

As My Wimsey Takes Me, Episode 14 transcript

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

CHARIS Hello and welcome to this episode of As My Wimsey Takes Me. I'm Charis Ellison—

SHARON And I'm Sharon Hsu—

ANGELA And I'm Angela Hines!

CHARIS Angela is a good friend of ours. She's actually my very oldest friend. We are, gosh, coming up...

ANGELA 30 years next spring

CHARIS That's right, next spring we'll have known each other for 30 years. And Angela is here to represent the people who [chuckles] really like FIVE RED HERRINGS.

ANGELA Yes, I love it.

SHARON We thought it was only fair since Charis and I have been slagging on this book ever since we started this podcast to bring in the other perspective. So thanks for joining us, Angela.

ANGELA Yeah. You're welcome. I'm glad to be here.

[sound effect of train wheels rumbling down a track and then a train whistle]

CHARIS So Sharon, would you like to introduce the book a little bit before we get started?

SHARON Uh, I sure will try. I feel like it is A Task to introduce this book. Not only because the mystery is incredibly convoluted and depends a lot on breaking the alibis of not one but six different people, some of whom disappear, some of whom seem to have airtight stories that start falling apart, et cetera, et cetera. But also because this book represents such a departure from both the style and the subject matter that we have become accustomed to thus far in the Wimsey books. So in FIVE RED HERRINGS, you'll remember this book becomes right after STRONG POISON, a book in which we see Peter fall in love with a woman who is standing trial for murder. And so, yeah, the next time we see him, he has gone off to Scotland. He goes to this village, a village that is known for its excellent fishing and its excellent pastoral landscapes. So the very first chapter of the book we find out, people come here to fish and people come here to paint. And if you have the great fortune of being both a fisherman and a painter, this

place is heaven on earth. And Peter...it's obvious really early on that this is a community that knows Peter. He's visited this place many times.

CHARIS One of the things that makes this book different, and this book is very heavy on specifics, this was a place that Dorothy L. Sayers had visited. And she was being minute in getting the place portrayed accurately.

ANGELA Does y'all's have a map of Galloway in the front?

SHARON Yes.

CHARIS I think so...it does.

ANGELA Okay. I just love it so much, like referring to it and stuff because she tells you exactly which roads and things that they're using to get between these places. But that's just the kind of reader that I am, I go, Oh, there's a map. Wait they're on this part. Okay. So then you know, but--

SHARON Okay. But question for you, Angela, how *legible* is your map? Because mine is so small that I can't read hardly any of the names.

ANGELA It's not terribly legible, but there's uh, Kircudbright [ANGELA pronounces this kirk-uhd-bright] and then Dumfries and--

SHARON and CHARIS together Kircudbright [pronounced cur-COO-bree]

ANGELA Sorry. Kircudbright [pronounced as SHARON AND CHARIS have just both said it] I can see--

SHARON Listeners, do *not* email us about this, please! [all laugh]

ANGELA Sorry. I'm sorry. They told me and then I got it wrong! Yeah. No, I mean, it's pretty, it's kind of legible, but yeah, it's pretty small. Like you don't have to look really closely, but it gives you like how many miles it is. You know, there's a little thing that shows, you know, it's very detailed.

SHARON Okay, my map infuriates me every time. Because when I try to reread this book in an Angela frame of mind of this time I'm going to follow all the roads and the trains, it is impossible for me to do so because the map is so small! And I, in floundering on what we were going to talk about in this episode, I actually did a deep dive into Sayers' letters to see if she, you know, mentions writing this book at all. There's quite a lot, especially her letters to her publishers, that's illuminating. But I wanted to tell you guys about this little aside that she has about maps. Also because we've had some listeners write in and say, do you guys know if

really, really airtight mysteries set in touristy places or, you know, Scotland were a thing? Because it feels like she's really doing like a pastiche of a certain kind of, I dunno, subgenre.

So in September, 1930, Sayers writes to her publisher, Victor Gollancz and she's in the middle of composing the book. She gives him a bunch of titles that she's kind of been thinking about and how she's working her way through the different alibis and clues. And then she writes, "By the way, a very odd coincidence has occurred. This book in which all the places are real and which turns on actual distances in real railway timetables is laid in exactly the same part of the country as Freeman Wills Crofts' new book, which also turns on real distances and times tables. We only discovered this the other day in the course of correspondence, which started about something else. The two plots are of course entirely different. It really doesn't matter a pin. Only there's just one point. The unspeakable Collins (as you will see, if you look at Crofts' book, SIR JOHN MCGILL'S LAST JOURNEY) have furnished him with the most mean, miserable, potty, small, undecipherable, and useless map, scrim-shanking, feeble, and unworthy to the last degree. Possibly he drew it himself. But in that case, they ought to have taken it away from him and given him something better. I look to you, as a publisher of repute, to allow me a large, handsome, clear, well-executed, generous, and convincing map, covering both end-papers (as this prevents tearing and facilitates reference) with the proper scale of miles and everything handsome about it. And no pettifogging talk about the expense of large blocks or the cheapness of having one's map made by the office boy. Whatever happens, we must go about ten better than the intolerable Collins!" [ANGELA and CHARIS laughing helplessly in the background]

I think she's talking about Harper Collins, the publishers? But I just laughed and laughed when I saw that because I don't know, we'd have to run down a first edition to see if she actually got the map of her dreams, but it certainly has not come through the ages that way!

[Ed Note: A quick aside from editor Charis, Dorothy L. Sayers did get her map. We found a listing on eBay of a first edition and you can see the beautiful legible map if you check our show notes on our website.]

SHARON So now that I have done a very long aside about maps, yes, this is a book that is based on real places and real times tables, though Sayers says not real people

CHARIS Not about real people, but she does thank real people in her forward.

SHARON Yes, "Joe Dignam, the kindest of landlords" is who this book is dedicated to.

CHARIS I think the forward is really sweet.

SHARON Would you like to say more?

CHARIS I mean, I didn't really have any, like, what I wrote in my notes was "what a sweet forward." And that was really it.

SHARON Oh, that's funny. I wrote next to "all the places are real places and all the trains are real trains and all the landscapes are correct," I just wrote: Jesus. [laughs] Sorry, I'll try to restrain myself!

ANGELA Imagine how much research it took to plot this out.

CHARIS Oh mercy!

SHARON Yeah. Well this was a real... so Kircudbright was a real place, and Sayers herself toddled up there quite a bit. And it's funny because after the book was published, it actually...I mean Kirkcudbright was on the map beforehand, but there was so much interest that later on, she actually complains to her friend about how she can no longer vacation up there because apparently this book was like a bestseller. It went to multiple printings. And then people would hear that, you know, Miss Sayers was in residence and go knock on her door to have her sign their books. Um, and this, you know--

ANGELA Eugh, yeah.

