

## As My Wimsey Takes Me: 'The Professor's Manuscript'

**Sharon Hsu** 00:17

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

**Charis Ellison** 00:21

And I'm Charis Ellison. Today we're going to talk about another short story by Dorothy L. Sayers. But we're going to take a little break from Lord Peter and meet a new character. And Sharon, do you want to tell our listeners a little bit about our new friend that we're discussing today?

**Sharon Hsu** 00:41

Yes, we will be discussing a short story about Montague Egg, or Monty Egg, another one of those bonafide Sayers character names that I just love. Right up there with Waffles Newton, you know?

**Charis Ellison** 00:56

Love Waffles.

**Sharon Hsu** 00:57

Right? So Monty is a traveling salesman. He represents Mssrs. Plummet and Rose. I'm assuming there's no weird way to pronounce that. But if I've somehow butchered those two names, please feel free to correct me on Twitter.

**Charis Ellison** 01:17

Don't worry, they will.

**Sharon Hsu** 01:19

They will. Yeah. So yeah, so Monty is a traveling salesman. He sells wine and fine spirits. And yeah, I'm not quite sure what else to really say about him. Because I think very different from the Lord Peter books, we don't get much of a sense of Monty's personal life. Like, does he have one?

**Charis Ellison** 01:42

Yeah. I mean, like, his life is very much his job.

**Sharon Hsu** 01:45

Exactly. Yeah. And he has sort of all these little funny aphorisms that he, you know, takes from sort of like the traveling salesman's--

**Charis Ellison** 01:54

handbook

**Sharon Hsu** 01:55

--handbook. Yeah.

**Charis Ellison** 01:56

Which I questioned whether it's an actual handbook or whether this is just like a little thing that he's written for himself.

**Sharon Hsu** 02:02

Right, like Peter's rules for the Cattery agents?

**Charis Ellison** 02:06

Yeah.

**Sharon Hsu** 02:07

Yeah. Unclear. Unclear from the text. Yeah, but so he, he's sort of jaunts around. And there are a bunch of short stories where he, you know, he isn't really so much brought in as a sleuth as more often, he will like witness a crime or the aftermath of a crime. And then there'll be something kind of in his background that you know, where he'll ping on to a detail and sort of provide the key to a mystery. So Monty first appears in the short story collection HANGMAN'S HOLIDAY, which came out in 1933. And then there's sort of another set of stories about him in the short story collection IN THE TEETH OF THE EVIDENCE, which published 1939. So we sort of have the established Lord Peter novels and stories at this point. And I think it's interesting that we kind of see Sayers turning to a very different kind of detective figure and a very different kind of protagonist removing all of that, that personal, emotional nonsense, like we mentioned. Yeah. And so the story we'll be talking about today is from that IN THE TEETH OF THE EVIDENCE collection, and it is called "The Professor's Manuscript."

**Charis Ellison** 03:19

Yeah. So we've talked in the past about how we enjoy it when Sayers kind of plunges you into a scene, right? Where characters just start talking. And I find that especially in short stories, I find that a really engaging way for a story to start when you're just plunged into some lively dialogue. And there's so much writing advice and stuff on writing forums about like, what should a good first sentence be? And it's supposed to do so many things, you know, it's supposed to establish setting and character and I feel like the way Sayers sometimes does that with jumping in with the dialogue. And it's almost never the main character's dialogue, you know it but it's someone talking to the main character, and it does a lot of that heavy lifting just right off the bat. You know, it has someone telling you who the main character is because they say their name or address them in some way. And you're kind of introduced to a tone and a place and that stuff kind of happens through the dialogue. Which happens here in this story, because we have Mr. Hopgood, a traveling representative for Messrs Brotherhood Limited. He says, "See here, Monty" to Mr. Egg, "traveling representative from Messrs. Plummet and Rose. It gives you a sense of that there, you know, like there's a casual atmosphere and there's... that wasn't going anywhere profound. I'm talking myself in a circle.

**Sharon Hsu** 04:44

No, I mean, you see that these two men are, you know, they're on like, nickname basis, right? You immediately learn that they're both traveling representatives. So the the job aspect comes on the forefront.

**Charis Ellison 04:57**

Mm hmm.

**Sharon Hsu 04:58**

I mean, it's very, it's a bit how the sausage gets made, right? Because he says, "While you're here, why don't you have a go at old Professor Pindar, I should say he was just about in your line." So it's like, right away in those two, no, in one sentence--it's separated by semicolon--you have, you know, the main character Montague Egg, you know what he does. And you've set up basically the whole premise for the plot of this short story by he's going to go visit a professor and try to sell him some wine. And you know, we find out very shortly thereafter that Mr. Hopgood had given it a go himself but was in his telling treated quite rudely, you know, brought in and, and then lectured about how soft drinks are gut rot and so forth.

**Charis Ellison 05:43**

Which, you know, Mr. Hopgood represents Brotherhood Limited, our listeners will want to remember that name for when we finally get to talk about MURDER MUST ADVERTISE.

**Sharon Hsu 05:53**

Yes, the whole unified theory of Dorothy Sayers. Someone, not us, can map that all out one day. But speaking of the unified theory of Sayers I feel like the second paragraph also... I feel like we get sort of like little Easter egg nods to other mysteries that we've had. Or not even, they're not so much Easter eggs as like, I guess, recycling of certain tropes or certain images that would be familiar, right? So Monty is a bit reluctant to have this conversation with Mr. Hopgood because he's reading his newspaper and we get a set of newspaper headlines, you know: "Screen star's marriage romance plane dash; continent combout for missing financier; country house mystery blaze, arson suspicions; budget income tax remission possibility" and none of these map one to one to the Peter books but I feel like they're little echoes. Like the plane dash makes me think about CLOUDS OF WITNESS when he's flying back with that crucial piece of information. The missing financier obviously echoes WHOSE BODY? and Sir Reuben Levy going missing. Country House mystery. Again, CLOUDS OF WITNESS, like obviously no arson there, but that sort of classic country house mystery. So I don't know, I think it goes back to what you were saying about how Sayers is so efficient with being very specific in her scene setting. But always, you always get the sense that there's a whole world beyond the scene that you're looking at, right? Like her world is just very populated.

