EXCERPT FROM

The Complete, Annotated Whose Body?

by Dorothy L. Sayers

With Notes, Essays and Chronologies

by Bill Peschel

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Available in Trade Paperback, Kindle and other e-reader versions.
Author’s Note

This excerpt contains Chapter One, the essays and chronologies of Dorothy L. Sayers’ life and Lord Peter Wimsey’s cases. This is what you’ll see if you buy the trade paperback book (minus this Author’s Note, of course).

The Wimsey Annotations project (at www.planetpeschel.com) has been in the works for nearly 15 years and is not yet finished. With the rise in self-publishing, combined with the fact that Sayers’ first two novels are in the public domain, the time was right for an annotated edition.

Researching Sayers’ life and that of her most famous creation provided fascinating insights into the history of England and its peoples in the 1920s. Sayers was also a well-educated woman, at a time when few women were, and her learning is reflected in Lord Peter’s aphorisms, witty sayings and direct quotations of everything from classic literature, to Gilbert and Sullivan, to catchphrases of the day.

I hope you’ll find reading “The Complete, Annotated Whose Body?” as enjoyable as I had researching it.

Cheers,

Bill Peschel
Notes to the Reader

“The Complete, Annotated Whose Body?” contains features the reader should be aware of.

**Footnotes:** The footnotes come from the two authors. Sayers’ four footnotes are included in the body of the text. The footnotes are supplied by Bill Peschel and serve several functions:

*Word definitions:* To figure out what words to define, several people of various ages read “Whose Body?” and marked the words they did not understand. They noted cultural and literary references, words understandable to British readers but not Americans (jumper, motor-lorry, finding her range) and words that might seem obvious to some readers, but not to others. What color is primrose? What’s claret? What is a Niagara? The annotator went through the suggestions and tried to define the truly rare or unusual words without overloading the text.

*Interpretations:* Explanations are provided of certain subjects for readers who are unfamiliar with, for example, the subtleties of England’s social classes, the inquest system, and pounds and pence.

*Biblical quotations:* All excerpts are drawn from the King James Version.

**Essays:** In the back of the book are essays about various aspects of the novel, Lord Peter and Dorothy L. Sayers. They are not necessary to understand the story, but they can help deepen your enjoyment of the novel.

**About this edition:** This edition was transcribed by John Mark Ockerbloom and Mary Mark Ockerbloom from the first edition published in the U.S. by Boni and Liveright in 1923. The text can be found at http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/sayers/body/whose-body.html. The U.S. copyright for this edition expired in 1951, when copyright was not renewed as required in the 28th year. Since this book was first published in the U.S., the copyright is not eligible for GATT restoration. Sayers made changes to the novel in subsequent editions, and some of them have been included.

And now, a personal request.

**If you like this book:** Tell your friends about it, or post a review on your social networking sites or the website where you bought this book. Word of mouth can spur sales, help me support my family and encourage me to spend more time writing! Thank you.

Bill Peschel
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Map courtesy of OpenStreetMap

1. Great Ormond Street, where Police-Inspector Parker lives
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3. Goodge Street, where Mr. Thipps ended up after the raid
“OH, DAMN!” SAID LORD PETER Wimsey at Piccadilly Circus.1 “Hi, driver!”

The taxi man, irritated at receiving this appeal while negotiating the intricacies of turning into Lower Regent Street across the route of a 19 ‘bus, a 38-B2 and a bicycle, bent an unwilling ear.

“I’ve left the catalogue3 behind,” said Lord Peter deprecatingly, “uncommonly careless of me. D’you mind puttin’ back to where we came from?”

“To the Savile Club,4 sir?”

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1 A major road junction in London’s West End where Piccadilly Road intersects with Regent and Glasshouse streets, Shaftesbury Avenue and Leicester (pronounced Lester) Square. The American equivalent would be Times Square in New York City. The word circus is derived from the Latin word meaning “circle.”

2 The names of two London bus routes. The ‘bus is a shortened form of the word omnibus. See the essay “Omnibus: One Vehicle’s Journey Through Linguistics” on page 231.

3 Lord Peter is heading to an auction of rare books. High-end auction houses issue catalogues describing their offerings in detail, allowing buyers to decide their bidding strategy.

4 A club for gentlemen, not to be confused with today’s “gentlemen’s clubs” which are really strip clubs with a fig leaf of respectability. Clubs such as the Savile, Boodle’s (founded in 1762) and White’s (founded in 1693) were once part of a grand tradition in which upper-class gentlemen would gather to dine, drink, network and, occasionally, die in the smoking room (see “The Unpleasantness at
“No—110 Piccadilly\textsuperscript{5}—just beyond—thank you.”
“Thought you was in a hurry,” said the man, overcome with a sense of injury.
“I’m afraid it’s an awkward place to turn in,” said Lord Peter, answering the thought rather than the words. His long, amiable face looked as if it had generated spontaneously from his top hat, as white maggots breed from Gorgonzola\textsuperscript{6}.

The taxi, under the severe eye of a policeman, revolved by slow jerks, with a noise like the grinding of teeth.

The block of new, perfect and expensive flats\textsuperscript{7} in which Lord Peter dwelt upon the second floor, stood directly opposite the Green Park,\textsuperscript{8} in a spot for many years occupied by the skeleton of a
frustrate commercial enterprise. As Lord Peter let himself in he heard his man’s voice in the library, uplifted in that throttled stridency⁹ peculiar to well-trained persons using the telephone.

“I believe that’s his lordship just coming in again—if your Grace would kindly hold the line a moment.”

“What is it, Bunter?”

“Her Grace has just called up from Denver,¹⁰ my lord. I was just saying your lordship had gone to the sale when I heard your lordship’s latchkey.”¹¹

“Thanks,” said Lord Peter; “and you might find me my catalogue, would you? I think I must have left it in my bedroom, or on the desk.”

He sat down to the telephone with an air of leisurely courtesy, as though it were an acquaintance dropped in for a chat.

“Hullo, Mother—that you?”

“Oh, there you are, dear,” replied the voice of the Dowager Duchess.¹² “I was afraid I’d just missed you.”

“Well, you had, as a matter of fact. I’d just started off to Brocklebury’s sale to pick up a book or two, but I had to come back for the catalogue. What’s up?”

“Such a quaint thing,” said the Duchess. “I thought I’d tell you. You know little Mr. Thipps?”

“Thipps?” said Lord Peter. “Thipps? Oh, yes, the little architect man who’s doing the church roof. Yes. What about him?”

“Mrs. Throgmorton’s just been in, in quite a state of mind.”

“Sorry, Mother, I can’t hear. Mrs. Who?”

“Throgmorton—Throgmorton—the vicar’s wife.”

“Oh, Throgmorton, yes?”

“Mr. Thipps rang them up this morning. It was his day to come down, you know.”

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⁹ Throttled. Strangled or choked. Stridency. A harsh, shrill or discordant sound.

¹⁰ A village in the county of Norfolk, a coastal area northeast of London. Duke’s Denver, Lord Peter’s family seat, is located several miles east of the village.

¹¹ A key used to open a lock on an outside door.

¹² A dowager is a woman who possesses a dower, or life interest in her deceased husband’s property. A duchess is the wife of a duke. The current Duke of Denver is Lord Peter’s eldest brother, Gerald.
“Yes?"
“He rang them up to say he couldn’t. He was so upset, poor little man. He’d found a dead body in his bath.”
“Sorry, Mother, I can’t hear; found what, where?”
“A dead body, dear, in his bath.”
“What?—no, no, we haven’t finished. Please don’t cut us off. Hullo! Hullo! Is that you, Mother? Hullo!—Mother!—Oh, yes—sorry, the girl was trying to cut us off.13 What sort of body?”
“A dead man, dear, with nothing on but a pair of pince-nez.14 Mrs. Throgmorton positively blushed when she was telling me. I’m afraid people do get a little narrow-minded in country vicarages.”15
“Well, it sounds a bit unusual. Was it anybody he knew?”
“No, dear, I don’t think so, but, of course, he couldn’t give her many details. She said he sounded quite distracted. He’s such a respectable little man—and having the police in the house and so on, really worried him.”
“Poor little Thipps! Uncommonly awkward for him. Let’s see, he lives in Battersea,16 doesn’t he?”
“Yes, dear; 59 Queen Caroline Mansions; opposite the Park.”17

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13 Phone calls were timed so that you could talk for three minutes before incurring an additional charge. Since an operator, who connects callers by plugging wires into a board, might be monitoring several conversations at the same time, mix-ups could cause calls to be prematurely terminated.
14 A pair of glasses consisting of two lenses connected by a metal bridge, sometimes with a string attached that is looped around the neck or a vest button. The word is derived from the French pincer, to pinch, and nez, nose.
15 A vicar is the title given to a parish priest. In the Anglican Church, England is divided into parishes and grouped into dioceses, each overseen by a bishop. Depending on who appointed him and how he is paid, the priest of the parish could be called a rector, vicar, curate (a sort of assistant to the parish priest) or even a perpetual curate (who acts as a parish priest but over a small parish). The vicarage, therefore, is the home of the vicar. It doesn’t mean that a rector lives in a rectorage. He lives in a rectory.
16 A district on the south side of the Thames, near the center of the city.
17 Battersea Park. A 200-acre green space opened in 1858 that’s home to a children’s zoo and the London Peace Pagoda. It is bounded on the north by the River Thames, the east by Queenstown Road, the south by Prince of Wales Drive, and the west by Albert Bridge Road.

Queen Caroline Mansions. On Prince of Wales Drive are buildings with names such as Park Mansions, Primrose Mansions and Prince of Wales Drive
That big block just around the corner from the Hospital. I thought perhaps you’d like to run round and see him and ask if there’s anything we can do. I always thought him a nice little man.”

“Oh, quite,” said Lord Peter, grinning at the telephone. The Duchess was always of the greatest assistance to his hobby of criminal investigation, though she never alluded to it, and maintained a polite fiction of its non-existence.

“What time did it happen, Mother?”

“I think he found it early this morning, but, of course, he didn’t think of telling the Throgmortons just at first. She came up to me just before lunch—so tiresome, I had to ask her to stay. Fortunately, I was alone. I don’t mind being bored myself, but I hate having my guests bored.”

“Poor old Mother! Well, thanks awfully for tellin’ me. I think I’ll send Bunter to the sale and toddle round to Battersea now an’ try and console the poor little beast. So-long.”

“Good-bye, dear.”

“Bunter!”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Her Grace tells me that a respectable Battersea architect has discovered a dead man in his bath.”

“Indeed, my lord? That’s very gratifying.”

“Very, Bunter. Your choice of words is unerring. I wish Eton and Balliol\(^\text{18}\) had done as much for me. Have you found the catalogue?”

“Here it is, my lord.”

“Thanks. I am going to Battersea at once. I want you to attend the sale for me. Don’t lose time—I don’t want to miss the Folio

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\(^{18}\) Eton College is an independent school — that is, not funded by the state — for boys ages 13 to 18 and attended mostly by sons of the English upper and upper-middle classes. It is located near Windsor, in Berkshire, about 20 miles west of London. Balliol is a college, founded in 1263 and one of 38 that form the University of Oxford, itself founded in the 10th century. Sayers’ son, Anthony Fleming, went to Balliol.
Dante* nor the de Voragine—here you are—see? ‘Golden Legend’—Wynkyn de Worde, 149319—got that?—and, I say, make a special effort for the Caxton folio of the ‘Four Sons of Aymon’—it’s the 1489 folio and unique. Look! I’ve marked the lots I want, and put my outside offer against each. Do your best for me. I shall be back to dinner.”

“Very good, my lord.”

“Take my cab and tell him to hurry. He may for you; he doesn’t like me very much. Can I,” said Lord Peter, looking at himself in the eighteenth-century mirror over the mantelpiece, “can I have the heart to fluster the flustered Thipps further—that’s very

* This is the first Florence edition, 1481, by Niccolo di Lorenzo. Lord Peter’s collection of printed Dantes is worth inspection. It includes, besides the famous Aldine 8vo. of 1502, the Naples folio of 1477—“edizione rarissima,” according to Colomb. This copy has no history, and Mr. Parker’s private belief is that its present owner conveyed it away by stealth from somewhere or other. Lord Peter’s own account is that he “picked it up in a little place in the hills,” when making a walking-tour through Italy.

