. The truth is that Mr. Temple has carried out a long-planned vengeance on the atheistic and widely hated Master who caused him, many years before, to lose his place as a Fellow of Pentecost. Mr. Temple's disjointed response to the initial announcement of the Master's murder is a calculated piece of eccentricity. In retrospect, after the reader has become aware of his genuine guilt and the intense Wrath that motivated him for so many years, the words are spine-chilling:

Justice is slow but sure. Yes, yes. The sword of the Lord and of Gideon. But the blood - that is always so disconcerting, is it not? And yet, I washed my hands, you know. . . . Ah, yes - Greeby has paid the price of his sins. ("Murder at Pentecost")

The idea of Justice is an important part of the revenge motive. Sayers realized that Wrath arises out of a "love of justice perverted to revenge and spite" (*Purgatory* 67). Like Mr. Temple in "Murder at Pentecost" the angry individual feels justified in his destructive action because he sees it as a means of balancing accounts or reversing the injustice of what he has had to endure.

Another of Sayers' early short stories paints a striking picture of Wrath leading to murder. "The Unsolved Puzzle of the Man with No Face" is, as the title suggests, an unusual, open-ended story. A strangled body, with the face completely obliterated, has been found on a beach. The victim is soon identified, and several suspects are considered. The police have gotten hold of a suicide note left by a man thought to have been in love with the victim's girl friend, hence he is an obvious suspect and his death by suicide appears to them to be a tidy end to the case. The note is viewed as "practically" a confession, and the police are quick to assume that Lust and Envy motivated the crime.

However, from what he has discovered about the victim, and what he has seen in a remarkable portrait of him painted by a man who worked under him, Peter Wimsey has

identified a different motive and a different murderer. He believes that the murder was committed in rage when one man's intense hate for another coincided with their accidental meeting in a lonely place. The police solution seems too neat and easy in comparison with Wimsey's gripping theory, describing the genesis and growth of murderous Wrath:

... a man with a mean, sneering soul ... took all the credit for the work of the men under his charge, and he sneered and harassed them till they got inferiority complexes worse than his own. ... thought of getting this painter to paint his portrait. ... So the painter painted the portrait as he saw it, and he put the man's whole creeping, sneering, paltry soul on the canvas for everybody to see. ... [after painting it] he hates it with a new and more irritable hatred. ...

[Later the painter went on a holiday to] a beautiful little quiet spot he knew on the West Coast where nobody ever came. ... he swam round the end of the rocks ... and, as he came up from the sea, he saw a man standing on the beach - that beloved beach, remember, which he thought was his own sacred haven of peace. ... he saw that it was a face he knew. He knew every hated line in it, on that clear sunny morning. ... And then the man hailed him in his smug, mincing voice. ... He felt as if his last sanctuary had been invaded. He leaped at the lean throat. ... He felt his thumbs sink into the flesh he had painted. He saw, and laughed to see, the hateful familiarity of the features change and swell into an unrecognizable purple. ... He stretched out his hand, and found a broken bottle, with a good jagged edge. He went to work with a will, stamping and tearing away every trace of the face he knew and loathed. He blotted it out and destroyed it utterly. ("The Unsolved Puzzle of the Man with No Face")

Lord Peter believes he could prove his theory if he liked, but he chooses not to challenge the police - perhaps because his sympathies are with the murderer rather than with the victim.

The reader is free to interpret the story as an illustration of Peter Wimsey's wild imagination, but there is compelling credibility in the motive of Wrath. The policeman's patronizing amusement at Wimsey's extravagant elaboration of his hypothesis suggests that the prosaic, official mind is incapable of grasping the violent intensity to which the passion of Wrath can rise. Perhaps this was Sayers' point. By leaving the plot unresolved she underscores the discrepancy between the thinking of a person who has real insight into human psychology, and the thinking of those who try to fit criminal behaviour into neat boxes.

Wrath also occurs in less malignant forms in Sayers' early works. She observed, in "The Other Six Deadly Sins," that the English are different from the Celts in this respect, remarking that the English are not addicted to the Wrath of the impulsive, warm-hearted sort, but people of Celtic descent frequently are. The Celt, she says, tends to take pride in having a quick temper for he associates it with honour, and loyalty to his roots. He clings fiercely to "his ancient tribal savageries" and broods upon "the memory of ancient wrongs in a way that to the Englishman is incomprehensible" (Christian Letters 140).

This sort of hotheadedness is illustrated in The Five Red Herrings, a novel about the Scots, and about artists - two groups renowned for a temperamental disposition. The victim, Campbell, is a particularly bad-tempered Scot, and the book opens with him picking a fight in a pub - a ruckus of the sort Sayers described in her paper on the Sins. Campbell's antagonist is an Englishman named Waters and the subject is Scottish superiority. The next morning Campbell is dead. There are multiple suspects, however, because six artists - most of them with Scottish tempers - have a motive. It is the same motive, Wrath, in each case, for Campbell had been an infuriating man. The warm-hearted quality which accompanies the suspects' quick tempers is evidenced by the good will and co-operation which most of them display toward the investigation, particularly in regard to the elaborate enactment of the events leading up to the killing.

Campbell's death turns out to be the result of a fall during a quarrel with one of the suspects, Ferguson, and the complicated circumstances surrounding the finding of the body turn out to be the result of Ferguson's frightened cover-up attempt. He had reckoned that his chances of proving his innocence were slim, for he was known to have repeatedly threatened Campbell's life.

This is, in many respects, Sayers' most complicated plot, yet the death itself had a simple cause - a fight and a fall. All the complications arise because there are so many suspects, people given to anger and to provoking the anger of others, and there is a sense in which none of the suspects is completely innocent. All seem to have the potential for

murderous rage, but none is actually guilty of murder. The novel illustrates Sayers' description of Wrath as a Sin of the warm heart and quick spirit which is "usually very quickly repented of." She added, however, that "before that happens it may have wrought irreparable damage" ("The Other Six Deadly Sins" Christian Letters 141).

Certain forms of this Sin appear less warm-hearted. Sayers saw the subtle evil in the spirit of vindictiveness which masquerades as righteous indignation. An insidious sort of vindictiveness is apparent in the various sorts of prejudice which she condemns in her novels. Prejudice, like the Celtic predisposition to rage, is a response to a perceived threat or affront to the solidarity or supremacy of one's own group. Prejudice involves fear and Envy, but it also involves very definite animosity which is a form of Wrath. In Clouds of Witness the young socialists strongly resent the upper classes. In Unnatural Death strong prejudice against negroes is illustrated by Mrs. Timmins' description of the Rev. Hallelujah Dawson as a "nasty, DIRTY NIGGER . . . dressed up as a clergyman" (ch. XI).

In Strong Poison we meet another form of prejudice. The repressed rage that many men felt toward liberated women is represented in the attitudes of young men like Philip Boyes and his friend Ryland Vaughan, and older men like Mr. Pond, Norman Urquhart's clerk. Pond harps on the impracticality and unreliability of women, who he believes "were most adorable when they adorned and inspired and did not take an active part in affairs" (ch. VII).

Have His Carcase contains multiple references to the current paranoia about Bolsheviks, which was a variant form of the general prejudice against foreigners reflected in the report of the jury at the inquest:

We should like to add as we think the police regulations about foreigners did ought to be tightened up, like, deceased being a foreigner and suicides and murders being unpleasant in a place where so many visitors come in the summer. (Ch. XXI)

This seems like a laughable form of small-mindedness but there is incipient evil in it. Prejudice is the kind of Wrath which justifies attacking those who are perceived as a threat to the insularity of one's own group.

Sayers' early novels portray Wrath and the other Sins very convincingly, but the "competent delineation of character" is also apparent in the credible presentation of the contrasting Virtues. Meekness (or peace) is the Virtue which Dante's Purgatory sets up in opposition to Wrath. Those who, in Meekness, refuse to strike back, and who strive to promote peace and reconciliation are working against the spirit of Wrath. Because they represent the spirit of God in the world peacemakers are "blessed" and "called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Clergymen are often used by Sayers to demonstrate such goodness. In Unnatural Death the Rev. Mr. Tredgold is a calming influence, and the Rev. Hallelujah Dawson, the maligned cousin of the deceased, is a moving example of Christian Meekness and forgiveness.

Forgiveness is shown triumphing over Wrath in the deathbed scene in The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club. The old general and his long estranged sister demolish the wall of Anger and Pride built up over sixty years with the simple words, "I'm sorry, Felicity; forgive me," and "There's nothing to forgive" (ch. XIX). Similarly, in Strong Poison, an elderly person is shown relinquishing Wrath and embracing forgiveness. Mrs. Wrayburn's genuine will announces that rather than holding a grudge, as the phoney will fabricated by Urquhart had indicated, "the testatrix FORGIVES the ill-treatment meted out to her" (ch. XIX).

Wrath is identified as "warm-hearted" in Sayers' paper on the Deadly Sins. Her delineation of character in the early novels, however, indicates that Wrath cannot be viewed exclusively as a matter of quick temper, easily repented of, with no harm done. Sayers' fictional characters illustrate the subtle forms of this Sin, and its tendency to give rise to prolonged vindictiveness as potentially damning as any of the "spiritual" Sins. Very clearly, Wrath may occur in both warm-hearted and cold-hearted forms.

## GLUTTONY

It difficult to say exactly where the benign form of this tendency ends and the actual Sin of Gluttony begins. Twentieth century thinking has moved far way from the asceticism of the Middle Ages which saw all bodily delights and comforts as detriments to the spiritual life. The reluctance to condemn bodily appetites can, however, blind people to the fact that the enjoyment of food and drink can become excessive to the point where it takes precedence over the enjoyment of things of higher and more lasting value.

Sayers viewed Gluttony as a Sin which was not confined to physical appetites. She preferred to define it broadly as a general propensity toward self-indulgence. It includes fastidious interest in the subject of food, but from Sayers' perspective it also includes the desire for a higher and higher standard of living. "The Other Six Deadly Sins" focuses almost exclusively on this aspect of Gluttony - the gluttonous consumption of manufactured goods.

Sayers' first eight novels do not emphasize the negative sort of indulging of bodily appetites. In fact, the idea that Gluttony, in any sense of the word, is specifically sinful is not apparent in her early fiction. Nevertheless, these novels do shed light on her later view of Gluttony.

The theology of Seven Deadly Sins includes the understanding that certain positive human traits have the potential of becoming Sins. A careful attitude toward money, an appreciation for good food, and a desire to match the accomplishments of others may, respectively, develop into the Sins of Avarice, Gluttony, and Envy. The tendency which has the *potential* to become gluttonous self-indulgence is a prominent trait in Peter Wimsey. The enjoyment of fine food, expensive wine, beautiful clothes, elegant furnishings, and bodily comfort generally is part of his lifestyle. Sayers tempers the



impression of excessive self-indulgence with a few allusions to Peter's periods of "roughing it" during his work for the Foreign Office, and with her hero's readiness to inconvenience himself physically in order to investigate a crime. However, Lord Peter's right to a lead a relatively pampered life is not seriously questioned.

In *Whose Body?* Detective Parker's eagerness in responding to an invitation to Lord Peter's flat is not because of his interest in further discussion of the investigation, but because Bunter's mention of breakfast arouses his interest in something much more rudimentary:

If the odour of kidneys and bacon had been wafted along the [telephone] wire, Mr. Parker could not have experienced a more vivid sense of consolation. . . .

A 19 bus deposited him in Piccadilly only fifteen minutes later than his rather sanguine impulse had promoted him to suggest, and Mr. Bunter served him with glorious food, incomparable coffee, and the *Daily Mail* before a blazing fire of wood and coal. A distant voice singing the 'et iterum venturus est' from Bach's Mass in B minor . . . presently Lord Peter roamed in, moist and verberna scented, in a bath-robe cheerfully patterned with unnaturally variegated peacocks. (Ch. V)

The passage recreates the sort of sensuous enjoyment which people of Lord Peter's class could afford. Wimsey has the refinement of taste to appreciate fully both luxuries of the highest order, and the homiest sort of comforts. All of the bodily senses are appealed to in this scene; wonderful food is part of the totality of physical comfort. There is no implication of excessiveness or selfishness in this early portrait of Lord Peter's lifestyle. For Parker, whose home life involves an "inconvenient flat," an incompetent housekeeper, and miserable food, Lord Peter's friendship provides a welcome haven on a beastly morning of "raw fog," before he sets out on a typical day of "arduous and inconclusive labour" as a police investigator. The unfair distribution of wealth is apparent, but it is not an issue. Lord Peter's privileged life is pictured not as an affront to the working classes but as a flash of munificent beauty in an ugly world. As Sayers recounts in her essay "How I Came to Invent the Character of Lord Peter," his affluence was the direct outcome of her own poverty:

I deliberately gave him ... [his large income]. After all it cost me nothing and at that time I was particularly hard up and it gave me pleasure to spend his fortune for him. When I was dissatisfied with my single unfurnished room I took a luxurious flat for him in Piccadilly. When my cheap rug got a hole in it, I ordered him a Aubusson carpet. ... I can heartily recommend this inexpensive way of furnishing to all who are discontented with their incomes. It relieves the mind and does no harm to anybody. (1)

Throughout Sayers' novels Lord Peter's reputation as a connoisseur of food and wine is consistently developed. In Clouds of Witness good food again represents the pleasant quality of upper class life. The meal served at Mr. Murbles' rooms was enhanced by the old-fashioned elegance of the setting and the discriminating choice of claret (ch. X). In Unnatural Death food is specifically recognized as a "beloved subject" of Lord Peter's (ch. XIV). The Five Red Herrings also contains a number of references to Lord Peter's enjoyment of Bunter's culinary prowess; in the midst of complex criminal investigations he is not oblivious to the delights of savoury stew, cheese souffle, grilled steak, and rhubarb tart.

In The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club Marjorie Phelps connects the fact that Peter's mind "always turns on eating and drinking" with her opinion that he is one of the "nicest" people she knows (ch. X), and she describes him to others as "an authority on food" (ch. XXI). Yet Marjorie's enjoyment of Peter's company is based not only on the good food he often treats her to (food which her *arty* friends would not be generous enough or rich enough to provide), but also on her appreciation of his personal qualities. His ability to wine and dine his friends elegantly is not the means by which he secures their esteem and loyalty.

Lord Peter is, in fact, able to see the humour in taking food too seriously. He lightens a heavy discussion by introducing the digestive process as an example of "beastly" things one must put up with:

Sometimes when I think of what's happening inside me to a beautiful supreme de sole, with the caviar in boats, and the croutons and the jolly little twists of potato and all the gadgets - I could cry. But there it is, don't you know. (The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club Ch. XX)

In two of the first eight novels there is a noticeable lack of reference to Lord Peter's interest in food. In Strong Poison and in Have His Carcase his lighthearted enjoyment of life is diminished and so is his preoccupation with some of the trivial things that delighted him in other books. His more somber mood in these novels is due to his sincere desire to win Harriet's love. This subtle alteration in Peter's attitude toward life suggests that when a higher and more permanent good becomes a person's central focus things which were earlier sources of delight tend to fade into unimportance.

Food is occasionally significant in the lives of other characters. It is associated directly with evil in the two novels in which murder is the result of poisoning. In neither of these cases is the Sin of Gluttony suggested as a significant factor leading up to the crime, yet in both books a preoccupation with food is shown in an increasingly negative light as the story progresses. Both poisonings depend, at least in part, on a character's attitude toward food.

In The Documents in the Case cookery is described as "a very important creative art" (document no. 27), and as "one of the subtlest and most severely intellectual of the arts" (document no. 37), especially from the viewpoint of Mr. Harrison, the mushroom expert who becomes the victim of poisoning. The poison is finally proved not to be that of poisonous mushrooms, but a synthetic substance with the same molecular structure. Harrison's preoccupation with his cooking and his study of mushrooms seems harmless at first, but in the end it is revealed as an obsession - an obsession which makes him oblivious to the failure of his marriage, and blind and vulnerable to the scheme of the man who continued a pretense of friendship in order to murder him.

The only obvious example of gluttonous indulgence in association with real villainy in a novel of Sayers' occurs in Strong Poison. The murderer, a lawyer named Urquhart, has such a sweet tooth that he "keeps stores of chocolate cream and Turkish delight in his desk, which he surreptitiously munches on while he is dictating" (ch. XI). He shows considerable concern for gastronomic matters. His fastidiousness about his meals is

verified by his kitchen staff. It is especially apparent in the arrangements surrounding the meal which he ate with his cousin on the evening when the latter was poisoned. His meticulous care to insure that every item of food consumed was accounted for, and shared by at least two people, was the first observable sign of his guilt.

The grotesque culmination of Urquhart's weakness for food comes in the final confrontation scene with Lord Peter. Urquhart's concern with elegant fare has, up to this point, borne some resemblance to Wimsey's own gourmet interests. (His taste for extremely sweet things, however, suggests he may not be a genuine gourmet, and that his preciseness about the preparation and serving of his last meal with Boyes had an ulterior motive.) In this scene his interest in food is revealed as little more than a crude form of Gluttony. On being served that "nauseating mess called Turkish delight which not only gluts the palate and glues the teeth, but also smothers the consumer in a floury cloud of white sugar . . . Urquhart immediately plugged his mouth with a large lump of it" (ch. XXII). Wimsey slowly reviews the case and finally, after an hour and a half, directly accuses Urquhart of making himself immune to arsenic so that he could poison his cousin. The accusation is clinched by a trick:

[Wimsey announces] 'That disgusting sweetmeat on which you have been gorging yourself in, I may say, a manner wholly unsuited to your age and position, is smothered in white arsenic. . . . If arsenic can harm you, you should have been rolling about in agonies for the last hour.'  
'You devil!' (Ch. XXII)

The candy is not actually poisoned, but the pretense serves to provoke a confession. The episode focuses attention on the repulsiveness of uncontrolled appetite, and links it with a particular kind of villainy which is self-pampering and viciously destructive - destructive both to one's own health and to the well-being of others.

There is interesting symbolism in the fact that the man who murders by poison had to become first a self-poisoner. The arsenic which Urquhart imbibed did in fact eventually kill him - not directly, but indirectly. He was systematic about everything that

he consumed, even down to the 'safe number' of grains of poison, yet in the final analysis it was his consumption of a deadly substance which brought about his death.

Temperance, the opposing Virtue to Gluttony, is apparent in a number of Sayers' characters. Miss Climpson's ability to stand firm against the pressure to conform to the opinion of the other jurors (Strong Poison) is due not merely to her moral fiber. It also represents a sort of physical toughness developed by the rigors of a disciplined life: "Miss Climpson . . . said that, in a righteous cause, a little personal discomfort was a trifle, and added that her religion had trained her to fasting" (ch. IV). The clergymen in these early novels were, similarly, men who understood the value of restraint and self-denial. They did not, however, carry asceticism to the extreme of viewing good food and drink as incompatible with the spiritual life. In The Documents in the Case the Reverend Mr. Perry's approach to this matter is as sound and reasonable as his views on other subjects. Munting describes a meal at his home:

The dinner was satisfying. A vast beef-steak pudding, an apple pie of corresponding size, and tankards of beers, quaffed from Perry's old rowing cups, put us all into a mellow humour. Perry's asceticism did not, I am thankful to say, take the form of tough hash and lemonade, in spite of the presence on his walls of a series of melancholy Arundel prints, portraying brown and skinny anchorites, apparently nourished on cabbage-water. It rather tended to the idea of: 'Beef, noise, the Church, vulgarity and beer.' (Document no. 52)

Sayers was not particularly concerned about the Sin of Gluttony in the purely physical sense. As we have seen, her condemnation of Gluttony in her paper on the Deadly Sins is based on a broader definition of it. She saw real evil in the mass brainwashing of the public: "every citizen is encouraged to consider more, and more complicated, luxuries necessary to his well-being" ("The Other Six Deadly Sins" Christian Letters 142). This concern, expressed in 1941, is not reflected in the way she depicted the upper class characters in her novels of the 1920s. It seems unlikely that she would have made a connection, even in retrospect, between the two different sorts of self-indulgence. The middle class greed for more and more material things which she

saw as a spiritual problem in 1941 seems to belong to a world which is very different from the world of her earlier fiction in which she allowed Lord Peter to wallow unashamedly in all of the 'finer things' of life.

A truly gluttonous person is the sort who would, both literally and figuratively, take the food out of another person's mouth, but this Sin rarely becomes a social problem. Gluttony does not rank high among the Sins which contribute to the complicated plots of crime stories because, ultimately, the Sin of Gluttony is a Sin against oneself. It can, however, become a very disturbing issue, as we will see in the next chapter when we look at Murder Must Advertise.

## AVARICE

The Sins we have just considered are those that Dorothy Sayers called warm-hearted - the Sins of "the common man." In their simplest forms they are associated with victims more than with villains. With Avarice we move into the area of the cold-hearted Sins, those which tend to involve the exploitation of others. These Sins are especially apparent in Sayers' genuinely criminal characters.

The Sin of Avarice is the love of money. It is well known to be "a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10, New International Version), and it is probably the most common motive for crime. It is, however, one of the least interesting of motives, and is therefore not very appealing to a detective writer who plans her plot as an intellectual puzzle.

In an undated, unpublished paper called "The Craft of Detective Fiction II," Sayers observed that readers were becoming so clever that writers had to increase progressively the level of complexity of the crimes (Wade ms.). The motive of Avarice usually needs to be well masked for once such a motive is known the criminal can generally be

identified as well. If the criminal is to profit directly from the victim's death it generally involves immediate robbery of the deceased (a most prosaic crime) or inheriting money from him - a situation which tends to narrow the field of suspects quite rapidly. The criminal is too easy to identify if the motive is obvious. The greed motive is less apparent if it can be arranged that the murderer will profit in some indirect way from the victim's death.

Nevertheless, in four of the eight Sayers novels written between 1923 and 1932, Avarice is the main motive of the criminal. Sayers manages to disguise the money motive, or so combine it with other Sins and motives that even the cleverest of readers cannot at first detect it. In each case the murderer is a cold-blooded, calculating individual who seems to value nothing except what can be assessed in monetary terms.

In Unnatural Death the investigators focus on the guilty suspect, Mary Whittaker, quite early in the story because she is the only person who has had both opportunity to commit the murder, and also a generalized sort of motive. Her precise motive, however, is puzzling for some time. It seems as though it must be Avarice, but it is unclear why the murder of an aunt, who was dying in any case, would benefit her. Her aunt had refused to make a will, but Miss Whittaker appeared to be the only next-of-kin who could receive the property. Legal complications involving new legislation regarding inheritance, and the turning up of the 'distant relative from overseas,' eventually make it clear that by hastening the old lady's death Miss Whittaker was indeed increasing her likelihood of acquiring her aunt's wealth. The ingenious and puzzling part of the plot in this novel is not, however, the motive of the criminal, but her unusual method of committing the murder. Greed is not a very difficult motive to understand, and consequently Sayers does not emphasize this aspect of Mary Whittaker's character. She does, however, present the Avarice as part of a complexity of wickedness which is extremely intense and deliberate.

Have His Carcase is another novel in which Avarice is the motive of the criminal. Henry Weldon murders his mother's fiancé because her will has been rewritten in the fiancé's favour, practically cutting Weldon out. His mother's unfairness to him in this decision is an important factor contributing to the crime. Nevertheless, Weldon - whose Lust has already been noted - is a genuine villain, a man who exhibits a number of the Deadly Sins. His main motive, however, is Avarice. The crude offensiveness we observed in association with his lustful tendencies is also apparent in the conversations which reveal his preoccupation with money. Peter tells Harriet about Weldon's insulting insinuation that Peter's interest in the case is motivated by greed:

Weldon went out of his way in the bar this evening to be as offensive as possible, without using actual violence or bad language. He informed me in an indirect but unmistakable manner, that I was poking my nose in where I was not wanted, exploiting his mother for my private ends and probably sucking up to her for her money. (Ch. XII)

Later Weldon tries to project his own greed on to Harriet as well:

I rather wanted to find out what the girl ... was after. When your mother's pretty well off, don't you see, you rather get the idea that people are looking out to make a bit out of her. (Ch. XIX)

Weldon is a character without redeeming features; he is almost a caricature of the coarse, self-absorbed, and stupid individual who becomes a criminal because of the Sin of Avarice.

In both The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club and Strong Poison the villains are also motivated by Avarice. Their greed is clearly identified, but not fully described. In the former book Penberthy "wanted money" because he was "sick of being poor" (ch. XX). The cold-hearted nature of his Avarice is reflected in his treatment of Ann Dorland. He first encourages an emotional attachment in a desire to acquire money through her inheritance and then throws her aside in an attempt to avoid suspicion. His character is not as black, however, as that of the other villains who are guilty of Avarice. His conversation with Wimsey after he knows he has been found out reveals a measure of decency; he agrees to write out a full confession which will clear Ann Dorland from



any implication in the murder. Nevertheless, his attempt to justify himself shows his complete self-centredness. Pride is revealed as the root of his cold-hearted sinfulness:

... if ever a man had rotten luck ... should have got my half-million, and Ann Dorland would have got a perfectly good husband. ... Mind you she did sicken me a bit. ... I never meant to get into all this rotten way of doing things - it was just self-defense. Still I don't care a damn about having killed the old man. I could have made better use of the money than Robert Fentiman. (Ch. XXII)

The villainy of Urquhart in Strong Poison is similarly cold and calculating. His employees are treated in a demanding, arrogant manner; his housemaid fairly judges that he would have taken no interest in his dying great aunt if she had not been rich (ch. IX); and his manicurist expresses her resentment by calling him "a stingy pig" (ch. XXI).

Avarice is not only a characteristic of criminals in Sayers' novels; it is also apparent in the lives of minor characters whose greed contributes to the plot in a specific way. In Clouds of Witness Lady Mary (Peter Wimsey's sister) has a suitor whose strong disapproval of "inherited property" does not diminish his aspiration to marry her and live on her money. Her attempt to elope with this predatory individual causes one of the major complications in the plot. A more important effect of Avarice in the same novel results from the greed of Denis Cathcart's French mistress whose selfish pursuit of wealth causes her to desert him, thus precipitating his tragic death by suicide. The greed of the housekeeper, Mrs. Cutts, in The Documents in the Case, causes her to steal and sell the crucial letters which otherwise would never have come into the hands of those investigating the crime. The inheritance on which the crime is based in Strong Poison is wealth accrued by a shrewd and grasping woman whose beauty was her passport to affluence:

She took everything - money, jewels ... and turned it into good consolidated funds. She was never prodigal of anything except her person. ... She had those tight little hands, plump and narrow, that give nothing away - except for cash down. (Ch. XI)

In Have His Carcase, too, the greed of the murderer is not the only instance of Avarice which contributes to the plot. The victim is also influenced by a desire for

money. Paul Alexis provokes his own murder by agreeing to marry a rich woman some thirty years his senior. His friends frankly admit that money was the only motive for his involvement with Mrs. Weldon.

In "The Other Six Deadly Sins" Sayers describes a type of Avarice which is completely different from the straightforward kind of greed which forms the negative impetus in many of her early novels. In this later context she condemns two different forms of Avarice which are more subtle. One of these is the ruthless business Enterprise which is hailed as a great Virtue in the modern world, and often winked at by the Church (Christian Letters 146). This form of Avarice is alluded to several times in her early novels. In Clouds of Witness corruption in advertising is noted briefly in the reference to the court case involving a firm which professed to "cure fifty-nine different diseases with the same pill" (ch. X). In Unnatural Death Lord Peter alludes to a "little private program" [sic] of his own which apparently involves investigation of and legal proceedings against money-lenders who oppress the poor (ch. III).

Another subtle form of Avarice condemned in Sayers' paper on the Sins is the admiration of the rich simply because they are rich, rather than because the work by which they made their money is good work (146). The scriptures stress the sinfulness of such an attitude:

For if there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place, and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool; Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and become judges of evil thoughts? (James 2:2-4)

There are numerous instances of people who show deference to Lord Peter Wimsey simply because of his wealth. In Have His Carcase Harriet's display of a "well-filled note case," and the revelation of the fact that she is a "friend of Lord Peter Wimsey" (deliberately mentioned by the police inspector, as an appeal to snobbery) result in a complete reversal of attitude on the part of the hotel staff.

Sayers' positive characters, however, refuse to be awed and manipulated by wealth. People of genuine integrity respect and assist Peter because of his personal qualities and the value of what he is doing, not because of the power that his money represents.

Liberality is the Virtue contrasted with the Sin of Avarice in Dante's Purgatory. Used in this way it has essentially the same meaning as the word "generosity," and suggests the ideas of openhandedness and unrestrained giving. Lord Peter certainly displays this quality, but generosity is not especially impressive in a man so rich. The characters of more humble means like Miss Climpson and Inspector Parker who diligently labour, unconcerned about financial gain, are among Sayers' best examples of the Virtue which stands in stark opposition to the Sin of Avarice.

## ENVY

"The Other Six Deadly Sins" describes Envy as the Sin which "hates to see other men happy" (149). It is roughly equivalent to jealousy, and appears to be a relatively clear-cut Vice, yet it is difficult to examine any case of Envy closely without noticing the way it overlaps with one of the other Deadly Sins.

Sayers speaks of it as going "hand in hand with covetousness" (149) or Avarice. The envious individual covets the advantages of others, and if he cannot have them he may seek to destroy them. The social climber and the snob are motivated by this sinful tendency. Envy is most commonly "the Sin of the Have-Nots," and therefore it is often tolerated and excused by those who are concerned about the disadvantages of the lower classes.

The resentment associated with Envy brings it into close relationship with the Sin of Wrath. Lord Peter is sometimes the butt of anger which is not essentially directed against him as a person, but against the privileged upper classes generally.

This form of Envy is not, however, a concern of Sayers' early novels. It is the Envy which occurs in the context of a "love" relationship which appears most noticeably as a recurring theme. She describes it in "The Other Six Deadly Sins":

In love, Envy is cruel, jealous, and possessive. My friend and my married partner must be wholly wrapped up in me, and must find no interests outside me. That is my right. No person, no work, no hobby must rob me of any part of that right. If we cannot be happy together, we will be unhappy together - but there must be no escape into pleasures that I cannot share. (149)

In Unnatural Death Miss Climpson tries to explain the dangers of a demanding possessive sort of friendship to a young girl enthralled by the predatory Mary Whittaker. Miss Climpson warns of the destructiveness of jealousy: "... jealousy is the most fatal of feelings. The Bible calls it 'cruel as the grave,' and I'm sure that is so" (ch. XVI). Later she recognizes that the relationship between the girl and Miss Whittaker had been indeed the sort of jealous friendship which she had feared:

Miss Climpson had little difficulty in reconstructing one of those hateful and passionate 'scenes' of slighted jealousy with which a woman-ridden life had made her only too familiar. 'I do everything for you - you don't care a bit for me - you treat me cruelly - you're simply sick of me, that's what it is!' ... Humiliating, degrading, exhausting, beastly scenes ... swamping all decent self-respect. Barre: quarrels ending in shame and hatred. (Ch. XXII)

The Envy that often arises in male-female relationships, however, is the form that concerned Sayers most. Jealousy in the sense of sexual possessiveness is more straightforward than the jealousy, or Envy, which causes a person to begrudge the achievements and self reliance of his spouse, or the status and privileges of the opposite sex generally. Sexually based jealousy is, nevertheless, often associated with this broader form of Envy between men and woman for it seeks to set limits on another person. The husband who is sexually possessive begrudges his wife any friendly contact with other men; he would prefer to see her socially isolated in her devotion to him than to see her happily interacting with a variety of friends of both sexes.

Sexually based Envy occurs in several of Sayers' novels. In Whose Body? it is the root cause of the murderous hatred which Julian Freke has toward the man for whom his sweetheart left him. He admits that it was the thwarting of his sexual desire for this particular young woman which gave rise to his "original sensual impulse to kill Sir Reuben Levy" (ch. XIII) - an impulse which became a firm determination and resulted in murder several decades later. Freke's feeling toward Levy is an intense form of evil which grew beyond simple sexual jealousy to become an extreme example of Envy - the Sin which hates to see other men happy.

In Sayers' second novel, Clouds of Witness, sexually based Envy occurs as the more usual sort of male jealousy. It influences the action in two ways. The entire mystery is connected with the death of Denis Cathcart who, it is eventually discovered, has died by his own hand. Cathcart's jealousy and desolation over the fact that his mistress had left him for another man led to his suicide. In the same book complications arise from Mrs. Grimethorpe's fear of her violently jealous husband. In The Five Red Herrings there is a less extreme case of a jealous husband: Hugh Farren becomes one of the suspects because his jealousy is seen as a possible motive for the crime.

The Envy which is caused by resentment of the status or privileges of the opposite sex is apparent in way a number of Sayers' male characters view women. Miss Climpson interprets men's condescending attitude toward women as a form of Envy:

I think men are apt to be *jealous* of women . . . and jealousy *does* make people rather *peevish* and *ill-mannered*. I suppose that when one would *like* to despise a set of people and yet has a horrid suspicion that one *can't* genuinely despise them, it makes one *exaggerate* one's contempt for them in conversation. That is why . . . I am always *very* careful not to speak sneeringly about men - even though they *often* *deserve* it, you know. But if I did, everybody would think I was an *envious old maid*, wouldn't they?  
(Unnatural Death Ch. XVI)

Because of the overlap of Envy and Wrath in the phenomena of male prejudice against women, Sayers' chief examples of it in the early novels have already been mentioned in the section on prejudice as a form of Wrath.

The Envy which is manifested in a resentful and demanding male-female relationship is very similar to the suffocating type of friendship Miss Climpson recognized in the relationship between Miss Whittaker and her young friend. This is the form of Envy which Sayers depicts most frequently in her early fiction. Philip Boyes resented the fact that Harriet's books were more successful than his own. He expected abject devotion from her. His demeaning attitude is clear in the way he explains to his father his decision to marry her: "My young woman is a good little soul . . . she really deserves it" (Strong Poison ch. VI). Philip's treatment leaves Harriet bitter and cynical. She suspects that no man, not even well-meaning Peter Wimsey, could really give a woman a "square deal" (ch. XI).

The tendency of many husbands to resent the achievements of their wives and to ignore or abuse their personal rights is a marriage problem which Sayers confronts over and over again in her fictional characters. It is a manifestation of the Sin of Envy, which resents the happiness of another person.

In The Documents in the Case Munting struggles with the frightening apprehension that no marriage can be really free of this Deadly Sin. He tries to exorcise it by facing it openly in his letters to his fiancée:

When I say I am not jealous, either of your work or your friends, I am lying. . . . I shall be reticent, inconsistent, selfish and jealous. I shall put my interests before yours, and the slightest suggestion that I should put myself out to give you peace and quietness to work in will wound my self-importance. (Document no. 13)

What, in God's name, are you going to do with me if I get jealous and suspicious? Or I with you, if it happens that way? I ask this in damn sober earnest, old girl. I've got the thing right under my eyes here, and I know perfectly well that no agreement and no promise made before marriage will stand up for a single moment if either of us gets that ugly bug into the blood. (Document no. 28)

The "thing" that he has right under his eyes is the Harrisons' terrible marriage. Harrison is a man of great sincerity and noble intentions. He speaks, and perhaps even thinks, glowingly of his wife, but his treatment of her is narrow, jealous and nagging.

Munting recognizes that it is his wife's personal life that Harrison is jealous of: "her office, her interests, the friends she had made for herself - everything that had not come to her through him" (document no. 37).

A milder form of the same sort of jealousy in a marriage occurs in The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club. George Fentiman's resentment of his wife's ability to earn money is revealed in the opening scene, and it continues to be his most dominant trait throughout the novel. Even his elderly grandfather notices and condemns his unpleasant treatment of Sheila, his wife. The fact that his inability to work is due to illness, and the fact that Sheila is loving and sensitive to his feelings, do not seem to lessen the intensity of this jealousy. His Sin is not as offensive as Harrison's simply because he recognizes the genuine value of his wife and the unfairness of his Envy even though he is not able to overcome his negative emotions.

When sexual jealousy is involved the Sin of Envy may lead to the murder of spouses. This murder motive does not occur in any of Sayers' novels, but it is used in two of her short stories. In "The Footsteps that Ran" the murderer's wife is a "lovely little woman" and very fond of him, but other men seem to find her attractive as well. At the end of the story Bunter asks what the man's motive might have been for murdering her. Lord Peter refers to the insight on jealousy given in the Song of Solomon, and Bunter quotes the passage alluded to - the same one Miss Climpson quoted: "Jealousy is as cruel as the grave" (Song of Solomon 8:6).

In the story "Nebuchadnezzar"<sup>17</sup> a man's guilty conscience causes him to panic during a party game involving role playing. He suspects his friends of using the game to reveal subtly that they know of his crime, so he breaks down and confesses that he poisoned his wife, a fun-loving girl who had left her home and friends to be with him. The motive of jealousy is conveyed through his erratic thoughts. He remembers how her happy singing bothered him, how he found seemingly incriminating letters (apparently from a male friend), how he callously fed her poison, how he kissed her, and then

watched her panic and die. In both stories it seems almost beyond reason that such a crime could be committed against one's wife without clear evidence of unfaithfulness. Perhaps the scriptural passage quoted by Miss Climpson and Bunter offers the only explanation: "Jealousy *is* as cruel as the grave."

Such Envy between men and women is not confined to fiction. In 1936 Sayers contributed an account of an actual unsolved case of brutal murder to a volume entitled The Anatomy of Murder. The husband's guilt was never proven - he had no apparent motive except the obvious one, as Sayers explains:

A caustic judge once expressed the opinion that . . . in the case of a married couple, there was no need to look for the motive for murder, since marriage was a motive in itself. . . . Since nobody else could be shown to have any motive for murdering Mrs. Wallace, the murderer must be the husband, since after all he was her husband, and so had his motive ready made. (160)

Throughout her novels, nonetheless, Sayers gradually builds a very positive contrast to the Envy-ridden sort of marriage. Her definition of a good marriage will be examined in depth when we look at Busman's Honeymoon. She begins her treatment of this theme, however, in her description of the marriage of Munting and Bungie (The Documents in the Case), and her references to the pre-matrimonial relationship of Ann Dorland and Robert Fentiman (The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club), and of Lady Mary and Inspector Parker (Strong Poison).

The positive quality which stands in direct contrast to Envy is the Virtue of Mercy. Mercy, or compassion, causes a person to be saddened by another's misfortune, rather than be saddened by another's good fortune and delighted by his misfortune, as the envious are. Many of Sayers' characters, particularly her clergymen, exhibit the trait of Mercy. A striking example occurs in Strong Poison. The Reverend Mr. Boyes, father of the young man Harriet Vane is accused of murdering, says "even if she were guilty, it would give me great pain to see her suffer the penalty" (ch. VI).



## SLOTH

"The Other Six Deadly Sins" describes Sloth as "the accomplice of the other sins and their worst punishment" (152). This Sin is sometimes difficult to identify because it is so often accompanied by other Sins. It may serve to mask another of the root Sins, but more often it is masked by them (153). It can involve physical lethargy, but Sloth, as a Deadly Sin, has much more to do with spiritual and moral apathy. Sayers identifies Sloth with the "refusal to take sides" which the world calls Tolerance, but which is in fact an inner numbness that develops into deadness of soul which "in hell is called Despair" (152).

Sloth exists, as do all the Sins, as both a tendency in ordinary, relatively virtuous people, and a serious Sin in very unpleasant people. With Sloth, however, it is especially hard to distinguish firmly between benign cases and malignant ones because it is such an internal disease and because its destructive power is not always immediately apparent.

Sloth is not in itself a motive for violent crime. Its deadly slow-working poison operates inwardly, rather than outwardly, but it may be a broad phenomenon with widespread effects. Other sinful tendencies are often valiantly defeated, but the victim of Sloth generally lacks the spiritual energy to break free of it. Sayers observed that it may be true to say that "the great, sprawling, lethargic sin of Sloth is the oldest and greatest of the sins and the parent of all the rest" (153).

The crime of criminal negligence which arises from Sloth is unlikely subject matter for a detective novel. Even though most forms of Sloth do not promote active evil, their passive influence may result in destructive effects which are outwardly observable. In the course of her first eight novels Sayers depicts Sloth in varying degrees, and suggests the genuine destructiveness which lies hidden in this passive but Deadly Sin.

The Five Red Herrings contains an entertaining description of the slowness of rural trains, and the casual attitude toward schedules which (exaggerated in Lord Peter's imagination) permits engine drivers and guards to leave the platform and stroll about inspecting the size of vegetables in nearby gardens (Chapter entitled "Lord Peter Wimsey"). This easy-going quality of rural life may look like simple Sloth to the urbanite, but Sayers views it as a positive quality. It allows a person to develop the sort of contemplativeness which goes hand in hand with spiritual health. George MacDonald said, "There is such a thing as sacred idleness, the cultivation of which is now fearfully neglected" (Wilfred Cumbermeade ch. 55, quoted in George MacDonald: An Anthology 153).

The apparent similarity, yet essential difference, between this healthy capacity for calmness and the empty passivity of Sloth is very significant, for Sloth, and indeed each of the Sins, may be seen as a perversion of a Virtue, as Sayers explains in her commentary on Purgatory (66).

Idleness in the rich *may* be accompanied by valuable contemplation, and there are overtones of this quality in the descriptions of Peter Wimsey's use of his leisure. More often, however, such idleness is associated with decadence. Lord Peter's comparatively positive image is accounted for by the fact that he is known to be a lord who *does something* (Have His Carcase ch. XXIII). Frequently, however, he assumes a stance of slothful idleness to serve as a cover for his investigations. Idle curiosity may seem like reason enough for asking questions if one is thought to be a bored aristocrat. In The Five Red Herrings Peter explains his annoying tendency to hang around watching the artists as a form of the simple love of idleness found in all classes:

'I do wish, Wimsey,' said Waters, irritably, 'you would get something to do. Why not go fishing, or take the car out for a run? I can't paint properly with you snooping around all the time. It puts me off my stroke.'

'I'm sorry,' said Wimsey. 'It fascinates me. I think the most joyous thing in life is to loaf around and watch another bloke doing a job of work. Look how popular the men are who dig up London with electric drills. Duke's son, cook's son, son of a hundred kings - people will stand

there for hours on end, with their ear-drums splitting - why? Simply for the pleasure of being idle while other people work.' (Chapter entitled "Graham's Story")

The conversation proceeds, however, to the question of whether a person could stand by and watch the work of detecting. Wimsey offers, "You can watch me now. There's no charge." Suddenly the facade of idleness explodes and Waters realizes with a shock that if he could "take the top of Peter's head off" he would "see the wheels whizzing around." Genuine idleness is difficult to detect from externals only.

Sayers spoke of "the empty heart, the empty brain, and the empty soul" of Sloth ("The Other Six Deadly Sins" 153), and drew particular attention to the empty brain:

Sloth is in a conspiracy with Envy to prevent people from thinking. Sloth persuades us that stupidity is not our sin, but our misfortune; while Envy at the same time persuades us that intelligence is despicable. (153)

It may seem unfair to hold people morally responsible for an apparently inherited trait like stupidity, but Sayers was not talking about simple intellectual slowness. She was attacking an attitude - the *willful* stupidity which rejects the value of mental acuteness. Many people begin with the disadvantage of limited mental ability; they can, however, choose to stretch the ability they do have to its full capacity. The kind of stupidity Sayers addresses here is a choice. The refusal to think and learn and strive is the Sin of Sloth.

The poor thinkers among Sayers' characters are not necessarily offensive. Mr. Thipps in Whose Body? is an example of one of the many minor characters in the novels whose simplemindedness is merely comic. The policemen in some of the stories are also comically obtuse. This sort of character is, however, too shallow for the stupidity to be analyzed and assessed in relation to the Sin of mental Sloth. They are usually presented as innocent, rather than perverse, in their lack of intelligent insight.

Some of Sayers' fictional characters with relatively "empty brains" are less innocent and harmless. Certain female characters show an extreme of gullibility which has very serious potential. The gullibility and idleness of rich, self-absorbed women is

represented by Mrs. Weldon in Have His Carcase. We have already observed how the combination of Lust and Sloth in her predatory tendency contributed to Paul Alexis' tragic death. Mrs. Wrayburn's nurse in Strong Poison is stupidly susceptible to the trickery of charlatans who pose as mediums. (In this instance the gullibility is advantageous to the investigation for it allows Miss Climpson to manipulate her to get needed information.) Lack of critical thinking places a person in a vulnerable position. Both these women are highly susceptible to the abuse of avaricious people largely because they are not thinkers. Their mental Sloth is potentially harmful to others as well as to themselves.

The only real villain in Sayers' early fiction who is actually stupid is Henry Weldon (Have His Carcase). Wimsey is fascinated by his obtuseness, and proceeds to present him with a series of seemingly sequential statements which force him to agree to a conclusion he previously opposed:

Mr. Weldon grappled for some moments with this surprising piece of logic, but failed to detect either the *petitio eleuchi*, the undistributed middle or the inaccurate major premise which it contrived to combine. His face cleared.

'Of course,' he said. 'Yes, I see that. Obviously it must have been suicide, and Miss Vane's evidence proves that it was. So she must be right after all.'

This was a syllogistic monstrosity worse than the last, thought Wimsey. A man who could reason like that could not reason at all. He constructed a new syllogism for himself.

*The man who committed this murder was not a fool.*

*Weldon is a fool.*

*Therefore Weldon did not commit this murder.* (Ch. XXI)

The logic is sound, but one of the presuppositions of the first statement is false: a murder need not be committed by a single individual - a fool may be assisted by cleverer people, as Weldon was. Nevertheless, Peter's line of thought makes clear why stupidly slothful people do not usually appear as villains in detective stories.

Sloth is also the Sin of the "empty heart" and the "empty soul." Sayers' commentary on Purgatory makes a connection between Sloth and a failure or insufficiency in love (67). In Clouds of Witness Cathcart's mistress, Simone, is such a spiritually deficient

person - a person of "empty heart" and "empty soul." Cathcart's farewell letter written just before his suicide acknowledges her callousness: "You may be sorry. But no - if you could regret anything, you wouldn't be Simone any longer" (ch. XVII). His desperation means so little to her that she doesn't even bother to read the letter - it was "very long, very tedious, full of *histoires*." She uses the word *histoires* three times to express her disdainful detachment from any sustained account of the concerns and feelings of another person. In this instance, sadly, that other person, Cathcart, is one who had loved her faithfully for many years. She says, "I never bother about what cannot be helped" (ch. XVI). Such people appear to be practically amoral; perhaps they have no soul left to damn. They do greatest harm to those misguided enough to love them.

Cathcart himself evinces the detached cynicism and self-hate which are also caused by the Sin of Sloth. Even as a much younger man he led a life which was essentially joyless; his time at Cambridge was characterized by "outward gaiety" and "inner emptiness" (ch. XVIII). Nevertheless, his capacity to feel pain reveals that his disease of the soul was far less serious than that of Simone.<sup>18</sup>

In Sayers' early fiction there are three important characters whose struggle to achieve spiritual wholeness involves a gradual liberation from the Deadly Sin of Sloth. Each of these individuals has a high level of intelligence and a degree of creative energy, yet in her depiction of them Sayers reveals the young intellectual's proneness to spiritual apathy. "The Other Six Deadly Sins" contains an eloquent description of the apathy and detachment of Sloth:

It is the Sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for. (152)

The words "cowardice," "complacency," and "irresponsibility" (Purgatory 65) further define Sayers' understanding of the complex nature of Sloth.

Ann Dorland in The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club is first described to the reader when Inspector Parker visits her. Her manner is "sullen" and "sulky." Parker observes that she moves "with a languor distressing to watch," and judges her to be a person who soon wearies of things (ch. XVII). Later Lord Peter, observing the condition of her studio (in her absence), concludes that she has been halfheartedly attempting to paint and then abruptly dropping everything in disgust (ch. XVIII). When Peter finally meets Miss Dorland his suspicions are confirmed: she has seemingly nothing to live for, and her emotional state has passed the point of listlessness; she is genuinely depressed (ch. XX).

Ann Dorland is not, however, beyond hope of recovery. Her intellectual eagerness, which is evidenced by the reading material that Parker and Wimsey saw in her room, is a factor in her recovery. Her despair is reversible partly because it has a specific cause - her betrayal by Penberthy. When she fully understands what has gone on she is able to leave the past behind. Lord Peter helps her to identify her strengths, reconstruct her self esteem, and look forward to the future (ch. XXI). She had been on the verge of becoming the sort of person who "cares for nothing . . . enjoys nothing . . . finds purpose in nothing," but she was pulled back from the brink.

In John Munting, of The Documents in the Case, Sayers paints a more typical picture of the disillusioned young intellectual. His earlier letters frequently express a wry sort of cynicism: he suspects that nothing in life is really worthwhile (document no. 13); he claims to hate cheerful people who make you feel better the minute they come in the room (document no. 23); he says it is his disease to doubt (document no. 37); and he scornfully declines to defend himself against a false accusation (document no. 37). His amused, detached attitude toward both religion and science is cleverly expressed in an unusually cheerful closing in one of the letters to his fiancée:

Only a fortnight now and I shall be seeing you. Praise God (or whatever it is) from (if direction exists) whom (if personality exists) all blessings (if that word corresponds to any percept of objective reality) flow (if

Heraclitus and Bergson and Einstein are correct in stating that everything is more or less flowing about). (Document no. 22)

Nevertheless, throughout the course of the novel Munting's attitudes become more positive and more responsible. There is a definite movement away from cynical disillusionment as a result of his genuine commitment to two things - the ideal of excellence in writing, and the woman he believes he loves. By choosing to be loyal to these things of real value he escapes becoming a person who "cares for nothing." His willingness to become vulnerable through writing and through loving is especially courageous, for he is intelligent enough to realize the personal risks involved.

By the middle of the book Munting is caught in a profound moral dilemma. He cannot hide in cynical detachment; he must take sides on an issue involving murder. His painful decision to support, and actively assist, the gathering of evidence finally brings about the execution of his friend Lathom. If he had refused to become involved in the private investigation conducted by the murdered man's son he would have conformed to the pattern of Sloth which always seeks to avoid moral responsibility, but he values justice too much to do so. His wife comforts him: "There was nothing else you could do" (document no. 52).

The experience is emotionally devastating for Munting, but his decision was the right one. Even though he retains some of the wry detachment characteristic of the scholarly mind, this young intellectual has overcome the instinct for non-involvement arising out of the Sin of Sloth. He has become willing to take a stand, however painful, for the things of real value.

Harriet Vane is one of Sayers' most important characters. (She will be examined in depth in the next chapter.) In struggling to achieve spiritual wholeness Harriet must defeat the negative pull of Sloth. After being cleared of the murder charge (Strong Poison) she tries to resume a normal life, but she is severely damaged emotionally. Just as a wounded animal is an easy prey, so an emotionally wounded individual is weakened, and more susceptible to spiritual attack. Temptation comes, and the pull of the Deadly

Sins is felt. In Harriet's case the temptation is, in part, to Sloth in the form of retreat. Like Ann Dorland, she reacts to betrayal and humiliation by retreating from relationships, and from life - in its fullest sense. She is strongly tempted to protect herself permanently by refusing any sort of demanding commitment. There is a certain emotional aloofness, and a lingering shadow of despair in the way Harriet approaches life in Have His Carcase. From this point she could become increasingly confirmed in her emotional isolation, and lose her intellectual integrity in the sort of cynical "Tolerance" which Sayers knew was a thin disguise for Sloth. Her final decision to relinquish aloofness and cynicism, and to take the risk of loving and being loved, occurs in one of Sayers last novels, Gaudy Night.

Zeal, the Virtue opposite to the Sin of Sloth, develops in the lives of individuals, like these three - Ann Dorland, John Munting, and Harriet Vane - who resist the Deadly tendency. Zeal is, also, a essential ingredient in detection. Peter, Parker, and Bunter, and those who assist them, are successful detectives because they care intensely about truth and justice. Their Zeal is shown in their willingness to put themselves to a great deal of trouble in their battle against crime and deceit.

## PRIDE

"Pride" is the only word used to name one of the Deadly Sins which may be used in a positive sense as well as a negative one. It is possible to view each of the Sins as a perversion of a positive trait - thrift may be perverted to become Avarice, ambition to become Envy, and so on - but, except in the case of Pride, the positive and negative traits are called by different names.<sup>19</sup>

Sayers clearly distinguishes *sinful* Pride by equating it with self-centredness, egotism, and arrogance - qualities which are unmistakably negative. She sees Pride in its



ultimate form as "the sin of trying to be as God" ("The Other Six Deadly Sins" 153). By this she means desiring to be answerable to no one, to be utterly self sufficient.

The Sin of Pride is apparent in all of Sayers' genuine villains. We observed earlier that she considers cold-hearted sinners to be the most evil. Such characters display a clustering of a number of the Deadly Sins. Their nature is well described by a definition of Pride which Sayers gave in her Introduction to Purgatory: "love of self perverted to hatred and contempt of others" (67). Her explanation of the sub-section of Pride called *vana gloria* is also directly applicable to the most reprehensible characters who occur in her early novels: "an egotism so overweening that it cannot bear to occupy any place but the first, and hates and despises all fellow-creatures out of sheer lust of domination" (Purgatory 147).

In Whose Body? Freke's long standing hatred of the man he finally murders is explained as being based on something much stronger than "primitive, brute jealousy" - Pride. Lord Peter explains it:

... the thing that rankles is hurt vanity. That sticks. Humiliation...  
having his aristocratic nose put out of joint by a little Jewish nobody.  
(Ch. X)

In Unnatural Death Mary Whittaker's evil desire to control is compared to the Sin of Satan - Pride: "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven" (ch. XVI). Miss Climpson, who is assisting Peter Wimsey in investigating the crime, is a very perceptive judge of character. Meeting Mary Whittaker for the first time she is "struck by a sudden sense of familiarity," but she cannot recall where she has seen that look before (ch. V). During a later encounter she makes the connection when she remembers the "defiant look" she had observed when a young man was taking "his first step into crime ... an unattractive mingling of recklessness and calculation" (ch. XXII). The defiance is indicative of the resentment of authority and restrictions that Pride encourages. Parker's final judgement underscores the intense egotism of Miss Whittaker's cold-hearted Sinfulness which led to the murder of three people:

I don't think I've ever met a more greedy and heartless murderer. She probably really thought that anyone who inconvenienced her had no right to exist. . . . An evil woman if there ever was one. (Ch. XXII)

The inhumanity and moral corruption of this extremity of Pride and Avarice is reflected in the imagery of cold and darkness with which the book ends. After Parker's words Wimsey can say nothing; he feels "cold and sick." They go out from the prison finally expecting to see the morning sun:

[but] only a pale and yellowish gleam lit the half-deserted streets. And it was bitterly cold and raining.

"What is the matter with the day?" said Wimsey. "Is the world coming to an end?"

"No," said Parker, "it is the eclipse." (Ch. XIII)

The egotism expressed by Penberthy (The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club) when he is confronted with his crime (ch. XXII) has been commented on above. His Avarice was the direct motivation for committing murder, but the Sin of Pride was at the root of it.

In The Documents in the Case the extreme self-centredness of Mrs. Harrison is an inward core of Sin which precipitates tragic events: adultery, betrayal, murder, and execution. In Strong Poison and Have His Carcase the complete self-centredness of the murderer is also very apparent. The monstrous arrogance of murderers generally is noted when Miss Climpson and Lord Peter discuss the murderer's desire "to control the issues of life and death" (Strong Poison ch. V) - in other words, to play God.

Characters who exhibit immense Pride are not always villains in the usual sense. Philip Boyes (Strong Poison) and Gilda Farren (The Five Red Herrings) are depicted as extremely proud individuals whose relationships with others are totally self-serving. In both of these cases, however, the spiritual flaw is of the sort that other people tend to tolerate, or perhaps even consider to be Virtue. The characters of both Boyes and Mrs. Farren are excellent illustrations of "good intentions strongly and obstinately pursued" ("The Other Six Deadly Sins" 154).

Boyces saw himself as a superior person - one of the great artists who deserve to be "boarded and lodged at the expense of the ordinary man" (ch. IV). Some of those who knew him well could not accept the idea that he would commit suicide:

He talked such a lot . . . he really had too high an opinion of himself. I don't think he would have willfully deprived the world of the privilege of reading his books. (Ch. VIII)

Yet it is hard to imagine that Philip Boyces was such an obnoxious person when Harriet first knew him. She esteemed him enough to agree to live with him. Pride, like the other Sins, is not a static thing. Unchecked, it grows steadily until it attains mammoth proportions. Perhaps Boyces began as an aspiring writer with the mixture of brash self confidence and nagging self-doubt we can observe in John Munting (The Documents in the Case), but his ambition and his ego were so fed by the flattery of friends like Vaughan that he eventually became an arrogant prig. The idealism and ambition which causes one to aspire to literary greatness is not evil, but, as Sayers observed in her paper on the Sins, such a "good intention" may pave the way to hell when it is "strongly and obstinately pursued."