**Charis Ellison 07:26**

Mm hmm.

**Sharon Hsu 07:26**

And she does it so efficiently. And I as someone who gets like, a little bit impatient with some of the endless world building that you can get in really big, big fantasy now, for example.

**Charis Ellison 07:39**

Naming no names.

**Sharon Hsu** 07:41

Yeah, we don't need to know everything about how this magic system works. Just tell me there's magic. I just, I really like this aspect of Sayers.

**Charis Ellison** 07:48

Yeah, I was just kind of like flipping through the first couple of pages of the story here. And like, there's nothing that describes where this conversation is taking place. And like one of my many faults as a writer is that I don't know what something looks like until I describe it to someone else. So like, my manuscripts are always full of long paragraphs where I described things because I needed to know and it's not necessarily information that anyone else needs. And the editing process is very annoying, because I have to take all of that out. And we don't have that here. Like there's no lengthy paragraph explaining to us that we're in like, oh, the breakfast room of an inn and you know, or a coffee house. Like there's no, there's no setup. Like it's just a place where traveling salesmen have breakfast, but that still we don't need more than that. Because that, like, I don't know about you, but I don't have any problem picturing where this scene is happening even though there's literally no description of the place.

**Sharon Hsu** 08:49

There's not even impressionistic details, right? I feel like sometimes Sayers will drop a line.. "there was like a clatter of coffee cups" or you know, you get a sense that Peter and Freddy Arbuthnot are sort of cozied up in a club or at a restaurant or something. And there's none of that other than you know, I guess they're somewhere where Montague Egg can read his newspaper without it being very rude. You're right. Like you just, you don't need it. Once again, this is one of those mysteries where we're pretty much gonna spoil it, like there's, there's no, no long drawn out spoiler alert here. But even in this first scene, Sayers puts in a lot of clues before you even really know what the mystery is gonna be.

**Charis Ellison** 09:29

Yeah, it's right there in one of those headlines, isn't it? The continental combout for the missing financier?

**Sharon Hsu** 09:34

Mm hmm. Yeah, but like you don't know what the mystery is gonna be yet. In fact, I would say through most of the story, it's one of those things where it's very unclear, I think, what Monty is noticing and why he like.. what he's inquiring about. It's definitely not one of those "a body was found" [premises].

**Charis Ellison** 09:52

Yeah, yeah, like this isn't a murder mystery. It's not a whodunit and it's not, you know, like, it also doesn't break the rules, right? Sayers meticulously follows the rules of showing us all the clues. But it's one of those things where you don't know what you're looking at until you see what you're looking at. Until you see the full picture. It's very Megan Whalen Turner that way.

**Sharon Hsu** 10:19

Yeeees. Which, let's have a conversation after we finish recording this episode about Megan Whalen Turner!

**Charis Ellison** 10:26

Yes. Although we can't talk about RETURN OF THE THIEF because I haven't read it yet. Because I, like I have it. It's sitting there, but I haven't started it yet. You know, a long anticipated thing. And then you just... 'cause once you're done with it, it's over.

**Sharon Hsu** 10:42

Yeah, I, well, I had the opposite experience of you know, I got sent to the galley pages a few months ago.

**Charis Ellison** 10:48

Yes.

**Sharon Hsu** 10:49

And like the fandom is such where I was like, I cannot talk... like, I can't even react to this. But you know, like, even if that feels like a spoiler of if I like, I am thrilled, or I'm sad or like whatever. Like I was just like, well!

**Charis Ellison** 11:06

There can be absolutely nothing.

**Sharon Hsu** 11:08

Yeah, I guess I'm gonna like twiddle my thumbs for three months. Just like, quietly have feelings in my own home.

**Charis Ellison** 11:16

Yeah, that's the punishment that you get.

**Sharon Hsu** 11:21

For having early access. It's true.

**Charis Ellison** 11:22

For having early access. Yeah. So yeah, so we we can talk about how much we love Megan Whalen Turner. But we can't get into any details yet, because yeah, I have to like commune with the book from a distance before I can actually read it!

**Sharon Hsu** 11:37

Before you approach the altar.

**Charis Ellison** 11:40

Yeah, this is normal, everyone. This is a normal reading experience.

**Sharon Hsu** 11:44

And for context for those of our listeners who we've just completely lost. [Charis laughs] I have no idea, maybe we'll cut all this. But--

**Charis Ellison** 11:52

This is a Megan Whalen Turner podcast now.

**Sharon Hsu** 11:54

Yes. Plot twist! We are talking about THE QUEEN'S THIEF, which is a deeply beloved series by both of us and hundreds of thousands of fans around the world, which is a I guess now a six book series by Megan Whalen Turner, begun like 25 years ago?

**Charis Ellison** 12:18

So long ago long. Yeah.

**Sharon Hsu** 12:20

A lifetime ago. And it has political intrigue, and so many plot twists, and everything is meticulously fair in that Sayers way of, she drops all these hints, but then you don't know they're hints until after you finish the book. And your mind has exploded.

**Charis Ellison** 12:37

When you get to the end of the book, and you go back to the beginning of the book, the second time you read the book, it's a different book. It's so good.

