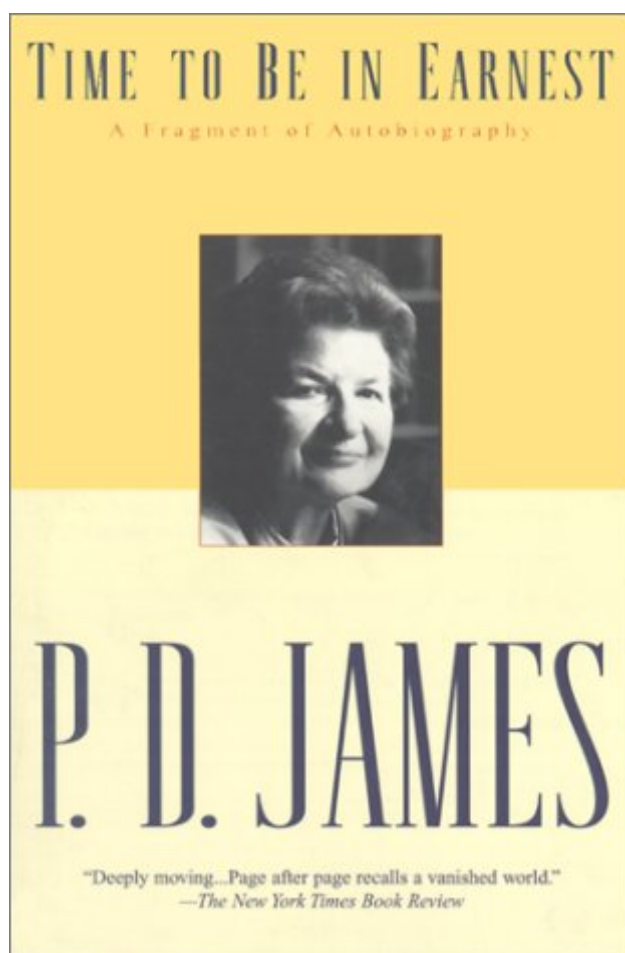


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Time To Be In Earnest



Synopsis

In 1997, P. D. James, the much loved and internationally acclaimed author of mysteries, turned seventy-seven. Taking to heart Dr. Johnson's advice that at seventy-seven it is "time to be in earnest," she decided to undertake a book unlike any she had written before: a personal memoir in the form of a diary. This enchanting and highly original volume is the result. Structured as the diary of a single year, it roams back and forth through time, illuminating James's extraordinary, sometimes painful and sometimes joyful life. Here, interwoven with reflections on her writing career and the craft of crime novels, are vivid accounts of episodes in her own past — of school days in 1920s and 1930s Cambridge . . . of the war and the tragedy of her husband's madness . . . of her determined struggle to support a family alone. She tells about the birth of her second daughter in the midst of a German buzz-bomb attack; about becoming a civil servant (and laying the groundwork for her writing career by working in the criminal justice system); about her years of public service on such bodies as the Arts Council and the BBC's Board of Governors, culminating in entry to the House of Lords. Along the way, with warmth and authority, she offers views on everything from author tours to the problems of television adaptations, from book reviewing to her obsession with Jane Austen. Written with exceptional grace, this "fragment of autobiography" has already been received with enthusiasm by British reviewers and readers. The thousands of Americans who have enjoyed P. D. James's novels will be equally charmed. Diary or memoir or both, *Time to Be in Earnest* is a delight. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

After an uneven beginning, *Time to Be In Earnest*, settles down to an earnest and enjoyable memoir (it is in diary form, covering a year: 1997-1998). P.D. James has a distinct voice, comprised of dignity, reserve, confidence, practicality and intelligence. This voice or persona flows throughout the book. Not a reader of P.D. James' mystery novels, I have no way of knowing if this voice appears in her fiction. It is not a quiescent voice and therefore, not lightly ignored. It does give the reader an image of the author's personality, an image that may or may not be accurate. P.D. James has an eye for detail, a quality that can bog down many a memoir and almost does in this case. However, there is something lesiurely, even unaggressive, about the wealth of detail, and it is intermingled with reflections on religion, nature, life, entertainment, writing and much more. And if you enjoy well-written pictures of nature, the prose of P.D. James will certainly delight and satisfy. In fact, there's a bit of everything in this autobiography for everyone. I found the comments about writing and true life detective cases most interesting as well as P.D. James' experiences in WWII. There are references to Chatsworth, the House of Lords, the BBC and more prosaically, P.D. James' cat, the Civil Service and the work on her house. There is always the suspicion in reading autobiography that it will be like watching other people's home movies: just a tad deary and confusing. This is not the case of *Time to Be In Earnest*. The smoothness of the writing carries the reader past all unknown faces (and it's fun to "meet" the few known ones). One gets the experience of the author's life as it happens. Many--if not most--memoirs/autobiographies are the analysis of events after they have been lived.

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