Gilda Farren is one of Sayers' most interesting minor characters - and perhaps the most interesting of all the characters in The Five Red Herrings. In one sense she is harmless, yet in another she is frightening, for she represents one of the most subtle forms of the most damning of Sins - Pride. Her life seems beautiful and stable - to all appearance; she is a success as a homemaker, a wife, a hostess, and a craftswoman. Yet beneath it all lurk some very ugly things:

She was the kind of woman who, if once she set out to radiate sweetness and light, would be obstinate in her mission. . . . a woman who would see only what she wished to see - who would think that one could abolish evils from the world by pretending that they were not there. (Chapter entitled "Farren")

A friend of her husband's named Ferguson violently resents her attempt to resolve his marriage problems, for he recognizes it for what it really is - a manifestation of self-righteous Pride:

She likes to do the motherly business - inspiration, you know, and the influence of a pure woman. Do good, and never mind what the rude world says. Sweetness and beautiful lives and all that rot. . . . My wife and I don't live together, and Gilda Farren takes it upon herself to lecture me. At least, I've choked her off now, but she once had the impertinence to try and "bring us together." Blast her cheek! She created a damned embarrassing situation. Not that it matters now. But I can't stick those interfering, well-meaning bitches. Now, whenever she meets me, she looks mournfully and forgivingly in my eye. I can't stand that kind of muck. (Chapter entitled "Ferguson")

When Lord Peter confronts her with her attempt to cover up her husband's sudden departure her response confirms his suspicion that intense Pride underlies her idea of wifely loyalty. Peter bluntly points out to her that she, primarily, wants people to think well of her, and that she enjoys being put on a pedestal and having control of her husband. She is so blind that she does not grasp the seriousness of these accusations. To her, marital infidelity is a far greater evil than self-centred manipulation of one's spouse. Peter's anger is so roused by her self-righteous stance as a 'faithful wife' that he lashes out with an accusation of her immense Pride that finally hits home:

If I were married to you . . . I should know that under no circumstances would you ever be unfaithful to me. For one thing, you haven't got the temperament. For another, you would never like to think less of yourself than you do. For a third, it would offend your aesthetic taste. And for a fourth, it would give other people a handle against you.' (Chapter entitled "Farren's Story")

Farren complains that his wife is "too good and too full of ideals" to understand certain things (Chapter entitled "Farren's Story"), yet he decides to go back to her:

His dream of escape had vanished. His wife had forgiven him. His absence was explained as a trifling and whimsical eccentricity. Gilda Farren sat upright and serene, spinning the loose white flock into a strong thread that wound itself ineluctably to smother the whirling spindle. (Chapter entitled "Strachan's Story")

Her strength is undiminished. Her self-righteous egotism continues to spin the threads which she uses to enmesh her husband, control his life, and smother his judgement.

In the delineation of Gilda Farren's character Sayers has depicted the Sin of Pride in one of its worst forms - a form in which it can exist largely unchallenged because it is one of the "respectable" Vices. In her paper on the Sins she had recognized this aura of

respectability as a sign of the insidious evil of the spiritual Sins (139). She observed that "the besetting temptation of the pious man is to become the proud man" (155).

Pride of this sort is one of the hardest of the Sins to confront and to eradicate. It thrives unchallenged in the high-minded individual because it is compatible with an ostensibly "Christian" life style, and because its true evil is often imperceptible from the outside.

Fiction which attempts to be true to life must depict human motivations as a complex mixture of positive and negative elements. Pride is usually involved. Sayers understood Pride as an evil influence which actually "turns man's virtues into Deadly Sins" ("The Other Six Deadly Sins" 153). There are many examples in her fiction of pride in the virtuous sense being perverted into sinful Pride. In The Documents in the Case Lathom's pride as an artist arises from his love of his work. Munting describes him as "a real creator . . . a Rembrandt" (document no. 37). But Lathom's high regard for his work soon becomes a high regard for himself, and he (like Philip Boyes) believes himself above other people and their mundane standards of right and wrong. Paul Alexis' rightful pride in his family ancestry (Have His Carcase) becomes so inflated by his selfish desire for personal glory that he is completely duped by the scheme of his enemies and lured to his death. Harriet Vane's self image is severely damaged by the ordeal she endured both before and after her lover's death. After such humiliation a person must re-establish self-esteem, but there is a danger of over compensation. Harriet's desire for independence and self-sufficiency is so great that she does not want "ever again to have to depend for happiness on another person" (Have His Carcase ch. XIII). Her feelings are understandable, but they are moving her in a dangerous direction, away from all that is really valuable in life. Self-reliance is indeed an asset, but, carried to its extreme, it becomes a cold, self-absorbed isolation - another face of the Deadly Sin of Pride.

Simple selfishness is another form of Pride - "sheer selfish indifference to others' needs and feelings" (Introduction to Purgatory 65). Miss Milsom's attaching such an

absurd degree of importance to her whims and feelings (The Documents in the Case), and Leila Garland's needing to be the center of attention at all times (Have His Carcase) are examples of the Pride of self-centredness. The worst case of this petty sort of self-centredness in Sayers' early fiction is the selfish attitude of certain Club members in The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club. The unhappiness and stress arising from the events associated with the old general's death at the Club mean absolutely nothing to the self-centred old man named Wetheridge - nothing except intolerable inconvenience to himself. He operates on the assumption that the world in general, and the Club in particular, exist only for his comfort. The word "unpleasantness" is fittingly used in the title for it recurs over and over again in the course of the novel in the disgruntled comments of selfish Club members like Wetheridge. Even the tragic suicide of a promising young man which occurs in the Club library at the end of the book is regarded by Wetheridge as a disgraceful lack of "consideration for the members" (ch. XXII). Selfishness is the dominant trait of a man who can perceive the suffering of others only as an unpleasant interruption of the pampered peace of his own little world. This too arises from the Sin of Pride.

Lord Peter Wimsey is himself highly susceptible to a loftier form of Pride - the Sin "of the noble mind," as Sayers calls it in her paper on the Sins (154). In her development of his character Sayers depicts a number of facets of Pride.

One of the most noticeable traits of Peter Wimsey is his smugness; he has a self-satisfied air about him which readers usually find amusing rather than negative. His lack of embarrassment when trapped in the midst of a rousing, evangelical meeting is accounted for by the fact that he is "one of those imperturbably self-satisfied people who cannot conceive of themselves as being out of place in any surroundings" (Strong Poison XIII).

The temptation to hold themselves above others is one which aristocrats often fall prey to. Other characters are aware of the aura of upper-class superiority that surrounds

Lord Peter Wimsey. His showy personality and high social status are potentially offensive, yet his genuine warmth and his interest in the lives of others prove he is far from being a supercilious aristocrat. His coldly inhuman sister-in-law, Helen, is the only recurring character who represents this sort of aristocratic stereotype. Sayers shows the real destructiveness of the Pride of social rank in her account of the long, tragic estrangement in General Fentiman's family: his sister was disowned and deprived of family contact for over fifty years simply for marrying beneath her class.

The attitudes and mannerisms which make Peter Wimsey conspicuous are not intended to represent Pride in the sinful sense. Sayers modeled her hero, to a certain extent, on the formula, first developed by Poe, of "the eccentric and brilliant private detective" (Introduction Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror 13). In an unpublished essay called "Detectives in Fiction" (Wade ms. D.7) Sayers points out that the individualist detective is bound to be irritating at times. Because he must symbolize the superior intellect he will naturally evoke a certain amount of resentment. She suggests that the detective is made memorable by his obvious mannerisms and tricks of behaviour.

Lord Peter's good opinion of himself, particularly in the first novels, is generally unoffensive because it is part of his likeable eccentricity. In certain circumstances, however, particularly in the later novels, his character is drawn with more depth and humanity. We are shown a serious side of him. In his character there is both the positive sort of pride - pride in his work, and the negative sort - a tendency toward the Sin of Pride in his attitude toward himself. He takes justified pride in work well done. In most of his cases he collaborates with the police in a very co-operative relationship based on mutual esteem - a relationship which could not exist if Peter's attitude toward his own cleverness in detecting was unduly arrogant.

His genuine belief in his own superiority surfaces occasionally, but it is usually masked by a humorous tone of self-mockery. This is illustrated when he tells Parker of his organization of a team of spinsters to investigate crime and corruption:

That's not a bad idea,' said Parker.  
'Naturally - it is mine, therefore brilliant. Just think. People want questions asked. Whom do they send? A man with large flat feet and a notebook. . . . I send a lady with a long, woolly jumper on knitting needles and jingly things around her neck. Of course she asks questions - everyone expects it. . . . One of these days they will put up a statue to me, with an inscription:

"To the Man who Made  
Thousands of Superfluous Women  
Happy  
without Injury to their Modesty  
or Exertion to Himself."

. . . Little private program [sic] of my own - Insurance against the Social Revolution - when it comes. "What did you do with your great wealth comrade?" "I bought First Editions." "Aristocrat! a la lanterne!" "Stay, spare me! I took proceedings against 500 money-lenders who oppressed the workers." "Citizen, you have done well. We will spare your life. You shall be promoted to cleaning out the sewers." (Unnatural Death Ch. III)

The tendency toward Pride certainly exists in Peter Wimsey, but the early novels seldom draw attention to it as a negative trait. Genuine Pride is an inward quality, and the early novels show Wimsey primarily from the outside. His boasting and cockiness are not interpreted as signs of sinful Pride because they are easily recognized, by those in close contact with him, as part of his stance as an idle young prig - a stance which often proves to be an invaluable cover for his serious purposes.

Throughout the eight novels, however, there is a clear progression toward greater self-awareness and greater humility in the character of Lord Peter. Sayers gradually develops in her hero a humanity and depth beyond what is typical of detective fiction. Even in the first novel, Whose Body?, Peter reveals a seed of self-doubt when he admits to Parker his uneasiness about his detective role:<sup>20</sup>

'I love the beginning of a job - when one doesn't know any of the people and it's just exciting and amusing. But if it comes to really running down a live person and getting him hanged, or even quodded, poor devil, there don't [sic] seem as if there was any excuse for me buttin' in, since I don't



have to make my livin' by it. And I feel as if I oughtn't ever to find it amusin'. But I do.' (Ch. 7)

Parker's response to this is a crushing exposure of Peter's Pride. He believes Peter is uncomfortable about hurting others, even criminals, not because of genuine compassion, but because of his concern about himself:

'... you're thinking about your attitude. You want to be consistent, you want to look pretty, you want to swagger debonairly through a comedy of puppets or else stalk magnificently through a tragedy of human sorrows and things. But that's childish.... You want to be elegant and detached? That's all right, if you find the truth out that way, but it hasn't any value in itself, you know. You want to look dignified and consistent - what's that got to do with it? You want to hunt down a murderer for the sport of the thing and then shake hands with him.... You can't be a sportsman. You're a responsible person.' (Ch. 7)

Parker has accurately identified one of Wimsey's weakness - a preoccupation with his image. Peter, however, passes off this challenge to his Pride as simply an indication of the "brutalising influence" of Parker's excessive reading of theology.

Seven novels later, in Have His Carcase, Harriet angrily accuses him of wallowing in his awareness of his own magnanimity:

'... You think you can sit up there all day like King Cophetua being noble and generous and expecting people to be brought to your feet. Of course everybody will say, "Look what he did for that woman - isn't it marvelous of him!" Isn't that nice for you? You think if you go on long enough I ought to be touched and softened.' (Ch. VIII)

Peter is no longer trying to duck accusations of arrogance by turning them into a joke; he accepts the validity of Harriet's criticism. In this scene his readiness to admit that he has been "patronising, interfering, [and] conceited" shows how far he has come in recognizing his own Pride. His desire to maintain a certain image has become insignificant in the light of his earnest desire to win Harriet's esteem and love. He can no longer maintain an elegant, detached stance. Humility is his only hope. He realizes that the "gratitude" Harriet owes him because he saved her life has become a "detestable burden," and a barrier in their relationship. His position is painful and humiliating, and the humorous manner in which he makes his repeated proposals is a facade which offers thin protection for his damaged ego:

'... Why do you suppose I treat my own sincerest feelings like something out of a comic opera, if it isn't to save myself the bitter humiliation of seeing you try not to be utterly nauseated by them? ... Is that a position for any man to be proud of?' (Ch. XIII)

Thus in Have His Carcase Lord Peter Wimsey recognizes that it is his assumption of superiority which Harriet finds unlovable, and he has become willing to be humbled in order to win her. This is an important stage in his progression toward the more mature and healthy self-image he has achieved by the last novel, Busman's Honeymoon.

Pride is inflated self-love. Peter begins to defeat the power of this Deadly Sin when he chooses to love something else - someone else - more than he loves himself.

In her first eight novels Dorothy Sayers achieved *competent delineation of character*. She actually produced greater verisimilitude than she first intended. Barbara Reynolds summarizes a letter of Sayers', written in the mid 1920s, in which Sayers expresses her concern lest her characters become too real for the genre in which she has chosen to write:

She touches on the problem of characterisation. It is best done, she considers 'in the flat and on rather broad lines'. The story she is at present preparing to start on, Unnatural Death, is showing signs of becoming "round" (that is to say, the characters are becoming more life-like and credible than the structure of the form can bear), and for that reason she is rather nervous of it. (Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul 138)

By the time she wrote Have His Carcase (the last of these first eight novels), in 1932, she had produced in her two main characters - Peter and Harriet - individuals whose personalities and feelings could not be entirely subordinated to the detective plot. By 1933 she had passed a threshold. Her delineation of character became more than merely *competent*. She moved into the area of the novel proper with the *serious treatment of the sins and passions* - a phrase of her own which aptly describes the new direction she developed in the last four books of the Wimsey series.

## CHAPTER SIX

### "Serious Treatment of the Sins and Passions" Sayers' Fiction, 1933 - 1935

Murder Must Advertise, The Nine Tailors, and Gaudy Night, even more than the earlier novels, are about people and the Sins that they struggle with. The plots are well planned and carefully executed and the best qualities of the detective genre are still evident, but characterization frequently takes precedence over the story line.

On 29 December 1931 Sayers gave a radio talk on the "Trials and Sorrows of the Mystery Writer" which was published in The Listener the following week. Most of it is a light hearted discussion of the difficulty of devising interesting plots. There is, Sayers admits, a "preoccupation with technique" among detective writers. She observes that detective writers, unlike "poets and highbrow people," are "free from professional jealousy." She attributes this absence of competitive snobbery to the fact that "nobody takes the detective story very seriously as a form of literature." The tone of the article is playful, but beneath the wry resignation to the detective story's lowbrow image is Sayers' firm belief in its moral value. She defends detective fiction against the illogical accusation that it encourages crime, by pointing out that the detective writer actually makes virtuous, law abiding characters more interesting than evil ones.

One of the "trials and sorrows of the mystery writer" is the fact that he must make his detective interesting without complicating his life with inner turmoil. Sayers writes,

I think we [detective writers] deserve a lot of credit for managing to make our worthy detectives interesting, especially in these days when no character is supposed to be interesting that doesn't suffer from some nasty inhibition or suppressed complex. We are allowing a few more of these unhappy characters in nowadays, but I don't think anyone has yet invented a morbid detective, if only because he couldn't keep his mind on his job if he was worrying all the time about his complexes. Of course, the character who ought to have a morbid mind is the murderer, but we can't expatiate at great length on his symptoms because we aren't supposed to let you know he is the murderer till the last chapter. So we have to be wholesome in spite of ourselves. ("Trials and Sorrows of the Mystery Writer" 26).

Although over-simplified for effect, the analysis of detective fiction in this essay makes an important observation about the classic detective story: the good characters are presented primarily as clear thinkers committed to defending what is right, and the psychological motivations of the bad characters are scarcely dealt with at all. After eight years of writing crime fiction Sayers was more aware than ever of how little scope there was in the pure detective story for analyzing the inner lives of characters.

She saw, however, that the genre was rapidly moving away from the early form which was little more than an intellectual puzzle. Psychological insight was becoming more important, and neither Dorothy Sayers nor the best of her contemporaries were prepared to limit themselves any longer to characters who were free of inner turmoil.

The detective story continued, of course, to focus on the good characters who wage war on crime rather than on the evil characters who commit it. Sayers developed this focus further, however. In her last four novels she shifts the emphasis so that the reader's interest is less absorbed by the detection process and more absorbed by the personal life of the detective, and the spiritual issues behind the situations the characters face.

In 1934, in her Introduction to the Third Series of Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror, Sayers begins with a quotation from Milton, because, she says, "we associate him intimately and peculiarly with the monstrous images of Sin and Death" (11). She judges that the popularity of both detective stories and ghost stories is due to the great interest of readers in the linked subjects Sin and Death. She goes on:

Some prefer the intellectual cheerfulness of the detective story; some the uneasy emotions of the ghost story; but in either case, the tale must be about dead bodies or very wicked people, preferably both, before the Tired Business Man can feel really happy and at peace with the world. . . . [Such stories] make you feel that it is good to be alive, and that, while alive, it is better, on the whole, for you to be good. (Detective authors, by the way, are nearly all as good as gold, because it is part of their job to believe and to maintain that Your Sin Will Find You Out. That is why Detective Fiction is, or should be, such a good influence in a degenerate world, and that, no doubt, is why so many bishops, school masters, eminent statesmen and others with reputations to support, read detective stories to improve their morals, and keep themselves out of mischief.) (11-12)

Sayers continued to affirm the detective story's moral value, but she was also anxious to see it realize its potential as a work of literature. For this, complex characterization was essential. She specifically addresses the importance of characterization in detective fiction in an essay on Emile Gaboriau, published in The Times Literary Supplement on 2 November 1935.<sup>21</sup> Gaboriau was a nineteenth century French writer (1835-1873), recognized as an important influence in the development of detective literature. Since detection problems occupied only a portion of his lengthy books his work had been criticized for "division of interest, and lack of the 'surprise' element" (677). Sayers maintains, however, that the structure of Gaboriau's work is justified, historically and artistically.

Gaboriau's admiring re-creation of the best sort of police work makes him, Sayers suggests, the model of "that whole school of detective writers whose true hero is Scotland Yard" (677). Yet Gaboriau, like Wilkie Collins (who both influenced him, and was influenced by him), saw his works as *novels*, not as detective stories in the limited sense. Sayers describes Gaboriau and Collins as mainline novelists whose plots *happen* to involve mystery and detection:

With all their passion for secrets and puzzles, they were novelists, and they aimed at writing novels. They can certainly never have dreamed that the detective problem could come to stand as a book by itself, cut off from the great stream of human and literary tradition. For them the character interest was as necessary as the plot interest. (677)

The element of "human drama" in such early detective novels makes them very different from later detective stories, such as those of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in which the story was so stripped down to the bare plot that the excitement had to be "aroused in the brain-centres alone, without the aid of the heart" (677). Sayers recognizes Gaboriau's tendency to overstate the issue of Sin. She calls him "a ferocious moralist," yet she commends his verisimilitude, observing that he can at least "persuade us that the sins have been committed." She describes the sense of Sin in his novels as "a dreadful and

monstrous reality," in which light he sees his characters "justly." He is able to "strip off the false glitter . . . to show the cheap and ugly clay beneath" (678).

Sayers acknowledges that many of the longer works of detective literature were structurally no more than expanded versions of the short story. She contrasts the currently popular detective novel with the work of Gaboriau, and identifies what she feels is the main deficiency of the modern detective story:

With all its incredible mechanical perfection there is one thing the "pure" detective novel is not: it is not in any real sense of the word, a novel. In everything but wordage it is an anecdote - the amplified creation of a detached incident, with but little extension in time or space, expressing only the most superficial philosophy of human conduct and accomplishing no catharsis but that of curiosity. (677)

In her Introduction to still another collection of stories, Tales of Detection (1936), Sayers again distinguishes serious novelists from those who "present the story as an isolated episode existing solely in virtue of its relation to the mechanics of detection":

[Novelists] are interested in the social background, in Manners and morals, in the depiction and interplay of character; their works have a three-dimensional extension in time and space; they all in their various ways, offer some kind of 'criticism of life.' (ix)

The pure detective story, she believed, lacked "psychological probability"; it had lost touch with the realities of life:

It became axiomatic that the great romantic emotions were out of place in detective fiction, so that we observed the extraordinary phenomenon of a whole literature based upon a hypothesis of crime and violence and yet abstaining from any *serious treatment of the sins and passions* - particularly the sexual passions - which commonly form the motives for violent crime. (emphasis added) (xii)

Here the word "passions" is used in the broad sense of drives or inward motivations.

The later detective novels of Dorothy Sayers particularly illustrate her concern for psychological truth. The emotional focus is not on the morbidity of the criminal mind, but on the daily lives and inner conflicts of respectable characters who have the same hopes and fears, the same frailties and vices, as people do in real life. Because these novels have the expanded vision Sayers called a "three-dimensional extension in time and

space," and because their "serious treatment of the sins and passions" offers a significant "criticism of life," they break through the boundaries of the classic detective story to become true novels.

James Brabazon, in his biography of Dorothy Sayers, explains the greater length of Have His Carcase and the four novels that follow it as a result of greater attention to people, and to the realities of daily life:

Dorothy is not restricting herself to the plot, she is spreading herself; the bony structure of the murder mystery is still there, but (like Dorothy's own frame) it is increasingly covered, not to say smothered, by warm and sometimes unruly flesh.

Once Harriet had opened the windows of the detective story and let in the real world [i.e. in Have His Carcase], however, she was not indispensable. (149)

It was the introduction of Harriet, and Peter's feelings for her, that moved Sayers' novels into "the real world." In the next two novels, Murder Must Advertise and The Nine Tailors, Harriet does not appear, but the increased attention to characterization is maintained.

In their essay, "The Agents of Evil and Justice in the Novels of Dorothy L. Sayers," R.D. Stock and Barbara Stock examine the development in Sayers' treatment of evil, and its effect on her characterization:

... the concern for justice is as strong in Sayers' early novels, sometimes demeaned as melodrama, as in her later, allegedly more substantial works. But ... she alters her method of delineating moral dualism. ... She begins with egregious villains, true 'traitors within our gates,' and with an agent of social justice [i.e. Lord Peter Wimsey] who is perhaps an 'original' and certainly a 'poetic figure.' By the middle of the series the criminals have become more mundane, and Lord Peter's insouciance is no longer impenetrable. Sayers' belief in the horror and irrevocability of evil remains firm, but characterization becomes less melodramatic and the portrayal of good and evil, in general, more like Dante's. (As Her Whimsey Took Her: Critical Essays on the Work of Dorothy L. Sayers 15)

This article recognizes in the later novels a "new pattern" in Sayers' approach to the subject of evil - an approach which involved a more mature treatment of the problem of Sin.

Have His Carcase appeared in print on 11 April 1932, but by the beginning of that year it is possible that Sayers was already at work on The Nine Tailors. In the Listener essay, "Trials and Sorrows of a Mystery Writer" (6 January 1932), she lists examples of things requiring laborious research, and one of them is "how bell-ringers set about ringing a set of grandsire triples" (26). The technical research for this book, however, took longer than she had anticipated, and before the end of the year she realized that she could not meet her commitment to her publisher unless she put it aside and wrote a quick one. Murder Must Advertise came out on 6 February 1933.

There is an aura of rural sanctity about The Nine Tailors; Murder Must Advertise is a stark contrast - it is set in the urban workaday world of London's masses, and in the play-by-night world of London's racy fringe. In The Nine Tailors the focus is on the Rev. Mr. Venables. Sayers wrenched herself away from the almost timeless dignity and humility of this country rector to write of the pettiness and corruption of modern life. Yet the two books have something in common: they are both more firmly rooted in Sayers' personal experience than any of her previous books had been.

The Nine Tailors is set in a small village in the Fens. Sayers' knowledge of rural life in this area came from her childhood, for she grew up in Bluntisham, a village in Huntingdonshire on the southern edge of the Fens, and her parents later moved to Christchurch, an even smaller and more remote Fens village. Mr. Venables has been judged to bear a strong resemblance to Sayers' own father, who was a country rector for most of his life (Brabazon 11, 150). Murder Must Advertise is similarly reminiscent of certain aspects of Sayers' own life.



### Murder Must Advetise

Murder Must Advetise is based, in part, on Dorothy Sayers' personal experience of the advertising business. From 1922 to 1929 she worked as an advertising copy-writer for Benson's, one of London's largest and most advanced advertising agencies. Her first-hand knowledge of the rhythm of life in advertising offices, and of the philosophy and practice of the advertising business, provided her with a story setting which required little research. The descriptive details, the atmosphere, and even many of the characters in Murder Must Advetise were easily drawn from Sayers' file of memories. In 1932 she had been away from this setting for three years - long enough to have acquired some detachment of perspective, but not long enough for the images to have lost the brilliant sharpness of recent experience. It is this convincing immediacy which makes Murder Must Advetise a memorable novel.

This book has, however, been viewed by some as less sophisticated than the other late novels, and even as a regression in technique. Her biographer, Brabazon, describes it as harking back to Sayers' early days "when plot ruled supreme" (150). He believes that Sayers herself disliked the book, and he himself apparently does not regard it as highly as the others:

Her letters are full of complaints about the book. She thoroughly disliked it, and resented having to do it. And indeed, if one looks closely, it is a very artificial story, and the whole sub-plot which has to do with the Bright Young Things of the day, with their fancy-dress parties and drug taking, is hollow and unconvincing to a degree. What the reader enjoys and remembers - indeed what makes the story - is the detail of the advertising agency. With barely a touch of satire, Dorothy draws an unforgettable picture of the kind of office in which she had worked for so many years, and once again triumphs by the sheer vigor of the writing and the enjoyment of life that she communicates to the reader. (150-51)

Ralph E. Hone (in Dorothy L. Sayers: A Literary Biography), however, quotes one of Sayers' comments on the book which suggests that her view of it was only partially negative:

The idea of symbolically opposing two cardboard worlds - that of the advertiser and the drug taker - was all right; and it was suitable that Peter, who stands for reality, should never appear in either except disguised; but the working-out was a little too melodramatic, and the handling rather uneven. (66)

A recent critical work on Sayers' novels by Catherine Kenney seems to agree with Brabazon in considering Murder Must Advertise "not [her] most effective fiction" (207). Kenney suggests that its main weakness is the way in which "its thematic material is presented in what are almost mini-essays within the text, rather than emanating from dramatized situations" (The Remarkable Case of Dorothy L. Sayers 207). The direct presentation of thematic material about the philosophy of advertising does occur in specific passages which record Peter's thoughts. However, it is, I believe, reflected by the novel's action as well.

A number of critics have praised the book's structure. Dawson Gaillard's general analysis of all Sayers' novels describes Murder Must Advertise as achieving effective integration of story and theme, working "by indirection and drama to lead readers from the puzzle plot to reflection upon causes of spiritual crises in their society" (Dorothy L. Sayers 64).

In their essay on Sayers' treatment of evil and justice, R.D. and Barbara Stock express even greater appreciation of the artistic achievement of this novel. They view it as "the most successful example of the new pattern," - i.e. the more mature portrayal of good and evil ("The Agents of Evil and Justice in the Novels of Dorothy L. Sayers" in As Her Whimsey Took Her 15). Their high regard for Murder Must Advertise is based on the breadth and depth of its moral vision:

This is not only Sayers's most forcible novel morally, it is also her first sustained attempt to depict a coherent world view, that of a cynical and amoral modernism, deluding and self-deluding. . . .

Through the first half of the series [i.e. of her novels], Sayers typically pitted a grandiose or exceptional criminal against a superhuman and relentless sleuth. This dualism . . . well represents the high blasphemy of evil, [but] it may at the same time distract us from its idiocy and horror. . . . Of the later works, Murder Must Advertise, we believe, most vividly evokes the horror. (20-21)

The horror of evil is powerfully evoked in Murder Must Advertise because Sayers was moving away from the form in which plot is dominant and characterization simple, and towards a form which uses more lifelike characters and addresses spiritual issues in a more direct way.

This novel portrays the Seven Deadly Sins more fully than any of Sayers' other fictional works because the Sins appear not only in association with individual characters, but also in a wider vision of modern society as a whole. The expanded and more coherent world view that the Stocks' essay describes is reflected in the range of socioeconomic classes and the variety of settings which appear in Murder Must Advertise. Two settings predominate, however: the mundane business premises of the advertising agency, and the shadowy world of the drug-traffickers. The novel draws attention to the varying degrees of Sin in both these worlds, and in society generally.

The agency called Pym's Publicity is a self-contained environment. The people who work there are defined as characters largely by the way they function as employees of that firm; their individual characteristics are displayed in the office setting. (The office environment is so vividly drawn that it seems rather surprising to discover that the characters actually have concerns outside it.) By including a wide range of different sorts of people, and sketching their duties, personalities, preoccupations, and inter-relationships, Sayers creates a colourful picture of daily life in this enclosed world. None of the individuals are studied in depth, yet they are drawn in sufficient detail to create a lively mosaic which has the variety and texture of real life.

The employees who make up the world of the advertising agency are largely ordinary working people who do not realize that a murder occurred under their very noses and that an investigation is being conducted. (It is generally believed that Victor Dean's death - which Lord Peter has gone under cover to investigate - was accidental.) All of them are shown to have a predisposition to one or more of the Seven Deadly Sins.

The overall atmosphere at Pym's Publicity is positive, but, as in any office, petty jealousies thrive, and factions form. There are under-currents of Envy, particularly toward those who have higher status because of their education. Some people are more likeable than others, but most are very approachable and transparent. Tallboy - a very central character in the plot - remains rather aloof. Undesirable attitudes range from those who are very critical of the firm (Mr. Prout, a photographer, regularly complains about having to work in a cramped space too small "to swing a kitten in") to those who are extremely loyal (Mr. Daniels, a group-manager, resents *any* implied criticism of the firm.). We recognize familiar character types: Mr. McAllister whose Scottish sense of decency is outraged by Mr. Tallboy's insensitivity, and Mrs. Johnson whose flirtatious manner has become an irritation and a bore.

The main interest, however, is centered in the copy department, and it is the copy-writers who are delineated in most depth. Mr. Ingleby and Miss Meteyard are university-educated, and Mr. Bredon (Peter Wimsey incognito) is closely identified with them by the other employees: he is a newly hired copy-writer, known to have an Oxford background. The intellectual bent, particularly of Ingleby and Miss Meteyard, predisposes them to the spiritual malady - a form of Sloth - that we observed in Munting (The Documents in the Case). The air of cynical detachment assumed by those who have studied at a university is commented on in the opening scene: the news that the newcomer, Mr. Bredon is a Balliol man calls forth a limerick: "Bredon went to Balliol / And sat at the feet of Gamaliel / And just as he ought / He cared for nought . . ." (ch. I).

Sardonic aloofness is even more apparent in Ingleby, a Trinity man, who is sketched from the beginning as a typical university graduate. An observer in the reception hall forms a first impression of him as "an untidy, saturnine person with both hands in his trouser pockets" (ch. IV). His stance is consistent - he is "completely and precociously disillusioned" (ch. III). Near the end of the novel, when everyone else in the office is confused and distracted by Mr. Bredon's arrest (actually, a pretended arrest), Ingleby is

merely amused: [He] "laughed at his colleagues' agitation and said it was a grand new experience for them all" (ch. XIX).

In Miss Meteyard, too, the "educated" viewpoint has created a certain aloofness. Her Sloth is not extreme enough, however, to prevent her from taking sides when the issue is serious enough. She is sufficiently sensitive to right and wrong to have recognized the evil in Victor Dean: she "loathed him" (ch. III). Yet she is described as an "odd woman" who takes things "very coolly" (ch. XX), and she describes herself as one who shirks responsibility, and doesn't make it her business to interfere. She says, "My sort make nothing. We exploit other people's folly, take the cash and sneer at the folly. It's not admirable" (ch. XXI). Her self-judgement is rather severe, for her spiritual Sloth has not deadened her moral sense and her compassion for others. She cares enough about Tallboy to warn him of the impending danger of his crime being revealed to the police - a crime which she believes to be morally justified.

The detachment of the educated copy-writers, who are referred to as "the varsity crowd," seems to be a Virtue in one sense. Their co-workers notice that they "don't quarrel like the rest" (ch. II), and Mr. Willis perceptively notes that there is even "no animosity" in their candid appraisal of the shortcomings of others (ch. II). Yet the absence of Wrath is a dubious asset in this case. It is not, in fact, the Virtue of Peace, but instead it is part of their aloofness and apathy - a form of Sloth - which is an affront to those who genuinely care about a particular issue. Wimsey points this out when he says, "Willis has put his finger on the real offensiveness of the educated Englishman - that he will not even trouble to be angry" (ch. II). Willis struggles to describe more fully this disturbing quality in his educated colleagues: "It's that awful, bleak, blank -" he waved his hands helplessly - 'the facade'" (ch. XVII).

Willis is himself a very decent individual, but his besetting Sin is the form of Wrath which is known as righteous indignation. His romantic interest in Pamela Dean, the sister of the dead Victor Dean, makes him violently resent anything that seems like a

threat to her well-being. Willis's opinion of the "hot" parties Dean and Bredon (Wimsey) have taken Pamela to is valid, but his intense, self-righteous attempt at confrontation, and his incompetent attempt to shadow her movements, cause Pamela to regard him as a "disgusting, stuck-up, idiotic, officious prig" (ch. V).

Willis's obsession with Pamela also creates a situation in which there is a deficiency of the proper sort of pride. He lowers himself, and the girl he claims to love, by revealing to Bredon (Wimsey) that Pamela is romantically attracted to him. This ill-advised move seems to be motivated by a mixture of Wrath and Envy. His Envy of men like Wimsey, who attract women more easily, has caused Willis to become excessively resentful and negative, and to sell himself short. Bredon identifies the inferiority complex arising from a particular sort of lower-class mentality - "snobbery" in its truest sense - which is the root of Willis's problem:

'The trouble is,' groaned Willis, 'that you've - my God! you swine - you've thrown her over and she says it's my fault.'

'You oughtn't to say a thing like that, old son,' said Bredon, really distressed. 'It's not done.'

'No - I daresay I'm not quite a gentleman. I've never been -'

'If you tell me you've never been to a public school,' said Bredon, 'I shall scream. What with Copley and Smayle, and all the other pathetic idiots who go about fostering inferiority complexes, and weighing up the rival merits of this place and that place, when it doesn't matter a damn anyway, I'm fed up. Pull yourself together. Anybody, wherever he's been educated, ought to know better than to say a thing like that about any girl. . . .' (Ch. XIII)

Bredon convinces Willis that he has been too soft and self-deprecating in the way he has approached Pamela Dean. His earlier proud, moralistic stance has been succeeded by this even more disastrous false Humility, derived from envious resentment of men with more advantages than himself. Willis benefits from the diagnosis, and finds he is able to woo Pamela Dean successfully. By the end of the book he is treating the office staff to chocolates and cake in honour of his engagement.

Copley and Smayle, whose complexes were alluded to in Bredon's rebuke of Willis, are also copy-writers at Pym's. Copley is aloof and dyspeptic, while Smayle is friendly and cheerful.

Mr. Copley, "a thin, predatory man with a stoop and jaundiced eyeballs" (ch. IV), is a proud person, quick to judge others as incompetent and inefficient, but he knows his work. He responds appropriately to the emergency which arises late one evening when everyone else has gone home. He devises a substitute headline for the Nutrax (nerve food) advertisement to replace one which the newspaper editors would not accept. His response to this incident, however, is self-righteous, and unduly negative toward his colleagues. Mr. Hankin, one of the copy department's supervisors, finds Copley difficult to work with because of his arrogant attitude. He believed that "all of Mr. Copley's valuable suggestions about departmental management were so much window-dressing, put forward to show how brilliant Mr. Copley was, and not in the least with the desire of aiding Mr. Hankin or the department" (ch. X). Bredon correctly judges Copley to be over-compensating for the fact that he feels threatened by the younger, better educated copy-writers. Copley's highly irritable digestive system mirrors his irritable disposition. He is a bitter and lonely man because the Sin of Pride prevents him from sharing in the spirit of team work which is the most positive quality of Pym's Publicity Agency.

Mr. Smayle is "a brisk, neat young man," with immaculate hair, and "very white teeth" (ch. IV), who lacks intellectual subtlety. He cannot be fairly blamed for the quarrel between himself and Tallboy for he could not foresee that his joking references to Tallboy's financial situation would cause offense. He is, however, a victim of the kind of Envy which Mr. Willis suffers from, for he feels inferior to those who have had a public school education. He says, "I suppose Tallboy thinks I'm not worth speaking to, just because he's been to public school and I haven't," and Bredon rebukes him for equating a certain sort of education with genuine superiority: "Look here, Smayle, if only you people could get it out of your heads that these things matter a damn, you'd be a darn

sight happier. Smayle appreciates Bredon's "gentlemanly" approach to the subject, but his interpretation of people's attitudes and behaviour continues to be based on a feeling of Envy toward those who have been to "real public schools" (ch. X).

The office boy, Ginger Joe, who assists Bredon in his investigations, is an entertaining and likeable character. The pride he takes in his role as a detective's apprentice is a positive and constructive sort of pride, and his loyal commitment to secrecy proves his moral strength. He shuns the cheap, instant glory of dropping hints about the investigation to the other boys. Even when the case has been closed he is content to refrain from any discussion of it. Wimsey says, "And you'll never say one word to anybody about you know what?" Ginger replies, "Not if you was to roast me alive, sir" (ch. XXI).

The typists for the copy department, Miss Parton and Miss Rossiter, reflect the chatty effervescence of office life generally. Bredon's initial, and lasting, impression is that Pym's is a friendly place where most people share ideas and support one another, yet there is an undertone of ill will in the relish with which certain negative occurrences are discussed. People love something scandalous to talk about. The excitement over the explosion between Tallboy and Copley rises to a climax with the comment, " - my dear, the thrills we get in this place!" (ch. VIII). Later, the "heart burning" subject of the flea found in the ladies' cloakroom must compete with "the juicier and more speculative topic" of Mr. Tallboy's embarrassing female visitor (ch. XVII). This very human tendency to take delight in the misfortune of others is an incipient form of Envy - the Sin "which hates to see other men happy" ("The Other Six Deadly Sins" 149).

The negative quality of office chatter is also evidenced in the tendency to sneer at the naivety of the management's optimistic assumptions. Pym's is an old-fashioned and conservative firm, and the owners try to maintain warm relationships with, and among, their employees by hosting frequent social events. They strongly believe in encouraging team spirit. Such noble ideals are, however, the butt of cynical jibes. In the midst of the



gossip about Mr. Tallboy's extra-marital affair, the innocence and isolation of the management are smugly derided:

'Directors are the last people to hear anything about the staff. Otherwise,' said Miss Meteyard, 'they wouldn't be able to stand on their hind legs at the Staff Dinner and shoot off the speeches about co-operation, and all being one happy family.' (Ch. XVII)

This familiar tendency to express resentment toward one's employers, and toward people in authority generally, is a form of Envy. Most of Pym's employees tacitly agree, however, that it is a good firm to work for. Near the end of the book Tallboy describes the management as "kind and decent" (ch. XX).

The copy-writer Tallboy is central in the plot for he is the murderer. He also figures prominently in Sayers' comprehensive picture of office life; many of the petty interpersonal conflicts involve him. He has "sulky good looks and restless light eyes" (ch. IV), and he is a tense, unhappy individual who, it is finally discovered, was being blackmailed by Victor Dean. Dean's death on the spiral staircase was not due to an accidental fall. Tallboy shot at him through a skylight, using a catapult, struck him in the head, and killed him.

Throughout the novel Tallboy's propensity to Wrath is very apparent. He becomes involved in nasty confrontations with two of his colleagues. There is understandable provocation for his quarrel with Mr. Copley, but the vehemence and abusiveness on Tallboy's part far exceeds what would seem to be appropriate. Tallboy reacts so strongly, however, because the Nutrax headline Mr. Copley changed was the signal to the drug traffickers which he supplied weekly through that advertisement. Mr. Copley's "interference" was clearly justified, and his restrained manner and obvious ill health makes Tallboy's rage seem all the more unfair. Tallboy's altercation with another co-worker, Smayle, arises from a more trivial cause. He so resents Smayle's jovial, if tactless, reference to some money found in his desk, that he refers to him as a "vulgar little tick," gives voice to his dislike of his teeth and hair cream, and actually decides to

exclude Smayle from the company cricket team. Later he cools down and decides to reinstate Smayle on the team, but he manages, accidentally, to offend him even more deeply by seeming to allude to his feeble-minded son. When the misunderstanding is revealed, instead of apologizing, Tallboy becomes angry again:

Mr. Tallboy was really aghast. He was stricken with shame, and like many shame-ridden people, took refuge in an outburst of rage against the nearest person handy.

'No, I didn't know. How should I be expected to know anything about Smayle's family? Good God! I'm damned sorry and all that, but why must the fellow be such an ass? . . . I don't wonder the boy's feeble minded if he takes after his father.' (Ch. X)

Wrath, however, is not the root Sin in Tallboy's case. His anger arises out of his intense anxiety and guilty conscience. His initial problems were of the usual financial sort, but they were compounded by his trying to make money the "easy" way - through gambling. He began assisting the drug traffickers in another attempt to get "easy money." He plays an essential part in the drug distribution scheme by giving advance notice of the initial letter in the weekly Nutrax headline. (The letter indicates which London pub the drugs will be distributed from that week.) He was told, in the beginning, that the scheme was nothing more than a form of betting trickery, but he later realizes that this is no excuse for his continuing to assist the drug dealers:

'Yes. I fell for it. ... I was damned hard up. ... I can't excuse myself. And I suppose I ought to have guessed that there was more to it than that. But I didn't want to guess. Besides, at first I thought it was all a leg-pull, but I wasn't risking anything, so I buzzed off the first two code-letters, and at the end of the fortnight I got my fifty pounds, I was heavily in debt, and I used it. After that - well, I hadn't the courage to chuck it.' (Ch. XX)

It is hard to blame Tallboy's actions directly on Avarice for his financial difficulties seem genuine enough. His initial betting, however, which began the whole downhill sequence, may have been based on greed. His own words reveal his real Sin: "I ought to have guessed . . . I didn't want to . . . wasn't risking anything . . . buzzed off . . . got my fifty pounds . . . hadn't the courage . . ." (ch. XX). It is a disastrous case of the simple and familiar *something for nothing* obsession - a form of the Sin of Sloth combined with

Avarice. Tallboy did what seemed easiest to do; he chose not to think, not to take moral responsibility for what he had carelessly gotten involved in. The broad and tragic effects of the drug racket were not an issue for him. He simply wished to ensure that he "wasn't risking anything."

Sloth and Avarice are thus the rudimentary causes of Tallboy's tragedy. Several other Deadly Sins are observable, however. The hopelessness of his circumstances cause him to seek an outlet in Lust, and he becomes involved with a loose woman. There is certainly an element of Pride in his behaviour and attitude: even the office secretaries observe that "Mr. Tallboy thought rather a lot of himself" (ch. X). His angry outbursts, discussed above, reveal his propensity to Wrath, the Sin which most directly causes him to plan and execute the murder of the man who was blackmailing him, an action for which he felt no tinge of remorse.

In spite of all this Tallboy is far from villainous in the sense that Sayers' earlier murderers were. Wimsey feels a special compassion for him: "The game's up, old man. I'm sorry - I'm really sorry, because I think you've been having a perfectly bloody time. But there it is" (ch. XX). This murderer is depicted as a weak, rather ordinary, person who carelessly got on a conveyer belt heading in the wrong direction. By the time he realizes where it is taking him he has gone so far that he lacks the courage to jump off. For most people who become entrapped by Sin the pattern is the same. Wimsey sees Tallboy's wrong choices as part of the larger context of human folly:

'I've been a bloody fool,' said Tallboy.

'Most of us are,' said Wimsey. 'I'm damned sorry, old chap.' (Ch. XX)

Tallboy is not portrayed as an evil person - a traitor within the predominantly wholesome world of Pym's Publicity. Even though he is not especially well liked, he is certainly not despised, as Victor Dean was. He is not a 'criminal type'; he is one of the ordinary people employed at Pym's. He has just made more wrong choices of a serious sort than most of the others have.

At one point Bredon (Wimsey) has a panoramic vision of the expanse of human sinfulness represented by this respectable advertising firm:

His eyes strayed to a strip poster, printed in violent colours and secured by drawing-pins to Mr. Hankin's notice-board:

EVERYONE EVERYWHERE ALWAYS AGREES  
ON THE FLAVOUR AND VALUE OF TWENTYMAN'S TEAS

No doubt it was because agreement on any point was so rare in a quarrelsome world, that the fantastical announcements of advertisers asserted it so strongly and so absurdly. Actually, there was no agreement, either on trivialities like tea or on greater issues. In this place, where from morning till night a staff of over a hundred people hymned the praises of thrift, virtue, harmony, eupepsia and domestic contentment, the spiritual atmosphere was clamorous with financial storm, intrigue, dissension, indigestion and marital infidelity. And with worse things - with murder wholesale and retail, of soul and body, murder by weapon and by poison. These things did not advertise, or if they did, they called themselves by other names. (Chap. XVII)

The people who work at Pym's are, taken as a whole, no better or worse than ordinary people anywhere. They share the tendencies common to all humanity - the Seven Deadly Sins.

This novel is more populous than any of the others Sayers wrote. It includes quite a number of ordinary people who are interesting for their own sake, as well as for their contribution to the storyline. Although Sayers focuses on a specific segment of the real world of modern middle-class life - a particular office in a particular kind of business - the larger world is implicit also. This is, in part, because there must be in the advertising business a constant awareness of the way the average citizen thinks. Those who write advertising copy at Pym's know how to appeal to the vanities, frailties, and fears of the common man. The consumer's Pride means that he is susceptible to snob appeal and flattery, his Envy means that he can be encouraged to make purchases simply to be as good as others, his Avarice and Sloth cause him to believe the *something for nothing* myth, and his Gluttony makes him purchase more and more consumable goods which he does not even need. This gullibility, primarily of the middle class, is the basis on which

goods are promoted and sold. Appeal to the weaknesses represented by the Deadly Sins is a rudimentary aspect of an economic structure dependent on advertising.

There is also another, quite different, group of people in Murder Must Advertise. They seem to be largely from the fringe of the upper class. Bredon (Wimsey) works at Pym's by day, and associates himself with this other group by night, because he suspects that Victor Dean's death is related to his involvement with them. They are friends of Dian de Momerie - Bright Young Things who squander their financial, physical and emotional resources in riotous living. They use drugs, or push them, or both. Their hedonistic lifestyle is quickly sketched through Bredon's fleeting encounters with them in the early chapters of the novel. Highly charged, emotive language is used to describe their haunts and activities. Willis refers to their "den of iniquity" (which the author judges to be "not far wrong" ch. IV), and Wimsey's descriptive expressions include, "hot parties," "foul," "nameless orgies" (ch. V). The wording seems melodramatic, but the serious destructive power of such debauchery is brought home by the allusion to two of the de Momerie circle who had committed suicide (ch. III and ch. IX).

Dian de Momerie is the central representation of the Sin and corruption of the whole group. Wimsey knows that Victor Dean had been involved with her. Attending a party dressed as a Harlequin, Wimsey attracts her attention by climbing to the top of a statue-group high above a shallow pool. Dian's extreme egotism is apparent in this first encounter. She screams out, daring him to dive in, and tosses aside the warning, "It's too shallow - he'll break his neck," saying, "He shall dive. I want him to" (ch. IV). Wimsey later observes that pleasing herself is the only reason Dian would ever admit for doing anything (ch. IX). She's a spoiled rich girl who gets a kick out of "corrupting the bourgeois" (ch. V).

Most of the Deadly Sins are apparent in Dian. Her promiscuity is evident: she initially wants Wimsey sexually: "he's got a lovely body ... I think he could give me a

thrill" (ch. V). Sloth is also apparent in her frequent references to boredom, and becoming "sick of" things.

The description of her delighted reaction to the row at Milligan's house (beginning of ch. IX) follows immediately after the account of the gossipy delight at Pym's over the row between Tallman and Copley (end of ch. VIII). The parallel shows that this rudimentary form of Envy - taking pleasure in the misfortune of others - occurs in the two totally different worlds.<sup>22</sup> Sayers observes in her commentary on Purgatory that to be disturbed by the unhappiness and strife of other people is to reject Envy and to exhibit the virtue of Mercy - Mercy in the sense of "generous-mindedness." She quotes Thomas Aquinas's explanation of this point (Summa II.IIae, q.36, a.3):

Envy is the direct opposite of mercy . . . for the envious man is saddened by his neighbour's prosperity, whereas the merciful man is saddened by his neighbour's misfortune; hence the envious are not merciful, and conversely. (186)

Those who truly wish others well do not take pleasure in the thought of their frustrations. But, more often, people do not regard their neighbours with enough good will to be saddened by their trouble.

In Dian this sort of Envy, and indeed all the Sins, occur in an advanced stage. She actually despises even her "friends." She describes the racket between Tod Milligan and the dealers with relish, glorying in the way it made him look ridiculous:

' . . . It was too amusing. He'd run short [of cocaine], or something. There was a hellish row. And that septic woman Babs Woodley was screaming all over the place. She scratched him. I do hope he gets blood-poisoning. He promised it would be there tomorrow, but he looked the most perfect idiot, with blood running down his chin. She said she'd shoot him. It was too marvellous.' (Ch. IX)

Some other genuinely evil people appear in Murder Must Advertise. Major Tod Milligan, the drug dealer, may be perceived as almost a stock character - a cold-hearted villain moved by one impulse only:

He was a large, saturnine man, blank as to morals, but comparatively sober in his habits, as people must be who make money out of other people's vices. (Ch. XI)

He was one of those "singularly disgusting" people who could "batten on the weaknesses of his fellow creatures without sharing them" (ch. XI). His motive is Avarice, and he plays into Wimsey's hand simply because "he's greedy" (ch. XV). When Wimsey queries whether the proposed "advantage" of his listening to Milligan is a "financial advantage," Milligan quickly retorts, "What other kind is there?" (ch. XIV).

Victor Dean, the copy-writer whose death leads to the investigation, was also a thoroughly bad person. The first description of him comes from Miss Meteyard who calls him "an unwholesome little beast" (ch. I!I). In his initial motivation for getting involved with the de Momerie crowd his Lust for Dian was secondary to his Avarice and Pride. Dian soon realized he was "out for what he could get," and was striving to identify himself with the upper classes:

... he actually called himself a gentleman. Wouldn't that make you laugh? ... He said we needn't think he wasn't a gentleman because he worked in an office. (Ch. IX)

He was, in fact, not truly a part of the genial world of Pym's agency because he violated its basic code of honour. Miss Parton recalls:

... he didn't play fair. He was always snooping around other people's rooms, picking up their ideas and showing them up as his own. (Ch. III)

His co-workers saw him as the completely self-serving, mean sort who takes advantage of others at every opportunity - never having his own cigarettes, never there when it's his turn to pay for the drinks (ch. XIII). He took advantage of Tallboy's desperation by blackmailing him. Wimsey judges his actions as "Dirty ... very dirty," and Tallboy justifiably views him as a "devil" (ch. XX).

There is some evidence of the Deadly Sins in several of the novel's minor characters. Montjoy is known to his neighbours as a very respectable bachelor, but he is, in reality, a criminal motivated by extreme Avarice and Lust. He is murdered because of a slip-up in his drug dealing, and the police are able to locate his well-hidden "loot" through his kept woman in Maida Vale (ch. XX). Miss Vavasour arouses the Lust of foolish men like

Tallboy and lures them into sexual relationships in order to make money by blackmailing them (ch. XIII). The Deadly Sins plague the lives of decent people as well. The otherwise virtuous Pamela Dean almost makes a fool of herself through her increasingly obvious Lust for Bredon. He becomes understandably embarrassed by the awkwardness her infatuation is beginning to create.

Bredon is, of course, Lord Peter Wimsey. Because in this investigation he has assumed another identity the presentation of his character has an interesting twist. In many senses Bredon *is* Wimsey, but another side of him. During the decade and a half represented by the eleven books in which he appears, Wimsey has gradually developed greater Humility and compassion. In Murder Must Advertise we see him, both in his temporary identity and in his permanent one, as more serious, more vulnerable, and more human.

Wimsey has little opportunity for Pride in this novel. First, he does not appear, except for one brief scene, in the natural, upper-class habitat in which he is pampered and in control. We see him in a relatively humble role identifying with the day-to-day toil of middle-class people. Some of his co-workers seem to detect his privileged background, but he works hard and becomes one of them. Even Mrs. Crump, the cleaner, comes to the conclusion that he is "not at all proud" (ch. IV).

Second, any stance which suggests Pride must surely become distasteful as he becomes more aware of the degrading effect class distinctions have on people who feel trapped by their socioeconomic status. He is confronted, more than ever before, with the damage done by the assumed superiority of the upper classes.

Third, appreciation of Wimsey's detective skill is severely limited by the circumstances of the case. There is little glory, and he is forced to work harder, physically, than ever before. By day, he toils in an office; by night, he risks his life in the pursuit of drug traffickers. Parker looks upon it as a long overdue encounter with the arduous nature of real detective work as the police know it. He tells Peter,



'It will do you no end of good to have a really difficult case for once. When you've struggled for a bit . . . you may be less sniffy and superior . . . [toward the police]. I hope it will be a lesson to you.' (Ch. V)

In spite of his flashy antics while disguised as a Harlequin, the final outcome affords Wimsey no significant moment of glory. Even his enforced triumph as a cricket player is abruptly cut off by the ignominy of being arrested. Although the people at the office finally learn that Mr. Bredon is Lord Peter Wimsey, they never discover the real reason for his sojourn at Pym's. He himself has no conclusive showdown with the drug dealers.

Even the final confrontation with the murderer, Tallboy, is an emotional anticlimax for Wimsey. It is hard to take delight in the cornering of so unhappy and pitiful a criminal. Tallboy leaves Wimsey's flat, accepting the suggestion that he would be better off to let himself be murdered on the street by the agents of the drug traffickers than to bring shame to his family by being legally executed. Just after Tallboy leaves Parker telephones Wimsey, jubilant over the successful cracking of the drug ring:

' . . . The whole thing is most satisfactory. Now we have only got to rake in your murderer chap, what's his name, and everything in the garden will be lovely.'

'Lovely,' said Wimsey, with a spice of bitterness in his tone, 'simply lovely.'

'What's the matter? You sound a bit peeved. Hang on a minute till I've cleared up here and we'll go round somewhere and celebrate.'

'Not tonight,' said Wimsey. 'I don't feel quite like celebrating.' (Ch. XX)

The difference in the attitude of the two men is due simply to the fact that Wimsey *knew* Tallboy as a person, while Parker did not.

In Murder Must Advertise both the murderer and the detective have been made to appear very human, because their frailties, passions, and Sins have been seriously and sensitively portrayed.

Some of Wimsey's human frailties are revealed in situations where, instead of functioning consistently and rationally with the goal of detection clearly in view, he appears to lose his focus momentarily. His emotions and instincts become dominant over his intellect. When he realizes that Tod Milligan has been efficiently gotten rid of by the

drug syndicate, he is suddenly struck by the miraculous fact that he himself is still alive. He shudders, and is overcome by a state of mild panic in which a series of "absurd and romantic plans" flit through his mind. In the cricket match a different sort of emotion takes over. He had decided not to risk revealing his true identity by playing at his full potential. In the excitement of the match, however, he "regrettably forgot himself . . . forgot his caution and his role" (ch. XVIII). The challenge of the work as a copy-writer also causes Wimsey to forget himself. He becomes so interested in the brilliant advertising scheme he has devised for Whifflets cigarettes that he astonishes Parker by suggesting that he might actually stay on at Pym's to see it through. He has fitted comfortably, albeit temporarily, into the working class role, and broken out of the artificial mould of the idle aristocrat who dabbles in detection. He has become more human.

Peter Wimsey is, however, much more than a human being in this novel. He is also a symbolic character. Disguised as the illusionary Harlequin, he wields an almost spiritual power which is truly terrifying to the superstitious Dian de Momerie. The merry associations of his harlequin costume and the "high, thin, fluting" melody he plays upon the penny whistle are appropriately reminiscent of the innocence of childhood. He symbolizes the power of goodness and Virtue - a power which becomes increasingly dominant over the power of evil as the story progresses.

In Dian's first encounter with the Harlequin she is enthralled by his agility and athletic prowess, but she is in her own environment, and he poses no threat. The next encounter occurs in a dark wood where she is lured by the sound of the whistle:

The sound was so bodiless that it seemed to have no abiding place. She ran forward and it grew fainter; a thick bramble caught her . . . . The piping ceased. She suddenly became afraid of the trees and the darkness. . . . She was running now, desperately, and screaming as she ran. A root, like a hand about her ankles, tripped her, and she dropped, cowering. The thin tune began again.

*Tom, Tom the piper's son -*

She sat up.

The terror induced by forests and darkness,' said a mocking voice from somewhere over her head, 'was called by the Ancients, Panic fear, or the fear of the great god Pan. It is interesting to observe that modern progress has not altogether succeeded in banishing it from ill-disciplined minds.' (Ch. IX)

By associating himself with the "great god Pan" (through the forest setting and his flute-like music as well as his direct reference) Wimsey appropriates the mystique of an ancient presence which is both playful and awesome. Dian's terror has spiritual roots. Her "ill-disciplined mind" and her close identification with the world of "modern progress" predispose her to Panic in the presence of a such an other-worldly power.

Her panic gives way to an uneasy awe. The Harlequin becomes horrifically fascinating to her. Within her own circle Dian dominates, with the Harlequin she is over-ruled and cowed. At first the masculinity of the Harlequin's power over her is sexually arousing, but this phase is brief. She is one of those people whose spiritual acuteness is increased rather than diminished through the surrender to corruption. In a waking vision she glimpses the inside of the Harlequin's mind - "I'm seeing something. . . . They are strapping his elbows. . . . The hanged man. . . . Why are you thinking of hanging?" (ch. IX). She later refutes Milligan's suggestion that she is sexually interested in the Harlequin, saying that she would "as soon get off with the public hangman" (ch. XIV). Wimsey's symbolic representation of the aggressive power of Virtue and law becomes more obvious as the novel progresses. Sayers has carefully established the magnitude of the power of evil within the drug syndicate. Yet the intimidating malignancy recedes and weakens as Wimsey's own power increases. He reverses the reality of the facts when he tells Dian, "I am the pursued and not the pursuer" (ch. IX). Dian first warns the Harlequin, for his own good, to "keep clear of" the dangerous Milligan. Later she realizes that the danger is on the other side. She warns Milligan, much more emphatically, to "keep off that man." She is genuinely afraid of him. Milligan mocks this fear, calling it

a "new sensation" for her, but he himself dreams that night of the Harlequin, of murder, and of hanging.

It is no joke that Peter Wimsey is associated with the hangman. The image may be a horrible one, and Wimsey himself shudders at it, but it is an accurate representation of his role as an agent of justice. Even his sister Mary, concerned about the intense pressure he is clearly experiencing, sighs to herself, "Being Peter's sister is rather like being related to the public hangman" (ch. XV). The symbolic association of Peter with execution has a troubling, almost mythic, significance. He, perhaps even unwillingly, stands for vengeance against evil.

As Tallboy leaves Wimsey's flat, accepting his imminent execution in the street as his just punishment for Sin, Wimsey hears in his mind the words, "- and from thence to the place of execution ... and may the Lord have mercy on your soul" (ch. XX). Bunter had earlier remarked that Tallboy looked "as though the Hound of Heaven had got him" (ch. XX). It had.

