

As My Wimsey Takes Me, Episode 6.5 transcript [prepared by Melanie Sliker]

[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. Today we're having a very special holiday episode. First we're going to wrap up some of our thoughts about UNNATURAL DEATH, because we realize that we're running out of room in just two episodes and we're going to need to start expanding our discussions to three episodes. And so we're gonna wrap up those loose ends, and then Sharon -- do you want to tell the listeners what we're going to do next?

SHARON: Yeah, we have a special treat: we are going to be talking about a previously unpublished Lord Peter short story that just came out this year in Volume II of BODIES FROM THE LIBRARY, which is a collection of previously unknown or rare or unpublished short stories from Golden Age detective greats. So we'll have a discussion about that, and then we've collected some reader questions that we will be answering.

CHARIS: Yay!

SHARON: Yes! So that's what we'll be doing.

CHARIS: Yeah, and thank you so much to all our listeners who sent us questions. We've got some really good ones that I'm excited to get into.

SHARON: Alright. So, Charis--

CHARIS: So, Sharon.

SHARON: We were laughing earlier about how we keep telling ourselves that "surely two episodes will be sufficient for each book" [both giggling], but I think with THE UNPLEASANTNESS AT THE BELLONA CLUB we'll definitely start expanding.

CHARIS: Yeah, I was thinking about the book and going, "Oh yeah, we're gonna have a lot to talk about. We're gonna have three full episodes worth of stuff."

SHARON: Maybe more.

CHARIS: And maybe more. We may still be going, "And a few episodes ago I remembered this thing."

SHARON: Yeah, so stay tuned listeners! [laughing]

CHARIS: [chuckling] Oh yeah.

SHARON: But I did want to pick up on our long chat about casual racism last time, because I think past!Sharon was still formulating some thoughts? And I just kind-of wanted to make clear why I take issue, I suppose, with this kind of depiction. Because I, like, when I want to excuse Sayers, you know, from having a bias here, or from sort-of unthinkingly replicating something harmful, my first instinct is like, "Oh yeah! But she's showing that these rural characters are really provincial" right? Or she's showing that the country constable is kind-of dim for falling for the frame-up of Hallelujah Dawson based on these kind-of racist stereotypes; like she's letting the reader feel smarter. Or like, you know, it's part of that characterization. And I think what I didn't quite get to last time was the fact that having only your villainess or stupid characters behave racistly is--it implies that only dumb or provincial people have these attitudes, right? When actually, racist stereotype and racism is just embedded in societal structures, and very wealthy people, very educated people, can also hold very very harmful ideas about other races.

CHARIS: Even people who do their best to do good things, even people who are helpful to people of other races, doesn't mean that they don't have racist ideas at the same time. Like, those two things can co-exist.

SHARON: Exactly, yeah. And I think that in some ways, to depict Peter as though he's so much more enlightened than the other characters is--I mean, in many ways, I think, very anachronistic, because I think all his wealth and privilege would actually in many ways buffer him from having to maybe do, like, anti-racist work on himself.

CHARIS: Right. I do feel like it's balanced out a little bit because we do see some of that casual racism come from Peter himself.

SHARON: Right.

CHARIS: We see some of that casual racism come from Parker. So that's also there, but I think that you're definitely right that a lot of times Sayers is using the more overt racism as a shorthand. Especially for like, "oh this is a bad character" or this is--maybe not *bad*, but a stupid character, or short-sighted.

SHARON: Right. Or villainous!

CHARIS: Yeah.

SHARON: And there's been a lot of discourse in the last few years about, like, clear coating villains, which we certainly talked about as well in our conversation. Or, using, you know, using fatness as a shorthand for this is a bad character. And all of these things are part of the cultural soup that we swim in. And I think it's important, you know, for you and me in our own work of anti-racism to call out when this happens, in the literature that we very much love. I definitely think that, you know, sometimes people are like, "oh, well, why can't you just let it go," [both laugh] "or understand that it was a different time," and it's like, you know, we're still reading these books, I just think it's important for us to talk about. So yeah! That's--that's my little coda, I suppose, on that particular conversation. [laughing]

CHARIS: Yeah, no, I think that's really important. And it's like, you can love something and talk about what's wrong with it. And I think that's part of bringing a critical eye to what you read, right? And I think that's something Sayers would support. She was all for reading things critically.

SHARON: Exactly. To take us somewhere entirely different --

CHARIS: [laughing] And now for something completely different.

SHARON: [laughing] Yeah. Since we were talking about how we noticed that the names in this book are sometimes kind of punny, right? So, like, Bertha Gotobed, Vera Findlater, she finds the truth too late, or also her body is found later. Far be it from me to, you know, ascribe authorial intention, or to imply Sayers had a dirty mind [chuckling], but did you notice that when the entire case is wrapped up, they mention who the inheritance ends up going to?

CHARIS: [intrigued] I did not notice.

SHARON: Okay, I was going to ask if you noticed his name. So Peter asks Parker, "How about the rest of the money? Will the Crown get it after all?" -- because it's been that whole, you know, inheritance law thing -- Parker replies, "No, unless she wills it to someone, it will go the Whittaker next of kin. A first cousin, I believe, called Allcock." [CHARIS bursts out laughing] "A very decent fellow living in Birmingham." And I'm like, "Oh, that's interesting in this book of *spinsters*, you know. The guy who ends up getting all the money is "all cock". Hmmm."

CHARIS: [laughing] Oh goodness.

SHARON: Sorry, mom, don't listen to this part. [both laughing]

CHARIS: Sorry, Sharon's mom, for snickering.

SHARON: Anyway, those were just the two parts that, you know--just wanted to pick up on the racism and the dirty pun. [both laughing]

CHARIS: Very important, very important things to talk about.

SHARON: Did you have a favorite line? I realized we forgot to talk about that last time.

CHARIS: I don't know if I have, like, a favorite single line, but I do have a favorite moment.

SHARON: Mmm, please tell.

CHARIS: It's one of those little throw away lines, but it's when Peter and Mr. Murbles go to meet Bertha Gotobed's sister. You know how I love Mr. Murbles.

SHARON: [laughing] Yes.

CHARIS: It's the bit where they get onto the train, and Mr. Murbles is -- like, Peter has run off, because Mrs. Cropped thought that she saw Miss Whittaker, and so Peter has run off to see about that -- and Mr. Murbles is just like, just being a little elderly gentleman, and he's getting the ladies all settled in the train carriage, and he "exchanges his old fashioned top hat for a curious kind of traveling cap with flaps to it, and Mrs. Cropped, in the midst of her anxiety, could not help wondering where in the world he had contrived to purchase this Victorian relic? As a matter of fact, Mr. Murbles' caps were especially made to his own design by an exceedingly expensive West End hatter, who held Mr. Murbles in deep respect as a real gentleman of the old school." [giggling] It's just the cutest little detail!

SHARON: [giggling] He's so delightful! He's helping Peter with this case, you know, everything's incredibly dangerous, and he has time to change out for his traveling cap.

CHARIS: When we were talking about CLOUDS OF WITNESS, I don't think we actually ever talked about the bit where Peter and Lady Mary and Parker and Sir Impey, they all go and have dinner in Mr. Murbles'--his rooms, and Mr. Murbles is just being so cute about it, you know? He's so delighted to have Lady Mary there, he's just like, "Oh, this is the first time I've entertained a lady in I don't know how many years." [both laughing] He's just--just precious!

SHARON: Oh Mr. Murbles, you old rascal! [laughing]

CHARIS: [laughing] Just want to put him in your pocket. [SHARON laughing in the background] And he doesn't bat an eye at being part of Lord Peter's investigations scheme.

SHARON: Never, never.

CHARIS: He's just, he's so game. He's a game old bird.

SHARON: [laughing] My favorite line actually also involves Mr. Murbles. It's at the end of that chapter, after Mrs. Cropped has sort of relayed the information about, you know, making the will and so forth. And there's this amazing line that says--so it's like right after she finishes her, you know, her recital I suppose, and it says, "Mr. Murbles was very slowly rotating his hands over one another, with the dry, rustling sound like an old snake, gliding through the long grass in search of prey."

