Pomp & Circumstantial Evidence

The official newsletter of
Magna cum Murder

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Spring 2020
Vol. 29, No. 1
Published Quarterly

Ball State University
E.B. & Bertha C. Ball Center
Muncie, IN 47306

Interview with Guest of Honor C.J. Box

by Reavis Z. Wortham

C.J. Box is the #1 *New York Times* best-selling author of twenty-seven novels including the Joe Pickett series. He's won the Edgar Alan Poe Award for Best Novel, the Anthony Award, Prix Calibre 38, the Macavity Award, the Gumshoe Award, two Barry awards, the Western Heritage Award for Literature, the Spur Award for Best Contemporary Novel, and the 2010 Mountains & Plains Independent Booksellers Association Award for fiction. Over 7 million copies of his books have been sold in the U.S. and abroad and they've been translated into twenty-seven languages. Two television series based on his novels are currently in development.

Box has worked as a ranch hand, surveyor, fishing guide, a small-town newspaper reporter and editor, and he owned an international tourism marketing firm. In 2008, Box was awarded the "BIG WYO" Award from the state tourism industry. An avid outdoorsman, Box has hunted, fished, hiked, ridden, and skied throughout Wyoming and the Mountain West. He served on the board of directors for the Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo and currently serves on the Wyoming Office of Tourism board. They have three daughters and one grandchild. He and his wife Laurie live on their small ranch in Wyoming.

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RZW: Did you believe when you were writing your first novel, *Open Season*, that it was something special and would lead to such success?

CJB: Not at all. I was simply hoping it would eventually be published and that locals in Wyoming and the mountain west would find it authentic. I never thought of the book as the first of a series. It wasn't until Putnam made an offer for three Joe Pickett books that the series was born.

RZW: When did you decide you wanted to be a novelist?

CJB: I think it's something that's hard-wired. I recall finding the place in my local library where my book — someday — would be shelved.

RZW: You had other jobs as you wrote your first books. Was that difficult? When did you carve out time to write?

CJB: I owned and ran a tourism marketing company for ten more years after my first novel was published, plus I have a family. So yes, it was difficult at times to find time to write. But I did it on airplanes, in hotel rooms, and whenever I could steal a few hours at home.

RZW: Your writing voice grabs readers at the outset and won't let go until the very end. Where did your knack for storytelling begin?

CJB: I'm not sure, other than I bore quickly when I'm reading a book that drags and I don't want to do that to my readers. I figure if I'm getting bored with the prose, that the reader will be bored as well. So, as Elmore Leonard once said, I try to "leave out the parts readers skip."

RZW: Who were your favorite authors that inspired you?

CJB: A.B. Guthrie, Joseph Heller, Raymond Chandler, Cormac McCarthy, Flannery O'Connor, and Thomas McGuane.

RZW: I believe you sold *Open Season* on your own, before you had an agent. That's a difficult thing to do. Then you interviewed agents before selecting one, exactly opposite of how this business works. How did you manage it?

CJB: I had a "local" agent but he was incompetent. It wasn't until three books in that I realized what I was missing, so my wife and I went to New York and interviewed about a half dozen agents. They don't like that very much. But the process resulted in working with Ann Rittenberg, who is still my agent today. She's great!

RZW: Did you have any idea what kind of phenomenon the Joe Pickett books would become?

CJB: Nope. I never thought that the world was just waiting for a Wyoming game warden series, and by God, I was the man to bring it to them.

RZW: Where did Joe Pickett come from? Did he appear fully developed in your mind?

CJB: I think of him as a typical western type: laconic, hard-working, and normal.

RZW: Joe is flawed, but in a good way. He's not an expert shot, he makes

mistakes, but he's not possessed by demons like so many other popular characters. What do you think attracts him to his readers?

CJB: I think it's those attributes because it adds tension to the novels if the reader knows Joe might screw up. Plus, a "normal" protagonist is kind of subversive these days.

RZW: Do you think the Joe Pickett novels would be as successful if you began with *Open Season* today, nearly 20 years later?