The evil of the drug traffic, which is relentlessly corabated by the agents of Virtue, is a deadly entrapment. The Harlequin tells Dian, "You can only go down and down" (ch. IX). Those who are completely sold out to evil already have one foot in hell:

[Dian] was the guardian of the shadow-frontier; through her, Victor Dean ... had stepped into the place of bright flares and black abysses, whose ministers are drink and drugs and its monarch death. (Ch. XI)

Dian recalls hearing, at a murder trial, the words of horrible finality, "And may the Lord have mercy on your soul," and, troubled by the thought of death, asks, "Do we have souls, Harlequin, or is that all nonsense? It is nonsense, isn't it?" He replies, "So far as you are concerned, it probably is" (ch. XI). The implication is that she is so confirmed in Sin that her soul is already lost. Parker and Wimsey recognize the fact that "dope-runners are murderers, fifty times over" with the fearful power not only of literally killing, but of dooming people to hell in both an immediate and an ultimate sense. Parker quotes scripture: "Fear not him that killeth, but him that hath power to cast into hell" (ch. XV).

The destructive power of the "city of night" (ch. XI) is mirrored, on another level, by the world of advertising. Parker reminds Wimsey of the resemblance: "As far as I can make out, all advertisers are dope-merchants" (ch. XV). They "tell lies for money" (ch. V). Their abuse of the common man involves preying on his frailties by encouraging his tendency to indulge in the Deadly Sins of Pride, Envy, Sloth, Avarice, and Gluttony. Their onslaught is relentless:

All over London the lights flickered in and out, calling on the public to save its body and purse: SOPO SAVES SCRUBBING - NUTRAX FOR NERVES - CRUNCHLETS ARE CRISPER . . . IT ISN'T DEAR, IT'S DARLING . . . MAKE ALL SAFE WITH SANFECT. . . . The presses, thundering and growling, ground out the same appeals by the million: ASK YOUR GROCER - ASK YOUR DOCTOR . . . MOTHERS! GIVE IT TO YOUR CHILDREN . . . HUSBANDS! INSURE YOUR LIVES. . . . Whatever you're doing stop it and do something else. . . . Be hectored into health and prosperity! Never let up! Never go to sleep! Never be satisfied. (Ch. V)

It is the lower and middle classes who are led on this "hell's dance of spending and saving." The wealthy "buy only what they want when they want it" (ch. XI); Lady Mary, Peter Wimsey's sister, never reads advertisements (ch. XVII). Advertisers are pictured as cold-hearted sinners, motivated by Avarice. They prey on the poor,

. . . those who, aching for a luxury beyond their reach and for a leisure for ever denied them, could be bullied or weedled into spending their few hardly won shillings on whatever might give them, if only for a moment, a leisured and luxurious illusion. (Ch. XI)

The traffic in lies, like the traffic in drugs, takes care to obscure the final destiny of those whom it snares. The gigantic promotion of Whifflets cigarettes, which Bredon concocted, offers coupons for almost everything a person might need to purchase. "The only thing you cannot get by Whiffing is a coffin; it is not admitted that any Whiffler could ever require such an article" (ch. XV).

There is, nonetheless, a striking ambivalence in Sayers' treatment of the world of advertising. To Wimsey it has the haunting appeal of "a sphere of dim platonic archetypes." He is fascinated by the familiar yet fantastical images - images which are

disconnected from reality yet particularly appropriate to the symbolic method Sayers uses in this novel:

... those strange entities, the Thrifty Housewife, the Man of Discrimination, the Keen Buyer, and the Good Judge, for ever young, for ever handsome, for ever virtuous, economical and inquisitive moved to and fro upon their complicated orbits, comparing prices and values ... perpetually spending to save and saving to spend. (Ch. XI)

He asks a question which neither he, nor the reader can answer: What would happen if all the advertising in the world were to stop? Would people still go on buying as much and for the same reasons, "or would the whole desperate whirligig slow down, and the exhausted public relapse upon plain grub and elbow grease?" (ch. XI).

The last line of the book, "Advertise or go under," acknowledges that advertising has become an essential of modern life. In an ideal world it might have been based on reason and facts. In our fallen world it exploits the worst of human tendencies. Nevertheless it has become part of the comfortable fabric of our lives - a necessary evil.

There is tension between the Deadly Sins and the Christian Virtues in individual lives and in society as a whole. Individuals may progressively defeat the Sins, and follow the way of Virtue. Society has a partial defense against evil because of the work of those like Wimsey and Parker who represent the formalized Virtue of the law which pursues and punishes those whose deadly sinfulness destroys the lives of others. (The law even attempts, albeit feebly, to protect the consumer from the worst abuses of advertisers.) In the final analysis, however, the evil in the world can only be curtailed: it cannot be cured, and Parker and Wimsey both realize this:

Parker made a hopeless gesture.

'I don't know, Peter. It's no good worrying about it. My job is to catch the heads of the gangs if I can, and, after that, as many as possible of the little people. I can't overthrow cities and burn the population.'

'Tis the Last Judgement's fire must cure this place,' said Wimsey, 'calcine its clods and set its prisoners free.' (Ch. XV).

Murder Must Advertise is unique among Sayers' works as a truly comprehensive picture of Sin. The Seven Deadly Sins are shown as an influence both in the lives of

decent, ordinary people and in the lives of people who are irretrievably immoral. The Sins are present in the friendly daytime world of an advertising agency, and in the hostile night-time world of a drug syndicate. Sayers skillfully juxtaposes the two "cardboard worlds", and successfully depicts the horror and irrevocability of evil and the power of Virtue, symbolized by Peter Wimsey, which relentlessly battles against it.

### The Nine Tailors

The Nine Tailors has received more commendation than any other novel Sayers wrote.<sup>23</sup> James Brabazon, Sayers' biographer, recognizes the thoroughness and skill in Sayers' "careful, detailed, loving building up of the portrait of a community" in The Nine Tailors (150). Dawson Gaillard's overview of Sayers fiction describes it as "panoramic": "Its activities and its landscape expand significantly . . . to take in heaven and earth" (71). In his essay "*The Nine Tailors* and the Complexity of Innocence" Lionel Basney calls it "the most successful of Sayers' stories at integrating detective interest and a seriously intended 'criticism of life'" (23). Catherine Kenney (The Strange Case of Dorothy L. Sayers) acknowledges the "coherent, serious theme that emanates from its particular setting and emerges from its plot" (59).

In his Literary Biography of Sayers, Ralph E. Hone describes the writing and the immediate success of this novel, quoting excerpts from Sayers' own account of the process:

It was hard work, including 'incalculable hours spent in writing out sheets and sheets of [bell ringing] changes,' until she could do any method accurately in her head. . . . When it was all completed 'the experts could discern only (I think) three small technical errors which betrayed the lack of practical experience.' She confessed that this achievement made her sinfully proud. As a consequence of the successful writing of the novel, Sayers was made an honorary member of bell-ringers groups and a vice-president of the Campanological Society of Great Britain. . . .

[A month after the publication of the novel] the Daily Express published an interview conducted with Sayers. . . . She is described as the 'best seller' in detective fiction on the basis of the sales of The Nine Tailors. It immediately ran into three impressions, nearly 100,000 copies being sold in seven weeks in the United Kingdom alone. (67-69)

In spite of the spiritual range of The Nine Tailors, the geographical setting is distinctly limited. There are a few very brief scenes in London and France, but the significant events all occur within the quiet village of Fenchurch St. Paul where the ebb and flow of life continues very much as it has for many generations. This is in strong contrast to Murder Must Advertise, which portrays the hectic life style of the large modern metropolis.

The moral climate is dramatically different from Murder Must Advertise as well. In the confined world of The Nine Tailors most of the characters uprightly eschew the Seven Deadly Sins, while in the more expansive world of Murder Must Advertise the Sins are frantically indulged. The implicit suggestion is, perhaps, that the "strait" gate and narrow way that Christ speaks of in Matthew 7:14 are more readily found by those whose lives are quiet and contained than by those before whom the whole world lies open.

The Nine Tailors is a book about Virtue - primarily the traditional, God-fearing Virtue of simple rural people. There is not a single scene depicting urban or upper class life. The theme of Virtue is reinforced by the dominant symbols - the church and its bells. Most of the characters are conscientious Christians. Even though the novel is, in the broad sense, a murder mystery, it transpires that no willful murder has been committed. Compared to the other novels there is very limited portrayal of sinful traits. The core of Sin from which all the trouble arises is largely confined to the past - the period when evil is most destructive is outside the time-frame of the book.

Geoffrey Deacon, the man who dies so mysteriously, represents this core of evil. He appears to have been a truly corrupt person, but we only hear about him - we never encounter him. He has not lived in the village for many years, and the evil things that he



did, though they stretch fingers out of the past to trouble the present, have limited destructive power. Will and Mary Thoday do suffer greatly during the course of the novel because of Deacon, but this is largely because of memory and conscience, not because Deacon continues to be an active threat. When the novel opens the evil is already curtailed and confined, both literally and figuratively, for (as we later learn) Deacon is already tied up in the bell tower where he will die.

Lord Peter's involuntary New Year's sojourn in Fenchurch St. Paul is a peaceful and uplifting experience. His mind deliberately resists all inclinations to think or talk 'shop': he responds "peevisly" when Bunter humorously alludes to hanging, and makes it clear, "We're not detecting now" ("The Bells are Rung Up"). In fact, fully one quarter of the novel goes by without a hint of mystery. The generosity of the old rector, the stately beauty of the church, the magnificent music of the bells, and the rural atmosphere of the village are sufficient to enthrall the reader. Even after the mystery is introduced, these are the things which continue to define the book's essence.

Of all Sayers' novels The Nine Tailors is the most notable for its beauty. The symbolism, the structure, and the characters all contribute to the novel's unique atmosphere. The scriptural phrase "the beauty of holiness" suggests the blend of aesthetic and moral values on which the beauty of The Nine Tailors rests. Yet there is a commonplaceness about the setting and a flesh-and-blood earthiness about the characters which preclude picturesque sentimentality. There is a disturbing awesomeness in the descriptions of the church and the bells. The setting and the symbolism provide a backdrop for the central beauty of the book - the dignity and Virtue of the characters.

The contrasting Virtues have much more than a casual relationship to the Deadly Sins. There is a clear tension between each Virtue and its opposite Vice. To decrease in Pride is, by definition, to increase in Humility; to control the tendency toward Gluttony is to become more temperate and self-disciplined.

The Virtues which are opposed to the spiritual Sins, Pride, Envy, and Avarice, are particularly noticeable in the major characters in The Nine Tailors. These Virtues are Humility, Mercy, and Liberality. The Virtues of Meekness, or peace, (opposed to Wrath) and Zeal (opposed to Sloth) are also very apparent. By looking at the opposing Virtues in the order in which the Sins are usually listed - Humility/Pride, Mercy/Envy, Peace/Wrath, Zeal/Sloth, Liberality/Avarice, Temperance/Gluttony, Chastity/Lust - we can observe the comprehensive picture of Virtue Sayers has developed in this novel.

The central character, and certainly the most memorable one, is the rector of Fenchurch St. Paul, the Reverend Mr. Venables. His life is the embodiment of all the Christian Virtues, yet his personality is not of the austere, meditative sort. He is a down-to-earth, bustling, happy man who watches over the spiritual and practical welfare of the villagers, but at the same time functions as one of them.

Mr. Venables is a thoroughly humble man. He does not consider himself to be superior to others in any respect. In fact, he is scarcely aware of himself at all. His constant preoccupation is with the welfare of others, from major concerns like flood preparations to minor ones like tooting his horn before edging his car into the road. Mr. Venables' education is connected with his practical wisdom but not with any sort of higher social status. His Humility regarding his specialized knowledge is apparent when he offers his own publication on the subject of bell-ringing for Lord Peter's perusal with the remark, "Perhaps you would like to look at this - a trifling contribution of my own to campanological lore" ("The Bells in their Courses"). He makes no mention at all of two other similar pamphlets, referred to on its title page.

The one upper-class family in the village, the Thorpes, also show the Virtue of Humility. Their friendliness and lack of haughty manners has won them the esteem of the villagers. It was "a rare trouble" to the whole village when old Sir Charles died ("The Bells in their Courses"). The eldest son, Henry, and his wife and daughter are just as well liked by their poorer neighbours. The repelling quality of Pride, in contrast to the

appealing quality of Humility, is illustrated in two minor characters associated with the Thorpe family - their pompous and arrogant housekeeper, Mrs Gates, and Henry's self-important brother, Edward. Mrs. Venables gives voice to the village's disapproval of Mrs. Gates' snobbery when she remarks that the housekeeper considered herself "far too much of a lady" to sit with the Thorpes' other servants ("Lord Peter is Called Wrong"). Edward Thorpe, who lives in London at the time of the novel's action, could never have become part of the village as the rest of the family had. Inspector Blundell expresses the scorn the villagers feel for Edward's high opinion of himself when he explains that it was Edward who had recommended the scoundrel Deacon for employment in his father's house:

'... having recommended the fellow he had to stick up for him. I don't know if you've met Mr. Edward Thorpe, but if you have, my lord, you'll know that anything that belongs to him is always perfect. He's never been known to make a mistake, Mr. Edward hasn't - and so you see he couldn't possibly have made a mistake about Deacon.' ("Lord Peter is Taken from Lead")

Envy rejoices in the misfortunes of others while Mercy is grieved by them. The best example of Mercy, or compassionate generosity of spirit, is again Mr. Venables. He is genuinely saddened by the misfortunes of others, and he invariably chooses to think the best of everyone. The discovery of the mysterious corpse in the graveyard and its subsequent internment with full ceremonial rites provide an exciting diversion for the village, but not for the compassionate rector, who cannot ignore the painful human tragedy behind the mystery. During the funeral Wimsey muses, "... how we are all enjoying it! Except dear old Venables - he's honestly distressed" ("Lord Peter is Taken from Lead"). When the corpse is later identified as Deacon's, and the crimes he had committed are openly discussed, the rector's dismay is tempered with compassion: "What a sad villain the man must have been!" ("Lord Peter is Called Wrong").

Few can compete with this degree of Mercy. The people of Fenchurch St. Paul are, nonetheless, characterized by compassion more than by its converse, Envy.

Superintendent Blundell, who plays a major role in the investigation, lacks the brusque and impersonal manner generally associated with policemen. He is patient with irritating individuals like Mrs. Gates, and his kindheartedness is especially shown in his attitude toward the idiot, Potty Peake. Even though Potty has caused annoyance and aroused suspicion during the investigation, Blundell is most anxious that Potty not be brought into a court unnecessarily lest the "poor chap" end up unhappily confined to an institution.

Meekness opposes the spirit of Wrath, the third of the Deadly Sins, by promoting peace and reconciliation. The constant demands made on the rector are so relentless that it would seem humanly justified if he expressed anger at being allowed no opportunity to plan his use of time and pace of work. His freedom from irritability is due to true Meekness - as a minister of Christ he rightly sees himself as a debtor to all men (Romans 1:14) and as the servant of all (Matthew 20:25-28). His function as a peacemaker is seen in his attempts to smooth out even small instances of friction, such as that between old Hezekiah Lavender, the veteran bell-ringer, and young Wally Pratt, the insecure novice.

Another example of this Virtue occurs in Hilary Thorpe, the young girl who is bereaved of both parents within a close space of time. Although subdued and saddened by her great loss, she displays none of the bitterness and anger often associated with grief. Such resentment of the "ways of Providence" is illustrated by the illogical and venomous anger against the Almighty expressed by old Mrs. Giddings ("Mr. Gotobed is Called Wrong"). Hilary, on the other hand, suffers her tragic losses patiently and with true Meekness. She explains to Lord Peter that she seldom visits the graveside because she doesn't think of her mother as being there ("Lord Peter is Taken from Lead") - a reflection of the Christian hope of eternal life stated in the inscription on the tenor bell, Tailor Paul: ". . . IN + CHRIST + IS + DETH + ATT + END + IN + ADAM + YAT + BEGANNE" ("Mr. Gotobed is Called Wrong").

The opposite Virtue to Sloth is Zeal. Since Sloth, broadly understood, also incorporates dreariness and sadness, its opposite also encompasses Christian Joy. Both Zeal and Joy are very visible traits in Mr. Venables:

'I will come immediately.' ("The Bells in their Courses")

He rushed off almost before he'd finished his breakfast. ("The Bells in their Courses")

The rector never took holidays at the greater festivals, and scarcely ever at any other time, and [his wife] could not see that there was any necessity for the rest of the world to do so. ("Mr. Gotobed is Called Wrong")

'Isn't it wonderful?' cried the Rector. ("The Bells are Rung Up")

He chugged off cheerfully, beaming round at them through the discoloured weather curtains. ("The Waters are Called Out")

Mr. Venables' lively Zeal and optimistic Joy are rooted in a faith which remains firm in spite of adversity.

These Virtues are apparent, too, in the lives of other characters. Mrs. Venables labours as cheerfully and as tirelessly as her husband does. Zeal is also evident in the willingness of the bell-ringers to toil all night to achieve something of great magnitude and beauty. They have the capacity to give themselves wholeheartedly to a very taxing labour and to value it for its own sake, regardless of any praise they might receive. During the flood when all the people of Fenchurch St. Paul are billeted in the church the remarkable orderliness and pleasantness of the situation is due to the fact that everyone has a mind to pull his weight and to find simple sources of enjoyment in spite of the great inconvenience and tragic losses. Hilary's determination to win a scholarship and earn her own living, even when she learns she has inherited a substantial fortune, further illustrates the Virtue of Zeal.

Liberality in the use of material wealth is another of the Virtues which is especially visible in Mr. Venables. He generously pays, out of his personal funds, for the deepening and repairing of the village well ("Lord Peter is taken from Lead"), and he undertakes the burial costs for the unidentified corpse ("Lord Peter is Called into the

Hunt"). He even advances money to many of his parishioners so that they can pay their tithes. Hilary Thorpe's parents show similar generosity and integrity in financial matters. Both her grandfather and her father felt honour-bound to pay for the emerald necklace, stolen by their servant Deacon and his accomplice from a visiting relative.

This relative was a mean woman - a sharp contrast to the Thorpes. Her Avarice caused her to accept money for the stolen necklace from the Thorpes who could ill afford it even though her own carelessness had been the main cause of the theft. She makes no comment when the necklace is recovered and returned to her at the end of the novel. After her death, however, it is revealed that she had been so deeply impressed by the integrity of Hilary's father in money matters that she bequeathed him the whole of her large estate with the commendation, "He is the only honest man I know" ("The Slow Work"). This unexpected turn of events indicates that Virtue is often highly esteemed, even by those who make little attempt to cultivate Virtue in their own lives.

Edward Thorpe, Hilary's proud London uncle, is also avaricious. Wimsey realizes that once Hilary has become a financial asset Uncle Edward will be much more likely to allow her to set her own career goals ("The Waters are Called Out"). Just as the Virtues cluster in godly people like Mr. Venables, the Sins also cluster in certain unpleasant minor characters like Edward Thorpe.

The Virtue of Temperance or moderation applies to many facets of life. It is opposed to Gluttony both in the general sense of excessive self-indulgence and in the narrower sense of an undue preoccupation with food and drink. Mr. Venables' freedom from Gluttony is shown in his refusal to give priority to his own meals. In the village of Fenchurch St. Paul food is not an end in itself, but a means of strengthening the body for worthy activity - such as bell-ringing:

[Mr. Venables] '... Come along, come along. You must make a good dinner, Lord Peter, to fit you for your exertions. What have we here? Stewed oxtail? Excellent! Most sustaining! I trust, Lord Peter, you can eat stewed oxtail. For what we are about to receive ...' ("The Bells are Rung Up")

Similarly, alcohol is consumed to provide much needed refreshment:

Wimsey, observing on a bench near the door an enormous brown jug and nine pewter tankards, understood, with pleasure, that the landlord of the Red Cow had, indeed, provided "the usual" for the refreshment of the ringers. ("The Bells in Their Courses")

There are a number of references to pleasant eating experiences in the novel, but the meals are simple and unpretentious. In the first chapter Lord Peter walks out of the storm into the cosy haven of the rectory craving muffins. That is just what Mrs. Venables has prepared for tea, and Peter enjoys them as much as - perhaps more than - he would the most elegant of meals. The people of Fenchurch St. Paul have neither the money nor the sophistication to eat and drink in the way Lord Peter is accustomed to. But perhaps they would have no desire to, even if they could. The Virtue of Temperance allows them enjoyment enough in buttery muffins, shepherd's pie ("The Bells in Their Courses"), and tinned salmon with lots of vinegar ("Lord Peter Dodges"). Even Potty Peake, with his limited mental capacity, is thankful for the roast fowl Christmas Day, and boiled pork and greens Sunday ("Plain Hunting").

Chastity is a Virtue which is largely taken for granted in The Nine Tailors. There are no instances of relationships which are predatory in a sexual sense, except that between the evil Geoffrey Deacon and his illegal French wife. He seemed to have used her primarily for his own convenience. The people of the village are most upright in sexual matters. Mary and Will Thoday are completely horrified by the fact that they have believed themselves man and wife not knowing that Deacon, Mary's first husband, had not actually died, but only faked his death.

Although all of the Virtues opposed to the Seven Deadly Sins are visible in the inhabitants of Fenchurch St. Paul, they occasionally display certain familiar sinful tendencies. Mr. Venables finds it necessary to preach frequently on thankfulness for, he says, "the people are much disposed to grumble" ("Plain Hunting"). The aged bell-ringer, Hezekiah Lavender, is an upright Christian, but he tends to be somewhat proud

and critical. He outspokenly expresses his preference for the old days when "everything was straightforward and proper" before "edification" spoiled it all. Still, his faults, like those of most of the villagers, are benign ones.

Deacon is the one character in the novel who is truly sinful. He does not actually appear in the novel, except in the memories of characters. He represents evil, but at a distance. His basic motivation for stealing the necklace was, of course, Avarice. Potty Peake recalls Will Thoday's anguished analysis of Deacon's evil: "'Money,' Will says. 'Tis a great wickedness, is money'" ("Plain Hunting"). Deacon's love of money led him to further evil actions. He begrudged his partner, Cranton, his share of the money they would receive if they sold the necklace, so he treacherously betrayed him. Cranton, who does appear in the novel, is a contrast to Deacon. Although technically a criminal, he is not a truly immoral and evil person. Inspector Parker describes him as "a highly respectable and gentlemanly burglar with the heart of a rabbit and a wholesome fear of bloodshed" ("The Dodging"). Deacon, on the other hand, was no stranger to Wrath. He was a ruthless, violent man. After several years in jail he escaped, murdering two men: a prison warden, and a soldier whose identity he wished to steal.

The success of Deacon's evil plots is attributed to his cleverness. When Old Hezekiah Lavender is reminded that he once thought highly of Jeff Deacon he comments on the spiritual phenomenon of wisdom facilitating evil:

'Quick he was, there ain't no denyin', and he pulled a very good rope. But quickness in the 'ed don't mean a good 'eart. There's many evil men is as quick as monkeys. Didn't the good Lord say as much? The children o' this world is wiser in their generation than the children o' light. He commended the unjust steward, no doubt, but he give the fellow the sack just the same, none the more for that. ("Lord Peter is Called into the Hunt")

Deacon's wickedness, upsetting though it was to the whole village, has become a thing of the past by the time the novel begins. It is only the Thodays who are still vulnerable. There is true righteous indignation in Will's rage against the man whose



crime so hurt his wife and whose reappearance after a long pretence of death made a mockery of their happy marriage:

'I see,' said Thoday, bitterly. 'I see. It comes to this - there ain't no end to the wrong that devil done us. He ruined my poor Mary and brought her into the dock once, and he robbed her of her good name and made bastards of our little girls, and now he can come between us again at the altar rails and drive her into the witness-box to put my neck in the rope. If ever a man deserved killing, he's the one, and I hope he's burning in hell for it now.' 'Very likely he is,' said Wimsey. ("Will Thoday Goes in Quick")

The imagery of hell recurs in Will's brother's account of Deacon's appearance when he discovered him dead in the bell-tower several days after Will had left him tied up there.

'... He'd died on his feet, and whatever it was, he'd seen it coming to him. He'd struggled like a tiger against the ropes, working at them till he could get upright, and they had cut through the stuff of his jacket and through his socks. And his face! My God, sir, I've never seen anything like it. His eyes staring open and a look in them as if he looked down into hell....' ("The Dodging")

The horror of this scene underscores the theme of righteousness. Judgement had indeed finally caught up with the sinner, who violated the sanctity of the Christian community, the sanctity of Christian marriage, and the sanctity of the house of God. He had sat under the preaching of Mr. Venables, and as a skillful bell-ringer he had participated in a ritual of Christian worship, yet he betrayed the trust of his wife and his employer, and brought disgrace on the whole community. While a service was in progress he hid the stolen necklace in the church itself, high in the beams among the cherubim. He sent Cranton an obscure cryptogram which, decoded by Wimsey and Mr. Venables, contains the line "He sitteth between the cherubim," and other verses from the Psalms, as clues to the location of the emerald necklace which has remained hidden in the church. His use, in this context, of references to God and heaven is the final insult to holiness.

The church and its bells symbolically represent the theme of Virtue, Sin, and judgement. Hezekiah Lavender closely identifies with his bell, Tailor Paul, which is

rung to announce every death in the parish. Because of this, and because of his age, he is very conscious of time, mortality, and the certainty of judgement. He speaks of the bells as if they were conscious agents of the righteous indignation of God against Sin, and admonishes Lord Peter to pursue Virtue and eschew evil:

'They bells du know well who's a-haulin' of un. Wonnerful understandin' they is. They can't abide a wicked man. They lays in wait to overthrow 'un. . . . Make righteousness your course bell, my lord, an' keep a-follerin' on her an' she'll see you through your changes till Death calls you to stand. Yew ain't no call to be afear'd o' the bells if so be as yew follows righteousness.' ("The Quick Work")

The theme of Christian Virtue is reflected in the awesome quality of divine holiness symbolized by the size and beauty of the parish church, which is closely identified with the life of the community. The name of the village shows how closely its identity is tied to the church. In the first chapter when Lord Peter and Bunter have been forced to abandon their car in a bitter snowstorm, the sound of the church clock is the first indication they receive of the nearby comfort of the village. The first sight of the huge structure is overwhelming: "there loomed out of the whirling snow a grey, gigantic bulk." Later the same evening its massiveness is again powerfully impressive as Lord Peter proceeds toward it in the company of the bell-ringers: "Ahead of them, the great bulk of the church loomed dark and gigantic" ("The Bells are Rung Up"). Inside, the impact is just as great:

[Wimsey] felt himself sobered and awestricken by the noble proportions of the church, in whose vast spaces the congregation . . . seemed almost lost. The wide nave and shadowy aisles, the lofty span of the chancel arch . . . the intimate and cloistered loveliness of the chancel . . . led his attention on and focused it first upon the remote glow of the sanctuary. Then his gaze returning to the nave, followed the strong yet slender shafting that sprang fountain-like from floor to foliated column-head, spraying into the light, wide arches that carried the clerestory. And there, mounting to the steep pitch of the roof, his eyes were held entranced with wonder and delight. Incredibly aloof, flinging back the light in a dusky shimmer of bright hair and gilded outspread wings, soared the ranked angels, cherubim and seraphim, choir over choir, from corbel and hammer-beam floating face to face uplifted. ("The Bells in Their Courses")

The size, the architecture, and the very atmosphere of the building lift the mind from the mundane and temporal world. When the rector admits his tendency to "lose count of time," Wimsey suggests that perhaps "the being continually in and about this church brings eternity too close" ("The Bells are Rung Up").

The bells provide part of the awesome atmosphere of holiness that surrounds the parish church of Fenchurch St. Paul, and they are the novel's most important symbol. They are, as Hezekiah observed, representatives of divine righteousness and judgement of Sin. Each of the eight bells has a unique history and character; together they produce a powerful and majestic expression of praise. In the long peal which rings in the New Year, the music of the bells is described as if it arose from their own character rather than from the wills of the puny men who pulled the ropes:

The bells gave tongue: Gaude, Sabaoth, John, Jericho, Jubilee, Dimity, Batty Thomas and Tailor Paul, rioting and exulting high up in the dark tower, wide mouths rising and falling, brazen tongues clamouring, huge wheels turning to the dance of the leaping ropes. . . . every bell in her place striking tuneably, hunting up, hunting down, dodging, snapping, laying her blows behind, making her thirds and fourths, working down to lead the dance again. Out over the flat, white wastes of fen, over the spear-straight steel-dark dykes and the wind-bent groaning poplar trees, bursting from the snow-choked louvres of the belfry, whirled away southward and westward in gusty blasts of clamour to the sleeping counties went the music of the bells - little Gaude, silver Sabaoth, strong John and Jericho, glad Jubilee, sweet Dimity and old Batty Thomas, with great Tailor Paul bawling and striding in the midst of them. Up and down went the shadows of the ringers upon the walls, up and down went the scarlet sallies flickering roofwards and floorwards, and up and down, hunting in their courses, went the bells of Fenchurch St. Paul. ("The Bells in Their Courses")

Even when they are still and silent an awesome presence seems to emanate from the bells. Hilary Thorpe, who loves to visit the bell tower, regards them with a kind of holy fear. As she mounts the second ladder "the bells, with mute black mouths gaping downwards, brooded in their ancient places" ("Mr. Gotobed is Called Wrong"). The two largest bells are especially personified. Hezekiah speaks of Tailor Paul as being aware of the moral state of her ringers, and bringing wrathful destruction on those who are evil. Batty Thomas is a "queer-tempered" bell that "has her fancies." She is reputed to have

killed two men ("Mr. Gotobed is Called Wrong"). Both Wimsey and Cranton confess to being overcome by the feeling that the bells were about to descend upon them ("Nobhy Goes in Slow"). Cranton's experience in the bell-tower is truly terrifying. He describes his descent of the ladder in the dark:

'... There I was, and those bells just beneath me - and, God! how I hated the look of them. I went all cold and sweaty and the torch slipped out of my hand and went down, and hit one of the bells. I'll never forget the noise it made. It wasn't loud, but kind of terribly sweet and threatening, and it went humming on and on, and a whole lot of other notes seemed to come out of it, high up and clear and close - right in my ears. You'll think I'm loopy, but I tell you that bell was alive.... ("Nobhy Goes in Slow")

Jim Thoday, who on the same night is removing Deacon's body from the bell tower, has a similar experience: "And those bells! I was expecting all the time to hear them speak ... you'd think they were alive, sometimes, and could talk" ("The Dodging").

Yet, for all their uncanniness and austere dignity, the bells are also an integral part of the life of the community. They ring in joy and in sorrow: in worship, in celebration, in bereavement, and in warning.

When the sluice breaks during the flood Will Thoday is killed, and it is Wimsey who must bring the news back to the church where the villagers have taken refuge from the rising water. Mary's grief and anguish disturb Wimsey so much that he escapes to the belfry and begins to ascend in spite of the violent clamour of the bells still ringing out the flood warning. Half way through the bell-chamber he realizes his mistake. He also realizes the cause of Geoffrey Deacon's death:

All the blood of his body seemed to rush to his head, swelling it to bursting-point.... It was not noise - it was brute pain, a grinding, bludgeoning, ran-dan, crazy, intolerable torment. He felt himself screaming, but could not hear his own cry. His ear-drums were cracking; his senses swam away. ("The Waters are Called Home")

He saves himself by getting through the trap door and out onto the roof.

After Will Thoday is buried Wimsey tells the Rector and Superintendent Blundell that the murderers of Geoffrey Deacon are "hanged already" - they are the bells. Mr. Venables muses on the spiritual implication of Deacon's strange execution:

'... the bells are said to be jealous in the presence of evil. Perhaps God speaks through those mouths of inarticulate metal. He is a righteous judge, strong and patient, and is provoked every day.' ("The Bells are Rung Down")

The Nine Tailors develops the idea of Sin and Virtue in one other significant way. It represents another stage in the development of Humility in Lord Peter Wimsey. In this novel, as in Murder Must Advertise, Wimsey has little opportunity for personal glory.

It is a blow to his pride as a detective when, contrary to his expectations, the emeralds are found, still in their original hiding place:

'And we're wrong, Blundell,' said Lord Peter. 'We've been wrong from start to finish. Nobody found them. Nobody killed anybody for them. Nobody deciphered the cryptogram. We're wrong, wrong, out of the hunt and wrong!' ("Lord Peter is Called Wrong")

Some of their deductions were correct, but their conclusions were wrong. Even though their ingenuity leads to the recovery of the necklace from "between the cherubim" of the church roof, they are not able to unravel the mystery surrounding the murder. It is left unresolved for many months, until Wimsey climbs the bell tower during the flood and discovers the missing piece of the puzzle. This insight, however, is something *given* to him; it does not come through his own mental processes. The final stage of the detection, like so many things in this novel, is divinely - not humanly - ordered. It is a humbling experience.

Throughout these last novels Wimsey is also shown to be increasing in the Virtue of Mercy or compassion. Detection consequently becomes much more stressful. Struggling with his sympathy for the Thodays, who, it seems, may have committed a crime, he expresses his frustration to Mr. Venables:

'I rather wish I hadn't come butting into this. Some things may be better left alone, don't you think? My sympathies are all in the wrong place and I don't like it. I know all about not doing evil that good may come. It's doin' good so that evil may come that is so embarassin'.' ("The Quick Work")

Later Wimsey's compassion extends even to the real villain: "Geoffrey Deacon was a bad man, but when I think of the helpless horror of his lonely and intolerable death-agony -- " ("The Bells are Rung Down").

During the case Wimsey develops greater Humility and Mercy. Perhaps it is impossible for a person to become involved in the life of Fenchurch St. Paul without growing in the Christian Virtues which are opposed to the Deadly Sins.

The worst forms of Sin are based on self-love, and the greatest contrast to such Sin is the self-sacrificial Love of others. This supreme *agape* Love, which images the redeeming love of God, is the highest of Christian Virtues: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The Nine Tailors portrays such sacrificial Love on a number of levels. The self-denial involved in Mr. Venables' ministry is very apparent, and his wife habitually considers the interests of others before her own.

Blame-taking by the innocent is a recurring phenomenon. Mary Thoday feels responsible for the theft of the necklace: "Poor Jeff, there's no doubt he was tempted - all through my fault, my lord, talking so free" [i.e. of her knowledge of where the necklace was kept] ("Emily Turns Bunter from Behind"). Her husband Will keeps the dreadful fact that Deacon is still alive to himself, in the same spirit of self-giving love: "So I made up my mind to say nothing about it and take the sin - if it was a sin - on my shoulders. I didn't want to make no more trouble for her" ("Will Thoday Goes in Quick"). Will and his brother James both thought the other had killed Deacon. Each of them tried to cover the assumed guilt of the other by allowing himself to be suspected of the crime.

When it is finally revealed that the "murder" was done by the bells Wimsey and Blundell both recognize that there is a sense in which all of the bell-ringers are responsible for Deacon's death. As Christians, functioning within the context of the religious life of the community, they unknowingly became the human instruments in a horrible execution. Wimsey's willingness to assume moral responsibility for the

sufferings of the unfortunate Thodays, and symbolic responsibility for the death agony of the wicked Geoffrey Deacon, shows the selfless concern for others that is part of Christian Virtue.

For Christians there is only one ultimate solution to the problem of Sin - redemption through divine grace, a grace that involves the willing sacrifice of the innocent on behalf of the guilty. This motif recurs throughout the novel and culminates in the death of the "dear, good fellow," Will Thoday, who lays down his life in a courageous attempt to save the village as a whole, and one man in particular, from the destruction of the flood. The flood itself symbolizes the divine cleansing and renewal which comes to the Christian community when Sin has been identified and eradicated.

Humility is the greatest lesson of all. Even clever, competent, well-meaning men like Lord Peter Wimsey must be humbled if they are to achieve true wisdom. God is sovereign, and the rector's response to Peter's uneasiness about his own role in the case emphasizes the limitation of human wisdom:

'My dear boy . . . it does not do for us to take too much thought for tomorrow. It is better to follow the truth and leave the result in the hand of God. He can foresee where we cannot, because He knows all the facts.'  
("The Quick Work")

Of all Sayers' novels, The Nine Tailors is probably the best loved. Its lasting appeal is not dependent on the plot, or even on the characterization. The impact of the work comes from its powerful depiction of Virtue, the compelling beauty which is the beauty of righteousness. Implicit in the whole is the awesome presence of the eternal God, sovereign and holy, who *sitteth between the cherubim*.

### Gaudy Night

When the novel Gaudy Night appeared a review in The Times Literary Supplement (9 November 1935) praised the interplay of psychology and detection which makes this book stand out among Sayers' novels "even as she stands out among writers of detective fiction." The reviewer called it "a novel of character development that moves alongside the development of the detective interest" (reported by Youngberg 22). Some of the reviews were unfavourable, however, perhaps because Gaudy Night bore little resemblance to the sort of book most whodunit fans expected. Gaillard reports that The Nation's review complained that it had "no murder, no action, no problem, no mystery" (72). The New York Times Book Review thought it too "highbrow" (Youngberg 25). Nonetheless, Sayers had done exactly what she had set out to do - she had changed the formula. Catherine Kenney observes that in this novel Sayers achieves what she had long worked towards:

... she finally accomplishes her goal of marrying the detective plot to the English novel. ... Gaudy Night is a mystery story, but in it, the focus is upon the human perplexities revealed through the mystery, rather than upon the detective problem per se. Thus, the novel ... troubles the reader into thinking about real human problems and real human life. (81)

Many readers view Gaudy Night as the richest of Sayers' novels - the pinnacle of her achievement as a novelist. She certainly put more of herself into it than she had into anything else up to that point in time. Barbara Reynolds points out how much of Sayers' own life it mirrors, and how many of her deepest concerns it explores (Dorothy L. Sayers 254f). Sayers said, in a letter to her friend Muriel St Clare Byrne,

... the whole book is personal ... in the sense that it presents a consistent philosophy of conduct for which I am prepared to assume personal responsibility. (Reynolds, Dorothy L. Sayers 254)

Gaudy Night, like its sequel Busman's Honeymoon, is a love story. It describes the long awaited blossoming of love between Harriet and Peter, who are the primary subject of Sayers' novels, particularly the later ones. For five years there were serious barriers



preventing their union - barriers which could be removed only through the maturing and refining of their characters. Harriet, in Gaudy Night, experiences the same sort of humbling, and growth in self knowledge, which Peter undergoes in the previous three novels. For her, as for Peter, the struggle with Pride is the most important conflict of all, because Pride subsumes all the other Sins.

The love between Harriet and Peter is romantic and physical, but it has the depth and richness of an affection which is deeply spiritual. The barriers to the mutual affirmation of their love for each other are finally removed because, in returning to Oxford, they reaffirm another and higher love.

Harriet comes back to Oxford for the first time in many years, and she is enthralled by her rediscovery of the relentless and unquenchable love of learning which resides there. Beside this love of truth all other passions and commitments seem petty and stifling. Does this mean, Harriet wonders, that for the woman who makes this her first love, all of life must be dominated by the intellect, and that the heart must be suppressed and mistrusted?

Gaudy Night is primarily concerned with priorities and choices, and with the wise Love of worthy things. In defining virtuous Love, it explores the contrasting perversions of Love - the Deadly Sins. Sayers explains the Augustinian view of Sin in her Introduction to Purgatory:

Man has a natural impulse to love that which pleases him. This impulse, which is the root of all virtue, can be perverted, weakened, or misdirected to become the root of all sin. Thus all the Capital Sins are shown to derive from love for some good, either falsely perceived, or inadequately, or excessively pursued. (66)

Thus, loving rightly is Virtue; loving wrongly is Sin. The Capital, or Deadly, Sins are perceived by Dante as various forms of wrong love.

Sin can be understood as loving good things in the wrong way, loving them too much, or placing too much value on relatively worthless things. Proportion is a key

concept. (The love of food is normal, for example, but it becomes the Sin of Gluttony when satisfying the appetite takes precedence over things of greater value.)

The first chapter of Gaudy Night is introduced by a quotation from Sir Philip Sidney about the foolishness, and costliness, of setting one's affections on things which have no real value:

Thou blind man's mark, thou fool's self-chosen snare  
Fond fancy's scum, and dregs of scattered thought,  
Band of all evils: cradle of causeless care;  
Thou web of will, whose end is never wrought:  
Desire! Desire! I have too dearly bought  
With price of mangled mind, thy worthless ware.

This is a central theme of the novel: those who are clear-sighted will eschew the entrapment of the will, and the deterioration of the mind, which results from wrong love.

In her essay "Gaudy Night," Sayers describes the development of her career as a writer of detective fiction, and the particular concerns which influenced her in her writing of Gaudy Night. She recalls her intention that her own books should represent the "doctrine" she had been proclaiming in her critical prose - "if the detective story was to live and develop it *must* . . . become once more a novel of manners instead of a pure crossword puzzle" ("Gaudy Night" in The Art of the Mystery Story 209). She acknowledges that her early books were more like conventional detective stories than true novels, but she sees them, nonetheless, as moving successively nearer to the goal of real literary quality. In Murder Must Advertise she had made her first serious attempt at fusing criticism of life with the detective plot. With Gaudy Night she believed she realized that goal:

The book is . . . very tightly constructed, the plot and the theme being actually one thing, namely that the same intellectual honesty that is essential to scholarship is essential also to the conduct of life. . . . To make an artistic unity it is, I feel, essential that the plot should derive from the setting, and that both should form part of the theme. From this point of view, Gaudy Night does, I think, stand reasonably well up to the test; the setting is a woman's college; the plot derives from, and develops through, episodes that could not have occurred in any other place; and the theme is the relationship of scholarship to life. I am sure the book is constructed on the right lines. . . . ("Gaudy Night" 216-217)

In Gaudy Night Sayers once again brings the detective story into contact with spiritual issues, but in a more complex way than ever before. The plot is well constructed in conformity with the highest standards of detective writing, yet the plot interest is not permitted to dominate. Characterization has depth and credibility, the internal conflicts take precedence over the external ones, the complex thematic structure is sound, and the city of Oxford as a symbol of what is truly valuable is a powerfully drawn image which permeates the entire work.

In Sayers' essay on the writing of the novel the theme of intellectual integrity is shown to be not only compatible with the love story, but necessary to it:

I could not [at the end of Strong Poison] marry Peter off to the young woman he had . . . rescued from death and infamy, because I could find no form of words in which she could accept him without loss of self-respect. . . . [Several books later] I was still no further along with the problem of Harriet. She had been a human being from the start, and I had humanized Peter for her benefit; but the situation between them had become still more impossible on that account. . . . Her inferiority complex was making her steadily more brutal to him and his newly developed psychology was making him steadily more sensitive to her inhibitions. . . . At all costs, some device must be found for putting Harriet back on a footing of equality with her lover. . . . I discovered that in Oxford I had the solution. . . . On the intellectual platform, alone of all others, Harriet could stand free and equal with Peter, since in that sphere she had never been false to her own standards. By choosing a plot that should exhibit intellectual integrity as the one great permanent value in an emotionally unstable world I should be saying the thing that, in a confused way, I had been wanting to say all my life. Finally, I should have found a universal theme which could be made integral both to the detective plot and to the 'love-interest' which I had, somehow or other, to unite with it. ("Gaudy Night" 212-13)

Gaudy Night addresses the question of which things in life are truly valuable and deserving of our love. It explores the subject of love on a number of levels, particularly the love between a man and a woman, and the love of learning. Scholars were first called philosophers because they were *lovers* of wisdom.

Harriet is the central focus, and it is her internal conflict which is the core of the novel. All of her conflicts have to do with love. She struggles with whether to accept her growing affection for Peter, or to abort it. This conflict is closely bound up with her

desire to escape from the uncertainty and trauma of emotional involvements into the seeming permanence and tranquillity of a life dedicated to intellectual pursuits. She is caught in the tension between heart and brain, and she believes that a choice must be made between the two.

It is Harriet's commitment to intellectual honesty, however, which enables her to sort through the confused emotions within her: the desire for detachment and independence; the fear that strong personal feelings are incompatible with moral and intellectual integrity; the instinct to protect herself from being hurt again; the fear of submerging her own identity in that of a husband; and the fear that, for a woman, commitment to a marriage means the sacrifice of her career.

This same intellectual honesty, in the end, enables Harriet to know and trust her own heart. She finally perceives that the intellect is not antagonistic to the heart; instead, it is only through the operation of the intellect that the heart can be examined and purified.

The heart must set itself on things of true value. Chapter XI begins with another quotation from a poem by Sidney, lines which restate the same central truth:

Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust;  
And thou, my mind, aspire to higher things;  
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust,  
Whatever fades, but fading pleasures brings.  
Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might  
To that sweet yoke where lasting freedoms be;  
Which breaks the clouds, and opens forth the light  
That doth both shine and give us sight to see.

The "higher things" to which the mind is exhorted to aspire are eternal, intangible things. The pursuit of them requires humbling of the ego, and submission to the "sweet yoke" of self-discipline - a confinement which, paradoxically, releases the soul into true freedom. The first line rejects emotional attachments to things of little value. It is usual to equate material possessions with the things of "dust" and "rust," but in the course of the novel Sayers suggests that some more consequential things may, in fact, be unworthy of the price we pay for them. One of them is marriage.

Some of Harriet's former classmates have chosen to become wives and mothers rather than pursue a career. Catherine Bendick is one of these women, and she is evaluated as having chosen wrongly. Sayers is not suggesting that commitment to a marriage is necessarily an unworthy thing. However, when marriage denies a woman the opportunity to exercise her intellectual potential the waste is tragic. Mrs. Bendick, who had once been a brilliant and promising scholar, is now an over-worked farmer's wife whose life is completely devoid of intellectual and cultural stimulation. After talking to her Harriet is left with "a depressed feeling that she had seen a Derby winner making shift with a coal-cart" (ch. III).

Set in contrast to this is the marriage of Phoebe Tucker, the history student who married an archaeologist (ch. I). Her married name is not even mentioned, perhaps because her original identity has never been submerged. She and her husband share their deepest interests; they both function as scholars in a way that is mutually supportive and enriching. This marriage is not over-priced, but in Sayers' opinion marriages like Catherine Bendick's are.

Even though marriages in which the woman sacrifices her career are initially based on a form of love, they are often the result of over-valuing the married status. In Chapter XI the history tutor Miss Hillyard (perhaps with some justification) accuses the other dons of feeling inferior to married women: "For all your talk about careers and independence, you all believe in your hearts that we ought to abase ourselves before any woman who has fulfilled her animal functions." Although Miss Hillyard's views are not usually meant to evoke the reader's approval, in this instance Sayers uses her to say something important: academic women should not feel that marriage is a higher calling than the one they have chosen to follow. When marriage is viewed as an end in itself it represents, Sayers suggests, a betrayal of things of highest value.

All of Gaudy Night's thematic threads can be perceived as variations on the theme of love: romantic love, the love of learning, the love of truth, the love of independence, the

love of one's spouse, and the love of one's "proper job." Most of the central characters seek to be single-minded, but they are pulled in various directions. It is not easy to discern clearly what the highest good is, and to love it perfectly. All of the tensions in the novel can be seen to arise from imperfections of love: the tension arising from the poison pen attack (an attack caused by a woman's desire to avenge her dead husband)' the tensions arising out of the pursuit of academic excellence, the tension between Harriet and Peter, and the inner tension with which Harriet grapples.

The various kinds of wrong-mindedness in Gaudy Night illustrate how Sins can result from perversions of love. Annie Wilson, the woman behind the poison pen attack, is motivated by Pride, Envy and Wrath, the three Sins which develop when self-love is perverted into love of neighbour's harm (Purgatory 66). Annie's self-love becomes, by extension, an obsessive "love" of her deceased husband which is so intense and imbalanced that it creates a desire to harm everyone and everything connected with the kind of scholarship which she blamed for destroying him.

Annie is not the only character who is in bondage to the Sins of Pride, Envy, and Wrath. These Sins are at the root of all the ugliness, failure, and unhappiness in the novel. The Sins of Sloth and Lust (involving "defective" and "excessive" love) also contribute to the moral complexities in which the characters become embroiled.

The destruction and trauma caused by Annie Wilson have their roots in something apparently positive - her understanding of what it means to be a loyal wife. It all comes out in the confrontation in Chapter XXII:

If he'd been a thief or a murderer, I'd have loved him and stuck to him. . . .  
You don't know what love means. It means sticking to your man through  
thick and thin and putting up with everything.

She sees her plan for avenging the disgrace and death of her husband as completely justified because it is based on "love." Her only defense is summed up pathetically at the end of her tirade: "I had a husband and I loved him."

The intense Pride which underlies Annie's malignant state of mind is revealed by her claim to be an expert in love. She preens, delighting in the delusion that she is actually far superior to her employers in the things that really matter:

Clear myself! I wouldn't trouble to clear myself. . . . I made you shake in your shoes, anyhow. You couldn't even find out who was doing it - that's all your wonderful brains come to. There's nothing in your books about life and marriage and children, is there? Nothing about desperate people - or love - or hate or anything human. You're ignorant and stupid and helpless. You're a lot of fools. You can't do anything for yourselves. (Ch. XXII)

The passionate hatred to which she gives vent supports the view that the emotion of hate entails both Envy and Wrath. She bitterly envies the dons' leisure, security, and exemption from manual labour: "I've heard you sit around sniveling about unemployment. . . . It would do you good to learn to scrub floors for a living." Annie's Wrath ("love of justice perverted to revenge and spite" Purgatory 67) arises from her view that she and her husband were victims of injustice. Her fury rises to a peak unequalled anywhere else in Sayers' fiction:

You brazen devils. . . . I wanted to see you . . . sneered at and trampled on and degraded and despised as we were . . . and [have to] say 'madam' to a lot of scum. . . . you silly old hags [dons]. . . . dirtiest hypocrite of the lot [Harriet]. . . . rotten little white-faced rat [Peter]. . . . I made fools of you all. . . . Damn you! I can laugh at you all! (Ch. XXII)

The Pride, Envy, and Wrath which festered inside Annie for many years developed because of the high value she placed on the happiness she experienced in her married life. After she lost this happiness her instinctive self-love became *Love Perverted*, the love of injury to others. As Sayers said in her Introduction to Purgatory the idea that one can gain good for one's self by others' harm is indeed an "evil fantasy" (66). The permanent damage to those she hates is slight, but Annie herself is virtually destroyed.

Two other individuals were responsible, to some degree, for instigating the unhappy chain of events on which the mystery of Gaudy Night is based. They are Arthur Robinson (Annie's husband), and the Research Fellow, Miss de Vine. In both cases there

was moral failure which involved a defect of love, and in both cases the central issue was scholarship.

Arthur Robinson was guilty of Sloth - "the failure to love any good object in its proper measure" (Introduction to Purgatory 67). He claimed to be a scholar, and yet his love of truth was so deficient that he was prepared to suppress information which would disprove the thesis he had worked so long on, and grown so attached to. Sayers believed that when a person chose the academic life he made a commitment to love and revere scholarly integrity above all else. To fail in that commitment was betrayal of the highest order.

Early in the novel Miss Lydgate describes a lower order of the same Sin against scholarly standards. A former student of hers had sold out to popular taste by writing a book on Carlyle which "reproduced all the old gossip without troubling to verify anything. Slipshod, showy, and catch-penny" (ch. I). This too is academic Sloth, failure to love truth and intellectual integrity above all else.

This moral deficiency, of which Arthur Robinson is the novel's most striking example, is significant not only in the plot. It also represents a major theme of the novel. The Virtue which is opposite to academic Sloth is the scholarly Zeal which has made Oxford what it is. The city is described repeatedly as a place made holy by the love of truth. The Warden, speaking at the reunion of alumni, describes the love of learning as a cause which may be viewed as a lost one by the rest of the world, but which, at Oxford, "finds its abiding home." Harriet, musing on the Warden's words, envisions a Holy War being waged by all those "to whom integrity of mind meant more than material gain," and concludes that "to be true to one's calling . . . was the way to spiritual peace." Her highest ideal is to be true to all that Oxford has taught her, true to the spiritual standards of the city whose "foundations were set upon the holy hills and [whose] spires touched heaven" (ch. II).



Miss De Vine's own responsibility for the tragedy which befell Arthur Robinson and his family is related to the fact that her "love" was very different from his. He sacrificed scholarly integrity because he believed that by upholding it he would sacrifice the welfare of his family (perhaps he felt that he could not "love" both): "It meant a good deal to him financially. He was married and not well off" (ch. XVII). His vision was narrowed to include only one priority - the human one. Miss de Vine's intense love of scholarly integrity represents a kind of Pride. It led to a narrowness of vision which caused her to be insensitive to the human suffering which was bound to result from her ruthless, but just, action in exposing Robinson's dishonesty, and instigating his dismissal from his post. Miss de Vine's Sin, like Robinson's, is a deficiency of love. She blames herself "most bitterly" for failing to follow up her "unavoidable" action with compassionate and practical concern about the family involved. She correctly recognizes that she has a moral responsibility to persons as well as to scholarship when she says,

One ought to take some thought for other people. Miss Lydgate would have done what I did in the first place; but she would have made it her business to see what became of that unhappy man and his wife. (Ch. XXII)

Her love of truth and justice is a high and noble ideal, but to love Mercy is higher still.

Sins which are distortions of love are at the root of other conflicts and problems which occur in Gaudy Night. There are many tensions in the lives of those who study and teach at Shrewsbury College - tensions which reflect the basic tendency toward Sin which occurs in every human heart.

The personalities of the students are developed much less than those of the tutors, but they show a wide variety of failings. The gossip of the Junior Common Room reveals that Envy is common in the relationships between Shrewsbury students. Flaxman is jealous of the sexual conquests of others (Envy), and merciless in her pursuit of their young men (Lust). She is so aggressive, selfish, and self confident (Pride) that the disapproval of her peers makes little impression on her. Cattermole is at Oxford at her

parents' insistence, and the absence of academic vocation (which could be interpreted as a mild form of Sloth) makes her especially insecure and vulnerable. She is victimized by the predatory Flaxman, and demoralized by the kindness of solicitous friends. Her suppressed resentment (Wrath) has made her unattractive and unpopular. Layton, the favourite of the English School, chooses to camouflage her brains by looking "fragile and pathetic" (ch. VII), rather than risk losing a physical gratification which is very important to her - her boyfriend (Lust). Newland is more virtuous - none of the Sins are specifically apparent in her - but her greatest strength, the Virtue of Zeal, almost becomes a weakness: "She's too hard-working and conscientious" (ch. XII). She is, therefore, especially vulnerable to the self-destructive despair that Annie's black messages seek to promote in the most diligent students.

In each of these cases the problem is created, or compounded, by the tensions between conflicting goals and conflicting value systems with which female scholars must struggle. It is never easy to pursue the goal of academic excellence with singleness of heart and mind; it is especially hard when one is young, and female.

Envy is a Sin of the members of the Senior Common Room as well, and it is the thing which most diminishes the solidarity of community life at Shrewsbury College. There is a continual smoldering of petty jealousy and unpleasant competitiveness among the dons. In the tension created by Annie's poison pen attacks, this undercurrent of mistrust and ill-will builds up until relationships become almost unbearably strained. In her Purgatory commentary Sayers explains Envy as a kind of fear (65), and as the love of one's own good becoming perverted to the wish to deprive other men of theirs (67). This definition is illustrated in the way a positive commitment becomes the Sin of Envy in an academic community of Shrewsbury. The dons are justifiably committed to the welfare of their own students and matters pertaining to their own subject area; this desire to strengthen and protect their own territory is tied in with their necessary self-esteem as scholars and their genuine love of learning. The commitment leads to the Sin of Envy

when the dons begin to perceive the privileges, advancement, or prestige of their colleagues as a threat to their own situation.

The female scholars struggle with the other two Sins which involve "love perverted" as well. Wrath and Pride develop out of characteristics which began as strengths. Miss Barton's dislike of violence and her desire to defend the rights of the underdogs, whether they be servants or criminals, are essentially worthy traits, but they are displayed in wrathful acidity toward those who fail to conform to her idealistic views. Miss Shaw's admirable desire to befriend her students becomes perverted into a petty self-centeredness; her self-image is boosted by casting herself in the role of confidante.

Even the Warden succumbs to Pride. Her scholarly standard of fairness and openness is so tenaciously held that she cannot agree to handle the exposure of Annie's guilt with the caution and discretion that Peter recommends. Her Pride in her leadership abilities precludes the recognition that this sort of confrontation requires the kind of worldly wisdom which Peter has, but which is foreign to her. Had she had less Pride in her own wisdom and more concern for the feelings of Harriet, Peter, and her colleagues (who were to be openly humiliated by Annie's bitter outburst), she might have accepted Peter's warning against interviewing Annie in the way she did.

Miss Hillyard, the History tutor, is the most extreme example of the spiritual Sins. Wrath and Envy are especially apparent in her sarcastic and bitter remarks. As a female scholar, she has had to struggle for recognition in a hostile, male-dominated world, and the struggle has left her deeply resentful of the many injustices to women. Wrath is described in Sayers' Introduction to Purgatory as "a love of justice perverted to revenge and spite" (67). In Miss Hillyard's case the built-up anger is expressed as spiteful ill-will toward a number of related things: marriage, married women, motherly responsibilities, male members of the academic community, and men generally. All these are to some extent competitive with the goals of academic women, but they clearly do not deserve the

degree of intense antagonism which Miss Hillyard feels for them. Her Wrath far exceeds the boundaries of righteous indignation - it is full of real vindictiveness.

Miss Hillyard's Wrath is a passion which is closely related to the Sin of Envy. She vehemently expresses her resentment of the intellectual ruin that marriage spells for so many women with academic promise (ch. XI). Yet this is, in a complex way, tied to her suppressed jealousy of women like Harriet who experience the love of a man.

Miss Hillyard's attraction to Peter begins during her first conversation with him when he is the guest of the Senior Common Room. She is very flattered by his knowledge of and appreciation for her scholarship. Before this scene is over she astonishes Harriet with her venomous comment on the fact that another of the dons has begun to monopolize his attention.

