

Dorothy Sayers, Charles Williams, and W. H. Auden discuss their unconventional love lives

Who I'd invite to my writers' dinner party

by [Charles Hefling](#) in the [May 10, 2017](#) issue

There wouldn't be much getting-to-know-you for the guests at my dinner party. They all knew each other. Three poets: W. H. Auden, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Charles Williams. Yes, Sayers was a poet, before and after she invented Lord Peter Wimsey; she translated the *Divine Comedy* into lively verse. Her inspiration was Williams's book *The Figure of Beatrice*. Williams too was a novelist, whose "supernatural thrillers" have never been out of print. For Auden he was "the only writer since Dante who has found a way to make poetry out of theology," and Auden's own poem *For the Time Being* is full of Williams's *The Descent of the Dove*.

No lack of common interests, then. But I hope my guests would talk not so much about what they wrote as what they (and Dante) wrote about—love, romantic love. To love someone, Williams said, is to be in love, meaning "the Love that moves the sun and the other stars." Suppose that's true. How do lovers in "the world of the flesh" (Auden) negotiate other commitments and promises and values, particularly the ones that come with orthodox Christianity, which all three of these theologically inflected poets professed? Their own love lives were none of them conventional, exactly. It could be a most interesting conversation.