CHARIS: Mmmmm

SHARON: And that is, just, like--especially coming right after the, you know, the old fashioned traveling cap and his fussiness over the ladies, it's such a beautiful, I feel, hit of characterization. Kind-of like, oh no, this guy is actually really, really intelligent, and, kind-of like, he's on the hunt now.

CHARIS: So good. It's just like, "Ohh, he is a really good lawyer!"

SHARON: Yeah! Like this is why Peter brought him in.

CHARIS: Yeah. Like, it's not *telling* you anything about how good he is in a courtroom or whatever, but it's just that implication that, "ooooo, he's a predator also!"

SHARON: [stage voice] He's like an old snake! Oo! So good.

CHARIS: He's a precious little old man and also--

SHARON: [laughing] And also a snake.

CHARIS: [laughing] Yes, that's wonderful. Well, I think there is one more thing that we meant to talk about in our last episode and missed.

SHARON: Yeah?

CHARIS: Which is that the original U.S. title of UNNATURAL DEATH--it wasn't first published as UNNATURAL DEATH in the States. When it was first published in America, it was under the title, THE DAWSON PEDIGREE. Which, on it's own it seems like, "Oh, yeah, that's a good title," but it's a terrible title for this book!

SHARON: [chuckling] Spoilers, galore!

CHARIS: It gives away *so much*! Just, immediately.

SHARON: Yeah, yeah, it really--I mean, it's sort of similar to how there's like an editorial note that a genealogical table has been provided at the end of the book. It comes, I think, two or three chapters before they actually really start getting into the Dawson family tree? And it's--if you trace it all the way down you see all the, all the distant cousins and stuff, and it's like, why? What? Hm? [laughing] Why put it *there*?

CHARIS: Yeah.

SHARON: My like, very lurid 1960s edition still has it in small print underneath. I'll include a picture for our listeners because they should really enjoy this cover with me.

CHARIS: That's the one that we got in the used bookstore?

SHARON: Yeah, when we were together. Of course it has a very, you know, a picture of Bertha Gotobed dead in the woods as its illustration and not an old lady because, you know, marketing.

CHARIS: Yeah, it's interesting that I think that most of the covers I've seen for UNNATURAL DEATH really focus on the Epping Forest murder. I'm looking at the copy I have here, which is the new edition from Hodder Books--they've got the new series with these lovely new covers.

SHARON: Yes, we're collecting them all.

CHARIS: Yes! And the cover illustration on this one--you know, it's a picnic basket with branches over it. Not a picture of Bertha Gotobed's body, but it's still referencing that specific part of the book.

SHARON: Were the Cathie Bleck covers--did they have an old woman in a bed? I can't remember.

CHARIS: [thinking] Um, I don't know...

SHARON: Ok, I'm gonna do a quick Google.

CHARIS: I'm not sure what edition I had of UNNATURAL DEATH before I got the Hodder one because I can't find it. I think I gave it to someone to read and it's probably floating around the house somewhere.

SHARON: Mmhmm. All my HarperTorch mass markets are in my parents' basement, where moth and rust doth destroy. [both laughing ruefully] Huh, this is interesting. There's one--this isn't the Cathie Bleck--but there's one with a body on a bed, but there's bright red blood around its head?

CHARIS: That... doesn't make any sense.

SHARON: [laughing] No, it doesn't.

CHARIS: That doesn't have anything to do with anything.

SHARON: That has nothing to do with anything!

CHARIS: That reminds me of a CLOUDS OF WITNESS cover that I saw where it was just like, "Ooo a spooky moor" and then a ghostly cat over it? But like an actual cat, not a jewelry cat, and I'm just like--someone knew enough about the book to know that a cat was important, but did not understand that it wasn't a cat-cat. [laughing]

SHARON: Huh! Did not follow up in any way, yeah.

CHARIS: [laughing] Yeah, but I think let's collect some images of different UNNATURAL DEATH covers and we can share those with our listeners and see how many seem to match the book?

SHARON: Sounds good, yeah. Well, we'll put that in the show notes and probably also on our social media.

CHARIS: Yes.

SHARON: So, be on the lookout for that, listeners! [chuckles] So, on to what we are actually supposed to be talking about this episode [laughing].

CHARIS: The focus of this episode, which is, THE LOCKED ROOM.

SHARON: Yesss. So Charis, you did some background correspondence on this.

CHARIS: Yes! Preparing for this episode, I got in touch with Tony Medawar, who very graciously agreed to chat with me online. He's the editor of the BODIES FROM THE LIBRARY anthologies, which THE LOCKED ROOM appears in BODIES FROM THE LIBRARY: Volume II. So, there's also BODIES FROM THE LIBRARY the first anthology, and he told me that there's going to be a Volume III coming out next year, in 2020.

SHARON: Ooo! Will there be another Sayers in it or--?

CHARIS: [apprehensively] I... cannot tell you that.

SHARON: [laughing] Okay.

CHARIS: I can tell you that there is going to be a Ngaio Marsh. Which, [mock scolding] that would mean more to you if you had done your homework.

SHARON: [sadly] Which I have still not. [laughing]

CHARIS: But, there's an unpublished Ngaio Marsh short story featuring her detective Roderick Alleyn. He did hint that as the series of BODIES FROM THE LIBRARY anthologies continue he's hopeful that Dorothy L. Sayers will feature in a future volume.

SHARON: Ooo! Very nice.

CHARIS: So, hopefully we have some more unpublished or rare Sayers to look forward to. [pause] So, as you said, the BODIES FROM THE LIBRARY anthologies are collections of stories that even big fans of Golden Age detective authors aren't familiar with just because they haven't had access to them. Because, you know, maybe they were published one time in a magazine and then didn't appear anywhere else so they haven't been collected, or maybe they were never published before.

SHARON: Mmhmm.



CHARIS: I asked Tony Medawar how he got started, finding these stories, and I thought it's so interesting, because he said that he just loved detective stories and it occurred to him that there must be more. [both laugh] He was just like, there has to be more. So he started looking for them and just going to archives, tracking down old magazines, and I'm just like, that's the coolest hobby!

SHARON: Yeah!

CHARIS: And you can find a transcript of my conversation with Tony Medawar in our show notes, so you can read, you know, in more detail his answers to my questions, and learn a little more about these great anthologies and what's coming up next.

SHARON: I have to put in a plug for special collections in university archives that hold these papers, because I feel like they really preserve so much ephemera that would otherwise be lost. And I -- sidenote -- there's a novel by A.S. Byatt I really love called POSSESSION, and it's like--the plot kind-of revolves around an academic finding a letter shoved inside a portfolio, in an unlabeled box, in a university archive. And when I first read it in high school I was like, "That's absurd. This is like, really stretching the imagination." [both giggling] And then, in undergrad, one of my campus jobs was I actually worked in the special collections at my university, and was immediately like, "Oh no, this is the most plausible set-up ever." [both laughing]

CHARIS: I love POSSESSION. I really need to reread that.

SHARON: Yeah, for our next podcast!

CHARIS: [laughing] How many 'next podcasts' do we have now? Four?

SHARON: I don't know, we'll have to collect them all. [laughing] Right, but, so this particular story is held, I think still privately, right? But the--

CHARIS: Right, the manuscript is in a private collection, but a copy is held at the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College in Illinois.

SHARON: Because they have most of Sayers' papers and so forth.

CHARIS: So, I suppose we should warn our listeners immediately that, given it's a short story, there's not much more we can say that's not giving away the plot.

SHARON: [laughs] Yeah.

CHARIS: I mean, we can kind-of hold back the whodunnit, but the whodunnit isn't really the point of this story?

SHARON: No.

CHARIS: So for our listeners who prefer to go into what you're reading completely fresh, without knowing too much about it, hopefully you have already gotten your hands on a copy of BODIES FROM THE LIBRARY: Volume II. If not, I hope that you'll seek it out. Please go read the book! You can buy it online -- we'll include links -- you can request it at your local library, share it with a friend, and read this short story so that you can come back and listen to this part of this episode without spoiling--

SHARON: In which we spoil everything! [laughing]

CHARIS: Because we're about to spoil everything. If you haven't read the short story and you do want to be surprised, check our show notes. We'll let you know where to skip forward if you just want to hear the Q&A portion that we're going to do after this. But I'm just like, oh, we can't really not--

SHARON: [laughing] We can't really talk about it.