CJB: I don't know. I hope so.

RZW: Your Joe Pickett novels move ahead in real time. Does that create problems?

CJB: It provides opportunities to keep the novels fresh. Since the characters all age and develop I think that helps keep the interest up for me and for readers. We've watched Joe and Marybeth raise a family of girls right before our eyes.

RZW: Nate Romanowski figures predominately in Joe's world, and often offers a hard-edged solution to Pickett's challenges. How do you describe this character who is not a sidekick, but a strong individual all his own? What does Nate bring to this series?

CJB: Nate is a popular character because he has his own code of justice and he enjoys dishing out violence. We all would like a Nate on our side.

RZW: Most of your books deal with the outdoors, the wilderness, and hunting and fishing. In your opinion, is there a hunger in this country for this type of writing, beyond the Joe Pickett series?
CJB: I think so. My books are popular with people who think they don't like fiction - hunters, fishermen and women, outdoors types. I hear from them all the time.

RZW: Where did Cassie Dewell come from? What made you decide to write her story, and your standalones?

CJB: Cassie was a secondary character in *The Highway* who ended up taking over the book and then subsequent novels as well. It wasn't planned. Reader reaction to her was extremely strong, and I really enjoy writing from her point of view.

RZW: When I first met you in California several years ago, you were meeting with film producers. Are there any film deals in the works? Have you written any screenplays based on your books? Have you considered selling the screen rights to "Joe" or "Cassie," or any of your standalone novels?

CJB: Things are happening so fast I can hardly keep up with them. *ABC* will air *The Big Sky* this fall which is based on *The Highway* and the Cassie Dewell novels. David E. Kelley is the executive producer, and the casting is done. In addition, the Joe Pickett series is being developed at *Paramount TV* as we speak.

☠ ☠ ☠

Reavis Z. Wortham is the author of the Red River historical mystery series and the Sonny Hawke contemporary western thrillers. He was the Magna cum Murder guest of honor in 2018.

A Book Here and There *by Molly Weston*

Living with a crippled dad early in life taught me to be mindful of ergonomics and motion study. Reading *Cheaper by the Dozen* dozens of times reinforced these lessons in my work life, now in my daily life as well. I'd never really thought about how this lifestyle affected my reading until the deadline for this article loomed—and zipped by me.

I'm now faced with mobility issues that now require me to save steps (even though my new Apple watch reminds me about my motion goals several times daily). Fortunately, Daddy's examples have come to the rescue in my reading life!

Thanks to the generosity of publishers (I give monthly talks on mysteries), I have lots of books on hand. I simply keep a mystery everywhere I'm likely to sit for more than five minutes. Breakfast table—check; recliner—check; bedside table—check; car pocket, check. Well, you get the idea.

Folks often ask me how I keep up with the plot with so many books. I'm not sure how I do it, I just do. By the time I've read two or three sentences, I'm right back in the story with all the characters firmly in mind waiting to continue their sagas.

Often when I get to a compelling part, I begin carrying the book around with me until I finish it, or get to what I call, a good stopping point. That's why some of my books have coffee stains or broken spines and others have vertical indentions from standing in my reading rack.

Speaking of reading racks, I have two kinds. The one in the kitchen is getting old. It has pegs that can adjust to the size and thickness of almost any book. Unfortunately, I lost one of the pegs and had to substitute a dowel; but it's not the exact size of the one I replaced, so every now and then when I turn a page, the dowel shoots out!

The other rack lives in my car. It's a folding wire contraption that works for almost any size of crime stories, but it's a little contrary about thickness. Any time I'm going to eat alone while out, I pull this from its home in the pocket behind the passenger seat. Totally accessible! The main drawback to this is that it's such a great rack that every reader who passes stops to ask where I got it. [There are plenty of expensive racks, but I found an online vendor offering a package of two like mine for less than $10.]