CHARIS I do love the bit where in the forward she says, "If I've accidentally given any real person's name to a nasty character, please convey my apologies to that person. Even bad characters have to be called something."

SHARON They do. Should we get past the forward? Should we talk about the first chapter? [laughing]

ANGELA The actual book?

CHARIS Yeah, let's get into the actual book. Oh, here's my map. And my map is...extremely small and fuzzy. Like this is a small mass market paperback, but oh, it's an appalling map.

ANGELA Sayers would be so disappointed.

SHARON She would be. She should haunt whoever put this together [all laugh]

CHARIS But yeah, the opening line of the book is "If one lives in Galloway, one either fishes or paints. Either is perhaps misleading for most of the painters are fishers also in their spare time. To be neither of these things is considered odd and almost eccentric." It's fish and paint.

SHARON Yes.

ANGELA That's what's going on here, that's it.

CHARIS Or, or both. And we get this long introduction to the community with hardly any people, you know, we have this long descriptive section where we aren't in anyone's point of view.

SHARON It feels super old fashioned as an opening? Like when we think about the other ways the books so far in this series have opened, often we're attached to a point of view or there's a kind of narrative omniscience that points itself out.

CHARIS Well, you think of the way STRONG POISON started with the roses on the bench. And they look like splashes of blood. Where it starts with this like extremely evocative isolated image, as opposed to this sketch of a landscape.

ANGELA This is almost more of a, like a Jane Austen type of opening. You know, this reminds me a lot of, I honestly can't remember if it's EMMA or SENSE AND SENSIBILITY that has an opening like this, but I just read both of them recently, so.

SHARON Yeah, it feels almost Austenian.

ANGELA Describing the area almost as a character instead of starting with people, you know?

CHARIS Yeah. Which, I mean, the landscape is very much a character in this book.
[chuckling] The landscape is almost more character in this book than Peter is.

SHARON Yes. Which, I'm sure we'll get into kind of the lack of any access to Peter's interiority, but you know, it almost feels like we don't access any...The suspects all kind of feel like paint by numbers to me as well. Um, no pun intended.

But we can talk about that in a bit. I did get a kick out of how, despite this very neutral, almost guidebook-y, omniscient narrative voice, there is this little aside of, you know, "There are artists who have large families and keep domestics in cap and apron. Artists who engage rooms and are taken care of by landladies. Artists who live in couples or alone with a woman who comes into clean," et cetera, et cetera. So kind of again, Sayers' interest in who does the work and kind of making the point of, okay, yeah, there are a lot of artists in this community, most of whom are men and most of whom...their artistic lives are made possible because of the domestic work of mostly women, right?

CHARIS and ANGELA Mmm, yeah .

SHARON And that's paragraph *two*. Which I think is just great.

ANGELA I love how it mentions that Lord Peter is just, you know, any eccentricity is just kind of shrugged at and just, "Oh, Christ. It's only his Lordship." Like I love that. He's just kind of like, yeah, he might be, you know, a lord, but he's *our* lord. So it's whatever, you know, he's aregular around here. So it's fine. Don't worry about him. He's a good chap.

SHARON He doesn't throw his weight around.

CHARIS Speaking of who does the work, I want to skip ahead a little bit to mention the beginning of Chapter Five, which opens with the sentence "It amused Lord Peter to leave the simple life at Kirkcudbright, greatly to the regret of the hotel keepers. He had this year chosen to rent a small studio at the end of a narrow cobbled close" blah, blah, blah, blah. And, um, "his explanation of this eccentric conduct was that it entertained him to watch his extremely correct personal man gutting trout and washing potatoes under an outside tap and receiving the casual visitor with less than ceremony." [laughing]

ANGELA Right? Poor Bunter!

SHARON Justice for Bunter!

ANGELA He's like "It's really funny to watch Bunter doing this stuff. So that's fine." Poor Bunter is almost not even mentioned in this book.

CHARIS Bunter well, he does play an important part in gathering some evidence a little bit later on.

ANGELA Right, yeah, he does--

SHARON Bunter, the ladies' man.

ANGELA But he's very much almost absent from this book, it seems like. I love Bunter. All of the books could use more Bunter.

CHARIS Yeah. He's not nearly as present as he is in, in like *STRONG POISON* where he played a much bigger role. I do love the fact that it also mentions that Bunter is constantly going across the street. So there's two ladies in the house across, and he's always doing things to help them cause he hates watching them do for themselves,

SHARON It distresses him to watch them make their own dinner.

ANGELA Oh yeah.

SHARON Aww, and they rewarded him with gifts "of vegetables and flowers from their garden. Gifts which Bunter would receive with a respectful 'Thank you, Miss, His Lordship will be greatly obliged.'" No! They're for you. Bunter! [laughing]

CHARIS Yes. But, sorry, I skipped us ahead a little bit, but it's hard to...it's hard to dig into this book because it's so, it's like a monolith of stuff, you know, it's so...it's just like the, the mystery is so...there's not a handhold for us to really get into, except I guess [unenthusiastically] we can talk about the victim.

SHARON Yeah, I think, I mean, yeah, maybe we keep wanting to skip ahead to the more funny and pleasant bits because, in a way, after the pastoral opening, you know, we dive immediately into this scene between Campbell, who becomes the victim, and basically everybody he wants to fight with, which is the entire world.

CHARIS Oh everybody. But a specific sub-people as well. Yeah. How about, Sharon, you describe that scene for us just briefly?

SHARON Oh boy. [chuckles] Okay. So we sort of, we pan in on Lord Peter, which is...it's really kind of a masterful piece of writing, right? Like you start with the village and the landscape and why people go there and then it's like, okay and *Peter* also comes here for XYZ. And on this particular evening, he was in the bar at an inn, "the bar of the McClellan Arms on the evening that the unfortunate dispute broke out between Campbell and Waters. Campbell the landscape painter had had maybe one or two more wee ones than was absolutely necessary, especially for a man with red hair"—which we...look, we could talk about the representation of Scots here—"And their effect had been to make him even more militantly Scottish than usual," and then Waters, who's the person that he's giving this diatribe to, "was an Englishman of good yeoman stock. And like all Englishmen was ready enough to admire and praise all foreigners, but like all Englishmen, he did not like to hear them praise themselves."

So this is, yeah, this is just kind of how we get started. And it is sort of interesting to me that, that phrase, you know, that Wimsey was in the bar "on the evening that the unfortunate dispute broke out between Campbell and Waters." It almost sounds like the narrator is recounting a past event that is like a well known kind of local event, right? "*The* unfortunate dispute," like it's, I don't know, just the use of *the* instead of *a* or *an* there.

CHARIS Yeah.

SHARON They basically, they get into a fight and call each other slurs.