CHARIS: [sheepishly] I didn't plan that out.

SHARON: No, it's alright, goodbye listeners. [laughs]

CHARIS: So Sharon, let's talk about THE LOCKED ROOM.

SHARON: Yes!

CHARIS: So you and I, we both read it, and kind-of immediately went, "Where does this fit in--"

SHARON: Uh-huh.

CHARIS: "--with the Peter that we know?"

SHARON: We both kind-of were guessing that it had to be early.

CHARIS: Yeah.

SHARON: Because there are certain aspects of his personality that feel like not-quite-yet formed, I think?

CHARIS: Should we start by giving our listeners just like a really brief sketch of the premise of the story?

SHARON: Yes. So, it's a very classic locked room mystery, in that the premise is that Peter is out -- once again! [laughing] -- in a country house, off on like a nice weekend with some friends. There's really only a handful of characters, and he kind-of falls in with this young woman, Betty Carlisle, who's also a guest. His hosts are Mr. and Mrs. Deerhurst, and there is another gentleman there who is also a veteran of the war, named Severin. So they're all there together and, basically, Mr. Deerhurst receives word that this horse that he'd placed all this money on has been, I think, injured in training. So he's like, "Oh my god I'm ruined!" and sort of dashes off to his study. Betty Carlisle and Lord Peter have this conversation where she's like, "Oh no, I think he might do some damage to himself," and Peter says, "Not to worry, he doesn't strike me as the type of person to commit suicide over this." Peter toddles off to bed, and the next morning Bunter brings him the news that Mr. Deerhurst was found dead in his library. All the doors are locked, all the windows are locked, and--yeah, and then a brief investigation ensues.

Listeners, your final warning! So, the rest of the story continues on to where the local constable and so forth come and return a very quick judgement of like, "Oh, we found the cartridge shell; everything seems sort of sufficient to return a judgment that it was suicide." And then I think like a year later, Betty Carlisle comes to Lord Peter and says, "Okay, I have to know: who actually killed Uncle Arthur?" And he's, you know, a little bit startled that she's come to the same conclusions as he has. But at that point he does the couple pages of the reveal of how he knows that it was in fact Severin, who was having an affair with Mrs. Deerhurst, who committed [dramatically] murder.

And I think the thing that is maybe most relevant to the conversations that we've been having so far, is that this is a story in which we see Peter withhold the identity of a murderer, even though he knows who did it. And I think that that's really interesting, given how much we've been talking about his pursuit of truth, and his, you know, his insistence on enacting justice, even when he's sympathetic.

CHARIS: And he doesn't just withhold the name of the murderer, you know. It's not like he declines to tell the police his conclusions: he *hides* evidence. Like he takes evidence from a crime scene, and he deliberately conceals the murderer--the identity of the murderer. Like, he

makes a very deliberate decision. And, yeah, that really seems so at odds with the Peter that we know; the Peter that I feel like we've been discussing.

SHARON: Mmhmm.

CHARIS: And as we mentioned, you and I, we both read this short story and we were immediately like, "So I wonder when this was written." [both laughing] Where was Peter in his development as a character? So I got in touch with the archivist at the Wade Center: I corresponded with Laura Schmidt, the archivist there, and learned from her that the best date that they have for the manuscript version of this short story is 1924. So, they believe that's when this story was probably written. So, after WHOSE BODY? was published, but before CLOUDS OF WITNESS.

SHARON: Mmhmm. Yeah, extremely early.

CHARIS: And I think it's really interesting that then this story wasn't published during Sayers' lifetime.

SHARON: Mmhmm. And like, during--there are a couple of collected Lord Peter short stories that she was putting out, I think, in magazines and then eventually in, like, its own volume -- and that she didn't include this one. Right?

CHARIS: Yeah, that maybe she was writing the story and then decided that it didn't reflect what she wanted to do with Lord Peter as a character? You know, because the premise of the story is him concealing this evidence and making this decision to hide the truth. And I can really imagine that thought process, of her writing this story because it's an interesting premise. Kind-of sets it up where it gives a chance for the reader to see all the clues--you know, that thing Sayers loves doing, where she's like, "Here are all the clues. Did you figure out which ones were important?"

SHARON: Right.

CHARIS: And then shows you all the pieces and how they fit together.

SHARON: Yeah, because she shows that scene of Peter being in the library with the local police officers and the inquest agent, or the medical examiner, and he describes in a very detailed way his actions. You know, he's looking down at the rug, he casually plucks a volume of Aquinas from the bookshelf -- but it's not until later that you realize *he* realizes where the stray bullet's gone and so forth.

CHARIS: Yeah, that the whole time he's standing where he is so that they don't see the bullet hole in the book. That he takes the book away with him so that they don't find the bullet that's lodged in the book. That he has his foot on that spot on the carpet because he's standing on the shell casing.

So, it's a clever story in that sense? Like, it's not a complicated mystery. But it's a clever story in the sense of showing all the clues to the audience without giving anything away? Which, you know, Sayers was so good at doing. And it's also, Peter has kind-of these interludes with Betty Carlisle, and they're fun character portraits.

SHARON: Mmhmm. He's quite the charmer, I have to say.

CHARIS: Right? I wrote in one of my margin notes: I was just like, this is one of the only times we really see kind-of Peter the womanizer? Like, not to say, womanizer in a pejorative sense, because I'm sure that in all his relationships with women Peter was a--

SHARON: Perfect gentleman.

CHARIS: --a perfect gentleman. But, you know, we get the impression that he has this reputation as a dilettante, and there's a reference to him having 'continental ideas.' So he has a history of relationships with women that we don't see.

SHARON: Rarely--like, never on the pages of the novels.

CHARIS: Right.

SHARON: It's always alluded to of like, "Oh yes, he'd taken up with like Viennese--"

CHARIS: Right, the Viennese singer. [laughter]

SHARON: But here we do see... again, it's never explicit, but there--

CHARIS: You have to read into the dialogue.

SHARON: Mmhmm. But it's very clear that he is, at the very least, kissing Betty Carlisle like every opportunity he can.

CHARIS: Yeah. Despite the fact that she tells him--

SHARON: She's engaged!

CHARIS: Yeah, she's like, "Oh, I'm engaged, but we can kiss."

SHARON: [laughing] Yeah, "And you're such a good kisser."

CHARIS: "It's nice, but..", talking about continental attitudes. But like, we see that very different side of Peter that doesn't show up, certainly, in the novels. I can't think of any examples in the short stories. (That doesn't mean that there are none, just that I can't think of any.) So, this is a different Peter than the one that we see in the novels. And I can--yeah, like I said, I can really imagine this being done, kind-of, as an exercise. And then Sayers deciding to put it aside because she realized that the character wasn't going the way that felt correct, you know? You know, that writer thing where you're just like, "Hmm, this doesn't sound like them."

SHARON: Right, right. And I'm really glad she didn't keep going in this direction.

CHARIS: Yeah, because I think Peter would have been less interesting.

SHARON: Yeah, there's something a bit expected or cardboard, I think, about him here.

CHARIS: Yeah, it's a little bit more generic of a character. And I was thinking -- a couple of people, when we asked for questions, we had I think at least two people ask us to talk about how we feel about Agatha Christie? And so I was thinking about that, and I like Agatha Christie a lot, but I don't latch onto Christie the way that I latched on to Sayers. And a lot of that has to do with the fact that I love a good mystery, but what matters to me in Sayers is the way that she wrote characters, and the way that she explored her characters emotions, and, just, like, all these feelings. And Christie was a very good writer who wrote very good mysteries, but she didn't have that--she didn't focus on that in the same way. So, for me as a reader, her characters fall flatter because I don't--they don't have that same draw.

SHARON: Well, it's like you can often pick up a Christie and it doesn't--you don't necessarily need to read it in the chronological publication order, right? Like, one Miss Marple is very similar to another. One Poirot is very similar to another. And so there's not that same, I think, arc of development that makes reading the Wimsey series in order so rewarding.

CHARIS: Mmhmm.

SHARON: I think it's, I don't know--going back to our conversations about how often the detective represents a kind-of outside authority. And I think the thing about authority, and state authority, is that it's like, in a lot of ways that apparatus can never be seen to change? It has to be, like, almost as unchanging as God. Right?