It does not occur to Harriet at first that Miss Hillyard could actually be interested in a man, as a man. Perhaps the attraction Miss Hillyard feels is initially hidden from her own consciousness. As Peter's fondness for Harriet becomes more and more apparent to the dons, Miss Hillyard's resentment of Harriet grows. The jealousy bursts into the open in Chapter XX - a chapter which appropriately, and very pointedly, begins with a quotation from The Anatomy of Melancholy on the subject of Envy:

For, to speak in a word, envy is naught else but *tristitia de bonis alienis*, sorrow for other men's good, be it present, past, or to come: and *gaudium de adversis*, and joy at their harms. . . . 'Tis a common disease, and almost natural to us, as Tacitus holds, to envy another man's prosperity.

Miss Hillyard accosts Harriet, demanding to know the precise nature of her relationship with Peter, and referring to him as Harriet's lover. When Harriet suddenly recognizes that the tutor is herself in love with this "biologically interesting" man she realizes that Envy is at the root of Miss Hillyard's spite toward her. Harriet's own anger dissipates and she feels genuine pity for "the tormented shell of a woman staring blindly into vacancy" (ch. XX). The torment is due to Miss Hillyard's inability to admit the very human desire for sexual fulfillment, something which her life of scholarship has apparently precluded.

Miss Hillyard may be dishonest with herself about the real reasons for the Anger she feels toward men generally, and toward the women who receive their love. She is, however, remarkable for her straightforwardness in other areas. The Sins of Envy and Anger, which are "Love perverted," have not totally destroyed her capacity to love that which is truly valuable. She demonstrates scholarly integrity, a deep love of truth, and a passionate belief that academic women deserve the same treatment as academic men.

Scholarship, however, is all she has. Is this enough to allow a person to experience spiritual and emotional wholeness? In Miss Hillyard's case, probably not. Even such a worthy love becomes harmful if it becomes such an obsession that it does not allow Love of others. Miss Hillyard has become blind to the importance of non-academic issues, and has come to view as enemies all those whose priorities differ from her own.

Sayers' treatment of Sin in her works of fiction culminates in her portrayal of the inner lives of Harriet and Peter in her last novels. In Gaudy Night their most significant problem is not the solving of the mystery, but resolving the dilemma of their personal relationship. In her essay, "Gaudy Night," Sayers explains that in the writing of Strong Poison she had realized that if Harriet and Peter were ever to "fall into one another's arms" in a manner that was not "false and degrading," she would have to "take Peter away and perform a major operation on him" so that he could become "a complete human being" (211). This she did:

I laid him out firmly on the operating table and chipped away at his internal mechanism through three longish books. At the end of the process he was five years older than he was in Strong Poison, and twelve years older than he was when he started. If, during the period, he had altered and mellowed a little, I felt I could reasonably point out that most human beings were altered and mellowed by age. (211-12)

Having taken Peter away from Harriet for two whole novels, Murder Must Advertise and The Nine Tailors, Sayers keeps him away for a long portion of Gaudy Night. Harriet grapples with the mystery without his assistance for many weeks. Her concern about her relationship with him is, however, a vital part of the inner conflict which is constantly

with her. Her brief encounters with Peter in London (ch. IX), after she has been to the Gaudy but before she's called back to Oxford to help solve the mystery, confirm the ambivalence of her emotions toward him, and the fact that "some kind of change" has occurred in him. The fact that he is not physically present in Oxford during the first part of her investigation allows her space to sort out her feelings. It also encourages her, however, to create a false picture of the idealized intellectual life in which the Peter problem is absent. When he finally appears she is forced to recognize that she has not succeeded in divorcing herself from him emotionally, and that - surprisingly - he belongs to this world of academia as much as she does.

In Gaudy Night Peter is depicted as a man who has achieved a spiritual plateau. The overhauling of his "internal mechanism" has required that his besetting Sins he confronted and repented of. The cockiness and exuberant Liberalism which seemed almost benign in the earliest novels have been shown up as a self-centered arrogance, and a frivolous flaunting of wealth and power. Peter's outward showiness has been greatly curtailed, but the inward struggle with Pride, the Sin of the noble mind, must continue. The tendency to slip into this Sin is never completely eradicated - the penitent must determine to "die daily" (1 Corinthians 15:31) to the desires arising from inordinate self-love.

The more mature Peter is less flippant and light hearted, but more human and more fully drawn. His earlier love of luxurious indulgence and lavish expenditure (variants of Gluttony and Avarice) are no longer dominant drives which influence the way he lives. He has become a stronger person, and his characteristic eschewing of certain Sins is more apparent than ever: He disowns Lust by refusing to use sexuality to break down Harriet's defenses. His exhausting work for the Foreign Office has completely eliminated the earlier image of the indolent and bored aristocrat (Sloth).<sup>24</sup> There is no hint of resentment (Wrath) in his references to what he has had to suffer in the five years of

waiting and hoping. Nor does he display any of the Envy of Harriet's independent achievements which the career success of women often promotes in men.

It is the absence of Pride, however, which most markedly indicates the spiritual growth Peter has achieved during the five years prior to Gaudy Night, the years of the "three longish novels" Sayers referred to - Have His Carcase, Murder Must Advertise, and The Nine Tailors. Early in Gaudy Night Harriet perceives him as having "the air of trying to make amends for something" (ch. IV). By the end of the novel she has grasped the fact that profound changes have occurred. She is no longer able to view Peter Wimsey as a pre-eminently proud person; instead she realizes that his love for her has humbled him and made him very vulnerable:

Harriet had seen him strip off his protections, layer by layer, till there was uncommonly little left but the naked truth. That, then, was, what he wanted her for. . . . She had the power to force him outside his defenses . . . perhaps the sight of her struggles had warned him what might happen to him, if he remained in a trap [of Pride] of his own making. (Ch. XVIII)

Sayers had, from the start, drawn Harriet as a real human being, and now she had "humanized Peter for her benefit," (essay "Gaudy Night" 212) yet certain changes must occur in Harriet to bring her to a point of readiness for marriage. The novel's principal crisis occurs as Harriet is forced to examine her own heart.

Harriet's inner conflicts occur partly because of the tension which she perceives between conflicting loves. But when she realizes that Peter and the intellectual life are *not* in conflict she is finally able to put aside the Pride which has been the real barrier between them.

Her growing love for Peter has created tension in the relationship rather than harmony because Harriet is trying to deny its existence in order to remain independent. She sees an emotional involvement as a form of entrapment, but yet she senses that *some* things demand, and perhaps are worthy of, emotional commitment. Early in the book she expresses her mistrust of her emotions and her difficulty in identifying her true feelings:

'... I never know what I do feel. . . . But one has to make some sort of choice. . . . And between one desire and another, how is one to know which things are really of overmastering importance?'

'We can only know that,' said Miss de Vine, 'when they have overmastered us.' (Ch. II)

Miss de Vine's answer is not very helpful. The strength of a particular desire does not seem to Harriet to be a valid reason for trusting it. She is not a romantic - she does not see the emotion of love as self-vindicating. In the past she has been misled and deeply hurt by something that went by the name of "love." From her present vantage point she sees her relationship with Philip Boyes as a distortion of love. He had demanded and evoked from her a sort of abject devotion which was degrading and destructive. In its excessiveness and imbalance her feeling for Boyes, instead of being a positive and healthy love, had become a form of Lust - not only in the sexual sense, but in the broader sense which Sayers called the "excessive love of persons" (*Purgatory* 67). Harriet now sees that her attachment to Boyes had betrayed her, and led her into a state of Sin: she had "broken half the commandments," "sinned and suffered," (ch. I). Even after five years she is still fearful and defensive.

More than anything else, Harriet dreads making the same mistake again by choosing to love something or someone unworthy to be loved. She fears all emotion, and tries desperately to convince herself that she can rebuild her life on a purely rational base. The heart versus brain dilemma is a major theme because Harriet's mistrust of her emotions leads her to believe that her only safety is in escaping them completely and retreating into the sphere of pure intellect.

Detachment, as Miss de Vine notes (ch. II), is Harriet's most obvious personality trait. It is a "rare virtue" that very few find lovable because coolness and emotional restraint often resemble coldness and apathetic aloofness - the Sin of Sloth. In Harriet detachment has not veered off in this negative direction; instead it has become a means of survival - a refusal to be engulfed by emotion, and to give way to despair. Peter is one of



the rare people who recognizes this as an inner strength, and (as Miss de Vine realizes) loves her because of it.

Yet in spite of her apparent ability to maintain emotional detachment Harriet has not achieved the inner calm that she craves. In her quest for something on which to anchor her affections she turns to Oxford as the symbol of the spiritual peace, independence, and permanence she so longs for. Even Peter, who has much to lose through the admission, agrees that the "everlasting rest" she is seeking is more likely to be found in "the life of the mind than the life of the heart" (ch. XV). Harriet's desire for "the life of the mind" is not, however, the pure aspiration of an academic vocation; it is contaminated by her desire to protect herself from the turbulence of life in the "real" world, and by her idealistic illusion that the hallowed halls of Oxford will provide a haven from all that is ugly and mean.

The illusion cannot be long sustained. The nightmarish quality of the situation at Shrewsbury breaks down her idealism. She begins to fear that even the intellectual life may betray her (as Philip Boyes did), and end in perversion and madness. For awhile her generalized suspicions make her recoil from those she had tended to revere:

Faces had grown sly and distorted overnight; eyes fearful; the most innocent words charged with suspicion. . . . She was suddenly afraid of all these women . . . walled in, sealed down, by walls that shut her out. . . . she knew the ancient dread of Artemis, moon-goddess, virgin-huntress, whose arrows are plagues and death. (Ch. XIII)

It is finally revealed that the direct cause of the evil that has terrorized Shrewsbury is *not* a female academic, but Harriet has become aware that much that is not admirable and noble lurks in the hearts of the dons, particularly in the heart of Miss Hillyard. She realizes that abnormality in one's relationships, and in one's perceptions of others generally, can indeed be the result of keeping "out of the way of love and marriage and all the rest of the muddle" of real life (ch. XVIII). She can no longer deny the existence of "the grotesque and ugly devil-shapes sprawling at the foot of the picture" in which the serene representations of the Church and the Universities salute one another "in

righteousness and peace" (ch. XIV). Yet the picture is predominantly one of Virtue and beauty, rather than Sin and ugliness. The Shrewsbury dons are, for the most part, women of brilliant intellect and noble character. In the Warden and Miss de Vine scholarly zeal has not precluded wisdom in the affairs of human life, and in Miss Martin, and particularly Miss Lydgate, there is a depth of sensitivity and compassion which is unmarred by any quality of intellectual severity.

By the end of the novel the love that Harriet feels for Oxford has matured. She sees it more realistically as a place of the highest ideals, peopled by individuals who have normal human frailties. She sees that it cannot, after all, afford its citizens spiritual security, or immunity to the pull of Sin: "then saw I that there was a way to hell even from the gates of heaven" (ch. XIV). Harriet no longer yearns for the academic life of Oxford as an escape from her own emotional dilemma, but she continues to perceive the University as a place of genuine spiritual life and permanence - "all Oxford springing underfoot in living leaf and enduring stone" (ch. XXIII).

She will always feel a deep attachment for Oxford, and for all it symbolizes, but she knows she can never be fully absorbed into it and possessed by it. In a sense, her affection for Oxford can be said to have passed from "love excessive" - an attachment that was self-serving, and almost obsessive - to mature love.

Set against the love of the academic ideals that Oxford stands for is another love that is even more susceptible to debasement. It is the love of women for men - a love that scholarly women have usually separated themselves from, and a love which Harriet particularly fears for many reasons.

Some of her reasons for fearing sexual love are valid ones. She suffered a great deal and almost lost her life because of a relationship which, as she now realizes, was a perversion of love, rather than honourable love. She received a proposal of marriage from Lord Peter Wimsey just after this experience had brought her to the lowest point in her self-esteem - "I was sick of myself, body and soul" (ch. XXIII). She was in no state

to receive love, much less return it. The proposal may, in fact, have appeared to be little more than an attempt, by a man used to getting everything he took a fancy to, to acquire her as another of his possessions. The thought of such a marriage was frightening; it was an affront to what little self-esteem remained to her.

Harriet's encounter with Annie Wilson's twisted mind and embittered spirit intensifies her fears - fears that she herself, by being a wife, could become prey to a perverse obsession. It had happened before - to her. Annie's case surpasses even Harriet's own painful memories as a frightening testimony to the fact that there is, in Peter's words, "no devil like devoted love" (ch. XX). In admitting this to Harriet, Peter realizes that he is confirming her worst fears, but he will not deceive her. He notes bitterly, "My talent for standing in my own light amounts to genius" (ch. XX). Later, in the aftermath of the devastating confrontation with Annie, Harriet rephrases his comment so that it sounds like a blanket indictment of all forms of romantic love:

He's always right. He said it was dangerous to care for anybody. He said love was a brute and a devil. You're honest, Peter, aren't you? Damned honest - (Ch. XXII)

The truth about conjugal love that Sayers has woven into her central theme is communicated through Annie's brutal and devilish evil, through Peter's honesty, and through Harriet's final choice. Love *is* dangerous. To love another person deeply is to become vulnerable. It is also to become susceptible to the perversions of conjugal love and the Sins that are wont to prey on it - Sins which Sayers illustrates throughout her twelve novels: Lust which violates personal dignity (Denis Cathcart, Clouds of Witnesses; Anne Dorland, The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club; Miss Twitterton, Busman's Honeymoon); Envy which seeks to possess and belittle (Robert Fentiman, The Unpleasantness; Mr. Harrison, The Documents); and even Wrath which perverts the positive intensity of love into a negative intensity - the lover may become "a brute and a devil" (Freke, Whose Body?; Mr. Grimethorp, Clouds of Witnesses).

If, then, love is so dangerous and marriage such a risky venture what brings Harriet to the point of choosing to take the risk?

The events of Gaudy Night force Harriet to come to terms not only with the issue of marriage generally, but also with the true nature of the man who wants to marry her. Quite conceivably an underlying reason for her refusal of his previous proposals may have been her perception of him as a rather proud person - a fairly accurate view of the Peter Wimsey she came to know in the course of events in Strong Poison and Have His Carcase. Much has changed, however, in the five years represented by the three intervening books. Even as early as Have His Carcase the humbling process was well underway, but Harriet seems unable to perceive it. Her Pride stands in the way.

When Peter finally appears, unexpectedly, in Oxford, Harriet is astonished, not by the incongruity of seeing him there, but by the absolute rightness of it:

For a long moment, Harriet simply could not believe her eyes. Peter Wimsey. Peter, of all people. Peter, who was supposed to be in Warsaw, planted placidly in the High as though he had grown there from the beginning. Peter, wearing cap and gown like any orthodox Master of Arts, presenting every appearance of having piously attended the University Sermon, and now talking mild academic shop with two Fellows of All Souls and the Master of Balliol. (Ch. XIV)

The Dean, to whom Harriet introduces Peter during this brief encounter, is not surprised in the least for she has looked up Peter's University record and become aware of the respect accorded to him as "one of the ablest scholars of his year."

Harriet is shamed by the realization that she has been too self-centered to familiarize herself with the details of Peter's background. Not knowing about his academic achievements or his diplomatic work for the Foreign Office, she was free to look down on him as a frivolous, idle aristocrat for whom everything had come easy. Now she is faced with the truth: he is not only "tired to death" by the stress of his work on the continent, he also - like her - comes back to Oxford as to a spiritual home and wishes

one could root oneself in here among the grass and stones and do something worth doing, even if it was only restoring a lost breathing for the love of the job and nothing else. (Ch. XIV)

Harriet's encounters with Peter's wayward nephew Lord Saint-George have afforded her more intimate knowledge of his family as well. Peter is frankly disapproving of the young man's impudence and extravagance, and alludes to his own tendency to shirk family responsibilities and to deny, outwardly, the "musty old values" which he inwardly craves. His Humility is evidenced in his willingness to admit weakness. Again Harriet is surprised:

[She] could find nothing to say to him. She had fought him for five years, and found out nothing but his strength; now, within half an hour, he had exposed all his weaknesses, one after the other. (Ch. XIV)

After only a few moments in his company, however, Miss Martin, the Dean, comments on the power of his personality: "A man with manners like that could twist the whole High Table around his little finger. . . . The man's dangerous, though he doesn't look it."

The afternoon of punting on the river (chs. XIV and XV) is an important episode for a number of reasons. Harriet is beginning to realize that Peter does indeed have "a just and generous mind" (ch. XIV) and a "sweetness of disposition" which allows him to be much more tolerant than she herself is when accosted by silly, but "harmless" people (ch. XV). She also recognizes, consciously, that she finds him very physically attractive (ch. XV). While Peter is sleeping in the punt, Harriet takes *Religio Medici* from his blazer pocket and reads "a most uncomfortable passage." It reminds her again of the frightening, insatiable longing which is part of the love between man and woman - a love toward which her increasing respect for and attraction to Peter are drawing her:

When I am from him, I am dead till I be with him. United souls are not satisfied with embraces, but desire to be truly each other; which being impossible, these desires are infinite, and must proceed without a possibility of satisfaction. (Ch. XV)

Despite this ominous warning Harriet's defenses against love are crumbling, along with her stubborn Pride.

During the punting trip Peter asks about the progress of Harriet's new novel, and, hearing that she has come to an impasse, offers her some advice. He suggests that she put more "guts" into her writing by giving her characters more "violent and lifelike feelings" (ch. XV). Harriet's gracious acceptance of his judgement, and her subsequently alteration of her book, are clear indications that her Pride is decreasing, and her respect for Peter increasing.

The epigraph to Chapter XIV sums up the developments of the two ensuing chapters - a truce is formed:

Truce gentle love, a partly now I crave,  
Me thinks, 'tis long since first these wars begun,  
Nor thou nor I, the better yet can have:  
Bad is the match where neither party won.  
I offer fair conditions of fair peace,  
My heart for hostage, that I shall remaine,  
Discharge our forces here, let malice cease,  
So far my pledge, thou give me pledge againe.  
MICHAEL DRAYTON

The conflict between them has subsided to such a degree that Harriet becomes conscious that she likes Peter "enormously" (ch. XV). Her heart is greatly in danger of becoming "hostage."

During their conversation on the river Peter's "just and generous mind" causes him to admit to Harriet that emotional involvements will not afford her the life of peace that intellectual pursuit offers: "If you want to set up your everlasting rest, you are far more likely to find it in the life of the mind than in the heart" (ch. XV).

The issues Harriet faces as she makes her final choice are crystallized in the sonnet which she attempts to write early in the novel, and which Peter later completes by composing a sestet for it:

Here then at home, by no more storms distrest,  
Folding laborious hands we sit, wings furled;  
Here in close perfume lies the rose-leaf curled,  
Here the sun stands and knows not east nor west,  
Here no tide runs; we have come, last and best,  
From the wide zone in dizzying circles hurled

To that still centre where the spinning world  
Sleeps on its axis, to the heart of rest.

Lay on thy whips, O Love, that we upright,  
Poised on the perilous point, in no lax bed  
May sleep, as tension at the verberant core  
Of music sleeps; for, if thou spare to smite,  
Staggering, we stoop, stooping, fall dumb and dead,  
And, dying so, sleep our sweet sleep no more.  
(Ch. XVIII)

Harriet's octave expresses a longing for inner peace, using the imagery of still things - folded hands and curled rose-leaves, and things that have ceased their pattern of motion - a sun which "stands" and a tide which no longer runs. She completes the octave with a less static image, however - the "still centre" at the axis of "the spinning world."

Peter's sestet turns her spinning world into a spinning whip-top, whose precarious balance is maintained by the whipping of Love. The message of his six lines is a hard one for Harriet to accept, for it suggests that she will only escape "staggering," falling, and spiritual oblivion by submitting to the dynamic tension of Love - the love relationship that Peter Wimsey invites her to share with him. She finds herself admitting, nonetheless, the absolute consistency of his position:

He did not want to forget, or to be quiet, or to be spared things, or to stay put. All he wanted was some kind of central stability, and he was apparently ready to take anything that came along, so long as it stimulated him to keep that precarious balance. (Ch. XVIII)

Harriet's deepest fear - the fear of what surrendering to love will make of her - is brought into the open by Miss de Vine, immediately after the ugly confrontation with Annie Wilson. Harriet admits to Miss de Vine that Peter has shown his respect for her by never once attempting to use his sexual attractiveness to break down her resistance. Miss de Vine pushes Harriet to look her fears in the face:

'Then what are you afraid of? Yourself?'  
'Isn't this afternoon warning enough?'  
'Perhaps. You have had the luck to come up against a very unselfish and a very honest man. . . . He hasn't tried to disguise the facts or bias your judgement. . . . He'll never make up your mind for you. You'll have to make your own decisions. You needn't be afraid of losing your independence; he will always force it back on you. If you ever find any

kind of repose with him, it can only be the repose of a very delicate balance.' (Ch. XXII)

Miss de Vine, like Peter, refuses to minimize the risks involved; she agrees that, by marrying, Harriet and Peter will have the power to "hurt one another . . . dreadfully," but she insists that Harriet must make her decision: "Bring a scholar's mind to the problem and have done with it" (ch. XXII).

The two Deadly Sins which relate most to Harriet's struggle are Pride and Lust. The extreme self-love of Pride precludes deep and unselfish commitment to another person. Lust is closely related to the selfishness of Pride for it is an excessive attachment to another individual in which the "loved" person is preyed upon and used to satisfy selfish desires - the desires for physical satisfaction, manipulative control, or ego gratification. In order to give and receive Love Harriet must get rid of the Pride which causes her to want complete independence. She must also shake off her intense fear of the perversion and abuse of Love (Lust) and begin to believe that a healthy relationship based on genuine Love is possible.

Lust and Pride are given the most significant positions in the diagrammatic presentation of the Seven Deadly Sins. Pride is the first, the parent of all the others. Lust is the last - not, I suspect, because it is the least deadly, or the least deep-rooted, but because it is the most difficult to identify clearly and to eradicate. Lust may be seen as the ultimate abuse of Love, and the most subtle and insistent of all spiritual problems. It is the last to be purged on Dante's mountain of Purgatory. Sayers, in her *Introduction to Purgatory*, explains the far-reaching significance of this:

It is the peculiarity of the Seventh Cornice that *all* souls, whether or not they are detained there to purge the sin of Lust, are compelled to pass through and suffer its torment of fire before ascending the Pass. . . . *Allegorically*, since every sin is a sin of love, the purgation of love itself is a part of every man's penitence. (285)

In both her conversation with Miss de Vine and her conversation with Peter the following day, Harriet sorts through her feelings about love, and moves closer to a resolution. She tries, as Miss de Vine suggested, to bring "a scholar's mind to the



problem." Yet her final decision is not made on the level of the intellect - it is a choice of the heart.

The concert Peter and Harriet attend together on their last evening in Oxford makes a final statement on the subject of Love versus Lust. The music of the two violins, which Peter can "hear" with more understanding than Harriet, symbolizes a love relationship which is honourable and balanced:

Peter, she felt sure, could hear the whole intricate pattern, every part separately and simultaneously, each independent and equal, separate, but inseparable, moving over and under and through, ravishing heart and mind together.

She waited till the last movement had ended and the packed hall was relaxing its attention in applause.

'Peter - what did you mean when you said that anybody could have the harmony if they would leave us the counterpoint?'

'Why,' said he, shaking his head, 'that I like my music polyphonic. If you think I meant anything else, you know what I meant.'

'Polyphonic music takes a lot of playing. You've got to be more than a fiddler. It needs a musician.'

'In this case two fiddlers - both musicians.'

'I'm not much of a musician, Peter.' (Ch. XXIII)

The chief qualities by which Sayers distinguishes Love from Lust are unselfishness and respect. These qualities produce the balance which is as essential to a good marriage as it is to polyphonic music. The violinists are more than fiddlers because they are able to perform a complex piece with a full awareness of, and respect for, the music of the other. Polyphonic music could not be produced if each musician - or even one of the musicians - were totally preoccupied with his own score.

Harriet realizes that what Peter wants is the sort of relationship in which neither spouse dominates the other. He does not expect or desire "harmony" in the sense that the career and interests of one person merely serve as a background and support to the other. Only when both partners in the marriage are "independent and equal, separate but inseparable" (ch. XXIII) can both "heart and mind" know full satisfaction.

It is a high ideal, and Harriet is still, at this moment, doubtful whether she can achieve it. She has, however, finally seen that what Peter offers her is diametrically

opposite to the relationship she had had with Philip Boyes. Peter invites her to enter a covenant, the strength of which is based on the Virtues which counterbalance the Deadly Sins: Humility, Forgiveness, Compassion, Zeal, Liberality, Temperance, and Purity in Love.

Harriet has sought and found the answer to one of the most perplexing questions of life: What does it mean to love rightly? She has feared that no marriage could be truly free from the Sins of Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, and Lust. The things that occurred at Shrewsbury College, paradoxically, both confirmed her worst fears and freed her from them.

Marriage is indeed a great risk, especially when it unites, in Miss de Vine's words, "two independent and equally irritable intelligences" which are capable of hurting one another "dreadfully" (ch. XXII). Miss de Vine seems to stand for the voice of pure rationality - the *brain* side of the heart/brain dilemma - when she states emphatically that she would not undertake such a risk "for any consideration" (ch. XXII). Yet Harriet's *heart* is no longer afraid as she and Peter leave the concert and walk together toward Magdalen Bridge. The ideals of the University are the standard against which Harriet's priorities have been measured. Her sojourn in Oxford has helped to cleanse and alter her values, and Peter himself has helped her to understand what it really means to love rightly. To his final posing of the question which has hung over her for five years, she can now reply, from the heart, "*Placet*" - "It pleases me."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Busman's Honeymoon

In the first editions of this novel the title on the fly leaf was followed by the description, "A love story with detective interruptions." Sayers chose to make this, the last of her published novels, a "sentimental comedy," as she calls it in her dedication letter, written to her friends Muriel St Clare Byrne and Marjorie Barber. She even suggests that "the detective interest might well seem to be an irritating intrusion" upon the love story. Her deprecatory tone - reflected in her apology for the "intolerable deal of saccharine" that the story contains - may have arisen from a feeling that this book fell short of the literary stature of Gaudy Night, or perhaps from a mild sort of embarrassment about having produced a book on a seldom discussed subject - the respectable intimacies of married people.

Busman's Honeymoon has been seen by some as a novel for which the reverse description is equally valid: "a detective story *with romantic interruptions*" (emphasis added) (Brabazon 156). Although the detective plot is well constructed, and is integrated, to a fair degree, with the themes which develop because of Peter and Harriet's newly married state, I do not believe that the mystery is the central focus. The chief function of the plot is, in my opinion, to provide the stressful setting in which Harriet's and Peter's relationship may be tried and refined.

This novel is different in many ways from the eleven which precede it, yet it is a very appropriate culmination of the Wimsey series. Sayers accurately labeled it a *love story*, yet its strength lies in the fact that it is, in actuality, *neither "sentimental" nor "saccharine."* It describes a marriage of two rational people, tested by the tensions of the murder investigation - tensions which virtually bring an end to the honeymoon atmosphere, almost before it has begun. Peter and Harriet are forced to confront the

ugliness of real life, and the moral challenges that it entails, *as a married couple* instead of as independent entities.

Because Sayers' central characters are more fully drawn than the detectives of the traditional whodunits, and because the focus is on the development of their marriage relationship, the structure of this book is very different from that of the earlier novels. The central conflict is concerned with the husband/wife relationship rather than with the identification of the murderer; therefore the plot does not conclude when the mystery is solved.

The last three chapters of the book are set apart from the others and called an *Epithalamion*.<sup>25</sup> They complete Sayers' treatment of marriage by describing the stresses the couple undergo during the period leading up to the execution of the murderer. As in Murder Must Advertise, The Nine Tailors, and Gaudy Night, character and theme are developed out of the detective plot, but, in a more literal way than in the earlier books, Sayers moves *outside* the confines of the detective story by continuing the novel for several chapters after the mystery is solved. This is not an extended denouement. It is the conclusion of the *real* story - the story of Harriet and Peter. It is their *Epithalamion*.

In her Sunday Times book review column of 23 December, 1934 Sayers asked her readers if they thought detective stories were ruined by "trying to touch such ultimate values as . . . real problems of conduct, real tragedy of pity and terror." She suggested that by refusing to read such "serious" detective stories they could, as readers, control the direction in which the genre would develop. She warned, however, that

No author who takes the writing of English seriously will be content to spin ropes of sand forever. One day he will want to put some passion in his work, and if he may not put it into his detective stories, he will go away and write some other kind of thing. Then we shall again have all the detective stories badly written and all the good writing elsewhere. It may be that the heady liquor of ambition will find the detective story too narrow a bottle and burst it altogether. Nevertheless I cannot see how we are to avoid making the experiment.

Writing the novel Gaudy Night (less than a year later), Sayers made her own final "experiment" in stretching the detective form to its limit. In a sense, the experiment was a successful one, for the bottle did not burst: Busman's Honeymoon was not a failure as a novel because the detective plot was developed in the context of "real problems of conduct [and] real tragedy of pity and terror." Sayers apparently felt, however, that she had strained the bottle almost to its breaking point, for after this one she did "go away and write some other kind of thing," in spite of pressure (ongoing till at least 1949) from publishers and readers to produce more Wimsey books (Reynolds, Dorothy L. Sayers 339).<sup>26</sup>

Busman's Honeymoon is a sequel to Gaudy Night in that it further develops ideas on the nature of love introduced in the former novel. Married love is shown as a supremely demanding, yet supremely enriching experience. Sayers frequently uses, as epigraphs, passages from Donne's poetry which describe conjugal love as a profound metaphysical experience, and draw attention to the central theme - the solemnity and joy, tension and peace that Harriet and Peter have in their marriage. The novel ends with a final quotation from Donne, from "Eclogue for the Marriage of the Earl of Somerset," in which the flame of married love is described as a fire which cannot end in ashes, for it does not consume that which fuels it. Such love

is joy's bonfire, then, where love's strong arts  
Make of so noble individual parts  
One fire of four inflaming eyes, and of two loving  
hearts.

Christianity views marriage as one of the highest forms of human love. The scriptures repeatedly use marriage as a metaphor for the covenant relationship between God and his people. The Book of Common Prayer describes marriage as "signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church," and quotes from the book of Ephesians the description of marriage as a mystery of puzzling spiritual dimensions: "they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning

Christ and the Church" ("The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony"). Thus, marriage is viewed as more than a legal partnership involving sexual intimacy and companionship; it is a spiritual union.

Just as the bond between God and his people is strengthened through righteousness, and weakened through Sin and disobedience, so the loving communion between husband and wife thrives on the Virtues of Humility, Mercy, Forgiveness, Zeal, Liberality, Temperance, and Purity in Love. These are the qualities of the spiritual life which are permitted to grow when the power of the Deadly Sins - Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, and Lust - is broken.

The Wimsey marriage is presumably not intended as a literal model for all marriages. Sayers would doubtlessly concede that people of different ages, backgrounds, and personality types will necessarily have different sorts of marriages. Nonetheless she has presented the Wimsey marriage as an ideal, although perhaps not an absolute one.

Most of the principles which are important in the bonding of Harriet and Peter Wimsey are universal ones: Pride and self-giving love are incompatible; Envy refuses to admire and respect the unique qualities of another person; Wrath does not allow real forgiveness; Sloth denies that a successful marriage is worth strenuous effort; Avarice expects happiness to come from material things rather than from relationships; Gluttony is more concerned with self-indulgence than with meeting the needs of another; and Lust, instead of highly esteeming the spouse, seeks merely to use and possess him. All of the Deadly Sins are incompatible with real Love and marital happiness, but with Pride most of all.<sup>27</sup>

Chastity or Purity is most commonly mentioned as the antithesis of Lust. It is, in fact, a manifestation of Love. Within the context of marriage Chastity means, not sexual abstinence, but the exclusivity of Love. ("Keep thee only unto him so long as ye both shall live.") Chastity, even for the unmarried, should be regarded as a positive quality, rather than a negative one - something one *does*, rather than something one *does not* do.

Charles Williams, whose work had a great influence on Sayers from 1943 onward, defines Chastity in a way that represents - though on a higher level - the direction in which Sayers herself was moving in her view of Love. Williams' theology stresses the spiritual relationship between the body and the soul. He suggests that people generally have lost the sense of "the unity of man - soul and body - in flesh" (The Forgiveness of Sin 23). Purity or Chastity in the bodily sense cannot, he explains, be separated from Purity of the spirit, for although we use the expression "sins of the flesh," all Sin is spiritual. In discussing the Sin of Adam, Williams uses the term Chastity to describe the Virtue that existed in the unfallen state. He sees Chastity as that which unites the body with the soul, and as the Virtue which encompasses all the others because it is "the obedience to and the relation with the adorable central body [- God]". Because of the Fall, he explains, Chastity and all the other Virtues came to be understood by their denials - "even sometimes by their vicious opposites," the Deadly Sins. Hence Chastity has been wrongly thought of as a negative Virtue, rather than as the positive and powerful thing that Milton, for example, showed it to be in Comus. Williams sees Chastity as the relation of the creature to his Creator, "the love of the soul for God" (The Forgiveness of Sin 24-26).<sup>28</sup> Viewed thus, Chastity becomes the highest of Virtues - the pure Love that binds together not only husband and wife, but also the soul and God. Sexual love, or Eros, is a literal part of the human bonding and is, in a mystical way, an image of the communion between the human and the divine.

Sayers' linking of sexuality and chaste love was not unique. The perception of Eros as a spiritual force of great power and holiness is illustrated in the work of C.S. Lewis, another writer for whom Sayers was in the ensuing decade to develop a high regard. In Lewis's novel That Hideous Strength the goddess (or angelic being) called Venus is the cosmic embodiment of both Charity and Eros. Lewis's presentation of this rich and symbolically complex figure illustrates a concept which underlies Sayers' depiction of the marital relationship of Harriet and Peter. The positive power of sexuality, and the

sensuous enjoyment usually associated with the Sin of Lust, is found in its highest form in the purity of marital love. In the chapter entitled "The Descent of the Gods" five overwhelming celestial beings appear in material form in order to communicate with, and empower, the resurrected Merlin. Only one of the other individuals in the small Christian commune encounters the divine beings directly, but each angelic arrival is marked by powerful mood changes within the house. At the descent of Venus the atmosphere is charged with sensuousness, softness, Virtue, and scorching energy. As the novel closes the strong influence of Venus is manifested in revitalized physical and spiritual relationships between husbands and wives. For the two main characters who have been estranged for some time this renewal of their marriage entails obedience, courage, Humility, and forgiveness. These are the qualities that, as Sayers illustrates in Busman's Honeymoon, pave the way for the passion and purity of marital love that is directly opposite to the Sin of Lust.

Sayers, in exploring the nature of the marriage union in Busman's Honeymoon, was working within the framework of Christian theology. Yet what Williams, Lewis, and Sayers were saying about conjugal love may have seemed radical to some readers. The idea that marriage could, and should, be something exciting and joyful had been discreetly veiled during the long centuries when Church authorities seemed to encourage the view that the sexual relationship was a necessary evil, tolerated by God only because He had not been able to think of a more decent way of propagating the species.

The Love which is expressed through the marriage relationship is one of the highest of spiritual experiences, but marriage is also a crucible in which Love is tested and refined. In Busman's Honeymoon Sayers describes the refining of the Love of Harriet and Peter. Because this is the last published novel, and therefore the culmination of Sayers' presentation, in her fiction, of the ongoing struggle with the Deadly Sins, Busman's Honeymoon deserves a closer, more sequential analysis than we have given the earlier novels.



The novel begins with a *Prothalamion* which is composed of six letters, or letter fragments, and a series of extracts from the diary of the Dowager Duchess, Peter's mother. Through them the reader is given a multi-faceted view of the Wimsey nuptials. The stir which the marriage caused is reflected in the opening line of the first letter, which is directed to Peter's mother: "So Peter is really married." The writer, a good friend of the Dowager Duchess, expresses her affection for Peter and reviews what she knows about Harriet in terms that subtly introduce the various threads that Sayers will weave into the novel. She "sees through" Peter's "affectations," and recognizes him as a man who wants a woman with depth ("more than a devoted admirer to hold his hand"), intelligence ("brains"), and character ("bowels"). She introduces the ideas of "fun" and "permanence" in marriage, and alludes to the negative response to the Wimsey marriage from those, like Peter's sister-in-law, who will view it as a "mis-alliance." But this "snobbish nonsense" will not, the reader suspects, have much effect on two people "passionately devoted" to each other, who are clever enough to elude gossip mongers, and strong-minded enough to "please themselves."

The letter written by Helen (Peter's sister-in-law), ironically conveys a very positive picture of the marriage proceedings. Her tone is spiteful, but her account of the ceremony serves to introduce two themes which are to be developed later, the magnitude of what is involved in the marriage relationship, and the Christian tradition of the wife as the submissive partner:

Peter was a white as a sheet; I thought he was going to be sick. Probably he was realizing what he had let himself in for. . . . They were married in the old, coarse Prayer-book form, and the bride said 'Obey' - I take this to be their idea of humour, for she looks as obstinate as a mule.

The description of the marriage by Miss Martin, the Dean of Shrewsbury College, emphasizes the great strength of the love commitment which is the basis of this marriage:

There was something rather splendid about the way those two claimed one another, as though nothing and nobody else mattered or even existed; he was the only bridegroom I have ever seen who looked as though he knew exactly what he was doing and meant to do it.

Her letter, however, also draws attention to the frequency of unhappiness in marriage:

I do hope they'll be most frightfully happy. Miss de Vine thinks there is too much intelligence on both sides - but I tell her not to be such a confirmed pessimist. I know heaps of couples who are both as stupid as owls and not happy at all - so it doesn't really follow, one way or the other, does it?

The *Prothalamion* is completed by the Dowager's diary entries for the four and a half months between the engagement and the marriage. They verify the wholeheartedness of Harriet's commitment to Peter - a complete reversal of the fear and defensiveness she felt throughout most of Gaudy Night.

Four specific sections of the diary have special relevance to the main themes of the book. First, there is the Dowager's conversation with Harriet about whether Bunter will continue as Peter's valet. It culminates with Harriet's emotional pronouncement: "I don't want Peter to lose *anything*" (entry for 21 May). This is an important indication of the lack of Envy in her approach to the marriage relationship. She refuses to see Peter's close relationship to Bunter as something in competition with his relationship to her. She will not (as envious spouses did in Sayers' earlier novels) try to eliminate from her husband's life any interests and commitments which do not involve her.

Second, there is the argument between Peter and Harriet over the use of the word "obey" in the marriage ceremony (entry for 16 Sept). Peter's repulsion, from the thought of a husband giving orders to his wife, is countered by Harriet's insistence that, in a relationship founded on mutual respect, "orders" would be given only in a crisis in which the husband was acting as a protector of the wife. Peter still feels that such orders could come from either of the spouses. (The idea of equal authority seems important to Peter at schafirst; later in the novel he becomes more comfortable with the idea that he must assume a degree of leadership - a leadership reflected in the hyperbole of Chapter XVII's title: "Crown Imperial.") Their disagreement about the wording of the ceremony is resolved by a compromise: Peter "consented to be obeyed on condition he might 'endow' and not 'share' his worldly goods."

The wholeness of Peter's commitment to Harriet is represented in the preference for "endow," for it means she assumes equal ownership of all that he possesses. There is an absence of Pride, in the sense of the desire to wield power, and of Avarice, in the sense of the desire to have sole control of wealth, in the position Peter takes in this discussion.

Third, there is the account, in the entry for 4 October, of Harriet's gift to Peter, and his reaction to it. The Donne letter is especially meaningful to both of them, not only because it was one of the few gifts that Harriet could have presented to Peter that would have had intrinsic value, but also because it is "about Divine and human love." Peter is deeply moved for he had seen the catalogue advertisement for it, and tried to purchase it for Harriet, but it had been already sold - (as he learns now) to Harriet, who wanted it for him. Both of them saw, in this exposition of the relationship between divine and human love, an explanation of the transcendent quality they felt in their love for each other.

Fourth, there is the Dowager's insightful description of Harriet, as she meets Peter at the altar. She is "genuinely lovely," not because of her striking features, or her carefully chosen dress, but because she looked "like a ship coming into harbour with everything shining and flags flying" (entry for 8 October) - after many tempestuous years she has arrived at the destination which her soul has long sought.

Sayers has laid out her themes clearly in this opening section. Busman's Honeymoon is very definitely a "love story," but not of the usual idealized sort which ends with the decision to marry. This novel begins where other love stories end. Sayers intends to show that being married, not getting married, is the climax of Love, and the state in which a person is challenged to gain increasing freedom from the deadliness of the Sins, and experience intimacy, joy, and Virtue of the highest order.

Chapter I, entitled "New-Wedded Lord," is introduced by a brief quotation from Samuel Johnson: "I agree with Dryden, that 'Marriage is a noble daring'." The chapter emphasizes risk, and demonstrates that, even on a honeymoon, practical matters may not work out as well as expected. Marriage, like all the worthwhile ventures in life, involves

a certain degree of courage. Harriet has a sentimental desire to own an old county house, called Talboys, which she visited and loved as a child. On their first night as man and wife, they take the risk of arriving, after dark, trusting in accommodations about which they know practically nothing. It is a choice based on love and necessity: Harriet had loved the house since she was a child, and there seemed to be nowhere else to go to hide from the press. The honeymoon venture, like the marriage itself, is a matter of "noble daring." There is much they could not know in advance, but in Love they have taken a step of Faith.

Fear is the opposite of Faith, and something which is driven out by "perfect love" (1 John 4:18). Yet Harriet and Peter experience certain fears in these early hours of their marriage. First, as they begin their drive from London to Great Pagford, Harriet momentarily fears that the man who is now her husband is a completely unknown quantity, a person who could just as easily cause her great misery as great joy:

She sat looking at Peter, as the car twisted smoothly in and out of traffic. The high, beaked profile, and the long hands laid on the wheel had been familiar to her for a long time now; but they were suddenly the face and hands of a stranger. (Peter's hands, holding the keys of hell and heaven . . . ) (Ch. 1)

(The mention of "heaven" introduces an image which recurs in the novel.) This fear is set to rest because Harriet is humble and honest enough to share it with Peter, who reassures her that such qualms are normal. She is also reassured by recalling how, four days earlier, she had returned his kisses with a passion that had confirmed to both of them that her sexual responsiveness was not the "daunted" tiger, Peter had feared it might be. Her capacity for sexual love has been renewed; the "entirely new tiger" represents a new beginning. The emotional crippling caused by the ugly and demeaning relationship with Philip Boyes has been undone. Remembering, now, that she has been made whole, Harriet can anticipate the "daring" venture of entering another sexual relationship in the confidence of love, rather than in fear.

The next fear that arises in the conversation during the drive to Great Pagford is Peter's "profound distrust" of himself at the prospect of fatherhood. He views parenting as a great risk because of the inherited weaknesses (thought to be connected to the inbreeding of noble families) which he suspects may show up in his offspring, and because of his doubts about "what kind of a father" he would make: "I'm a coward about responsibility." Harriet reminds him that by marrying her he has introduced a "common," healthy strain into the genetic pool. She surprises him by saying that her wish to have children is based on the fact that they would be his. This aspect of married love is a new, and rather unsettling, experience for Peter: "It's embarrassing to be taken seriously - as a person." Both of them contemplate the risk of parenthood with maturity and Humility.

By the middle of the chapter they have arrived at their destination. Coming back to this village, and to the house which was part of her childhood happiness, is a very complex emotional experience for Harriet for several reasons which Peter cannot share. For her it is a nostalgic pilgrimage - an attempt to recapture some of the joy and innocence of childhood. But there is pain in the adult realization that there will be no more "strawberries and seedy cake" waiting for her there, that the "dear old couple" are "dead by now," and that a "hard-faced, grasping man" is the only host they can expect. As they pull up to the gate Harriet experiences a different sort of inner turmoil. The reality is worse than her expectations: there is "no light in any of the windows." In the next few minutes Harriet experiences real anxiety. Her fear is much more than concern that their first night of marriage will be plagued by inconvenience and discomfort. As they wait for Bunter to investigate, Harriet's "sense of guilt that no embraces can stifle" arises from the fear that her wish to connect her married state with the joy and security of her early life was foolish romanticism, and that she has failed in her duty to make her husband's life agreeable rather than difficult:

This, she felt, was her fault. Her idea in the first place. Her house. Her honeymoon. Her - and this was the incalculable factor in the thing - her husband. (A repressive word when you came to think of it, compounded of a grumble and a thump.) The man in possession. The man with rights - including the right not to be made a fool of by his belongings.

This troubled meditation involves several levels of conflict. The most immediate concern is somewhat relieved by Peter's cheerfulness, and his down-to-earth observation that "the goosefeather bed and the new-wedded lord are inseparable only in ballads." The more far-reaching misgivings, fears of the repression, possession, and domination that a married woman may fall victim to, are reminiscent of those she struggled with during the years that she had resisted Peter's declarations of love. They are, however, fears which she has almost overcome, and from which she will gain full freedom later in the novel.

Harriet's attempt to reclaim something from her past succeeds much better than her panicky fears at the moment of arrival predict. Mrs. Ruddle, the housekeeper whom Bunter finally locates, does remember the happy days when Harriet's father was the beloved doctor of Great Pagford, and Harriet's childhood connection with the place is so significant and highly esteemed that she is greeted - both by Mrs. Ruddle, and later, by others who remember the family - as someone who belongs there, someone who has come *home*.

Home is an important part of the marriage theme. A true home is one in which the Deadly Sins have no place, and where one may enjoy the Virtues of Love, Joy, and Peace. Harriet has come home in two senses: she has returned to Talboys, a place where she had experienced love and security as a child, and she has married a man who offers her *home*, in providing the love and security which she has lacked for so long. She has, however, not yet discovered what form the *lordship* of her "New-Wedded Lord" will take.

It is a long evening. The hours between arrival and bedtime are full of the inconveniences of real life rather than the illusions of an idyllic honeymoon bower. Peter

and Harriet do not retire for the night until the end of Chapter III, but the title of Chapter II, "Goosefeather Bed," reflects the expectation of that moment. Their physical desire is undiminished by the confusion, delays, and troublesome circumstances of their wedding night. The joys of their "Bride-bed," Chapter II's epigraph reminds us, lie ahead of them - a private ecstasy of which the reader will be told only as much as it is "fit" to talk of.

In spite of the frustrating circumstances of the next few hours, Harriet and Peter do not allow the ugliness of Anger to mar their first evening as man and wife. Talboys has not been prepared for their arrival, and the personal belongings of the owner, although swiftly removed by Mrs. Ruddle and Bunter, are disturbing. This place which Harriet has tried to "come home" to seems to be saying, by its very unpreparedness and inconveniences, that it is *not* her home. Each of them is troubled by the fear that the other might have been happier "at the Hotel Gigantic somewhere-or-other on the Continent."

Harriet hopes that there will be "a good, roaring fire" to welcome Peter after his struggle to clear space in the woodshed for his car, but the glowing hearth in the sitting-room is denied them. The blocked chimneys are, both literally and figuratively, associated with the corrupt nature of Noake - the owner, whose spirit must be exorcised before Talboys can be truly theirs, and truly *home*. By the time Peter returns from the woodshed the difficulties of the evening have come to climax:

As he passed the threshold a thick cloud of black smoke caught him by the throat and choked him. Pressing on, nevertheless, he arrived at the door of the kitchen, where a first hasty glance convinced him that the house was on fire. Recoiling into the sitting room, he found himself enveloped in a kind of London fog, through which he dimly descried dark forms struggling about the hearth like genies of the mist. He said "Hallo!" and was instantly seized by a fit of coughing. Out of the thick rolls of smoke came a figure that he vaguely remembered promising to love and cherish at some earlier period in the day. Her eyes were streaming and her progress blind. He extended an arm, and they coughed convulsively together.

At this point the physical inhospitality of the place has reached its apex. Instead of the comforting glow of a cosy fire they receive choking billows of black smoke. Instead

of the peaceful repose which should characterize late evening in a family dwelling, the scene is full of violent movement: figures recoil, struggle, and are wracked with intense coughing. Instead of increased familiarity and intimacy, the imagery becomes hellish: familiar forms become unfamiliar and almost threatening - "dark forms . . . like genies in a mist." Nonetheless, the scene, despite the Dantesque imagery, is predominantly comic. The actual difficulties are mechanical and temporary, whereas the happiness Peter and Harriet have is deeply rooted in something spiritual and permanent - the covenant of Love they have formed with each other.

Peter's sense of humour brings the chapter to a close on a note of hilarity which is sharpened by their joyful anticipation of what the next few hours in this *home* will hold:

'Peter, I'm past apologising for my ideal home.'  
'Apologise if you dare - and embrace me at your peril. I am as black as Belloc's scorpion. He is a most unpleasant brute to find in bed at night.'  
'Among the clean sheets. And Peter - oh, Peter! the ballad was right. It is a goosefeather bed!'

"Jordan River," the title of the third chapter, picks up a thread from the first chapter. As they drew near to their destination Harriet had reassured Peter that she had no more qualms than she had had on the night when she accepted his proposal of marriage. He responded with, "Thank God! Stick to it, sweetheart. Only one more river." She rejoined, "And that's the river of Jordan," and, after another comment by Peter, Sayers ends the section with the cryptic phrase, "One more river." In the context of the drive to Great Pagford from London this could be read literally as an indication that they must cross only one more bridge before their journey ends. In the light of the third chapter's title - "Jordan River" - the idea of crossing one last river takes on a larger meaning. The marriage ceremony was not the final step in their progress toward complete commitment to one another. The physical consummation of that marriage must occur before it is a real marriage (even in the eyes of the law).



In the Negro spiritual alluded to, the Jordan River represents the final ordeal each individual must face - death. In Christian tradition death is often pictured as the fording of a deep and treacherous river.<sup>29</sup> Sayers connects the consummation of marriage with the experience of death by her use of this allusion. The metaphor is appropriate for a number of reasons. There is a subtle link with the seventeenth century figure of speech which used "die" to denote sexual intercourse. This idea occurs in Donne's love poetry<sup>30</sup> - poetry which plays a special part in this novel.

Sayers supports the death metaphor of the title "Jordan River" through the Donne quotation she uses to introduce the chapter:

The feast with gluttonous delays  
Is eaten . . .  
    . . . night is come; and yet we see  
    Formalities retarding thee. . . .  
A bride, before a 'Good-night' could be said,  
Should vanish from her clothes into her bed,  
As souls from bodies steal, and are not spied.  
    But now she's laid; what though she be?  
Yet there are more delays, for where is he?  
He comes and passeth through sphere after sphere;  
First her sheets, then her arms, then anywhere.  
Let not this day, then, but this night be thine;  
Thy day was but the eve to this, O Valentine.  
JOHN DONNE: *An Epithalamion on the*  
                  *Lady Elizabeth and Count Palatine*

The bride vanishes from her clothes "As souls from bodies steal." The metaphor is potentially confusing, for the body occurs in two different roles. As the mortal body is to the soul at the time of death - that is, something to be cast off in order to rise to a higher level of existence - so the clothes are to the body at the time when the marriage relationship is to be consummated. In this conceit the body, with its capacity for sexual intimacy, is compared to the soul as it "steals" from its body and passes into intimacy with God in eternal life. The conceit is sustained in the lines which describe the bridegroom passing "through sphere after sphere" and reaching a destination which is beyond sheets, beyond arms. The entrance into a world which transcends time and space

is suggested by "anywhere." The mystical and transcendent quality of sexual intimacy is underlined by the symbolism of death.

This short chapter, Chapter III, includes several incidents leading up to the long awaited climax. Humility is a significant theme as Peter becomes conscious of being inexorably stripped of vanity after vanity as he approaches his "Jordan River." He huminourously alludes to the egotism which has thitherto been fed by all the comforts and luxuries which wealth afforded - luxuries and comforts which he has very few of at the present moment. He comments ironically to Bunter, "My egotism has reached an acute stage tonight, but there's no need for you to pander to it." He jokes about his pride in his personal appearance, too, saying of Mrs. Ruddle, "The worst I know of her is that she doesn't like my face, but that will hurt her more than it will me."

At Peter's request Bunter repeats, for their benefit, the speech he gave "below stairs" at Peter's mother's in honour of Peter and Harriet's marriage. He concludes with the wish that their relationship will exemplify the quality found in first-class port - "strength of body fortified by a first-class spirit and mellowing through many years to a noble maturity." "Strength of body" is the resilience and toughness of character essential to a strong marriage; "first-class spirit" suggests a gracious or selfless nature; and the reference to "mellowing through many years" sees marriage as a continuing process toward "noble maturity." When the journey *toward* wedded Love has ended, another journey begins - a journey in which that Love is refined.

Peter and Harriet can joke about the incredible number of things that have gone awry. They look upon them as temporary trials which will serve to test the mettle of their characters and of their love:

'At any rate,' said Peter, lighting the cigarettes, 'the matches still seem to strike on the box; all the laws of Nature have not been suspended for our confusion. We will muffle ourselves in overcoats and proceed to keep each other warm in the accepted manner of benighted travellers in a snow-bound country. . . .'

' . . . Are you sorry we didn't go to Paris or Mentone after all?'

'No, definitely not. There is a solid reality about this. It's convincing, somehow.'

'It's beginning to convince me, Peter. Such a series of domestic accidents could only happen to married people. There's none of that artificial honeymoon glitter that prevents people from discovering each other's real characters. You stand the test of tribulation remarkably well. It's very encouraging.'

"Thank you - but I really don't know that there's a great deal to complain of. I've got you, that's the chief thing, and food and fire of sorts, and a roof over my head. What more could any man want?"

Thinking back over the indignities of the past few hours Peter sees himself "stripped of every vanity save one." Although they must resign themselves to the absence of certain luxuries which pamper the flesh in trivial ways, he retains his confidence in his ability to satisfy his wife physically. In this one aspect of life, sexuality, the appetites of the flesh merge with the yearnings of the spirit. He says, "Embrasse-moi, chérie. Je trouverai quand même le moyen de te faire plaisir. Hein? tu veux? dis donc!"

Harriet waits in the bedroom while Peter allows Bunter to scrub him "like a puppy at the scullery pump." There *is* a fire on the bedroom hearth. Since this fireplace had been unused for many years it happened to have a soot-free, useable chimney. The homey fire in this room, when it was not possible to have one in the rooms downstairs, is symbolically appropriate since it is in this room that they will engender the *home* that their marriage will provide for them. However tied to Harriet's heart strings this particular house may be, it is their conjugal relationship, much more than any physical setting, which will offer them the peace and security of *home*.

The visual appearance of the bedroom creates a balance of dignity and cosiness:

The wood upon the hearth was flaring cheerfully, and the water, what there was of it, was boiling. The two brass candlesticks bore their flaming ministers bravely, one on either side of the mirror. The big fourposter, with its patchwork quilt of faded blues and scarlets and its chintz hangings dimmed by age and laundering, had, against the pale plastered walls, a dignified air as though of exiled royalty. . . .

Here the last river of the old life will be crossed. In the consummation of their marriage they will undergo a change which may be likened to death and rebirth. The atmosphere is charged with beauty, expectation, and joy:

She put out the bedroom candles. The sheets, worn thin by age, were of fine linen, and somewhere in the room there was a scent of lavender. . . . Jordan river. . . . A branch broke and fell upon the hearth in a shower of sparks, and the tall shadows danced across the ceiling.

The door-latch clicked, and her husband sidled apologetically through. His air of chastened triumph made her chuckle, though her blood was thumping erratically and something seemed to have happened to her breath. He dropped on his knees beside her.

'Sweetheart,' he said, his voice shaken between passion and laughter, 'take your bridegroom. Quite clean and not the least bit paraffiny, but dreadfully damp and cold. . . . What does it matter? What does anything matter? We are here. Laugh, lover, laugh. This is the end of the journey and the beginning of all delight.'

Contrast is used to reflect the various dimensions of this joyful climax: Peter's stance is both chastened and triumphant; Harriet's amused chuckling coincides with a pounding heart, and shortness of breath; and the damp, cold, apologetic bridegroom is overcome by both passion and laughter as he encourages his bride to forget all the things that don't matter, and abandon herself to the delight of love.

When the Jordan River is crossed one journey is ended and another begins. Bunter, in another part of the house, is "not precisely anxious . . . [but] filled with a kindly concern." Having "brought his favourite up to the tape," he is intuitively aware of the high risks involved in the race that lies ahead.

Sayers informs her readers that she will not "indulge in what a critic has called 'interesting revelations of the marriage-bed'." She does, nonetheless, reveal something which occurs during the lovemaking - a brief verbal exchange in which Peter notices and challenges the fact that his wife has just addressed him as "My Lord." Harriet's unpremeditated use of the term has ironic overtones. Peter, who just a few weeks ago considered it "a breach of manners to give orders to his wife," now admits that he gets "a kick out of" hearing Harriet call him her "lord." He says, "One never values a thing till one's earned it, does one? Listen, heart's lady - before I've done I mean to be king and emperor." The statement is made, at least partly, in jest, but Peter's role as husband will, in fact, demand more leadership than he first suspects.<sup>21</sup>

The river of Jordan, an image of death, is a surprising, but fitting, symbol for the radical demands of married love. Harriet and Peter come to the river's brink and cross it, with a measure of pain (for certain vanities must be cast aside), but also with triumphant joy, for the death of the old life in which they were separate entities makes way for their rebirth as "one flesh," in a union which is both physical and spiritual.

Chapter IV is entitled "Household Gods." In it Harriet and Peter begin to perceive themselves as householders, and become more aware of the tension between the oppressive spirit of Noakes which lingers about the place and the genial spirits - represented by Mr. Puffett, the sweep - which they would wish to instate as the presiding deities of their household.

The chapter opens with Harriet and Peter awakening, and realizing where they are and what they have become to each other. Peter's joking comment that Harriet, if she has forgotten she is his wife, must "learn it all over again" alludes to the sexual union as the soul of the marriage, and to the progressive nature of the marriage relationship.

This morning, Talboys seems much more like a home. It affords bacon and eggs, a garden from which to gather flowers, and best of all a benevolent chimney sweep determined to restore their chimneys to usability. Harriet's announcement, "Peter darling, the sweep's come," strikes Peter as the ultimate representation of the irrevocable fact that they are truly married. The problem of the blocked chimneys is a major one which will take some time to rectify, but Bunter is "pleased to note that [Harriet's] temper was, so far, admirably controlled." In spite of the many housekeeping difficulties there is a prevailing spirit of harmony and peace rather than of Wrath. Yet, the house seems to Harriet to resemble "a lovely body inhabited by an evil spirit."