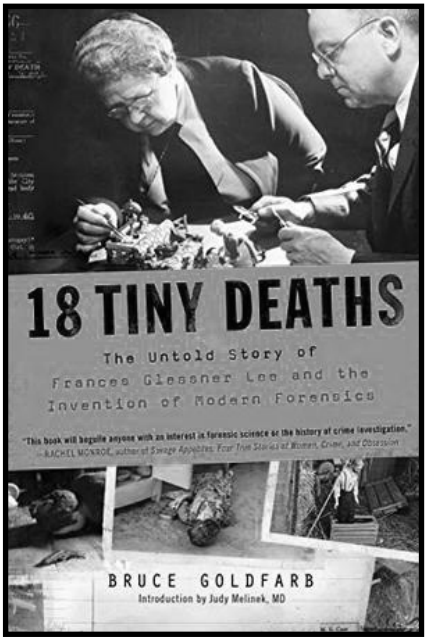
You'll notice I didn't mention a book in my office. That's because the siren song of a good mystery pulls me in and I really do need to work on the computer sometimes.

☠ ☠ ☠

Molly Weston reads, writes, and sometimes works in Garner, NC.

18 Tiny Deaths

The Untold Story of Frances Glessner Lee and the Invention of Modern Forensics
By Bruce Goldfarb



The eye-opening biography of Frances Glessner Lee (1878-1962), who brought American medical forensics into the scientific age.

As journalist and former paramedic Goldfarb (*Health Care Defined: A Glossary of Current Terms*, 1997, etc.) explains, coroners, responsible for investigating unexplained deaths, originated in the Middle Ages; in America, they often paid little attention to medical progress. In the 1800s, all were political appointees, often the local undertaker or a party hack who needed a job. Incompetence was universal, and scandals and corruption were commonplace. Observers complained that "the cause of death certified by coroners was so untrustworthy that health department officials testified that the city's vital statistics would be more accurate if death certificates signed by coroners were excluded altogether." Worse, sloppy investigators allowed criminals to escape and often ensnared the innocent. By 1900, only a few large cities required a medical examiner with medical training. The daughter of a wealthy Chicago industrialist, Lee showed little interest in good works until, in her 50s, she spent a long period in a luxury convalescent hospital with George Magrath, an acquaintance and a medical examiner in Boston. A dedicated investigator, he regaled Lee with gruesome tales—generously recounted by Goldfarb—and made no secret of his despair over the state of his profession. Inspired, Lee took up the cause. In 1931, she approached Harvard's president, offering to pay for a chair in legal medicine, the first in the U.S. For the rest of her life, Lee lobbied energetically and spent liberally to reform the coroner system and promote education in death investigation, sponsoring seminars that continue to this day. She died with many honors—Erle Stanley Gardner wrote an obituary—but her battle is far from won. Coroners still serve about half the U.S. population in less than 30 states, and less than a third of those require scientific training. A genuinely compelling biography.

-Kirkus Reviews

Available now from Sourcebooks!



Mary Higgins Clark

December 24, 1927
to
January 31, 2020

A message from Carolyn K. Reidy, President & CEO of Simon & Schuster

"It is with great sadness that I write to inform you that Mary Higgins Clark died January 31, 2020, in Naples, Florida, at the age of 92. The cause was complications of old age.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of Mary's contribution to our success, and her role in the modern history of Simon & Schuster. Beginning in 1975 with the publication of *Where Are the Children*, each of her 56 books has been a bestseller. There are more than 100 million copies of her books in print in the United States; they are international bestsellers and have been translated into every major and many less well-known languages.

But these storied publishing accomplishments tell only a small part of the larger story that is Mary Higgins Clark. She was, simply, a remarkable woman who overcame an early life of hardship and challenges, never doubting her ability as a natural-born storyteller (and she was one for the ages), and who persevered through trial and rejection until she at last achieved her Holy Grail of being a published author.

Those of us who are fortunate to have worked with Mary—and at Simon & Schuster, that is multitudes—know her as a person of tremendous loyalty and dedication: In this day and age it is exceedingly rare for an author, especially one as prized as Mary, to remain with a single publisher for an entire forty-five-year career.