**Sharon Hsu** 12:44

Yes, it's so good. And if you are not familiar with the series, we highly recommend it. This is a great time to get hooked because the last book finally came out. So you're not going to have to do that thing where you're waiting years and years and years.

**Charis Ellison** 12:58

Like six years, was it six years between THE KING OF ATTOLIA and CONSPIRACY OF KINGS?

**Sharon Hsu** 13:04

Yes. Yeah, I think the longest gap was six years and the shortest was like two or three, between books. But I always tell people yeah, the only thing...like try to go in as unspoiled as possible. And the only thing you really need to know is that the premise of the first book is a thief who brags that he can steal anything is tasked with stealing an object that doesn't exist, or that only exists in myth, basically. So that's it. That's it. Go forth and read.

**Charis Ellison** 13:33

Yeah, that's all you need to know. Just trust us, just trust us.

**Sharon Hsu** 13:39

But yes, so Sayers also! I was actually reflecting as you were talking about how going back and immediately rereading to pick up clues, that a short story is much more efficient for that kind of thing. You could do it pretty quickly versus flipping back to the beginning of a very long series.

**Charis Ellison** 14:02

Yeah, but yeah, I guess getting back to Montague Egg. I think, so we've talked a lot about Peter and about how one of the things we love about Peter is like, how much depth he has his character, right. And then we have Monty who is not at all that. You know, he almost feels like a caricature. But not in an annoying way. Monty feels like the main character in an a not too deep, but very fun to watch murder mystery show. Which, you know, like something like a formula, a formulaic whodunit show, where it's not totally believable that that these murders keep happening, you know, like, like, you know, like a MURDER SHE WROTE or--

**Sharon Hsu** 14:56

Mmhmm, like, I wouldn't characterize Monty himself as a jolly person, like that, that feels a little bit too...

**Charis Ellison** 15:05

Yeah, but I mean like he's just like a cheerful normal person who's just--

**Sharon Hsu** 15:10

--keeps having these odd things happen around him. Yeah, like the stories, the stories feel they just have like a jolly or tone, I think.

**Charis Ellison** 15:19

Yes. And I think what I call the tone is that it just feels very much like Sayers is just like winking real broadly the whole time. And it's not like...we're not digging into Monty's soul at any point in these stories.

**Sharon Hsu** 15:36

No, these are very much I think more those like puzzle box mysteries.

**Charis Ellison** 15:41

Yeah.

**Sharon Hsu** 15:42

Like they feel...Yeah, they feel a little bit like an escape room in a box or like a, like a murder dinner party, you know, kit or something.

**Charis Ellison** 15:52

Yeah, yeah. And very much a palate cleanser. You know, and I like I want I kind of wonder there's a part of me that wonders if that's what writing them was for Sayers.

**Sharon Hsu** 16:05

Yes, like something she could kind of quickly dash off between--

**Charis Ellison** 16:08

Yeah, and just like, they're, they're fun. They're light, you know, like, they have a lot of wit, but not metaphysical wit? You know, 'cause like, when we've talked a little bit about how repeatedly in the Lord Peter books, Sayers is asking her audience to meet her at a, like, a certain education level, in order to get some of the clues or in order to get some of the references, you know, like, she's... that she's expecting certain things of her audience. And these stories don't necessarily do that. And they, I feel like it's not that there's... there's not less craftsmanship going into the stories because they are still, like, they're tightly plotted, and the writing is still up to snuff. But it's like they cater to a different audience. Maybe this is something that we'll have stronger opinions about once we get into, you know, some of the later books. Like, I know that, like both of us are just like, we're gonna get to GAUDY NIGHT and then we're going to have like, so much to say about classism. And it like, I know that I specifically haven't fully developed my ideas about that yet. But where does this fit, in terms of like, who Sayers was writing for? What like, what audience did she have in mind when she was writing? And what does that say about the differences between the tone of the stories?

**Sharon Hsu** 17:36

So much to unpack with what you just said!

**Charis Ellison** 17:40

Let me just bring in all this luggage!

**Sharon Hsu** 17:42

Oh, no, it's great. I feel a little bit like, you know, back when I used to teach undergrads and sometimes my students would say something, and I'd be like, oh, there's like 50 million directions we could go with this! It's so exciting! Not that I'm the teacher and you're the student here. But you know, it's like my brain started pinging in a lot of directions as you were talking, I think, yes, there's like a certain expectation of Sayers in the Peter novels, that maybe there's some cultural or intellectual references that she holds in common with at least her ideal reader, right? Like, maybe not her mass audience, but kind of leaving some clues that somebody who had sort of like the education that she had, or was concerned about the same concerns that she had would pick up on. I think there's also a kind of, like, moral demand that she was making of readers in the Peter novels, especially as they... I was gonna say, as they keep developing, but I mean, even really early on. We've, we've talked so much about, you know, how she uses the novels to explore questions of justice, and like, who gets justice and who gets to be in the place of justice? And is it even... is detecting even sort of like a moral thing? You know, when someone like Peter, who gets to do it for fun, does it and it like potentially ruins other people's lives? Like I don't think Sayers... I think there are some places where her classism and sort of her, her biases really show through but I don't think it maps one to one. Like I imagine that, to her, like the lay reader or the everyday reader was also fully capable of grappling with moral issues, right? Like, I don't think she was like, oh, the really, the... only the highly intelligent reader is going to be like interested in the ethical dilemmas I'm putting forward, because she is putting them forward in these very popular books with mass appeal to a kind of mass culture audience, but I think with the Monty stories, she's really interested in kind of playing out that question of like, what kinds of knowledge, what kinds of access, what kinds of information are given to you or like are sort of attached to different classes, you