CHARIS Yeah. We have some, some blanked out slurs here. Slurs, or like maybe just swear words? Blanked out, unlike a certain racial slur that is encountered, we encountered it a good bit in UNNATURAL DEATH. It's also later on in this book, and we don't need to get into describing what it is, but it is interesting that these are blanked out and that one is not.

SHARON Yeah. I mean, we've had listeners write to us and, you know, we very much acknowledge that the world has changed in many ways since Sayers wrote her books. You know, one of the ways of which is what is considered polite language or, you know, unspeakable language. But yeah, I think there's certainly, there's certainly some playing off stereotype of the Scottish people in this book. I have no idea if, you know, in her period, if it would have been considered kind of just as acceptable as engaging in stereotype about Jewish people or Black people or so forth. I don't think any of it ages particularly well, but it's kind of interesting even what the book itself makes or renders unspeakable or unrepresentable versus what it doesn't.

ANGELA I think it's also interesting, too, that right after this fight, we basically get the rundown of the motives. When people are talking about, Oh, Campbell's terrible and oh yeah, this guy had a fight with him and this guy has a fight with him for this reason. You know, like there's a lot of listing of all of the people that Campbell has picked fights with and all of the reasons everyone's mad at him. So I think that's kind of interesting how it's coming straight after this, you know?

CHARIS Like he hasn't even been murdered yet, but we've laid the groundwork for who wants to. Well, then we also, like, we know that Campbell is someone who has a chip on his shoulder. It describes him as being, you know, militantly, scotch. And then after Campbell has kind of been thrown out of the bar, someone else's describing him and talking about how he's from Glasgow and his mother was an Ulster woman, like, meaning that she was from Ireland? So like, there's this idea that he's, that maybe he's not, that he's not properly Scottish. Murdoch, who's the person talking, says that "he's no' a Scotsman." [all chuckle]

SHARON Kind of going back to all those different national stereotypes, right? We saw it with, um...what are names? In CLOUDS OF WITNESS with uh, Cathcart and how he took after the French part of his family and so forth. So, everyone's always just jonesing to disown the poor actors among themselves.

ANGELA He's not *really* Scottish. Not like us.

CHARIS Not properly.

SHARON Yeah. So Campbell gets thrown out of the inn. And I think before we talk about his untimely demise, it's pretty fascinating to me that at the end of chapter one, we get an entire scene from Campbell's perspective. And I think it's the first time we've had a case where we're in the victim's point of view at all, because Peter usually comes on, you know, after the body has been found. Correct me if I'm wrong, is it the only case?

CHARIS It's certainly the only one I can think of right now.

SHARON So not only does it stand out for being different in that way, right? Of getting inside the point of view of the victim, but also my goodness, what a deeply violent and vicious point of view that is as well. I don't know if this is in here to make us all...to make us dislike Campbell as well or to, yeah. I don't know. Let's discuss! Why this is here?

ANGELA I love the phrasing, how it says "Campbell chugging fitfully homewards." Like just those three words, you get such a sense of like, he's so angry and so raring for a fight, just with "chugging fitfully homewards." I just love that that turn of phrase there. But yeah, it is really interesting to get from his point of view about how all of these people are terrible--

CHARIS And how everyone is against him.

ANGELA Like "Curse Strachan! And that fellow Farren! Farren would hear about it," you know, he's thinking to himself about how all of these people are terrible. "And why not go straight back away and have the thing out with Farren? Why not? After all, what did it matter?" You know?

CHARIS And we get that hint of, you know, something that we'll go into more in a little bit here, but, Mrs. Farren and her role or lack thereof in this situation, that having heard her name dropped here and the fact that Campbell has this attachment to her and that then you know, we don't get more explanation of what that situation actually is until later on.

SHARON But just the violence of the language that his point of view is cathected through, right? Angela, that you were pointing out. Like "he stopped the car and lit a cigarette smoking fast and savagely, the whole place was against him. He hated the place anyhow. Farren was a devil, a beast, a bully." Like everything about him is just really, really keyed up. And then the scene ends with a violent squealing of brakes and an angry voice demanding...uh, I feel like I shouldn't say the curse words 'cause we have a clean podcast [all laugh], but, "What the... elided elided are you doing, you fool, sitting out like that in the elided middle of the road, right on the bend." And Campbell turns and he hears—so he's sort of blinded by the glare of headlights—and "he hears a voice say with a kind of exasperated triumph, 'Campbell, of course. I might've known it couldn't be anybody else'". And the scene ends and the next day and the next chapter begin with Campbell found dead.

CHARIS Yes.

SHARON Charis, would you like to talk about the circumstances?

CHARIS Um.

SHARON [laughing] Not it! You!

CHARIS [laughs] It's so like, ugh, it's just so difficult to try and break this mystery down into bite sized chunks. It's so difficult to summarize without it just becoming this extremely long... but you know, we have this weird scene where Campbell is spoiling for a fight and he sees someone to get in a fight with, but we don't know who that someone is. And then the next chapter we find out the chapter heading, in the chapter title, that Campbell is dead. And we're with Wimsey. We aren't really in Wimsey's head, but we're kind of like next to him, narratively. And he's being told about the circumstances. And we find out that Campbell's body was found up at the Minnoch, which is, you know, there's some cliff edges that lead down to the water. His body has been found tumbled down the rocks and in the water. His easel with a partially finished painting up on the cliff edge. And so like the assumption is that he's fallen down and gotten killed.

And Peter in his nosy way is asking a few questions. And Mr. Murdoch, who is the proprietor of the McClellan Arms, is telling Peter about it and saying that maybe he wanted water for his painting. And Peter's like, Hmm, he wouldn't want water for oil paintings would he? But what did he want? So he's already questioning the circumstances. He's just like, Oh, I think I'll just go along and, uh, and just see. Peter toddles along to the Minnoch to see them recovering the body. To see what there is to see.

SHARON It says, "A sky full of bright sun and rolling cloud banks, hedges filled with flowers, a well-made road, a lively engine, and the prospect of a good corpse at the end of it, Lord Peter's cup of happiness was full. He was a man who loved simple pleasures." [laughs]

CHARIS Oh Peter.

ANGELA *Right?*

SHARON Oh Peter.

ANGELA And I love when he gets there and the Sergeant looks up and is like, Oh yeah. "They had met already and he was prepared Wimsey's interest in corpses." [all giggling] Just like, Oh yeah, it's His Lordship. He loves dead people.

SHARON Yeah. So Peter starts scouting the scene, having it described to him. And, and you know, the narrative is also kind of following what he's hearing and what he's seeing, and the painting that is on Campbell's easel and the things that Peter finds when he's rifling through the corpse's pockets and the bag that's next to the easel and so forth. And kind of, as the scene goes on, Peter gets more and more excited. Um, it says "Wimsey's air of idleness had left him. His long and inquisitive nose seemed to twitch like a rabbit's as he turned the satchel upside down and shook it in the vain hope of extracting something more from its depths." And he clambers down to the stream and looks about there. And then all of a sudden we have a very deliberate cutaway.