CHARIS: Right; as static as possible.

SHARON: Yeah, yeah. In order to, I don't know, to reinforce the ideas of law and justice and so forth. And so I really think it's interesting that Peter, he's--I mean he's not quite like a trickster figure, but he's so against type in that way. And I think even in this story, like part of the reason he conceals the evidence is because he *is* making a distinction between like, what the law says needs to be done and what he thinks is just? Because it really--his reading of the situation is that Mrs. Deerhurst sort-of drove her lover into a jealousy so that he would kill her husband for her. So I think in Peter's mind it's like, "well, here's this other shell-shocked veteran who's fallen in with the wrong woman." And he's like the finger that pulls the trigger but he's not the heart that made the intent.

CHARIS: Right.

SHARON: And that to him is why he's not going to turn this guy in.

CHARIS: Right, he really sees Severin as just this poor sap.

SHARON: Yeah, and in his mind it's like, well, I can't--you know, the law's not gonna come for Mrs. Deerhurst, but justice should. And so he really makes a differentiation between those two pillars. That the law does not always serve justice.

CHARIS: Yeah. I think the Mrs. Deerhurst character, in kind-of like the love triangle between her husband and Severin, it's really interesting to me--I know we can't talk about this too much? Because it would be spoilers for FIVE RED HERRINGS? [SHARON laughs] But this does feel like a precursor to some of the relationships that we see in FIVE RED HERRINGS.

SHARON: Sorry, all I remember from FIVE RED HERRINGS is like, time tables. [laughing] I'm like, "are there relationships? Are there characters?"

CHARIS: There are, there are relationships. There's a woman in FIVE RED HERRINGS who--this is kind-of like a subplot. You know, there's a married woman who has this idea about--

SHARON: Ohhh, right, yeah.

CHARIS: She really ascribes to the idea of the woman being the angel in the home. That she has a responsibility to make things beautiful and restful--

SHARON: And easy.

CHARIS: Right. So she's not the same character as Mrs. Deerhurst, who is described as someone who *loves fuss*. Like, what she loves is to create a fuss and create a row, and she's someone who loves *drama*. And like, she probably doesn't even do it intentionally, but she is the type of person who is constantly creating drama.

SHARON: Right.

CHARIS: And I think we all have known people like that. [laughter] They're so exhausting. If there's not drama going on around them they will find some.

SHARON: They'll make some, yeah.

CHARIS: Yeah. And if you told them that they make drama they would never believe you.

SHARON: But Peter does make a remark about Mrs. Deerhurst, that she's--or about, I think about Severin, right? Like that he has one idea about women, that they should be protected, and they should be--. And so he can't--it's like he can't recognize that the woman that he's having this affair with is manipulating him because he can't--he like couldn't even fathom the idea that women could be manipulative, I guess?

CHARIS: Yeah. That leads into another interesting point--skipping aside from the FIVE RED HERRINGS connection, cause I don't know that there's much more I can say without giving too much about that book away. And we haven't--we're not even there yet! [both laugh]

But, one of the things that I do think is really interesting in this short story, and that really reflects a theme in Sayers' other work, is that Severin is not the only man who has one idea about what women are. Right? Betty Carlisle actually tells Peter that -- what does she say? She's kind-of talking about both men, and saying that they both think that women are only one thing. And they think that--"that men who think that they know all about women usually know about one woman, and their mistake is assuming that all women are the same."

SHARON: Mmhmm.



CHARIS: And I think that that is very interesting and kind-of like, very indicative of things that Sayers continues to think about. You know, like there's that famous Sayers quote that I see people reference a lot, because it's such a good one, where she says that men often ask her, "How do you write men so well?"

SHARON: [chuckling] Oh yeah.

CHARIS: And she's just like, "I write them as people." [SHARON laughing in the background] She's just like, people often--or I think she says something that people often assume that she must have like a brother because she can write men--cause she writes men so well, you know, like when they're having private conversations that don't involve women. And she's like, "I just assume that they're people -- you know, like women are also."

SHARON: It's really refreshing given that often male creators are like, "How do you write--?"

CHARIS: [laughing] "How do you write women?"

SHARON: [laughing] "How do you write women? What is a woman?" And I think, she mentions that in her essay "Are Women Human?"

CHARIS: Yeah, I believe that's where that quote's from.

SHARON: Yeah. And she also says, like, "nobody -- like, no human being wants to be told that they are representative of their entire gender."

CHARIS: Right.

SHARON: That's not--that's not a respectable thing to do, to extrapolate one woman's behavior to make generalizations about all womankind.

CHARIS: Yeah, yeah. I'll find the exact quotes so that we can put those in our show notes. So listeners, please check the show notes. [laughing]

SHARON: [laughing] We're going to have so many!

CHARIS: There are going to be very long show notes for this episode. So listeners, please check the show notes to get the exact quotes and references for these things that we're paraphrasing.

SHARON: Yeah. Was there anything else?

CHARIS: Well, I'm just kind-of going through my margin notes here and, like, there are so many little things. When I first sat down and read this short story I was really focused on Peter as a character. And going like, oh, this is interesting, but also a little bit weird because this is a Peter story but it doesn't quite feel like Peter, you know? So like I was really focused on the character aspect.

And then when I sat down to make proper notes on it -- [cheekily] because I'm a professional who always makes notes on things -- there were so many good lines and good little bits. And, you know, that thing that Sayers does where she'll make a subtle reference and you're just like, oh, this is kind-of like--without, probably, without it being like a big thing, she'll make a reference that just creates a connection in your mind to kind-of like guide you into seeing things a certain way? And so it was just kind-of interesting going through the story and seeing that skill?

SHARON: Even so early on.

CHARIS: Yeah. It's such an early story, and it's not as strong as her later work is in terms of the character writing. But the skill level of the writing itself is definitely here. There's one part where Peter's observing Mrs. Deenhurst and he thinks of her as Amelia Sedly "in the robes of Cleopatra."

SHARON: Mmm, that's so good.

CHARIS: Yeah!

SHARON: VANITY FAIR reference.

CHARIS: Yes, the reference to VANITY FAIR, and then you have the reference to Cleopatra, who, you know like--it's unfair to, I think, the actual historical personage of Cleopatra--

SHARON: [laughs]

CHARIS: -- but it does bring up that idea of a temptress, or like a woman who seduces men until they do outrageous things.

SHARON: Right.

CHARIS: And it also very subtly brings up the idea of suicide.

SHARON: Yeah, definitely!

CHARIS: And, like, driving men to suicide. And so I'm just like, it's a smooth, subtle, almost red herring thing, and so I'm--there's just several little things like that, where I'm like, "Ooo!"

SHARON: Yeah, that level of craft in just a short few pages.

CHARIS: Yeah.

SHARON: And Bunter--Bunter gets enormous showing in this story. He's really like...

CHARIS: [laughing] There are several points where my notes in the margins were--it just says "BUNTER!!!" in all caps.

SHARON: [laughs] Yeah, he's really--I mean it really goes into the, you know, what we've observed about Peter sending Bunter in when it wouldn't be--like Bunter being able to find information Peter can't, right?

CHARIS: Yeah.

SHARON: Like there's one part where Peter, very deliberately--it's after Mr. Deerhurst gets the message, and Peter, very deliberately, removes himself from the proceedings, because it would not be "gentlemanly" to eavesdrop on a family row. But, he's also like, "Okay, Bunter, just tell me about it in the morning." [laughing]

CHARIS: Yeah -- also this line where the narrative is just kind-of running down the list of characters, right?

SHARON: Mmhmm

CHARIS: And we're getting the description of Anthony Severin and his history, and the narrative says that, "Wimsey -- a detective by instinct as well as by training -- had found out all about him by interrogating his own manservant Bunter. And Bunter, though he had only been a couple hours in the house, had, as usual, all the facts at his fingertips."

[both laughing]

SHARON: Again, if Bunter were the detective, there would be no mystery.

[both laughing]

CHARIS: Bunter would be in and out! Although, I mean there's also the great line where Bunter is just like, "I thought you might like to get up. Unfortunately your host is dead." [laughing] "I took the liberty of waking you early because--"

SHARON: [chuckling] Unfortunately...