The term "household gods" suggests benevolent spirits which preside over a home, spirits of good will and generosity which are in direct contrast to the stinginess and greed which characterized Noakes' lifestyle. Puffett is the dominant character in this "Household Gods" chapter. By humorously referring to him as "our household god, our

little Lar" Peter identifies him as a benevolent figure on whom they are, at the moment, particularly dependent. Puffett's demeanor suggests paternal authority and graciousness, and, in an almost prophetic way, he exposes and denounces the nature of the evil spirit which has presided over the house. He identifies it as a spirit of Avarice. The Wimseys are shocked at his announcement that Noakes had actually sold his Tudor chimney pots. But the exorcising of the malevolent spirit seems already to have begun as the benign guardian begins his work:

He beamed kindly at them, peeled off his green uppermost layer and, arrayed now in a Fair-Isle jumper of complicated pattern, addressed himself once more to the chimney.

The title of the next chapter, "Fury of Guns," suggests imminent violence, but the epigraph taken from the "Henny-penny" children's story, maintains the light-hearted tone. The list of animals with humorous names who busily spread the news of doom is an image of the multiplicity of anxious characters who invade the Wimseys' honeymoon sphere, creating humour and diversion. The quotation is appropriate for another reason: figuratively, the sky *is* soon to fall in on the peace of Peter and Harriet. In this chapter, however, their happiness is unclouded as they, for the first time as man and wife, receive a fascinating group of visitors.

The power of money, in both a positive and negative sense, is introduced in this chapter. We are given a hint of its evil effect on Crutchley, whose poverty predisposes him to Envy and Avarice. These Deadly Sins, as we later learn, produce in him an intense and murderous Wrath. The power of money is most apparent in this scene in the general reaction to Peter's generous donation to the vicar towards the Church Music Fund. It causes a marked response in all the others present. Describing the incident through Harriet's eyes, Sayers presents the power of Peter's wealth as a positive thing:

For the space of a moment, Harriet saw every person in that room struck into a kind of immobility by the magic of a piece of paper as it crackled between the vicar's fingers. Miss Twitterton awestruck and open-mouthed; Mr. Puffett suddenly pausing in mid-action, sponge in hand; Crutchley, on his way out of the room with the step-ladder over his

shoulder, jerking his head round to view the miracle; Mr. Goodacre himself smiling with excitement and delight; Peter amused and a little self-conscious, like a kind uncle presenting a Teddy bear to the nursery; they might have posed as they stood for the jacket-picture of a thriller: *Bank-Notes in the Parish*.

Sayers apparently saw such an open acknowledgement of wealth as honest, generous, and appropriate. She was not uneasy (as many modern readers will be) about the financial advantage which Peter had over neighbours such as Mr. Goodacre and Mr. Puffett. Wealth only becomes problematic, in her view, when it is accompanied by Avarice, the love of money and the power associated with it. Peter Wimsey's consciousness of his own wealth is neither arrogant nor manipulative. In this scene the spontaneity of his gesture, and his subsequent pleased and self-conscious stance, represents the open spirit of true Liberty.

Even the kindly rich are not, however, always viewed in a positive light. Later chapters of the novel illustrate the resentment and Envy which great wealth like that of Peter Wimsey can promote in others. This issue is closely tied to the murder motives, Avarice and Wrath.

In this chapter Peter's financial superiority is identified as part of his role within the "ordered society" which is the basis of rural English life. The ease and enjoyment Peter shows in chatting with the vicar, and committing himself to attend the village concert, reveal something significant to Harriet - the basis of the underlying strength and stability that she had come to love him for:

She understood now why it was that with all his masquing attitudes, all his cosmopolitan self-adaptations, all his odd spiritual reticences and escapes, he carried about with him that permanent atmosphere of security. He belonged to an ordered society, and this was it. More than any of the friends in her own world, he spoke the familiar language of her childhood. In London, anybody, at any moment, might do or become anything. But in a village - no matter what village - they were all immutably themselves; parson, organist, sweep, duke's son and doctor's daughter, moving like chessmen upon their allotted squares. She was curiously excited. She thought, 'I have married England.'

The various strands of symbolism which come together in this passage clarify some important ideas which recur in Sayers' work. She frequently associates the simplicity and

moral fiber of unsophisticated country people with the highest order of goodness. The Church provided the moral system by which people lived, and clergymen, as Sayers depicted them, exemplified the basic Christian Virtues. By association, the clearly defined social relationships of rural communities take on a kind of divine sanction in Sayers' thinking.

Peter Wimsey is set up as a better, more virtuous, person than the aristocrat who has abandoned his responsibility as a country landowner. Sayers suggests that it is only in this role that a wealthy man can maintain contact with the basic values of common people, and a balanced perspective on the privileges and responsibilities which pertain to the aristocracy.

The passage quoted above emphasizes the security and stability which village life symbolizes for Harriet, but the security is rooted, not so much in nostalgic memories of happy times in her early life, as in her sense of the value and permanence of the English way of life.<sup>32</sup> Harriet's joy and excitement at the thought, "I have married England," points to the symbolic stature Sayers has been gradually developing in her hero in these last novels. Without destroying the essential nature of the character that she created fourteen years earlier, she has made him exemplify the highest ideals of English life, ideals which include the Virtues of Humility, Mercy, Peace, Zeal, Liberty, Temperance, and Purity.

There is mutual geniality between the Wimseys and those who occupy lower ranks in this "ordered society." Peter spontaneously bursts into the song "Birds in the Wilderness" and everyone in the room joins in - "All mad together, thought Harriet." Puffett's observation that singing helps "to take your mind off your troubles" is thought by the Vicar to be an affront to the joyful honeymoon atmosphere, but the sweep obstinately insists, "When a man's married . . . his troubles begin" - a remark which he applies to rich and poor alike.



His direct reference is to the present household problem - soot. Within the context of the plot and themes of the novel, however, the statement has ironic significance. The investigation Peter will undertake in this novel *will* produce emotional complications of a sort he has never had to deal with before, because he has never before had to consider the feelings and wishes of a wife.

The chapter concludes with the exciting clearing of the chimney by a gun blast - a breakthrough in the struggle to make this house a home, and with the announcement of the arrival of a "financial individual" - a threat to the secure world Harriet and Peter desire to create around them.

In Chapter VI, "Back to the Army Again," Peter is recalled to active duty as a detective. The war image of the title suggests that detection is his form of warfare, and the epigraph is a reminder that once one has undertaken to "meddle with right and with wrong" there can never be a complete return to innocence, or a complete escape from moral responsibility.

In this chapter, and in many of the subsequent chapters, the focus is on detection rather than on the relationship between Peter and Harriet, but from this point on a shadow is cast over their happiness - a shadow that is much more troubling than the inconveniences of the first night.

Peter counters the belligerence of MacBride, the financial individual, with poise and courtesy. The Wimseys' emotional control is maintained through the shocking revelation of Noakes' enormous debt, and treacherous dealings, but it falters near the end of the chapter when the man's murdered body is discovered in the cellar. Peter no longer relishes a detective challenge, the meddling "with right and with wrong" to which the epigraph refers, but now, married to Harriet for just twenty-four hours, and expecting a quiet honeymoon, he is forced "Back to the Army Again."

[Harriet] turned to Peter, who stood motionless, staring down at the table. Oh, my God! she thought, startled by his face, he's a middle-aged man - the half of life gone - he mustn't -

'Peter, my poor dear! And we came here for a quiet honeymoon!'  
He turned at her touch and laughed ruefully.

'Damn!' he said. 'And damn! Back to the old grind. *Rigor mortis* and who-saw-him-last, blood-prints, finger-prints, footprints, inform-ation received and it-is-my-dooty-to-warn-you. *Quelle scie, mon dieu, quelle scie!*'

From this point on there will be a degree of emotional tension seemingly incompatible with honeymoon joy.

Chapter VII deals with the choice between the soothing world of luxury and self-indulgence, and the prickly world of moral responsibility. It is titled "Lotos and Cactus."

Early in the chapter the significance of the epigraph becomes apparent. The two stanzas from James Thomson's poem "In the Room" describe an old bed which

told such tales  
Of human sorrows and delights,  
Of fever moans and infant wails  
Of births and deaths and bridal nights.

Harriet and Peter talk over their uneasiness about their use of the house, and especially the bed, of the murdered man, but they realize that they have no reason to feel guilty. Peter says,

Supposing I'd come here to disport myself with somebody who didn't matter twopence, I should be feeling a complete v art. . . . But as things are, no! Nothing that you or I have done is any insult to death - unless you think so, Harriet. I should say, if anything could sweeten the atmosphere that wretched old man left behind him, it would be the feeling we - the feeling I have for you, at any rate, and yours for me if you feel like that. I do assure you, so far as I am concerned, there's nothing trivial about it.

The fact that their marriage was consummated in the bed of an evil man, while his murdered body lay decaying in the cellar beneath them, does not in any way contaminate their love. Instead, the Virtue of Love is a purifying force which brings about spiritual cleansing. Good is not overcome by evil, but evil is overcome by good. They are determined that the unclean spirits will be exorcised from this house which, Harriet maintains, "never was . . . [Noakes] - not really!" Their decision to stay, rather than retreat, is a bold statement of their ownership, and of their readiness to battle with evil rather than give place to it.

When Harriet wishes that they could somehow escape the unpleasantness of a murder investigation Peter's reaction is quick and strong:

[Harriet:] 'But, Peter - need you investigate this. . . . it's such a beastly little crime - sordid and horrible.'

'That's just it,' he broke out, with unexpected passion. 'That's why I can't leave it alone. It's not picturesque. It's not exciting. It's no fun at all. Just dirty, brutal bashing, like a butcher with a pole-axe. It makes me sick. But who the hell am I to pick and choose what I'll meddle in? . . . I can't wash my hands of a thing, merely because it's inconvenient to my lordship, as Bunter says of the sweep. . . . Don't say it isn't my business. It's everybody's business.'

Harriet immediately sees the validity of Peter's position. They both recognize the impossibility of lotos-eating when moral responsibility requires that one take "a nice mouthful of prickly cactus instead."

Harriet's concern to honour Peter's preferences, and her commitment to supporting him wholeheartedly, give her poise and focus through a series of tense scenes. Appropriately enough for the wife of a detective, she even does "the honours at her own table for the first time" as hostess to a peculiar assortment of guests including a collection agent and several police investigators. She, nevertheless, struggles inwardly to resolve certain feelings of uneasiness which are reminiscent of the heart/brain dilemma that troubled her in Gaudy Night:

He appeared satisfied, but Harriet cursed herself for a fool. This business of adjusting oneself was not so easy after all. Being preposterously fond of a person didn't prevent one from hurting him intentionally. . . . He wanted you to agree with him intelligently or not at all. And her intelligence did agree with him. It was her own feelings that didn't seem quite to be pulling in double harness with her intelligence.

The focus in Chapter VIII is on money. Sayers uses the letter symbols for pounds, shillings, and pence as the title, and chooses as an epigraph a passage describing niggardliness. The Sin of Avarice casts a shadow over the entire book, for it is the Sin of both the murdered man, and the murderer.

It is MacBride, the collection agent, whose views dominate this chapter. He cynically maintains that all people really care about is money, and implies that even

family affection plays a poor second to Avarice: "Nothing like £ s. d. for going straight to the heart." Even Peter is forced to concede the validity of MacBride's judgements. The atmosphere has become very tense - circumstances seem to be casting Miss Twitterton in the role of murderer. Her motive is the most obvious thing of all, for she is Noakes' heir.

In Chapter IX a degree of friction develops between Harriet and Peter because of the difference in the male and female approach to emotional issues. Harriet's resentment of men's cold crudeness, shown in their joking about death, is paralleled by Peter's resentment of women's tendency to be overly emotional. For a brief period they are both tempted to view the other according to these stereotypes, but Peter has sufficient sensitivity (heart), and Harriet enough rationality (brain), to bring a quick recovery of their mutual respect.

Chapter X begins with the departure of the police. The newlyweds find themselves alone for the first time in many hours, but the responsibility of the investigation continues to test the mettle of their Love. Peter's low-spirited mood is, he recognizes, caused by Pride - he had wanted to preen in the thought that every aspect of the honeymoon had been "wonderful" for Harriet. His recognition and deprecation of his own Pride, however, indicates how far he has come in subduing it. He mocks himself saying, "His lordship is in the enjoyment of very low spirits, owing to his inexplicable inability to bend Providence to his own designs."

The temptation to nurse his injured Pride is overcome by the cheerful Humility which Harriet's humour and good sense promote. We see him accepting - on a deeper level than ever before - the fact that Harriet loves him for himself, not for the quality of life he can offer her. He is perceptive enough to realize, as he shortly admits, that he is being "handled" by his wife. Nevertheless, there is a greater openness in their Love because of the "shock tactics" Harriet uses in her blunt statement of her feelings:

'I'm only trying to tell you, in the nicest possible manner, that, provided I were with you, I shouldn't greatly mind being deaf, dumb, halt, blind and imbecile, afflicted with shingles and whooping-cough, in an open boat without clothes or food, with a thunderstorm coming on. But you're being painfully stupid about it.'

Sayers recognizes that it is through the experience of being loved that a person develops a positive image of himself. There is a positive alternative to the inflated self-esteem of *Pride*, and to the deflated self-esteem which can lead to *Envy*. That alternative is the sense of worth which develops within a genuine Love relationship like that of Harriet and Peter.

Many marriages, as Sayers illustrated in her earlier novels, are devoid of such mutual affirmation of worth. In this novel, too, Sayers introduces several such relationships, which contrast with Harriet and Peter's marriage.

In this chapter, Chapter X, she uses a conversation in the pub to give a quick sketch of the unhappy marriage of Aggie Twiterton's parents. Her mother was a schoolmistress, with "airs and lah-di-dah ways," who married beneath herself because she fell for the good looks of an ordinary cowman, but she failed to respect her husband as a person. The impetus to his becoming violent and abusive is succinctly summed up: "If you treat a man like dirt, 'e'll act dirty."

A little later in the pub conversation Mr. Puffett suggests that physical attraction is a poor basis for marriage: "there's more to marriage, as they say, than four bare legs in a bed." Even though he regards financial security as an important factor, he adds the comment, "Or legs in silk stockings, neither," which implies that money enough to afford luxuries would not, in itself, guarantee a good marriage. He prods Bunter with the suggestion that Lord Peter could have married for money, but apparently chose not to. Bunter's response is a proud one: "'His Lordship,' said Mr. Bunter, 'married for love.'" In his rejoinder - "'I thought as much. . . . Ah, well - he can afford it, I dessay'" - Mr. Puffett implies that marriage based on romantic love is a luxury that the poor can seldom afford. Even for the wealthy, however, love has been a rare motive for marriage. It is

very difficult - for both the rich and the poor - to escape the tyranny which money represents. Avarice in the rich, and stark necessity in the poor lead alike to matrimonial liaisons in which it is the financial position which is esteemed rather than the person.

In the next chapter, Chapter XI, a particular stress resulting from marriage is commented on. Marrying early, and without a good financial base, has put a young police officer named Sellon in a very vulnerable position. Sellon's immediate supervisor is unsympathetic because he had advised him against the marriage, saying that "he was doing a foolish thing and that the girl would be the ruin of him." Such comments, Superintendent Kirk points out, ignore the intensity of emotion with which such decisions are made. Wise marriage choices, it would seem, are based on a balance between rationality and emotion.

In Chapter XII Kirk tries to find evidence which will free Sellon from the suspicion that has fallen upon him, implicating him in Noakes' murder. Returning at a very late hour to Talboys to check out another theory, Kirk pushes Bunter's goodwill to the limit. Peter, however, is sympathetic. His attitude toward the intrusion contrasts sharply with that of the persona in the chapter's epigraph who considers the invasion of his privacy to be lacking in propriety, "civility," and "discretion." We see, near the beginning of Chapter XIII, how much Peter respects the compassion which motivated Kirk's late night visit. He places a much higher value on such "divine qualities" as generosity and Mercy, than he does on his own right as a householder, and a honeymooner, to be undisturbed after 11:00 p.m.

In Chapter XIII Harriet and Peter are subjected to another, and much worse, invasion of privacy - that of the press. They handle this calmly, managing to discourage the flow of "romantic bilge-water," and to impress the reporter with the quality of their regard for one another. Their preference for openness and frankness will not, however, lead them to the extremity of a *complete* open home policy. Harriet skillfully brings the reporters' visit to an early conclusion, and Bunter strategically uses animals to deter would-be inter-

viewers. The Wimseys' attitude toward the intruders is devoid of the Pride and Wrath which such violations of privacy tend to provoke, but they do set limits. There is a balance to be maintained between warm-hearted hospitality, and the peaceful exclusivity of the home.

The beautiful imagery describing the "out-bursting" of love in the epigraph to Chapter XIV is especially appropriate. By the end of the chapter Harriet and Peter have reached a level of joy which surpasses anything they have yet experienced. It is a joy which is independent of immediate events. Instead, it is a spontaneous product of genuine, self-giving Love - the Virtue which stands directly opposite to the Sin of Lust.

The conversation which Peter and Harriet have over lunch, just following the inquest, is an important prelude to the peak of happiness which occurs a few hours later. Harriet expresses her surprised appreciation for Peter's humble willingness to conform to the formalities of village life, and even endure the much inferior quality of liquid refreshment it entails. The younger Peter had indulged his refined tastes to a point which bordered on the Sin of Gluttony, and, though he always possessed the ability to make himself at home in a village setting, Harriet had not had the opportunity to observe him accepting things like parsnip wine and public house sherry cheerfully.

Sayers' understanding of Gluttony, described in her Introduction to Purgatory, is broadly sketched as an "excessive love of pleasure," placing high value on things which are secondary goods rather than a primary ones. Such a description has never truly applied to Peter Wimsey for he has always displayed a high regard for the "primary good" which is the welfare and happiness of others. As his character develops and matures through the course of the eleven novels, his concern for people, and for friendly relationships with them, comes to predominate over his love of good food and fine wine. The pleasure foregone in the drinking of cheap sherry at the vicarage - when he is accustomed to drinking the best sherry money can buy - is a minor sacrifice. In his new role as head of a family which owns property in this rural community, he values forming

relationships with the village people more than he values his own indulgences, such as fine wine.

Peter's priorities no longer hint at Gluttonous tendencies. His quick recovery (a few chapters later) from the shock of Mrs. Ruddles' rendering his precious port undrinkable, is further evidence that his right to enjoy his favourite things is - at this point in his life, if not always before - exercised with Temperance and moderation. His indulgence of his tastes is so ordered to maintain what Sayers called "the right hierarchy of secondary goods" (Purgatory 67).

Harriet genuinely admires Peter's gracious spirit:

'Peter, you're not normal. You have a social conscience far in advance of your sex. Public house sherry at the vicarage! Ordinary, decent men shuffle and lie till their wives drag them out by the ears. . . . You're definitely too good to live.'

The scene of happiness near the end of the chapter is directly connected to the decision to "go off somewhere" by themselves for the afternoon (a wise, self-preserving impulse, not "selfish and naughty" as Harriet ironically labels it). While driving along they discover, in an old churchyard, one of their own chimney-pots serving as a sun-dial base. It seems, too, that it will be fairly easy to reclaim. It is a small unexpected pleasure, but one which somehow verifies the feasibility of their desire to restore Talboys to its former wholeness - physically and spiritually- and make it their home.

In this scene, for once, Peter's thinking and emotions come into central focus more than Harriet's. As they sit quietly in the churchyard, it becomes apparent, especially to Peter, that the experience of marriage has affected each of them differently:

His spirits were in a state of confusion . . . chaos of his personal emotions. . . . He had got what he wanted. . . [but] was faced with an entirely strange situation, which was doing something quite extraordinary to his feelings. . . .

He had somehow vaguely imagined that, the end of desire attained, soul and sense would lie down together like the lion and the lamb; but they did nothing of the sort. With orb and sceptre thrust into his hands, he was afraid to take hold on power and call his empire his own. . . . As soon as he tried to think, a soft, inexorable clutch seemed to fasten itself upon his bowels. He had become vulnerable in the very point where always,



until now, he had been most triumphantly sure of himself. His wife's serene face told him that she had somehow gained all the confidence he had lost.

Harriet has arrived at the still centre, the point of rest, which was the subject (in Gaudy Night) of the sonnet expressing her deepest longings. Peter, however, has not yet adjusted to living with a woman for whom he feels such powerful emotions, and to functioning as the leader in the marriage relationship. He is struggling with a heart-versus-brain dilemma similar to Harriet's dilemma before their engagement. The two faculties had seemed compatible to him before, and he had naively expected his Love for Harriet to be worked out through both head and heart operating in simple balance. Now, the emotional side of him seems to be overpowering his rationality.

Peter's "chaos of personal emotions" does not, however, reach serious proportions. He has achieved too much mature Humility to allow such uncertainty to curtail his happiness. Because the Sin of Pride has little power over him, he is not prey to the illusion that his wife loves him for his superior wisdom, poise, and confidence. Nor does he allow Envy to make him resent her display of serene confidence, at a point in time when he feels particularly vulnerable.

Humility entails accepting one's limitations; it is therefore a very liberating experience. When masks are removed and the individual is free to be himself the intimacy of real Love becomes possible. The relationship between these two great Virtues works both ways: just as Humility prepares the way for Love, Love prepares the way for Humility. It is only in an atmosphere of Love that a person can be fully conscious of his imperfection and vulnerability, and yet know real security.

Harriet's problem with Pride, although different from Peter's, has been just as great. Because of her relationship with Boyes, and the notoriety which being tried for his murder had brought her, she had lost virtually all of her self-esteem. Peter, too, had been disappointed in love, but in his case it did not lead to prolonged self-recrimination. Harriet's intense Pride, which is especially apparent in Have His Carcase and Gaudy

*Night*, is a defense against further pain, but it renders her unable to accept a gift from anyone, least of all Peter, to whom her debt is humiliatingly huge already. As she strives to be completely independent of others *Pride* becomes a defensive wall, a barrier which isolates her from Love. But the barrier is finally penetrated, and she is freed to be vulnerable and humble - and loved.

Here, two days after her marriage, as she sits with Peter in the churchyard, Harriet cheerfully admits her financial destitution: "I was thinking, I'd never paid my secretary her salary and at the moment I haven't got a penny in the world except what's yours." She spent the last money she had on wedding clothes to do *Peter* (not herself) proud, with a joyous abandon and spontaneity that her former *Pride* would never have allowed:

' . . . [I] borrowed ten bob of [my secretary] at the last minute for enough petrol to get me to Oxford. That's right, laugh! I did kill my pride - but, oh, Peter! it had a lovely death.'

'Full sacrificial rites. Harriet, I really believe you love me. You couldn't anything so utterly and divinely right by accident.'

Self-sacrifice is one of the qualities which distinguishes conjugal Love from the superficial relationships based on Lust. While they sit quietly, Peter has been thinking about the differences between this relationship and the previous liaisons they both have had. From Harriet's response to his lovemaking he has realized how inept and self-centred her former lover's sexual performance had been. Even Peter's own, less negative, experiences of "the passionate exchange of felicity" were of a much lower order than the passion he feels for Harriet ("no woman had ever so stirred his blood"). The main difference, however, does not lie in that dimension. The newness is in the "enormous importance of the whole relationship." For the first time "it really mattered to him what his relations with a lover were." He wonders about Harriet's feelings.

Asked whether she thinks life to be worth living "on the whole," Harriet admits to Peter that, in spite of all the unhappiness she endured in earlier years, she has always believed in the *goodness* of life. Now, overriding all the troublesomeness of the crime

investigation into which they have been drawn is the awareness that she is experiencing the actuality of that goodness:

'... Things have come straight. I always knew they would if one hung on long enough, waiting for a miracle. ... Well, it seems like a miracle to be able to look forward - to - to see all the minutes in front of one come hopping along with something marvellous in them, instead of just saying, Well, that one didn't actually hurt and the next may be quite bearable. ... Oh, damn and blast you, Peter, you *know* you're making me feel exactly like Heaven. ...'

Harriet's image of minutes stretching ahead of her, full of marvellous things, is reminiscent of Peter's idea of marital happiness six years earlier, when he first anticipated marrying her. In Chapter IV of Strong Poison he envisions life with Harriet: "one wouldn't be dull - one would wake up and there'd be a whole day for jolly things to happen in." Now, for both of them, the dream has become substance. Their life as a married couple is not without worries and trials, but it is a life in which they will anticipate each new day with joy, rather than dread.

Harriet's reference to heaven (in the passage just quoted) evokes a loving response from Peter, yet also "a curious misgiving." He recalls that in the past women had said "they found paradise in his arms," but that the expression seemed merely a sort of hyperbole for sexual pleasure. Harriet's "Heaven" seems less like an extravagant expression, but Peter is unsure what it really means:

He was as much troubled and confused now as though someone had credited him with the possession of a soul. ... He was filled with a curious misgiving, as though he had meddled in matters too high for him; as though he were being forced, body and bones, through some enormous wringer that was squeezing out of him something undifferentiated till now, and even now, excessively nebulous and inapprehensible.

But his misgivings are "pleasantly erratic" and, he judges, "couldn't possibly turn into something that had to be reckoned with." There is a note of irony here. The "matters too high for him" - relating to his love for Harriet and hers for him - will indeed make disturbing demands on him before long.

There is a spiritual depth in their love which runs much deeper than physical attraction and personality compatibility:

He . . . tightened his bodily hold on his wife as though to remind himself of the palpable presence of the flesh. She responded with a small contented sound like a snort - an absurd sound that seemed to lift the sealing stone and release some well-spring of laughter deep down within him. It came bubbling and leaping up in the most tremendous hurry to reach the sunlight, so that all his blood danced with it and his lungs were stifled with the rush and surge of this extraordinary fountain of delight. He felt himself at once ridiculous and omnipotent. He was exultant. He wanted to shout.

A short while later, after Harriet has exulted in the death of her Pride, Peter's joy mounts even higher:

The fountain had become a stream that ran chuckling and glittering through his consciousness, spreading as it went into a wide river that swept him up and drowned him in itself.

This scene in the churchyard, more than any other in the novel, illustrates the ecstasy which arises when, as the chapter's epigraph puts it, Love comes "Like the outbursting of a trodden star," and a person leaves darkness behind to walk "within the brilliance of another's thought."

In Chapter XV the focus is less on the feelings of Peter and Harriet and more on marriage in a broader sense. Harriet and Peter are invited for sherry by the vicar, Mr. Goodacre, and his wife, virtuous people with a strong and happy marriage. The Goodacres resemble Mr. and Mrs. Venables in The Nine Tailors in that their bond is based on mutual respect and shared commitment. Mrs. Ruddles' gloomy suggestion, in conversation with Bunter, that the Wimseys' marital happiness will be short-lived, and that Peter will soon treat Harriet as badly as her husband treated her, evokes a vehement rebuttal. Bunter's expectations of lasting happiness for Peter and Harriet are based on his personal knowledge of Peter's genuine kindness and fairness. Later in the chapter we learn of the sick, predatory liaison which existed between Crutchley and Miss Twiterton - a relationship in which there was no real esteem, respect, or kindness, and which has turned into something very bitter and ugly.

Chapter XVI is entitled "Crown Matrimonial." (Both Chapter XVII and the last section of the *Epithalamion* have similar titles. The later titles using "Crown" suggest the glory of rulership - "Crown Imperial" (Chapter XVII); and the glory of heaven - "Crown Celestial" (*Epithalamion* 3). In Chapter XVI the crowning glory is "Matrimonial" - the joy of married Love which again, in this chapter, rises to an emotional peak as it did in the churchyard scene. The epigraph, too, describes the height of Love as the reaching of a glorious pinnacle, and a still "centre" (as in the *Gaudy Night* sonnet), but the journey is not always an easy one - many have miscarried on this road to the apex of joy:

NORBERT: Explain not: let this be  
                   This is life's height.  
 CONSTANCE: Yours, yours, yours!  
 NORBERT: You and I -  
                   Why care by what meanders we are here  
                   I' the centre of the labyrinth? Men have died  
                   Trying to find this place, which we have found.  
                   ROBERT BROWNING: *In a Balcony*

The chapter begins with Peter and Harriet's return to Talboys after the visit to the vicarage. They are intoxicated with Love and happiness to a degree which Harriet finds almost frightening. Peter defends the rightness and the permanence of their feelings with lines from "The Anniversarie" by Donne which suggest that Love such as theirs lives in an eternal present, and cannot decay. Harriet, for the first time, understands why poets like Donne spoke of Love in such transcendent terms. She says, "All my life I have been wandering in the dark - but now I have found your heart - and am satisfied." And Peter replies,

'And what do all the great words come to in the end, but that? - I love you  
 - I am at rest with you - I have come *home*.' (emphasis added)

At this point Peter's most solemn and humble declaration of Love is interrupted by a "great strangling sob" from the jilted Miss Twitterton who is hiding on the stairs outside their room. This embarrassing episode is a pointed reminder of the deep longing for fulfillment in Love that exists in every heart, whether rich or poor, young or old, beautiful or ugly. Yet Harriet quickly perceives, in the way Miss Twitterton describes

Crutchley, the man she believes she loves, a condescending attitude based on Pride and extremely "fatal" to Love.

Miss Twitterton's pain tempers Harriet's own happiness and prevents her focus from becoming narrow. At her highest point of personal happiness Harriet is faced with the unhappiness of others. Because she realizes how devoid of genuine Love the lives of many people are, and that no one can *deserve* the joy that she and Peter have, Harriet can appreciate what she has all the more. She is not trapped by the sort of self-absorption which might develop in a more tranquil honeymoon situation. Instead, through difficulties and interruptions, the Virtues of Humility and Mercy are permitted to grow.

Chapter XVII brings Peter and Harriet to the greatest test their Love has yet had. Peter's radical commitment to truth, even if it means hurting "friends," is difficult for Harriet to accept. Like Dian de Momerie (in Murder Must Advertise), Harriet realizes with horror that this man's hands are "hangman's hands." The hands that have touched her gently in love making are also skilled in the performance of severe, violent functions. They have, many times, been used - figuratively - to make and tighten a noose, and they will be again. She feels that something beautiful which exists between Peter and her is being destroyed. Can their "peace" co-exist with the ugliness and death that the detective must deal in?

Harriet asks, "Can't we escape?" At Peter's sudden offer, however, to "leave this miserable business and never meddle again" she is horrified by the abuse of wifely power she had begun to indulge in. She quickly sees that this is not what marriage is meant to be - Peter letting his affection for her corrupt his judgement, and becoming less than himself in order to satisfy her demands. The selflessness with which she now commits herself to allowing no "matrimonial blackmail," and to trusting his judgement is indeed "love with honour."

A new stage in their relationship has been reached. It is expressed in terms which parallel those used by Miss de Vine in Gaudy Night when she told Harriet that love for a

man would become the priority of her life when it had "overmastered" her. The idea of *mastering* is in keeping with the suggestion of the husband's leadership in the title of this chapter - "Crown Imperial". Yet Harriet's submissiveness is met by equal Humility on Peter's part:

They stood so for a moment; both conscious that something had been achieved that was of enormous - of *overmastering* importance. Then Harriet said, practically:

'In any case you were right, and I was wrong. The thing has got to be done. By any means so long as we get to the bottom of it. That's your job and it's worth doing.'

'Always provided that I can do it. I don't feel very brilliant at the moment.' (emphasis added)

In Chapter XVIII there are only a few moments of domestic tranquillity before another disruptive invasion. Peter and Harriet graciously invite the two intruders - who have come to remove the furniture from under them - to stay to dinner. In the midst of the chaos, they are determinedly building up around them the atmosphere of a hospitable home. When they find themselves alone once more the subject of matrimonial blackmail resurfaces. They talk of the evil of possessiveness which involves the desire to manipulate, control, and virtually *own* the other person - desires which are rooted in the Sins of Envy and Lust.

Chapter XIX has the title "Prickly Pear" and an epigraph which uses the same image. Both are taken from Eliot's "The Hollow Men" and are particularly appropriate to both the story line and the development of theme. They allude to the cactus - which (we learn later) is a key to the mystery - and to the awkwardness, or prickliness, of the whole business of detection.

The epigraph uses two different sections of Eliot's poem. The first, in presenting a picture of a frightening, dead land, reflects the oppressive dream world which has haunted Peter - but with decreasing intensity - ever since the War. At the start of the chapter he awakens from what he calls a mild form of "the old responsibility dream." His dream represents both the frustration arising from the unsolved case, and the

essential detail in the evidence which he is still struggling to recall. Harriet's awareness of his frightening dream vexes him because such nightmares reveal the emotional scars he would prefer to mask, even from his wife. The remnants of his Pride whisper to him that it is kinder and more noble - when he *must* suffer emotionally - to suffer alone. The emotional transparency and vulnerability that the closeness of married Love demands is something Peter will continue to fight till the last pages of the novel.

The fact that the furniture will be shortly removed from the house seems to constitute an "order to retreat" but Harriet is not anxious to leave. She is afraid that this house, which had just begun to feel like home, will become repulsive to Peter because by leaving it now he will also be leaving the murder case behind, unsolved.

When the letters from Peter's uncle, Paul Delagardie, arrive the marriage advice they contain for the newlyweds represents a more direct statement of the principles which build a strong relationship.<sup>19</sup> The letter to Harriet advises her to be responsive to Peter's sensitive and generous nature, and to be aware that "Il sent besoin de se donner - de s'épancher." [He feels the need to give himself - to open his heart.] Above all, she must not strive for mastery, using coldness and coquetry, for Peter "ne sait pas s'imposer; la lutte lui répugne." [He does not know how to be overbearing; strife is repugnant to him.] The implication is that the only leadership in the marriage which Peter will assume is that which *she* lays no claim to. The husband can only be the head of the family if the wife allows him that role. She must realize that "Pour le rendre heureux," she must allow him to make *her* happy.

The letter Peter has received from Uncle Paul advises him to respect Harriet's intelligence, but to avoid being weak ("pas de faiblesse") and excessively compliant ("trop soumis"). It is for him to channel Harriet's passionate nature ("Tâche de comprimer les élans d'un coeur chaleureux. . ."), and in this way to win her respect, and maintain the vitality of their marriage.



In spite of Uncle Paul's reputation for casual sexual involvements and, in Peter's words, "cynical indelicacy," his recommendations clearly recognize the value of a structured relationship based on the self-givingness of Love - the sort of relationship which contrasts markedly with self-serving liaisons based on Lust.

The culmination of the cactus imagery comes at end of the chapter. The murder method is discovered: the pot containing the cactus had been set up as a pendulum to strike the victim in the back of the head. The chain was the missing detail that Peter had been struggling to find - it had been part of his dream. The substitution of a chain of a different length had been a key part of the murderer's arrangements. Earlier in the novel (Chapter VII) "a nice mouthful of prickly cactus" was contrasted with the luxuriant self-indulgent life style of lotus eaters. By the time the mystery is solved the possibility of a lotus-eating sort of honeymoon has been long forgotten, and the cactus has become - literally as well as figuratively - the central image of the whole difficult experience.

In Chapter XX Crutchley, the murderer, is speedily confronted and arrested, but the bitterness and hate which pours out of the cornered man brings the case to a close on a very sour note. Instead of creating an aura of satisfying success around her detectives, Sayers chooses to depict the sort of nastiness that conscientious and virtuous people are often subjected to in real life.

The Wimseys, in the first few days of their marriage, have seen most of the Deadly Sins in operation, but the worst have been Avarice, Envy, and Wrath. Through it all they themselves have demonstrated the opposing characteristics - the Virtues of Liberality, Mercy, Humility, and, above all, Love.

The central importance of the marriage theme is verified by the title of the last division of the novel - *Epithalamion*, which, like a wedding poem, celebrates the Wimsey marriage. The *Epithalamion* has three chapters and each is titled according to the location in which it is set.

The first is "London: Amende Honorable." Its opening paragraphs suggest a verisimilitude surpassing that normally found in detective stories. Harriet finds reality to be quite unlike "those admirable detection stories with which she was accustomed to delight the hearts of murder-fans." Instead of "finishing off on a top-note," they must endure the anti-climax of an exhausting sequence of official statements and tedious police procedures.

This last division of Busman's Honeymoon is the final stage in the Sayers' humanizing of Peter, and presentation of him as a person of genuine compassion. She introduces a deliberate link with her first novel - a reference to the architect Thipps (in whose flat the body was found in Whose Body?). It is a small detail but it suggests the unifying and rounding out of the whole of Peter's detective career and personal development.

In this London chapter Peter must deal with some unpleasant business, and Harriet suffers from the sense that she is unneeded and perhaps even unwanted. Peter's arrangement with Sir Impey Biggs for the defense of the accused seems, from Biggs' comments, to be unprecedented. Peter appears more painfully aware than ever before of the unfair advantage of the rich over the poor, and of the moral obligation he has toward those who might never have become criminals if they had not been plagued by poverty.

We learn from Bunter later, however, that it has been a pattern of Peter's for some time to make such "honourable amends" (alluded to in the chapter's title) by maintaining responsible contact with the condemned man up to the point of execution. Sayers did not imply this, however, in earlier novels. She concluded her plots tidily just as the case was solved - an appropriate pattern for a book in which the mystery plot is the central focus. In this last novel, however, she prolongs the conclusion to explore more fully her hero's humanity and capacity for Virtue.

While in London, Peter's preoccupation with his duty to the criminal he has just caught overshadows his consciousness of the woman he has, almost as recently, married.

The change of scene in Chapter 2, however, relieves the sense of estrangement Harriet has been feeling.

Chapter 2 of the *Epithalamion* is called "Denver Ducis: The Power and the Glory." Its focus is on Harriet's becoming acquainted with the glorious past of Peter's family, and the less glorious, but equally powerful, *personal* past which continues to haunt him - a haunting that is much less benign than the haunting of Duke's Denver by ancestral ghosts. In the first part of the chapter Harriet is charmed by the dowager duchess and the almost story-book atmosphere of the place. The gentility of Peter's family is tempered by warmth and informality. It provides a pleasant escape from the harsh realities that Harriet and Peter faced in London.

The dowager's account of Peter's sufferings from the aftermath of the war experiences, and of Bunter's rescuing him, is very important in helping Harriet understand and accept the emotional turmoil Peter must live through as he anticipates Crutchley's trial and execution.

When Harriet and Peter attend church with the Dowager Duchess Peter reads the lesson - a scripture passage of specific relevance to the case they have solved, as well as to Peter's present burden of moral responsibility. It speaks of those who must execute judgement, of the slowness of people to see the truth, and of men who set wicked traps for others. It suggests the awfulness of what must finally be faced ("and what will ye do in the end thereof?")

The last chapter is "Talboys: Crown Celestial." The title harks back to the two earlier types of crowns alluded to in titles: the crown of "matrimonial" joy, and the husband's "imperial" crown of leadership. "Celestial" is related to the imagery of heaven in earlier conversations between Harriet and Peter - imagery which, although employed in a light-hearted, hyperbolic way, subtly implies the timeless and transcendent quality of the highest form of Love between a man and a woman. By the close of this chapter

Harriet and Peter will come to the end of a period of spiritual estrangement and enter again, and with even greater joy, the "heavenly" intimacy of married love.

The trial scene shows Peter's willingness to go as far as integrity will permit to prevent Crutchley's conviction. Crutchley's bitter accusation of the power of wealth is biting for it is an important reminder of the Envy the poor often feel toward the wealth and privilege of people like Peter and Harriet. Although disconcerting, Wrath and Envy of the sort Crutchley expresses are understandable emotions which the rich must remain conscious of if they are to shun Avarice and live responsibly and compassionately in the real world.

The three weeks between the trial and the execution put great strain on the marriage. The war-time horror of being responsible for the deaths of others still lingers in Peter's subconscious, and surfaces under stress such as this. Symptoms of his post-war trauma return - aloofness, retreat into a shell, refusal to share pain. He treats Harriet impersonally, almost coldly, but her Love survives the ordeal.

Harriet does not challenge or even question Peter's withdrawal from her; she knows the reestablishment of their spiritual intimacy can occur only when he is ready. It is a measure of her Humility that she makes no demands or claims. She recognizes that emotional pain is a very personal thing - the last thing that a proud man is willing to share.

In this chapter they have returned to Talboys, now refurbished, but it cannot really feel like home while their relationship is in this state of limbo. As she waits for Peter's return from his last visit to Crutchley on the eve of the execution, Harriet thinks of the house as a place which has been exorcised, but which may yet have its emptiness possessed by evil, if goodness does not claim it first:

The old house was Harriet's companion in her vigil. It waited with her, its evil spirit cast out, itself swept and garnished, ready for the visit of devil or angel.

Plagued by fears, Harriet too must wait for good or evil. She believes that if Peter does not come back to her tonight *before* Crutchley's execution brings an end to the crisis, it will constitute a failure in their marriage - she thinks of it as a "failure that will be with us all our lives."

It is past two when Peter and Bunter return to Tallboys. At four a.m., four hours before the execution which he so dreads, Peter comes back to Harriet, admitting weakness in a way he has never done before. Shivering, he says,

It's not cold . . . it's my rotten nerves. I can't help it. I suppose I've never been really right since the War. I hate behaving like this. I tried to stick it out by myself. . . . It's damnable for you too. I'm sorry. I'd forgotten. That sounds idiotic. But I've always been alone.

Harriet accepts his penitence, but it is unnecessary. She does not feel that he owes her anything. All she wants is to share in his pain: "I'm like that, too. I like to crawl away and hide in a corner." Peter's response to this is the emotional climax of the novel:

'Well,' he said, with a transitory gleam of himself, 'you're my corner and I've come to hide.'

'Yes, my dearest,'  
(*And the trumpets sounded for her on the other side.*)

The victory is a spiritual one. If there is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner that repents (Luke 15:7), there must also be rejoicing when two people struggle free of the power of Pride, and all the other Deadly Sins that would blight their communion, and achieve an intimacy which surpasses any other earthly experience. Out of all that was "wrong and wretched" in their previous lives something supremely beautiful has emerged. They have not escaped, and cannot escape, the distresses of life, but as Harriet holds her stricken husband, sharing his pain, the weakness they have acknowledged to each other becomes a bond of strength between them. Humility and Love have triumphed over Pride and independence. This is "the assurance" that breaks upon Harriet's mind, that is like "the distant note of a trumpet."

By developing in her once light-hearted detective an unsettling degree of moral responsibility - even to the wicked - Sayers had written herself out of the detective genre. Her last detective works are true novels rather than traditional whodunits. Murder Must Advertise, The Nine Tailors, and Gaudy Night all have well controlled balance between the detective story and the development of character and theme. I feel, however, that in Busman's Honeymoon the detective story plays a rather weak second fiddle to the story of Peter and Harriet's marriage. It is, as Sayers said herself, the detection which interrupts the love story, not the reverse.

By the end of this novel Peter Wimsey is no longer suitable as a hero of detective fiction. In real life a criminal investigator *might*, indeed, be as compassionate to the condemned as Peter Wimsey has become, but it seems unlikely that such a man could enjoy his work. Yet the aura of enjoyment is what gives the Wimsey books, especially the early ones, their charm.

Sayers wrote herself out of the genre because she became more serious. Her focus shifted away from the shallow mysteries of crime to the profound mysteries of the human spirit. From this point on her chief concern was not in the development of intricate plots, but in exploring the intricacies of the soul.

Busman's Honeymoon is a less tidy book than the others, and perhaps a less satisfying book, in an aesthetic sense. But it has, to a certain degree, what Katherine Mansfield called the *untidiness of real life*. For those who wish to discover the qualities, or Virtues, that Sayers believed most essential to a happy life, and the Deadly Sins that she believed most destructive to human relationships, it is probably the most important and impressive book of all.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Pre-War Drama and Non-Fiction, 1937 to 1939

Dorothy Sayers' significant work as a dramatist did not begin until 1937, when she was already in her mid-forties. Her interest in theatrical productions, however, had begun in her youth (Reynolds, Dorothy L. Sayers 37). In 1915, at Somerville College, she had been a leading participant in the Going-Down Play of her year. She helped write it, served as musical director, and performed one of the main roles.

Now, twenty years later, Sayers found herself drawn into the world of theatre. Alzina Stone Dale, in the Introduction to her edition of two of Sayers' plays, explains how Muriel St. Clare Byrne - lecturer at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and Sayers' friend since Oxford days - helped this to come about:

By the mid-thirties Lord Peter Wimsey had become such a well-known character that any number of people were eager to adapt him to stage or screen. . . . [Sayers] asked for Byrne's help in screening these scripts, which Byrne gave with her usual efficiency, but she found them all dreadful and began to urge Sayers to write a play herself. . . . It is a testament to their belief in one another's capabilities and their capacity to work together that early in 1935 Sayers finally agreed to try and write a Wimsey stage play with Byrne's help. (Love All and Busman's Honeymoon xxii)

The play Busman's Honeymoon, begun in February and finished by the end of the summer, did not open on stage until December of the following year, 1936, by which time Sayers had also written the novel version of it. Although the familiar characters and the detective plot tied Busman's Honeymoon very closely to Sayers' previous work, it proved to be the gateway to a totally new phase in her writing.

The appearance of Lord Peter Wimsey on stage at the end of 1936 was no surprise. The direction, however, which Sayers' writing career took in the next twenty-four months seemed to the casual observer to be a startling departure from what she had been and done for the previous fifteen years. Her first religious play, The Zeal of Thy House, was performed at the Canterbury Festival in June of 1937. The following year the play had

short runs at three different London theatres during the summer, as well as a provincial tour in the fall. By that time Sayers had produced three very impressive essays on the Christian faith (one published by St. Martin's Review, and two by The Sunday Times). By the end of 1938 she had written a radio play on the birth of Christ for the BBC, and an article for The Radio Times expressing her concern that people grasp the reality of such New Testament events. She had also agreed to write a second play for the Canterbury Festival.

Sayers saw no reason for people to be surprised at these developments. She was amused that "the spectacle of a middle-aged female detective-novelist admitting publicly that the judicial murder of God [i.e. the crucifixion of Christ] might compete in interest with the corpse in the coal hole was the sensation for which the Christian world was waiting" (from a 1954 letter, quoted by Brabazon 166).

In 1937 and 1938, however, the transition to writing predominantly religious material was not as complete as it would appear from a list of her published works. Her light comedy play Love All was written in 1937 or 1938 (Dale xxx), although not produced until April of 1940, and not published until 1984. It is also very possible, it seems to me, that her unfinished Wimsey novel, "Thrones, Dominations -" was written during 1937. Nonetheless, the fact that she failed to complete this last work of fiction, and the fact that the stories included in In the Teeth of the Evidence (published in November 1939) seem to belong to an earlier stage of her career, indicate that Sayers' interest in writing detective fiction had run out. The theatre was rapidly becoming her first love.

She had an instinct for what good drama required, and was rapidly becoming interested in a more complex and challenging sort of drama than either of her first two plays had been. Her letter to the editor of The New Statesman and Nation,<sup>24</sup> on a current production of Chekhov's Uncle Vanya, is apparently her first public pronouncement on the subject of drama. It clearly shows her sensitivity to the way a character's spiritual



state is communicated to a theatre audience - a sensitivity which was at the root of her success as a Christian dramatist. Her letter takes issue with a review by Desmond MacCarthy of the Chekhov play:

I had never previously seen the play, read the play, or heard a single word of discussion about this or any other production of it. Through this strange gap in my education I thus viewed the performance as a stage-play and not as a venerable institution. This probably accounts for some of the differences between my impressions and those of the seasoned critic. I find, for instance, that I ought not to have come away filled with enthusiasm for Mr. Cecil Truncer's interpretation of *Astrov*. But I remain impenitent about this. His reading may not be true to tradition, but if it is not true both to human nature and to what Chekhov actually wrote, I will eat my hat. I do not know what the "orthodox" reading may be, but if one goes by the text of the play it is clear that *Astrov* is not a man who has "lost his soul and looks like it." He is that far more disconcerting figure - the man who has lost his driving-power and does not look like it. All the exterior apparatus of strength is still there . . . what is lost is the inner cohesion and sustained courage to defy circumstance. His tragic-comedy is that he still has his moments of believing in himself. . . . I believe that where [Mr. MacCarthy] and I differ fundamentally is in our respective ideas of what the play is about. He thinks that in the final scene the reiteration of the words "they've gone" should affect us like a passing-bell, and that the laughter which greets them at the Westminster [Theatre] destroys the spirit of this drama of futility. That is, in spite of the end of the third act and other plain indications of the playwright's purpose, he insists on seeing the play as a tragedy. But the whole tragedy of futility is that it never succeeds in achieving tragedy. In its blackest moments it is inevitably doomed to the comic gesture. The sadder, the funnier; and conversely, in the long run, the funnier, the sadder. The English are at one with the Russians in their ability to understand and create this inextricable mingling of the tragic and the absurd, which is the base of Shakespeare's human (and box-office) appeal. (27 February 1937)<sup>55</sup>

This letter is not particularly remarkable as a piece of literary criticism.<sup>56</sup> What is significant about Sayers' comment on Chekhov's play is her eagerness to make her voice heard in public on this "new" subject, drama, and her interest in the paradoxical, tragicomic nature of serious theatre. It also reveals her readiness to challenge "tradition," and to test a play by her own understanding of human nature. This understanding of human nature had always been grounded in a Christian world view, and, in this sense, the religious plays and essays which Sayers produced from 1937 onward harmonize with what she had written earlier. The difference was that her stance was now openly Christian, and that she recognized, with a degree of amazement, that many people "in this

nominally Christian country. . . heartily dislike and despise Christianity without having the faintest notion what it is."

With this observation she begins her April 1938 article for St. Martin's Review. She goes on to describe the questions people asked her after seeing The Zeal of Thy House - questions which showed a startling ignorance, especially among young people, of the basics of Christian belief:

That the Church believed Christ to be in any real sense God . . . that the Church considered Pride to be sinful, or indeed took any notice of sin beyond the more disreputable sins of the flesh: - all these things were looked upon as astonishing and revolutionary novelties, imported into the Faith by the feverish imagination of the playwright. ("The Dogma is the Drama" Christian Letters 23-24)

She speculates that "a short examination paper on the Christian religion" would reveal a complete misunderstanding of Christian teaching, including the theology of Sin and Virtue, and the relationship between the intellect and Christian faith:

Q.: What does the Church think of sex?

A.: God made it necessary to the machinery of the world, and tolerates it, provided the parties (a) are married, and (b) get no pleasure out of it.

Q.: What does the Church call Sin?

A.: Sex (otherwise than as excepted above); getting drunk; saying "damn"; murder, and cruelty to dumb animals; not going to church; most kinds of amusement. "Original sin" means anything that we enjoy doing is wrong.

Q.: What is faith?

A.: Resolutely shutting your eyes to scientific fact.

Q.: What is the human intellect?

A.: A barrier to faith.

Q.: What are the seven Christian virtues?

A.: Respectability; childishness; mental timidity; dullness; sentimentality; censoriousness; and depression of spirits.

Q.: Wilt thou be baptized in this faith?

A.: No fear!

(Christian Letters 25)

Sayers holds Christians, particularly Christian writers, at least partly responsible for this "misleading" perception of Christianity. She claims that "whenever an average Christian is represented in a novel or play, he is sure to be shown practicing one or all of the Seven Deadly Virtues enumerated above."

The assumed incompatibility between reason and faith alluded to in this "examination paper" was to become a frequent target in her writing. She identified real Christian faith with mental alertness and vigor, and was, from this point on, to launch a veritable campaign against the sort of mental Sloth she saw as the most prevalent spiritual disease of her day. Near the end of "The Dogma is the Drama" she issues an explosive condemnation of the sort which was to characterize her writing during the next decade:

Let us, in Heaven's name, drag out the Divine Drama from under the dreadful accumulation of slipshod thinking and trashy sentiment heaped upon it, and set it on an open stage to startle the world into some sort of vigorous reaction. (26)

In the same month, April 1938, she attacked another manifestation of spiritual Sloth, declaring that timidity is "the besetting sin of the good churchman." She goes on to qualify the accusation:

Not that the Church approves it. She knows it of old for a part of the great, sprawling, drowsy, deadly sin of Sloth - a sin from which the preachers of fads, schisms, heresies and anti-Christ are most laudably free. The children of this world are not only (as Christ so caustically observed) wiser in their generation than the children of light; they are also more energetic, more stimulating and bolder. ("The Triumph of Easter" The Sunday Times)

The same Sunday Times article picks up the thread of an idea which she used in the final scene of Busman's Honeymoon when Harriet muses over the way goodness can emerge out of circumstances that seem so "wrong and wretched." Sayers reminds the readers of her Easter article that the Church is "clear" in its teaching that God is "continually at work turning evil into good. . . . He takes our sins and errors and turns them into victories."

This, too, was to become a recurring theme in this new phase of her writing. In her Christian plays the depiction of the deadliness of Sin is juxtaposed with a vision of redemption. There *is* a solution to the problem of Sin. She warns, however, against imagining that "evil does not matter since God can make it all right in the long run"

("The Triumph of Easter"). The story of Judas shows Sin working both ways. For the sinner himself, who does not come to a point of repentance, the final end is damnation. Yet, on another level, Christ through His betrayal and death "brought good out of evil . . . [and] led out triumph from the gates of hell" ("The Triumph of Easter")."

The first of the three Christian plays she wrote between 1937 and 1940 includes a striking example of the Sin of Pride - "the Sin of the noble mind." The character is a twelfth century architect called William of Sens; the play, The Zeal of Thy House.

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#### The Zeal of Thy House<sup>18</sup>

Sayers was initially reluctant to accept the invitation from the Friends of Canterbury Cathedral to write a play for the 1937 festival, for she feared it would require her to "mug up the history of kings and archbishops." Ralph Hone (in Dorothy L. Sayers: a Literary Biography) records this reaction, and goes on to describe why Sayers eventually agreed:

What finally persuaded her was the advance information that the 1937 festival was to be a Service of Arts and Crafts. She could avoid the kings and archbishops. Who were the artists and craftsmen who built the cathedral? She found the answer that she needed - and her inspiration - in the medieval Latin account written by Gervase of Canterbury, who recorded the gutting by fire of the Norman Choir in the twelfth century, and the building of the new Choir under William of Sens. (84)

An amazing number of the particulars of Sayers' plot are derived from the medieval record of the monk Gervase. The uncertainty about how much of the original structure should or could be retained and incorporated into the new; the consultation with a number of architects of differing opinions; the choosing of William of Sens because, at least in part, of his good reputation; William's delay in informing the monks of the extent of the work and cost involved; the architect's invention of ingenious machines to facilitate

the work; the occurrence of an eclipse shortly before the accident; the completion of specific sections of the work before William's fall; the fall being from a height of fifty feet, and occurring at the beginning of the fifth year, while they were preparing for the turning of the great vault; his continuing to supervise from an invalid's couch; the resentment by certain monks of William's designation of authority to the industrious monk who oversaw the masons; and William finally accepting the fact that he must relinquish the work to another architect - *all* these things are mentioned in Gervase's record (Woodman 91-94). Sayers was very true to her historical source. The crucial things that she added to the story as she shaped her plot concerned the personality, behaviour, and attitudes of the central character.

The direction she chose in drawing meaning out of the facts, however, was not a completely original invention. Gervase's account of William's fall ends with the comment that no other person was injured, and that it was against the "master" only that this "vengeance of God or spite of the devil" (*del Dei vindicata, vel diaboli desaevit invidia*) was directed (94). It would seem that Gervase viewed the French architect as a person who somehow provoked God, or the devil, or both.

Sayers picks up the chronicler's suggestion, and expands on the sparse facts to create a character who is immoral, in several senses of the word, and who is puffed up with his own importance as a great artist. The story she tells is as faithful as it can be to the facts of history; it is also an accurate account of the nature of certain Deadly Sins.

The play's spiritual dimension is brought into focus by the use of a Choir, which functions somewhat like a chorus, and by four angels whose words and actions are not normally perceived by the other characters. The exceptions are two special revelations: as the sword of judgement is raised a child is allowed a glimpse of the spiritual beings, and near the end of the play William himself is confronted by them.

The Choir's words near the beginning of the play introduce the theme of Sin: they pray that God would rouse his people from "sin's deadly sleep," and provide lights which

will cause the soul to be alert and vigilant (16). The angels record and comment on the sinfulness of men, particularly the Sloth of the neatherd whose carelessness led to the fire which destroyed so much of the cathedral (17). Sloth, in the form of "hatred of work," is judged by the recording angel Cassiel to be "one of the most depressing consequences of the Fall" (18). The sanctity of work is an important theme in this play, as it is many of Sayers' later dramas and essays. The concept of work is associated with the Deadly Sins in a number of ways. The most obvious is, of course, at the simplest level of Sloth - the "hatred of work" mentioned by Cassiel. Gabriel observes that some men are not susceptible to this particular Sin, but enjoy work in the way that angels do. Therefore they "work like angels" (18). William of Sens is a man of this breed.

Wrath is another Sin which seems to have little power over the French architect. We observe this early in the play when he replies coolly to the angry insults of the two English builders whose proposals for restoring the cathedral are rejected. It is a coolness born of Pride, however, not of gentleness and peace. His flippant admission that he has dishonestly manipulated the situation by telling the monks what they want to hear suggests that he may indeed be prepared to damn his soul "for the sake of the work" (34).

The second act, set two years later, reveals that much magnificent work has been done by this dedicated, gifted builder, "All well and truly laid without a fault" (37). The angelic recorders take note of this, yet on the debit side of his record the page is "crammed full of deadly sins":

Jugglings with truth, and gross lusts of the body,  
Drink, drabbing, swearing; slothfulness in prayer;  
With a devouring, insolent ambition  
That challenges disaster. (37)

The list includes dishonesty, the fleshly Sins of Lust and Gluttony, and spiritual Sloth. There is soon talk of the architect being guilty of financial trickery (Avarice) as well. Deadliest of all, however, is the "insolent ambition" of Pride which is steadily mounting.