19 Lord Peter collects incunabulum: books, pamphlets and other material created before 1501 when the printing press came into use. Here is what he wanted Bunter to bid on:

Folio Dante. A reference to the 1481 edition of the works of Dante Alighieri (c.1265-1321) containing his “Divine Comedy” that describes his journeys through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. Books are categorized according to the size of their pages, and a folio is one of the largest, with each page about 8¼ inches by 13 inches. During the last decade of her life, Sayers worked on translating the “Comedy,” completing “Hell” and “Purgatory” and most of “Paradise.”

de Voragine — “Golden Legend” — Wynkyn de Worde, 1493. A collection of the lives of the saints compiled by Jacobus de Voragine (c.1230-1298), the archbishop of Genoa. Although called “Legenda Sanctorum” (Readings of the Saints), it was also known as “Legenda Aurea” (Golden Legend) because it was thought worth its weight in gold. It was a popular work in medieval times, and after the invention of the printing press, versions were published in every major European language.

Wynkyn de Worde (d. 1534) was an English printer who worked with printer William Caxton (ca. 1415-1422-ca.1492) and was one of the first to produce books for the public rather than for noble patrons.

Four Sons of Aymon. A medieval French romance telling of Charlemagne’s struggles with the four chivalrous noblemen of the title. Although it dates from the late 12th century, the version Lord Peter wanted was the first English edition, printed in 1489 by William Caxton.
difficult to say quickly—by appearing in a top-hat and frockcoat? I think not. Ten to one he will overlook my trousers and mistake me for the undertaker. A grey suit, I fancy, neat but not gaudy, with a hat to tone, suits my other self better. Exit the amateur of first editions; new motif introduced by solo bassoon; enter Sherlock Holmes, disguised as a walking gentleman. There goes Bunter. Invaluable fellow—never offers to do his job when you’ve told him to do somethin’ else. Hope he doesn’t miss the ‘Four Sons of Aymon.’ Still, there is another copy of that—in the Vatican.** It might become available, you never know—if the Church of Rome went to pot or Switzerland invaded Italy—whereas a strange corpse doesn’t turn up in a suburban bathroom more than once in a lifetime—at least, I should think not—at any rate, the number of times it’s happened, with a pince-nez, might be counted on the fingers of one hand, I imagine. Dear me! it’s a dreadful mistake to ride two hobbies at once.”

He had drifted across the passage into his bedroom, and was changing with a rapidity one might not have expected from a man of his mannerisms. He selected a dark-green tie to match his socks and tied it accurately without hesitation or the slightest compression of his lips; substituted a pair of brown shoes for his black ones, slipped a monocle23 into a breast pocket, and took up a

** Lord Peter’s wits were wool-gathering. The book is in the possession of Earl Spencer. The Brocklebury copy is incomplete, the five last signatures being altogether missing, but is unique in possessing the colophon. 24

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20 A man’s knee-length coat. It was commonly cut tight at the waist and could be single- or double-breasted.
21 A word dating from the 15th century for mortician or funeral director.
22 A reference to a hobby horse, a toy consisting of a stuffed horse’s head mounted on a stick, sometimes with a small wheel attached at the base. Understandably, trying to ride two of them at once can lead to confusion.
23 A lens encircled by a wire to which a string is attached. A monocle could be worn to correct eyesight, as a magnifying glass, or, particularly among the upper classes, because it was stylish to wear.
24 Signatures. A portion of a book, in which several pages are printed, front and back, on a large sheet of paper, which is then folded one or more times, trimmed and bound.
beautiful Malacca walking-stick with a heavy silver knob.

“That’s all, I think,” he murmured to himself. “Stay—I may as well have you—you may come in useful—one never knows.” He added a flat silver matchbox to his equipment, glanced at his watch, and seeing that it was already a quarter to three, ran briskly downstairs, and, hailing a taxi, was carried to Battersea Park.

Mr. Alfred Thipps was a small, nervous man, whose flaxen hair was beginning to abandon the unequal struggle with destiny. One might say that his only really marked feature was a large bruise over the left eyebrow, which gave him a faintly dissipated air incongruous with the rest of his appearance. Almost in the same breath with his first greeting, he made a self-conscious apology for it, murmuring something about having run against the dining-room door in the dark. He was touched almost to tears by Lord Peter’s thoughtfulness and condescension in calling.

“I’m sure it’s most kind of your lordship,” he repeated for the dozenth time, rapidly blinking his weak little eyelids. “I appreciate it very deeply, very deeply, indeed, and so would Mother, only she’s so deaf, I don’t like to trouble you with making her understand. It’s been very hard all day,” he added, “with the policemen in the house and all this commotion. It’s what Mother and me have never been used to, always living very retired, and

Colophon. A publisher’s trademark or insignia, found usually on the title page. It can also be a description of the book’s typography, paper weight and other information, usually found at the end of the book.

25 A variety of rattan or palm plant, named for a town in western Malaysia. Unlike most palm plants, Malacca has a solid stem, making it ideal for use as a cane.

26 A 200-acre green space opened in 1858 that’s home to a children’s zoo, a lake for boating, and the London Peace Pagoda. It also contains several gardens — including one devoted to sub-tropical plants — lodges, shelters and war memorials.

27 Why should Mr. Thipps be grateful for Lord Peter’s behavior? A less-known definition of condescension in Merriam-Webster is the “voluntary descent from one’s rank or dignity in relations with an inferior.” In England’s class system, how you act toward a person depends on whether they rank higher or lower than you. A sprig of the nobility ranks above a common architect. Lord Peter is not obliged to take notice of Mr. Thipps, so the fact that he not only willingly does so, but calls at Mr. Thipps’ home to help, is cause for gratitude.

28 Secluded.
it’s most distressing to a man of regular habits,\textsuperscript{29} my lord, and reely, I’m almost thankful Mother doesn’t understand, for I’m sure it would worry her terribly if she was to know about it. She was upset at first, but she’s made up some idea of her own about it now, and I’m sure it’s all for the best.”

The old lady who sat knitting by the fire nodded grimly in response to a look from her son.

“I always said as you ought to complain about that bath, Alfred,” she said suddenly, in the high, piping voice peculiar to the deaf, “and it’s to be ‘oped the landlord’ll see about it now; not but what I think you might have managed without having the police in, but there! you always were one to make a fuss about a little thing, from chicken-pox up.”

“There now,” said Mr. Thipps apologetically, “you see how it is. Not but what it’s just as well she’s settled on that, because she understands we’ve locked up the bathroom and don’t try to go in there. But it’s been a terrible shock to me, sir—my lord, I should say, but there! my nerves are all to pieces. Such a thing has never ‘appened—happened to me in all my born days. Such a state I was in this morning—I didn’t know if I was on my head or my heels—I reely didn’t, and my heart not being too strong, I hardly knew how to get out of that horrid room and telephone for the police. It’s affected me, sir, it’s affected me, it reely has—I couldn’t touch a bit of breakfast, nor lunch neither, and what with telephoning and putting off clients and interviewing people all morning, I’ve hardly known what to do with myself?”

“I’m sure it must have been uncommonly distressin’,” said Lord Peter, sympathetically, “especially comin’ like that before breakfast. Hate anything tiresome happenin’ before breakfast. Takes a man at such a confounded disadvantage, what?”

“That’s just it, that’s just it,” said Mr. Thipps, eagerly, “when I saw that dreadful thing lying there in my bath, mother-naked,\textsuperscript{30} too, except for a pair of eyeglasses, I assure you, my lord, it

\textsuperscript{29} Mr. Thipps meant living according to an unvarying schedule: getting up at the same time every morning, going to bed at the same time each night, attending church, and not carousing or getting into trouble. In short, not doing anything that would cause the neighbors to gossip about you.

\textsuperscript{30} As naked as the day you were born.
regularly turned my stomach, if you’ll excuse the expression. I’m not very strong, sir, and I get that sinking feeling sometimes in the morning, and what with one thing and another I ‘ad—had to send the girl for a stiff brandy or I don’t know what mightn’t have happened. I felt so queer, though I’m anything but partial to spirits as a rule. Still, I make it a rule never to be without brandy in the house, in case of emergency, you know?”

“Very wise of you,” said Lord Peter, cheerfully, “you’re a very far-seein’ man, Mr. Thipps. Wonderful what a little nip’ll do in case of need, and the less you’re used to it the more good it does you. Hope your girl is a sensible young woman, what? Nuisance to have women faintin’ and shriekin’ all over the place.”

“Oh, Gladys is a good girl,” said Mr. Thipps, “very reasonable indeed. She was shocked, of course, that’s very understandable. I was shocked myself, and it wouldn’t be proper in a young woman not to be shocked under the circumstances, but she is really a helpful, energetic girl in a crisis, if you understand me. I consider myself very fortunate these days to have got a good, decent girl to do for me and Mother, even though she is a bit careless and forgetful about little things, but that’s only natural. She was very sorry indeed about having left the bathroom window open, she reely was, and though I was angry at first, seeing what’s come of it, it wasn’t anything to speak of, not in the ordinary way, as you might say. Girls will forget things, you know, my lord, and reely she was so distressed I didn’t like to say too much to her. All I said was, ‘It might have been burglars,’ I said, ‘remember that, next time you leave a window open all night; this time it was a dead man,’ I said, ‘and that’s unpleasant enough, but next time it might be burglars,’ I said, ‘and all of us murdered in our beds.’ But the police-inspector—Inspector Sugg, they called him, from the Yard—he was very sharp with her, poor girl. Quite frightened her, and made her think he suspected her of something, though what good a body could be to her, poor girl, I can’t imagine, and so I told the inspector. He was quite rude to me, my lord—I may say I didn’t like his manner at all. ‘If you’ve got anything definite to accuse Gladys or me of, Inspector,’ I said to him, ‘bring it forward,  

31 A supervisory rank, above sergeant but below chief inspector. They’re called inspectors today.
that’s what you have to do,’ I said, ‘but I’ve yet to learn that you’re paid to be rude to a gentleman in his own ‘ouse—house.’ Reely,” said Mr. Thipps, growing quite pink on the top of his head, “he regularly roused me, regularly roused me, my lord, and I’m a mild man as a rule.”

“Sugg all over,” said Lord Peter, “I know him. When he don’t know what else to say, he’s rude, Stands to reason you and the girl wouldn’t go collectin’ bodies. Who’d want to saddle himself with a body? Difficulty’s usually to get rid of ‘em. Have you got rid of this one yet, by the way?”

“It’s still in the bathroom,” said Mr. Thipps. “Inspector Sugg said nothing was to be touched till his men came in to move it. I’m expecting them at any time. If it would interest your lordship to have a look at it—”

“Thanks awfully,” said Lord Peter, “I’d like to very much, if I’m not puttin’ you out.”

“Not at all,” said Mr. Thipps. His manner as he led the way along the passage convinced Lord Peter of two things—first, that, gruesome as his exhibit was, he rejoiced in the importance it reflected upon himself and his flat, and secondly, that Inspector Sugg had forbidden him to exhibit it to anyone. The latter supposition was confirmed by the action of Mr. Thipps, who stopped to fetch the doorkey from his bedroom, saying that the police had the other, but that he made it a rule to have two keys to every door, in case of accident.\(^{32}\)

The bathroom was in no way remarkable. It was long and narrow, the window being exactly over the head of the bath. The panes were of frosted glass; the frame wide enough to admit a man’s body. Lord Peter stepped rapidly across to it, opened it and looked out.

The flat was the top one of the building and situated about the middle of the block. The bathroom window looked out upon the backyards of the flats, which were occupied by various small outbuildings, coal-holes,\(^{33}\) garages, and the like. Beyond these

\(^{32}\) Indicating that Mr. Thipps is a very cautious, careful man.

\(^{33}\) A hatch in the sidewalk used to access an underground coal bunker. Delivery men would lift the hatch (which otherwise would be latched down from inside)
were the back gardens of a parallel line of houses. On the right rose the extensive edifice of St. Luke’s Hospital, Battersea, with its grounds, and, connected with it by a covered way, the residence of the famous surgeon, Sir Julian Freke, who directed the surgical side of the great new hospital, and was, in addition, known in Harley Street\textsuperscript{34} as a distinguished neurologist with a highly individual point of view.