know. So we've talked before about how there are times when Peter has to send Bunter in to like canoodle up to a lady's maid basically, because it would just be vastly inappropriate for Peter to interview that servant or like the, the, you know, the idea that they just wouldn't tell him what he needs to know because the class differential is too large, right? That there is a kind of class solidarity between servants where they wouldn't necessarily, you know, expose their real thoughts to someone who is a lord. And I think the Monty stories in particular, like because Monty occupies the point of view of the laboring class, I think there's a really interesting question to be asked from an epistemological point of view, like what knowledge is available and not available to Monty, right? Like, well, as we'll see, if we ever started talking about this story, we'll see that it's a mystery in which... if Peter walked into Professor Pindar's study, there would be no mystery. Like the conversation that he would engage in with the professor on like Greek and Latin, he would immediately know that, spoiler alert, this professor is a fraud. Whereas Monty has to piece together a bunch of other clues, but it's not presented as like, Oh, poor Monty. If only he could read classical Greek, it's more like, oh, he has invested in studying human nature--

**Charis Ellison** 21:17

Mm hmm.

**Sharon Hsu** 21:18

--in a very different way than like Peter has and has to because of the difference in their social standing. Monty picks up on clues that are more about Oh, in my knowledge of you know, quote, unquote, fine gentleman, they do things XYZ way, such that he's able to unpack where the professor is being fraudulent. And I do think, like, I keep coming back to... I know I say this almost every episode, but like, I'm gonna have so much to say about this when we get to GAUDY NIGHT. Because I do think Sayers betrays a lot of anxiety in GAUDY NIGHT regarding social boundary crossing and class boundary crossing, and that gets all wrapped up in education and women's education. So, yes, now I have talked to myself into a circle. But those are all the things that I'm interested in all the time about Sayers and also in this story!

**Charis Ellison** 22:11

Yeah, yeah. Oh, it's like this story is just an interesting cross section of that, right, because it's a cross section of those two worlds, the educated world where Peter would know immediately. This could never be a Lord Peter mystery story, because it wouldn't be a mystery. But then you have Monty inhabiting this completely different world. I think, what really strikes me about Monty, you know, kind of as a detective figure is how his ability to solve things relies just on him being observant, being someone who's interested in human nature. And he talks a lot about how he very deliberately makes a study of human nature, because that's part of his work. But also, he has a bright inquiring mind, and he pays attention to details. And it's what makes him a good salesman. But it also those are the qualities that Sayers is kind of saying, like, this is what makes a good detective is someone who niggles at fine details. And it's just like, Oh, this thing doesn't fit. I'm just gonna keep pulling on this string. And, oh, here's another string, until all those things kind of click together--

**Sharon Hsu** 23:27

Which is something he definitely shares with Peter, right?

**Charis Ellison** 23:30

Yeah, that like... that inability to let things go. It's like picking at a scab, you noticed this, this thing's not quite right. You know, but it's like that kind of thing. Or it's like, like that brain itch. Where you can't let go of it until you have tracked it all the way down to its source. That like, I just feel like that is for Sayers the quality that makes the detective is that interest in pursuing a question all the way to its conclusion, as opposed to just having a thought and then letting it drift away. Peter even says that in WHOSE BODY?, you know, there's that scene where he has to go to a lunch party, and his mother is there and he's kind of chatting with the other guests about how an ordinary person they have facts and they just roll around like peas on a tray. But a detective starts stringing the peas together.

**Sharon Hsu** 24:21

Yeah. And Monty does that here too.

**Charis Ellison** 24:24

Mm hmm.

**Sharon Hsu** 24:25

So after he's seen Professor Pindar, which, put a pin in that we'll come back to it. We'll actually describe what's happening in this story, listeners! But it says: "Well, thought Montague Egg, that's a puzzler that is. All the same, it's no business of mine. And I don't want to make a mistake. I wonder who I could ask. Wait a minute. Mr. Griffiths. He's the man, he'll know in a moment." So it's like Monty's almost even playing out that, that inner dialogue that we know Peter has done in the past too, of, well, my curiosity is pulling at these threads. I noticed something is wrong with the picture. But is it really my place? Mmm, but I'm gonna do it anyway.

**Charis Ellison** 25:01

Yeah, I can't help it.

**Sharon Hsu** 25:03

Yeah. And I think... I'm not interested in the question of like, was Dorothy Sayers a snob or not? Again, anything that hinges on biography, I'm like, I don't care. But I think it is meaningful that what her body of work does not say is that intelligence and curiosity and the right to ask questions only belongs to the well educated or the wealthy or the Lord Peters of the world. I think it's very clear that, like you said, she's saying these are, these are the set of qualities that make a good detective. And they can appear in in anyone of any class, really. So it's not that noblesse oblige thing of just wait for the aristocracy to solve your problem. Or even I guess, the less caricature-y way of putting that would be the subconscious belief that some people hold that, Oh, those who are wealthy or titled must, therefore, you know, that there's like a moral goodness that comes along with that, like, I think. And you know, maybe Americans are more susceptible to that, because of the whole Protestant work ethic thing? I don't know. But like, I think there's often... I mean, you know, in our country, there's, there's a lot of moralizing about wealth and about poverty, that impoverished people somehow deserve it and don't work hard and blah, blah, blah, blah, that garbage.

**Charis Ellison** 26:25

And if people are wealthy, it's because they deserve to be blessed that they have somehow earned wealth as a blessing. Which is not biblical at all! Because I'm pretty sure it's easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle than something something something.

**Sharon Hsu** 26:43

Yeah, but the hermeneutical hijinks yu and I have both heard on that! It's just astonishing how many interpreters of that verse tie themselves in crazy, crazy knots, like to not read it, literally. And they read lots of other things very, very literally. It's like, hmmm. I'll just leave it at that.