CHARIS Yeah. Like, and like we've had like three pages of detailed description of what Peter is looking at. It's very similar to the bit in UNPLEASANTNESS AT THE BELLONA CLUB, where we get the description of everything that Peter sees when he's examining the General Fentiman's clothing, right? Except *even longer*--

ANGELA Well, there's a lot of details!

CHARIS But he goes through all of Campbell's painting things. He goes through Campbell's jacket. He goes through Campbell's bag. And he doesn't find what he's looking for. And so he goes to talk to Dalziel, the Sergeant. And he tells the Sergeant, and like the cutaway says here, "Lord Peter Wimsey told the Sergeant what he was to look for and why. But as the intelligent reader will readily supply these details for himself, they are omitted from this page."

ANGELA And I am the sort of reader who immediately flips back and figures out what was missing and goes, Aha!

SHARON [laughing] Angela is the intelligent reader. Charis and Sharon are fools!

ANGELA I have to go back and go, wait, okay, wait, what exactly was he looking for? But then, you know, but like it's not obvious? But you can figure it out. If you want.

CHARIS Right. And I am the type of reader who will blissfully carry on, knowing that I will be told at some point.

SHARON Yeah. I think you can say, you can figure it out if you pay close attention. Sayers always plays fair. But there *is*, there's like a slight amount of technical knowledge that you would need. Like very, very slight.

CHARIS Yeah.

ANGELA Like a little bit, I guess? But like, there's, I don't know. I don't want to, I don't want to say it too much.

CHARIS [laughing] Angela is just very much just like, no, it's easy.

ANGELA I mean, it's not *hard*, you guys! But I think that's one of the things that I love about this book, is that she gives you literally every detail that you need to work it out yourself. Which is the thing that I love doing with mystery books. I was telling Charis that at one point when I was a kid, I was like 10 or something. And I was reading this Nancy Drew book and the whole thing hinged on this one character's eyebrows that were mentioned like once. But Nancy knew that it was a case of mistaken identity because this guy was clearly someone else because of his eyebrows. And I was so angry, I threw the book across the room because I'm like, that's not

fair. You gave me all of these other clues and you didn't even mention that and bring attention to it.

CHARIS It wasn't fair!

ANGELA I was so mad. I was so mad, but I love that Sayers always plays by the rules and gives you what you need. But then this one *especially*, this one.

SHARON Yeah. This isn't a case of Sherlock Holmes.

ANGELA Yeah, exactly.

SHARON Like knowing, you know, Holmes knows all this stuff about tobacco that the normal reader can't be expected to know. Like there isn't...it doesn't suspend disbelief that most people who are reading this book would know kind of enough about art to be able to pick up on the clue.

ANGELA Yeah.

SHARON So Peter says, "There's something missing, look everywhere for it. And if we can't find it, it means murder." And another funny extract or interesting extract from Sayers' letters is that she, before she hit on calling book THE FIVE RED HERRINGS, she originally wanted to call it THE SIX SUSPECTS, but somebody else had already published a book with that title.

ANGELA Oh no!

SHARON Yeah. So she proposes to Mr. Gollancz, she says, how about SIX UNLIKELY PERSONS or THE BODY IN THE BURN or THE MURDER AT THE MINNOCH. And then she draws like a, you know, parenthesis around all of that and goes "dull" or THE MISSING OBJECT, or THERE'S ONE THING MISSING. And she describes to him in this letter about how she's kind of come up with exactly this paragraph that we just read, where she's going to leave it to the reader to figure out what is the thing that's missing. And, she says "substitute a blank page in which the reader is invited to use his wits."

ANGELA Nice!

SHARON And originally she said, "The missing paragraph can be printed if desired in a sealed page at the end of the book. Or it may merely be supplied by Wimsey in conversation in the final chapter," which is what she ultimately goes for.

CHARIS Yeah. Which, there's something about this aside that, you know, we kind of talked about the beginning feeling, you know, like an Austen or, you know, like an older book.

And this aside also feels very old fashioned. And like, I can't put my finger on exactly what it reminds me of, but it does feel like the type of narrative voice that you would get in a more Victorian [work], you know, like where the narrative voices is more intrusive?

ANGELA And where the narrator is talking to the reader, you know? Like "the intelligent reader will readily supply it themselves."

CHARIS Yeah! Like that's it! That kind of device is something that I kind of associate with a more Victorian novel. But I don't know, like I can't put my finger quite on what my brain is trying to connect it to something, but the connection is not quite there, because I only have two brain cells in general and I'm down to one because I have a pandemic brain. Um, so yes. So I don't know. I don't know, but it does... reading this book in context with the rest of the series, it feels very much like an odd duck.

ANGELA It is. It is very much, it's very distinct among the Sayers books.

SHARON And we've talked before about how, you know, people had complained about the love interest in STRONG POISON and kind of the strong character portraiture. So in a little way, this was maybe Sayers being spiteful. Like, "Okay, they want an airtight mystery? I'll give them an airtight mystery, with no love, you know, barely any interiority, like no character development!"

CHARIS But so. many. train. tables!

SHARON So many!

ANGELA But also this is one of the few ones I feel like where there's such an ensemble. 'Cause there's these six people who all have equally good motives and also equally shabby alibis, you know? I feel like she does a great job of balancing all of that out. There's a scene near the end where all the police are talking about, Oh, well it was definitely this guy because of these reasons. And here's the timetables that match and Oh, no, it was definitely this guy 'cause here's the timetables that match. And they all do such a great job of putting this information together that if they didn't miss a couple minor clues, like, yes, it's very plausible. So I just love, I love it. So. I don't have anything else to say. Sorry, that was a weird transitiony thing.

CHARIS No, we do that all the time. It comes out in the wash when we edit it. I smooth it out.

ANGELA Well good, I was like, no! Let me rant about what I love about this book!

SHARON [laughs] Well *somebody* should.

CHARIS Yeah, someone should. And it's just, it's so fascinating to me because we're such different types of readers, but we love so many of the same books. But our Venn diagram is not a perfect circle, and this book is one of the ones where we do not agree.

ANGELA It's one of the ones where we go, wait, really?

CHARIS You like *this*?? Which... it's not that I hate this book. Like I don't want our listeners to get the impression that I hate this book, but this is one of those books where having read it once, I don't want to read it again. Because like, I've read it. I know how the mystery works. I know what the clue is. I think it's really clever, but it doesn't have anything that draws me back the way the rest of the books in this series do. Because it doesn't engage me emotionally.

ANGELA That's the thing, you're so character-oriented when you read.

CHARIS I *am*! I want to feel things, Angela!

ANGELA You want to feel things! I'm very much interested in world-building. And so this one does such a great job of giving you the feel of the place and the community and who these people are, you know.

CHARIS And the landscape, all the specifics.