This information was poured into Lord Peter’s ear at considerable length by Mr. Thipps, who seemed to feel that the neighbourhood of anybody so distinguished shed a kind of halo of glory over Queen Caroline Mansions.

“We had him round here himself this morning,” he said, “about this horrid business. Inspector Sugg thought one of the young medical gentlemen at the hospital might have brought the corpse round for a joke, as you might say, they always having bodies in the dissecting-room. So Inspector Sugg went round to see Sir Julian this morning to ask if there was a body missing. He was very kind, was Sir Julian, very kind indeed, though he was at work when they got there, in the dissecting-room. He looked up the books to see that all the bodies were accounted for, and then very obligingly came round here to look at this”—he indicated the bath—”and said he was afraid he couldn’t help us—there was no corpse missing from the hospital, and this one didn’t answer to the description of any they’d had.”

“Nor to the description of any of the patients, I hope,” suggested Lord Peter casually.

At this grisly hint Mr. Thipps turned pale.

“I didn’t hear Inspector Sugg enquire,” he said, with some agitation. “What a very horrid thing that would be—God bless my soul, my lord, I never thought of it.”

“Well, if they had missed a patient they’d probably have discovered it by now,” said Lord Peter. “Let’s have a look at this one.”

\textsuperscript{34} A street in the City of Westminster in London, known as a home for doctors and medical organizations since the 1800s.
He screwed his monocle into his eye, adding: “I see you’re troubled here with the soot blowing in. Beastly nuisance, ain’t it? I get it, too—spoils all my books, you know. Here, don’t you trouble, if you don’t care about lookin’ at it.”

He took from Mr. Thipps’s hesitating hand the sheet which had been flung over the bath, and turned it back.

The body which lay in the bath was that of a tall, stout man of about fifty. The hair, which was thick and black and naturally curly, had been cut and parted by a master hand, and exuded a faint violet perfume, perfectly recognizable in the close air of the bathroom. The features were thick, fleshy and strongly marked, with prominent dark eyes, and a long nose curving down to a heavy chin. The clean-shaven lips were full and sensual, and the dropped jaw showed teeth stained with tobacco. On the dead face the handsome pair of gold pince-nez mocked death with grotesque elegance; the fine gold chain curved over the naked breast. The legs lay stiffly stretched out side by side; the arms reposed close to the body; the fingers were flexed naturally. Lord Peter lifted one arm, and looked at the hand with a little frown.

“Bit of a dandy,” he murmured. “Parma violet and manicure.” He bent again, slipping his hand beneath the head. The absurd eyeglasses slipped off, clattering into the bath, and the noise put the last touch to Mr. Thipps’s growing nervousness.

“If you’ll excuse me,” he murmured, “it makes me feel quite faint, it reely does.”

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35 A monocle custom-made for the wearer is easy to keep in place. When it is not, or, in this case, when Sayers wanted to emphasize Lord Peter using his lens as a magnifying glass, he worked his monocle so that it fit snugly.
36 In the 1920s, London’s more than 7 million inhabitants made it the most populous city in the world. That also meant hundreds of thousands of chimneys burning coal for fuel and depositing soot that caused serious health problems. The Great Smog of 1952, when weather conditions wrapped London in a thick blanket of smog for four days, reportedly caused at least 4,000 premature deaths — later studies suggest as many as 12,000 — and led to the Clean Air Act of 1956 which banned the use of coal for domestic use in cities.
37 Someone who pays exaggerated attention to his personal appearance. Possibly a shortened version of “jack-a-dandy” from the 1780s.
38 A perfume made with a member of the violet family.
He slipped outside, and he had no sooner done so than Lord Peter, lifting the body quickly and cautiously, turned it over and inspected it with his head on one side, bringing his monocle into play with the air of the late Joseph Chamberlain approving a rare orchid. He then laid the head over his arm, and bringing out the silver matchbox from his pocket, slipped it into the open mouth. Then making the noise usually written “Tut-tut,” he laid the body down, picked up the mysterious pince-nez, looked at it, put it on his nose and looked through it, made the same noise again, readjusted the pince-nez upon the nose of the corpse, so as to leave no traces of interference for the irritation of Inspector Sugg; rearranged the body; returned to the window and, leaning out, reached upwards and sideways with his walking-stick, which he had somewhat incongruously brought along with him. Nothing appearing to come of these investigations, he withdrew his head, closed the window, and rejoined Mr. Thipps in the passage.

Mr. Thipps, touched by this sympathetic interest in the younger son of a duke, took the liberty, on their return to the sitting-room, of offering him a cup of tea. Lord Peter, who had strolled over to the window and was admiring the outlook on Battersea Park, was about to accept, when an ambulance came into view at the end of Prince of Wales Road. Its appearance reminded Lord Peter of an important engagement, and with a hurried “By Jove!” he took his leave of Mr. Thipps.

“My mother sent kind regards and all that,” he said, shaking hands fervently; “hopes you’ll soon be down at Denver again. Good-bye, Mrs. Thipps,” he bawled kindly into the ear of the old lady. “Oh, no, my dear sir, please don’t trouble to come down.”

He was none too soon. As he stepped out of the door and

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39 British businessman and politician (1836-1914) who, while he never made prime minister, was one of the most influential statesmen of the 19th and 20th centuries. He favored sporting an orchid in his buttonhole, and his collection was renowned.

40 Prince of Wales Drive, which runs along the south edge of Battersea Park, was previously known as Prince of Wales Road.

41 A reference to the home of his brother, the Duke of Denver.

42 Cry out loudly.
turned towards the station, the ambulance drew up from the other direction, and Inspector Sugg emerged from it, with two constables. The Inspector spoke to the officer on duty at the Mansions, and turned a suspicious gaze on Lord Peter’s retreating back.

“Dear old Sugg,” said that nobleman, fondly, “dear, dear old bird! How he does hate me, to be sure.”

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43 Battersea Park railway station at the southeast corner of the park. To return home, Lord Peter would catch a train to Victoria Station, a major railway terminus south of Buckingham Palace, and either catch a cab or walk up Grosvenor Place along the west side of Buckingham Palace’s gardens.
THE WORLD
OF
WHOSE BODY?
Argentina plays a large but shadowy role in “Whose Body?” Since 1900, the South American country loomed large in the imagination and bank books of Britain and Europe. Investors were making money helping the country to industrialize, the tango was sweeping the dance halls, and the phrase “as rich as an Argentine” became common.

The reason why leads us into the dismal science of economics. At the risk of putting everyone to sleep, I’ll cover the highlights to show that the world simply didn’t wake up one day and decide to fall in love with Argentina.

What happened is that Argentina set itself up to attract overseas investments. It succeeded, and as the country developed (and helped the investors turn a profit), it drew more investments. As the country got richer, so did the investors.

Then, catastrophe struck, but we’ll get to that in a moment. In the meantime, here’s the nickel tour of Argentina history during what is commonly called the “Belle Époque” period, which lasted from 1900 to 1914, when the outbreak of war in Europe changed the game.

Until 1900, the Argentine economy was in the doldrums. The country had great natural resources, but not enough money to develop (and profit) from them. The first railroad was built in 1857, and as the lines grew, more areas were able to ship their produce – beef, wool and grain especially – to the coast for export.

Then, in 1899, the country joined the gold standard, pegging the value of its currency to the precious metal (2.27 paper pesos
per gold peso if you must know). It also established two institutions to handle gold redemption and currency stability, the Caja de Conversión (the currency board) and the Banco de la Nación. The CC was responsible for maintaining the gold standard and convertibility of currency externally, while the Banco engaged in normal commercial banking operations as the state’s bank. Most importantly, the country made sure that the currency board was preserved from political interference. This is an important point. Freed from politics and linked to a stable precious metal made the country attractive to investors. Investment money started coming in. More rail lines were built, more goods were exported. The country also underwent an immigration boom, especially from Spain and Italy. By 1914, nearly 30 percent of Argentina came from somewhere else. Even today, 60 percent of Argentina’s population – about 25 million – can trace their ancestry to Spain or Italy.

Argentina grew wealthy. Between 1900 and 1912, it doubled the number of railroad miles to more than 20,000. It also managed to hold a significant chuck of the world’s gold supply: 3.7 percent of the world’s monetary gold and 5.7 percent of the gold held in central banks and treasuries. The largest Argentine companies, the railroads, were listed on the London Stock Exchange. The investments in the railroads helped finance the country’s development, particularly the port city of Buenos Aires and most industries. Argentina, in turn, was given access to capital at low interest rates.

Per capital income rose to astonishing heights: 50 percent higher than Italy, five times higher in neighboring Brazil. Argentina went on a building spree, and it used European architecture as its model. Argentines, as flush with money as the Japanese were in the 1980s, went on a buying spree in Europe, bringing with them the exotic, sensual dance, the tango.

Then World War I upended the table. Investors cashed in, selling their securities around the world. Nations went on a borrowing binge to pay for the war. They issued more money than they could cover by their gold reserves. They cut loose their currencies from stable gold, letting their values rise and fall, and Argentina had to follow. Trade fell off.

As a result, businesses in Argentina starting going bankrupt.
Banks lost between 20 percent and 45 percent of their deposits (by comparison, during the worst of the Great Depression in the U.S., bank deposits fell by 39.5 percent). Their stock prices collapsed dramatically. For example, the Banco de Galicia dropped from a high of 160 in 1911 to 48 three years later.

Argentina’s Belle Époque era was over.
Adolf Beck

Seeing Is Not Believing

It sounds like the beginning of an Alfred Hitchcock movie. A man on the street is accosted by a woman he has never seen before and accused of stealing her jewelry. He summons a policeman, only to find himself arrested and put on trial.

But instead of the Cary Grant fleeing the police and working to clear his name, this story is about Adolf Beck, who suffered a more terrifying and tragic fate than anything the master of suspense dreamed up.

On a November day in 1895, an unmarried language teacher walking down Victoria Street meets a nicely dressed man with smooth, aristocratic manners. He tips his hat and addresses her as Lady Everton. Ottilie Meissonnier corrects him, and as they chat she picks up hints that he is very rich and very well connected. He is a cousin of Lord Salisbury, the prime minister. He owns an estate in Lincolnshire and a yacht. Although she isn’t Lady Everton, the man is clearly attracted to Ottilie and she, in return, is certainly drawn to him.

The next day, they meet for a cup of tea. Over the crumpets, he invites her to the Riviera on his yacht. The subject of her wardrobe is raised, and he writes her a check for £40 to buy new clothes. When he offers to give her jewelry, Ottilie is so carried away by her good fortune – or at least the prospect of a good time – that she hands over two wrist watches and her rings so he could properly size her gifts. He also borrows £2.

Her dream of seeing the French coast from the desk of a rich man’s yacht lasts until that afternoon, when a bank clerk informs
her that the check is worthless.

Ottilie fumes and regrets, until fate seemingly took a hand. Several weeks later, walking again down Victoria Street – and the novelist in me wonders if she did so hoping to find His Lordship – she spies Lord Salisbury’s “cousin.” She confronts him, demanding her jewelry back. Startled, he denies ever meeting the woman and calls a policeman to pry her off him.

For Adolf Beck, this is where his life took a sudden turn for the worst. Because the police at Scotland Yard have been wanting to get their hands on Lord Salisbury’s mythical cousin. For some time, a man known as John Smith had been pulling this scam under the names Lord Wilton and Lord Willoughby. They order an identity parade, and Beck is put in line with men who don’t look at all like him. Not surprisingly, Ottilie picks him out. His handwriting is compared with Smith’s, and the expert announced that the samples didn’t match. The police ignored that on the assumption that the criminal Beck would know to disguise his handwriting.

The absurdities pile up at Beck’s trial. A policeman identified Beck as Smith based on their last meeting 20 years ago. The presiding judge, who had sentenced Smith then, said he recognized Beck as well. Beck is convicted and sentenced to 7 years in prison. He is even given Smith’s prison number.