**Charis Ellison** 27:07

This is a theology podcast now. It's what Sayers would want.

**Sharon Hsu** 27:12

Oh our poor listeners. The emotional whiplash we must be giving them.

**Charis Ellison** 27:17

I feel like probably they're there with us.

**Sharon Hsu** 27:21

Yeah, I imagine so.

**Charis Ellison** 27:23

Like, who knows how to focus these days anymore? I know I sure don't. You know, like, my brain is pinging off in different directions, because it's making me think of, I follow a lot of blogs and like Instagram accounts of people who are not just body positive, but are fat positive, meaning like, they're actively combating, you know, the stigma against fat bodies and fatphobia. And a quote that I saw recently, that I'm paraphrasing because I can't remember exactly what it went. Something about, like being thin isn't a moral position. It's like if you happen to be skinny, it doesn't give you the moral high ground automatically. Because I, because I feel like that's essentially what you're saying about wealth, right? Like, there's no fundamental moral high ground that comes with being wealthy. And you're right, there's like this built in feeling that surely there must be that, oh, if people are wealthy, then there, there must be something special about them. And they're, it's really not. They're just people who are, you know, like, who got lucky or whose ancestors got lucky? Or maybe it wasn't luck. Maybe it was unscrupulous--

**Sharon Hsu** 28:37

Maybe it was exploitation?

**Charis Ellison** 28:39

Yeah.

**Sharon Hsu** 28:40

So often was! Generational wealth is a huge driver of inequity in much of the Western world. And a lot of the ways that families acquire generational wealth was certainly not what gets prescribed to, say, immigrants, or people of color, of just work hard to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. Like, oh, actually, y'all crushed a lot of people under your boots to to get that wealth. So. Surprise! This is now an anti-capitalist podcast.

**Charis Ellison** 29:14

It was always that.

**Sharon Hsu** 29:15

Spoiler alert, it was always that.

**Charis Ellison** 29:19

Oh, were we talking about a short story?

**Sharon Hsu** 29:21

Were we talking about a jolly short story?

**Charis Ellison** 29:23

Oh, yes.

**Sharon Hsu** 29:26

Let me just like very, very, very quickly run through the plot of the story, to provide some context for our listeners. So Montague Egg takes up Mr. Hopgood's excellent advice and goes to the town where the... this professor has just bought an old family home, the Wellingtonia House. He asks the landlord I think of like the inn that he's staying at, for... no, not the inn that he's staying at but like the inn that he's selling--

**Charis Ellison** 30:01

Yeah, he visits an inn to deal with a complaint.

**Sharon Hsu** 30:04

Yes. Turns out that they were like storing their bottles of tawny next to the heating pipes. But yeah, so you know, he's like, should I go call on this person you know. Tell me anything you can about him. Sort of doing the background intel and the landlord's like, Oh, well, you know, I guess he must be wealthy because he bought the place outright but you know, seems to be a bit cheap, like...

**Charis Ellison** 30:27

Doesn't go out and do anything.

**Sharon Hsu** 30:29

Exactly, doesn't really seem to want to bring trade into the town, you know, but he does, he does get like a nice steak chop sent up every week or so. He lives there alone with his housekeeper, etc, etc. So Monty takes himself off to the house and is greeted by a middle aged woman in an apron. Quote: "at

sight of whom Mr. Egg instantly dismissed the manner he used for domestic servants, and substituted the one he reserved for persons 'out of the top drawer,' as he phrased it, a pre-war gentlewoman in a post-war job, he decided." So again, his study of human nature and of social classes where he's like, Oh, this is, you know, like, maybe a gentlewoman fallen on hard times. So he sort of pulls out his best manners for her. He gets shown into the professor's library, and does a bit of like, you know, that thing we all do, right? When you go to someone's house for the first time, and they have books on the shelf, and you kind of like crane your head to see what books they have?

**Charis Ellison** 31:32

I don't crane my head, I go straight to... I'm, I'm a snooper.

**Sharon Hsu** 31:37

Both of us, just like, you know, telling ourselves now.

**Charis Ellison** 31:40

Don't ask me to your house, if you don't want me to go through your bookshelf.

**Sharon Hsu** 31:43

How else? How else do you know that you want to be friends with someone? Come on. So it's a very attractive library, we get a couple long paragraphs of the different books that Monty sees. And again, this is Sayers sort of laying out, you know, all the details that maybe don't make meaningful sense right now, but will. There's a desk with a typewriter with a pile of neatly typed sheets embellish with footnotes, and quote, "a good many passages of what looked to Mr. Egg like Greek though it might of course, have been Russian or Arabic or any other language with a queer alphabet," which... I'd like to think he'd be able to tell the difference, but oh well. And then the professor comes in. He, you know, has a very, very long beard, very long hair, very dresses in that absent minded professor way, like "grey trousers, which had forgotten the last time they'd ever seen a trousers press and a pair of carpet slippers, over which grey woolen socks wreathed themselves in folds," which is just such a delightful--

**Charis Ellison** 32:43

I love that!