CHARIS: "--unfortunately he's destroyed himself."

SHARON: Oh Bunter.

CHARIS: Oh Bunter, Bunter, Bunter.

SHARON: Yeah, he's maybe not the most sympathetic.

CHARIS: Yeah, it's just so--he's so professional all the time.

SHARON: Yeah.

CHARIS: Oh! But here's the other thing I meant to talk about: you mentioned the part where Wimsey overhears this row, this family conflict going on, and he--the actual line is, "He withdrew backwards with delicate steps like a cat retreating from a lighted cigarette end."

SHARON: [chuckles]

CHARIS: Which is a line that I love, and I was just like, "I recognize this." And so I went looking, because I knew there was something very similar, and there's a line in BUSMAN'S HONEYMOON, which -- it's near the beginning, and so to like, describe the scenario without spoiling things for our listeners who have not gotten that far in the books yet: in BUSMAN'S HONEYMOON, Peter is in this country house. The country house has a clogged chimney, and someone has decided that the best way to clear a chimney is to shoot a rifle up it.

SHARON: Of course! Of course. As one does. [laughing]

CHARIS: And so there's several other people in the room, and they're all kind-of watching this guy shoot--getting ready to shoot up a chimney. So like, everyone is watching this happen, and Peter [laughs] is described as, "walking backwards, like a cat that has stepped in spilt perfume."

So like it's a very similar line, where he's just like, "silently walking backwards," because he has figured out that this is gonna be catastrophic. [chuckling] But he's gonna let it happen! [SHARON laughing in the background] He's gonna quietly remove himself and let it, let it happen. It's such a funny scene, I'm so excited to get to BUSMAN'S HONEYMOON, some day, in twenty years.

SHARON: [laughing] For our 100th episode.

CHARIS: Yes. So like, I just, I love that idea that Sayers was just holding on to this line--

SHARON: To that image?

CHARIS: Yeah, to that image of Peter backing up like a cat from something. And that she saved it all the way until she was writing the last Wimsey novel.

SHARON: Yeah, yeah. Great artists cannibalize from themselves.

CHARIS: Yes. And I knew that there was another reference to, like, a description of Peter being cat-like.

SHARON: He's often, yeah, described as like prowly that way.

CHARIS: Yeah! So, like, what I--I was just like, I know that I remember something. So I was hunting around for it, and I think that what I was thinking of was the line in MURDER MUST ADVERTISE where he is described as, you know, like prowling around like a cat, kind-of familiarizing himself with his surroundings. And I do love that image and how it ties into the Wimsey coat-of-arms with the cat.

SHARON: Yeah!

CHARIS: Yeah, so I'm just like, I enjoyed that a lot.

SHARON: I did notice, because we talked about how much I loved the line in WHOSE BODY? about the dog with the ear sort-of like flipped inside-out, that she reused it in the very next book. [laughing] Or something very, very similar. And I was like, hmmm. [both laughing] Unfair.

CHARIS: Yeah. Oh, but jumping back a bit -- I feel like I'm jumping around a lot, but I keep looking at my notes going like, "Oh yeah, and that." There's this bit in here where Peter is talking to Anthony Severin, and Severin is telling him about how he learnt to read books since

his illness -- which, like, obviously doesn't mean he learned *how to read*, but that he just like, "Oh I didn't read books before and now I read books." And he's just like, "Oh did you--it's such a shame that men are so terrible. Like, I never realized how terrible we are to women, but now I'm reading all these feminist things." And, you know, Peter is kind-of looking at his bookshelf and thinking to himself that Anthony's reading was obviously edited with care?

SHARON: Uh-huh.

CHARIS: And on the very next page there's a reference to Anthony Severin "knitting his patient brows horribly over a work by Dorothy Richardson."

SHARON: [bursts out laughing] That's right! I'd forgotten about that.

CHARIS: [laughing] Yeah. So I was just like, that name is there for a reason. And so I looked Dorothy Richardson up because I wasn't familiar, and--

SHARON: Well she's a modernist writer, right?

CHARIS: Yeah, and what I thought was interesting was that she was an early modernist, and she wrote with an emphasis on the importance and distinct nature of the female experience. Which, I think is really interesting because it kind-of plays into that idea of focusing on the difference between men and women? And I think we talked a little bit about one of the issues Sayers had with--

SHARON: With the first wave.

CHARIS: Yeah, with the first wave of the feminist movement was that it focused on the fact that women have a unique contribution. You know, the idea that women are fundamentally different and special.

SHARON: Mmhmm. Right.

CHARIS: And Sayers didn't care for that. It's like this is a reference to that.

SHARON: Oh absolutely, yeah.

CHARIS: And I think like here, specifically in this story, that that is kind-of backing up this idea of the men in the story seeing women as only one thing. Severin sees women as something, you know, special and important and vulnerable and something that, you know, needs to be on a

pedestal. And Mr. Deerhurst sees women as they need to-- [scoffs] "you gotta treat 'em rough and, you know, show them who's boss." Like he has that very, very much of an attitude. And then Peter's kind-of between these two men. Peter and Betty Carlisle are on the sideline going, "Not all women are the same!" [laughing]

SHARON: Surprise!

CHARIS: This whole story would be different if people realized that.

SHARON: [laughing] Yeah. Yeah, it's interesting that even though there's something kind-of, like-- [sigh] I don't even know if stereotypical is the right word, right? But like, expected? About the way that Peter is sort-of like romancing Betty Carlisle for a bit of fun? Like this is kind-of him at his most Bond-esque, I think? [laughs] But not in like the gross Bond way? I don't know. But there's, you know, I feel like there's something kind-of old fashioned about that depiction. But at the same time they are having all of these intelligent conversations, about, like--you know, the different--how, yeah, how not all women are the same. So you do get the sense that even though this is like an easy way to show that Peter is attractive to women and that he likes them and that he's continental, like, part of his attraction to Betty Carlisle is that she has a mind. It's not just like, "oh, I would be kissing any woman in the countryside that I ran across." [laughing] So actually the opposite of James Bond in that way.

CHARIS: Yeah, pretty sure that James Bond would kiss a llama if it was wearing a bikini.

SHARON: [laughing] Very true.

CHARIS: Oh, I did want to mention that, you know, this story really hinges on the fact that Peter lies by omission, right? And that he deliberately conceals the evidence that a crime took place. You know, like--I guess it kind-of mirrors UNNATURAL DEATH in that way. Like UNNATURAL DEATH is all about him running around trying to prove that a crime took place, and this story is about him deliberately concealing the fact that a crime took place and letting people assume that there was a suicide.

SHARON: Yeah.

CHARIS: But despite the fact that he chose to conceal the evidence, he keeps it. He keeps all the evidence. And he's also shown to be worrying about it when Betty Carlisle comes to see him later, after the fact. And it's implied that she comes because there's been this sensational scandalous murder, and, you know, like, there's been this murder trial where--

SHARON: It's a parallel.

CHARIS: Yeah, there's a parallel.

SHARON: A woman drove her lover to kill her husband.

CHARIS: Yeah. He "secured a seat in court throughout the trial." And then he comes home and is sitting there with this volume of Aquinas on his knee. Like, obviously thinking about the Deerhurst murder, because we find out a page or two later, when he's explaining everything to Betty Carlisle, that this is the book that has the bullet in it. Like, he's not sitting there reading it. [chuckles]

SHARON: [laughs] No.

CHARIS: He's sitting there like, staring at this bullet hole.

SHARON: Yeah. And he, I mean, you know, at the end he tells her because Mr. Severin has died in the interim, right? I think he's killed himself.

CHARIS: Yeah, it's-- it's implied, for sure, that he killed himself.

SHARON: That he overdosed, yeah.

CHARIS: Yeah, "officially" it's an accidental overdose, but probably it was suicide.

SHARON: Yeah, so there is this aspect of, like, justice has been served--or, you know, now that the players are off-stage, yeah.

CHARIS: Yeah. And I mean, I think you could read an inference into that, that Peter kind-of looked at Anthony Severin as just like, "Mrs. Deerhurst is gonna drive you to suicide anyway?"

SHARON: Mmhmm.

CHARIS: I think that he anticipated that? Just like, "You're gonna be punished anyway. And so why should you also suffer the public humiliation of a trial, and all of that." Yeah.