As Beck served his sentence, his solicitor petitioned the Home Office to re-examine the case. He pointed to a report from the prison doctor saying that Beck wasn’t circumcised. Smith was. In the face of a magically regenerating foreskin, the Home Office concluded that Beck was not Smith, but not that he had been subjected to an unfair trial. They did, however, give him his own prison number.

Meanwhile, a Daily Mail journalist, George R. Sims, who had known Beck since 1885, took up the case. His articles swayed public opinion, but it was not enough. Beck was paroled after five years for good behavior in 1901, but in the eyes of the law, he was a criminal. The best he could do was attempt to resume a normal life.

Until his nightmare returned. Three years later, Paulina Scott, a servant, told police that a grey-haired distinguished-looking man had met her on the street, flattered her, and stolen her jewelry. The
police inspector remembered the Beck case and took her to a restaurant that he frequented. Scott could not say if Beck was the man.

The inspector set up a trap. As Beck left his flat, Scott accosted him, saying he was the thief. He denied it. She said an officer was waiting to arrest him. Beck fled. To the police, this was the proof they needed, and he was arrested.

Another trial, and this time five women testified against him, and he was found guilty. But this time, the judge had some doubts about the case. He delayed sentencing.

Ten days later, in a coincidence only a novelist could come up with, the real John Smith was arrested while trying to pawn several women’s rings. He was Wilhelm Meyer, a Viennese doctor who had fallen on hard times. Many of the women who had identified Beck on the stand agreed that it was actually Meyer who had sweet-talked them.

Looking at the police photographs, it’s easy to see why they could have been mistaken. Although there are differences between the two men – Meyer looks heavier – both were close enough otherwise to be brothers.

After an investigation, the Home Office was criticized for not reopening the case even after it found that Beck and Smith were not the same man. The judge in the first trial was also found at fault for his conduct. Several reforms were instituted, including the establishment of the Court of Criminal Appeal, charged specifically with ruling on the facts on the case, and not just how the law was applied.

Beck was given a pardon by the King Edward VII and £5,000 in compensation, but it wasn’t enough. He spent it all and died in poverty in 1909.
When business tycoon John P. Milligan dictated coded cables to his secretary in Chapter 4, he was using cutting-edge technology that united the British Empire. The first successful transatlantic telegraph cable was laid down in 1865, and, by 1870, another cable succeeded in reaching India. Design, construction and installation of the cable cost enormous sums of money, and Britain had the entrepreneurs with the capital and the will to see the project through. This, in turn, gave the British government enormous advantages in transmitting intelligence and information to its far-flung territories.

The price of a telegram was determined by the number of words sent, usually with a flat fee for the first 10 or 50 words. Customers were advised to save money by omitting needless words, truncating addresses and never using punctuation (which counted as a word). Businesses used codes, either developed in-house or bought to not only save money, but keep messages secret from the telegraph operators.

One book, “Unicode,” published in 1889, lists detailed codes under a variety of subjects that truncated as much as a dozen words into one:

* Appointments: “Wish to see you particularly. Shall be here until –” (AFFOREM)
* Births: “Confined yesterday, twins, one alive, a boy, mother well” (ANIMOR)
* Cheques: “Cheque returned unpaid, send cash by return of post” (ARGYRITIS)
* Deaths: “Baby died today, particulars by letter” (CAPEDO)
* Hotels: “Reserve one single bedroom, one double bedroom, one double-bedded room, and a sitting-room, shall arrive on – “ (FOLIUM)
* Marriages: “Marriage postponed in consequence of – “ (NATALIS)
* Military: “Furlough to all officers on leave has been cancelled, and they are ordered to rejoin at once” (NOSSEM)
* Racing: “Lay the odds to £5,000 against – “ (PLUMBO)
* Railway traveling: “Leaving by train arriving at London Bridge at – “ (SECRETIO)
English Anti-Semitism

Or, Why Can’t the Jews Be More Like Us?

Part of the problem with English anti-Semitism is in identifying it. The English pride themselves on a sense of humor that emphasizes irony, sarcasm and taking the piss out of everyone, regardless of race, creed and national origin. When soccer fans chant, as they did a few years back, “I’d rather be a Paki than a Jew ... I’ve got a foreskin, haven’t you, fucking Jew” and “Gas a Jew, Jew, Jew, put him in the oven, cook him through,” are they hating Jews or indulging in offensive behavior for its own sake? When Monty Python’s Eric Idle has Sir Robin singing in “Spamalot” that “we won’t succeed on Broadway / if we don’t have any Jews,” is he anti-Semitic or merely using a shopworn trope to make a joke?

The Jewish history of England has shifted between uneasy tolerance to enthusiastic pogroms. Jews have been living in England since Roman times. They surface in the records around the time of William the Conqueror. Although they never numbered more than 6,000, living in scattered communities but mostly in London, they were subjected to the usual restrictions and blood libels Jews faced elsewhere, interrupted with the occasional massacre and expulsion from various cities. Other times, they were tolerated, largely because they contributed beyond their numbers to society, particularly as moneylenders to royalty. They were well-positioned for the task because Christians were forbidden to charge interest on loans and Jews were not.

Eventually, this ability to make money led to trouble. In the 12th century, Jewish financier Aaron of Lincoln amassed a fortune
by making loans on land, commodities, and to build abbeys and monasteries. When he died in 1186, King Henry II acquired his fortune and loans under a law mandating that the property of usurers go to the crown.

One wonders if the king had realized just how far Aaron’s empire extended. When the books were opened, it was found that Aaron was the second-wealthiest man in England, apart from Henry (who was also in debt to Aaron).

Henry shipped Aaron’s treasure to France to pay for his war against Philip Augustus. The ship sank, but Henry still had the loans, totaling about £15,000. The amount was so large that a separate department within the exchequer was created to handle the payments.

In 1190, a fire broke out in York, and a debtor of Aaron, Richard de Malbis, used it to incite a mob into attacking the home of Aaron’s former land agent. The widow and children were killed and the house set on fire. The rest of York’s Jews took refuge in a wooden tower on a hill above the city. They were besieged for several days until the tower caught fire. Some died, but the rest, rather than fall into the hands of the mob, killed themselves. The survivors were promised their freedom if they surrendered. They did, and they were killed, too.

The Jews fared little better under Henry’s successor, Richard, and future kings. Aaron’s death had revealed how much money flowed through Jewish fingers, and thereafter the crown made sure it was a silent partner in their business transactions. In 1194, Richard declared that the king will keep track of all Jewish transactions using a chirography, a document that could be cut into pieces with a portion held by each party. Because the king could keep track of all transactions, he could efficiently tax them (Richard, no fool he, also allowed English courts to help Jews recover on defaulted loans, taking 10 percent of the proceeds).

This state of affairs was bad enough, but then the popes got involved. In 1198, Pope Innocent III urged all Christian princes to renounce usury. Then, he ruled that all Jews were doomed to perpetual servitude for killing Jesus. By 1218, English Jews were required to wear a badge of oblong white cloth. While it was intended to keep Jews or Muslims from having sex with Christians (or, to deprive Christians of an excuse to have sex with Jews), it
also made them a target of hostility.

By 1290, the Jewish community had been bled so much they contributed less to the royal treasury. King Edward I had developed other sources of revenue, and they were expelled. For the next 350 years, England would be, in the language of Nazi Germany, “Judenfrei.”

We have Oliver Cromwell to thank for the official return of Jews to England. In the 1650s, a leader of the Dutch Jewish community asked Cromwell to readmit them. Cromwell couldn’t think of a reason not to, so when he couldn’t get a council formed to make it official, he simply declared that the ban would no longer be enforced.

Jewish families found homes in port cities and manufacturing towns such as Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester. London became the center of Jewish activity. Over time, there was a loosening of legal restrictions and a granting of rights. Synagogues were established in 1657. By 1698, England allowed Judaism to be practiced openly. An attempt in 1753 to grant citizenship to foreign-born Jews was dropped due to opposition, but the momentum was still moving toward emancipation.

The process accelerated during the Victorian period. Jews were admitted into the legal profession in 1833 and London elected its first Jewish mayor in 1855. Lionel Rothschild was elected to Parliament in 1847, but couldn’t take his seat until 1858 because, understandably, he refused to swear an oath “on the true faith of a Christian.” During the 1800s, Jews slowly gained more rights such as admission into colleges, Disraeli was appointed prime minister. By 1890, all religious and commercial restrictions were gone.

During the 1880s, there was a massive wave of immigration from Eastern Europe, particularly from Russia where Jews were persecuted. In the cities, they replaced the assimilated Jews who moved into the suburbs alongside their English counterparts. The increase in immigration coincided with an rise in fear from the importation of potentially dangerous ideas and political beliefs such as anarchism, socialism and Zionism. Inevitably, the link became forged in the public mind between foreigners who looked different, spoke a different language and who followed non-English customs, and the specter of revolution.
By 1914, there were about 250,000 Jews living in England. After World War I, several events raised and altered their profile.

In 1917, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration that supported a Jewish national home in Palestine. During the war, English forces with the help of Capt. T.E. Lawrence – more popularly known as Lawrence of Arabia – assisted the Arab Revolt against Ottoman Turkish rule and captured the southern portion of the empire in what is now Israel, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Jordan. In 1923, the League of Nations instituted the British Mandate for Palestine, formalizing British rule for the area “until such time as they are able to stand alone.”

At about the same time, an English translation of “The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion” was published in Britain under the title “The Jewish Peril.” Appearing in the Russian Empire as early as 1903, the anti-Semitic tract, claiming to be a document stolen from a secret Jewish organization, outlined a Jewish plan to dominate the world.

In reality, much of the “Protocols” was plagiarized from an 1864 French novel that attacked Napoleon III. Nevertheless, many groups through the years have found “Protocols” to be a useful tool. The White Russians used it to discredit Communism by blaming Jews for the Russian Revolution. In America, Henry Ford distributed a half-million copies. Sometimes, the references to Jews were replaced with Bolsheviks and publicized as an expose of Communist goals. Today, “Protocols” is sold throughout the Middle East, where it has been endorsed by many Arabic governments and intellectuals.

In Sayers’ time, anti-Semitism was no longer government policy, but it existed, as Harold Abrams says in “Chariots of Fire,” “on the edge of a remark.” There even seemed to be a boundary between acceptable and unacceptable forms of anti-Semitism. At Bloomsbury gatherings, Virginia Woolf would poke fun at the Jewishness of her husband, Leonard, although it should be noted she later regretted her snobbishness over marrying a Jew. When composer Arthur Benjamin won a scholarship at the Royal College of Music in London, his composition teacher remarked to him that “you Jews can’t write long tunes.”

We see this attitude reflected in “Whose Body?” when we
contrast the attitudes of Sir Julian Freke and the Dowager Duchess. By losing the woman he loved to Sir Reuben Levy, Sir Julian had “his aristocratic nose put out of joint by a little Jewish nobody” and so he plots to murder him. This is bad. Throughout the novel, the Duchess says the most foolish things about Jews – “I’m sure some Jews are very good people, and personally I’d much rather they believed something, though of course it must be very inconvenient, what with not working on Saturdays and circumcising the poor little babies and everything depending on the new moon and that funny kind of meat they have with such a slang-sounding name, and never being able to have bacon for breakfast.” – that is not even remarked upon. That seems acceptable.

Sayers’ attitude toward Jews is a contentious issue among biographers. She personally knew and got along well with many Jews. This included John Cournos, her Russian-Jewish lover who broke her heart by opposing marriage, only to emigrate to America and marrying.

But Sayers held to the common belief that, as a people, Jewish loyalties tended to favor their religion over their nation. In one letter written during World War II, she listed the ways the British people saw how Jews acted among them – of Jews sending their money to America instead of risking it in England, avoiding fire-watching duty during bombing raids, breaking the law to secure an apartment then informing against the landlady – “but it all really boils down to the same thing: ‘bad citizens.’” Their rejection of Jesus Christ as the Messiah merely confirmed in her mind that by setting themselves apart, they shouldn’t object if their presence is resented. Perhaps the best that could be said of Sayers’ beliefs is that she tried to do no harm with it.
Alert readers of “Whose Body?” will see the word ‘bus and wonder about that mark to the left of the b. The more insightful readers might even feel a flicker of curiosity about the rare sighting of the word’s reverse apostrophe. Or, if you’re blessed with astigmatism like me, assume it’s a typo, or a bit of dirt. That is the vertiginous appendage left by a longer word that suffered a verbal appendectomy.