She was similarly devoted to her readers, until very recently going out of her way to meet them while on tour for every one of her books, and drawing tremendous energy and satisfaction from her interactions with them, even though she long ago could have pulled back from that part of being an author. She was, too, a generous member of the literary community, especially toward new authors, and was well known beyond the publishing world for her support of innumerable philanthropic and civic causes.

Of course, no one here has been associated with Mary longer than Michael Korda, Editor-in-Chief Emeritus of Simon & Schuster, who says:

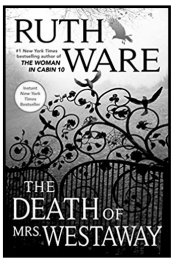
'Mary and I have been dear friends, and worked together since 1975, during which time we never had a cross word between us, which surely sets something of a record for author-editor relationships.

She was unique. Nobody ever bonded more completely with her readers than Mary did; she understood them as if they were members of her own family. She was always absolutely sure of what they wanted to read—and, perhaps more important, what they didn't want to read—and yet she managed to surprise them with every book. She was the Queen of Suspense, it wasn't just a phrase; she always set out to end each chapter on a note of suspense, so you just had to keep reading. It was at once a gift, but also the result of hard work, because nobody worked harder than Mary did on her books to deliver for her readers. She was also, unfailingly, cheerful under pressure, generous, good humored and warm-hearted, the least 'temperamental' of bestselling authors, and the most fun to be around. I feel privileged to have enjoyed forty-five years of her friendship, and saddened that I will no longer be able to pick up the phone and hear her say, 'Michael, I think I've figured out how to make this story work.' She was a joy to work with, and to know.'

Yes, she was deservedly known as the Queen of Suspense, but in our building we have long and fondly thought of her as the First Lady of Simon & Schuster. Today we did not just lose an author, but a true and well-loved member of the Simon & Schuster family. I will miss her tremendously, both on a personal and professional level, but we all can be grateful and proud for having had the privilege of being her publisher these many years, and thankful for all she has meant to her millions of readers and for her kindness and service to many generations of authors."

Note from Kathryn: I remember how thrilled and proud we were to have Miss Clark as our Magna cum Murder guest of honor in 1995!

The Death of Mrs. Westaway
by Ruth Ware



A down-on-her-luck tarot card reader gets a mysterious letter proclaiming a lost inheritance, and ends up in the middle of decades-old family secrets, in Ruth Ware's *The Death of Mrs. Westaway*.

Ware's novel is a straight-up, reverent (but contemporary) take on the old-fashioned gothic, with a rotting old house, a menacing housekeeper, and a cold attic bedroom (with mysterious bars on the window, naturally), among other standards of the genre.

Even though I started piecing it together about halfway through, the storytelling is engaging throughout, and never takes its foot off the accelerator.

The Ready-Made Thief
by Augustus Rose



A troubled teen runaway runs afoul of a vast, baroque conspiracy in Augustus Rose's debut novel *The Ready-Made Thief*.

Every once in a while I come across a novel that is completely fresh, and this one is it; it has the trappings of a contemporary thriller, but has at its core the work of avant-garde artist Marcel Duchamp, and delves deeply into his works. There are unsolved codes, hidden rooms in art museums, a deadly secret society, and more, all cleverly tied to some of his famous pieces.

Contemporary influences include the dark web, the rave scene, and the sex traffic world. It wraps up in an appropriately hazy fashion.

Bluebird, Bluebird
by Attica Locke



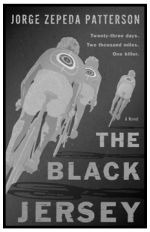
A hard-drinking Texas Ranger, on suspension after a racially charged standoff, heads to a small Texas town to investigate two murders on his own--one of a black man passing through and one of a white local waitress--in Attica Locke's *Bluebird, Bluebird*.

Locke is a writer and producer for the TV show *Empire* but is also a solid fiction writer; this thriller cooks right along, with strong characters to bolster the story.