SHARON: Yeah, exactly.



CHARIS: So--and that's a hint, I think, of the Peter that we do know. And I think the Peter, particularly, that we're going to encounter in THE UNPLEASANTNESS AT THE BELLONA CLUB.

SHARON: And MURDER MUST ADVERTISE, yeah.

CHARIS: Yeah, I think that we will see echoes of this, for sure, with the idea that justice is served, ultimately. Yeah, it's going to be interesting to talk about those things and then go into talking about BUSMAN'S HONEYMOON, for sure. But--yeah.

Sooo, let's move on to listener questions.

SHARON: Yeah! So this one came in on twitter, and it's something that I think a couple listeners asked about -- but, @ibmmiller wants to know: "Is Michelle Dockery the best current option to play Harriet, yes or YES?", in all caps. [both laughing]

CHARIS: [laughing sheepishly] My answer is actually no.

SHARON: [intrigued] Ohh!

CHARIS: Like, I think that she would be good. I think that Michelle Dockery is fabulous, *but*, I think she's not who I would pick to play Harriet?

SHARON: Hm.

CHARIS: Which is not to say I don't think she would do a wonderful job, but she's not the type that I would have in mind.

SHARON: Well, who would you cast instead?

CHARIS: Other than like, an unknown, because I don't know that there's anyone that I could think of off-hand that I think is just like absolutely perfect? But, like, before I cast Michelle Dockery, I think that I would try to get Hayley Atwell.

SHARON: That was my initial thought, too. [both laughing] So, Ian made a really good point that Michelle Dockery does have a certain brittleness, I think, that especially early Harriet, when we meet her in STRONG POISON--like I can really see it after this particular listener kind-of pointed out that aspect. And we know she can sing! So.

CHARIS: [chuckles] Yeah. But when you're doing like, "could so-and-so play such-and-such part," a lot of times you just go, "Ooo, do they fit the physical type that I see in my head?" And Michelle Dockery does not. And that's like, I mean, splitting hairs, but...

SHARON: [laughs]

CHARIS: But just like, in terms of bone structure, she doesn't feel right to me, whereas Hayley Atwell does. And, I mean, I do think Hayley Atwell could play--like, she could play the brittleness, but I think that she could also play the later Harriet in a way that I have trouble imagining Michelle Dockery doing. So, both very fine actresses who would do a wonderful job, but--I don't know. And, like, other than those two, there isn't someone who comes to mind.

SHARON: But the answer to that question is, we like the idea of Michelle Dockery, we like the idea of Hayley Atwell, and other listeners can also weigh in.

CHARIS: Yeah. I think that I would lean more towards Hayley Atwell, but I also just--I love Hayley Atwell.

SHARON: Don't we all. Yeah, I wonder if she might be a bit too warm for Harriet, but, maybe it's just because I've seen her play a certain type, you know.

CHARIS: Yeah, and I think that the thing about Harriet is that she *is* a very warm character who has become cold because of circumstances.

SHARON: Mmhmm

CHARIS: I feel like if you have Michelle Dockery playing her as cold then it's cold all the way down? Whereas I feel like I can imagine Hayley Atwell playing her cold, but that warmth is underneath. Does that make sense?

SHARON: Yeah! Totally. I think the really--my, like, where I have difficulty is fan-casting Lord Peter.

CHARIS: Mmm, yeah.

SHARON: I feel like everyone who usually gets mentioned I can find something wrong with? [laughing] People say Tom Hiddleston a *lot*.

CHARIS: I adore Tom Hiddleston, but he's too -- pretty? To be Lord Peter?

SHARON: Yeah, yeah. And I think there are a lot of people who--they could do--Like, I've also heard someone mention John Mulaney? Um...

CHARIS: [surprised] Oh! Yeah. [apprehensive] That would be... interesting? It would be interesting.

SHARON: Eh? I feel like it would be lots of silly ass and maybe not enough gravitas behind it. My issue with a lot of the people who get brought up for Peter is that I think it's easy to do the Puck-ish, silly ass side, and harder to show a gravitas behind that?

CHARIS: Mmhmm

SHARON: So, it's, you know, to me, John Mulaney is just too young and too light.

CHARIS: Right, and too American?

SHARON: [laughing] And too American, yes, for sure.

CHARIS: Now I did--I saw someone mention Matt Smith, which is not a casting that would have occurred to me, but, I've seen a few episodes of The Crown with him--

SHARON: Just glowering all the time?

CHARIS: Right! And so like, knowing from Doctor Who that he can do, kind-of, the silly ass bit, but then like, also watching The Crown and seeing him do like the aristocratic, serious. And so I'm just like, Oh! And I also feel like he's not conventionally attractive in kind-of the right way?

SHARON: [laughing] Like maggoty.

CHARIS: He has--I'm just like, he has the right kind of silly face?

SHARON: [sadly] But his chin's too strong!

CHARIS: [thinking] Yeah... but he has the forehead.

SHARON: Yeah, I guess. [laughs]

CHARIS: And he has enough nose -- like, whoever plays Peter has to have sufficient nose, you know.

SHARON: That's true.

CHARIS: Well, why don't I ask you a question?

SHARON: Okay, sounds good.

CHARIS: We had another question, also from Ian, which is, "What editions are you using and which editions do you like?"

SHARON: So again, because I have collected my Wimseys very haphazardly [laughs] -- so I have, I think, an almost complete set of Cathie Blecks, as I mentioned, at my parents' house from when I first started reading them, and those were sort-of the widely available ones. And I *really* like those: I love the illustrations because they do feel really, like, perfectly whimsical. I then--I think when I kind-of rediscovered Wimsey in--or, you know, started rereading them really voraciously in grad school and I had moved away, I just got them all on Kindle. So I have a full set of Kindle editions, and some of these really lovely [laughs] 1960s, I think, Avon editions are what I've been using primarily for making notes as we record the podcasts. I have some of the new American--like the reissued American covers, which I do not prefer: I find them a little... boring? [laughs] And am also now collecting the new, like, the new British ones with the art deco covers which I really like. So yeah, the answer is *all* of them. [laughs]

CHARIS: [laughing] That is true for me as well. I actually just had to get up and grab off my shelf because I was like, "wait, I don't actually know for sure." All of my copies, until recently, have also been obtained haphazardly. So I have a mix. Let's see: The Perennial Library editions - which I like overall. Perennial Library from Harper and Row. I like the overall design of the books, but I don't love the cover illustrations -- but I kinda like the design around them? And then I have some of the Cathie Bleck covers, I have some--oh, these are also Perennial Library, let's see...

SHARON: Yeah, I think they have two separate--

CHARIS: Yeah, two separate ones. So I have some of the ones with the cover designs by Karen Goldberg, with cover illustrations by Marie Michal. And then I have some Perennial Library ones that are designed and illustrated by Paul Davis Studio, 1987. And then, of course, I'm collecting the new Hodder British editions. Thank goodness for bookdepository.com. [laughing]

SHARON: Yes! Absolutely. Those have been sort-of our gifts to ourselves as we've finished various recordings.

CHARIS: Yeah. But if someone would like to release a beautiful hard cover edition--

SHARON: [wistfully] Mmmm, yes.

CHARIS: --of the entire series. I've seen special editions, but they don't ever seem to be the full set. It'll be like four of the novels and I'm just like, I can't do that.

SHARON: Yeah. [Pause] I'm going to ask you another question.

CHARIS: Okay.

SHARON: @frozenwritingcorner on tumblr asked us, "What's your opinion on Agatha Christie? I love her stories, but as a person of color they can be hard to sit through, as so many of them involve racist language/attitudes. Any recommendations on authors with similar type stories that aren't as dated perhaps?"

CHARIS: Ooo.

SHARON: I know, I was also really stumped.

CHARIS: I mean like, the problem with writers from this era is that so many of them fall into the same use of stereotypes.

SHARON: Mmhmm

CHARIS: And I can't--I mean--I kind-of feel like Ngaio Marsh has *less*? Certainly not *none*, but maybe less than Christie and, you know, Sayers? As for modern writers... That's tricky, because like when I read modern mysteries or modern thrillers I'm not looking for something that replicates that Golden Age--

SHARON: Feel?