**Sharon Hsu** 32:43

--description. Yeah, Monty notices that he has an extremely ill fitting set of dentures, not my favorite thing that Sayers does, but she renders the whistling noise, the "hish click," like as he's speaking. And they have a very lovely discussion of the wine list before Monty sort of asks like, Oh, are you thinking of settling permanently in this part of the country? The professor gets a little bit like, Okay, you know, like time for you to go, once Monty starts to pry a bit. And then the professor mentions that he's finishing a book with "the, the hishtory of the early Chrishtian church" and makes this comment like, "oh, but that means nothing to you, I take it, hey?" said professor." Monty says "no, like this swan of Avon, if I may put it that way, I've small Latin and less Greek. And that's the only resemblance between me and him, I'm afraid," which sort of points to once again, something we'll talk about with GAUDY NIGHT, Latin learning was actually very, very widely available in Britain kind of at this time, especially in sort of the elementary levels. But yeah, Greek would have been much less common. So then Monty... you know,

he starts pulling the thread. And, again, as readers, we're not quite sure what thread he's pulling yet. But he starts sort of writing to different people who'd be in the know. Have you ever heard of this Professor Pindar? Gets referred to to a different professor who, you know, says like, this guy doesn't seem to hold any English or Scottish professorship. "Of course, it might be a foreign or American. Did he speak with any accent, Egg? No? Well, that proves nothing. Of course, anybody can get a professorship from those odd American universities these days." [both laugh] A little jab at the Americans and our shoddy standards. So then Mr. Griffiths, who was the first person that Monty was asking about if you've heard of this person, writes to him later and says, I corresponded with the professor and, you know, managed to get a copy of the typescript he's working on. It's a first class manuscript, but he's also being really evasive. He doesn't say where he got his professorship. He's being a little dodgy, but the book is really, really good. So I'm going to try to try to get it for this publisher. Then Monty gets another letter that says Professor Pindar absolutely refuses to see me or to discuss his book. Dr. Abcock, whom we consulted about if he knows this guy, is also getting excited about this manuscript, I think, I think what we should do is get hold of ANOTHER professor. [exasperated aside] Academia! Consult more professors! Like Dr. Wilverton is gonna know everything and everybody. But like, yeah, for sure the person who wrote this book is a, is a bonafide scholar. So then finally they hear from Wilverton. And Wilverton says like the book is absolutely the work of a first rate scholar. I know the scholar, you know, I recognize the manuscript because I read part of it at one point, and it was written by a young man called Roger Donne. D-o-n-n-e, like John Donne, which, put a pin in that! Donne turned to drink and ended his life in a very impoverished way. And so Wilverton says his guess is that when all of Donne's things were sold after his death, somebody bought up the manuscript. So then at that point, they're all like, What is going on? And Monty remembers the missing financier, and all of the threads sort of coalesce for him. And he says, like, yeah, this is someone who clearly was trying to go through a lot of trouble to be seen. Like, you know, he goes all the way back to talking about Mr. Hopgood and saying, like, yeah, usually, usually customers... if they don't like soft drinks, they wouldn't even have the salesperson be shown in. So that was sort of the first thing that Monty noticed, was this professor was kind of going out of his way to be seen in his library full of books, but unlike most academics, seems to not want to engage with the academic community. And so basically, at the end of it all, Monty's like, you know, you should call the police because this man is the missing financier who took a bunch of assets from Mammoth Industries. He must have just bought up somebody's library and is like trying to pass himself off as a professor, his housekeeper is actually his wife. And yeah, and the reasons that Monty knows this isn't because he himself was like, trying to engage the fake Professor Pindar in a long, scholarly conversation. He noticed things like why would a man with false teeth order steak? He noticed that all the books are sort of crammed really, really tightly into the shelves, and he was like, you know, no person who needs to consult books very often would do that, because it would just damage the spines to take them in and out. He was like, there was no organization to the library, which anybody who knows a reader is like, there are just meticulous systems that we do things with! You wouldn't, you wouldn't put the 15th century pamphlets next to the, the 12th century manuscripts or whatever! So yeah, those are all the things that that Monty notices. And so he says, like, you know, "Greek or no Greek, I couldn't believe that gentleman ever read any of his books. I expect he just bought up someone's library, which is often done by rich gentleman who get their libraries done by furnishing firms." Which is also I think, going back to the class thing (and then I'll start talking) and an interesting nod to like the way that I guess like, the nouveau riche might have this class anxiety around having the right things. But of course, the right things are never the things that you can

just outright buy, right? Like they have to have the aura of being very old and being priceless in many ways and coming down to you through your family versus just a consumable object. I suppose. So. Yeah. That is, that is the story. Where do we want to dive back in?

**Charis Ellison** 38:41

Well, I think, you know, when you lay it out like that, it's kind of interesting, because it doesn't so much have a plot, as it is an unusual circumstance. And then you just kind of get to see Monty poking at it a little bit. And then he tugs the right thread and everything unravels. And the only reason they're able to prove anything is because in the course of his friend who works for a publisher making inquiries about the book and getting to see the manuscript, and then making inquiries of a couple of different professors to, you know, kind of get some background and be like, you know, is this guy legitimate? Because we want to buy this book?

**Sharon Hsu** 39:17

Yeah, basically, peer review.

**Charis Ellison** 39:20

Yeah, and they just happen to hit on the one professor who can be like, I have seen this stuff before. And I know it was written by this guy who was my pupil, who passed away in poverty and his stuff must have been sold. I mean, that's not a plot! But like the story is still so interesting and enjoyable to read. Partly because Monty is just a pleasant character. Like that's the word that comes to mind, is just like, he's just pleasant to read about. And it's also just interesting seeing all the little pieces click into place, and who needs plot really?

**Sharon Hsu** 39:54

Who needs plot when... when you can talk about themes?!

**Charis Ellison** 39:59

Yeah, It's so neat, you know, like you said puzzle box earlier. And it really is. It's just like one of those things which is like all the things just like kind of shift around and then slot into place and it's all neat and tidy. And I don't know. Like I kind of, I found this story rewarding to read. Like my brain enjoyed this, my brain found it refreshing. Ah, yes, it all fits together. Look how neat and clean it is. I will take that dopamine hit. Thank you.