What makes *Bluebird, Bluebird* a cut above contemporary crime writing is drawing a vivid portrait of race relations, as well as a fully realized characterization of rural Texas.

The Black Jersey

by Jorge Zepeda Patterson



A French cyclist begins to realize that a series of accidents and mishaps on the Tour de France are anything but in Jorge Zepeda Patterson's *The Black Jersey*.

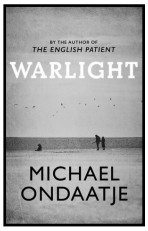
Our reluctant hero is former military, and thus is forcibly recruited to investigate, all the while feeling the threads unravel on an old friendship with the Tour's front-runner, a Hollywood-ready American.

His girlfriend, an old mentor, and the colorful collection of other cyclists make up a fully-realized cast in a thriller that moves, literally, at deadly speed.

This was an entirely refreshing novel with a unique setting and characters.

Warlight

by Michael Ondaatje



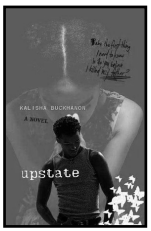
After World War II, two British youngsters are left by their parents in the care of a mysterious lodger they call The Moth; years later, one of the young men reflects on all that happened, and all that was revealed, during that unusual time in Michael Ondaatje's *Warlight*.

This is a literate novel, with espionage overtones; first in the past and then in the present, as the young man works for a British spy agency himself, and gradually learns the fate of his mother, father, and other characters swirling around in his youth.

The espionage elements are interesting, but perhaps not as rewarding as the musings on family, on time and place, and on the secret, unknown lives of the people around you, especially as children.

Upstate

by Kalisha Buckhanon



In Harlem, a teenager goes to prison for killing his father, but keeps up with his high school girlfriend over the course of years, in Kalisha Buckhanon's epistolary novel *Upstate*.

Engaging storytelling really floats a lesser-seen literary style, which frames the proceedings in the form of letters. We see the two main characters grow from unpolished high school students to wiser adults, with compelling twists and turns throughout.

I thought this was a really good coming-of-age story, presented in a unique fashion. Worthwhile novel from Kalisha Buckhanon.

☠ ☠ ☠

John Dalton is the Director of Communications and Marketing for Indiana University East in Richmond, Indiana, by day and a freelance writer by night.

How well do you know the legends? Dorothy Sayers

Dorothy Leigh Sayers was an English crime writer, poet, playwright and Christian scholar. She is recognized as one of the greatest mystery writers of the 20th century. Although she considered her translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* to be her best work, Sayers is better known for her series of novels and short stories set between the First and Second World Wars featuring the aristocratic amateur sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey that remain popular to this day.



1. Dorothy Leigh Sayers was born on __ in __.
    a. June 13, 1893; Oxford
    b. July 8, 1893; Birmingham
    c. January 13, 1883; Oxford
    d. June 13, 1893; Cambridge

2. Dorothy L. Sayers went to Godolphin School where she eventually won a scholarship to ____, Oxford and was one of the first women to graduate from Oxford University in 1915.
    a. St. Hugh's
    b. Lady Margaret Hall
    c. St. Hilda's
    d. Somerville College

3. Sayers' first novel *Whose Body* was published in the year ____.
    a. 1933
    b. 1926
    c. 1923
    d. 1937

4. In every Lord Peter Wimsey novel, is his valet and former batman, Bunter in the background. What is Bunter's first name?
    a. James
    b. Also, Peter
    c. Mervyn
    d. William

5. Mr. Murbles appears in several of the Lord Peter Wimsey books in minor roles. Who is he?
    a. The family solicitor
    b. The family butcher
    c. Lord Peter's chauffer
    d. The family doctor

6. In the short story "A Matter of Taste," you learn that Peter's initials are P.D.B.W. What does the D and B stand for?
    a. Donald Booth
    b. Death Bredon
    c. Donald Bradman
    d. David Balfour