CHARIS: --style? Yeah! Because even like--even when it's really well done, I think that it still feels contrived because I know that I'm not reading an actual Golden Age detective--you know? So like when I'm reading modern mysteries I tend to read stuff like Tana French, you know, which is very different--

SHARON: In feel.

CHARIS: --very different in feel.

SHARON: And contemporary in setting. Have you read any Flavia de Luce's? I have not.

CHARIS: I haven't either.

SHARON: So I guess we can't--

CHARIS: [laughs] Yeah, neither of us can comment on them. Yeah, those have been recommended to me but I haven't read them yet.

SHARON: Yeah. You know what I would say has kind-of the flavor and has a mystery element is TO SAY NOTHING OF THE DOG by Connie Willis.

CHARIS: Oh yeah. Which is so fun.

SHARON: It is so fun, yeah. It is very, I think--maybe that's what I would recommend to this listener is, check that one out. If other listeners who are maybe more well versed in this very particular sliver of a venn diagram than we are [both laughing], please do weigh in and we'll retweet, and so forth.

CHARIS: Yeah, like, I'm just like, oh this is a little bit of a personal fault, because mostly I just read Sayers over and over and over again. [laughing]

SHARON: Same! [laughing]

CHARIS: Yeah, when I read contemporary writers, I tend to read things that are very different. And all the Golden Age--the detective writers that I can think of, fall into these same pitfalls, you know?

SHARON: Yup.

CHARIS: Ngaio Marsh *might* have less, but it's not like I read every single Ngaio Marsh book, so I can't say with absolute confidence. Yeah, but Christie and Sayers and--

SHARON: Josephine Tey, for sure

CHARIS: Josephine Tey, yeah, they all fall into that trap where, yeah, there's gonna be racism. And, I mean, there's many modern writers that also have that problem as well. So, yeah. [laughing ruefully] Sorry we don't have better recommendations!

SHARON: [sadly] Yeah.

CHARIS: But listeners, please let us know if you have any recommendations for us to pass along.

So, the next question for you, Sharon: we had an anonymous question from someone on tumblr, asking, "You find a black cat and you decide to name him after a character from a book. What do you name him?"

SHARON: Oh!

CHARIS: And they don't specify that it needs to be a Sayers, so it could be any book.

SHARON: Right, well, certainly--yeah. I feel like if it were a white cat I would name it Mogget [laughs] from the SABRIEL books by Garth Nix.

CHARIS: Yeah. Which, I can kind-of answer this question because I did have a black cat and her name was Sabriel--

SHARON: Ohhh yeah! That's right!

CHARIS: --after the Garth Nix books.

SHARON: Yes, that's excellent. If it can be a media property based off of a book [CHARIS laughing in the background] because I did not actually read the books, but I would absolutely name a black cat Toothless, from "How to Train Your Dragon."

CHARIS: Oh, yeah, so cute!

SHARON: Yeah.

CHARIS: If I were naming a black cat after a character from Sayers... if it was, like, a sleek black cat I think I would name it Bunter.

SHARON: But you already have a robot vacuum named Bunter!

CHARIS: I know I have a robot--

SHARON: You can't cheat. [laughing]

CHARIS: I know I have a robot vacuum named Bunter, and it's very sleek. But--

SHARON: [exclaiming] Oh!

CHARIS: --if it was a fluffy black cat, that would be different.

SHARON: [eager] No no no, Charis, if it were a sleek black cat it could be Mrs. Merdle!

CHARIS: [gasp] Ooo, yeah!

SHARON: Peter's car, yeah. [laughing]

CHARIS: If it were--and if it were like a fluffy--a small fluffy black cat, I think I would name it after the Dowager Duchess.

SHARON: Honoria?

CHARIS: Yeah, I like--Honorina -- yeah, I like the name--I like the idea of it being named Honoria and calling it 'Your Grace.'

SHARON: [laughs]

CHARIS: [chuckling] That's very funny to me. [pause] Now I'm just imagining what type of cat I would name Harriet. Because, like, when I got my cat, there were people who were just like, "Well name it Harriet, after Harriet Vane." And I was like, "No, you don't understand, my cat is grey, and Harriet is a name for a brown cat." [SHARON laughing in the background] I just feel very strongly that, like, only a brown cat should be named Harriet.

SHARON: Brunette.

CHARIS: Yeah! It's a brunette name in my mind.

[both laughing]



CHARIS: I don't--I don't know why.

SHARON: I--you know, just--yeah. Why are--why is every Elizabeth Bennet a brunette, even though Austen never says what her hair color is?

CHARIS: It's because Elizabeth is a brunette name.

SHARON: Yeah.

CHARIS: And Amber is a blonde name.

SHARON: [laughs]

CHARIS: I don't make the rules--

SHARON: You just conform to them.

CHARIS: --I just know what they are instinctually. [both laughing] But I was just like, you know, an orange tabby could be Parker.

SHARON: Mmmm, mmhmm.

CHARIS: And like a big--a big white tomcat could be Sir Impey.

SHARON: [laughing] Yeah. Or, I feel like--like a big tuxedo cat.

CHARIS: [enthusiastically] Oh yeah! Yeah, you're right, a tuxedo cat.

SHARON: Mm, yeah. Well, [laughs], okay-- [both laughing] @tentacosaurus from Twitter would like to know, "There are some big and obvious recurring themes and motifs in the novels (i.e., Peter's PTSD or gender politics). Are there any small and/or surprising recurring things you noticed in your close reading?" [chuckles] Which I feel like we could do a whole episode on.

CHARIS: Ohhh yeah, we could just go on and on.

SHARON: Yeah. And we've brought some of them up, right? Like the attention to servants...

CHARIS: Yeah, attention to servants, the, you know, hints about the interiority of even minor characters. And the, like, how obvious it is when that's missing. [SHARON chuckling in the

background] I think the small thing about the gender relations--you know, even when it's very small. Obviously, like, gender relations and gender politics is a big theme, but I think sometimes it's handled in small ways that I think are really interesting.

I also think it's interesting how often Peter uses Biblical quotes. That's something that's recurring, and things like that that I see tying into Sayers the theologian.

SHARON: Yeah, which will be a thread that she develops later on in her career.

CHARIS: You know we kind-of talked about the detective is like the moral judge; the moral authority is the detective. And so, like, it's interesting for Peter to be this character who's fundamentally a, by the nature of the genre, kind-of a moral center, who himself struggles with morality, who also quotes Biblical things constantly. It's like, hmm, all those things kind-of wind together in a really interesting way.

SHARON: I know. I feel like I have some threads but they would all be sort-of giving things away from future books. [laughs]

CHARIS: Yeah, so we don't want to spoil too much.

SHARON: So we'll just--we'll bring those up as they come.

CHARIS: So our friend Amanda asked, "If you could insert yourself as a random background character, what or who would you be, and in what story?"

SHARON: That's a good one.

CHARIS: I have an answer for you.

SHARON: [excited] Yeah? Okay.

CHARIS: I think that she [Sharon] would be a member of the Senior Common Room at Shrewsbury.

SHARON: Aww! [laughs]

CHARIS: On a spiritual level, that's where you belong.

SHARON: Yeah, that's very--that was sort-of where my mind immediately leaped to. At least that's the book I would most want to be a random background character in--and definitely a member of the Senior Common Room and not an undergraduate. [laughing]

CHARIS: Yes! [laughing]

SHARON: Otherwise maybe I would like to be the person who makes Mr. Murbles' hats. [both laughing] What about you?

CHARIS: I mean like, short of just being like also--yes, I would like to be a member of the Senior Common Room also--

SHARON: [laughing] Well, yes, of course, where you also belong.

CHARIS: I think... Hmm. If I had to choose a minor character from the actual books to be, I think it would be Marjorie? Who's a character that we haven't encountered yet, but we will in--we will soon.

SHARON: Oh yes!

CHARIS: Cause I'm just like, she seems nice, she's artistic--

SHARON: She is, yeah.

CHARIS: --and I like her. But I think if I were creating a random background character--

SHARON: Would you want to work at the advertising agency? At Pym's?

CHARIS: I was just thinking about that, and I think not? [chuckles] People seem too stressed.

SHARON: [laughs] Deadlines.

