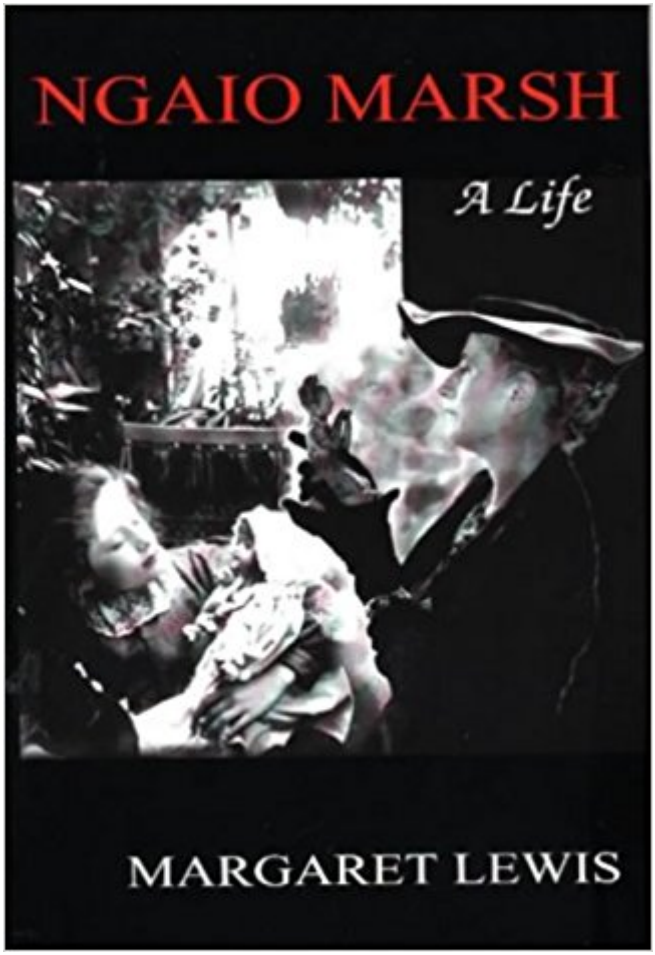
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Ngaio Marsh: A Life



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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.

Book Information

Hardcover: 275 pages

Publisher: Poisoned Pen Press; 1 edition (May 1, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1890208051

ISBN-13: 978-1890208059

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 1 x 9.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,113,755 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #17 inÃ Â Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > Australian & Oceanian #80 inÃ Â Books > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense > Writing #199 inÃ Â Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Genres & Styles > Mystery & Detective

Customer Reviews

Marsh (whose first name is pronounced nye-oh) penned more than 30 mystery novels before her death in 1982. Most of them featured series Detective Roderick Alleyn and have theatrical settings, with which Marsh was intimately familiar as a director and producer of plays in her native New Zealand. Biographer of mystery writer Ellis Peters (Edith Pargeter: Ellis Peters, Dufour, 1994) and an author of crime fiction herself, Lewis was invited to write this biography by Marsh's estate. This enjoyable book, published in 1991 in the United Kingdom, gives the reader a good feel for Marsh's life while illuminating the ways certain events and circumstances inspired her fiction?as when she incorporated her direction of Macbeth into her mystery Light Thickens (Amereon, 1976). Considerable detail is also provided regarding her theatrical work. Recommended where there is a demand for literary biographies and an interest in golden-age mysteries?Denise Johnson, Bradley Univ. Lib., Peoria, Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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A fine biography of a notable lady. I was more interested in her writing career, creating the Inspector Alleyn mystery series. But this book does a fine job of explaining enough history about New Zealand to help one understand where and how she grew up, and goes into great detail about her career as a stage director. Her writing career is also covered and goes into detail about when she wrote each book and what it might have been inspired by in her own life. Interestingly enough, she didn't often reveal things about her personal life in her books, which is why she never felt confident about writing novels, but instead chose the Mystery/Detective genre. Her life was not the overly dramatic celebrity life that one often finds in biographies of the famous, as she was a rather down to earth person; so don't expect that. I liked it.

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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