7. Dorothy Sayers also wrote a number of short stories about Montague Egg, who was a commercial traveler selling ____.
    a. Sweets
    b. Wines and Spirits
    c. Tobacco
    d. Spices

8. How many total novels are in the Lord Peter Wimsey detective series?
    a. 23
    b. 16
    c. 14
    d. 15

9. What makes Sayers' novel *Gaudy Night* an unusual sort of mystery?
    a. The narrator is the guilty party
    b. There is no murder in the story
    c. The crime is committed by a child
    d. The crime is committed by a group

10. Sayers began writing plays for public performance in 1935 with ____.
    a. *The Zeal of thy House*
    b. *The Emperor Constantine*
    c. *The Man Born to be King*
    d. *The Busman's Honeymoon*

11. Which character is introduced in *Unnatural Death*, and is a great help to Lord Pter in some of the books following that?
    a. Inspector Parker
    b. Miss Climpson
    c. Bunter
    d. Harriet Vane

12. Sayers' last project of translating ____ was completed posthumously by her friend Dr. Barbara Reynolds.
    a. *Paradiso*
    b. *The Song of Roland*
    c. *Tristan in Brittany*
    d. *The Heart of Stone*



Answers on page 14

Magna cum Murder Registration Form

To pay by credit card, register online at magnacummurder.com

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If you have attended Magna before, which years?_____

Select one or more that describes you:__Reader __Vendor __Publisher/Agent/Editor __Other __Author (At least one full-length crime fiction or true crime novel or collection of short stories published in 2018 through 2020. Provide titles, publication dates, and publishers. E-mail information to magnacummurder@gmail.com.) Authors registered for entire weekend will be considered for panels, but program assignments are not guaranteed.

REGISTRATION OPTIONS (Per Person)
__Full Weekend Registration - $295 (Includes everything)
__Saturday Limited Registration - $175 (Banquet extra)
__Sunday Limited Registration - $75 (Includes lunch)
__Limited Vendor Registration - $155 (Vendor space extra)
__Spouse Meals - $200 (Includes meals only, must accompany a full weekend registration.)

EXTRAS
__Saturday Luncheon - $65 per person
__Saturday Banquet Dinner - $95 per person
__Vendor booth space with one table - $150
__Vendor booth space with two tables - $200
__Vendor booth space with three tables - $250

Amount enclosed, payable to Ball State University: $_____
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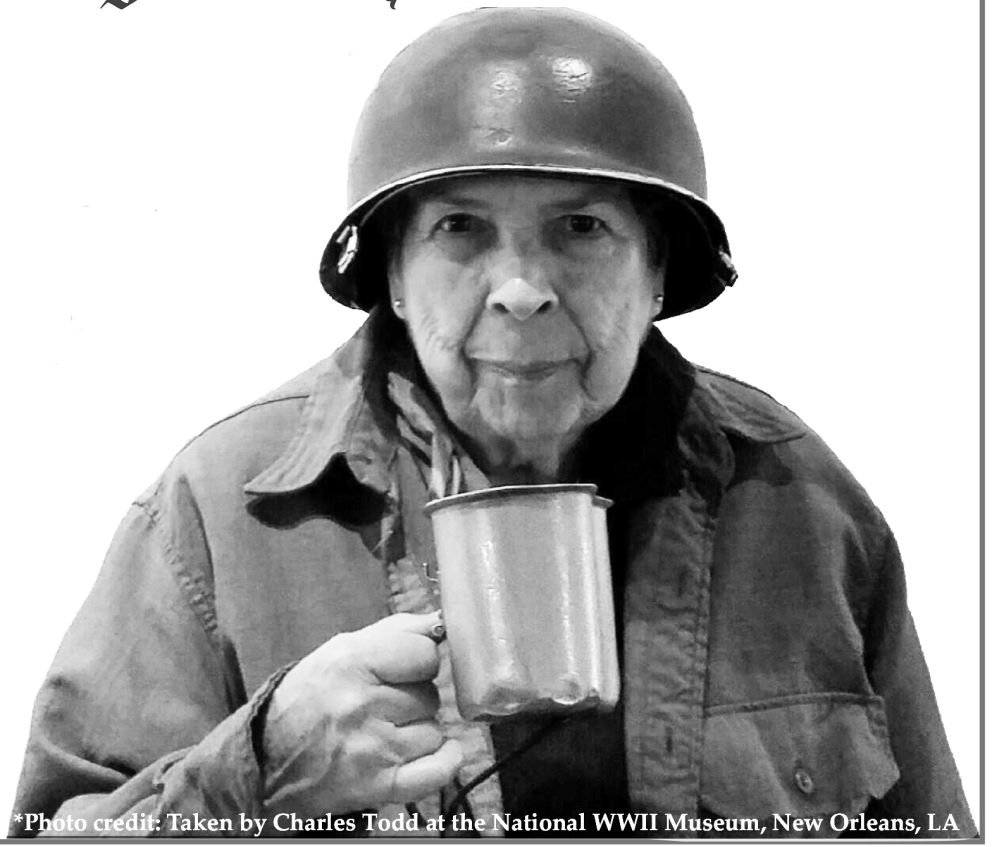