In the novel’s second paragraph, Lord Peter’s cab driver evades a No. 19 ‘bus. Later, police Inspector Parker hops on that same bus to accept a breakfast invitation at 110A Piccadilly, where he was served “glorious food, incomparable coffee, and the Daily Mail before a blazing fire of wood and coal.” The self-made wealthy businessman, Sir Reuben Levy, still rode to work on the No. 96 ‘bus, and even took one to his fatal assignation with Sir Julian Freike, who observed to his romantic rival that his little economies would be the death of him.

A slightly longer form of the word appears when Inspector Parker delights in reading “railway-stall detective stories on the principle of the ‘busman’s holiday.”

So ‘bus is an example of evolution in language, the revival of the ancient Latin word omnibus, revived and applied, first, to a means of transportation never seen in Roman times, then amputated, staunched temporarily with the apostrophe, given new life with new definitions.

Omnibus began life as omnis, the Latin word for all. Attaching the –ibus suffix turned it into the dative plural word
meaning “for all.” In 1828, when an enterprising businessman put long coaches with seats on the streets of France and offered to carry anyone with a few francs, they were called a carriage for everyone, or a voiture omnibus.

As use of the vehicle spread, so did its name. A year after its introduction in France, a London newspaper announced that “the new vehicle, called the omnibus, commenced running this morning from Paddington to the City.” Already, the practical British had dropped the voiture part, and within a few years would cut off the omni- part as well.

Over time, the useful word became applied to other things. In politics, an omnibus bill is legislation that collects miscellaneous proposals, an omnibus train stops at all the stations on its route, and an omnibus book is a collection of different pieces. In electronics, an omnibus bar carries power from a source, and computer technicians today talk earnestly about busses. When a NASA technician in the movie “Apollo 13” talks about an undervolt in “main bus B,” he’s using a descendant of a word that originated 170 years before, and caught in transition by Sayers’ pen.
Dr. William Palmer’s trial and execution in 1856 was a sensation, combining sex, gambling, debt, a creative murder method and the possibility of multiple killings. The publicity over the case was so extensive in Staffordshire that it poisoned the jury pool, and the trial had to be moved to London, a first in English judicial history. In his diary, the presiding judge called it “the most memorable judicial proceedings for the last fifty years, engaging the attention not only of his country but of all Europe.”

Palmer can blame his widespread notoriety by being caught on the cusp of technological change. Before the Industrial Revolution, newspapers were expensive and served a diet of news aimed at businessmen and politicians. The growth of literate middle and working classes inspired newspapers for them. These papers were less expensive, selling usually for a penny, and focused more on crime and human-interest stories. Into this maw was fed the Palmer case, and the public snapped it up. One newspaper’s special illustrated issue sold more than 400,000 copies.

The arc of Palmer’s story ran a decade, beginning in 1846, when he qualified as a doctor at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital in London, and set up his practice in his hometown of Rugeley, Staffordshire, a landlocked county near the Welsh border. He married the next year and spent several years building his practice and his family. His wife bore him a son, William, who outlived his father, and four children who died in infancy.

Rural Staffordshire was known as a center of horse racing, and
in this semi-shady world, where fortunes were raised and lost in convivial times of gambling, fixed races and celebrations, Palmer began to lose his way. He began gambling heavily and quickly ran up debts. Not content with losing money solely on betting, he bought racehorses. He spent his days neglecting his practice, attending the races and mingling with the touts, gamblers, riders and other denizens of the sporting life.

As pressure from his debtors grew, the people who associated with Palmer began dying. In 1849, his mother-in-law came to stay with the Palmers. She lasted a fortnight before dying unexpectedly, leaving her estate to her daughter and son-in-law. The next year, a racing acquaintance to whom Palmer owned £800 died. Between 1851 and 1854 came the turns of the four infants – although their deaths could be chalked up to high infant mortality of the times. The death of Palmer’s wife in September 1854 could be more suspicious; she left behind an insurance policy for £13,000.

Despite the substantial sums, Palmer’s expenses still outran his earnings. He turned to forging his mother’s name to win loans totaling £13,500. He covered his risk by taking out an insurance policy for that amount on his brother, Walter.

But when Walter died 11 months later, the suspicious insurance company initiated an inquiry. Palmer tried to insure his groom for £10,000, but the appearance of two writs for payment drove Palmer to more desperate measures.

The next month, Palmer attended the races in Shrewsbury with John Parsons Cook, a solicitor who, like the doctor, had abandoned his profession for gambling on the horses.

Their day at the races was profitable for Cook, less so for Palmer, so Cook arranged a supper party to celebrate. That night, he began vomiting. Palmer took him back to Rugeley and put him up at the Talbot Arms Inn opposite the doctor’s house. Palmer’s solicitude extended to traveling to London to pick up Cook’s winnings at Tattersall’s – a sum of £1,000 – which he used to pay his debts. He also forged Cook’s name to a check.

Meanwhile, Cook grew sicker until he died five days later, reportedly “bent in the shape of a bow, resting on head and heels.” An old doctor called in pronounced death by apoplexy.

Cook’s stepfather was not convinced. He arranged a post mortem, which Palmer attended. Antimony, a chemical element
whose poisoning symptoms resembled strychnine, was found in Cook’s organs. Palmer’s behavior also aroused suspicions that he was trying to sabotage the tests. He jostled a person carrying the glass jars containing the organs. Later, when it was discovered that someone had cut slits into their paper covers that could contaminate the samples. Palmer had helped moved the jars.

Palmer was arrested and brought to London for his trial. One sensation was caused by Alfred Swaine Taylor, the leading toxicologist of his day, whose “Manual of Medical Jurisprudence” became the first standard work on the subject. On the stand, Taylor testified about the antimony found in the organs, but admitted, “I have never had under my observation the effects of strychnia on the human body; but I have written a book on the subject.”

After a 12-day trial, Palmer was found guilty. At his hanging, to the hissing of spectators, he said, “I am innocent of poisoning Cook by strychnia,” leaving open the question of what he did use.
Edmond De La Pommerais

From Deception To Murder

As in the cases of William Palmer, George Joseph Smith and Thomas Wainwright, the French doctor Edmond de la Pommerais found murder a shortcut both to fortune and the grave.

Pommerais was a homeopathic doctor who reinvented himself as a count and succeeded in 1861 in marrying Mademoiselle Dabizy, who stood to inherit her family’s fortune. He also acquired several mistresses, including Séraphine de Pauw, who became a widow after Pommerais treated her husband.

Pommerais’ first victim was his mother-in-law, who had objected to the marriage and retained a firm hold on her daughter’s money. She died two months after the marriage and a few hours after dining with the couple, and Pommerais, as her doctor, certified the cause as Asiatic cholera. His wife inherited the estate, and for awhile his life was occupied with spending her money and gambling.

When the money ran out, he turned to his Séraphine, who was in debt as well, and suggested committing insurance fraud. He convinced her to let him take out a policy on her for 500,000 francs. She would fake a fall down the stairs and appear to be so close to death that the company would give her an annuity of 5,000 francs a year to avoid paying off on her death. Considering that in 1871, the average worker in Paris earned 1,500 francs a year, this was a substantial sum. As part of his plan, she agreed to write several letters to Pommerais after her “fall,” describing her symptoms and praising him for his medical skills and charity.
She duly fell ill, and the insurance company’s doctors examined her but couldn’t agree on a diagnosis. She also received regular visits from her doctor – Pommerais, of course – who prescribed drugs for her to take.

When she died, Pommerais raised suspicions by quickly applying for a payout. Then, Séraphine’s sister went to the police. Unbeknownst to Pommerais, Séraphine had told her about the insurance scheme.

Séraphine had been in the ground for only 13 days when she was exhumed and examined by Dr. Auguste Ambroise Tardieu, the pre-eminent forensic medical scientist. He couldn’t find any proof of the usual poisons, such as arsenic and antimony. Séraphine’s complaints of a racing heart led him to suspect digitalis, but no test existed to trace its presence.

Fortunately, the police had preserved the contents of her stomach, so Tardieu made an extract from it and fed it to a frog, while he gave another an extract of digitalis. Both died in the same manner.

At the trial, Pommerais’ lawyer attacked Tardieu’s evidence, but the combination of his testimony and that of Séraphine’s sister, plus the large amount of digitalis in Pommerais’ possession that he couldn’t explain away, was enough for the jury. He was convicted and sentenced to be guillotined.

On June 9, 1864, an estimated 40,000 Parisians crowded the streets around the Square de la Petite Roquette to watch the execution. It was a scene worthy of Balzac: students from the Latin Quarter, the workingmen and idlers, women and children, hallooing, smoking and drinking. Spectators gazed down from the roof tiles.

American reporter George Alfred Townsend witnessed Pommerais’ last moments:

At four minutes to six o’clock on Thursday morning, the wicket in the prison-gate swung open; the condemned appeared, with his hands tied behind his back, and his knees bound together. He walked with difficulty, so fettered; but other than the artificial restraints, there was no hesitation nor terror in his movements. His hair, which had been long, dark, and wavy, was severed close to his scalp; his beard had likewise been clipped, and the fine
moustache and goatee, which had set off his most interesting face, no longer appeared to enhance his romantic, expressive physiognomy. Yet his black eyes and cleanly cut mouth, nostrils, and eyebrows, demonstrated that Count de la Pommerais was not a beauty dependent upon small accessories. There was a dignity even in his painful gait; the coarse prison-shirt, scissored low in the neck, exhibited the straight columnar throat and swelling chest; for the rest, he wore only a pair of black pantaloons and his own shapely boots.

As he emerged from the wicket, the chill morning air, laden with the dew of the truck gardens near at hand, blew across the open spaces of the suburbs, and smote him with a cold chill. He was plainly seen to tremble; but in an instant, as if by the mere force of his will, he stood motionless, and cast a first and only glance at the guillotine straight before him. It was the glance of a man who meets an enemy’s eye, not shrinkingly, but half-defiant, as if even the bitter retribution could not abash his strong courage … he seemed to feel that forty thousand men and women, and young children were looking upon him to see how he dared to die, and that for a generation his bearing should go into fireside descriptions.

Then he moved on between the files of soldiers at his shuffling pace, and before him went the chaplain, swaying the crucifix, behind him the executioner of Versailles — a rough and bearded man — to assist in the final horror.

It was at this intense moment a most wonderful spectacle. As the prisoner had first appeared, a single great shout had shaken the multitude. It was the French word “Voila!” which means “Behold!” “See!” Then every spectator stood on tiptoe; the silence of death succeeded; all the close street was undulant with human emotion; a few house roofs near by were dizzy with folks who gazed down from the tiles; all the way up the heights of Pere la Chaise, among the pale chapels and monuments of the dead, the thousands of stirred beings swung and shook like so many drowned corpses floating on the sea. Every eye and mind turned to the little structure raised among the trees, on the space before La Roquette, and there they saw a dark, shaven, disrobed young man, going quietly toward his grave.

He mounted the steps deliberately, looking towards his feet;
the priest held up the crucifix, and he felt it was there, but did not see it; his lips one moment touched the image of Christ, but he did not look up nor speak; then, as he gained the last step, the bascule or swingboard sprang up before him; the executioner gave him a single push, and he fell prone upon the plank, with his face downward; it gave way before him, bearing him into the space between the upright beams, and he lay horizontally beneath the knife, presenting the back of his neck to it. Thus resting, he could look into the pannier or basket, into whose sawdust lining his head was to drop in a moment.

And in that awful space, while all the people gazed with their fingers tingling, the legitimate Parisian executioner gave a jerk at the cord which held the fatal knife. With a quick, keen sound, the steel became detached; it fell hurtling through the grooves; it struck something with a dead, dumb thump; a jet of bright blood spurted into the light, and dyed the face of an attendant horribly red; and Count de la Pommerais’s head lay in the sawdust of the pannier, while every vein in the lopped trunk trickled upon the scaffold-floor!