ANGELA Yeah, the landscape, all those specifics really draw me in. Whereas they don't draw you in at all.

CHARIS They do not. I mean, I appreciate them as part of a greater whole, but they aren't something that makes a book rereadable for me. So rereading this book is a little bit of a slog because I'm just like, I don't have that motivation of getting to the solution of the mystery since I remember how it ends.

ANGELA Right.

CHARIS And getting through all the timetables and the alibis and the this and the that—

SHARON And the debunked alibis and the debunked theories!

CHARIS Yeah. None of that is enjoyable for me. This is definitely a case of, it's not that I don't like it because there's something empirically wrong with it, but it is a case of being a very different type of reader.

ANGELA It's just not your cuppa. That's fine.

CHARIS It is not my cuppa.

ANGELA Something I said to Charis in an earlier conversation was that I love the way that Sayers has all these red herrings and like, it's literally titled FIVE RED HERRINGS, there's so much! Usually in a mystery I can spot the red herrings and I just go, Oh, well, clearly not that guy. ' Cause he's being waaay too obvious. And in this one it's like, they're all just plausible enough. Like yeah, Wimsey debunks the five red herrings at the end, but it's like, before he does it, it's just like, Oh yeah, it totally could be that guy. You know? It kind of feels like the murder mystery dinner parties, where everyone has a motive. Everyone has opportunity. You don't know until you get to the very end of this dinner party, who the murder actually is because it—

CHARIS It *does* feel *exactly* like a murder mystery party!

ANGELA I just put it together! Like just now! And I was like, Hey, those are things I *also* love. [chuckling]

CHARIS You could make this into a murder mystery dinner party game with hardly any effort.

ANGELA Yeah, exactly.

SHARON It's funny because when I do murder mystery dinners, I'm always just much more interested in inhabiting the character assigned to me and interacting and doing improv with the other characters. And it's very much like, Yeah, it'll all, we'll figure out who it is in the end.

ANGELA It'll tell us if we get to the end and we haven't figured it out, it's fine.

SHARON Exactly! [all laughing] Everyone calm down!

ANGELA I like to figure things out. I like to be clever, I'm sorry.

CHARIS You do! You should, Angela, you should tell the anecdote about why you, why it's important to you to be clever.

ANGELA Okay. So I realized recently that between THE HOBBIT and there's a song called "Devil in the Garden" that my dad used to listen to all the time when I was a kid where it's this, riddle game between this devil figure and this young woman. And so there's these two riddle games that were in my imagining of the world. And so I was just absolutely sure, as a very small child, like around five or six that someday my life was going to depend on being clever. Like I needed to be able to figure things out and be clever because someday my life would depend on it. You know? Like there will be a riddle game, which might cost you your life or your soul, depending on who you're up against. So like cleverness is a very important trait.

SHARON This makes all the sense in the world!

ANGELA Yeah.

SHARON This explains everything. So...about the book...

[all laugh]

ANGELA Oh yeah. Oh yeah. The thing we're here for!

SHARON That thing we're here to talk about!

Peter quickly twigs on to the fact that it must've been the murderer who did the painting that's on the Campbell easel. So he narrows down to the murderer has to be a good enough artist to be able to mimic Campbell's style. That's how he's able to rule out part of the population of Kirkcudbright. The other half of the population that wants to kill Campbell.

ANGELA Living in Kirkcudbright, we have Michael Waters, who had quarreled with Campbell the previous night and threatened to kill him. We have Hugh Farren, who lives alone with a wife who is apparently very much attached to them, but he's jealous of Campbell. Matthew Gowan, known to have been publicly insulted by Campbell and refuses to speak to him. And then living in Gatehouse-of-Fleet, we have Jock Graham, who was known to be carrying on a feud with Campbell and to have ducked him in the Fleet after being assaulted by him. Henry Strachan, who was known to quarrel with Campbell and turned him off of the golf course. Ferguson was his neighbor and they had a fight about a wall. So those are the six suspects and their grievances with Campbell.

SHARON I feel like one of the things that frustrates me about the book is how long it takes us to just gather everybody's alibis. 'Cause we get this list early on, but then it's like, Oh, this person, yeah, this person went off by train. This person went sailing. Like they just, they spend so much of the early part of the book just *waiting*. I just find it kind of exhausting.

ANGELA Right. You're like, just get us to the thing already. Why are we having to wait so long?

SHARON Yeah. I mean, I also, I do enjoy trying to figure out the mystery when I read one. I'm not entirely like, Oh, I don't care. But I think it just, it feels like it takes so long to even assemble all the different things I'm supposed to be figuring out that by the time, you know, I'm like, okay, all the information is in front of me. I don't know. It just, if it feels--

ANGELA You're almost at the end of the book at that point. So it's kind of like, oh well, whatever.

SHARON Yeah. So I think maybe in that sense, it feels less than fair to say I don't....And you know, maybe Peter, we could say Peter has a similar issue with the investigation. That's why it takes him so long, but I just, yeah. Maybe I find the grunt work of detecting very... similarly to Peter, if I had a Bunter or a Sergeant Dalziel to send about, I would do that!

ANGELA Or a Parker! Like I feel in most of the mysteries, this is what Parker does. He has to track down all the people and figure out all the things, you know? But it is a lot of like, okay, well I'll go talk to this guy. Oh, he's not home. Oh, he's left? You know, well, I'll go talk to this guy. Oh, well he's not home. There's a lot of Wimsey walking up to people's doors and knocking and they're not there.

SHARON So yeah. It's very frustrating to me as a reader.

ANGELA I'm sorry.

SHARON Why can't everyone just stay put!

CHARIS Yeah. Well I think it just circles back to, Sharon, you and I being character-oriented readers, because I'm just like, I'm happy to get all this information, but I want to couch it among emotional goings-on, you know? And it being sort of so dry is just like the, you know, I'm just like, okay, this is all salad. Where's the meat, where's the beef?

ANGELA I was just looking right at the end of chapter three. There's a line where it says, "Wimsey looked at his watch. Jock Graham was at present the most promising candidate for criminal honors. But since he had disappeared, there was nothing really done about him for the present." And I feel like that just kind of sums up y'all's frustration with this whole early part of the book. Like, well, we think it could be that guy, but we don't know where he is.

CHARIS Yeah. He can't do anything about it. And so everything is useless.

ANGELA Everything's on hold until we can talk to those guys.

CHARIS [long sigh] Yeah. It, yeah. It's just, it's, it's tricky because it's so...I do admire the way this book is put together. But also I don't want to read it!

[all laugh]

SHARON Okay, how much of that has to do with the just *scrupulous* rendering of dialect on the page?