**Sharon Hsu** 40:26

Yes, Animal Crossing and Sayers, the only things giving us dopamine these days. [both laugh] I also kind of love that there is... and like, tell me if this is... if I'm making too tortured of a leap here, as is my wont. But I feel like it's a story that really... it really plays on the question of taste, right? Taste as a, as a marker of class, as something that's like taught to you by your class, as something that class anxiety revolves around, as something that can be mimicked, but not necessarily naturalized. Like the false professor can buy this manuscript and replicate it on typewriter, but he's always going to be found out because he can't actually have the conversation about Greek and Latin and the early church fathers and so forth. And yet, you know, he's able to have a very long and pleasant conversation with Monty about his wine list. So it's sort of like the questions of... what are the tastes of the intellectual class?



What are the literal tastes of like a middle class that's newly wealthy, that's like maybe aspiring to to get into a certain kind of class position. All of this, of course, taking place beneath this financier committing fraud, and then like trying to pass himself off, you know, and our detective is a salesman who, who literally, pedals a kind of taste.

**Charis Ellison** 41:51

Uh huh.

**Sharon Hsu** 41:51

Like the taste of wine, the taste of fine spirits. Like when Monty hears, Oh, yeah, he gets a steak chop, he's like, okay, you know, he starts going through his catalogue about, like, what pairs well with steak. So it's like... [chuckles] this is where like, you know, if I were delivering a paper on this, I'd be like, here all the interesting questions that this raises and uhhh, hmmm, like, talk is over! Go talk about, you know, the answers among yourselves! But like, I just think it's really interesting to me that a kind of literal taste is wrapped up in questions of class and what kinds of knowledge belong to which classes and how people can be found out as trying to pass themselves off in a class that they are not, based off of having the wrong taste for that class, right? And so, I guess, again, not to accuse Sayers of being a snob, but I think, I think once again, it's, it's just like, she's really invested in these questions. In some ways, like maybe a little bit invested in also policing the boundaries there and like, you know, not letting people get away with it. And I feel like I'm stretching for a connection to the fact that the young gentleman who unfortunately took to drink and wasn't able to fulfill his destiny as being a brilliant scholar is Roger Donne. I mean, like, we know Peter loves John Donne. Donne himself was sort of a... he's a really interesting figure for the Modernists because he's, you know, obviously was like well known when he was writing poetry and then Donne really fell out of popularity for a couple centuries. And the popular reception history of Donne is that it wasn't until T.S. Eliot got really, really interested in John Donne and sort of like, revitalized Donne's reputation that he was seen as a very important poet in the canon. So I feel like there's something there too, about Peter, and this guy, Roger Donne as... as like being connoisseurs of tastes, because they too, are, are really interested in John Donne or like connected with John Donne in a way that, you know, not everybody, not every scholar would have, like recognized, so to speak, Donne's 'genius' or something. So there's, there's also something about like being on the forefront of a certain kind of, you know, academic reading or intellectual reading or, or having a sort of marginalized or marginal opinion that is supposed to show like what good taste Peter has at least? Hnnngh, anyway, yeah. Great, great to do a podcast where I just word vomit all of those thoughts and can't go back and fix the argument. But I feel like that's just all swirling around in this goblet.

**Charis Ellison** 44:34

Well, I think that that makes sense. Because we get the impression that Sayers was concerned with these things, and they, they just bleed through. And that's, I don't know, like I find that whole question very interesting. I've said before that, like I'm interested in the way that the the questions that people are asking, you know, consciously or subconsciously when they do creative work, and the way those questions kind of bleed into whatever they're doing. And do I think that Sayers was sitting down to examine the class system? Uh, no? Not really? :ike I think in GAUDY NIGHT and BUSMAN'S HONEYMOON she made some conscious decisions about dealing with those questions, may or may



not have come to any actual conclusions... We'll have stuff to say about that. When we get there someday, in 10 years, but yeah, like, I feel like in this story, there's not a deliberate attempt to make any kind of commentary. It's just that it shows up because, you know, you reckon with the world that's around you. And Sayers was living in a world that was in... I mean, you think of the '30s. And it's just this kind of weird time, you know, like you've had this devastating war, women are in a strange new position in society, like the values in society have shifted a little bit. And like America is doing what, like, [chuckles] whatever is going on in America! We're having an interesting time.

**Sharon Hsu** 46:10

Just giving professorships out willy nilly!

**Charis Ellison** 46:14

Who knows! Obviously, class was still important, and class markers were still important. But people who were used to a certain amount of class privilege had to, you know, feel a little unbalanced. And because you're just like, Oh, wait, my, my position and the course of my life has suddenly been up ended, kind of like when Monty is introduced to the quote unquote, housekeeper, who in actuality is the financier's wife, you know, but he says, he looks at her mannerisms. And he assesses her immediately as a pre-war gentlewoman in a post-war job. Like when you see the people around you and the ups and downs of where people go in society don't match up with what you anticipated. There's a lot of... I can, I can imagine there being, whether Sayers consciously thought about it in this way or not, but underlying class anxiety, about, you know, protecting what you see as what you deserve. Like oh, but but I'm this such and such a class, like I'm middle class, I deserve, I deserve higher education, or I like I deserve a job with benefits. I worked so hard to get here... by being born into an educated family.

**Sharon Hsu** 47:31

I think this will also be a really interesting conversation as we get into HAVE HIS CARCASS again, and certainly when we get to GAUDY NIGHT, because we've both talked about how we... we don't necessarily like to read Harriet as like the Dorothy Sayers avatar in the books, right? Or at least to stop there would feel insufficient. But I think... like something that I've grown sort of increasingly uncomfortable with, in my readings of the Harriet books as I've gotten older, because that character was so important to me when I was a teenager, and still is very, very important to me. But I think something I've noticed more and more is the sort of attitude that gets placed in Harriet, or this attitude that Harriet holds, that feels very, like, you know, like, 'I'm not like the other girls'?