*Photo credit: Taken by Charles Todd at the National WWII Museum, New Orleans, LA

Answers to Sayers Quiz

1. Dorothy Leigh Sayers was born on the 13th of June in 1893 and was the only child of Rev. Henry Sayers, who was headmaster of Christ Church Cathedral School at the time.
2. Dorothy L. Sayers went to Godolphin school where she won a scholarship to Somerville College, Oxford and was one of the first women to obtain a degree from Oxford University in 1915.
3. Sayers' first novel *Whose Body* (which introduced fictional protagonist; Lord Peter Wimsey) was published in the year of 1923.
4. In every Lord Peter Wimsey novel, his valet and former batman, Mervyn Bunter is in the background.
5. Mr. Murbles appears in several of the Lord Peter Wimsey books in minor roles as the family solicitor.
6. In the short story "A Matter of Taste," you learn that Peter's full name is Peter Death Bredon Wimsey.
7. Montague Egg, was a commercial traveler selling wines and spirits.
8. There are 15 total novels in the Lord Peter Wimsey detective series.
9. Sayers' novel *Gaudy Night* is an unusual sort of mystery because there is no murder in the story.
10. Sayers began writing plays for public performance in 1935 with *Busman's Honeymoon*.
11. Miss Climpson is an elderly lady who does a lot of undercover investigating for Lord Peter after first being introduced in *Unnatural Death*.
12. Sayers' last project of translating Volume III of Dante's Divine Comedy *Paradiso* was completed posthumously by her friend Dr. Barbara Reynolds after Sayers unexpectedly passed away from a heart attack in December 1957.



"Books are in the mind, Grandfather Alessandro said. Too many books and you forget your body is in the world."

-Tom Spanbauer, *In the City of Shy Hunters*

☠

"It is with books as with men: a very small number play a great part."

-Voltaire

☠

"Librarians Dewey it better."

-Bumper sticker, 2005

☠

"Books are immortal sons deifying their sires."

-Plato

☠

"Books are a refuge, a sort of cloistral refuge, from the vulgarities of the actual world."

-Walter Pater

☠

"Reading - the best state yet to keep absolute loneliness at bay."

-William Styron

"After all everybody, that is, everybody who writes is interested in living inside themselves in order to tell what is inside themselves. That is why writers have to have two countries, the one where they belong and the one in which they live really. The second one is romantic, it is separate from themselves, it is not real but it is really there."

-Gertrude Stein

☠

"There are books in which the footnotes, or the comments scrawled by some reader's hand in the margin, are more interesting than the text."

-George Santayana, "Imagination"

☠

"Never lend books, for no one ever returns them; the only books I have in my library are books that other folks have lent me."

-Anatole France

☠

"Americans like fat books and thin women."

-Russell Baker

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