They threw a cloth upon the carcass and carried away the pannier; the guillotine disappeared beneath the surrounding heads; loud exclamations and acclaims burst from the multitude; the venders of trash and edibles resumed their cheerful cries, and a hearse dashed through the mass, carrying the warm body of the guillotined to the cemetery of Mt. Parnasse. In thirty minutes, newsboys were hawking the scene of the execution upon all the quays and bridges. In every cafe of Paris some witness was telling the incidents of the show to breathless listeners, and the crowds which stopped to see the funeral procession of the great Marshal Pelissier divided their attention between the warrior and the poisoner, — the latter obtaining the preponderance of fame.
George Joseph Smith was a murderous bigamist with great game and a penchant for aliases. By the time he visited the hangman in 1915, he had matched and dispatched three women and married several more that he had left poorer and, hopefully, wiser.

Smith’s career in matrimony began in 1898 when he married Caroline Thornhill under the name Oliver George Love. He ran a bread shop at the time, and when it went bankrupt, put his wife to work as a maidservant, stealing her employers’ jewelry. When she was caught, Smith fled, and Caroline took the fall, spending a year in prison. But she got her revenge when she encountered Love/Smith by chance. She called the police, testified against him, and he was sentenced to two years.

From 1908 to 1914, Smith married at least seven women. Most of the time, he simply took whatever cash and bonds was at hand and fled. But in August 1910, under the name Henry Williams, he married Annie “Bessie” Mundy. At 33, she was already a spinster and presumably grateful for being rescued from that state. Unfortunately, Smith loved her £2,500 in savings more. When he discovered it was held in a trust for her, he grabbed £150 in spare cash instead and fled. In a charming touch worthy of “Sex and the City,” he left behind a letter accusing her of infecting him with a venereal disease.

Then fate took an interest in Bessie. Two years later, she encountered Smith by chance at the seaside resort of Weston-super-Mare. He explained that he had abandoned her because he learned he had contracted venereal disease, and rather than infect
her, chose to leave. He had regretted his rash act ever since and had devoted himself to looking for her. Now they were reunited, they would live together for the rest of their days.

Bessie believed him. They settled in Herne Bay, a seaside town in Kent, southeast England. Happy again, Bessie signed a new will in Smith’s favor, meaning that he’d inherit the trust if she died. They visited an ironmonger and bought a tin bath. He took Bessie to a doctor, saying she had had an epileptic fit. She complained only of headaches, for which medication was prescribed, but the groundwork had been laid for Smith’s next step.

Less than a week later, he called the doctor again. Bessie was in the tub, dead, a cake of soap in her hand. The doctor concluded drowning by epilepsy, Smith buried his wife in a pauper’s grave, pocketed the £2,500 and returned the tub.

Next year, Smith began courting 25-year-old Alice Burnham. When her father asked Smith for information about his family, he wrote in reply “my mother was a Buss horse, my father a Cab driver, my sister a Roughrider over the Arctic regions, my brothers were all gallant sailors on a steam-roller.”

Despite getting up her father’s nose – or perhaps because of it? – Alice married Smith. This time, he insured her life for £500, and they moved to Blackpool where they rented a house. With a bath.

This marriage lasted longer – six weeks – before she was found dead in the bath. The inquest ruled “death by misadventure.” Smith took the money, but the suspicious landlady shouted “Crippen” – the name of the notorious wife-murderer – at his back.

Incredibly, he does it again the next year. This time, as John Lloyd, he selected Margaret Elizabeth Lofty, a clergyman’s daughter. They were married in Bath, and the next day traveled to London and took lodgings in the Highgate area. That afternoon, she visited her solicitor and signed a will in her husband’s favor.

That night, the landlady heard unusual splashing in the bath, followed by music. Smith was in the parlor, playing “Nearer My God to Thee” on the harmonium. There was silence for awhile, then “Lloyd” popped in. He had bought some tomatoes for his wife’s dinner. Has she come out of the tub? She hadn’t, and never would under her own power. Another “death by misadventure.”
Only this time, Margaret’s death was covered by the London papers, and eventually read by both the “Crippen”-shouting landlady and Alice Burnham’s father. He told police, and Smith was arrested.

While prosecutors had Smith bang to rights for bigamy, proving he killed Bessie Mundy and Alice Burnham was more difficult. Enter Bernard Spilsbury, the brilliant pathologist for the Home Office. Five years before, his forensic evidence had helped convict Dr. Hawley Crippen in the murder of his wife. This time, he was charged with determining how the women died.

It was a difficult task. An examination of the bodies and the medical records showed no signs of struggle. They were not drugged and did not suffer a stroke or heart attack. In Bessie Mundy’s case, Spilsbury compared the bathtub’s five-foot length with five-foot-six Bessie and reasoned that there was no way she could have drowned from an epileptic seizure.

When the newspapers picked up the story about the “brides in the bath” case, the police chief of Herne Bay remembered a similar death in his jurisdiction. He sent a letter to Spilsbury, and police confirmed that the “Henry Williams” of Herne Bay was the same man as the George Smith of Blackpool and “John Lloyd” of Highgate. Now police had three murders to solve.

Spilsbury came up with a theory. He and Detective Inspector Arthur Neil experimented on female divers roughly the same size as the victims, using the same tubs the women drowned in. They tried pushing the women down, but they naturally resisted, splashing water everywhere, including on their attacker.

Then, Spilsbury suddenly took hold of the woman’s feet and pulling. She slid underwater, forcing water up her nose and into her lungs and passed out. It took doctors a half-hour to revive her, but they had their theory confirmed. The jury took less than a half-hour to convict Smith of the murder of Bessie Williams, with the deaths of Alice Smith and Margaret Lloyd used to buttress the prosecution’s case. On August 13, 1915, he was hanged at Maidstone Prison.
In a world of innocent bystanders who stand by and do nothing, Henry Wainwright had the bad fortune to find the one man who wouldn’t leave well enough alone.

Wainwright ran a brush-making business on Whitechapel Road, but sales were down and he had to sell the building. But before he did, he had to do something about the awful smell that had been hanging in the air around it for a year.

On Sept. 11, 1875, he met Alfred Stokes, his former employee, on the sidewalk outside the business. He had asked him to help carry a few parcels in return for some tools Wainwright no longer needed. Wainwright’s brother, Thomas, owned an unused building across the Thames, and he had agreed to let Henry store a few things there until he could get back on his feet.

Wainwright let Stokes into the building and showed him two heavy parcels wrapped in oil cloth. Stokes picked them up and found they were heavy and awkward to handle. As they set off down the street, he began complaining about the nasty smell emanating from them. Wainwright stopped them, told Stokes to guard the bundles, and walked down the street in search of a cab.

While Wainwright was away, Stokes opened one of the parcels. Staring back at him was the head of a decomposed woman laying on a severed arm. Stokes rewrapped the package and said nothing as Wainwright returned with the cab.

As Stokes loaded the bundles inside, Wainwright coolly
smoked a cigar and chatted with a woman friend who had stepped out of a tavern. He talked her into the cab and said goodbye to Stokes. The cab driver whipped up his horses, and the wagon rolled off for London Bridge.

Stokes took off in pursuit. He encountered two policemen and gasped out his incredible story. They didn’t believe him. He resumed his pursuit as the cab crossed the bridge and turned down Borough High Street.

The winded Stokes feared he would have to abandon the chase, but the cab stopped. As Wainwright carried the bundles into the building, Stokes found two policemen who were more willing to investigate. They stopped Wainwright, opened a bundle and, after declining Wainwright’s bribe of £200, arrested him.

The victim was Miss Harriet Lane, who had been Wainwright’s mistress for two years and murder victim for one. She knew him as Percy King, when he had set her up in lodgings. Their relationship was good at first, and she bore him two children.

Then, business fell off at his brush-making business. He burned down one of his buildings for the insurance, but the company was suspicious and denied the claim. He had to cut Harriet’s allowance. She complained bitterly, then threatened to go to his wife.

So, in June 1874, Wainwright severed the relationship. He took her to his business, shot her three times, slit her throat, and buried her beneath the floor. Since he also sold cleaning supplies, he took out of stock 50 pounds of chloride of lime and threw that into Harriet’s grave to speed decomposition.

But Wainwright’s knowledge of chemistry was on a par with his business skills. Not all lime act the same. Quicklime aids decomposition; chloride of lime retards it.

In the days after Harriet’s disappearance, her father and a friend who was caring for Harriet’s children grew worried. Wainwright told them that she had eloped to the Continent with Edward Frieake. In October, Mrs. Wilmore received a telegram from Frieake telling her, “We are just off to Paris and intend to have a jolly spree.” Everyone found this disturbing, but reassuring, except for the real Edward Frieake, who knew Harriet and was upset that someone was using his name. Wainwright reassured him that this was an entirely different Frieake, and he was right. The eloping Frieake was actually Henry’s brother, Thomas, who had not only
posted the phony letters from the Continent, but had even planted the idea of Harriet eloping with another man by visiting her disguised as Frieake.

This came out at Henry’s trial, in one of those human moments that testimony in a homicide case preserves. Harriet’s landlady testified that Frieake/Thomas Wainwright was visiting Harriet when they sent her to the pub for champagne. She returned with the bottle and three glasses, hoping to cage a drink and was put out when they ignored the hint. She got her revenge at the trial, as the counsel for the defense noted in his closing speech that “whether or not she thought the rising generation less polite than in her younger days, the disappointment was one likely to impress the matter upon her memory.”

Another measure of the brothers’ relationship came out at the trial. When Henry needed to move the late Harriet, he had Thomas buy some tools, a cleaver and a garden spade, which he used to cut Harriet up into 10 pieces for easier moving. The trial transcript noted that Thomas charged his brother five shillings for tools that cost him three, a 66 percent markup.

Readers of the trial record may be surprised to see the name of W.S. Gilbert surface as a barrister for the defense. But the librettist half of Gilbert and Sullivan had nothing to do with the case. He was busy working on “Broken Hearts,” a drama in blank verse, when he was called for jury duty. Rather than attend, he got a friend to assign him to the Wainwright case for two days, long enough so he could be excused.

“Broken Hearts” debuted on Dec. 7, but Wainwright never got to see it. Four days before Christmas, he mounted the scaffold, sneered, “Come to see a man die, have you, you curs?” and was hanged. His brother got seven years. Stokes received £30 and public contributions raised £1,200 for Harriett’s children.
THE WORLD OF DOROTHY L. SAYERS
Inventing Lord Peter

In The Beginning

In “Gaudy Night,” one of Harriet Vane’s Oxford contemporaries discussing the belief that everyone has a “proper job” – the problem being how to determine what that job is – advised that “we can only know what things are of overmastering importance when they have overmastered us.”

This statement could sum up the career of Dorothy L. Sayers. After leaving Oxford, she tried several professions – teacher, academic, manager of a school, advertising – but she found her passion in translating classical works and chronicling the adventures of Lord Peter Death Bredon Wimsey.

Sayers found her way to Lord Peter through her love of crime stories, particularly those about Sexton Blake. The adventures of “the poor man’s Sherlock Holmes” were chronicled by a stable of hired writers in the same way that the Stratemeyer syndicate published the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew stories.

Working at a school in the Normandy area of France in 1919-20, Sayers spent her spare time reading crime stories. When she came down with mumps and had to spend three weeks in isolation, she begged her friend Muriel Jaeger – to whom she would later dedicate “Whose Body?” – to mail her all the Sexton Blake books she could find. By mail, they amused themselves with mock-intellectual discussions of the stories’ and their relationship to folk rituals and mythology.

About this time, Sayers was inspired to attempt a Sexton Blake story. A French politician is found dead in a flat lent to him by Lord Peter. In this draft, he is described as a “harmless sort of
fellow.” He is a war hero, a skilled horseback rider and a collector of first editions. One character described him as “fair-haired, big nose, aristocratic sort of man whose socks match his tie. No politics.” He gets involved in the investigation, ferrets out an important clue and helps chase the villain in his private airplane, which seems a lot of action by a minor character. From the first, Lord Peter seems determined to edge himself to center stage.

