

As My Wimsey Takes Me, Episode 0 transcript

[THEME MUSIC: jaunty Bach-esque piano notes played in counterpoint gradually fading in]

SHARON: Hello, and welcome to As My Wimsey Takes Me. I'm Sharon Hsu--

CHARIS: --and I'm Charis Ellison. We're two friends who are sleuthing our way through the Lord Peter Wimsey mystery novels by Dorothy L. Sayers.

SHARON: Between us we have two and a half English degrees, but our best credentials are that we're huge fans who have read the Lord Peter Wimsey books dozens of times each.

So Charis, we're gonna be talking today about why we're doing this podcast. Do you want to tell the good people how you first encountered the Wimsey novels?

CHARIS: I would love to! Falling in love with the Wimsey novels for me was a lot, kind of like the way Harriet Vane falls in love with Peter Wimsey, which is that it happened very slowly and then all at once.

SHARON: [laughing] And you resisted for a long time?

CHARIS: I resisted for so long! Well, I mean not really, I just didn't think about it for a long time. You and I were both members of an internet forum called Readerville as teenagers, and some of the adults that we interacted with there were big fans of Dorothy Sayers, so I had heard the name, I was familiar with the books in a general, vague way, and the first one that I actually read was I think GAUDY NIGHT? Which is coming to things a little bit backwards. And I read it and I enjoyed it, but it didn't have the impact for me that it has now, obviously, because I read it by itself.

And so then a year or two later I think that I read... UNPLEASANTNESS AT THE BELLONA CLUB, I think was the next one that I read? And then I think a year or two after *that* I read MURDER MUST ADVERTISE. And then a year or two after that I read HAVE HIS CARCASE, and I suddenly went "Oh! There's so much more going on here than I realized," that there was a lot more complexity in these characters. Because just reading one book at a time, I wasn't seeing the bigger character arc that Peter is going through, and that Harriet is going through.

You know, when you read GAUDY NIGHT by itself it's an enjoyable book, and they're enjoyable characters, but you, you haven't been on this really fraught journey with them already, so it didn't have that same impact. So then once I had read HAVE HIS CARCASE I started going back and reading the books in order. And by the time I got to BUSMAN'S HONEYMOON, which I read on a family vacation, sharing a hotel room with my parents--

SHARON: [laughing] Oh dear...

CHARIS: --waiting, like waiting until they had gone to sleep so that I could turn the lamp back on, and then lying in bed, with my heart pounding, just absolutely entranced—not necessarily because of the mystery that's in that book, but because it was the culmination of such a tremendous amount of character growth—and like, crying over it into the hotel pillow.

SHARON: [laughs]

CHARIS: And kind of ever since then I've just been re-reading the books nearly constantly. So, yeah, so that's my Dorothy Sayers story, it was very slowly and then suddenly I cared about this more than most other things.

[both laugh]

SHARON: That's excellent. I think I also... I think GAUDY NIGHT was also my first Wimsey novel--

CHARIS: Did we read it as a discussion book in the YA Reading Group?

SHARON: We must have! Uh--

CHARIS: I think, I think we did-

SHARON: Which looking back is quite odd! [laughs] Here, have this enormous novel, um, about two people who have this long pre-history *that you don't know*.

[both chuckle]

SHARON: And I think I similarly to you had the reaction of "Oh! This is intriguing because it's set in Oxford, and the characters are ranging from charming to horrifying"... but didn't really understand the whole backstory. I think I then went back and read the Harriet Vane Wimsey books to try to pick up more of that backstory, but also... still kind of... didn't get it? Until I read MURDER MUST ADVERTISE a few years later and just fell in love with Peter. And, I mean, in my opinion, that's one of the best mysteries, too, so at that point, I think I also started just picking up various books in the series and reading them very non-methodically? Kind of every time I was in a thrift store and saw a mystery of Sayers' I would buy it. And that led to me having several copies of FIVE RED HERRINGS, I think.

CHARIS: [laughing] That's so funny that it's that specific one. It's like, ah yes, you have multiple red herrings!

SHARON: Yes, we, uh, also Charis, we're gonna have to read RED HERRINGS for this, uh--

CHARIS: [groans] Oh, we're gonna have to talk about *timetables*.

SHARON: *And TRAINS.*

CHARIS: [slightly hysterical] SO MANY TRAINS.

