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Ngaio Marsh: A Life



Synopsis

Ngaio Marsh, a died-in-the-wool New Zealander, wrote more than thirty polished, quintessentially English detective novels between 1934 and 1982, the year of her death. How did she, in some senses an outsider, do it? To say would give away the story of her life, better read in these pages than told. But those who have already met her elegant sleuth Roderick Alleyn know he, too, kept his footing in diverse plots, managing the local idiom whether crime cracking in Britain, on the continent, or in New Zealand. Marsh's talent was as varied as her heritage. A gifted artist, a spirited dramatist, actress, and producer, her crime fiction embraces her triple interests. Scotland Yard's Alleyn is named for famous Elizabethan actor Edward Alleyn. His wife, Agatha Troy, is a talented artist. Nearly all Marsh's novels reference one of Shakespeare's plays. Many are set in the worlds of art and theater. Most are conceived with the dramatist's eye, a keen one, as her high honors for mystery and her work in the theater attest. Biographer Margaret Lewis explores these diverse worlds and the rich harvest of Marsh's long life. Lively, acute, sympathetic, she paints a well balanced portrait of a woman leading a single life who was never alone nor lonely, an Edwardian who followed her muses in a thoroughly modern manner, and a writer who, while invincibly Colonial, celebrated England's Golden Age of mystery as royally as its other Queens of Crime. Our publication is timely given St. Martin's Press' commitment to republish all of the Ngaio Marsh mystery books in Dead Letter paperbacks.

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Customer Reviews

Ngaio Marsh (b. 1895, d. 1982) wrote 32 detective stories featuring Detective Roderick Alleyn and sometimes his amour Agatha Troy, and occasionally their son Ricky. The genial bear-like Inspector Fox was always in support. Ngaio was a single child brought up in Christchurch New Zealand by parents who loved books and the theatre. Ngaio (pronounced "Nye-oh") shared their passion for the arts and went to London where she was an interior decorator, a painter and by 1934, a published author of detective stories. For much of the rest of her life she spent several months a year in Great Britain, and the remainder in Christchurch. She directed very successfully a variety of Shakespearean plays for the University Dramatic Society and toured some of them around New Zealand and to Australia. She was a vibrant and outspoken force for the awakening of the arts in her homeland. She was witty and classy and wonderfully well-read and her novels are laced with humour and blood-thirstily conceived murders. She became famous the world over and was made a Dame in 1966. She never married or had children but had a wide-ranging circle of good and loyal and loving friends. Her house in Christchurch is still open to the public. A great talent. Margaret Lewis has done a fine research job and writes well, clearly with affection for her subject, but we get no further insight into the subject's personality or psyche than we do from her books and C.V., and that seems how it is meant to be.

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