

***I Died for Beauty: Dorothy Wrinch and the Cultures of Science* by Marjorie Senechal.** Hardcover, Oxford Univ. Press, 2012, ISBN 978019973259-3, \$27.71

In her new book *I Died for Beauty*, Marjorie Senechal explores the life story of British mathematician Dorothy Wrinch, the first woman to receive a doctor of science degree from Oxford University. Wrinch's accomplishments, much like those of other women in science (i.e. Rosalind Franklin) have often been disregarded by other members of her field. Senechal's study of Wrinch's colorful and sometimes tragic life employs a cast of well-known characters, including but by no means limited to JD Bernal, WH Bragg and his son, WL Bragg, John von Neumann, and Bertrand Russell.

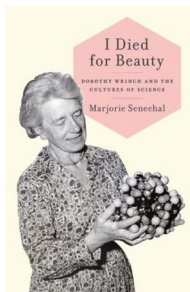
Senechal's work is well-researched and stems from a place of deep personal interest. She knew Dorothy Wrinch, a character who liked to go by "Delta" and signed her personal letters with δ . Senechal details a number of her visits with Wrinch during Wrinch's time as a professor at Smith when Senechal herself was a student. What is genuinely unique about this book is that it is arguably as much a biography of the development of mathematics as a tool in molecular biology and protein crystallography as it is a biography of Wrinch. Senechal explores (albeit in slightly less detail) the relevant life stories of every single one of her characters. She assumes the reader knows nothing about her illustrious cast, and introduces each new character with a hefty tidbit of background information. And if one still has trouble keeping all of these great names straight, she provides a detailed "Cast of Characters" list at the end of the book.

One of Senechal's more inventive representations of history involves presenting the multi-decadal "feud" between Nobel Laureate Linus Pauling and Dorothy Wrinch as an opera. Pauling, a chemical engineer by training, saw Wrinch's work, which sought to explain conundrums in chemistry with mathematics, as irrelevant. When Wrinch proposed a simple model for protein architecture similar to a cage, Pauling responded by publishing a list of her "errors" in an effort to push her out of the field of chemistry. Wrinch eventually moved her academic efforts across the pond, continued to insist "beauty is truth" and stood by her model of simplicity. Vindication for her efforts came only partially and too late. Pauling clung to his views on Vitamin C to the end of his career despite mounting evidence to the contrary, which must have seemed like vindication to Dorothy. However it is Pauling, not Wrinch, who figures in most discussions about the history of chemistry.

Senechal does not portray Dorothy Wrinch as a woman wronged by her field of work and by her colleagues in the field, but rather as the story of an important contributor to the field of protein crystallography whose name is often overlooked. Senechal's work is driven by her own passion as a woman in science and her profound respect for Wrinch's contributions and brilliance during a time when most women were homemakers. This book ensures that Wrinch's legacy will not fade, and that her contributions and colorful life will be remembered.

Jeanette S. Ferrara

Editor's note: See the 'Living History' autobiography of Marjorie Senechal, pp 20-23.



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