CHARIS Some of it is definitely that, because it is...it's a lot. And I, as a personal preference, I almost never like dialect written out, you know? Like I feel accent clues can be

given different ways than writing out accents, phonetically, because I just don't ever feel like it goes as well as I would like. It always feels like something that should be like...that feels comedic and it makes it hard to take those characters seriously, which really feels like a disservice to the actual people in there. Their actual accent and ways of speaking. So like, I don't...I don't know how actual Scottish people feel about it, but to me as a reader, it feels frustrating and it feels kind of totally off balance because I associate it with...it feels like a parody to me. And so it's distracting and annoying.

ANGELA It just slows me down. And like, I have to read over it twice or three times sometimes depending on how convoluted the sentences are, to go what are they saying? What's going on?

So there is a humorous part where the inspector is talking to the British butler, Alcock?

SHARON Yes!

ANGELA He says, "Your name is H'alcock?" And the Butler's like "Halllcock." "H-A-double L?" "There is no haitch in the name, hey is the first letter, and there is h'only one h'ell." [all laughing] It's really *funny*, you know, just in the middle of this book where it's like this thing about the accents being so different.

SHARON Yeah. And then the inspector asks who drove Mr. Gowan off. "Hammond, the chauffeur." "Ammond?" says the inspector. [giggling]

ANGELA "*Hammond*."

SHARON "'*Hammond*,' said the butler. 'H'albert Hammond.'"

ANGELA "With a haitch."

SHARON That scene does make the rest of it, I think, somewhat worthwhile?

CHARIS Really, really funny. And I feel like that's a really good use of the accent difference, whereas I appreciate it much less when it's the rest of the book and it's writing the Scottish accent.

ANGELA Especially when it's whole conversations where it's two or three people that are Scottish people speaking and you're going, okay. Alright. There's important information on this page. I got to find it.

SHARON Yeah. Maybe not fair to bury the clues that way.

CHARIS Yeah. Gosh, it's so hard to disseminate this mystery. Like, I'm just like, where do we go next?

ANGELA I mean, I'd love to talk about the little girls, but I don't know if it's time for that yet, but just as I'm flipping through my book, I'm like, Oh, hey, here's where we're talking about Strachan. And then we come to the part with Myra and Wimsey talks to her and I love it so much. Where she's like, he's talking about the black eye that her dad has, you know, and she's like, "Yes, isn't it? I asked him if he had been fighting and he told me not to be impertinent. I like fighting. Bobby Craig gives me a black eye once, but I made his nose bleed and they had to send his suit to the cleaners." And she's so proud. And she's like, you know, Wimsey tells her that young women ought not to fight.

"Why not? I like fighting" and how she's going to grow up and have a pistol and a beautiful evening dress and lure people to opium dens and stick them up!

CHARIS [laughing] What has this child been reading?

ANGELA Right? I love it. And she tells Peter that "I'd better marry you because you've got such a fast car, that would be useful." I just, I love her so much. She's such a vivid child, you know, especially with so many of the other characters being kind of not as well rounded, I feel like she's so vibrant on the page.

CHARIS Yeah. It makes me think of...it will be a few books before we are introduced to the little girl in GAUDY NIGHT, but in GAUDY NIGHT, there's a little girl who talks about wanting to have a motorcar and run a garage. I think it's really interesting that these, these three little girls...are there other little girls in any of the other books? I think--

ANGELA There's two in this book.

SHARON Um, there's the little girl in STRONG POISON. Bill the lockpick's daughter

CHARIS Oh, and she's really cute. But like, we have these three little girls and Sayers kind of makes them all rowdy little... like feral children, which is very accurate, I think, for many young girls!

ANGELA Yes, 'cause Helen Smith is mentioned later in the book. She gives some evidence because she was out. Her parents were out to dinner, so she was out with the boys trying to, I think she says poaching rabbits or something like that. She was running in the field with the boys when she happens to witness this thing, you know? And so, yeah, it's just very interesting. And then she's like, Oh, it was almost ten. So I had to run home. You know, I just love these little girls who are very rowdy and wild and I would've loved to be friends with them when I was a kid.

SHARON Yeah. It's striking the sort of narrative importance given to the young girls, because they witness really key moments. Especially in a mystery where so much of the action of the murder is about the world of men, right? The violent world of men or the... the homosocial space between these different male artists. And in some ways it feels like a really masculine book.

ANGELA It is! Well, we have what, five police officials, and they're all men.

SHARON So many!

ANGELA There's so many police in this book. Not to mention Parker, who gets a...they call him up and ask him for some stuff. So they talk to him, but there's like five who are on the scene. Yeah. It's a very, very masculine book, but then these little girls are so critical to figuring things out.

CHARIS Speaking of the women in this book, which there are not a lot and you know, most of them have important roles, but their actual presence on the page is kind of brief. But one of the women who plays a large role is Mrs. Farren. We kind of touched on her before, but the motivation for her husband, Mr. Farren, to be a suspect is that Campbell kind of carried a torch for Mrs. Farren and you know, would come and hang out in her sitting room and her husband didn't like it and didn't like him and would come in and kick him out.

And, you know, in that brief scene that we get that's from Campbell's perspective, he talks about how he was visiting; he's reflecting on the fact that he wanted to sit in the cool green sitting room of Mrs. Farren and be soothed by her. And that Farren had come in and ruined it and kicked him out. And, you know, in Campbell's eyes, Mrs. Farren is the only nice person, the only person who likes him, the only person that he likes. And when we're introduced to Mrs. Farren, her goal in life is to be a womanly woman in like, it's almost...it feels like it's a mania with her.

And speaking as an ex-evangelical, someone who was raised in homeschooling circles, she feels very familiar, where she's someone for whom being hyper feminine is her idea of a ministry. She sees herself as creating a refuge. She wants to embody that kind of Victorian idea of the angel in the house. She sees that as her role, and her purpose in life is to be genteel and dainty and restful and to make everything around her beautiful. And it's like she's borderline fanatic about it. And I have...man, I have such a flinch reaction as someone who is not any of those things, but who was raised...

ANGELA With that as the ideal? Yeah.

CHARIS Well, I mean, like, not so much by my parents, but I was definitely raised around that atmosphere that was very present in the culture. There were definitely people that we know, people that we still know, who adhere to that as an ideal. And I am not about it. Like, it's one thing for it to be someone's preference, but Mrs. Farren obviously thinks that it should be all

women's preference. That to be a woman is to be working to embody this ideal. And I'm just like, Hmm, nope, nope, no, no, no.

SHARON Well, and, Charis, I think your point that she is hearkening to what at this point would have been a very old fashioned ideal of the Victorian angel in the house. I think even, even the way she's described, right? The narrative says "she looked like a ghost painted by Burne Jones in one of his most pre-Raphaelite moments." She even namechecks the Lady of Shalott, which is an Arthurian story, but also very, very famously painted by... um, oh my God. Waterhouse?

CHARIS Maybe? One of the pre-Raphaelites! And written by Tennyson. A very Victorian...