Nonetheless the condemnation of William's Sin is not, at this point in the play, particularly severe. *All* men are sinners. Father Theodatus despises the visiting pilgrims for he knows such common people partake of the commonplace Sins - drink, gossip, dirty stories, and idleness. Although his accusations have a basis in truth the other monks chide him for his uncharitable spirit toward these "worthy," if imperfect, people (47). The angels' view of William's Sins is almost as benevolent as that of the monks (excluding Father Theodatus) toward the pilgrims. In spite of William's short-comings, there is "grace" to be found in him. His tangible achievements, and his earnest commitment to his work, do count for something in the heavenly realm. When a work is done for the glory of God, it becomes a form of prayer. The angel Raphael says of William,

Behold, he prayeth; not with the lips alone,  
But with the hand and with the cunning brain  
Men worship the Eternal architect.  
So when the mouth is dumb, the work shall speak  
And save the workman. (38)

Yet even at this early stage of the play the audience is aware that the architect is not an admirable person. His inconsistency is apparent for, though he is far from scrupulously honest himself, he self-righteously disapproves of the dishonesty of a tradesman who sells them an inferior grade of lime. His only yardstick for integrity is based on truth and reliability in respect to his area of expertise - physical construction. His own little deceptions are of no consequence, in his view, for they have no immediate negative effect on the building project.

The introduction, in Act II, of the attractive widow Ursula allows for greater development of the architect's character in several ways. First, talking to her causes him to give fuller expression to the "power and glory" of his "craftsman's dream." Second, Ursula, who consciously casts herself in the role of Eve, becomes the gateway to greater Sin. The lustful attraction between them is openly acknowledged: "The first time our eyes met, we knew one another / As fire knows tinder."

When Act III opens two more years have passed. Again, much impressive work has been completed, but by now the illicit relationship between the architect and the widow is well known, and has become a problem with practical and spiritual dimensions. The Prior realizes that William's arrogant self-sufficiency has rendered him immune to any admonitions he might deliver. He wisely chooses, therefore, to appeal to the architect's artistic pride in his work. He points out that because of William's "private amusements" the quality of work being done by the men under him is deteriorating:

... instead of attending to their work, your workmen waste their time in gossip and backbiting about you. If you choose to be damned, you must; if you prefer to make a death-bed repentance, you may; but if an idle workman does an unsound job now, no repentance of yours will prevent it from bringing down the church some day or other. (63)

William congratulates the Prior on having come up with the one argument to which he would listen. There is, however, no indication that he feels any regret, much less repentance. He has merely tacitly conceded to the Prior's stress on "the value of discretion." He remains completely unconcerned about the moral issues.

The full extent of the architect's Pride is soon revealed. He tells Ursula that the Prior cannot take the work away from him for he, William of Sens, has been appointed to it by a higher authority - God himself: "He has put me here and will keep me here." He compares himself to God in a way that borders on blasphemy:

We are the master-craftsmen, God and I -  
We understand one another. None, as I can,  
Can creep under the ribs of God, and feel  
His heart beat through those Six Days of Creation; (67)

After describing the creation process in exultant detail, William comes to the creation of man:

And lastly, since all Heaven was not enough  
To share that triumph, he made his Masterpiece,  
Man, that like God can call beauty from dust,  
Order from chaos, and create new worlds  
To praise their maker. Oh, but in making man  
God over-reached Himself and gave away  
His Godhead. He must now depend on man  
For what man's brain, creative and divine



Can give Him. Man stands equal with Him now,  
 Partner and rival. Say God needs a church,  
 As here in Canterbury - and say he calls together  
 By miracle stone, wood and metal, builds  
 A church of sorts; my church He cannot make -  
 Another, but not that. This church is mine  
 And none but I, not even God, can build it.  
 Me hath He made vice-gerent of Himself,  
 And were I lost, something unique were lost  
 Irreparably; my heart, my blood, my brain  
 Are in the stone; God's crown of matchless works  
 Is not complete without my stone, my jewel,  
 Creation's nonpareil. (68)

Ursula's frightened warning that his bold words may tempt God to smite and slay him meets with even greater arrogance: "He will not dare; / He knows that I am indispensable." He declares that till this work is done his life is "paramount with God" (69).

To any audience or reader aware of Sayers' belief in creativity as the God-like aspect of man, William's words are particularly disturbing. They certainly demonstrate audacious Pride, yet they also allude to many truths which Sayers held in high esteem. She placed great emphasis on the idea that man is "made in the image of God" in the sense that he partakes of the creative nature of God. This combination of truth and error in the proud claims of William of Sens illustrates something Sayers addresses directly in a later play The Devil to Pay - half-truths which are more deadly than obvious lies. When good qualities, like self-esteem and a sense of one's worth as a creative being, swell out of all proportion, the Sin is very great. It is the root Sin of all the others - Pride, the Sin of wanting to be God.

Ursula is shocked by William's claim that he is "indispensable" and "paramount with God." She says, "You make me shake to hear you. Blasphemy! blasphemy!" (69). Ursula herself is a functional character rather than a fully drawn one, yet her motivations are revealed to a certain degree. Initially she appears to be motivated by Lust, but later it seems that she has come to love William genuinely. In any case, her Sin is warm-hearted. In her speech about Eve in Act II, she identifies herself with the desire to seize

God-like knowledge and power, yet the self image she projects does not suggest great Pride. She is an attractive, beguiling woman, yet she calmly accepts the fact that William's work is more important to him than she is (67); she humbly assumes second place in his life. Her physical desire for William is not compounded with other Deadly Sins, whereas William's Lust for her is part of a complex web of several Sins, all arising out of his immense Pride, the deadliest of all.

William admits, however, to the existence of only one sin: "Idleness is the only sin." By this he means the simplest form of Sloth - the lethargy which is diametrically opposed to his energy and drive as an artist. His point of view is very credible for it is human nature to first, and often exclusively, recognize the Sins which are farthest removed from one's own tendencies. The failing a person feels most self-righteously free of is often a narrow sub-category of one of the Seven Sins. William's case is a good example, for though he is confident that he is not guilty of idleness, he is (as we learned from the angels' comments near the beginning of Act II) guilty of more serious Sloth - Sloth in prayer.

William concludes this conversation with Ursula with, "I must be doing in my little world, / Lest, lacking me, the moon and stars should fail." These lines, to be credible at all, must be spoken as a humorous hyperbole. This man's Pride, however, does not permit the self-mocking stance that a different sort of person might assume in uttering such lines. His inflated sense of his own importance is very real. The Sin of Pride has risen to a peak, and the first climax of the play is rapidly approaching. The recording angel Cassiel announces that "the hour has come," and the angelic swords are drawn (70).

The words of scripture in the versicles sung at this point set the impending judgement in the context of certain spiritual principles. The first two of the four antiphonal responses are from Psalm 127:1:

Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it.  
Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

These lines make it clear that God is sovereign; just as the security provided by the setting of a nightwatch is worthless unless undergirded by the security of divine protection, so the efforts of earthly builders are worthless unless the master builder is God himself.

The third and fourth responses are from Psalm 69:9 and Psalm 86:10:

The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and rebukes are fallen upon me.  
For thou art great and doest wondrous things; Thou art God alone.  
(70)

The second of these passages affirms God's transcendency, creative power, and uniqueness. No being on earth or in heaven can begin to approach his majesty, much less be "paramount to God" as William has claimed to be. The passage from which the title The Zeal of Thy House is taken is more difficult to apply for it has several levels of meaning. In Psalm 69 it is preceded by phrases like "I endure scorn for your sake," and "I am a stranger to my brothers," and is immediately followed by "the insults of those who insult you fall on me." In this context it describes a passionate commitment to God's work for which the speaker must endure suffering. The line also occurs in John 2:17 when, following Jesus' cleansing of the temple, his disciples recall this phrase from Psalm 69:9 (which has been identified as one of those which have a prophetic significance as a description of the Messiah). They think of "zeal of thy house" as an apt description of the zeal for maintaining the holiness of God's house which Jesus has just ruthlessly demonstrated:

He made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple all from the temple area. . . . To those who sold doves he said, 'Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!' (John 2:16)

Sayers' use of this phrase as the title for the play twists its meaning away from the intense love of holiness which both of its scriptural contexts imply. Yet she has used the expression in a way which derives its power from the original contexts, and which is heavy with the sort of ambivalence which enriches so much of scripture. William's

"zeal" is a consuming passion for the house of God in a more literal sense than is intended in the biblical use of the phrase. In so far as it is a love for something which pertains to God and His glory the architect's "zeal" is a positive quality. In his case, however, the words "hath eaten me up" (or "has consumed me") have a negative implication. William has allowed his passion for building to consume all other loyalties. He has come to love the work far more than he honours the God whom the work is meant to glorify. Ironically, the "rebukes" that are to fall on the zealous man in this play are completely opposite to the sort which fell on the psalmist, and on Christ. They were rebuked by the enemies of God because of their love of righteousness; William of Sens is rebuked by God himself for his Sin.

The verses are followed immediately by more scriptural passages from the Choir which foreshadow later developments in the play (70). The first speaks of the Lord executing judgement and the ungodly being trapped in the work of his own hands. The second describes the false confidence of the evildoer who believes that no harm can come to him. The third describes suffering that resembles death, and the fourth affirms that in the midst of all this a man may call on God to deliver his soul.

In one of his own "machines" William is now hoisted to inspect the top of the great arch, but the travelling cradle in which he is being raised is pulled by a flawed rope. The rope was checked for weaknesses by Father Theodatus and a workman who were both distracted from their task by the sight of Lady Ursula in close conference with William. Awareness of the illicit sexual relationship between Ursula and William made both of them think of other things. One man was embarrassed, the other amused, but both failed to notice the flaw in the rope.

As the architect reaches the top of the scaffolding - a height of about fifty feet - a young boy in the group of onlookers cries out that he sees a "terrible angel" with a "drawn sword in his hand" (71). Ursula's exclamation, "Mother of God," suggests that she either sees the angel too or realizes, from the boy's words, what is about to happen.

There is a shout, a crash, and then the concrete realization of the fall. "He's fallen ... Master William's down" (71). Miraculously, he is still alive. The Choir's lines describe the mercy of the Lord, and His readiness to redeem His chosen one "Israel" - or William of Sens - "from all his sins" (72).

Even though the greatest Sin is William's, the Sin of the two men who failed to detect the flaw in the rope is fully exposed. The workman readily admits his neglect, humbly repenting with the words, "I have no excuse" (74). Father Theodatus, self-righteous and judgmental since the beginning of the play, feels no remorse for his carelessness which facilitated the divine plan "to overthrow the wicked man" (75). His proud stance is rebuked by the Prior as a betrayal of the Church and of Christ. It is a cold-hearted, spiritual Sin - the Sin of Pride, for which Christ so harshly rebuked the religious men of his own day.

Act IV begins six months later. William has refused to resign as overseer of the building project, even though his invalid condition has resulted in inefficiency and contention among the workers. The architect's former Pride has been partially broken, however, by his forced dependency on the kindness of the monks. He describes himself as being "nursed and coddled, and comforted like a child" (85). Nonetheless, much hardness still remains. He refuses to allow Ursula to be his wife and nurse, pushing aside her love because he is too proud to admit his need of her (87-88).

Intending to sleep in the cathedral, William asks that the Prior come to see him there. While he waits the Choir sings words of scripture describing the lowest point of suffering a man can experience: days like smoke, burning bones, withered heart, and bones separating from flesh. He makes his confession to the Prior. He acknowledges Lust, Gluttony, Wrath, Avarice - all the things that "take the eye and charm the flesh." He truly repents of these things, but takes some pride in the fact that he is not guilty of the sort of spiritual Sin which "eats inward" and "fettters the soul." He agrees with the Prior that "there is no power to match humility," and that God, like a cunning craftsmen

who can redeem error into triumph, wills to use his failures to "further His great ends." Yet, to the Prior's query about Sins of the mind he replies that he knows of none that he has committed (91).

Left alone, and trying to sleep, he is tormented by the voices of the Choir chanting in Latin of death and judgement. Unseen by him, the four angels have gathered around him, and as William cries out fearfully for light Gabriel lays his hand on the architect's eyes, and says, "Let there be light" (93). Without this divinely given light of understanding and recognition William is as blind as Balaam, in the Old testament story referred to in the Choir's lines. At first Balaam was unable to see "The angel of the Lord, standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand," even though his terrified donkey saw it (Numbers 22:21-35). Like Balaam, William is finally allowed to perceive the presence of the angel, and like Balaam, whose immediate response was "I have sinned," he connects the angels' presence with his own sinfulness (94).

Still, he maintains that since he has repented there should be no need for this confrontation:

WILLIAM

... What then art thou,  
Threats in thy hand, and in thy face a threat  
Sternier than steel and colder?

MICHAEL

I am Michael  
The sword of God. The edge is turned toward thee:  
Not for those sins whereof thou dost repent,  
Lust, greed, wrath, avarice, the faults of flesh  
Sloughed off with the flesh, but that which feeds the soul,  
The sin that is so much a part of thee  
Thou know'st it not for sin.

WILLIAM

What sin is that?  
Angel, what sins remain? I have envied no man,  
Sought to rob no man of renown or merits,  
Yea, praised all better workmen than myself  
From an ungrudging heart. I have not been slothful -  
Thou canst not say I was. Lust, greed, wrath, avarice,  
None ever came between my work and me. (94)

He goes on to explain that each of these Deadly Sins named was kept in check so as not to interfere with his work. His focus is on things "done / Or left undone" (95) - the outward manifestations of Sin.

Michael counters William's defense with a truth which is central to the theology of Sin: "Sin is of the heart," but William is still unable to acknowledge his Pride. He rages, defending the excellence of his work, and foolishly charging God with Envy of his artistic achievement: "He will not have men creep so near His throne / To steal applause from Him" (95). The action has risen to its second and most important climax. It seems that the drawn sword which Michael has been holding must now surely fall on this brazen egotist.

Unexpectedly, as William pours out a torrent of rage and resistance against the Almighty, picturing himself unjustly abused, Michael meets every line with a parallel picture of Christ, the suffering redeemer - "helpless," "scourged and smitten," "racked limb from limb," forced to give up his life with half its normal span "unlived" (96-97). This vision, and only this, can break down such stubborn Pride. The broken, bitter artist sees something he has never seen before - the brokenness of God. The Almighty is not his competitor; He is his suffering redeemer. "Could God, being God, do this?" William asks in awe (97). Suddenly, grasping the great mercy of the divine nature, he is able to recognize God as God.

Reverence and Humility follow, and Raphael gives him the words of submission which he meekly repeats: "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." He now sees himself as he really is, and recognizes his Sin as the worst of all:

O, I have sinned. The eldest Sin of all,  
Pride, that struck down the morning star from Heaven  
Hath struck down me from where I sat and shone  
Smiling on my new world. . . . (98)

He recognizes that he deserves damnation, and asks only one thing of God:

Let me lie deep in hell,  
 Death gnaw upon me, purge my bones with fire,  
 But let my work, all that was good in me,  
 All that was god, stand up and live and grow.  
 The work is sound, Lord God, no rottenness there -  
 Only in me. Wipe out my name from men  
 But not my work; to other men the glory  
 And to Thy Name alone. But if to the damned  
 Be any mercy at all, O send Thy spirit  
 To blow apart the sundering flames, that I  
 After a thousand years of hell, may catch  
 One glimpse, one only, of the Church of Christ,  
 The perfect work, finished, though not by me. (99)

Like the prodigal son, William receives a forgiving welcome that he neither expects or deserves. A trumpet sounds, the sword is sheathed, the record against him is closed, and the angels celebrate the victory won and the lost one reclaimed (99-100). For the repentant William the gates of heaven are flung open wide. His cross of suffering is his identification with Christ, and he is promised also that he "with Him shall wear a crown / Such as the angels know not." In this life it only remains that he "be still, / And know that he is God and God alone" (100).

The architect's spiritual rebirth is evidenced by his complete reversal of his earlier decisions. He announces his unconditional withdrawal from the work, and his good will toward the man who will succeed him. He asks to be taken to Ursula to make amends to her, and he humbly acknowledges his great debt of love to the monks who have been his co-workers and servants.

The idea that Pride is the chief of all Sins is implicit in many of Sayers' novels. Here, however, the concept becomes a major theme, concentrated and intense. Sayers now more directly acknowledges the Seven Deadly Sins as basic sinful tendencies which operate individually, as well as in combination, to blind and to damn. She continues to show the cold-hearted, spiritual Sins to be more deadly than the warm-hearted, carnal ones. The most important aspect, however, of her treatment of Sin in The Zeal of Thy House is the greater emphasis on the themes of repentance and redemption - themes which were to be of central importance in the works of the next two decades.



In August of 1938 Sayers published an article entitled "Writing a Local Play," which revealed her ambivalence about her new venture as a playwright. It shows her struggling to balance the tensions between profit and professionalism, and between moral issues and artistic ones. In this essay she describes the pitfalls that await a professional writer who agrees to write a play for a local community or church group. Little financial remuneration may be expected from such ventures, and writing for "edification" often results in "sloppy pieties . . . dreary propaganda . . . [and] dull moralities that flop on the modern stage" (*The Farmers Weekly* 26 August 1938:42). She believes that an edifying play can be a good one if the edification "arises naturally out of the story" (42). Most importantly, she recognizes that "the story is not dramatic unless it contains the elements of some kind of *spiritual* conflict" (emphasis added) (42).

Here she does not confine her interest or her discussion to religious drama, but from this date onward the plays she was commissioned to write were all Christian in content. Perhaps she would have written a "secular" play had the opportunity arisen. Her interest, however, at this point in her life was becoming increasingly focused on the sort of "spiritual conflicts" which pertain directly to Christian "dogma."

In the first of a series of three articles on "Sacred Plays" Sayers explains the understanding of Christian drama which was the basis of the six dramatic works she produced between 1937 and 1951 (beginning with *The Zeal of Thy House* and ending with *The Emperor Constantine*). She has no interest in "plays expressive of vaguely metaphysical uplift." To her, "Christian" plays are those which have "a definitely Christian and orthodox content, which deliberately set out to expound and explore the Christian faith and its implications . . . and offer an explanation of the human problem in terms of the universal creed of Christendom" (*The Episcopal Churchman* 6 January 1955: 21).

In *The Zeal of Thy House*, her first overtly Christian work, she had used a story which was partly historical and partly invented. The dramatic tension developed out of a

spiritual conflict involving Sin and repentance. Her next work of drama was to be quite different. It was a nativity play which she was commissioned to write for the BBC in the fall of 1938. Since the plot was one which allowed for no imposition of new material, and which was too familiar to create suspense, it posed a special challenge. How was she to make of the Christmas story a drama which went beyond picturesque tableaux and introduced a significant spiritual conflict?

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#### He That Should Come<sup>40</sup>

Her approach to this writing assignment is described in her article entitled "Nativity Play," which appeared in The Radio Times on December 23, two days before the broadcast of the play itself. She concedes that the limitation of the material is to blame for the fact that most Nativity plays are "remarkable for their twaddling triviality of form and content," and have "all the charm of complete unreality." The goal she set for herself was to give the story "actuality." She did this by reconstructing the historical setting with as much verisimilitude as she could muster. The fact that there was "no room in the inn" became her starting point for the environment which she created surrounding the birth. She brings together at the inn in Bethlehem a large number of characters who are representatives of various personality types, and of various opinions on the political situation and on spiritual issues.

The radio play begins with a prologue in which we hear the voices of the three Wise Men "asking each in his own way whether this [child] is He That Should Come and fulfill the world's desire" ("Nativity Play" 13). Each of the characters at the inn is, in some sense, asking or avoiding the same question. Those who sincerely seek find the

answer, albeit "a strange and puzzling answer, of which the significance could only be made clear when the last word of the story was written at Pentecost" ("Nativity Play" 13).

Structurally, this play is a complete contrast to The Zeal of Thy House. It does not depict a dominant central character who struggles with a particular spiritual problem. Instead it paints a picture of a spiritually needy world. It is the world of Palestine in the first century, but it has a universal quality about it for the characters represent the varieties and degrees of sinfulness found in any generation, and in any culture.

The influence of the Deadly Sins is obvious in the conversation at the crowded inn. There is Wrath over the oppressive taxes imposed by the Romans, and continuing angry interaction between the Jews who bitterly resent the Romans and those who are more tolerant. The hedonism fostered by the Roman lifestyle involves the Sins of Gluttony and Lust - fleshly Sins which arouse the righteous indignation of proudly religious men like the Pharisee:

It was a black day for Jewry when King Herod built the public baths for the corruption of our young men. You loll about there all day, oiling your bodies and anointing your hair, reading lascivious heathen poetry, talking blasphemy, and idling away the time with Greek slaves and dancing girls. May the curse of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram light on King Herod and his baths too! May the earth open and swallow them up! (245)

Shepherds (who have stopped briefly at the inn) express similar disapproval of the self-indulgent Roman lifestyle.

The besetting Sins of three very different characters are apparent in the conversation which follows Pharisee Zadok's announcement that the Messiah will "smite the heathen [i.e. the Romans] with a rod of iron." The merchant's Sin is Avarice: his concern for maintaining the peaceful conditions conducive to profit makes him very nervous when anti-Roman sentiments are expressed; the Jewish Gentleman rebukes the Pharisee for his Pride, and is in turn rebuked by the Pharisee for his easy-going Sloth:

MERCHANT

Heaven preserve us! my heart was in my mouth. All this treasonable talk.

#### JEWISH GENTLEMAN

Zadok, do you never think that this stiff-necked resistance may end by destroying our nation?

#### PHARISEE

Your easy toleration will end by destroying our souls. How long, O Lord, how long? (251)

Of the three, the Jewish Gentleman is the most likable. He shows the least stubbornness and Pride, and his tendency to compromise and to indulge in the luxuries of Roman civilization are warm-hearted Sins.

With the arrival of Joseph and Mary the contrast between Humility and Pride becomes a central focus of the play. Joseph's humble confidence in the word of God that he has received throws into even sharper relief the arrogant certainty of the Pharisee that he has all the final answers on religious questions.

The traditional ballad about Adam and Eve which is sung by the Jewish gentleman represents the cycle of temptation and Sin. After Eve has picked the forbidden fruit and the tree which bore it has withered and gone, another grows up in its place, and the song ends where it began with Adam and Eve standing under the tree of temptation. Since the Fall, there seems to be no way out (263-64).

Throughout this unhappy picture, however, Sayers has been gradually inter-weaving a thread of hope and expectation. Ironically, the arrogant Pharisee is the character who first refers to "the great day of redemption when the Lord's Messiah comes" (247). The centurion is naturally suspicious that this Messiah-talk represents a threat to the authority of Rome. The Merchant's worried comment is "Do let's leave the Messiah out of it. So far as I know, he isn't even born yet" (250). The centurion cynically replies,

Very sensible of him. If he takes my advice he'll put off being born for quite a little bit. King Herod has done a very tidy job keeping order in this province and he has no use at all for Messiahs and insurrections. Good evening. (250-51)

The shepherds' response to the Greek Gentleman's questions about the Messiah present two seemingly conflicting pictures. Their explanations are based on several

different strands in Old Testament prophecy concerning the promised one. It was foretold that he would be a majestic king and deliverer, but also a humble prophet (254-56). Joseph's account of the angel's prophecies to himself and Mary also refers to the hope of deliverance. Joseph's contribution, however, makes it clear that the deliverance will be spiritual rather than political: "He shall save His people from their sins" (259).<sup>41</sup>

When the birth of Mary's baby is announced by the innkeeper's wife the response is an ironic mixture of realistic fears, gloomy speculation, and unwitting prophecy:

#### GREEK GENTLEMAN

And there you are! Kingdoms rise and fall, wars are waged, politicians wrangle, trade suffers, poor men starve, philosophers exchange insults and agree in nothing except that times are very evil and mankind rapidly going to the dogs. And yet, when one more soul is born into this highly unsatisfactory world, everybody conspires to be delighted.

#### JEWISH GENTLEMAN

And every time his parents are persuaded that he's going to turn out something wonderful, whereas, if they only knew it, he's destined, as likely as not, to finish up between two thieves on Crucifixion Hill. (267)

Paradoxically, both the parental expectations of glory and the cynical prediction involving Sin and shame will come to pass in the life of this child who has just been born.

The suspense in the play arises out of the tension between two alternatives: openness and closedness. Those who are hardened in Sin will not believe and cannot receive; those who prize Virtue and seek in childlike simplicity will receive the "glad tidings of great joy" (269).

Of all the characters who become aware of the birth, the shepherds show the greatest Humility. To them alone comes the full angelic revelation, and they excitedly invade the late night quiet of the inn, eager to see the new born child. The spiritual state of the other characters is reflected in their varying responses to the shepherds' "news." The merchant's Avarice is undergirded by the self-centredness of Pride. He is completely immune to the shepherds' jubilation, and a mindset identical to that of Wetheridge, the

self-absorbed old veteran in The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club, is apparent in his whiney complaint:

Miracle, indeed! I thought I was being murdered. This inn is disgracefully run. I shall complain to the authorities.

The Pharisee has already left, and the impossibility of his having shown any interest in this turn of events is symbolized by the Greek's wry comment: "He cast himself into outer darkness some time ago." Neither the Greek Gentleman nor the Centurion can hear a single word of the distant angelic song. The Greek becomes silent while the shepherds honour the "little king," and the Centurion remains sardonically aloof. The Jewish Gentleman thinks he "did hear something - but it was very faint." Yet his promise of "a rich gift" should he meet Mary's son again, and the revelation that his name is Joseph of Arimathaea, are evidence that this man has a heart which has not been hardened by Sin and will, in time, be fully opened.

The play draws attention to the paradoxical dimensions of the story: into a troubled, unprepared, and sinful world the Holy Son of God is born - a king, yet his circumstances are poor and lowly; a helpless, unpromising infant, yet he is announced as the world's deliverer. Those, like the Pharisee, who are most religious and most aware of the Messianic prophecies, are so blinded by Pride that they see and hear nothing of the miraculous news, though it happens under their very noses.

The words of the Magi emphasize the paradox on which the theology of Sin and Virtue is based. Virtue often seems like weakness, and Pride and aggression appear to be strength, but "God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:27):

CASPAR

I looked for wisdom - and behold! the wisdom of the innocent.

MELCHIOR

I looked for power - and behold! the power of the helpless. (273)

### The Devil to Pay<sup>42</sup>

The second play which Sayers undertook for the Canterbury festival was written early in 1939. It is, in my opinion, the most disappointing of Sayers' religious plays. Although she gives the familiar Faustus story a new and interesting twist, the plot lacks structure, much of the characterization is weak,<sup>43</sup> and the conclusion lacks credibility. Nonetheless, The Devil to Pay has moments in which the combination of thought and language achieves a high level of excellence.

Many aspects of the theology of Sin revealed in Sayers' earlier work are reinforced in this play, and certain new lines of thought are introduced. The central focus is on the Sin of Pride - a theme which is dominant in four of her dramatic works: this one, The Zeal of Thy House, The Man Born to be King, and The Emperor Constantine.

In her introduction to this play Sayers explains that it is based on "the question of all questions: the nature of evil and its place in the universe" (111). Other underlying questions are "In what sense can a man be said to sell his soul to the Devil? What kind of man might do so, and, above all, for what inducement?" (111). She explains why, unlike the legendary Faustus and the Faustus of Marlow's play, her character will not sell his soul for "the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity and the lust of worldly power." She says,

I do not feel that the present generation of English people needs to be warned against the passionate pursuit of knowledge for its own sake: that is not our besetting sin. Looking with eyes of to-day upon that legendary figure of the man who bartered away his soul, I see in him the type of the impulsive reformer, over-sensitive to suffering, impatient of the facts, eager to set the world right by a sudden overthrow, in his own strength. . . . (113)

The Seven Deadly Sins are basic inclinations which all people share, but individuals are accountable for the Sin in their lives because they have been given the power of choice. When a person allows his thinking and behaviour to be governed by these sinful inclinations he, essentially, chooses Sin over Virtue. To make as radical and as

deliberate a choice as Faustus makes, however, is to "sell" oneself to Sin. Whether or not there is a bodily personification (like Mephistopheles) of the temptation to choose evil, the end result will be essentially the same - a descent, over a period of time, to lower and lower levels of immorality. This downward path forms the general outline of the plot of The Devil to Pay.

In a 1945 lecture "The Faust Legend and the Idea of the Devil" which she gave to the English Goethe Society, Sayers explains the two phases in Faustus' transactions with the devil which she depicted in her play:

In the first . . . [evil] is consciously accepted and exploited . . . to cast out bodily evil by evoking the aid of spiritual evil. . . . When this endeavour to make Satan cast out Satan fails, he reacts into the next phase, which is to repudiate the actuality of evil, and, with it, the whole personal responsibility for the redemption of evil. (16)

Faustus' initial motivation for his association with evil forces seems, at some moments, to be an altruistic one. He says,

There must be some meaning in this tormented universe, where light and darkness, good and evil forever wrestle at odds; and though God be silent or return but a riddling answer, there are spirits that can be compelled to speak. (129)

Sayers' analysis of his motivation, however, fails to acknowledge sufficiently the intense Pride which she built into her character. The Sin which he commits here, and continues to commit until the last moments of the play, is the Sin of Pride in its most heinous form. It is a wish which becomes an obsession - the desire to be as God, to usurp God's role and God's authority.

Pride is frequently manifested as a desire to rule one's own affairs with no reference to God. In this case, however, Pride swells to far greater proportions: Faustus seeks to exert his personal authority over a wide territory including physical matter, spiritual beings, and even the linear structure of time.

Faustus is permitted by Mephistopheles to view himself as the one in control of the entire situation; he thinks of himself as master of the demons who do his bidding. The



reverse is, in fact, the case. So it is with sinful choices: there is an illusion of power but the real control is in other hands, and as time goes on there is less and less ability to discern between right and wrong. This shrinking of the soul is especially apparent when Faustus' soul is found to be so diminished that nothing remains of it but a black dog.

It is significant that when Faustus first calls up Mephistopheles Sayers has him, in true medieval fashion, do so in "the name of God, and by His virtue and power" (130). There is no mistake about God's godhead; nor is there any doubt about the malevolence of Mephistopheles' nature. In his first conversation with Faustus he proudly announces that "Evil" is one of his names, and that he was the one who persuaded Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit (132). His frankness on this point is amusingly disarming. Later in the first scene, when the mirror image of Helen vanishes in a rumble of thunder, Faustus shouts, "Hell and confusion! Damned, damned juggling tricks, Nothing but sorcery!" Mephistopheles retorts, "What did you expect / When you called me up?" (138).

The most convincingly evil thing about Mephistopheles is his blasphemous accusations against God. He says that the creation of earth is "the work of a mad brain, cruel and blind and stupid," that the scriptures are "fumblingly expressed," and that the incarnation of Christ is "a prime piece of folly" (132-33). Faustus is soon influenced to adopt the same insolent attitude toward the Almighty, and consciously to reject Him:

If God's so harsh a stepfather to His sons  
Then we must turn adventurers, and carve out  
Our own road to salvation. Here's to change! (135)

Mephistopheles leads him on in this process of seeing Virtue as evil and Sin as good. He sets up those who "enjoy their lusts" as being "strangely happier than the godly," and speaks of the "heartbreak" which comes "when one ferocious *virtue* meets another" (emphasis added) (137). He blames the unhappiness of the world on the fact that man "meddled / With *virtue* and the dismal knowledge of God" (emphasis added) (137).

Faustus' Pride seems, at least initially, to anticipate the idealistic Pride of Judas in The Man Born to be King. It also resembles the Pride of William of Sens (The Zeal of

Thy House) in its craving for God-like power. Faustus surpasses their error though, in thinking that it is possible to eliminate the very concept of Sin, and make meaningless the atonement provided through the cross of Christ. He says, "We will forget old sins - we'll break the cross" (140). Faustus is even more aggressive and insolent in the way he challenges God than William of Sens. Scene I ends with him announcing, "We're off to Rome to heard God in his own stronghold" (145).

Lust is the first of the other Deadly Sins to become apparent. Towards the end of Scene I Faustus is tempted by a fleeting glimpse of Helen of Troy. Since he has completely turned from God and Virtue he makes no attempt to push back his immediate Lust to possess her. Mephistopheles' cryptic warning would terrify a more timid soul:

Fool, she is not for you  
Nor any man. Illusion, all illusion!  
For this is Grecian Helen, hell-born, hell-named,  
Hell in the cities, hell in the ships, and hell  
In the heart of man, seeking he knows not what.  
You are too careful of your careful soul  
To lay fast hold on Helen. She is a mirage  
Thrown on the sky by a hot reality  
Far below your horizon. (138)

This is an apt description of the Sin of Lust - perhaps next in malignancy to the Sin of Pride - which deceives and entraps. It starts with an appeal to the physical appetites and goes on to ensnare his emotions and heart, and damn his soul to hell.

Gluttony, too, is part of the mesh of Sin which entraps Faustus. "He must live delicately," says Mephistopheles (139). Pampering of the flesh is part of Sayers' definition of this hedonistic Sin.

Avarice is also introduced early in the play. In Scene I, gold is brought to Faustus on a shining tray. The demon describes all the suffering and aggression of the world which arises from the lack of money, or the love of it, as "the lost treasure of the world" which is like a steaming river flowing down "in one red stream to the hot heart of hell" (139). Money may provide a means of doing good, but that which Faustus impulsively flings to the poor blind beggar results in violent fighting, and "three men stabbed" (143).

Avarice and Pride are closely linked. Faustus, with Pride and self-advancement at the root of all his motivation, sees money as a source of power. His gift to the beggar was not given in compassion but in an attempt to play God by manipulating and taking authority over poverty. Such "indiscriminate charity" is indeed, as Mephistopheles says, "a device of the devil" (143) - a device which causes more suffering than it alleviates. Similarly, Faustus' altruism in healing the sick and raising the dead is shown in Scene II to turn to wormwood. The evil source from which such power comes can produce miraculous cures, but cannot result in any wholesome, lasting good because "Every good gift and very perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17).

Sloth plays a minor part at one stage of Faustus' entrapment. In Scene II, when Faustus is resting in the arms of his virtuous and loving servant-girl Lisa, he is almost "drowning into Paradise" (160). Mephistopheles, however, quickly turns the relaxed, lethargic mood into an opportunity to rekindle Lust by causing the image of Helen to re-appear. The demon observes, "Sloth is a sin and serves my purpose; though there are merrier ways to be damned" (160). Lust is certainly a "merrier way." In this instance the childlike impulse to rest in Lisa's arms, which might have recalled Faustus to a genuine love of her Virtues, gives way instead to a Slothful state of mind into which his Lust for Helen makes a grand re-entrance and the goodness of Lisa is quickly forgotten.

Once again Lust for Helen is described as a deadly bewitchment. She says,

when I call,  
Thou canst not choose but turn to me again . . .  
I am the fire in the heart, the plague eternal  
Of vain regret for joys that are no more. (162)

And again the hidden depths of this Sin are alluded to. By creating longings which cannot be truly satisfied through sensual experience Lust eats away at the heart.

Sayers expands the symbolic associations of the classical Helen making the Helen of her play a manifestation of the mythical woman Lilith. Helen says that Adam lay on her breast and called her Lilith:

Long, long ago, in the old, innocent garden  
Before Eve came, bringing her gift of knowledge  
And shame where no shame was. (161)

This is a trick to make Faustus believe that he can, in loving Helen, "undo the sin of Adam, [and] turn the years back to their primal innocence" (163).

In her doctoral dissertation "The Neo-Medieval Plays of Dorothy L. Sayers" Marion Baker Fairman explains the background of the Lilith symbol:

Though Helen links her previous self with innocence, in literature Lilith is identified with evil. The word is found in Isaiah 34:14 where it is translated as a 'nightmonster' or a 'screechowl' who 'shall find herself a place of rest' in the desserts of nettles, dragons, and death. In the Talmud, it is recorded that Adam had a wife called Lisis before he married Eve; of Lisis, or Lilith, he begat nothing but evils. Lilith is described as having beautiful hair, in the meshes of which lurk a multitude of evil spirits. (133)

Faustus is determined to have Helen, and with her a final escape from what she calls "the bitter knowledge / Of good and evil." This brings the play's action to the classical barter scene. For the removal of the knowledge of good and evil there is a price - the "usual price," Faustus' soul (163). As Faustus signs the bond Lisa cries out that he should "take Christ's way, not this way" and "fly to the arms of God." He replies, "To the arms of love. Sweet Helen, receive my soul" (165).

Charles Williams identified Chastity as the "love of the soul for God."<sup>44</sup> Viewing it thus, it would seem appropriate that Lust, its opposite, should be the Sin which influences Faustus to turn from God (whose love is represented by the virtuous Lisa) and embrace an entirely different sort of lover.

Scene III begins in Innsbruck at the Emperor's Court. Many years have passed, and Mephistopheles confirms that Faustus has grown in sinfulness. What masqueraded as "primal innocence" is, in fact, "primal brutishness," and the list of Faustus' Sins is ac-

accompanied, in true medieval fashion, by animal comparisons: "lecherous as a goat . . . cruel as a cat . . ." (173). He no longer delights in using his power to effect cures, instead he delights in violence and carnage. His Lust still rages and he means to have the Empress in his bed. This is not to be, however, for time has run out; the contract has come to an end. Yet even on this last night Faustus' Sin continues to harm others. His association with the Emperor affords the opportunity for Mephistopheles to exert an evil influence. Faustus advises the Emperor that the best stance as a camouflage for his military aggression is "profound scientific knowledge coupled with a total innocence of moral responsibility" (184).

The weaknesses of the play become especially apparent as we approach the climax in the last act. The "good" characters are unconvincing and rather infantile, and the plot lacks tension and structure. The conclusion does not seem to follow from what has gone before. In her attempt to give an unusual twist to an old story Sayers sacrifices credibility. The problem is apparent as early as Scene II: the Pope's benevolent evaluation of Faustus' spiritual state seems inane and generous. It is hard to accept unquestioningly his statement that Faustus has "sinned through love." Faustus' humanitarian impulses were short lived and rather mild in comparison with his lust for power and his readiness to blaspheme God. The Pope's observation that he has not sinned against the Holy Ghost by calling good evil and evil good is completely unconvincing for that is precisely what he did do.

Now, in the last scene, we are asked to believe Faustus when he claims he bartered away his soul "in ignorance" (200). Sayers' point seems to be that by the time Faustus made the actual pact his awareness of right and wrong was so diminished that he could no longer be held morally responsible. This does not fit well with the fact that he was at this point *asking* for freedom from an awareness of right and wrong. Still, we may concede that such a loss of moral awareness might occur over a period of time and that the final stage in its elimination could have been the formal agreement to sell his soul.

More unconvincing yet is Faustus' cry, "Christ! Christ! Christ! / They have taken away my Lord these many years." We have never seen Faustus acknowledge Christ as Lord; from the first scene of the play he wished to "tear the usurper Christ from His dark throne."

Sayers' desire to show the power and compassion of God redeeming back a soul from the clutches of Satan is consistent with the emphasis on redemption in all her later work. Her way of bringing it about, however, is not compatible with the earlier events of the plot, nor does it reflect orthodox theology.

Goethe's Faust also escapes damnation, but in his case it is more credible because the lust for knowledge which led him to barter his soul is not a sin of sufficient magnitude to warrant damnation. He is redeemed in the end because

Whoe'er aspires unweariedly  
Is not beyond redeeming  
And if he feels the grace of Love  
That from on high is given,  
The Blessed Hosts that wait above,  
Shall welcome him to heaven. (*Faust* V. vii).

It is possible that Sayers' less convincing salvaging of the soul of the man who sold himself to evil was influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by the doctrine of Universalism which teaches that *all* souls will eventually find salvation.

The last scene of Sayers' play is, nonetheless, a very powerful one. Faustus is called back to consciousness and commanded to be "not as thou art, but as thou wast." What we witness is a return to a point in his spiritual life which must be assumed to have existed before the play began. Once we have persuaded ourselves to accept this new, humble, contrite Faustus we can follow with fascination the surprising developments which conclude the play. Faustus is shown the "poor brute soul" which he made for himself. His claim that he was cheated because "he did not bargain for a soul like this" has some validity because Helen lured him with the falsehood that the removal of the

knowledge of good and evil was a return to the state of primal innocence that was Adam's before he fell (161-62).

We remember, however, that Faustus' motivation for selling his soul was not a desire to be free from Sin, but a desire to indulge his Lust. We remember, too, that long before this he had turned completely away from God. Perhaps we are meant to view his rejection of a God whom he believes to be unjust, as an attempt to seek goodness in another place by carving out his "own road to salvation" (135): Yet to say 'God is not good, but . will become good myself by employing the powers of evil,' seems identical with the Sin that the Pope claimed Faustus was *not* guilty of - "that last sin against the Holy Ghost / Which is, to call good evil, evil good" (156). For this Sin (we have it on papal authority) there is no forgiveness.

Putting these inconsistencies to one side, we can observe some internal unity within the last scene. However dubious the theology, the legal reasons for the outcome are made clear. Faustus is forgiven and reclaimed because the power of choice has been restored to him, and he chooses rightly. His alternatives are "to live content / Eternally [deprived of the knowledge of good and evil] , and never look on God," or to have knowledge after all. He makes his choice:

I will go down with Mephistopheles  
To the nethermost pit of fire unquenchable  
Where no hope is, and over the pathless gulf  
Look up to God. Beyond that gulf I may  
Never pass over, nor any saint or angel  
Descend to me. Nevertheless, I know  
Whose feet can tread the fire as once the water,  
And I will call upon Him out of the deep,  
Out of the deep, O Lord. (208-09)

The play has made a gigantic swing. Faustus, amazingly, ends at a point exactly opposite from where he began. In Scene I he used terms like "the most high God," and "the unspeakable name of God," but only as part of the formal method of calling up spirits. He had no personal reverence for God, and once under Mephistopheles' influence

he quickly turns to vehement abuse of the Alm:ghty. Now, in the final act, he esteems God so highly that he would rather suffer eternally than to be eternally denied a glimpse of Him. This choice seals his redemption. He will be taken down, but only to be "purged thoroughly." Finally, God will deliver his soul from hell and receive him to Himself (211).

In The Devil to Pay we are reminded that *choice* is crucial to the theology of Sin and judgement. The idea of a choice after death, however, is uncommon in Christian thought. It is significant, therefore, that two Christian writers, whom Sayers very much respected, introduced this concept into at least one of their creative works.

Charles Williams, in Descent into Hell, allows a character who has already died to learn of the truth and choose God. C.S. Lewis, in The Great Divorce, describes characters already in hell catching a bus to the outskirts of heaven where they are met by some of the redeemed who try to help them understand where they went wrong in life. It first appears that Lewis is suggesting that they may now see their error, choose differently, and so enter heaven. What actually happens is that the choices made in life hold; the individual is set in the mould which the choices of long ago formed for him. The situation Lewis creates is most unorthodox, but, in the final analysis, his theology is not. Williams' depiction of choice after death is much closer to what Sayers' does here, and to what she initially appears to be doing in The Just Vengeance<sup>45</sup> - allowing an eternal choice to be made *after* death.

All three writers are seeking to underscore the mercy and justice of God. Williams, and perhaps Sayers too, would seem to postulate that if a person did not, in their natural life, have a clear opportunity to perceive truth, reject Sin, and choose righteousness, God would give him a chance to choose after death.

Yet Sayers' use of this unorthodox idea is less convincing than Williams' for Faustus was well informed in theology, and seems to have made very conscious choices in his



life. After death, however, his vision of God is immeasurably enlarged and clarified. The breadth and power of that vision brings the play to a moving and memorable conclusion.

One of the most significant messages of The Devil to Pay is that Pride, Lust, and the other Sins, work together to entrap and blind the soul to the point where power of choice no longer exists.<sup>46</sup> Yet even when the power of Sin appears to have triumphed, God, in His mercy, can still wrench the soul from the jaws of hell.

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A few months before the onset of the war The Sunday Times (April 1939) published an article by Sayers entitled "The Food of the Full-Grown." This very significant essay gives us a picture of how she, as a woman of forty-five, viewed the years behind her and the years ahead. She says, "To believe in youth is to look backward; to look forward we must believe in age." She describes Christianity as "a religion for adult minds," and Christ as "the food of the full-grown."

The essay is, in part, about Time, and how we must learn to "make terms" with it. She challenges the idea that as we grow older life "must necessarily contain more evil than good, since things 'get worse and worse'." It is wrong, she says, to "assume that Time is evil in itself and brings nothing but deterioration." She speaks of those who are saints, or artists, or indeed anyone who has achieved a measure of "triumphant fulfillment" as people who have acquired valuable insight. (It would seem that she included herself in such a group; her success as a novelist and playwright had shown her to be a genuine artist, and given her a degree of "triumphant fulfillment.") These individuals, she believed, are able to speak with authority of

the soul's development in Time, of the vigorous grappling with evil that transforms it into good, of the dark night of the soul that precedes crucifixion and issues in resurrection. ("The Food of the Full-Grown")

When she wrote those words Sayers could not have fully foreseen the "dark night," and the "vigorous grappling with evil," which lay just ahead in the war years, nor could she have known then how important the images of crucifixion and resurrection would become in her work.

"Full-grown" is an absolute when applied to the physical body, but in the spiritual sense the possibility of further maturing is never eliminated. This Sayers knew well. In using "full-grown," however, to represent mental and spiritual adulthood she was striking a note which was to resound again and again in her later work. Throughout the war she would come to believe even more strongly in the responsibility of every individual to become an *adult*, and to deal with the past, face the future, and live realistically and courageously in the present.

She speaks, in this article, of the futility of trying to flee from Time and Evil, quoting from Eliot's The Family Reunion, "my business is not to run away, but to pursue, not to avoid being found, but to seek." This means, among other things, "Repentance . . . a passionate intention to know all things after the mode of heaven," and a "release, not from, but into, Reality."

## CHAPTER NINE

### Drama and Non-Fiction of the War Years

During the war Dorothy L. Sayers became more conscious than ever of the need to combat evil courageously, and more aware than ever that the greatest evils are spiritual ones. Everything she wrote during these years bears witness to the deeper level of spiritual concern that the war inspired. Her lectures and essays speak repeatedly of the seriousness of Man's moral responsibilities and the seriousness of Sin.

Sayers was an original and independent thinker, but she was very sensitive to the problems of life in the world around her. Many of the issues she dwelt on between 1939 and 1945 were closely related to the general concerns of people during the war. The idea that everyone must take personal responsibility and work hard for victory, which was reiterated over and over in the public press, is reflected in Sayers' repeated attacks on Sloth. She was very conscious, too, of the restrictions and suffering that the war introduced into the lives of average citizens, and of the confusion and distress that arose as they tried to make sense of it all.

Writing to a friend, the Rev. Dr. James Welch,<sup>27</sup> on 20 November 1943, she describes suffering as the means by which the problem of Sin is dealt with - the means of redemption:

... most people ... look upon themselves as the victims of undeserved misfortunes, which they (as individuals, and as a species) have done nothing to provoke. Contemporary literature and thought seem to me to be steeped in self-pity. ... If only they could start from the idea that there is 'something funny about man' and that he does tend to fight against the right order of things, they could get a more robust outlook on suffering and catastrophe, and see that they were carrying

a. the direct consequence of their own wrongness - the 'punitive' element in suffering

b. the indirect consequence of other people's wrongness - the 'redemptive' element

(This concerns, of course, chiefly what Taylor<sup>28</sup> calls 'our Cross rather than Christ's'; but I don't see how God's Cross can be seen to be relevant before the sinful nature of Man and the nature of 'redemption' is understood.)

Sayers had already explored these concepts in her journalism and her drama, but in the years between 1939 and 1945 new insights and new urgency became apparent in her work. The last performance of The Devil to Pay, in its short London run, took place on 19 August 1939. War was declared just two weeks later, and although the serious conflict did not ensue for over a year, many things were already changing.

Sayers published, in November of 1939, two detective stories in The Sunday Graphic, and in the same month brought out a volume of detective stories,<sup>49</sup> but these were the last works of fiction published in her lifetime. The direction which her writing took from this point on is apparent in two articles which appeared in September of the same year, 1939. "What Do We Believe?" in The Sunday Times, and "How to Enjoy the Dark Nights" (i.e. of the blackout) in The Star, represent the two broad topics on which she would write almost exclusively during the next six years: the Christian faith, and the stresses and challenges of the war.

Sayers' dedication to the war effort was very apparent<sup>50</sup> by the end of the year. In December she encouraged patience and co-operation (with the seemingly unnecessary restrictions) in "Prevention is Better than Cure," published in St. Martin's Review. In the same month "Is This He That Should Come?" (in The Christian Newsletter) brought together both of her key subjects with the suggestion that war may not be as incompatible with the Christian idea of peace as it first appears. Here Sayers describes Christ as far different from the "Gentle Jesus" of children's prayers. He is "an energetic and formidable Personality" who, in his earthly ministry refused to tolerate hypocrisy and injustice in order to maintain a superficial sort of peace. The article's title is clearly linked to her Christmas play of the previous year, but the picture she paints here of the one that "Should Come" focuses not on the birth of Christ, but on His adult life and teaching. One of the most striking traits Sayers identifies in this man who was "the improbable-possible in person" is "a constant charity for the warm-hearted sins and a sustained dislike of cold sloth, envy, avarice and pride."

A month earlier Sayers had begun her most interesting and most sustained project as a war-time journalist. "The Wimsey Papers" appeared in The Spectator in eleven weekly installments between 17 November 1939 and 26 January 1940. They were, essentially, a series of fictional letters on the effects of the war on those at home. Several letters were included in each installment, and, in most cases, they were written from the point of view of characters from the Wimsey novels.

On 24 November an extract was included from a sermon preached by the Rev. Mr. Theodore Venables (of The Nine Tailors) on 12 November, Armistice Sunday. Mr. Venables agrees with commentators in the public press that "the whole interval between this war and the last had been indeed a period of armistice - not peace at all but only an armed truce with evil." He goes on to say,

In this world there is a continual activity, a perpetual struggle between good and evil, and the victory of the moment is always for the side that is the more active. Of late years, the evil has been more active and alert in us than the good - that is why we find ourselves again plunged into war. Even evil, you see, cannot prosper unless it practices at least one virtue - the virtue of diligence. Good well-meaning peaceable people often fail by slipping into the sin of sloth. . . . If Christian men and women would put as much work and intelligence into being generous and just as others do into being ambitious and covetous and aggressive, the world would be a very much better place. . . .

Mr. Venables reminds his congregation, too, that Christ, when He saw that "the time for peace had gone by," said that those without a sword should buy one. Peace, as the world recognizes it, was not His highest priority. Violence is not necessarily evidence of the Sin of Wrath. Christ clearly taught that "the sin that was worse than violence was a cold and sneering spirit."

A recurring theme of "The Wimsey Letters" is the need for diligence and vigilance - the need to overcome Sloth. In the last installment, Peter's Uncle Paul, blames current problems on "complacency" and reminds Harriet that "indolence" is a great destroyer of relationships. In this last installment, too, Peter himself writes to Harriet from "somewhere abroad" that for once in his life he is perfectly sure of something - that

people can no longer find protection in ignorance. "The only thing that matters" is that people understand and accept their "personal responsibility."

In January of 1940 Sayers published her first long work of non-fiction. Months earlier she had been asked by her publisher, Victor Gollancz, "whether she would care to think about writing a Christmas message to the nation" (Brabazon 177). The "message" she produced during those first four months of the war was probably much more substantial than the publisher had envisioned - a book of a hundred and fifty pages called Begin Here: A War-Time Essay. Although it was written in a hurry, and has been judged, by both Sayers herself and others, as "not one of her best" (Reynolds, Dorothy L. Sayers 296), its references to Sin are interesting and significant. Its main thesis is that the war period is a time for people to re-think their beliefs and their value systems, and to start fresh on a sounder basis. Sayers insists that spiritual values and the respect for individuality must be given priority, and that work must be seen as the basis of human dignity.

Sayers' view of Sin is especially apparent in Begin Here. In Chapter I she writes,

The whole set of ideas connected with the word "sin" is nowadays considered very old-fashioned; it has become more usual to regard our actions as automatic reactions or responses to the pressure of varying environment. This view, however interesting, is apt to make us feel very helpless. There is a good deal to be said for the opinion that a sin is a sin and an error is an error; that both should be examined, admitted, repented of, and then put out of our thoughts. Repentance is, in fact, another way of saying that the bad past is to be considered as the starting-point for better things. (13-14)

Here she picks up a point she had introduced at the end of Busman's Honeymoon and in "The Triumph of Easter" - the idea that, although evil can never be said to be good in itself, it can be transformed into good: "from the existing good and evil we must hammer out the positive good" (Begin Here 15).

In explaining the history of thought which led to the Church's excessive preoccupation with the Sins of the Flesh, Begin Here refers briefly to the Sins of Gluttony and Lust. These Sins are described, however, as much more than animal

appetites - Sayers sees them as tendencies and preferences which are not instinctive, but "self-conscious" and learned (112). Hence they are more deadly than is sometimes supposed.

Sloth, however, is the Deadly Sin on which Sayers focuses most attention in Begin Here. Sloth of the mind is described as one of the worst Sins of all:

... many people contrive never once to think for themselves from the cradle to the grave. . . . The acquisition of knowledge is not the same thing as thinking; it is only the first step towards it. . . . the test of thinking is that if it is real, it makes us not passive but active. (19)

[War] jerks us out of the passive contemplation of the world as a kind of external show and . . . sets us asking whether the things we have always taken for granted ought not to be examined and actively thought about. (20)

Her emphasis on mental energy and initiative led naturally to the subject of creativity in work. In Begin Here she lays down, in simple terms, the ideas which would form the basis of The Mind of the Maker (which she wrote a year later) and of her later essays on the subject of work

... the truth is, that man is never truly himself except when he is actively creating something. To be merely passive, merely receptive, is a denial of human nature. 'God', says the author of Genesis, 'created man in his own image'; and of the original of that image he tells us one thing only: 'In the beginning, God created.' That tells us plainly enough what the writer thought about the essential nature of man. . . . in a mechanized civilization like ours the average man and woman find themselves . . . disoriented. . . . What, without knowing it, they chiefly miss is the power and opportunity to be actively creative. Their work becomes more and more automatic and repetitive. . . . they do not know how to make a concerted effort to find new fields for creative energy. (23)<sup>36</sup>

Sayers also attributes to mental Sloth a number of undesirable developments of the twentieth century. One of these was the glorification of youth and the devaluing of maturity: "the 'escape-mechanism' of the lazy-minded, who want to shuffle off their responsibilities upon the shoulders of the young" (Begin Here 26). Another result of Sloth was the disrepute into which the Church had fallen: "lazy habit . . . [the Church allowing] the professionals to do most of her thinking for her. And the professionals [were themselves] old-fashioned in their method of thinking. . ." (Begin Here 42-43).

Sloth was also at the root of the preference for bodily fitness over mental agility: "sloth of mind and contempt for learning . . . accompany the cult of the body" ([Begin Here](#) 115).

One of Sayers' main points in [Begin Here](#) is that man is essentially a rational creature, but that his rationality has been smothered by the Sin of Sloth. She berates the stereo-typed "common man" who boasts of his ignorance of art, philosophy and theology, who is pandered to by the "cheap journalist," and who confuses the innocence of childhood with the sinful stupidity of those who have refused to grow up mentally:

It is to flatter a generation of mental sluggards that the lick-spittals of public life make a virtue of imbecility. There are people who with a blasphemous insolence will quote Christ's saying about a little child in support of this horrid degradation of knowledge and power. The mildest thing to be said about them is that they clearly know nothing of children. Every normal child is a walking interrogation-mark; its ruling passion is to learn and express itself; it becomes dull and inert only by association with adult dullards. When we cease to grow, when we cease to ask intelligent questions, then indeed we have ceased to be as little children, and the Kingdom of Heaven is closed to us. (123-24)

The child is a symbol of spiritual alertness in a number of Sayers' later works. In [The Zeal of Thy House](#) a small boy is the only one able to see the angel whose raised sword will fall in judgement on William of Sens. In [The Devil to Pay](#) the childlike simplicity of Faustus' two servants serves much the same function, but with less success.<sup>11</sup> Again, in several of the plays of [The Man Born to Be King](#) sequence a child is used to represent the same sort of Zeal and mental integrity that Sayers describes in [Begin Here](#) as the opposite of spiritual and mental Sloth.

Sloth generally occurs in conjunction with several other Deadly Sins. In Sayers' description of the "common man's" boasting of his ignorance of art and philosophy (noted above), there is a connection made between mental Sloth and the Sin of Pride. This connection is further developed in "The Feast of St. Verb," an article published in



The Sunday Times in March of 1940. Here, Envy is also introduced as a Sin which often occurs alongside the other two:

Stupidity is the sin of Sloth, nourished and maintained by a furious spiritual Pride that leaves intellectual Pride nowhere in the race to destruction. . . . The religion of stupidity is always persecuting because it is envious and without humility. . . . The Church, patroness of the arts, mother of learning, guardian of the Heavenly Reason, has long deserted her charge. She has driven out the poets and prophets, trampled beauty underfoot, and set her face like a mute against knowledge, she has consecrated stupidity and enthroned sentimentality which is the stupidity of the heart.

A similar thought is expressed in an unpublished, undated work called "Prayers for Diverse Occasions" (Wade ms. 81/199.37). In her prayer "For Wisdom and Learning" she links Pride with ignorance: "Deliver us from the pride of the intellect that usurps the throne of God, and from the pride of ignorance that spits in the face of God." "The Contempt of Learning in 20th Century England," which appeared in The Fortnightly in April of 1940 connects mental Sloth with the Sin of Avarice and also with the Envy which causes people to resent the intellectual integrity of others.

Sayers did not see her continuing discussion of Sin as a negative emphasis. She realized that people needed to hear something uplifting in the midst of the trauma of war, and she believed that she was giving them just that. "Creed or Chaos," a lecture given in May of the same year, explains the doctrine of Sin as something far more "heartening" than the philosophy of determinism which attempts to provide "release from the burden of sinfulness":

Today, if we could really be persuaded that we are miserable sinners - that the trouble is not outside us but inside us, and that therefore, by the grace of God, we can do something to put it right, we should receive that message as the most hopeful and heartening thing that can be imagined. (41)

The lecture includes her characteristic attack on the careless thinking of "ignorant Christians," and a strong statement that "Christianity is first and foremost a rational explanation of the universe" (31). Many people, she claims, are too slothful to become

knowledgeable in the Creed which they profess to believe; as a result there is Chaos in the Church and in society (31-32).