[both laugh]

CHARIS: [serious announcer voice] Dear listeners, you have that to look forward to. There's going to be *so many trains*.

SHARON: [sarcastic] Can't wait. [normal voice] Uh, yeah, and I think it really... I didn't read the series sort of chronologically or in any order until... ahhh, it was probably my first year of grad school. I was doing a PhD in English and I got to the end of the academic year and went into this horrible reading slump, where--

CHARIS: [sympathetic noise]

SHARON: --every book I was picking up was just, you know, would read ten pages and go "Eugh, nope, nope, no." And at one point, I said to myself, what I *really* want is... like a big novel that I can just sink into, where I know everything is gonna kind of turn out well, but I can think about it and have feelings... And then I saw my copy of GAUDY NIGHT sitting on the bookcase and went, "Aha! Yes, that! That is, that is it."

And returning to it... I mean, gosh, ten years after I'd first read it was a revelation. And especially since I was in academia at the time and having many conflicted feelings about that, I was like "Oh, this book is written for me!" So from there I went through and read, you know, starting from WHOSE BODY? all the way out to BUSMAN'S HONEYMOON, which I had *never read*--

[horrified gasp from Charis]

--because everyone was like, "Oh yeah, the mystery in it is not that great," which... thank you, friends--

CHARIS: [laughing] Who cares about the *mystery*?

SHARON: [laughing] Exactly!

CHARIS: Who cares about the mystery when you can have fraught emotional relationships?!

SHARON: Yes, exactly.

CHARIS: Not that I don't also care about the mystery, but--

SHARON: I mean, *but*. Let's be real.

CHARIS: But *emotions*.

SHARON: Exactly. And maybe that's what people were trying to tell me? Was like... it's great because there are more emotions than mystery? But... I don't know, when I was seventeen, I heard that as, "This is not a very good book." So. Bad job, past me. Bad job. Poorly done.

Yeah! So from there, I sneakily or less sneakily tried to work GAUDY NIGHT into my dissertation, and eventually realized that that was kind of the only chapter that I actually cared about [laughs]. So, I got partway through writing it, dropped out of grad school, but still really wanted to talk about Sayers. So I corralled Charis into, uh, helping me do that... with the good people of the Internet!

CHARIS: Yes! And we're very excited! But like, really for me, that's what started the really wanting to do this podcast, was because while you were working on your dissertation chapter, we kind of had a discussion group. You know, just getting on a video chat and talking about a chapter of GAUDY NIGHT and it was *so fun*. And I was just like, I want to do this for *all* the books, all the time!

SHARON: And now we are, dear listener!

CHARIS: And now we are. So Sharon, why don't you tell our listeners a little bit about what they can expect from the podcast and what we're hoping to achieve as we work through this series of books and talk about all our feelings.

SHARON: Well, they can definitely expect a lot of feelings. So many feelings. But I think we're just going to start from WHOSE BODY? and work our way through the chronological publication dates, with a couple episodes per book, probably until we hit MURDER MUST ADVERTISE. And then as the books expand, we will likely expand what we have to talk about.

CHARIS: There's going to be so much more meat to get into.

SHARON: Yeeeeees. But first we have to get through *timetables and trains*.

[both laugh]

CHARIS: Just. So. Many. Trains! [laughs] It's fine, we love trains, we love trains--

SHARON: Yes, yes, that's definitely, you know, *not* the book that everybody skips when they read the series. And we'll organize roughly by themes, we think. Our spoiler policy will be that

we will try to talk around the big reveal of the whodunnit until we absolutely cannot, and then we will give a warning to our readers.

CHARIS: Yeah, we'll try and save it for the last episode of discussing a book.

SHARON: Yes. We'll make sure that the first introductory episode we don't give it all away in case our dear listeners would like to follow along and be introduced to Peter, and Harriet, et cetera, for the first time themselves!

CHARIS: Thank you so much, everyone, for listening to this 0 Episode, and we hope that you'll join us for our first episode, which will be coming out soon. We're going to be discussing some of the themes in *WHOSE BODY?* that we find intriguing. And we're also going to talk *a lot* about the Dowager Duchess because Charis loves her *so much*.

SHARON: And justice for Bunter!

CHARIS: Justice for Bunter, who is. just. tremendously underpaid!

SHARON: [laughs] So stay tuned for next time!

[THEME MUSIC: jaunty Bach-esque piano notes played in counterpoint gradually fading out]