Sayers did not try to get her Sexton Blake story published, but she tried Lord Peter in an unfinished play “The Mousehole: A Detective Fantasia in Three Flats.” Lord Peter and his Piccadilly flat are retained, but this time the crime scene is an upstairs apartment where a couple are found dead. This version lasts only a few pages, but long enough to introduce Constable Sugg, his nemesis in “Whose Body?”

By this time, Sayers had left her job in France and resettled in London. Her prospects were not promising. She was 27, unmarried and had held three jobs in four years. Her publishing record consisted of two slim volumes of poetry. She seemed rudderless, but she was intelligent, well-educated, enormously confident and capable of hard work. Between applying unsuccessfully for jobs and doing freelance editing, she boned up on criminology in the British Museum’s Reading Room.

Despite two unfinished attempts, Lord Peter seemed determined to hang around. On Jan 22, 1921, Sayers wrote to her mother that she had an idea for a detective story about a fat lady found dead in her bath – an echo of the “Brides in the Bath” murder case? – wearing nothing but her pince-nez.

For her detective-hero’s name, Sayers chose Peter and combined it with the elegantly playful Death – pronounced to rhyme with “teeth.” Bredon was possibly inspired by the A.E. Housman poem “On Bredon Hill.” His last name is a play on whimsy – defined as a whim or caprice – and beautifully evokes his detecting behavior and habit of taking an interest in other people’s business. His family’s motto, after all, is “As my Whimsy takes me.”

For Lord Peter’s looks, Sayers drew on a memory from her first year Oxford. In 1913, she attended the graduation ceremony where the Newdigate prize for best student composition was given to Roy Ridley. Ridley had an aristocratic profile that resembled
Dante, addressed friends as “old thing” and favored spats and a monocle. He was also a heavy drinker, favoring what were known at Oxford as “Roy Ridley specials,” sherry lacked with a dollop of gin, that he would drink throughout the day. A former pupil of his, Canadian author Robertson Davies, later wrote that “Ridley was the only clergyman I ever saw celebrate Holy Communion wearing a monocle.” (Later, Ridley would lose his position and his wife over an affair with the master’s secretary and end up a reviewer and examiner in Bristol.)

In a letter to a friend, Sayers wrote that she’d “fell head over ears in love with him on the spot” and that his full name — Maurice Roy Ridley — was “like the hero of a six-penny novelette.”

(Sayers would later forget that Ridley inspired Wimsey. In 1935, she would meet Ridley, then chaplain of Balliol, and write in shock that she “had seen the perfect Peter Wimsey.” Ridley’s later claim that he inspired Wimsey would annoy Sayers.)

For Wimsey’s personality, Sayers drew on two men: Eric Whelpton and Charles Crichton. Sayers had met Whelpton as a neighbor in London, and had fallen in love with him. Her attachment to him was firm enough that when he moved to Normandy to run an exchange bureau for French and English students, she followed to act as his secretary. He was well-dressed, educated, knew food and wine and came from an aristocratic family, complete with an ancient manor in Wales.

Another piece of the puzzle was supplied by Crichton, a co-worker at the school. He had attended Eton, served in the war as a cavalry officer and was familiar with London society. His valet, Bates, probably inspired Lord Peter’s servant, Bunter. A former footman at a ducal house, he had enlisted in the war alongside Crichton and served as his batman. Although Crichton and Sayers disliked each other, they could not avoid each other’s company, and at mealtimes, she listened to his stories about the high life familiar to Lord Peter, with its parties, balls and weekends at country houses.

Combining in a character a university education with aristocratic privileges was new in crime fiction. Lord Peter’s rank as the brother of a duke meant he wasn’t encumbered by the requirement to attend the House of Lords and maintain an estate,
but high enough to lend him respectability and connections. His wealth – its source never explained – enabled him to buy anything he needed for his detecting activities, maintain his flat in Piccadilly and acquire rare books. His Oxford education gave Sayers an opportunity to display her learning.

Lord Peter’s wealth also gave the impoverished Sayers a way to enjoy luxury by proxy. “At the time I was particularly hard up,” she wrote, “and it gave me pleasure to spend his fortune for him. When I was dissatisfied with my single unfurnished room I took a luxurious flat for him in Piccadilly. When my cheap rug got a hole in it, I ordered him an Aubusson carpet. When I had no money to pay my bus fare I presented him with a Daimler double-six, upholstered in a style of sober magnificence, and when I felt dull I let him drive it. I can heartily recommend this inexpensive way of furnishing to all who are discontented with their incomes. It relieves the mind and does no harm to anybody.”

Building detective stories also satisfied Sayers’ love of order and form. In a letter to her onetime lover, John Cournos, she compared fiction to laying a mosaic, laying it down piece by piece, “apparently meaningless and detached – into its place, until one suddenly sees the thing.” Her favorite method was to find the murder method and build her plot and characters around it.

By the summer of 1921, Sayers had finished her first novel. Lord Peter, at last, was born.
The Lord Peter stories are unique in the mystery genre in that Sayers’ allowed the great detective to age and grow, from the shell-shocked bachelor nobleman of “Whose Body?” to the 52-year-old husband and father of “Talboys.” The following is a chronology of Lord Peter’s life and cases, derived from information stated in the stories and inferred from the clues.

This timeline assumes that the novels and short stories were published in chronological order unless told otherwise.

Thanks to Michael Rawdon for his groundbreaking work on the timeline.

1890
Peter Death Bredon Wimsey born at Duke’s Denver, Norfolk. His birthday is never given.

1900
Harriet Vane born.

1903-8
Attends Eton.

1912
Graduates from Balliol College’s School of Modern History with first-class honors.

1914-18
Serves as major in a rifle brigade and sees fighting in France. In one battle, an artillery shell buries him in his bunker. He is rescued by Bunter, his batman, but suffers from trauma.
1921

*The Attenbury Emeralds.* His first case, which takes place after the April strike by coal miners.

**Summer: The Vindictive Story of the Footsteps that Ran**

1922

*Whose Body?* Mr. Crimplesham’s letter from Salisbury is dated November 192–, and the Dowager Duchess notes that no one can forget about a great war in a year or two. Since “Clouds” opens a year after the events in “Whose Body?” and gives Lord Peter’s age as 33, that places the year as 1922.

1923

*Clouds of Witness.* The story opens in autumn with a 33-year-old Lord Peter coming home from a vacation after the events in “Whose Body?” which places this in October and November.

1924

“The Abominable History of the Man with the Copper Fingers” Most of the story is told in flashback in 1920, but the rest must occur about this time.

1925

**April: The Entertaining Episode of the Article in Question.** The story opens with Lord Peter and Bunter having spent three months in Italy: “Accordingly, it was with no surprise at all that the reliable Bunter, one April morning, received the announcement of an abrupt change of plan.”

**June: The Fascinating Problem of Uncle Meleager’s Will.** The story opens with “it was a beautiful June that year.”

**Summer: The Fantastic Horror of the Cat in the Bag.** Philip Storey on the trans-Atlantic liner says he’s off to meet his wife at the lakes: “Very pleasant there in summer.”

**Fall: The Learned Adventure of the Dragon’s Head.** The key is the
age of Peter’s nephew, the 10-year-old Viscount St. George (a.k.a., Young Jerry, Jerrykins or Pickled Gherkins). Since in “Gaudy Night,” set in 1935, he is 21 or 22, that places this story in 1925, possibly in the fall since he’s home from school due to an outbreak of measles.

1925-6
*The Unprincipled Affair of the Practical Joker:* No date is given, so the story takes place between the fall of 1925 and April of 1926.

1926
*April: Unnatural Death.* Chapter 2 begins with “The April night was clear and chilly, and a brisk wood fire burned in a welcoming manner on the hearth.”

1926-7
*The Bibulous Business of a Matter of Taste* and *The Piscatorial Farce of the Stolen Stomach.*

1927
*Aug. 1: The Unsolved Puzzle of the Man with No Face.* The story opens during the rush at the end of the Bank Holiday weekend, which in 1927 was Saturday, July 30 to Monday, Aug. 1. This assumes that the victim, found dead while swimming, would find the waters of the English Channel too cold during the spring Bank Holiday on June 6.

1927
*November-December: The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* begins on Nov. 11, Armistice Day.

1927
*November: The Undignified Melodrama of the Bone of Contention.* Lord Peter gives the policeman his card and asks him to look up “Chief Inspector Parker.” Parker was promoted to that rank between “Bellona Club” and “Strong Poison,” and in this story Lord Peter finds himself shivering in “a white November fog” that places the story in November of 1927.
1927-1929

*The Adventurous Exploit of the Cave of Ali Baba.* This story spans two years, from Lord Peter’s “death” until his reappearance. Since his obituary mentioned that he died at 37 “the previous December,” that puts the year as 1927.

1929

**December: Strong Poison.** Philip Boyes meets Harriet Vane in 1927, and she agrees to live with him in March 1928. They separate in February of 1929 and Boyes dies on June 23, 1929. Given a month between her first trial, which ends in a hung jury, and the second, combined with Miss Climpson’s letter of Jan. 7, 1930, places her trial in December 1929. The judge’s comment that Harriet is 29 places her birth year at 1900.

1930

*The Nine Tailors.* Lord Peter’s car runs off the road on New Year’s Eve, and Lady Henry’s funeral occurs on Saturday, Jan. 4, which places it in 1930. This neatly dovetails with the events in “Strong Poison.” In Chapter 15, unable to secure the evidence to free Harriet Vane, Lord Peter gives Miss Climpson the task of acquiring an old woman’s will. That is on Dec. 30, 1929. While Miss Climpson is away, Lord Peter has to remain idle, and “to chronicle Lord Peter Wimsey’s daily life during the ensuing week would be neither kind nor edifying. An enforced inactivity will produce irritable symptoms in the best of men” (Chapter 16).

On New Year’s Eve, Lord Peter drives to Walbeach to visit friends, only to get his car stuck outside Fenchurch St. Paul. He participates in ringing in the New Year, gets his car repaired, and is back on the road on the afternoon of Jan. 1, giving him plenty of time to make it to Walbeach and back to receive Miss Climpson’s celebratory letter of Jan. 7 ("Strong Poison," Chapter 19).

Also occurring this year: *The Image in the Mirror, The Incredible Elopement of Lord Peter Wimsey, The Five Red Herrings* and *The Queen’s Square.*
1931

June 18: Have His Carcase. The chapter headings carry the month and date, and Harriet Vane refers to herself as “the Harriet Vane who was tried for murder two years ago” (Chapter 3). Also, the Christmas party story, The Necklace of Pearls, occurs this year.

1933

Murder Must Advertise. The victim dies in May, and this story begins a few weeks later and runs for a month. Followed by In The Teeth of the Evidence.

1934

Striding Folly.

1935

Gaudy Night. The Author’s Note states that the book occurs in 1935, and Lord Peter is 45 (Chapter 2). The story occurs during the first half of the year. Harriet went travelling after the events in “Have His Carcase” (Chapter 4) and returned around June 1933 to write two novels and several stories based on her experiences, and that she and Peter had only sporadic meetings since then.

1935

Busman’s Honeymoon occurs in the same year as “Gaudy Night.” Lord Peter is 45 when he weds Harriet on Oct. 8.

1936

Thrones, Dominations. Begins in January and runs through late March. The author’s note by Jill Paton Walsh gives dates for the births of Peter and Harriet’s three sons: Bredon (Oct. 15, 1936), Roger (1938) and Paul (1941).

Oct. 15: The Haunted Policeman begins when Peter and Harriet’s son Bredon is born. See the 1936 note regarding “Thrones, Dominations.”

1940

Feb. 10: A Presumption of Death. Harriet writes Peter on Feb. 6 and mentions an air-raid rehearsal will take place Saturday after
the dance at the village hall.

1942

_Talboys_. Peter is 52, Bredon is six and Roger is four. Paul would therefore be a year old.

1951

_The Attenbury Emeralds_. The crime takes place in 1921, and the story is narrated 30 years later, when Lord Peter is 60.
TIMELINE OF DOROTHY L. SAYERS’ LIFE

This chronology draws on Barbara Reynolds’ excellent biography for most of its information. Events that occurred without a month or day attached are listed at the head of the appropriate year. All quotes are from Sayers’ letters.