In "Creed or Chaos" Sayers also comments on the Church's failure to take a stand against the Avarice which assumes that the main purpose of work is to make money:

Nothing has so deeply discredited the Christian Church as her squalid submission to the economic theory of society . . . [by accepting the fallacy that] work is not the expression of man's creative energy in the service of Society, but only something he does in order to obtain money and leisure. (43)

In a talk entitled "Why Work?" given at Brighton in March of 1941 Sayers again connects the problems of the modern world with the wrong attitude toward work which results from Sloth, Envy, and Avarice:

Unless we do change our whole way of thought about work, I do not think we shall ever escape from the appalling squirrel-cage of economic confusion in which we have been madly turning for the last three centuries or so, the cage in which we landed ourselves by acquiescing in a social system based upon Envy and Avarice. A society in which consumption has to be artificially stimulated in order to keep production going is a society founded on trash and waste, and such a society is a house built upon sand.

Throughout all her journalism of this period the theme of the seriousness of Sin, particularly Sloth, Pride, and Avarice, occurs repeatedly, but with variations in emphasis. In "Notes on the Way" (*Time and Tide* June 1940) she deals with Avarice again, but this time the money principle is identified as a strong enemy of the artist's belief that "as much good work should be done as possible," that good quality work is an end in itself, not a means to a financial end.

The wide recognition Sayers was gaining as a Christian journalist is evidenced by the invitation she received to be one of the speakers at the Archbishop of York's conference on The Life of the Church and Order of Society which was held at Malvern in January of 1941. Sayers' address, "The Church's Responsibility," contends that the Church must recognize that

the whole of man's humanity, at its most vital, developed, and characteristic, is the vehicle of the divine part of his nature; that he cannot

grow nearer to God by disassociating himself from the his own humanity, or from the rest of humanity. (66)

She goes on, in this address, to speak very bluntly on the Church's failure to condemn the most spiritual, and most serious, of the Deadly Sin::

She [the Church] will condemn those sins which respectability has condemned already, but not the sins by which respectability thrives. . . intellectual corruption . . . legalized cheating. . . She will acquiesce in a definition of morality so one-sided that it has deformed the very meaning of the word by restricting it to sexual offenses. And yet, if every man living were to sleep in his neighbour's bed, it could not bring the world so near shipwreck as that pride, that avarice, and that intellectual sloth which the Church has forgotten to write in the tale of the capital Sins. (73)

During the remainder of 1941 Sayers continued to write and lecture on these same themes: the Church's role, Christian responsibility, the importance of creativity, the sacramental nature of work, and the dignity of the individual. The last of these themes led naturally into a concern with women's rights - a subject on which she spoke out strongly on two occasions. In "Are Women Human?" (a speech given to a Women's Society in 1938) and in "The Human-Not-Quite-Human" (an article in Christendom: A Journal of Christian Sociology September 1941) she spoke out against the way women are viewed and treated. Man, she points out, is always dealt with as a human being, *Homo*, first, and as a male, *Vir* second; whereas women are dealt with "only as *Femina*" because they are not viewed as "fully human" ("The Human-Not-Quite-Human" 116-117). Her discussion of unfairness toward women describes the same sort of Envy of men toward women Miss Climpson talks about in Unnatural Death.<sup>52</sup>

Sayers concludes "The Human-Not-Quite-Human" with an account of Christ's treatment of women:

Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were the first at the Cradle and the last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man - there had never been such another. A prophet and a teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronized . . . who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend. . . . Nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything 'funny' about woman's nature. (122)

Through Miss Climpson, Sayers had earlier identified the sort of sneering and belittling of women indirectly condemned in this passage as a form of contempt based on jealousy, and hence as a particular manifestation of that Deadly Sin which hates to see other people happy - Envy.

The most renowned of Dorothy Sayers' non-fictional prose works is The Mind of the Maker which appeared in the summer of 1941. It is a treatise based on the parallel Sayers observed between the three persons of the Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and the three dimensions of the creative process - Idea, Energy and Power. The book was written, as Ralph Hone records, because she wished to go beyond her "few brief statements about divine vocation in work" by thinking through her own experience as a literary artist and using it to illustrate "the sacramental and creative aspects of the work of the writer" (125).

The Mind of the Maker is closely connected with Sayers' treatment of the subject of work, and is consequently linked to her high esteem for the Virtues of Zeal, initiative and commitment, and her disdain for the Sin of Sloth. The nature of the subject precludes direct comment on particular Sins, but the book opens and closes with references to Sin as man's basic problem.

The first chapter distinguishes between moral code and moral law. The moral code of any group or any era consists of a body of rules which "depends for its validity on a consensus of human opinion about what man's nature really is, and what it ought to be" (8-9), whereas the pronouncements which Christianity makes about the moral law are not regulations at all, but instead "purport to be statements of fact about man and the universe. . . . These statements [the Christian creeds] do not rest upon human consent; they are either true or false" (8-9). She quotes Lord David Cecil's statement that "Christianity has compelled the mind of man not because it is the most cheering view of man's existence but because it is truest to the facts" (13). She goes on,

It is unpleasant to be called sinners, and much nicer to think that we all have hearts of gold - but have we? . . . It is encouraging to feel that progress is making us automatically every day and in every way better and better and better - but does history support that view? . . . Or does experience rather suggest that man is 'very far gone from original righteousness and is of his own nature inclined to evil'? (13)<sup>53</sup>

The last chapter of The Mind of the Maker makes a similar point about man's inherent sinfulness:

If . . . men feel themselves to be powerless in the universe and at odds with it, it is because the pattern of their lives and works has become distorted and no longer corresponds to the universal pattern - because they are, in short, running counter to the law of their nature. . . . If I am right in thinking that human society is out of harmony with the law of its proper nature, then my experience again corroborates that of the theologians, who have also perceived this fundamental dislocation in man (172).

The sense of powerlessness and spiritual dislocation was a natural result of the war. By mid 1941 tensions were mounting, and, in the light of the constant news of violence and devastation, spiritual issues took on a new importance. Sayers believed that people were now seeing things in their true light.<sup>54</sup>

The April 1941 article, "Forgiveness and the Enemy," was still another application of the theology of Sin to the immediate situation of war-torn England. The article, Sayers records, was one of several she wrote which were "so unpopular with the persons who commissioned them that they were suppressed before they appeared." This particular one was initially suppressed because "what the editor of a respectable newspaper wanted and got [from some other writer] was Christian sanction for undying hatred against the enemy" (Foreword Unpopular Opinions 7). In the essay Sayers questions whether any of the crimes committed during the war, deserving of punishment though they may be, are truly "unforgivable" (15-16). The uncompromising quality of her theology is nowhere more evident than in this firm refusal - in the midst of the trauma of war - to condone the spirit of Wrath which stubbornly refuses to forgive the enemy.

Throughout all of her prose writing on the many practical and moral issues which concerned her, Sayers' sense of the universality of Sin and the need for redemption was a

unifying theme.<sup>55</sup> She always kept the divine solution to the problem of Sin clearly in view:

... goodness can use the destruction-tending evil for the creation of new forms of good. This is the process which the theologian calls redemption. ("Devil, Who Made Thee?" World Review August 1940)

Sayers' active involvement in drama declined during the war years. She published an essay in March of 1940 on the production of Christian drama ("Divine Comedy," The Guardian March 15), but 1940 was disappointing in terms of actual dramatic productions. Her light comedy Love All finally got on stage in April at a very small theatre in Knightsbridge, but closed again after only three weeks. It was never performed in a West End theatre. The Zeal of Thy House had been scheduled to be revived at Canterbury that summer, but mounting war tensions brought disappointment in that area too.

Although the war brought an end to Sayers' involvement with stage productions, it was during these stressful years that her most impressive dramatic work was produced - a sequence of plays entitled The Man Born to be King. In February 1940 she was invited by the BBC to write a series of radio plays on the life of Christ. She worked on this project during 1940 and 1941, and into 1942. The first five plays (of the sequence of twelve) were completed by the end of 1941.

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### The Man Born to be King<sup>56</sup>

Next to her novels, this play sequence has been the work for which Dorothy L. Sayers is most widely known. Her decision to take on such a lengthy and demanding project was influenced by something more than her professional interest in Christian drama, and her liking for challenging tasks. She saw the Incarnation of Christ, His life, His death, and His resurrection as the most important landmark in the history of the

world. She also believed that since so few people ever realized the monumental significance of these events, it was high time that the story of Christ was handled, not liturgically or symbolically, but realistically and historically.

Understanding the meaning of Christ's death would, she believed, shed light even on the tragedies of war time. She told Dr. Welch that people had difficulties accepting the vast numbers of deaths associated with the war because they did not want to believe that actions have permanent consequences. They had not grasped the fact that although the evil of the past cannot be abolished, it *can* be redeemed, or made good, because of the intervention of God in history (in the Incarnation):

I remember Alan Wheatley saying: 'I can't bear all this killing - it's so irrevocable.' All death is irrevocable - that's why we find it such an outrage. But we feel that everything else ought to be revocable. Nobody will allow that something could really happen, which divides B.C. from A.D., and as a result of which the world can never be the same. That would be committing oneself to something; and we feel we ought always to be able to revise decisions and prevent them from having consequences. . . . [Another writer] talks about a 'fresh start' and 'escape from the meshes of our past chains and past mistakes.' There isn't, of course, any 'escape' or 'fresh start' in the sense of abolishing the past and its consequences. The past can never be wiped out, but only redeemed and 'made good.' (letter of 20 November 1943)

The war had confronted people with the reality of suffering. Sayers was one of those who came to understand the problem of pain in a new light because of what she lived through between 1939 and 1945. She saw the day to day sufferings of ordinary people as part of a larger pattern:

Why does crucified God make more difference to washing-day than Socrates drinking hemlock? If it doesn't, why call yourselves Christians? Christianity was called the Way. But Jesus said: "I am the Way," - not "I'll show you the way." I suppose that on washing-day the Christian washerwoman is, so to speak, "carrying" the general dirtiness of the world. In the same sort of way, when we have to do without a fire on a cold night to save fuel, we (comparatively innocent) are to that extent "carrying" the stupidity of ministers (political ministers, I mean, not parsons!), the tiresomeness and lack of charity between miners and owners, and the guilt of war which makes extra coal necessary. By our willing acceptance of that "little daily crucifixion" the deficit is wiped out and the evil sterilised. . . . We take the other people's guilt and carry it," and so . . . redeem it and there's an end. If we refuse then the evil continues to propagate itself, - armies are destroyed and battles lost for

lack of coal. Or if we violently resent the sacrifice, we start a fresh cycle of anger and hatred and trouble. As a matter of fact, in an emergency, when we are strongly conscious of our solidarity with ministers and miners, however sinful, because they and we are one in blood, we do feel that the act of atonement is not only expedient, but right - for a brief moment we really see the pattern of the Cross as the pattern of life. God, being Incarnate, therefore solid in blood and nature with man can "carry the guilt" of mankind because He is at once perfect Innocence and perfect Charity (which we can never be); it is the Incarnation which at one and the same time confirms the validity of the pattern and gives the power to live the pattern . . . . (letter to Dr. Welch, 11 November 1943)

Suffering is the result of Sin, both directly, and indirectly, but, paradoxically, it is also through suffering - particularly the pattern of suffering symbolized by the Cross - that the evil of Sin must be *redeemed* into good. The evil of war brought Dorothy Sayers to a more profound realization of the relevance of the Incarnation and the Cross to the lives of ordinary people. The Man Born to Be King made that relevance plain to millions.

A number of other writers produced Christian dramas of high literary quality during the 1930s and '40s - T.S. Eliot, Norman Nicholson, Christopher Fry, and Charles Williams for example. What Dorothy L. Sayers accomplished, however, in her sequence of radio plays, was remarkable and rare, not only in her period but in English literature as a whole.

Using scripture as her primary source, and filling in the details with the help of careful research and her skillful characterization, Sayers weaves the words of Christ and the events of His life into a series of twelve short plays, each having its own internal unity, but remaining dependent on the others for its maximum impact. She keeps close to the words of scripture, but she adapts and harmonizes them with a contemporary, commonplace sort of language. The result is immediacy and credibility. By including a multitude of short, often disparate, fragments, she orders and subordinates the material into a beautifully coherent sequence.



Perhaps, from her own perspective, The Man Born to be King's most important achievement was the attainment of the goal she aspired to when she wrote "Nativity Play," the 1938 article introducing He That Should Come:

We are accustomed to think of them all, good and bad alike, as 'sacred personages' living a remote symbolic life 'in the Bible'. But they did not live 'in the Bible'; they lived in this confused and passionate world, amid social and political conditions curiously like those of the present day. Unless we can recapture a strong apprehension of that plain fact, they will forever remain for us an assemblage of wraiths and shadows.

This was exactly what she did in The Man Born to be King. She recaptured a sense of actuality to such an extent that few people can read the plays, much less become involved in a production of them, without becoming drawn in by the aura of reality that imbues them.

In her introduction to the published version of the plays Sayers expresses her regret that this "very great story indeed" is no longer "taken seriously" (37). Because of this she viewed writing The Man Born to Be King as a solemn challenge:

To make of His story something that could neither startle, nor shock, nor terrify, nor excite, nor inspire a living soul is to crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to open shame. (The Man Born to be King 37)

She has taken these last phrases from the Hebrews 6:6 account of those who fall away from the faith. Whether or not the writers of less successful plays on the life of Christ deserve such strong condemnation, Sayers succeeds in making a very clear statement of her own desire to do justice to this story.

Three main threads unify the sequence. One is the holiness and Kingship of Christ; another is the rebellious, sinful character of Judas; and the third is the theme of Love, which involves the alignment of loyalties. This theme is especially developed towards the end of the sequence as individuals - through their choice of Sin or Virtue - gradually reveal themselves as either "friends" or "foes" of the Kingdom.

Jesus sums up the relationship between holiness - which stands for goodness or Virtue in a broad sense - and Love - which is often viewed as one specific Virtue: "This

is holiness - to love, and be ruled by love: for love can do no wrong" - a truth so simple "that a child can understand it" (87). Children, and those who become as children, are in fact the only ones who "really can understand it" (87). The greatest of Virtues, Love, is portrayed by Christ and those who align themselves as friends of the Kingdom. The greatest of Sins, Pride, is portrayed through the character of Judas who becomes one of its greatest enemies.

In the first play, "Kings in Judaea," the kingship theme of the whole sequence is initiated. Although the advent of the child "Born to Be King" is central to the play, it focuses particularly on four other kings: the three Magi - Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar - and King Herod.

In this play the Magi and Mary are characterized by graciousness and Humility. As Caspar observes, there is much affinity between lowliness and holiness (57). Herod is a great contrast: his Pride is enormous, and his comments on the events of his life<sup>10</sup> show how Wrath and Envy combine to produce murderous hate. He trusts no one, and believes that "love is a traitor" (54).

Love is an important theme in both strands of the story for it relates to the tragedy of King Herod's life, and it occurs in the probing questions the Magi ask when they visit the newborn King. Each of them represents one avenue of man's search for truth. One of them speaks of Wisdom, another of Power, and another of Sorrow (58). They ask whether the "promised Kingdom" of this infant King will bring a final reconciliation between these three things and Love?

The title of second play, "The King's Herald," refers to John the Baptist, who heralded the kingship of Christ. This play introduces the character of Judas - one of the most striking illustrations of Pride in all of Sayers' writing. Sayers takes the few facts that are recorded of him in scripture, and by making a number of reasonable inferences, creates a set of basic traits from which his attitudes and actions credibly emerge. In her introduction to this play she paints the outline of his character in firm, clear strokes:

He is infinitely the most intelligent of all the disciples, and has the boldness and drive that belong to a really imaginative brain. He can see the political possibilities of the Kingdom - but also, he can see at once (as none of the others can) the meaning of sin and repentance and the fearful paradox by which all human good is corrupted as soon as it comes to power. . . . He has the greatest possibilities of them all for good, and therefore for evil. He is an opportunist; and he is determined that when the Kingdom comes, he shall have the chief hand in the business. He will not follow John to Jesus - when he comes, it will be because he thinks the moment has come for him to take matters in hand. (69)

The "rare gift of humility" (80) of the disciple John, and the Humility which generally prevails among all the disciples, are in pointed contrast to the Pride of Judas, which becomes increasingly apparent as the sequence of plays progresses. Ironically, it is Judas himself who recognizes that John the Baptist's call to repentance means that "the false peace of the [proud] heart must be broken, and its complacency chastised" (82).

This second play directly addresses the nature of Sin through Jesus' account of His three temptations. The paradox of temptation - arising from inside, yet originating from an external source of evil - is reflected when Jesus says, "Something spoke in me that was not myself" (86). The evil of the first temptation (to use miraculous power "for one's self" by turning stones into bread) is the evil of self-indulgence which underlies the Sins of the Flesh - Gluttony, Lust, and certain forms of Sloth. In the second temptation the voice of "that Other" tempted Him to throw Himself from the pinnacle of the temple, in expectation of being borne up by angels. The voice said, "Prove to them what you are. . . . Prove it to yourself" (86). The evil underlying this temptation is defined by the scripture with which Christ pushes it back: "Thou shalt not put God to the proof," and by his explanation to the disciples, "He [God] must be trusted as a father and a *friend*" (emphasis added) (86). This, and the third temptation - which is to serve Satan in order to gain control of the whole world - are both appeals to Pride, but in different ways. In the second temptation God is impudently challenged; in the third there is an attempt to usurp His power.

Simon Peter is dismayed at the realization that worldly power is so vulnerable to temptation and corruption, and begins to fear for the restoration of "the Kingdom." The

problem is the disciples do not yet realize what "the Kingdom" of God actually is. Jesus must patiently, over a period of time, illustrate, exhort and rebuke until they finally understand. Here He illustrates the hidden nature of the Kingdom by likening it to the "silent and unseen" work of yeast, and tells them that it is based on the inward holiness which is to be "ruled by love". "Wherever there is love, there is the Kingdom of God" (87).

The third play, "A Certain Nobleman," comments on Sloth and Avarice. It has as its central character a man of excellent qualities - "full of family affection, kindly with servants" - but who "sits loosely to his religion" (92). He fails to wholeheartedly love that which is of highest value. This form of Sloth, however, is something he turns away from by the end of the play: "It's a fact - one ought to think more about religion" (100), "I've never . . . thought much about religion . . . I'll try . . . I'll listen to all you say and believe from my heart" (108).

There is a vehement rebuke of Avarice in the account of Jesus' cleansing of the temple. He violently drives out those who are using the house of God to line their own pockets, calling them "robbers and liars" (104). Avarice even makes an appearance in the lives of sincere and upright people like the disciples. When they begin to worry and quarrel about money (107) Jesus reminds them of the choice they have made, and must continue to make. By deciding to follow Him each of them has chosen to be a "friend" of God's Kingdom, and a person cannot truly love God and serve their own interests at the same time. In financial matters this simply means trusting in God's provision day by day. "Let the future look after itself," He says, and "[Remember] There's more in life than eating and drinking, and . . . clothing" (107).

In the introductory notes to the fourth play, "The Heirs to the Kingdom," Sayers clarifies the play's thematic structure and its relationship to the sequence as a whole: "The friends and foes of the Kingdom are now definitely ranging themselves in opposite camps" (112).

The disciples, the closest of the "friends," have seen most clearly the beauty of Christ's holiness which shows up Sin for what it is. This is made clear in Sayers' notes on Simon Peter's first meeting with Jesus: "It was just an astonishing catch of fish - and suddenly it came over him that he was a very ordinary sinful man faced with something so beautiful as to be quite unbearable" (112). Matthew, too, has been "swept off his feet by a heavenly kindness and beauty of mind which had never dawned, even as a possibility, on his sordid experience" (113). He has been a warm-hearted sinner, and he has never had a problem with Pride ("has no opinion of himself" 113). He is one whom Jesus especially likes for his "utmost sincerity without any sort of self-consciousness" (113).

Matthew makes an important observation, however, about the continuing tendency toward a particular Sin, even after one has broken out of its entrapment. The suggestion that his "worldly wisdom" might make him a suitable choice as the group's treasurer causes him to exclaim:

No, no, not me. Please, Master, don't let it be me. I've put money out of my mind, and I'd rather not have the handling of it. I was brought up bad, you see - and I've repented; but if I was to feel the silver in my fingers again, I wouldn't answer for myself. (118)

In this play, a surprising addition to the "friends" of the Kingdom is the Roman Centurion Proclus, whom we met in the first play, in Herod's court. "His religious opinions are confused," even though "his feelings are in the right place" (115). His reluctance to come to a conclusion and make a commitment is not a very serious instance of Sloth, for he is free of Pride, the Sin which fuels the deadliness of all the others. His Humility and his absolute confidence in Jesus' spiritual authority (130-31) cause Jesus to hold him up as a unique and "amazing" example of faith.

This is the play in which Judas begins to be important. Sayers explains that he means to be faithful to the "true light," but that because of his "sin of spiritual pride" he has no direct vision of that light. All he sees of it is "its reflection in the mirror of his

own brain . . . [which] will twist and distort the reflection" (114). After Judas's first meeting with the High Priest, Baruch the Zealot describes him as having "the weakness of all clever people . . . intellectual dishonesty springing from intellectual pride - the sin by which Adam fell" (128). Because of Pride this gifted man, who could have been the greatest friend of the Kingdom, will end as the worst foe - "the worst that is the corruption of the best" (114). Jesus recognizes that men like Judas are a risk that must be taken: "The great intellect must be let in, whatever its dangers" (114).

Much of Jesus' teaching in this fourth play is related to Sloth. He commends the wisdom, keenness, and reliability of "worldly people . . . [who] give their minds to what they are doing" (118). The absence of mental Sloth makes them more competent and productive than many of the "unworldly people" who serve God.

Even though Sin of the heart is more deadly than the outward evil it gives rise to, Jesus teaches that behaviour should never be viewed as a minor part of godliness. Heeding and obeying is the sign of true wisdom. A person who obeys Christ's commands is like a wise man who builds his house on a rock. The slothful man who "only listens and does nothing about it" is like the foolish man who builds his house upon sand only to have it destroyed by the wind and rain (129). The majority of the people remain slothful and uncommitted, and Jesus rebukes the idleness which is at the root of their failure to heed and obey: they are "like silly children running about in the streets" seeking to escape responsibility, and be continually entertained" (132). The seriousness of Sloth is apparent: the judgement of God will finally fall on them (132) for their neglect of the truth, and their failure to clearly align themselves with the "friends" of the Kingdom.

To be a friend of the Kingdom is to be a disciple. Discipleship has little appeal for the Slothful who seek an easy life, nor does it appeal to those who exercise no restraint on the Sins of Envy and Wrath. The law which underlies all Christ's teaching about the

Kingdom is the Law of Love: "Never hate . . . take no revenge . . . be generous [even to enemies] . . . Love even your enemies, do them all the good you can" (129).

The fifth play, "The Bread of Heaven," has much to say about hunger of various sorts. Judas's inner cravings are analyzed in the introductory notes. His gnawing Pride causes him to feel Envy toward the other disciples (136-137), and this serves to isolate him from the spiritual life of the group. By contrast, the Humility of Philip (one of the less gifted disciples) gives rise to spiritual authority - he is "allowed to work a miracle" (137).

Jesus' presentation of the Beatitudes occurs in this fourth play (143-4). As the medievals understood, there is a contrast between the Virtues which the beatitudes praise and the Seven Deadly Sins<sup>39</sup> - a contrast which may be seen as implicit in Sayers' rewording of this famous teaching.<sup>40</sup>

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). The poor are blessed in that "nothing [no attachment to money - Avarice] stands between them and the Kingdom."

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). Those that mourn and are sorrowful avoid the blight of spiritual numbness. Because they care and suffer "their souls are made strong through suffering." Their Virtue is opposite to the Sin of Sloth, for the slothful do not care enough to mourn.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). Those that are meek and humble "receive the world as a gift," whereas those that are driven by Pride strive to obtain and achieve things in their own strength.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6) Those who "long for holiness as a man longs for food . . . shall enjoy God's plenty" for they shun the Sin of Gluttony which places food and other forms of bodily gratification above the things which pertain to the spirit.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 3:7). They will receive Mercy for they do not Envy, and begrudge the happiness of others - instead they rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 3: 8). Such "single-hearted" individuals are free of the Lust which involves loving other persons in a perverse or excessive way (Introduction to Purgatory 66-67); therefore, they will be given a clear vision of God, who is their first and highest love.

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God (Matthew 3:9). Those who "establish peace," are the opposite of the Wrathful. Because they deal in Love rather than hate they "share of God's very nature."

These are the traits of those who are "friends" of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus goes on to speak of the unhappiness of those who are outside the Kingdom, who are rich, well-fed, and self-satisfied - there is "an emptiness in their souls that nothing can fill" (143-44). The image of hunger (with its relationship to the Sin of Gluttony) continues into the incident of the miraculous feeding, and recurs in Jesus' subsequent condemnation of those who place highest value on the wrong sort of food:

I don't think you came to look for me because of the miracles. You came because you ate the loaves and the fishes, and expected favours to come. How hard you work for earthly food, which is consumed and perishes! Work to win the food which builds up body and soul to everlasting !  
(153)

Christ miraculously provides physical bread for hungry people, but he praises those who hunger and crave for *spiritual* food. He announces that he is the "Bread of Life," and that the man who comes to Him shall never hunger and thirst again.

One man, however, who has come to Him, in the physical sense, has held back from trusting and loving Him completely. Towards the end of this fifth play we see Judas projecting his own egotism on to Jesus as he begins to fear that Jesus may be "merely preaching himself" (154).



The introductory notes to the sixth play, "The Feast of Tabernacles," tell us that Judas has now reached the point where he feels that "nothing will ever go right unless he is helping to pull the strings . . . everything has to be managed by himself" (159).

The notes also draw attention to the cold-hearted Pride of another character who is becoming increasingly important. Caiaphas, the High Priest is "completely unscrupulous . . . ice-cold, and egotistical" (160). Interestingly, Sayers chooses to show *Judas* confronting the High Priest's sinfulness. Having described Rome as the punishment of God on the Sins of Jewry, Judas taunts Caiaphas with the fact that he himself must "cringe to Caesar," and tells him, "That is the measure of your humiliation, and your sin" (175). Caiaphas, however, takes the insult calmly. When Judas has left, Caiaphas delights in the fact that Judas's Pride and Envy will allow them to use him for their own ends. He knows that "people with ideas are always jealous of their leaders" (176).

Wrath becomes an issue several times in the course of this play. First, the disciples, even John, become angry toward those who rejected their ministry. This Anger Jesus quickly identifies, not as righteous indignation, but as a wrongness of spirit (167). Forgiveness and Mercy must replace the spirit of vindictiveness if these men are to walk in obedience to the Kingdom's Law of Love. By the end of the play they have another chance to put this teaching into practice for they are confronted with an even greater degree of rejection. The Wrath of those who are enemies of the Kingdom has risen to nasty proportions (178).

In the seventh play, called "The Light and the Life," Judas plays a more minor role. He is shown, however, as becoming "genuinely tormented," and Sayers describes his mood as that of "a jealous husband" (184) - suspicious and resentful.

Martha of Bethany is also, like Judas, troubled by the Sins of Pride and Envy, but in a different way. Sayers labels her as "house-proud" (183). The Envy she feels toward her sister's freedom from housewifely anxieties seems very human and forgivable, but Jesus helps her see the wrongness of her resentful spirit by comparing her to the jealous

elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son (189). She repents of her Sins and recognizes the Pride at the root of her attitude. Her use of the terms "narrow," "exacting," and "self-righteous" to describe herself (189) shows she is developing Humility. Once Jesus has confronted her, she is quick to recognize Pride for the ugly thing it is.

Since Sayers has chosen to treat Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene as one and the same, Jesus' use of the Prodigal Son story in his correction of Martha (as a counterpart of the prodigal's elder brother) is especially appropriate. The exuberant sort of hedonism which comes through in Mary's description of her early life includes the Sins of Gluttony and Lust - "I loved the wrong things in the wrong way" (187) - but her Sin is warm-hearted, and easily redeemed. In her conversation with Jesus she recalls how meeting Him completely changed her life:

Did you know? my companions and I came there that day to mock you. We thought you would be sour and grim, hating all beauty and treating life as an enemy. But when I saw you, I was amazed. You were the only person there that was really alive. The rest of us were going about half dead - making the gestures of life, pretending to be real people. The life was not with us but with you - intense and shining, like the strong sun when it rises and turns the flames of our candles to pale smoke. And I wept and was ashamed, seeing myself such a thing of trash and tawdry. But when you spoke to me, I felt the flame of the sun in my heart. I came alive for the first time. And I love life all the more since I have learnt its meaning. (187)

In this speech the relationship between the two images of the play's title - Light and Life - is clearly defined, and the healthy, life-engendering quality of righteousness is boldly contrasted with the deadening sickness of Sin.

The Sin of Sloth makes an appearance in this seventh play. Here it takes the form of cowardliness. The parents of the blind man healed by Jesus are narrow, cringing people who "will take no responsibility for anything" (185). They do not care enough for truth, or for the health and happiness of their own son, to risk offending the religious authorities by speaking out honestly and acknowledging the miracle. Such people lack the courage to become "friends" of the Kingdom.

The note on Judas at the beginning of the eighth play, "Royal Progress," describes the crumbling of his intellectual idealism, and the open revelation of his sinful character. Sayers says, of his conversation with the elders,

He makes it clear that what he had admired in Jesus was not really Jesus at all, but only the projection of his own ideas in another person - 'my dreams - my prayers - all I had ever imagined'. What Judas really wanted was a Jesus who would interpret Judas to the world, under his guidance and direction. . . . Then, out come all the petty, personal grievances which have hurt his pride. . . . The idea of killing . . . flattering to his rather morbid theories about suffering. . . . [His] masochism . . . [can easily] become a kind of sadism - the worship of suffering for its own sake is not very far removed from the desire to inflict suffering. (208-09)

Sayers suggests that, because Judas has nothing left to believe in, he finds something to cling to by demanding a concrete commodity from these men - money. Judas, it seems, has never been completely free of Avarice. His complaint about the money wasted in the anointing of Jesus with costly perfume arises from his greed for money (John 12:6) *not* from concern for the poor - the reason he offers as an explanation for his obvious displeasure.

The Sin of Avarice is alluded to again when Jesus tells of a rich man who died, "and went to the place of torment," not because he was rich, but because he was heartless toward the poor. Avarice is also the issue when Jesus rebukes greedy brothers, and warns them to steer clear of covetousness (225), and again when He advises the rich young man to sell all he has, and come and follow Him. The young man leaves sadly, and Jesus agrees that he is to be pitied, for it is very hard for the wealthy who are so sorely tempted to "set store by riches" to overcome the Sin of Avarice and enter the Kingdom of God (227).

The contrasting Virtue is Liberality and compassion toward the needy. Jesus describes the day of judgement as a time when those who have shown kindness to the poor will be honoured and rewarded (224-25). He repeatedly emphasizes that Love is the highest of all Virtues, and that those who accept that truth are "not far from the Kingdom of God" (226). Man's first obligation is to love God with all his being, and his

second is to love his neighbour as himself. When there is genuine Love for God and for others the rest of the commandments "keep themselves," and there is no place for Sin (225-26).

In the ninth play, "The King's Supper," Judas's meanness and Pride contrast with Peter's complete generosity of spirit (237). Sayers describes Judas becoming hardened "into a fury of pride and anger" (239) as the Passover approaches. At the Passover meal Jesus gives His followers His most profound teaching on Humility. He himself assumes the role of a servant and washes their feet. He makes of the event an object lesson representing the spiritual cleansing He offers them. Hearing this, Peter impulsively demands that not just his feet, but his hands and head be washed also. Jesus explains that the unintentional lapses into Sin which occur daily in their lives do not necessitate a complete re-washing. Their original turning from Sin and embracing of Virtue when they began to follow Him is not reversed by every minor failure: "They who are already washed do not need to be washed again. Only their feet become travel-stained. When those are washed, they are clean altogether" (246). But one of them, Jesus reveals, "is not clean" (246). Though he allows Jesus to wash his feet, he has never been truly washed, spiritually.

In the tenth play, "The Princes of this World," the disciples are sorely tested. Disaster has struck, and their weakness and lack of courage is bitterly apparent. This is especially so for Peter who has so foolishly overestimated his own strength by declaring, "Even if everybody else should desert you, I never will" (253). John's Humility is greater than Peter's, and he does not try to excuse himself for fleeing at the time of Jesus' arrest.

In this play we are introduced to Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee, whose character represents a catalogue of Sins, including the hedonism of Gluttony and Lust, and the vicious cruelty born out of Envy and Wrath (263). Sloth is, however, his dominant trait; he has a "drawing, languid voice" and an empty, shallow mind: "He is

perfectly frivolous, with just enough cunning to avoid even the shadow of any responsibility for anything" (264).

In this play Judas is finally forced to face the truth about himself, and the truth about Sin (263). He comes to the realization that his refusal to believe in Christ was due to "the envy and hatred of innocence." He refuses to be saved, descending instead to the lowest level of Sin "where sits the devil of pride that makes the sin unforgivable because the sinner resents and hates and refuses the forgiveness" (263).

Caiaphas, the High Priest, is a different breed of sinner - one who is completely ruthless and "totally destitute of any sense of sin." Yet, the comment Sayers makes about Judas in the notes to the ninth play, may, I feel, be applied to both Caiaphas and Judas: both men "hated Jesus as the egoist hates God" (240).<sup>61</sup>

Such deliberate rejection of God's holiness is different from the rejection of Jesus by the crowd who shouted "Crucify him, crucify him!" In their case Sin arises from the mental Sloth that allows such mobs to become a tool in the hand of clever manipulators. But Sloth is a Deadly Sin, nonetheless, and their careless readiness to assume guilt - "His blood be upon us and upon our children" - is a chilling testimony to Sloth's ability to numb the soul to the awful reality of judgement.

In the last two plays, "The King of Sorrows" and "The King Comes to His Own," the focus is on the suffering of Christ, and His death and resurrection. For the friends of the Kingdom there is great emotional trauma and severe testing.

The characters of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus seem to represent a twilight zone between friends and foes, for they have a degree of indecisiveness which resembles the cowardliness of Sloth. Nicodemus habitually wavers and avoids risks, and Joseph lacks clarity and alertness - he "*almost* sees" (emphasis added) (289).

In the final play the difference between the two men becomes more apparent. Nicodemus recoils from the glimpse of truth he has been given; "the nemesis of a timid intellect has overtaken him . . . confronted with the unimaginable thing . . . his reason

cracks" (322). His distraught raving, however, indicates that at a deep subconscious level he has known for some time that Jesus was "the Lord's anointed," and that he is overcome by the horror of what they have done to Him. Joseph is a stronger individual. His timidity lessens as events build up to the final climax, and his last words are a pointed challenge to Caiaphas (322, 334).

In contrast with Nicodemus and Joseph, Baruch the Zealot, who has appeared in many of the plays, is far from timid and hesitant. His Sin is at the opposite pole from the passivity of Sloth for it evokes aggressive emotion. He deals in Wrath. Judas is now out of the picture, but the Zealot's business of strife-mongering continues to stir up bitter Anger against Rome (290, 295-96).

The crucifixion of Christ is the greatest example of wrong doing in the whole of the play sequence. The responsibility for this crime - which Sayers calls "the judicial murder of God" - must be shared by a number of groups and individuals: Judas, the mob at the trials, the Jewish priests, and even the Roman authorities. The Roman governor Pilate "washed his hands" - literally and, he thought, figuratively - of personal responsibility for the death of Christ. Sayers recognizes, however, that the gesture did not leave him guiltless. Pilate, although decent, fair, and clear-headed, is motivated by his personal ambitions. He "has blotted his own record in the past by tactless dealing with the people he rules and despises" (264). Thus the accusation that his present sympathy with this self-proclaimed "King" puts him in a position of disloyalty to Caesar frightens and defeats him. Self-interest corrupts his judgement; he is "not big enough to smash his way out of a compromising situation" (265).

In the eleventh play, Sayers uses the frightening dream of Pilate's wife to convey the idea that, despite the hand washing, this Roman governor will be "relentlessly condemned" (292) by generation after generation of Christians in their repeating of the Apostles Creed:

... in all tongues and all voices ... even the little children with their mothers....

(*Children's voices*: 'Suffered under Pontius Pilate ... sub Pontio Pilato ... crucifié sous Ponce Pilate ... gekreuzigt unter Pontius Pilatus ...') (310)

Dr. Welch records the powerful impact of this play, and of the sequence as a whole:

... even supporters of the plays flinched and shrank from the glimpse of the Crucifixion we were given in the eleventh play. . . . We *dare* not 'behold the Man'; we dare only behold our easy and comfortable version of him. . . . Again and again when the figure of Christ in these plays faced one with a direct challenge one's reaction was 'No! not that, anything but that!' . . . [He is] a veritable Hound of Heaven. The eleventh play, on the Crucifixion, though it only hinted at the physical horror we were spared, was almost unbearable because the stupidity and brutality of the ordinary man and woman in the crowd convicted *us*. (Foreword The Man Born to Be King 16)

In this play one of the Magi, Balthazar, has come back to witness the fulfillment of his prophetic vision of sorrow, suffering, and death. Mary had told him, in the first play, that her Son would take his sorrows for His own (59). The King who gave the gift of myrrh, a spice used to embalm the dead, watches as the soldiers take Jesus' body from the cross. Mary recognizes Balthazar as she gathers her dead Son into her arms. She tells him that these nail-pierced hands are "the baby hands that closed upon your gift of myrrh" (312). In the first play Joseph had observed, "Myrrh is for love also" (59). His Love led Him to this destiny for which He was born - to be 'King of Sorrows.'

The last play is "The King Comes to His Own." In her commentary, Sayers points out that doors play an important part in the last play: "[It] contains a good deal about doors, and knockings at doors. It is, in fact, a play about the door between two worlds" (317). It is the friends of the Kingdom to whom these doors are open. They are ordinary people who make many blunders, but they are also identified with the Virtues that Christ represented, especially with the highest Virtue, Love. Next to Love and dependent on it, is Humility. These qualities are especially evident in the followers of Jesus in this last play, and it is to such *humble lovers* as these that the doors of resurrection, revelation, and righteousness are opened:

SALOME: The tomb's been opened . . . (327)

JOHN: . . . Risen and gone! - O Jesus! my friend and my living Lord!  
(330)

MARY MAGDALENE: Rabboni! (331)

CLEOPHAS: Then he took the bread . . . we saw his hands - and the  
marks of the nails were in them. (337)

JESUS: I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and am known by  
them. All of them. From the beginning of the world, and  
forever... (338)

. . . You are not slaves, but sons. Free to be false or faithful. . . (340)

. . . are you in truth my friend? Follow me. (342)

In The Man Born to Be King many individuals come into contact with a man who is "at once perfect Innocence and perfect Charity" in whom they see "the pattern of the Cross as the pattern of life" (letter to Welch, 11 November 1943). They all must choose, sooner or later, whether they will be a part of His Kingdom, or an enemy. The choice between Deadly Sin and life-giving Virtue becomes very personal because it is a choice based on Love for *a person*. Simon Peter, John, Philip, and the others become friends of the Kingdom, but not because they consciously avoid the Sins of Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, and self indulgence. Their choice and their goal was simply to Love and to "follow."

They had made this choice at the beginning, but much has changed in the three years that they have been with Jesus. Now, they must re-affirm their initial choice, having witnessed the Cross and therefore knowing more fully what loyalty to God's Kingdom will cost them. Jesus, the Man Born to Be their King, promises to be with them "even unto the end of the world" (342).

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Even though The Man Born to be King occupied much of Dorothy Sayers' time during 1942, and increasing difficulties due to the war limited her activities between



1943 and 1945, she continued to give lectures, to write to and for the papers, and to write book introductions and reviews.

She was still very supportive of the war effort, and the importance of a proper work ethic and a right view of the war were recurring subjects. In "Work - Taskmaster or Liberator" (June 1942) she continued to stress the wrongness of evaluating work by "a purely money standard," and the need for all forms of labour (even that of a factory worker) to offer challenge and promote initiative. A 1943 essay "They Tried to be Good" affirms the uprightness of the English involvement in the war, and blames the "Enlightened Opinion" of modern thinkers for the condemnation of Britain's actions early in the war - condemnation which, Sayers believed, intimidated the British and curtailed their effectiveness. Sayers traces this "mischief-making" to "Progressive Humanism [which] had been proclaiming for years that ". . . there were no sinful men; indeed, there was no such thing as sin." She argues that when Hitler went so far that it became apparent to everyone that "Germany was really being wicked" public confidence in Progressive Humanism and the Perfectibility of Man collapsed, and the war was seen in its true light - as essentially a struggle of good against evil.

Sayers' foreword to Garet Garrett's A Time is Born (1945) comments on the wasteful consumption which, before the war, had become an accepted part of twentieth century life:

The exhortations to spend became vociferous; the old morality was stood on its head: thrift was no longer a virtue, but a crime against progress - to buy and scrap and buy afresh became the mark of the good citizen. (vi)

In "The Other Six Deadly Sins" she had identified such ravenous consumption of manufactured goods as a form of the Deadly Sin of Gluttony, and a very negative trend in pre-war society. The title of Garrett's book alludes to the hope for a better way of life in the post-war world. Sayers believed this could only materialize if people recognized the wrongness of this greedy demand for "wasteful luxuries."

Although Sayers' devoted much of her energy to commenting on what she saw as current and pertinent issues, she had not lost her interest in creative writing. Christian drama, in particular, was still dear to her heart. In June of 1943 she gave a lecture on drama at St. Anne's House, Soho<sup>62</sup> which was part of a series involving a number of speakers. The general topic was "Christian Faith and Contemporary Culture," and Sayers' subject was "Church and Theatre." The content of this lecture is reproduced in a series of three articles entitled "Sacred Plays" published in 1955 (Gilbert 219). Although the 1955 articles are clearly a re-written version of her earlier St. Anne's presentation<sup>63</sup> they represent the general view of "Church and Theatre" which she shared with her audience in 1943.

She begins the first article by speaking of the greatness of the Christian "myth":

[Christianity] is unique among religions in this; that its myth is a part of history. The events of that myth have a date in time as well as a position in terrestrial space. . . . That is why it is impossible to treat Christianity as a purely 'spiritual' religion. Whether we deny it or accept it, we have to come to terms with history. . . . A myth is not necessarily a fiction, but it is a story - in the Christian case, it is a true story: The central, veritable, and unique myth from which all other myths derive whatever shadows of truth they may contain. (*The Episcopal Churchman* 6 January 1955: 20)

She goes on to explain, in a passage we noted earlier<sup>64</sup>, that her interest in Christian drama is limited to plays which "offer an explanation of the human problem in terms of the universal creed of Christendom." She sees as worthless those which seek to provide "vaguely metaphysical uplift" (21).

In the second article of the series "Sacred Plays" Sayers addresses a very basic problem facing Christian playwrights: people no longer know the basic facts of the Christian story - "ignorance of the Christian assumptions . . . rests upon ignorance of the Myth." Their minds are full of "totally false conceptions" regarding Christian beliefs:

They do not know what is meant by redemption or atonement . . . not only do they repudiate the idea of sin - they simply do not know what Christians mean by the word; and their moral code has in many cases departed so far from Christian standards that any solution of a moral problem based on Christian assumptions is merely unintelligible to them.

Within my lifetime, for instance, it has become possible to distinguish Christians from non-Christians simply by the attitude they take to such virtues as Humility, Patience, Reverence and Joy - for the most part they take them to be vices, standing in the way of the qualities of Leadership, Progress, Envy (which they call Equality) and Rebellion which they have been taught to admire. (23 January 1955: 24)

A clear grasp of the orthodox Christian view of virtue and vice was in her opinion a basic requirement for the understanding of Christian drama.

She goes on to discuss the three types of plays which were part of the current revival of Christian drama - Mystery, Miracle, and Morality. Sayers proposes that the Morality play is most likely to pose problems for those who lack a basic understanding of the Christian "Myth." The Miracle play has certain advantages: a chorus or interpreter can be used to "state explicitly the relation of the human problem to the Myth." Its main disadvantage is that its use of the supernatural may cause modern audiences to dismiss it as something "picturesque" but irrelevant (24).

She sees the Mystery play as the most important of the three:

The Mystery - the direct presentation of the Myth on which all else depends - is the thing which presents (at this time and in England) the greatest practical difficulties; but it is probably the most essential of all. People will not go to Church, they will not read the Bible, they will not listen to sermons - but they will flock in thousands to see the great Mystery cycle at York; and they will turn on the radio . . . to listen to The Man Born to be King. (23 January 1955: 24-25)

Sayers' two greatest dramatic works were Mystery plays. In the first article of the "Sacred Plays" series she suggests that The Man Born to be King is "the nearest modern approach to a genuine Mystery Cycle." Since, however, it deals only with the life of Christ she calls it "a poor, truncated affair compared with the great medieval cycles which embrace the entire myth, from the Creation to the Last Judgement." She goes on to point out that another of her plays is truer to the form in another sense:

Nearer . . . to the intention of the original type is my Lichfield Passion: The Just Vengeance, in which a brief summary of the Myth, extending from the Fall to the Particular Judgement, is embedded in a dramatic framework of local history and a modern problem of conduct. This, however, is a work of a mixed type, rather than a Mystery proper. (6 January 1955: 22,35)

### The Just Vengeance<sup>66</sup>

This is the play which Sayers regarded as her masterpiece (Reynolds, The Passionate Intellect 97). It was written to be performed at a festival in honour of the 750th anniversary of Lichfield Cathedral, an event initially planned for 1945, but postponed until 1946 because of the war (Reynolds 82). Planning for the event began in August of 1943. Before the middle of 1944 Sayers had been approached, and she had agreed to write the play. By June she had decided that this time, in spite of the legal ruling against the depiction of the person of Christ on any theatre stage,<sup>66</sup> she would introduce Christ as a visible character (Reynolds 83). She began researching the history of Lichfield, but was not, for some time, able to decide on a specific subject for the play.

By August a new interest had come into her life which was not only to inspire the theme and content of her Lichfield play, but also to dominate the remaining fourteen years of her life: she had discovered, and come to love, Dante's Divine Comedy.

Barbara Reynolds explains how Sayers' passionate absorption with The Divine Comedy led to her writing of The Just Vengeance:

At the back of her mind she was on the look-out for a central idea which should pull together all the disparate fragments she had gathered from her preparatory reading. . . . Certain lines in Canto VII [of Paradise] caught her eye: . . . they seem, she says [in a letter to Charles Williams], 'to get down to something absolutely central.' (The Passionate Intellect 84)

Lines 88 to 93 of Canto VI described God "wreaking vengeance" on those responsible for the death of Christ by allowing the Emperor Titus to destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Now, in Canto VII, Sayers' attention was caught by Beatrice's explanation to Dante that although the crucifixion was *just* in the sense that it was part of God's plan for the redemption of man that Christ should assume man's guilt and be his substitute, it was *unjust* in another sense:

Thus was the doom inflicted by the Cross,  
If measured by the nature so assumed,  
The most just penalty that ever was.

Yet judgement ne'er so monstiously presumed,  
If we reflect who bore the punishment,  
Being joined in person with the nature doomed.  
(VII. 40-45)

Here a fascinating paradox is created around the concept of vengeance: the crucifixion was itself a "just vengeance" in which the sinful nature of man (assumed by Christ) was punished by God, but the human agents who made the crucifixion possible were themselves justly punished by God for their crime against His Son.

Reynolds points out that in taking this as the theme of her Lichfield play Sayers develops a new angle of the concept - "man's response to God's sacrifice, a willingness to accept and offer up suffering in turn" (87).<sup>67</sup> She was familiar with the scriptural teaching that we must share in Christ's suffering if we are also to share in His resurrected life, and with the words of Thomas à Kempis: "Whoso will carry the Cross, the Cross shall carry him." From these ideas she developed the theme of her play: divine justice and the suffering of the innocent (Reynolds 88).

By December 1944 she had begun translating The Divine Comedy (Reynolds 42), an immensely absorbing project which was to continue until her death in December 1957. Nonetheless, she found time during 1945 to write The Just Vengeance. Even though she probably did not finish it until late in 1945 and it was not produced until June of 1946 (almost a year after the end of the war), this play belongs essentially to the war period.

The central character is an Airman who has been shot down in combat, and who dies confused and angry because of all that he has witnessed and suffered. After death his spirit returns to his city, Lichfield, where he is met by characters from the city's past, and shown a series of images which lead him to understanding and repentance.

Reynolds quotes Marcus Wichelow, an actor involved in the Lichfield production, on the relevance of the play to those who had just returned from a traumatic war experience:

It was exactly right for the time. There we were; we had come through the war, but many of our friends had not. Like the Airman, we were bewildered. The play captured the atmosphere of the period and was above all clear; we knew exactly what it was all about. It united us all. (The Passionate Intellect 92)

In her introduction to the play Sayers says that it concerns "Man's insufficiency and God's redemption act, set against the background of contemporary crises" (280). She summarizes the unusual plot thus:

The whole action takes place in the moment of the death of an Airman shot down during the late war. In that moment, his spirit finds itself drawn into the fellowship of his native city of Lichfield; there, being shown in an image the meaning of the Atonement, he accepts the Cross, and passes, in that act of choice, from the image to the reality. (280)

In showing "the meaning of the Atonement" this play directly relates to our theme of Sin.

George Fox, the Quaker, is the chief interpreter of the images the Airman is shown, and Fox tells him, very early in the action, why he has been allowed to return to his city in his moment of death:

Friend, it is very well that thou hadst a concernment  
For this or for that; they that are concerned for nothing  
Do not come back to this city or any other. (284)

Although his concern means that he is not guilty of the Deadly Sin of Sloth, the Airman recognizes that he can't class himself with "righteous people" like George Fox. He feels that he has been trapped in a situation where the only choice was between evil and evil:

... if we do wrong, or even if we do nothing,  
It comes to the same in the end. We drop a bomb  
And condemn a thousand people to sudden death,  
The guiltless along with the guilty. Or if we refuse  
To drop a bomb, and condemn a thousand people  
To a lingering death in a concentration camp. . . .  
We have no choice between killing and not killing;  
We can only choose which set of people to kill -  
And even at that, the choice is made for us;  
I did not choose; perhaps I ought to have chosen?  
I was told to go and I went. I killed; I was killed.  
Did any of us deserve it? I don't know.  
You can stand there and say your hands are clean;  
I cannot. But you were lucky. You could be meek  
And go to prison, and not take others with you. (288)

This same feeling of being both a victim and a sinner is echoed by the individuals from Lichfield history who make up the Chorus.

The angel who is the Recorder of the City clarifies one aspect of the issue when he tells the Airman, "What matters here is not so much what you did / As why you did it" (295). This is so because essential sinfulness - the Deadly Sins - are intents of the heart rather than outward actions.

Belief is also of the heart, and the Airman is forced to examine his own inner state, and try to sort out the confusion in his personal creed. He is angered by the suffering of all the people he has seen "crucified" (296), but he longs to believe in justice, "a just world where everyone will be happy" (297). As he tries to shift the blame for the chaos in the world to those who lived before him, the people of the Chorus, one generation after another, shift the blame backward in time in the same way. The Airman catches a glimpse of the central truth, that he is not yet prepared to accept, when he says it seems "as though there were something wrong with Man himself" (298). He asks angrily "why it is that everything we do turns to a horror we never contemplated."<sup>68</sup> He feels he has a right to know "what it is all about" (299).

In the first stage of the Airman's instruction, through images, he is shown Adam and Eve. He is told by Eve that their choice - which was a choice to experience evil - resulted in good things being perverted into suffering and Sin: love became possession, Lust, and jealousy; the good luck of others engendered Envy; and the appetites of the body ("holy and glorious flesh") became death-ridden. Because Adam views Eve's part in the Fall as a Sin of the intellect, he denies her the right to exercise her intellect: "Women must have no further opportunity - / They can't be trusted" (306). In this Sayers creates an archetypal image of the Envy which causes men to belittle the intellectual capacity of women.

Next the Airman is confronted with the story of Cain in which the Deadly Sins of Pride, Envy, and Wrath lead to the first murder. In Sayers' re-telling of the story the first

tool invented by man, an axe, becomes the first weapon - another example of evil as a perversion of good. Cain and Abel become symbols of man's dual role as wrong-doer and victim. The Recorder asks,

... Do not you all  
Suffer with Abel and destroy with Cain,  
Each one at once the victim and the avenger  
Till Cain is Abel, being condemned for Abel,  
And Abel Cain, in the condemning of Cain? (314)

The Chorus identifies with Cain and Abel, and they cry out for justice on behalf of both.

Eve alone perceives the folly of such a demand. "Children, take heed," she says, "And do not pray for justice; you might get it" (315). She senses that there is something higher than justice - "a kind of mercy that is not unjust" (315). The Chorus echoes Adam's prayer that God would somehow roll back the Sins that "shut out the face of Heaven" (316).

Again, Sin is pictured as a perversion of goodness, as Adam pleads for deliverance

From the proud virtues that are our undoing,  
From the harsh righteousness whose name is murder,  
From the liberality whose name is treason ... (317)

The Chorus joins in the cry of repentance and desperation, and in response to the urgency of their need the Gates of Heaven open to reveal the Persona Dei, who introduces Himself as "the image of the Unimaginable" (318). In Him, God shall submit to man, and experience evil. In this great paradox "God shall see God's face set like a flint / Against Him" (319). This Persona Dei, the Son of God, promises that He will bear their Sin and carry their sorrow, and that He will also redeem evil into good. There is, however, one requirement of man:

... But all this  
Still at your choice, and only as you choose,  
Save as you choose to let me choose in you.  
Who then will choose to be the chosen of God,  
And will to bear Me that I may bear you? (319)

At this point a new set of images is introduced. The Airman is given a glimpse, from the viewpoint of Mary, of Christ's coming into the world. This is followed quickly



by images of His earthly ministry, and those who chose to oppose it. The Persona Dei makes the options clear, as well as the magnitude of the consequences:

. . . What you choose  
You choose, and it is yours for ever - that  
Is the great Law, of which no jot or tittle  
Changes. But if you choose Me, you choose Love. (328)

While Judas bargains with the enemies of Jesus, the Airman addresses Him for the first time, asking how the law of goodness can be kept by imperfect man. It is one of the most basic of theological issues: How can a man, with the inherited fallen nature (full of Pride, Envy, Wrath, Avarice and the Sins of the flesh), ever overcome his sinfulness and become righteous?

. . . Will the seed of Cain  
Forgive, or seek forgiveness, or be meek?  
Was it worthwhile - forgive my bluntness, sir -  
That God should be made man, only to say  
To man, 'Be perfect,' when it can't be done? (329)

Christ's answer is Himself:

Only Myself can keep My law in you;  
Merely to hear my words and nod approval  
Is nothing - 'tis a house that's built on sand.  
I must be closer to you than your marrow. . . .  
I give My body to be broken for you  
That I, in you, may break and give yourselves  
For all the world. (329)

The next set of images shows the trial and abuse of Christ. In this sequence the Airman undergoes a shocking encounter with his real self when he finds himself shouting, "Crucify! crucify!" along with the angry mob. Although he never intended to say such a thing, the words lead to the acknowledgement of his own Sin. He recognizes that he cannot disassociate himself from the mass of humanity whose Sins, in one way or another, brought Christ to the cross. But, even as He stands condemned to die, the Persona Dei addresses the crowd, and certain specific individuals, declaring His authority over the power of Sin:

Give Me the greedy heart and the little creeping treasons,  
Give Me the proud heart and the blind, obstinate eyes (to Caiaphas);  
Give Me the shallow heart, and the vain lust, and the folly (to Herod);  
Give Me the coward heart and the spiritless refusals (to Pilate);  
Give Me the confused self that you can do nothing with; I can do something.  
(339)

The reply Caiaphas makes to these words represents the Pride of all those who are beyond help because they refuse to acknowledge their Sin: "I am not a sinner; I have nothing to reproach myself with" (340). The replies of Pilate and Herod confirm their unredeemable commitment to their characteristic versions of the Sin of Sloth (339-40).

Yet the words of the Chorus, as the cross is bound on the back of the Persona Dei, make it plain that the Sins of those very men, along with the Sins of Cain and Judas, and the Sins of all mankind are here bound "on the back of God" (341-42).

As, one by one, individuals from the Chorus volunteer to share in the suffering, burden, and shame of the cross-laden Persona Dei, the Airman too arrives at a turning point:

Sir, I understand now what I ought to do.  
Am I too late to bring to the wood of Your Cross  
Whatever in me is guilty and ought to be crucified?  
Whatever, being innocent, is privileged to die in your Death?  
(345)

He is not too late. The Persona Dei invites him to be one of those who in taking up the Cross are, as Thomas à Kempis says, themselves carried by the Cross.

The Airman watches the soldiers crucify the Son of God. He stands with Mary at the foot of the Cross and assumes the role of John the beloved disciple to whom Jesus commits the care of His own mother. The Airman speaks for all the individuals who make up the Church. Though they are not without Sin, they suffer and endure, and trust that their willingness to be identified with Christ in His death will "turn necessity into [the] glorious gain" of salvation (346). He understands now how a man may overcome Sin and possess righteousness:

Look now! we are but thieves of righteousness,  
Pocketing up Your merits as our own

And from Your treasure paying back to You  
The debt we owe You. (346)

As the Persona Dei hangs on the Cross the Airman vicariously suffers with Him the "dying into life," and the "wringing horror" of the justice which must be endured. He comes at last to the terrible "helpless moment / When there is nothing to do but let go" (348).