SHARON Yes. It's a Victorian depiction of an even older story of a certain Victorian myth of chivalry. It's just...all of it is just constructed. It's nothing to do with real history.

CHARIS Right. And like, you know, bringing up the Lady of Shalott, like someone whose role is to be contained and that if she breaks loose from that containment, it brings disaster. Like what [chuckles] what's the subtext there? So subtle!

SHARON Yeah. Well, and it's, I don't know. I kind of want to keep chasing this. 'Cause I think there's such a, there's an interesting art historical aspect to it too. Where the really famous painting of the Lady of Shalott...the depiction of her, she's in the room weaving and the mirror is behind her and you, as a spectator, are looking in through the window. But the whole thing is within the frame of a painting as well. She's doubly contained.

And I actually got to see the painting in person a couple of years ago; it was touring. And the thing is, the size of it is larger than life. Like maybe nine feet tall? It's incredible. The mirror has just cracked and she's like standing in the middle--

CHARIS And like the, the thread is around is wrapping around her--

SHARON Is it William Holman Hunt?

CHARIS Yes! It is Hunt!

SHARON Aha! Sorry, I took part of my qualifying exam in this period and I'm like, I cannot, I'd have to give back my half of the degree I did not finish if I could not name this!

CHARIS No. Well, I mean, the thing is that there's so many Lady of Shalott paintings. There's so many pre-Raphaelite Lady of Shalotts.

SHARON Yes. All those men had a giant boner for this story about a woman who can't leave her room. [all laugh] Sorry, mom, don't listen to this one.

CHARIS I mean you're not wrong. Not wrong.

SHARON Not wrong! Okay. But yeah, so Mrs. Farren, it also says she's spinning, right? When Wimsey goes to see her, she's...not only is she embracing this kind of throwback, femininity, I feel like she's very deliberately deploying it within this community of artists. Like she, not only does she think she needs to exist to make things pleasant, but she exists to *looked at*.

CHARIS Oh wait, Sharon, there *is* a Waterhouse painting of the Lady of Shalott where the mirror has just cracked and the thread is wrapped around her. So I don't know which one you're thinking of, but one is Waterhouse and one is Hunt. [all laughing] It's just so hard to narrow it down, especially since we were not looking at them together, but we will, we'll put it in the show notes, which one Sharon was thinking of.

SHARON We'll put them *all* in the show notes.

ANGELA So I have, I have a confession for you guys.

CHARIS What is your confession?

ANGELA The very first time I read this book, I suspected Mrs. Farren was actually the murderer.

SHARON Ooooh!

CHARIS I think I did too!

ANGELA Because it's like, we have all of these men that we suspect, but what if it was Mrs. Farren?

SHARON I mean, that would have made Mrs. Farren so interesting. So much more interesting than she is.

ANGELA Right? Yeah. So the first time I read through it, I was like, ok, wow, Mrs. Farren is going to be the murderer, oh my gosh! And then I got to the end and I was like, Oh, I was completely wrong. You know, so, but I feel like it would have been really interesting since this book is so incredibly masculine. There's these six men who are the suspects, and there's Peter, and there's all of these policeman and there's all these other men who get mentioned, you know? And the only woman who's a real character is Mrs. Farren.

SHARON I think I had a moment...I mean, I'm trying to reconstruct my state of mind when I first read it. But I think I had a moment where I was like, Oh, is it going to turn out to be none of

the men? And I don't think I went so far as to suspect Mrs. Farren but I was sort of like, I wonder if it'll just be not any of the ones we've been led to believe.

CHARIS Which would have been cheating! That would have been so maddening.

ANGELA It would have been cheating. It would not have been strictly fair to be like, here are the six suspects and five of them are red herrings and then it be not one of them. Speaking of women, there is one other woman that is somewhat important in this book.

CHARIS Oh, that's right. I always forget about her!

ANGELA Mrs. Smith... Le Measurer? I fee like I have butchered that name and I am very sorry. But Mrs. S-L comes in to provide an alibi for someone, one of the suspects. Oh, he was with me *all night*. What time did he leave? About nine o'clock. Oh okay, so he doesn't have an alibi for the Tuesday morning. Well, no, but I thought it was the Monday night he needed an alibi for. She comes forward, and then later that very same person is like, Oh my gosh, why did she do that? And so then he has to come in and give us the actual alibi of where he was. But you know, it's very interesting.

CHARIS Let me get to the page, because I wrote in my notes, Mrs. Smith Lemeas- Le Mehz-ee-ay?

ANGELA Ahaha! You also are butchering it!

SHARON That's okay. I'm sure someone will tell us how to pronounce it on Twitter

ANGELA Mrs. S-L.

CHARIS Yeah. Mrs. S-L. But for one thing, I always forget about her when I reread the book, I'm just like, who are you? Oh yeah, you're that person.

ANGELA Yeah. She shows up and it's like Oh yeah, I forgot about that!

CHARIS But this time reading it, I put down on my notes that she kind of is a mirror of Mrs. Farren, in that she's also this extremely feminine presenting person, but, you know, whereas Mrs. Farren is all about presenting herself as completely pure and angelic, Mrs. S-L is...she presents herself as a widow. And like it says in, what chapter are we in?

ANGELA 18.

CHARIS 18. Yeah. We know there's this kind of this little thing where it says that "she was accustomed to say that the rents in Scotland were so low and she had to do the best she could with her poor little income. It did not matter where she lived, she would add sadly, since her

husband's death, she was all alone in the world." And she's like someone who's conscientiously feminine, conscientiously dainty. It also mentioned that Peter had been introduced to her the previous year. And "had afterwards expressed the coarse opinion that the lady was out for blood." So like you just, you have these two presentations of extreme femininity, but expressed very differently. And about Mrs. S-L, there's the phrases used. "Her manner was plaintive and artless, her age rather more than it appeared. And young men who knew no better were apt to see in her a refreshing revelation of an unfashionable womanliness."

ANGELA She's sort of a foil for Mrs. Farren

CHARIS Yeah. And like, she shows up and she's mostly just there to put a wrinkle into the plot by supplying this alibi and then like the person she's trying to supply the alibi for disavows her immediately. Like it's a very, obviously that she was just kind of trying to make that person indebted to her because she is conniving.

SHARON Do you guys also see Mrs. S-L as a narrative echo of Mrs. Grimethorpe?

Speaker 1 00:59:58 Oh, you're yeah, you're right.

SHARON Yeah. I mean, it just, in the one case we have a woman who could actually provide an alibi for a suspect, but it involved, because they were having an affair, it would involve her sort of exposing all of this to the public and to a really jealous husband. Versus Mrs. S-L very blithely using that same story. But it's a lie to kind of try to indebted someone else to her...and they're both foreign, so yeah.

CHARIS Yes, I can see that, except that she's less than pathetic for sure.