**Charis Ellison** 48:22

Yeeeeeah

**Sharon Hsu** 48:22

Kind of like... we'll see that a lot in HAVE HIS CARCASS as she's watching and sort of judging the goings on at the hotel. And certainly in GAUDY NIGHT, it's, it's just a perpetual... her attempt to align with the dons at Oxford versus like ALL the women in her graduating class, who she feels like squandered their potential. And there's, I mean, there's so much about like, potential and career and things that were promised to women of a certain education and the things that were actually given

them. So I don't I mean, I don't want to like flatten that distinction too much. Again, we'll be.. we will, we will talk about this at length. Eventually.

**Charis Ellison** 48:59

You'll have so much to say.

**Sharon Hsu** 49:01

Yeah, but I do think that there are a lot of things that betray a certain kind of class anxiety in these books and these stories, and whether Sayers was working through anxiety that she herself had or reflecting, you know, attitudes that she saw in society at large, or both, it's something that I think we'll want to pull apart more.

**Charis Ellison** 49:22

Mm hmm.

**Sharon Hsu** 49:22

I feel like there's a lot of condemnation in Sayers' body of work of people trying to pass themselves off as something that they're not, especially when it comes to class, especially when it comes to education. And that that disapproval resides more in Harriet than in Peter is very interesting. I mean, I think part of it is that like, you can become an impoverished lord, but you're always going to be a lord, right?

**Charis Ellison** 49:23

Yeah.

**Sharon Hsu** 49:23

It's like they exist in around that's very different from... oh, say, the railway baron who made a lot of money and was granted a knighthood. You know, might buy that country manor and like might buy a bunch of nice books to put in his library and then oh, no, nobody's going to know his, his true.... you know, his dirty origins or something. Anyway, I look forward to babbling about all of that more in the future.

**Charis Ellison** 50:13

Yeah, there's, there's threads, and we're gonna tug on the threads because we can't help it.

**Sharon Hsu** 50:20

Can't help it. Yeah. And speaking of tugging on the threads, we do intend to return to HAVE HIS CARCASE, our long abandoned book next! We're not going to do any more short stories.

**Charis Ellison** 50:35

Yes, this was basically us getting back in the saddle and--

**Sharon Hsu** 50:40

Palate cleanser for us too.

**Charis Ellison** 50:41

Yeah, a palate cleanser for us. And yeah, just getting getting back into the swing of things. So that when we do like, when we dive back into HAVE HIS CARCASE, we are, [chuckles] we are not gonna do, uh, this. [both laugh] I mean, like, we went so many directions, and I enjoyed it all. But it did wander around a little bit.

**Sharon Hsu** 51:11

It was very wandery, which, okay for a short story, but if we're going to try to get through the many chapters of HAVE HIS CARCASE, we will need to be slightly more focused.

**Charis Ellison** 51:21

Yes. And we will be. We will be. But you know, it's kind of like we are talking about, like the interest in the things that Sayers worried about bleeding into her work, the stuff that we're worried about, in current events, bleeds into the podcast, and that's fine.

**Sharon Hsu** 51:39

Very true.

**Charis Ellison** 51:40

Yeah, I don't I don't think it makes any sense to pretend that you don't experience things through the lens of your current experience, you know?

**Sharon Hsu** 51:50

Yeah. I mean, we certainly aren't going to pretend that.

**Charis Ellison** 51:55

We're not going to pretend that. I don't see any point in pretending that and I think, I don't know, like as readers, I think it's interesting the way you read a book at different points in your life, and it feels different, or different things stand out to you, or the same book can play a different role in your life over and over again.

**Sharon Hsu** 52:14

100%

**Charis Ellison** 52:16

Yeah, and I think that's, that's one of the things I like about it. It's one of the reasons I am a chronic reader.

**Sharon Hsu** 52:22

Agreed. [chuckles] Yeah, sorry, I don't--

**Charis Ellison** 52:25

Like I did, I was just like, I didn't really have a closing thought for that. I just.

**Sharon Hsu** 52:28

it's okay, just go reread the entire QUEEN'S THIEF series and read RETURN OF THE THIEF so that WE can talk about it.

**Charis Ellison** 52:39

I'll read it. And we'll just we'll just have to schedule a call just for that. Just to talk about that.

**Sharon Hsu** 52:46

So yes, thank you, patient listeners who have stuck with us.

**Charis Ellison** 52:49

So patient!

**Sharon Hsu** 52:50

So patient, through our completely unannounced, unplanned hiatus, plus these short story episodes, which we hope were a delightful surprise, but maybe were a frustrating detour from Wilvercombe and our beloved Peter and Harriet. But yes, we will return to the sandy shores soon!

**Charis Ellison** 53:13

In the meantime, you can find us on Twitter and Instagram as @wimseypod. That's Wimsey spelled w-i-m-s-e-y, and you can find transcripts and show notes of our episodes on our website at [asmywimseytakesme.com](http://asmywimseytakesme.com)

**Sharon Hsu** 53:30

Our logo is by Gabby Vicioso and our theme music was composed and recorded by Sarah Meholick. If you've enjoyed this episode of as As My Wimsey Takes Me, we'd love for you to give us a rating and a review on Apple podcasts or on your podcatcher of choice. And we also hope that you'll tell all your friends who love Dorothy L. Sayers as much as we do.

**Charis Ellison** 53:49

Join us next time for more talking piffle!