CHARIS: It seems like a little bit of a stressful environment. I mean like, fun, but it's not something I'd want to do long-term. I don't know! I really--I'm kinda stumped. I mean like, being like, "Oh yeah, I'd want to be a member of the Senior Common Room," is kind-of easy. But, I don't know. Maybe what I would want to be would be like one of the Shrewsbury alum? You know, like, you come to the Gaudy--

SHARON: Yeah! Well, you'd be Phoebe Tucker. [laughs]

CHARIS: Yes.

SHARON: The one that still is exercising her brain. [laughs] Not one of the one's Harriet's so disappointed in.

CHARIS: [chuckling] Right, yeah, one of the ones who went on to have a positive life. [SHARON chuckling in the background] Positive and fulfilling life. Or, you know, like in GAUDY NIGHT, Harriet Vane goes to that literary party?

SHARON: Oh yeah.

CHARIS: The unnamed friend [laughing] that she's going to visit, who's apparently the type of person to throw that type of party, I'm just like, "That person! They seem to have a good thing going on."

SHARON: Yeah. Though Sayers does poke a lot of fun at like, her contemporaries and the silliness of their books.

CHARIS: Yes. [laughing] Kind-of the pastiche of artistic salons. Which we haven't gotten to yet, but. Or I'd want to be friends with, like, Eiluned Price.

SHARON: Yes!

CHARIS: And I just blanked on the name.

SHARON: Sylvia? Is it Sylvia?

CHARIS: Yeah! Sylvia. Yes, I think I'd want to be part of their set and be friends with them.

SHARON: Or we could both be Cattery agents with Miss Climpson.

CHARIS: [excited] Oh yes! Oh, no, you're right, I take back all my other answers. [SHARON laughing hysterically in the background] I want to be in the Cattery.

SHARON: Yay!

CHARIS: Yes, I want to work with Miss Climpson. That's what I want.

SHARON: You'd be very good at it.

CHARIS: I want to be Miss Climpson's assistant.

SHARON: Amanda asked another question that I'm also curious about. Which, she was wondering, "How has Sayers' writing -- or maybe even particularly with the Peter books -- influenced how you operate in real life?" Because clearly these are very important stories to us. [laughs]

CHARIS: Right, like we care about them so much that we want to talk about them for hours, and then [laughing] spend hours editing and transcribing. [SHARON laughing in the background] And get other people to listen to them. There's a lot of devotion going on here. And it's some of those, you know--like when you start reading something when you're young, it can be hard to track how it influences you because it's just been there, doing it quietly for so long. But I do think I credit Sayers with just being a part of my, kind-of, personal moral awareness? Because you know, like, we see Peter go through an arc of self-discovery about himself and about his moral choices and where those choices come from. Reading about that and having that all explored is fascinating to me. And I think, like, brought up questions that maybe I would have explored on my own eventually, but that was the first thing that brought them to mind? So, you know, started that thought process going.

SHARON: Yeah. I think, for me--I mean, certainly the question that Harriet is asking in GAUDY NIGHT, of like, "What is the appropriate balance between the head and the heart?" was a big part of my--I think I kind-of hit on that book at exactly the right time in my personal life, where I was asking those questions, too. And sort-of asking as a, you know, as an intelligent woman who at the time wanted to be in academia. I mean, certainly not--there weren't quite as many restrictions [laughing] now as there were for women then, thankfully. But really, kind-of--I don't know, I found it really encouraging that the books -- and like a whole set of readers who loved these books -- very much believed in the idea of an intellectually equal relationship between men and women? I think that was really important for me to see modeled in fiction and through various readers I knew for whom the Peter/Harriet relationship was so important for that reason. Just as I was at the point in my own life where I started making romantic choices, I should say. So, yeah, that was a big influence! [laughs]

CHARIS: So let's do one more. This is a question from our friend Nia, who asks, "How has time and life experience changed how you appreciate the characters in the Wimsey novels? Which ones do you connect with more now versus your first reading?"

SHARON: I think I certainly appreciate Bunter more.

CHARIS: [laughing] We appreciate Bunter more and more.

SHARON: [laughing] Yes, like, the more that I've had to run my own life and household I'm like, "Oh gosh, Bunter's just doing all the work."

CHARIS: [sighing wistfully] Oh to have a Bunter.

SHARON: Yeah, I would get much more done every day if I had a Bunter, I think. [chuckling]

I think, I mean, time and life experience has certainly deepened my appreciation of the books and of the characters as, you know--I think I started reading them just as they're fun, pleasant mysteries; they have some themes that I really appreciate, as I just mentioned. But with more time, I think I just really have come to see how much depth Sayers puts in all these characters. I think there are aspects of just, as you get older, as you go through more things, I certainly--I think I understand the character of Peter a little bit better. And I really appreciate how much Sayers was thinking through that this is a traumatized character. And I feel like she's pretty--she's really responsible with that, right? Without making any judgments on the rightness or the wrongness of how he copes with that trauma. She presents his character very fully formed to us, of "these are all the ways Peter's life has been so disrupted and formed by what he went through in the war."

CHARIS: I think that's really similar for me as well. You know, reading the books when I was younger I just really enjoyed the mystery, I enjoyed the relationship between Peter and Harriet. And reading them deeply as an adult--I really have a new appreciation for the complexity. And I feel like doing the close reading that we're doing now for this podcast is giving me a new appreciation for, on a very like line-by-line level, technical appreciation--

SHARON: For the craft.

CHARIS: Yeah, for the craftsmanship that Sayers is putting into her work. We didn't start this podcast going like, "We know a lot about Sayers. [SHARON laughing in the background] We have a lot of knowledge to pass on." In the course of doing this I feel like I'm learning a lot about Sayers herself. And when we poke around doing research for our episodes; or when people share things with us; when we get the opportunity to do things like read Mo Moulton's book; it broadens my understanding, and that brings a whole new element to the way I read the stories as well.

Because as much as I appreciate reading things like THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR, I also am really interested in why authors write the things that they write and what, like, circumstances may have brought those ideas to the forefront. And I feel like I'm learning a lot more about that, and to me that enriches the whole reading experience in new ways, which is really fun. And to be still reading these books after [mumble mumble mumble] years -- [laughs] *lots* of years, because--gosh, I've been reading them since I was a teenager and I'm an old lady.

SHARON: [laughing] You're not an old lady.

CHARIS: [laughing] I'm so old.

SHARON: [laughing] Put you on the shelf.

CHARIS: But, I don't know, we're getting close to twenty years of me reading Sayers? Probably not quite twenty, but getting there. And so the fact that I'm reading these books, again, and finding so much new stuff to think about and to talk about, that's, like, that's amazing.

SHARON: Yeah. I think--I mean, when you were talking about sort-of having more context, it kind-of made me reflect, too. Like yeah, I'm sure there was some aspect of reading and loving these books that partially informed my desire to do my field specialty in modernism in grad school. But also, you know, it's a bit like a snake eating its own tail, right? Like, growing a certain kind-of expertise about the historic and societal and political movements that were informing literary modernism -- now coming back and reading Sayers with that lens, I think, has also opened up the books in a way that I found really personally rewarding and enriching. Just like, oh yeah, all these things that--you know, maybe I even assumed she was separate from in high modernism, and finding oh no, yeah, she's doing all this experimentation as well! That's been really cool to think about. So... Not picking up that dissertation though, no way. [laughing]

CHARIS: [laughing] No. They should have just given it to you.

SHARON: I'll just submit, you know, all the thousands of pages of transcripts that we'll have by the time this is over. [both laughing]

So, thank you again to Laura Schmidt from the Wade Center, and to Tony Medawar for speaking with Charis about BODIES FROM THE LIBRARY.

CHARIS: Yes, and THE LOCKED ROOM manuscript.

SHARON: Yeah, and again you can find the transcript of that conversation in our show notes. And we'll be back in two weeks with our first of three? Possibly more? [both laughing] Episodes about THE UNPLEASANTNESS AT THE BELLONA CLUB.

CHARIS: Yes, we will see you--well, we won't see you. But we will chat with you again in 2020, which is a real year now.

SHARON: [screams in disbelief then devolves into laughter] Happy Holidays, Charis!

CHARIS: Happy Holidays!

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