ANGELA Yeah, but it's very interesting, that it's the exact same Well, he couldn't tell you where he was because he was with me.

CHARIS Whereas he comes back from where he was and eventually is just like, well, I'm not going to tell you where I was, but I wasn't with *her*.

SHARON But in a way, Mrs. S-L is...she is a bit of an outlier to Angela's point about how women are often key witnesses in this book. So the neighbor ladies who live two cottages down from Peter and they're described as going to see an exhibit in Glasgow the morning of the murder, and you know, they ran into somebody on the train and so forth. And then there's also Mr. Gowan's maid, who I think we could, maybe we can wrap up by talking a bit about her?

ANGELA Yeah. Sounds good. Yeah, because she's the other key witness sort of thing.

SHARON Yeah. And once again, you know, because she's a servant, this is one of the few places where Bunter shows up in the book. Because Peter--

CHARIS This is a job for Bunter.

SHARON This is a job for Bunter. Seducing housemaids. [all laugh]

CHARIS He's a man of many talents and this is one of them!

ANGELA I love that Bunter first calls her "the young person." He's talking about "the young person confessed to me that she has cause for dissatisfaction." Like he basically goes over and ingratiates his way in. And like, gets her to talk about all this stuff. Doesn't he take her out to dinner or something?

SHARON The cinema.

CHARIS Yeah. He takes her to the movies. And what I think is funny is that he does this in anticipation, like Peter hasn't asked him to go ingratiate himself to anyone in Gowan's household yet. But he's just like, Oh, Gowan is a suspect. And I know this maid, and so I am going to go preemptively get information,

SHARON And it's the, the maid's information breaks Gowan's original alibi, right? Because the housekeeper and butler had kind of been covering up and said like, Oh no, he, you know, he'd gone.

ANGELA He's out of town. He left this day. And she's like, no, there was someone in the upstairs room.

SHARON Yeah. And it's interesting, 'cause...So she tells Bunter this whole story about, you know, there was a room that she wasn't allowed to go into and it smelled like disinfectant.

CHARIS Well, I love that it's an upper hallway that she would normally never go into and they were careful to tell her not to go into it. So of course she went--

SHARON Immediately. And she's like, it smelled like disinfectant and then she saw an apparition all bandaged up.

CHARIS And it had this horrible face!

ANGELA It's very sort of Jane Eyre almost, you know, it's very--

CHARIS Yeah. It's very, it's so wrapped in gothic overtones.

ANGELA Sensational, oh my goodness. Yeah.

SHARON Yeah, I mean, Wimsey even says "Bunter, your narrative style would do credit to THE CASTLE OF OTRANTO." And then later on he says, this case resembles the plot of a Wilkie Collins novel. So really those mid-Victorian sensation, gothic-y, women in the house books.

ANGELA Well, and at one point Wimsey is just like, "could you cut out some of the fancy adjectives and say plainly what the face was like? And he's like, "I had not myself the opportunity of observing the face. But the impression produced on me by the young woman's observations--" You know?

CHARIS And like, specifically the callbacks to Wilkie Collins. Sharon, you and I mentioned, or you mentioned specifically in one of our STRONG POISON episodes that Sayers had gotten complaints about there being too much romance and not enough mystery in STRONG POISON. And that FIVE RED HERRINGS is kind of her response. And I do think it's kind of telling that there's this callback to a historical mystery, like to Wilkie Collins, as opposed to the kind of the Modernist approach that like...Sharon, Sharon you are the Modernist expert [SHARON chuckles] is there any in this book?

SHARON I mean, Modernism, um, you know, is not, it's not a technique necessarily, right? I wouldn't want to characterize it as like, is there, or isn't...does it show up or not? But I think when I called the book old-fashioned, I do think that this book recurs to a much more... to a style that we associate much more with either the Victorian country house novel or going all the way back to the Regency period and Jane Austen Or I would say even it, it reads a little bit, to me, like turn of the century Henry James, but it's definitely, I think, working much more in the realist mode of observing an entire society of people, you know, in kind of this microcosm of a village and digging into motivation and human nature and so forth. I think it's much more interested in doing that than doing any kind of stylistic experimentation. With the, I would say exception of...I think the book does some interesting things with time, which maybe we get into next time, but yes, in a nutshell, I would say, this is much more of a realist novel to me than a Modernist one, at least in style.

CHARIS Yeah. Very little about it feels experimental. Or of all of Dorothy L Sayers books, this is the one that I feel could have been written by someone else. Which is interesting because the plot hinges on style being something that can be replicated, right? Like artists had to be able to, the murderer had to be able to replicate Campbell's painting style. And there's this conversation about like, yes, Campbell is art is good, but it's also generic. And that's kind of how I feel about this book--

ANGELA That's a good point.

CHARIS That like, it's good, but there's something about it that's a little bit generic and yeah. It's not inimitable the way that I feel STRONG POISON is.

SHARON Right. And I think there's a whole conversation about aesthetics there that we could maybe get into a bit next time as well of, you know, is the ultimate artist the one who can mimic anyone or the one whose style is inimitable? Because I forget who it is...is it Graham who says like, his problem is he can do a passable Ferguson, he could do a passable Campbell et cetera. And then he's like, but I don't have a style of my own. And that's where I fall short.

CHARIS Yeah. Do you love how I was just like, ah, let's start wrapping things up and then I just start throwing things out?

ANGELA But also!

CHARIS How many rabbit trails can I start!

SHARON We can maybe pick up there next time. I am *very* invested in the question of replication in these books. We will probably have an entire episode where we get to GAUDY NIGHT about mass produced objects, but, um, yeah. Anyway.

ANGELA Yeah. That's a really good point because this is like the least Sayers-ish Sayers.

CHARIS Yeah. Alright. Well we'll leave it there.

SHARON [chuckles] Yes, something look forward to next time listeners!

CHARIS Yes. Thank you, Angela, for joining us.

ANGELA You're welcome!

CHARIS And Angela will be joining us again for our next episode, discussing the second half.

ANGELA So I can talk about all the clues!

CHARIS That episode will be much easier, I think because where we are going to reveal the whodunit and all the solutions, and we will get to the part where Lord Peter catches a fish.

SHARON In the meantime, you can find us on Twitter and Instagram as @wimseypod that's Wimsey spelled W I M S E Y. Our website, where you can find transcripts for each episode as well as links to any resources we mentioned on today's podcast, is asmywimseytakesme.com.

CHARIS Our logo is by Gabi Vicioso and our theme music was composed and recorded by Sarah Meholick. If you've enjoyed this episode of As My Wimsey Takes, Me, we'd be really grateful if you would give us a rating and leave us a review on iTunes or on your podcatcher of

choice. We also hope that you'll tell all of your friends who love Dorothy, L Sayers as much as we do.

SHARON See you next time for more talking piffle!

[theme music plays and gradually fades out]