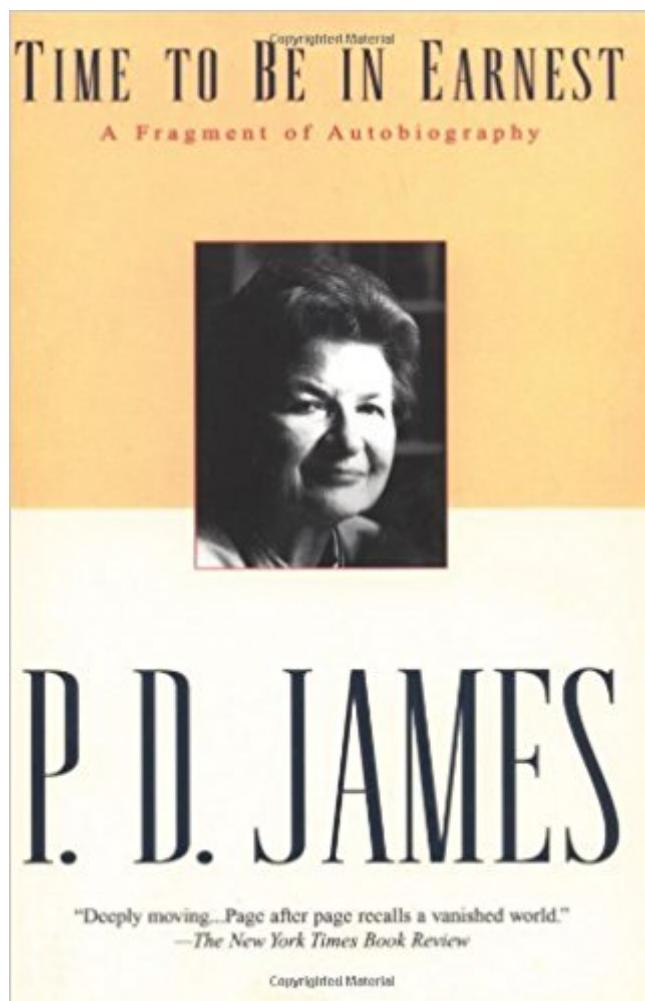


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Time To Be In Earnest: A Fragment Of Autobiography



Synopsis

On the day she turned seventy-seven, internationally acclaimed mystery writer P. D. James embarked on an endeavor unlike any other in her distinguished career: she decided to write a personal memoir in the form of a diary. Over the course of a year she set down not only the events and impressions of her extraordinarily active life, but also the memories, joys, discoveries, and crises of a lifetime. This enchantingly original volume is the result. *Time to Be in Earnest* offers an intimate portrait of one of most accomplished women of our time. Here are vivid, revealing accounts of her school days in Cambridge in the 1920s and '30s, her happy marriage and the tragedy of her husband's mental illness, and the thrill of publishing her first novel, *Cover Her Face*, in 1962. As she recounts the decades of her exceptional life, James holds forth with wit and candor on such diverse subjects as the evolution of the detective novel, her deep love of the English countryside, her views of author tours and television adaptations, and her life-long obsession with Jane Austen. Wise and frank, engaging and graceful, this "fragment of autobiography" will delight and surprise P. D. James's admirers the world over.

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Customer Reviews

"At seventy-seven it is time to be in earnest," wrote Samuel Johnson, and bestselling crime writer P.D. James took this maxim as a challenge, setting out to record "one year that otherwise might be lost." The result is a fascinating and reflective account, part diary and part memoir, of one very full year of Baroness James's life, interspersed with her memories and intelligent analysis of "what it was like to be born two years after the end of the First World War and to live for seventy-eight years

in this tumultuous century." P.D. James grew up in Cambridge, England, between the wars and worked in the home office of the forensic and criminal justice departments, which sparked her interest in that area, though she did not become a published novelist until 1962 with *Cover Her Face*. She began to write full-time after her "retirement" in 1979, and along the way became a governor of the BBC before taking a seat in the House of Lords in 1991. *Time to Be in Earnest* is a lucid and penetrative work by one of the most influential figures currently involved with the arts in Britain. James reveals her vast scope for enjoyment, interest, and simply getting on with life (her husband, Connor White, died at the age of 44 in 1964 after years of mental illness), whether it be spending time with her children and grandchildren, musing on the hideous British architectural mistakes of the 1960s, or giving her view of the controversies continually surrounding the running of the BBC. At an age when many people would be considering slowing down, James seems constantly on the move, recording her day-to-day existence and her past with an alert and judicious eye. "I am sustained by the magnificent irrationality of faith," she states. "I inhabit a different body, but I can reach back over nearly 70 years and recognise her as myself. Then I walked in hope--and I do so still." --Catherine Taylor, .co.uk --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