The last images are those of the Resurrection and Ascension. The risen Persona Dei invites those who chose Him, and allowed Him to choose for them, to enter into the freedom, beauty, and power of holiness which has taken the place of the bondage, ugliness, and futility of Sin:

Come then, and take again your own sweet will  
That once was buried in the spicy grave  
With Me, and now is risen with Me, more sweet  
Than myrrh and cassia; come, receive again  
All your desires, but better than your dreams,  
All your lost loves, but lovelier than you knew,  
All your fond hopes, but higher than your hearts  
Could dare to frame them; all your City of God  
Built by your faith, but nobler than you planned,  
Instead of your justice, you shall have charity;  
Instead of your happiness you shall have joy;  
Instead of your peace the emulous exchange  
Of love; and I will give you the morning star.  
(350-51)

The message of The Just Vengeance is a profound one. Coming at the end of Sayers' large volume of war-time writing, it is appropriate that it should portray so vividly the limitations of human nature and its inherent sinfulness. The Just Vengeance shows that salvation is available to all men, but that it is found, not in suppressing and avoiding evil, but in identifying oneself with Christ's suffering and death, and appropriating His righteousness. Thus it provides a fitting conclusion to Sayers' war time theme of evil being *redeemed* into good through suffering.

## CHAPTER TEN

### The Last Twelve Years: 1946-1957

It was during an air-raid in the summer of 1944 that Dorothy Sayers began to read The Divine Comedy. She had recently been impressed by Charles Williams' book The Figure of Beatrice, but her resolve to read the Italian classic for herself was not kept until the day she quickly chose it to take with her to the air-raid shelter in her home. As Barbara Reynolds has shown (The Passionate Intellect Chapter 1), her mind had been well "prepared" for this work which was to be the greatest influence on her in the latter years of her life.

From this point on Sayers' energies were devoted almost entirely to translating The Divine Comedy and lecturing on Dante. The last twelve years before her death were not a winding down of her career. Instead they were climactic. She was totally committed to a task which was creatively and intellectually fulfilling, and which, also, she was convinced, spiritually and educationally valuable:

Dante, the greatest Christian poet, the pre-Tridentine Catholic European, had a vital message, in her eyes, for the modern world. It was not sufficient that he should be accessible only to those who could read Italian, or to a closed society of scholars. Her lectures on Dante, delivered between 1946 and the year of her death, were also marked by this serious approach. She took Dante, as she took the Gospel story, seriously. In this she was unique. . . . She had found a way of speaking out on matters of moral and social concern while at the same time doing her 'proper job', namely, using her literary and critical skills. (Reynolds, Dorothy L. Sayers 355-56)

There was, nonetheless, a high degree of continuity between the things that concerned her during the war and after it, for what she had found in Dante was someone who illuminated, superbly, basic truths that she had long been aware of - one of these was the reality of Sin.

An Ash Wednesday address given in March of 1946, entitled "Making Sense of the Universe," illustrates her continuing desire to show that theological truths applied to real life. The lecture initially addresses the widespread problem of post-war disillusionment:

... to ninety-nine people out of a hundred to-day, the world, and man's life, and man's place in the world have come to appear completely irrational. . . . They see man surrounded by what appear to be vast impersonal forces which he cannot control . . . they see his noblest aspirations and his finest ideals either helplessly frustrated or else turning in a hideous and incomprehensible way into the very thing he most dreads and dislikes. (3-4)

Humanism, Sayers goes on to say, has been leading people astray for three hundred years by encouraging an optimistic faith in Man that is irrational and contradicted by all experience. It is the "Christian revelation" which makes sense of the universe, and "gives the power to put the wrong things right" (5). The Church teaches that man is diseased, the disease is called Sin, but that "the disease is curable" (11).

Sayers' journalistic output was meager in the late forties and early fifties, but the few articles and press letters she produced reveal that her intense absorption in The Divine Comedy had not altered her emphasis. Pride, Envy, and Sloth continued to be the Sins that concerned her most.

Two letters on art and criticism submitted to The New English Weekly (April and May, 1946) argue that critics are often too proud and too envious to acknowledge the true merit of high quality literary works. By encouraging readers not to be "fooled into veneration" such critics, Sayers says, have "robbed us of a rich source of human happiness, without adding a cubit to our stature."

The July 1946 "Letter to Average People" is one of her most strongly worded attacks on mental and spiritual Sloth:

I do not care whether you believe in Christianity or not, but I do resent your being so ignorant, lazy and unintelligent. Why don't you take the trouble to find out what Christianity is and what it isn't? . . . Why don't you do a hand's turn for yourselves, confound you? You would be ashamed to know as little about internal combustion as you do about the Nicene Creed. . . . Go away and do some work, and let me get on with mine.

In a letter to the BBC Quarterly on "Problems of Religious Broadcasting" (April 1947, 29-31) Sayers complains that the majority of Christians are emotionally committed to their faith without having an adequate intellectual grasp of it, divorcing "the head . . . from the heart and the bowels." The same letter attacks another manifestation of Sloth, which she later described in her notes on Purgatory as "that acquiescence in evil and error which readily disguises itself as Tolerance" (209). Sayers admits that the BBC has every right to allot time "to the exposition of other philosophies, from Anthroposophy . . . to Zoroastrianism," but strongly asserts that "religious" broadcasting in a "Christian country" has no business displaying "a shop-window of assorted ways to salvation."

Her implied criticism of "the persons in charge of the religious programming" of the BBC provoked a reply from the Rev. Kenneth Grayson, Acting Director of that department, accusing her of "sturdily wading into " an exhibitionist sort of pseudo-battle, merely for the fun of it. In his opinion no real conflict existed. Her reply, in the July issue of the BBC Quarterly, makes it very clear that at this point in her life Dorothy L. Sayers viewed the tensions between good and evil, and between truth and error, (even within the official confines of the Church) as an outright *war*. She makes no more apology for assuming an aggressive stance than a soldier in the front lines of battle would:

The enemy is quite real; we of the laity who live in enemy-occupied country know his name and face and strategy only too well, and shall be happy to point him out, in case Mr. Grayson has failed to notice him. . . . [Mr. Grayson] may rest assured that we are waging neither a sham war, nor a war against him, *sed adversus mundi rectores tenebrarum harum, contra spiritualia nequitiae, in caelestibus* [but we wrestle against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places].

Although she was always concerned about the immediate issues of modern life, Sayers was becoming more convinced than ever that the wisdom of medieval scholars had lasting value. In the summer of 1947 she was asked to give a lecture at a vacation course in education, which was held at Oxford. She spoke on "The Lost Tools of Learn-

ing." (The talk was published as a book by Methuen in 1948.) The topic allowed her to draw attention to the failures of the modern education system and to positive aspects of the medieval system. She suggested that perhaps we can, in some senses, return to the Middle Ages, and that a modern, modified form of the Trivium might be the best means of recovering the lost tools of learning.

In 1946 Sayers had given two scholarly lectures on Dante, the first of many. In February of 1947 she addressed the history society of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. Her lecture, "The City of Dis,"<sup>68</sup> explains the arrangement of the descending levels of Hell. Dante's plan of the levels - which progress downward from one sort of Sin to another, each worse than the one before - is not simply a parallel, in reverse, of the way the Seven Deadly Sins are purged on ascending levels in Purgatory, nor should it be:

From the purely narrative point of view, no poet, not even Dante with his passion for symmetry, could easily face the task of going through exactly the same list of sins twice over with no variation except that between upside-down and right side up. . . . the dogmatic reason for the difference . . . [is] that whereas in Hell evil deeds are punished, in Purgatory evil tendencies are corrected. (*Introductory Papers on Dante* 129)

Nonetheless, there is an overlap in the depiction of Sin in Hell and Purgatory. This lecture on Hell deals with a number of the Deadly Sins, or sinful tendencies, which are treated more fully in Purgatory. The description, given in Hell, of particular Sins is of interest because the ultimate value of Dante's narrative is found in its allegorical application. "The map of Hell," Sayers says, "is the map of the black heart" (130).

In the first levels of Hell we recognize various forms of Sloth.

The Vestibule is very crowded. . . . Here are the people who never come to any decision. . . . wide-minded tolerance and freedom from bigotry and dogmatism. . . . they discuss everything, but come to no conclusion. . . . They shrink from responsibility. (132)

In the First Circle we find those "who cannot trust the universe" and are therefore "strangers to ecstasy," and guilty of "the rejection of eternal joy" (133).<sup>70</sup>

In the Second Circle are the lustful. Their Sin is based on "mutual indulgence - the self-indulgence of indulging other people" (134). Sayers delineates the broad arena of this very deceptive Sin, which includes much more than sexual indulgence:

The sin, you see, looks convincingly like self-sacrifice. One gives way to one's lover out of pity, and damns him with the kindest intentions. One indulges one's children to their hurt because you cannot bear to give them a moment's unhappiness. One writes and speaks no matter what foolishness, because one's public turns up an eager face and must not be disappointed . . . lusting ourselves for their grateful appreciation. We love them, we say, and like to see them happy. We devote ourselves . . . It is a sweet and swooning agony of pity and self-pity. (135)

The Third Circle is the Circle of the Gluttons. This is a more serious Sin because "the appetite, once offered and shared, has now become appetite pure and simple, indulged for its own sake" (135). Such sinners, however, like those of the previous levels, are seldom condemned by modern society:

They have an engaging egotism; they demand so amiably and seem to get so much out of life that we feel they have hit on the right attitude to the world of things. They have, in fact, a high standard of living - and that, we agree, is the thing to aim at. . . . If Dante had seen a civilization that understood beatitude only in terms of cinemas and silk stockings and electric cookers and radiators and cars and cocktails, would it have surprised him to find it all of a sudden waking to the realization that, having pursued these ideals with all its might, it was inexplicably left cold, hungry, bored, resentful and savage? Probably not, for he described Gluttony so. For Dante, the punishment of sin is the sin itself; the Gluttons lie prostrate under an eternal drench of rain and sleet and snow, and Cerberus, the embodied appetite which ruled them, rules them still, yelping and tearing them. (135)

In the Fourth Circle of Dante's Hell Avarice is punished, and in the Fifth, Wrath. Avarice in its simplest sense is the hoarding of money, but here squandering is punished along with hoarding as the opposite side of the same coin, since both are selfish appetites gratified through the misuse of money. The Wrathful are of two different sorts, too: one group is "active and ferocious" venting itself "in sheer lust for inflicting pain and destruction", while the other group is "passive and sullen . . . gurgling its inarticulate hymn of Hate" (136-37).



These are the last of the Circles of Incontinence which make up Upper Hell. Below is Nether Hell in which the Sins are no longer those of self-indulgence, (which are roughly parallel to those which Sayers earlier called "warm-hearted Sins"). Now "evil has become conscious of itself . . . the will is awake and the consent is deliberate" (138). In these lower levels of Hell we see images of souls in which "the will is set in obduracy; it no longer drifts at the service of the appetite but drives and uses it" (140).

In the first circle of Nether (or Lower) Hell we meet an aggressively defiant character who represents the Sin which dominates the lower regions of Hell - Pride:

He is Dante's first great image of Pride - the first image of the dark, Satanic facade of nobility that almost persuades us to be of the devil's party. People have asked where, in the *Inferno*, is the punishment of the proud? The answer is in Upper Hell, nowhere; in Nether Hell, everywhere. All the Sins that justify themselves are proud sins. But, as hell deepens, we shall see the progressive degeneration of Pride. (140)

Pride, although the root of *all* the Sins, is especially associated with the cold-hearted, spiritual Sins. These more serious forms of sinfulness are punished at these deeper levels, and we go down, down, till we come to "the final image of Pride": the total ruin of one that was "fairest of the sons of light" - Satan himself.

In 1947 Sayers lectured on two aspects of "Dante's Imagery" - the Symbolic and the Pictorial - at the Society for Italian Studies Summer School at Cambridge. She comments on the episode of Apollo and Francesca in The Inferno (an alternate name for Hell), which represents the downward progress of Sin - a descent which is symbolically paralleled by the physical features of Dante and Virgil's downward journey:

The sin it figures is that of carnal passion - a sin whose venom and excuse at once is mutuality. Lust is not (at this point) merely self-indulgence; it is mutual indulgence. It may put on a specious appearance of generosity, even of self-sacrifice. It is an exchange in love, even if it is an exchange of deadly poison. The gradual and inevitable steps by which the perverted mutuality declines into selfish appetite, into mutual grudging, into resentment and sullen hatred; thence into violence and sterility and despair; and so into the long and melancholy series of frauds and falsehoods by which human beings exploit one another, - those are the steps by which we painfully clamber down the hideous descent from Acheron [a river at the upper level of Hell] to Malebolge [one of the lowest levels of Hell]. (Introductory Papers on Dante 15)

In 1948 Sayers spoke again to the Society for Italian Studies, this time on "The Meaning of Heaven and Hell" and "The Meaning of Purgatory." The first of these lectures deals, in part, with Dante's theology of Sin. It shows the relationship between free will, Sin, and Hell. Sayers explains the free will of the human "creature" as the capacity for "assent to reality," and the capacity for knowing itself as "other than" God:

[This] offers the possibility for the self to imagine itself independent of God, and instead of wheeling its will and desire about Him, to try and find its true end in itself and to revolve around that. This is the fall into illusion - which is Hell. (Introductory Papers 62)

The rebellion against God for which Satan fell has always been viewed as the result of Pride. The Fall of Man involved Pride as well, but, Sayers explains, it happened "rather differently, because "man [unlike the angels who fell] is not pure intelligence. . . . Therefore his knowledge cannot be purely intellectual but has to be gained by experience" (63). She goes on to draw a picture of what actually occurred when Adam and Eve were tempted and made the choice which introduced Sin:

[Man] is created good, in a good world; but Satan suggests to him that there is a different way of knowing reality - it can be known not only as good, but also as evil. God, says Satan, knows it both ways; if Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, they will also know like God. Satan, however, carefully omits to point out that God can 'know' evil purely as an intellectual possibility, without experiencing it or calling it into existence.; but that Man, if he is to know it at all, must know it as he knows everything else, by experience. Adam and Eve, intoxicated by the idea of being 'as gods', disregard all warnings and eat; they have their desire, and know evil. (63)

She explains that this illusion of Hell is actually "something which is very familiar to us" (64). We often "chose to think that what we at the moment want is the centre of the universe to which everything else ought to accommodate itself" (64). Once we have started thinking this way the whole universe will seem to be hostile to us, and that "being so badly treated, we have a just grievance against things in general" (64). This, of course, is an illusion, but we often would "rather wallow in it and vent our irritation in spite and malice than humbly admit we are in the wrong" and get back to reality by changing our

ways (64). Sayers considers such a state of mind "a foretaste of the experience, of Hell" (64).

Pride is shown as the basic sinful impulse which gives rise to Wrath, and also to Envy - in the person who demands "exclusive devotion to himself" under the illusion that he is "as God" (65). As Sayers describes the jealousy, and psychological abuse, (which masquerades as "a superior brand of love") that arises from such extreme self-centredness, we are reminded of her treatment, in her earlier works, of Envy as a deadly impulse within the marriage relationship.

The "tendency" to this illusion - seeing God and the universe as hostile to one's ego - is, Sayers says here, "what is known as Original Sin" (66). We are all partakers of this tendency. It always involves Pride, and often other Sins as well. She goes on to show how the permanent choice of the I-centred illusion becomes a final choice against Heaven, and for Hell:

It is the deliberate choosing to remain in the illusion . . . that is of the very essence of Hell. The dreadful moods when we hug our hatred and misery and are too proud to let them go are foretastes in time of what Hell eternally is. So long as we are in time and space, we can still, by God's grace and our own wills assenting, repent of Hell and come out of it. But if we carry that determination and that choice through the gates of death into the state in which there is, literally, no time, what then? . . . As it passes out of the flesh the soul sees God and sees its own sin. . . . We might adapt the definition of Boethius and say: 'Hell is the perfect and simultaneous possession of one's own will forever.' . . . Hell is the knowing of Sin in its essence. (66-68)

Sayers enlarges on this last sentence by observing that "Hell is a punishment only in the sense that a stomach-ache, and not a beating, is 'punishment' for greed" (68). She describes the essence of several specific Sins as they are seen in Dante's Hell. Gluttony has been stripped of its "bright lights and holiday atmosphere" and is reduced to its essence: "a cold wallowing in dirt, a helpless prey to ravenous appetites," and Covetousness is no longer "dignified" as a form of economy, but is reduced to "meaningless squabble about a huge weight of nonsense" (68).

The lecture on "The Meaning of Heaven and Hell" concludes with the observation that any poet who writes on such a topic as Dante chose "has a double task to perform" in his depiction of Sin: he must show it as both "attractive" and "damned":

If sin were not attractive nobody would fall into it; and because pride is its very root, it will always present itself as an act of noble rebellion. . . . The poet's business is to show both the brilliant facade of sin and the squalor hidden beneath it; his task is to persuade us to accept judgement. Purgation is what happens to the soul which, accepting judgement, moves out of illusion into reality, and this is the subject of the Purgatorio. (71-72)

The second of Sayers 1948 lectures, "The Meaning of Purgatory," explains Aquinas's doctrine of the need for purgation, not from the *culpa*, the guilt, of sin, but from the *reatus*, the stain, of it (Introductory Papers 80-84), and shows how Dante develops the idea of the redeemed souls gladly ascending Mount Purgatory because they fully desire the purification which will make them fit to enter the presence of God (84-91). Sayers acknowledges that by showing *all* souls passing through Purgatory on their way to heaven Dante differs, if taken literally, from the commonly held theological view. However, if taken in the more significant allegorical sense, "the ascent of the Mountain is clearly necessary for all, since the Earthly Paradise [at the summit] is . . . the goal at which the penitent in this world has to aim" (98). On the literal level Dante is describing a process believed to occur after death. On the allegorical level he is depicting the process by which the soul, in this life, progresses upward toward holiness.

Sayers concludes this lecture with the assertion that Dante's belief system must be understood if we are genuinely to appreciate his work. Even those who do not believe as he believed should "realize that it is a belief which a mature mind can take seriously" (100). "Seriously" is a key word in her concluding comments on the difference between Dante's Christian view of the seriousness of Sin and the usual modern view:

The widespread disinclination to-day to take Hell and Heaven seriously results, very largely, from a refusal to take this world seriously. If we are materialists, we look upon man's life as an event so trifling compared to the cosmic process that our acts and decisions have no importance beyond the little space-time frame in which we find ourselves. If we take what is

often vaguely called 'a more spiritual attitude toward life', we find that we are postulating some large and lazy cosmic benevolence which ensures that, no matter how we behave, it will all somehow or other come out right in the long run. But Christianity says, 'No. What you do and what you are matters, and matters intensely. It matters now and it matters eternally; it matters to you, and it matters so much to God that it was for Him literally a matter of life and death.' (100)

In 1949 Sayers published only one article, yet ten years earlier, in 1939, she had produced in a single year nearly twenty essays and at least four speeches on a wide range of subjects. The difference was due to the fact that translating and interpreting The Divine Comedy was such a demanding and absorbing task that she had little time and energy for other sorts of writing. After five years of hard work she saw the publication of her translation of Hell by Penguin Books on 10 November 1949.

Her single newspaper article for that year, which was written to promote the sale of the translation, appeared nine days later in Everybody's Weekly. It was entitled "Love was Dante's Salvation." In it Sayers recounts how Dante, as a young man, had a spiritual revelation of "what love really meant" - it was the means to salvation and the impetus behind the whole of The Divine Comedy. Sayers explains:

The 'Comedy' is an allegory of the way to God . . . it is the story of Everyman's passage from the dark wood of error, through the knowledge of and the death to sin: after that the toilsome climb up the mountain of repentance to the recovery of lost innocence: and thence upwards by the mystical way of illumination to the vision of God. (25)

Her Dante lectures in 1949 include "The Comedy of the Comedy" which ends with a picture of Man as Dante sees him "in both of his contrasted and paradoxical aspects":

[Dante sees man] as . . . a creature feeble, foolish, infantile, absurd, yet a child of Grace, coaxed with an infinite Divine tenderness along the path to glory . . . [and as] a traitor to God and self, obstinate in the will to destruction, the child of the Devil, the scorn and outcast of creation. (Introductory Papers 174)

In both roles - the foolish child coaxed to glory by divine Grace and the obstinate traitor willing his own destruction - Man evokes laughter. There are two sorts of laughter suggested in The Divine Comedy: one pursues the damned down to the seat of Hell, and the other pursues the child of Grace "up to the very steps of the Throne." In painting

these two contrasting scenes Sayers recognizes Pride and Humility as the qualities which most distinguish between the redeemed and the lost:

The damned think highly of themselves; fixed in a ghastly self-sufficiency and rooted in pride, they caper grotesquely to the whips and prongs of an insatiable and demonic appetite; the laughter is terrible and tragic. The redeemed think humbly of themselves and recognize their own folly; for them is the song, the shouting, the celestial dance . . . the laughter of the rejoicing universe, for them the Divine Comedy. (174)

Another of Sayers' lectures on The Divine Comedy is of particular relevance to this study. It is "The Cornice of Sloth," given in 1950 at the Society for Italian Studies Summer School at Exeter. It is on the Cornice of Sloth that Dante asks Virgil, his guide, to define the greatest of the three great "supra-rational Christian graces" - Love (Further Papers 121). The word "love" can be used broadly to denote all of the desires and attractions which men feel for both worthy and unworthy things. As Sayers was to explain in her Introduction to Purgatory, Sin may arise from "*Love Perverted* (love, that is, directed to a false object . . . [or] Love, which, though directed to an object legitimate in itself, errs either by *Defect* . . . or by *Excess*" (66). "All Dante's pilgrimage is undertaken that he may learn what and when and how to love" (Further Papers 122). When Love is thus refined it becomes the supreme Virtue from which all other Virtues stem.

The lecture on "The Cornice of Sloth" also comments on the way the Sin of Sloth is purged. This is the only cornice of the mountain in which no specific prayer is provided for the spirits; instead there is an exhortation to good works. Sayers suggests an explanation for this which reveals the strong disapproval she felt for people who attempt to mask laziness with a pretense of meditation:

Perhaps these spirits had been too much inclined to relax into a 'cosy piety'. 'Sloth', says the mystical writer Tauler, 'often makes men fain to be excused from their work and set to contemplation. Never trust a virtue that has not been put into practise.' So, on this Cornice the neglect of the Active Life is purged; the souls remind themselves that to labour is to pray. (133)

Sayers also suggests two reasons why Dante may have chosen "Blessed are they that mourn" as the beatitude pronounced by the angel on this cornice. First, because Sloth is "the sin of not-caring," the grief of repentance which these spirits now are able to feel is especially blessed. Second, there is blessing in the active repentance which has now replaced the Sin of Sloth or Accidia - "the depression that sits down and wrings its hands instead of reacting vigorously to trouble and difficulties" (145).

Sayers' experience of Dante was a profound one, not only because of the greatness of his work and the challenge it afforded her as a translator and critic, but also because she felt a "spiritual kinship" with him (Reynolds, The Passionate Intellect 212). She said, "I can be at home in the universe of Dante's mind . . . because Dante and I share the same faith" ("Dante and Milton" Further Papers 151). Part of that "faith" was an appreciation for the seriousness of the Deadly Sins - an appreciation which Sayers had developed over many years, but which was deepened and enriched by her study of Dante.

In 1950 and 1951 Sayers did very little journalistic writing, but there was one major undertaking for which she took time away from her work on The Divine Comedy. It was a play entitled The Emperor Constantine, the longest and most elaborate of her dramatic works.

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### The Emperor Constantine

This is the last of Sayers' significant plays,<sup>71</sup> and at least in scope, the most impressive. In June of 1950 there was a public announcement of the fact that Dorothy L. Sayers had agreed to write a play for the Essex borough of Colchester which would be part of the 1951 Festival of Britain (Hone 171). This play involved more research than

any of her others had done for she was determined to develop, as accurately as possible, three different lines of historical material: first, old Essex records and legends regarding the Christian ruler, King Cole, and his daughter Helena who was reputed to be the mother of Constantine; second, the life of Constantine himself; and third, the whole religious controversy which led to the formulation of the Nicene Creed.

The Emperor Constantine is a long and comprehensive work - a virtual chronicle play. It has twenty-five scene changes, ninety-six characters, and a running time of nearly four hours. It was produced in its entirety, by Sayers herself, in Colchester in July of 1951, and ran for twelve days. In February of the following year a shortened version of it, entitled Christ's Emperor, was performed at St. Thomas's Church in London, for a three week period.

During this London run Sayers wrote a promotional article which provides a concise summing up of the way the theme of Sin is developed in her account of the life of Constantine. In his early years he had little awareness of Sin. He initially embraced Christianity for reasons of political expediency, but by the end of his life he came to believe in it as the true Faith. Sayers describes the crisis when the Emperor first confronts the fact of Sin:

At this moment of his triumph [i.e. just after the Council of Nicaea] as Christ's Emperor in Church and State, disaster befalls Constantine. Old sins come home to roost and not only old sins, but old errors, and even former virtues. . . . Deceived [by his embittered wife] and outraged [at what he believes his son Crispus is guilty of], Constantine gives the order to execute Crispus. His secretary [coming to warn him it is all a plot] . . . arrives too late. . . . Constantine, after giving orders for the execution of his wife and her accomplices, hurries back to Rome. . . . Finding his mother at her prayers, he pours out to her his horror and bewilderment. He has discovered and experienced the fearful bond of sin which so unites all men that even their virtues are tainted. 'I who call myself God's Emperor - I find now that all my justice is sin and all my mercy bloodshed. . . .' (*Everybody's Weekly* 16 February 1952: 20)

Throughout the play Helena, Constantine's mother, provides the most complete representation of the Christian Virtues. Her Humility and Compassion are apparent from the earliest scenes of the play, and they are as much a part of her essential nature as her



wisdom and graciousness. She also displays intellectual Zeal: in the midst of the complex Arian controversy, she relentlessly studies the relevant works of theology so that she can fully understand the issues. Helena is the strongest character in the play - emotionally, morally, and spiritually.

Constantine has not acquired the Humility of his mother. The Pride he displays early in the play, however, does not seem particularly offensive, because his extreme self-confidence and self-assertion occur in the context of the ambitious drive without which military and political success would be impossible. At the age of twenty-one Constantine has determined that he will be Emperor, and before long his superiority to other leaders is obvious: "The people were shouting for Constantine and, by Mars, he deserves it. We weren't out-fought; we were out-generalled" (62). Even at the earliest stages however, his mother's servant, Matibena, connects his rising ambition with the sort of egotism which Christ rebuked in his disciples: "He wants the top seat, like the blessed disciples at the Lord's supper" (33).

By the second act Constantine has complete control of the western Empire. A few scenes into this act, and before the play has even reached its mid point, Constantine's pride of leadership begins to sound ominously like arrogance. To Bishop Hosius's warning against the sort of presumption that attempts to compete with the honour of God himself, Constantine replies, "He has called me to be His viceroy, and He will not abandon me before my task is done" (87).

Matibena points out that Constantine, although officially "Christian," has never experienced repentance:

Forgive us our trespasses and God be merciful to me a sinner - that's what he needs to learn. He never thinks of the blessed Lord that died to save us, except as an ally to win his battles for him. (101)

The emperor's attitude toward this new deity he has chosen to honour is, indeed, far from submissive and contrite, and there is a distinct bite in his mother's quiet joke: "Constantine darling, you're not God" (107).

Pride is depicted in this play from another angle through the heretic Arius who is arrogant to the point of insolence. He refers to his spiritual superiors - saintly men, many of them maimed in the persecution under Diocletian - as "crazy fanatics out of the desert . . . babbling [and] crowing" (133), and he vindictively accuses the gentle bishop of Alexandria of "sheer jealous spite . . . senility and softening of the brain" (144). On the other hand, the Church leaders whose views triumph at the Council of Nicea are humble men of genuine Virtue, quite unlike Arius and his followers.<sup>72</sup>

The tragic climax Sayers described in her article on the play occurs close to the end. Constantine seeks to understand the motivation behind his wife Fausta's evil deception, and another sort of Sin is exposed: the hate which emerges from a twisted "kind of love" which is actually closer to Lust and encompasses the Sin of Envy. Fausta is so jealous of Constantine's absorption in his work that she purposes to hurt him intensely, and so jealous of her stepson, whose inheritance will preempt that of her own sons, that she destroys him (178).

Finally, Constantine is forced to face his own Sin and, with it, the truth about what Sin is. Helena tells him she has been praying for God's "mercy upon all sinners," and he replies,

You told me once that until I understood sin I should never understand God. Now I know sin - I am sin; and understand nothing at all. . . . Sin is more terrible than you think. It is not lying and cruelty and murder - it is a corruption of life at the source. I and mine are so knit together in evil that no one can tell where the guilt begins or ends. (181)

His mother responds by stating that "evil can never be undone, but only purged and redeemed" (181), and goes on to explain that "the price is always paid, but not always by the guilty . . . innocence alone can pardon without injustice, because it has paid the price" (182).

Constantine has grasped the essential doctrine of Christianity (a doctrine which Sayers had stressed during the war years) - the meaning of the cross of Christ, and the fact that there is no redemption apart from it. He can identify himself, however, only

with the shame and anguish of the cross, not with the deliverance from sin which it represents: "I am bound and not free, and the iron of the nails is in my very flesh. Pray for me" (183). The horror of his Sin is great upon him, but he cannot yet humble himself in complete repentance.

The Epilogue of the play occurs twelve years later. The Emperor Constantine is on his death bed. In the intervening period his relations with the bishops have been disappointing. Anger had always been one of his major failings, and the prolonged quarreling over theological points exasperated him so much that he completely lost his patience. He condemned and banished some of those who were rightly defending the truth. At the time of his death, however, a bishop is called for "to baptise him and to receive him into the fold of Christ's Church" (187). He repents of his unfair treatment of the godly bishops. He comes to the end of all the tortuous paths, and guilty "dissimulations" by which he has tried, all his life, to avoid surrendering to the very Truth of which he was the proclaimed hero. The Hound of Heaven has run him down.<sup>21</sup> He undergoes baptism, humbly knowing himself to have nothing to offer to the God whom he has so proudly "served." He is "stripped naked to the cleansing waters" (188).

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Even though Sayers' translation of Purgatory continued to occupy most of her time during 1953, she produced a number of short forewords, press letters, and essays. She contributed, to a volume of essays called Asking Them Questions, an article which answers the question "Is there a Definite Evil Power that attacks People in the Same Way as there is a Good Power that influences People?"<sup>24</sup> Sayers affirms that there is a definite "spirit of evil," but her emphasis, as always, is on the positive answer to the problem of evil. She describes God's long-suffering: "when anything goes wrong with His creation,

He does not throw it away in a fit of anger, but sets himself to redeem the wrong . . . the wrong which we call 'sin' (44).

In the same essay Sayers also explains how the free will which God gave to mankind makes the choice of Sin possible, and goes on to describe Adam's Sin as the result of seeing "good as evil" (48).<sup>35</sup> Adam's choice, of course, also arose out of Pride, as did Satan's, much earlier. In this essay she describes the destructiveness of that Deadly Sin more graphically than ever before:

Satan's pride revolted against being a mere independent creature; he wanted to assert himself and show that he was as great as God. But what could he do? He could not create anything, for all creation belongs to God. The only thing the proud, perverted will can do to assert itself is to destroy. . . . Of that proud spirit there is now nothing left but a ravenous, chaotic will, a motiveless and unmeaning malice, at once cunning and witless, like that of a maniac; an empty rage of destructiveness, without hope or purpose save to rend and divide, and reduce all creation to the same hell of futility as itself. It was to this spirit of strife and destruction that man opened the doors of his mind when he learned to see God's good creation as an evil thing. And he opens them to Satan every time he allows the lust of division and destruction to take hold of his will; for evil thrives upon division. (48-49)

She goes on, in the same article, to show how people are provoked to Sin by the simple fact that differences exist between themselves and others. God designs and delights in diversity and variety, but evil distorts this "good thing" to its own end. She uses the husband/wife relationship as an example of how differences, potentially a source of joy, can become the provocation for the Deadly Sins that destroy marital Love:

Difference . . . only becomes an occasion of evil when a proud and envious will distorts it into division and hatred. For example . . . you are a man and your wife is a woman, and that difference between you is precisely the source of your delight in one another. But it is a difference that can only too easily be twisted into a source of division and misery: if, for example, you fall into a habit of thinking and speaking as though to be different in sex meant necessarily to be in opposition about everything; or if the husband despises the wife for being 'only a woman' [Pride], or the wife uses her sex to exploit the husband for what money and luxury she can get out of him [Avarice and Gluttony]; or if either of you is possessive and jealous, breaking up the other's friendships or jobs [Envy]; or if either looks on the other as a mere instrument for comfort or pleasure [Lust]; or tries to subjugate or 'mould' or in any other way do violence to the other's personality - in these and a hundred other ways the difference of sex may be made into a devil's tool of destructiveness instead of the occasion for

what the English Prayer Book calls 'the mutual society, help and comfort that one ought to have of the other'. (51)

The most interesting of the casual items Sayers produced in the early 1950s is series in Punch in November 1953 and January 1954. The "Pantheon Papers" are satirical parodies based on the Church's calendar of holy days, accounts of early saints, and homilies for particular seasons. The clever style is very entertaining and, at first glance, it might appear that Sayers is making jabs at solemn Church tradition. A closer reading, however, reveals that her intention is quite the opposite: she is exposing, on one hand, the sacred aura which had grown up around science and secular humanism, and on the other, the phony piety which has infiltrated the Church itself.

The "Papers" appear to have been written initially for private amusement, for those which were published by Punch are only a portion of those which Sayers wrote.<sup>76</sup> Those that she decided to make public, however, reflect many of her special concerns.

The first issue of the "Pantheon Papers" (Punch 2 November 1953, 17-19) includes the "gratification of St. Gorge" in the Calendar of Unholy and Dead-Letter Days. This refers, of course, to the most obvious sort of Gluttony, but there are subtle allusions to a more insidious form of Gluttony, consumerism, in the various references to automobiles.

Sloth and Pride are exposed in the Hagiological Notes describing various saints. Sayers created "St. Lukewarm of Laodicea" out of the accusation of the "lukewarm" church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:4-16. This spiritually slothful saint was "so broadminded as to offer asylum and patronage to every kind of religious cult." His indecisive, uncommitted luke-warmness caused him to become known as "The Tolerator," and when some cannibals, whom he had befriended and helped, attempted to boil him, the water could not be kept hot enough, and his flesh was found to be too "tough and tasteless" to eat (18).

Pride was the dominant trait of the saintly sisters Ursa and Ursulina, famous for

practising the Polar virtues of frigidity and superiority to a truly heroic degree . . . [until] the Spirit of Proper Pride miraculously turned them into White Bears, and translated them to the North Pole, whence they

perpetually contemplate their own reflections in the starry heavens.  
(Punch 2 November 1953: 18)

The Pride of St. Superciliary, patron saint of pedants, was based on her "remarkable erudition" which caused her to disdain anyone who "knew only six languages, and was weak in mathematics." She ended up being so elevated by her raised eyebrows that she floated away "in a northerly direction" (Punch 2 November 1953: 18).

The January 13th. installment, "More Pantheon Papers," contains a letter from (Miss) Ursula Bruin, of The Igloo, Coldharbour, Chiltern Hundreds which explains what is required for "pure ethical Polarism." Its high altitude, frigid atmosphere, and hellish isolation - requires that one erect one's Pole and climb up it (Punch 13 January 1954: 84). The connection between Pride and coldness in all these examples indicates that Sayers still viewed the cold-hearted Sins of the spirit, especially Pride, as being worst of all.

The Papers continue with a list of "Spiritual Weapons for Polar Rearmament," which paint a picture of egotistical paranoia and "hellish isolation." Some of the traits listed arise from the cold, spiritual Sins of Pride, and Envy (resentment), and others from spiritual Sloth. They include,

Pained expression  
Hurt feelings  
Standing on dignity  
Being consciously under-privileged  
Avoiding duty by prayer  
Avoiding prayer by duty  
Carefully remembering injuries  
Maintaining a proper pride  
Suffering in silence  
Keeping oneself to oneself  
Self-justification, by speech not works  
Detachment (from enthusiasms of others) (Punch 13 January 1954: 84)

The "Creed of St. Euthanasia" is a brief account of the Pride of humanism based on the worship of science. It begins,

I believe in Man, Maker of himself and inventor of all Science. And in Myself, his Manifestation, and Captain of my Psyche; and that I should not suffer anything painful or unpleasant. (Punch 13 January 1954: 84)

The last item in "More Pantheon Papers" and the most lengthy one is "A Sermon for Cacophony-Tide." Its January publication was very appropriate for it describes "the seed-time of the Polar year" when the greedy season of "Wishmas" is over, and when "the mud is ready - that rich unwholesome mud in which the Polar seeds can germinate." The metaphor, predictably, incorporates the chief spiritual Sins:

Envy, Wrath, and Pride: Plant those seeds now. Do not be discouraged if your opportunities appear limited. The smallest dispute, the most trifling misconception may, if sown with envy, watered with complaints, sprayed with clouds of verbiage and artificially heated with righteous indignation, grow into a lofty and isolated Pole, up which you may climb to look down upon your neighbours. (Punch 20 January 1954: 124)

The greater part of the "Sermon" is an attack on the lack of intellectual integrity which Sayers so vehemently abhorred, especially in ideological disputes. She saw it as one of the worst modern manifestations of the Sin of Sloth. The style of the satire continues in the same vein, with the advice being given from a devilish point of view, much as is done in C.S. Lewis's Screwtape Letters:

Again, it is often unwise, and always unnecessary, to invite examination into the merits of your case: far better to rely on a devout invocation of the sacred authorities. 'Science tells us -'; 'Progress demands -'; . . . Be especially careful when baiting Neo-Scholastics and other superstitious theologians, never to have studied their doctrines - it will only cramp your style and offer them a handle for controversy. You need only pick up at third hand enough of their technical jargon to use it inaccurately, and so make rational debate impossible. . . . Strive earnestly to confuse every issue: there are no injuries so estranging as those that are dealt in the dark by men who do not know what the quarrel is about. . . . Reserve your resentment for people, not for ideas. . . . Any effort to oppose a new idea on the grounds that it is nasty, false, dangerous, or wrong should be promptly stigmatized as heresy-hunting. . . . If the idea is, in fact, silly or untrue, all the better: you will then be able to sneer impartially at both those who hold and those who condemn it, and thus enhance the sense of your own superiority which is the sole aim and reward of all Polar activity. (Punch 20 January 1954: 124)

So, such intellectual Sloth, like all other Deadly Sins, ends where it begins - in the great parent Sin of Pride.

In 1955 Sayers' translation of Purgatory was published. Two thirds of her Dante project was completed. Perhaps it was her admiration of Dante's great skill as story-teller

that led her to take time out to do some story-telling of her own. The six brief stories she produced in 1955 were all based on biblical material. Early in the year she published a narrative poem, "The Story of Adam and Christ," which appeared on a decorative, folded card, with medieval illustrations. In September she brought out a more elaborate card (with twenty-seven doors opening onto decorations) on "The Story of Noah's Ark." This time the re-telling of the story was in prose rather than verse.

More interesting, in terms of content, were the four stories published in Everybody's Weekly for four consecutive weeks in December 1955. The first and last of them involve Sin in a significant way. In the first, "Children of Cain," the hero is Kenan, a young man who is seventh in descent from Seth, the son of Adam. He travels to the land of Cain to seek out Cain himself for he has heard that he is still alive. The old man tells Kenan his story, from his own warped viewpoint which is steeped in Pride and bitterness. The story ends with Kenan himself learning, tragically, that he and all men are "of one kin" with the murdering Cain, and that "the innocent must suffer for the guilty, and the lamb be slain on the altar for the sins of the whole world."

The last one is "The Bad Penny," the story (from the book of Philemon) of the dishonest runaway slave Onesimus who, having become a Christian, returns to his former master with a letter of recommendation from the apostle Paul. Like all of Sayers' reworking of Bible incidents, this tale is remarkable for its immediacy and verisimilitude. Onesimus comes alive to us in this short narrative - a small time-sinner, and a rather insignificant individual. Yet he has made a new beginning, and Paul actually calls him "a great credit" and "a dear brother in the Lord." Like the Prodigal Son, he returns in Humility and repentance. However, he also has certain idealized expectations. After deflating encounters with several servants who are reluctant to overlook his past record, he discovers that his hopes of a warm welcome will not be disappointed after all. Those who love God celebrate Onesimus's return. The foolish boy who ran away to make his fortune returns with "something better than a fortune" and is restored to a loving



household willing to forget that his name was ever associated with wrong-doing. The sigma of Sin need not be a permanent one - grace provides a remedy.

In the last two years of her life Dorothy L. Sayers devoted herself almost exclusively to the translation of Paradise, the last book of The Divine Comedy. In 1956 she gave several lectures, largely based on her Dante work. In two of them, "Dante Faber: Structure in the Poetry of Statement" and "The Poetry of Search and the Poetry of Statement," she distinguishes between two types of poetry. She applies the term "the poetry of Statement" to The Divine Comedy and to other poetry which has been called "didactic" because such writing "openly asserts conclusions drawn from experience" (The Poetry of Search and the Poetry of Statement 7).

She herself has been accused of similar didacticism. What she says, in these two lectures, of poets who write from such a position of certainty, applies very much to the literature of *Statement* which she herself wrote in the later years of her life:

The poetry of Statement . . . maps the true route from tentative beginning to triumphant arrival. If it mentions false wanderings it is only to warn people off them; but it is concerned to get somewhere and to show other people the way. The poet must of course have plodded every step of the journey himself. . . . [He] is concerned with the truth he has discovered about things in general, not merely with the workings of his own mind. . . . It is possible to argue that the poetry of Statement is more mature than the poetry of Search. It is only when we have known how to profit by much experience that we learn for ourselves the truth of all the great commonplaces. (8-9)

So it is, I think, right to be interested in the poetry of Statement - the poetry in which the poet tells us, *not about himself, but about something*. Standing back from his poem, constructing it with infinite pains and pleasure, so that it may stand secure in its symmetry of balanced parts, he sets it before us as an abiding witness to *the truth*, which he has tested and found to be true. (emphasis added) (44)

The following year was the last year of Dorothy Sayers' life. She died of a sudden stroke on 17 December 1957. It is strangely appropriate that her last article to appear in the public press, one she wrote the previous January for a series in The Sunday Times, should be on "Christian Belief about Heaven and Hell." The Times editors altered her title to "My Belief about Heaven and Hell" - a decision which she undoubtedly found

provoking, for she vehemently maintained that her pronouncements on Christianity were not private, idiosyncratic views, but basic Church teachings. In this article, as in so many others, the originality of her presentation gives familiar dogma a unique impact.

She compares human existence in time and space to the dependent reality contained within the covers of a book - the whole universe that we know is "a made thing" (8). Its Maker, God, is an independent reality comparable to the author of the book. When people die "it is as though they come out from the book to partake of the real existence of their author." Working from this metaphor she explains the relationship between sinful Man, God, and eternity:

To accept reality it is necessary to acknowledge that the source and centre of our being is not in ourselves, but in God. Sin is the self-sufficiency which urges us to reject this idea and to delude ourselves with the flattering fantasy that Man's being is centred in himself' that he can be 'as God.' Thus our outlook is not only finite, but violently distorted, and evils are called into existence - evils which, though from the point of view of eternal reality they are seen to be lies and illusions, yet within the created frame of things are, unhappily, quite as real as anything else in the material universe. . . .

The will and judgement need to be purged as well as strengthened before we can become possessed of our true selves and endure to enter the heavenly presence of God. . . .

There remains, however, the terrible possibility that the continual indulgence of the false self [by yielding to Sin] may so weaken the true Godward will that it becomes impotent, so that, in the moment of death which becomes the moment of choice, the soul will shrink away from the presence of God and refuse beatitude. If so, we shall have what we have willed to have. We shall have to live forever with the sinful self that we have chosen; and this is called Hell. . . .

Christians believe that 'in the end of the world' God will make 'a new heaven and a new earth,' and that the body will then be raised from the dead and be united to the soul. . . . St. Paul calls the resurrection body 'a spiritual body,' and stresses its difference: 'It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.'

In any case, we need not puzzle our wits to find a time and place for it within the universe, because, in the end of time, that universe 'shall be rolled together as a scroll' (that is, as a reader shuts up a volume when he has finished with it), and God himself will write a new book. (The Sunday Times 6 January 1957: 8)

This account of the Christian doctrine of heaven and hell is an appropriate culmination to all that Dorothy Sayers wrote on the subject of Sin, for it takes in the whole of time and eternity. Sayers was, in her later years, remarkable for her large

physical size, but the expansiveness of her vision was even more exceptional. Her writing, especially during the war, reveals how well she empathized with the immediate, distressing problems of human life. But she also saw the larger picture. She recognized these ordinary problems as part of the larger problem of mankind's sinful tendencies - the Seven Deadly Sins. She saw ahead, too, into another dimension, when redemption will be complete, and "corruption" and "weakness" will be raised in "incorruption . . . [and] power."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Conclusion

In following the theme of Sin through all of Dorothy L. Sayers' work we have observed many aspects of her literary achievement. In the poetry of her youth she used traditional verse forms to develop Christian concepts, particularly the idea of the redemptive role of Christ. Her early novels and short stories show a high level of competence in characterization. Her depiction of human nature was based on her understanding of the basic sinful tendencies which all men share. The last four novels are remarkable for their "serious treatment of the sins and passions." They reveal Sayers as much more than a mystery writer. She probes into the inner lives of her characters and explores the spiritual tensions which make up the most significant struggles of human life. Her treatment of the tension between Sin and Virtue is an important part of her success as a serious novelist.

In the last two decades of her life Sayers turned to drama and non-fiction, and her subjects and themes became more openly Christian. She had been one of the most popular detective writers of the day, but she now became highly esteemed in three other areas. She was a prominent journalist, a leading Christian dramatist, and one of the most influential authorities on Dante. She wrote with eloquence and vigour, but more important, she had something significant to say. People recognized the truth of her observations on the basic problem at the root of Man's nature. Christians call this problem Sin, and many of them have found it helpful to describe its nature in terms of the Seven Deadly Sins. Sayers was one of those who used this concept, both directly and indirectly, to clarify the problem of Sin and the way it must be combated.

She increasingly understood that the connection between "holy" and "whole" was more than an etymological one. The movement away from the bondage and fragmentation caused by the Deadly Sins, and the movement toward Virtue and holiness,

is, in fact, a progression toward wholeness and health - emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. This - using terms she herself used of the poetry of Statement - is the truth which *she* "tested and found to be true." Her work is "set before us as an abiding witness" to that truth.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Since one of the underlying premises of this thesis is that the Seven Deadly Sins are essentially a formalized way of describing sinfulness generally, I have chosen not to differentiate between the *Sins* and *Sin* by capitalizing one and not the other. Hence every use of "Sin" as a noun will be capitalized, except in quoted material.

<sup>2</sup> Each of the seven Sins will be capitalized in both the English and the Latin form. However, when a word like "pride" is used in a sense which is not sinful, such as "took pride in his work," it will not be capitalized.

<sup>3</sup> The antithesis between Envy and Mercy, which may not be immediately obvious, is explained on page 52 in my discussion of Dante's treatment of Envy.

<sup>4</sup> "Virtue" and the names of major Virtues will be capitalized throughout this thesis.

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise specified all biblical quotations are taken from the Authorized Version.

<sup>6</sup> This idea has occurred in more recent literature. In Canto I of Byron's Don Juan, Avarice is referred to as an "old-gentlemanly vice."

<sup>7</sup> The concept could, no doubt, be appropriately used in studying the work of any Christian writer.

<sup>8</sup> The authoritative aura of this book is enhanced by the description of the author given on the title page: Bishop of Hull, Canon Residentiary of York, Vicar of Scarborough, Rural Dean, and Fellow of King's College, London.

<sup>9</sup> This quotation, and the following one, from letters written in 1913, were given to me by Barbara Reynolds.

<sup>10</sup> As recorded in the curriculum records of Sayers' Oxford years.

<sup>11</sup> These will be discussed in the final chapter.

<sup>12</sup> This lecture was published eighteen months later by Methuen & Co.; three years after its initial presentation it appeared in a periodical called Woman's Journal; today it is most accessible in Creed or Chaos and Other Essays (1947) and Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World (1969). The latter of these is the source to which my page numbers refer.

<sup>13</sup> The young musician has been identified as Arthur Forrest, a young man Sayers knew from the Bach Choir, who enjoyed talking to her about music and seemed to have "serious intentions" of trying to court her (Barbara Reynolds, Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul 52).

<sup>14</sup> Reynolds' biography reveals that Charles Williams read and admired this poem (82, 273).

<sup>15</sup> The third volume of Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror appeared in 1934. In America the series was published under the title The Omnibus of Crime, and in both countries the second and third volumes were called "Second Series" and "Third Series."

<sup>16</sup> Her use of the motive of Wrath in The Five Red Herrings does, however, allow her to create a complex plot, but the complexity is mechanical - due to the sheer number of suspects who behave suspiciously - not motivational.

<sup>17</sup> Even though this story did not appear in print until 1939 ( in In the Teeth of the Evidence), it could well have been written much earlier. I have decided to place it with her earlier fiction for purposes of discussion.

<sup>18</sup> The deadliness of this condition has been examined by other novelists. An outstanding treatment of the subject occurs in Graham Greene's A Burnt Out Case. It exposes the inner numbness and lack of emotion which are principal symptoms of the spiritual disease called Sloth, the leprosy of the soul.

<sup>19</sup> Because of this, the issue of the sinfulness of Pride sometimes becomes confused, as it does in the essay in *praise* of pride which Dame Edith Sitwell actually contributed to a volume entitled The Seven Deadly Sins (Ian Fleming, ed. 1962). Her essay is excellent in itself, but is ludicrous in its context since it is not about the Sin of Pride at all, but about pride in the positive sense.

<sup>20</sup> This characteristic of Wimsey is particularly reminiscent of the detective in E.C. Bentley's Trent's Last Case, which Sayers greatly admired. Barbara Reynolds records that Sayers "confessed to Bentley how ashamed she was to think how much her 'poor Peter' owed to his Trent" (Dorothy L. Sayers 257).

<sup>21</sup> This unsigned article is attributed to Sayers by agents' records (Gilbert 1750).

<sup>22</sup> The juxtaposition of the two rows is a structural device which serves not only as a connection between events in the two disparate worlds, it also connects them thematically.

<sup>23</sup> The negative appraisal by Edmund Wilson is a notable exception. However, since it is part of an attack on whodunits generally (in an essay entitled "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?") and since Wilson admits that he skipped large portions of Sayers' novel, his condemnation does not deserve to be taken too seriously.

<sup>24</sup> In fact, Peter was never truly bored or indolent. The image had developed largely because the bored demeanor was one of his favourite masks.

<sup>25</sup> The term normally refers to a song sung in praise of a newly married couple.

<sup>26</sup> The fact that she attempted another novel "Thrones, Dominations -" (begun in 1936) suggests that Sayers was not totally convinced that she had exhausted the possibilities of Harriet and Peter. Or perhaps, even the possibilities of the detective novel.

Barbara Reynolds informs me that at one point the manuscript of that work has the word "murder" scribbled across it. Still, the shape of the mystery had not begun to emerge in the 177 pages of somewhat detached incidents that comprise the unfinished work.

<sup>27</sup> Just as Pride is the basis of all the Deadly Sins, so Love (which includes Humility - esteeming others more than oneself) is the antithesis of all the Sins:

Love is patient, love is kind [generous, rather than covetous]. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking [which may include the selfishness of Gluttony and Lust], it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres [not slothful]. Love never fails. . . . And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, and 13).

<sup>28</sup> In her introduction to Williams' biography of James I Sayers describes The Forgiveness of Sins as "searching and disquieting in its examination of the ever-present and ever-insoluble problem of reconciling the Law with the Gospel" (xi).

<sup>29</sup> Pilgrim's Progress is the most obvious example.

<sup>30</sup> One example is found in "The Canonization."

<sup>31</sup> Paradoxically, this male inclination to take the lead is not, within Christian marriage, an expression of Pride and self-centredness. Instead, the husband's headship is meant to reflect the *sacrificial* relationship of Christ to the Church:

Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it. . . . So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself: for no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church. . . . a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife; and they two shall be one flesh (Ephesians 5:25, 28, 29, 31).

the stress is on the self-giving quality of love expressed by the Greek *agape* - the kind of marital love which causes the husband to prize and cherish his wife, and to sacrifice himself for her.

<sup>32</sup> Sayers' patriotic feeling and her sense of what it means to be "English" are developed in two articles: "The Gulf Stream and the Channel," and "The Mysterious English."

<sup>33</sup> The fact that the letters are written in rather difficult, idiomatic French tends, however, to limit the number of readers who will fully grasp their content.

<sup>34</sup> It was in the same month that she finished The Zeal of Thy House.

<sup>35</sup> The question 'Is Chekhov comic or tragic?' is a perennial one. Indeed, we are told that Chekhov himself and his producer sometimes found themselves on opposite sides of the issue.



<sup>36</sup> It is not clear whether Sayers means to imply that true tragedy only exists when life is viewed as meaningful, rather than futile.

<sup>37</sup> Judas's Pride was to become a central focus in Sayers' most famous drama, The Man Born to be King, 1941.

<sup>38</sup> The page numbers for quotations from this play refer to Four Sacred Plays, Gollancz, 1948, which includes The Zeal of Thy House, The Devil to Pay, He That Should Come, and The Just Vengeance.

<sup>39</sup> These articles were published in 1955, but were based on material she had presented in lecture form twelve years earlier, in 1943, at St. Anne's House, Soho (Gilbert 188, 219).

<sup>40</sup> The page numbers for quotations from this play refer to Four Sacred Plays, Gollancz, 11948.

<sup>41</sup> Joseph adds that this was said by the angel to Mary (259). Here Sayers has made, for once, an error in scriptural accuracy; the angel said it to Joseph himself (Matthew 1:21).

<sup>42</sup> The page numbers for quotations from this play refer to Four Sacred Plays, Gollancz, 1949.

<sup>43</sup> I concede, however, that the stiffness in characterization is explainable, to a certain extent, by the fact that Sayers has in this play intentionally followed medieval models in which flatness of characters is expected. Nonetheless, modern audiences tend to expect more credibility in characterization, even in plays which are medieval in style and tone.

<sup>44</sup> This idea was discussed earlier, pages 201.

<sup>45</sup> Sayers says of that play, however, that what is depicted is not choice *after death*, but expansion of the *moment of death* during which the choice is made.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Williams believed that free will is not something we *have* but something we *become*, as we little by little choose to choose (The Forgiveness of Sins 21).

<sup>47</sup> Dr. Welch was Director of Religious Broadcasting for the BBC. Sayers' friendship with him developed through her correspondence with him regarding The Man Born to Be King.

<sup>48</sup> Possibly Cyril Taylor, a writer she refers to in a letter to Welch written nine days earlier.

<sup>49</sup> In the Teeth of the Evidence.

<sup>50</sup> Some of these ideas reflect the discussion of "Work" by nineteenth century writers such as Ruskin.

<sup>51</sup> In adults such naivete tends to appear more like immaturity than wise innocence.

<sup>52</sup> See page 103.

<sup>53</sup> The quotation is identified in a footnote as from the Church of England: Articles of Religion, IX.

<sup>54</sup> C.S. Lewis develops makes a similar point in his essay "Learning in War-Time."

<sup>55</sup> "The Other Six Deadly Sins," which provides much of the basis of this thesis was written during this period - in October 1941.

<sup>56</sup> The page numbers for quotations from this play refer to the Gollancz 1969 edition.

<sup>57</sup> The idea of "carrying" the Sin, or the suffering of others is part of Charles Williams' concept of "substituted love" which is developed in Descent into Hell and other works.

<sup>58</sup> Sayers thoroughly researched the details of Herod's life.

<sup>59</sup> Dante's use of the Beatitudes as contrasts to the Deadly Sins is discussed on pages 51-54.

<sup>60</sup> In indicating how the specific Sins contrast with the Virtues portrayed in the Beatitudes I have drawn (particularly for the second Beatitude) on Dante's Purgatory, a work which Sayers was not familiar with at this point in time. Nonetheless, it is significant that her rephrasing of the Beatitudes in this context so closely parallels the way Dante uses them on his Mountain of Purgatory.

<sup>61</sup> Sayers treats this "hatred of God" as an aspect of Pride, but it has sometimes been regarded as a separate Sin. Thomas Aquinas called it *odium*. It has never been included in the list of the Deadly Sins, perhaps because it is a Sin not commonly seen in daily life. It seems to be not so much a basic root of sinfulness, as an advanced stage - a stage reached by very few.

<sup>62</sup> Sayers was, in her later years, very involved in the activities at St. Anne's House in Soho, which had become a centre for lectures, debates, and discussions on a wide range of topics related to religion and the arts.

<sup>63</sup> This conclusion is based on the fact that she refers in the 1955 articles to events of the 1950s such as the revival of the York Mystery Cycle, and also to The Just Vengeance which she wrote in 1945/46.

<sup>64</sup> Page 273.

<sup>65</sup> The page numbers for quotations from this play refer to Four Sacred Plays, Gollancz, 1948.

<sup>66</sup> Since The Man Born to be King was a radio play it was not strictly bound by this regulation.

<sup>67</sup> This is, of course, a development of the idea of 'carrying' the suffering or Sin of others which she discusses in her letter to Dr. Welch of 11 November 1943. (See page 289-290.)

<sup>68</sup> This is the same pertinent question that Sayers refers to in her letter to Dr. Welch, quoted on page 1.

<sup>69</sup> This lecture was based on the notes she had just completed to accompany her translation of Hell.

<sup>70</sup> See the earlier discussion of this point, page 23.

<sup>71</sup> She did, however, produce a short play on Dante and his daughter which was presented as a BBC Schools Broadcast in May 1952.

<sup>72</sup> It is clearly difficult, at this point in history, to judge whether such an interpretation of the characters involved is accurate, or merely an instance of history being re-written by the winning party. Whatever details she may have gleaned from historical records, Sayers chose to depict Arius and his followers with an ugliness of soul appropriate to the ungodliness she perceived in the doctrine they propounded.

<sup>73</sup> Dr. Welch uses this phrase to describe the powerful impact of Christ as Sayers portrays Him in The Man Born to Be King (Foreword 16).

<sup>74</sup> This unusual capitalization was used in the printed text.

<sup>75</sup> She uses terms very similar to those used by Williams in The Forgiveness of Sin.

<sup>76</sup> The Wade Center, Wheaton College, holds manuscript copies of "Panthoeon Papers" amounting to 91 pages. Only a very small portion of these were published in Punch.

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