James's fans will eagerly devour every word of this insightful and witty account of a year in the life of the master mystery author In the diary she began on her 77th birthday, in August 1997, James comfortably segues from daily activities into reminiscences about her childhood, early forays into writing and her career as a civil servant in Britain. She also weighs in on a variety of subjects, including the movie *Titanic* (the "usual Hollywood anti-British bias" irritated her), the publishing industry (promising novels are "promoted, packaged, and sold like a new perfume") and London's Millennial Dome, which inspired her "Dome Pome" (which begins, "O Dome Gigantic, Dome immense/ Built in defiance of common sense"). James reveals herself to be proper, dignified and reserved, but she doesn't reveal much more: readers expecting a traditional diary or spilled secrets are bound to be dissatisfied, though they can't say they weren't warned; in her prologue, James announces that she'll neither rehash painful memories nor record "the events of every day." The painful memories no doubt relate to her late husband's long battle with mental illness, which she mentions often but never fully explores. It's just as well she sticks to the latter promise, for while many of her activities will interest a wide range of readers, there are times when her musings do little to contradict her claim that she is simply "an elderly grandmother who writes traditional English detective fiction." 16 pages of photos not seen by PW. 50,000 first printing. (Apr.) Copyright 2000

I'm a big PD James fan and was happy to discover this. It's essential PDJ, no-nonsense, no sentimentality, no tell-all or confessions. But I learned a lot more about her than I had known. She cherishes her Anglicanism and is a Tory, not Labour. Her commentary on aspects of modern life is acerbic and wonderful. She takes the BBC to task for down-market programming and up-market executive salaries. An old-fashioned Englishwoman, very talented, generous with her gifts -- she speaks everywhere and sits on committees, stays very busy, but still has produced, what, two dozen or more books? Who knew she didn't go to university, nor did her parents, it just wasn't in the cards between the wars. Neither her childhood nor marriage were of the fairy-tale variety. And she became a civil servant to support her family and ensure a steady paycheck, sticking with it for 18 years after publication of her first book. What a woman!

England's Baroness P.D.James wrote her first book in the early 1960's, dealing with the marital complications of a mentally ill husband and raising a young family. Employed for 30 years in the British Civil Service, she had the background for what became a series of 17 mystery novels. She brilliantly crafted the character of Inspector Adam Dalgliesh and attracted international readers. By the time she was in her late 70's she had been asked, and had declined, many times to write an autobiography. What she decided to do instead was to keep a daily diary for one year, not necessarily of her activity each day but intermingled reflections of past experiences, as well. *Time To Be In Earnest* is unusual in it's personal comments, her years of public service and eventual entry into the House of Lords, and her "obsession" with her own favorite author, Jane Austen. Each revelation is a short and personal story, an interesting view into James's thoughts and her life.

I found this book in my library yesterday and have read it almost non-stop. It is truly delightful. I like the understated way she weaves her life story. What impressed me most is her down to earth way of saying that she realized that she would have to support her family since her husband was unable to. She just did it without whining or expecting anyone to help her. Her ideas and opinions on the health care system are right on target. Her references to other works, both hers and other authors, will keep me busy for a long time. I want to check out all of them. What I envy most is her mention of going here and there to conferences and book signings, etc on the great train system in England. I have spent some time there and know how convenient it is. Wish we had such a rail system in the U.S. Her thoughts on the writing experience are also informative. Am so glad she has written this

book.

I have always loved PD James work and have waited in anticipation for each new series that would air on English TV. I think the fact that she decided to write her Auto Biography as a diary was a brilliant idea. Although she wrote this book when in her mid seventies Ms. James life was full to the brink with meetings, book launches etc. If you are unfamiliar with her books, this will at least nudge your curiosity enough to read and immerse yourself into an England that has sadly, almost dwindled away.

P.D. James has given her readers a rare glimpse into her thinking. I saw the daily events as ways to connect with what she wanted to say about her beliefs and about her very interesting and productive life. I have read all of her books and was pleased to be able to understand the author behind the mysteries which she so skillfully writes. I also enjoyed her glimpse into a world which is fading fast - a world where character was important and manners counted for a lot. Elizabeth Skoglund author of Divine Recycling: Living Above Your Circumstances

P.D. James has long been one of my favourite authors. Her cast of characters are second to none and her descriptive writing passages should be studied by all aspiring writers. She is the full package. Even her age has not slowed her down, or made her less of a writer. When I saw she had written an autobiography I was only too happy to download it. Written in 1997, the year P.D. James turned 77, "Time to be Earnest" is her quest to be an adult. She writes not just of current events, but of her past. She recounts events of her school days, of the war and living with her husband as he deals with mental illness. She writes candidly, but without looking for pity at being a single parent. This book, written in her indomitable style is a wonderful insight into what makes P.D. James tick. She is a true lady, and her strength of character shines through every page of her diary.

For PD James fans, her memoir written toward the end of her life is a delight to read. When she started writing, she used her initials instead of her first name because of the bias against female detective fiction writers. Her masterly works are reflective of her superior intellect and subtly nuanced ethical standards. This book reveals the humanity of a sensitive but disciplined mind. I highly recommend it.

I've been intrigued by P.D James since I read her very first novel and have always wanted to know

her better as a person. *A Time to Be in Earnest* provided a tantalizing look at a long and productive lifetime of a woman who encountered more than her share of challenges and dealt with them with courage and resourcefulness. While not everyone will appreciate the diary form of this autobiography, I found it to be just as unique and thought-provoking as James' fiction - and James herself. I also appreciated her thoughts about the very personal nature of memoirs in general. It's important to remember that a personal memoir is just that: personal. It reflects the writer's unique perspectives and worldview. I would recommend *A Time to Be in Earnest* to any fan of PD James!

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