1893  
*June 13:* Born Dorothy Leigh Sayers in Oxford, the only child of the Rev. Henry Sayers, chaplain of Christ Church Cathedral and headmaster of the choir school, and Helen Mary Leigh. On her father’s side, ancestors came from Littlehampton, West Sussex; on her mother’s from the Isle of Wight.

1897  
Family moves to Bluntisham-cum-Earith, Cambridgeshire, where her father was rector.

1898  
Meets Ivy Shrimpton, a cousin eight years older than Dorothy, who would later help raise Dorothy’s child.

1899  
Taught to read at four, Dorothy begins learning Latin at age six from her father. She also knows how to write in cursive and read newspaper articles.

1901-2  
Dorothy and Ivy’s friendship deepens. Ivy joins in playing imaginative games, writing stories and poems, and gives Dorothy books such as “Little Women” and “The Ingoldsby Legends.”

1906-7  
Dorothy reads “The Three Musketeers” in French, identifying with the hopeless romantic Athos. She engages her family in role-playing scenes from the book, and she acquires a
musketeer costume, complete with wig and facial hair. She also reads John Milton, Alexander Pope, Samuel Butler, Moliere, and Thomas Beddoes’ “Death’s Jest Book,” from which she would later draw on for epigrams in “Have His Carcase.”

1908 Dorothy plays four pieces on the violin at a village concert in Somersham.

1909 Enters Godolphin School in Salisbury. She takes violin and piano lessons, sings, and has several plays produced.

1911 Spring: Dorothy scores highest rank in Cambridge Higher Local Examination with distinctions in French and spoken German. At Godolphin, she contracts measles and double pneumonia and almost dies. She recovers under her mother’s care well enough by October to play Shylock in a production of “The Merchant of Venice.”

1912 Returns home, possibly from illness, and continues studies by mail.


October: Begins studying modern languages and medieval literature at Oxford. Joins Oxford Bach Choir. Forms the Mutual Admiration Society with fellow students, including Muriel “Jim” Jaeger, to read and critique each other’s works.

1913 Sees Maurice Roy Ridley, a recent Balliol College graduate, when he receives the Newdigate Prize for best composition in English verse. She “fell head over ears in love with him on the spot,” and will base Lord Peter Wimsey on his likeness. In 1935, she will see him again when he is chaplain of Balliol and, forgetting her 1913 encounter, calls him “the perfect Peter Wimsey.”

1914 July 30-31: Arrives with two friends in Le Havre,
France, for a vacation. The next day, Germany declares war on Russia and invades Luxembourg. Train travel stopped as France mobilizes for war. They return to the Sayers’ family home at Bluntisham on Aug. 25

1915 Decides against a career in academia: “I was really meant to be sociable.” Declines father’s offer to stay at Oxford another year and finishes with first-class honours. As was custom at the time, she was not awarded a degree. Considers training as a nurse and unsuccessfully applies for a job with the Board of Trade. Accepts post as French teacher at a school in Hull.

*December:* The 1915 volume of “Oxford Poetry” appears with a lay (12 poems) by Dorothy.

1916 Travels to Hull for teaching post. Amid frequent zeppelin raids, Dorothy moves students away from learning by rote, encourages them to put on plays in French and forms school choir.

*August:* At Cambridge, begins translating “Chanson de Roland” into rhymed couplets, and returns to Hull for autumn term. Father accepts a living as rector of Christchurch in what is now Cambridgeshire, and offers to pay for Dorothy’s education in publishing with Basil Blackwell in Oxford. Dorothy accepts and resigns teaching job as of Easter, 1917.


1917 *May:* Moves to 17 Long Wall Street, Oxford, and begins work at Basil Blackwell. After only two meetings, receives marriage proposal from the Rev. Leonard Hodgson, later Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford and Canon of Christ Church. She turns him down, and his persistence irritates her.

*July:* Operated on for appendicitis, and while recovering flirts with the surgeon.

1918 *September:* Dorothy’s second book, “Catholic Tales and
Christian Songs” is published by Blackwell.

1919  January: Moves to 5 Bath Place, Oxford. Catches German measles.

May: Leaves Blackwell’s, finding office work tedious and the company moving away from publishing literature to textbooks. Works as a freelance editor, journalist and teacher. Falls in love with Capt. Eric Whelpton, who suffers from polio, misdiagnosed as epilepsy, that causes fainting fits and amnesia, a detail Dorothy would use in “The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club.”

Whelpton accepts post teaching English in Normandy, France. Dorothy seeks a job in France as well, and Whelpton hires her as his secretary, responsible for organizing exchanges of French and English students. She reads mysteries and mentions to Whelpton her idea of forming a syndicate with Oxford friends to write crime stories.

October: Elected member of Modern Language Association.

Near end of the year, Whelpton falls in love with a married woman in London and becomes bored with his job. Dorothy becomes jealous and comes down with mumps. Asks friend, Murial Jaeger, for Sexton Blake books to read while recuperating.

1920  Turns down Whelpton’s offer to buy his share in the business.

June/August: Part of her translated “Tristan” appears in “Modern Languages,” the journal of the Modern Language Association, and receives praise in an editorial.

September: Leaves job and moves to London, settling in an unfurnished room at a women’s club, 36 St. George’s Square, Pimlico. She lives on fees from freelance translating and a stipend from her father. Tries writing film scenarios and begins creating Lord Peter Wimsey.
October: Oxford changes its rules on degrees for women and holds first ceremony. Sayers receives a B.A., followed by a M.A. Accepts temporary teaching job at Clapham High School. Moves to rooms at 44 Mecklenburg Square that she would give to Harriet Vane in “Gaudy Night.” Spends Saturdays reading criminology books at British Museum.

1921 Plans detective story that would become “Whose Body?” and Grand Guignol play (unwritten). Collects material for Wilkie Collins biography, of which only a few chapters would be written.


November: Sends “Whose Body?” manuscript to be typed and begins “Clouds of Witness.”

December: Moves to 24 Great James Street, St. Pancras, London, that would be her London home until her death.

1922 English publishers reject “Whose Body?”

March: Meets Sir Arthur Marshall, barrister and politician, and pumps him for information about the House of Lords and its legal proceedings for “Clouds of Witness.” His information came from Lord Russell, who had been tried for bigamy. Applies for job as copywriter with advertising firm S.H. Benson’s, accepts offer in June.

April: Signs with agent Andrew Dakers.

Summer: Falls in love with author John Cournos.

July: Boni and Liveright offers $250, no royalties, for U.S. rights to “Whose Body?” Relationship with Cournos falls apart over his desire to use contraceptives (she calls it “that taint of the rubber-shop”). He would leave England in October.

December: Sayers involved with Bill White, a motor car salesman who lives in the flat above Sayers.
1923 **May:** Becomes pregnant by White. He admits he’s married, introduces Sayers to his wife, who agrees to see her through the pregnancy. Sayers decides not to tell her elderly parents to protect them. Arranges with cousin Ivy Shrimpton, making a living as a foster parent, to care for her infant. “Whose Body?” published by Boni and Liveright in the U.S.


**November:** Sayers takes leave of absence to give birth in secret. Moves to “mother’s hospital” in Southbourne, Hampshire (now Dorset). Bill White’s wife moves into Sayers’ Great James Street flat to handle mail and care for the cat.

1924 **Jan. 3:** Gives birth to John Anthony Sayers. The doctor is the brother of Bill White’s wife, who doesn’t know about the affair.

**Jan. 30:** Gives John Anthony to Ivy Shrimpton to care for, which she does until he reaches maturity. Returns to work at S.H. Benson.

**August:** Learns John Cournos had married Helen Kestner Satterthwaite, who has two children and writes detective stories under pseudonym Sybil Norton. She writes him to express congratulations, opening correspondence in which they discuss their former relationship. Cournos would portray Sayers and their affair in his novel “The Devil Is an English Gentleman.”

1925 Meets Oswald Atherton “Mac” Fleming, a Scottish journalist who suffers from shell-shock after a gas attack during the war.

1926 **February:** “Clouds of Witness” published by T. Fisher Unwin.

**April 13:** Marries “Mac” Fleming at Holborn Register Office,
London. Benson launches Mustard Club advertising campaign, designed by Sayers, for Colman’s mustard.

1927 Sept. 16: “Unnatural Death,” the first of three novels sold to Ernest Benn, published.

1928 Sayers collaborates on a novel with Dr. Eustace Barton, who writes mystery stories under the pseudonym Robert Eustace. They will work on the book throughout the year and in 1930, publish “The Documents in the Case.”

July: “The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club” published by Ernest Benn.

August: Sayers acquires flat about her and begins renovations to provide Mac and her with more space.

September: First volume of “Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror” published by Victor Gollancz.


October: Mac buys “Sunnyside,” at house at 24 Newland Street, Withan, Essex for Helen Sayers and her sister, Mabel Leigh.


Mac leaves News of the World and freelances.

1929 June: Sayers and Mac visits Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland. They will return frequently and Sayers will use this location as the basis for “Five Red Herrings.”

July: Translation of “Tristan in Brittany” published by Benn.

July 27: Helen Sayers dies 10 months after her husband’s death
from an internal stoppage connected with a rupture of the bowel.

August: Successful negotiations with American publishers enable Sayers to leave Benson’s at the end of the year.

1930 The Detection Club is formed by a group of mystery writers including Sayers, Agatha Christie, Austin Freeman, E.C. Bentley and Freeman Wills Croft.

February: Finishes “The Documents in the Case.”

April: Manuscript of “Strong Poison” sent to Victor Gollancz in response to inquiry as to the title of her next Lord Peter novel.


August: Aunt Mabel Sayers dies suddenly while Sayers and Mac are in Scotland. Sayers invites her mother’s sister, Maud Sayers, to stay with them to act as buffer with Mac.


March: Works on “Have His Carcase” while arranging for hospital treatment of John Anthony’s scarlet fever. Mac ill.


December: “The Floating Admiral,” a collaboration with members of the Detection Club in which Sayers wrote the final chapter, is published by Hodder and Stoughton.

1932 Works on “My Edwardian Childhood,” a memoir that she leaves unfinished.

February: Begins “The Nine Tailors.” Research into the ringing of church bells proves longer than expected, and she writes “Murder
Must Advertise” to meet her publishing deadline. Continues work on Collins biography, in which five chapters are written before it is abandoned.

April 11: “Have His Carcase” published by Gollancz.

1933  Feb. 6: “Murder Must Advertise” published by Gollancz.

May: “Hangman’s Holiday” a collection of 12 short stories, four of them involving Lord Peter, published by Gollancz.

“Ask a Policeman” another collaboration with the Detection Club, published by Arthur Barker. Sayers also begins two years of weekly book reviews for the Sunday Times, which requires reading as much as two novels a day.

November: Visits Muriel St. Clare Byrne on a vacation to discuss separating from Mac. She decides against it.

1934 During the year, Sayers works on autobiographical novel “Cat o’ Mary” under the pseudonym of Johanna Leigh, that is abandoned after 200 pages.


June 13: Attends gaudy at Somerville College, which would inspire “Gaudy Night.”

1935 “The Silent Passenger” a Lord Peter movie with a scenario written by Sayers, appears in a greatly altered form.

February: Works on “Busman’s Honeymoon,” a Lord Peter play with Muriel St. Clare Byrne.

March: Lectures at Oxford on “Aristotle and the Art of Detective Fiction.” Meets Roy Ridley, recognizing him as Lord Peter’s double (and forgetting that she was inspired by him in 1913).

September: Eleven-year-old John Anthony is told he has been
“adopted” by Cousin Dorothy and Cousin Mac and his surname would be Fleming. He is asked not to reveal that his “mother” is Dorothy L. Sayers, ostensibly to keep away fans.

Nov. 4: “Gaudy Night” published by Gollancz.

1936 “Papers Relating to the Family of Wimsey,” a pamphlet of “historical” material about the family created for their amusement by Sayers and her friends, including heraldry expert Wilfrid Scott-Giles, privately printed. Begins “Thrones, Domination,” the 13th Lord Peter novel, but abandons it after writing six chapters and outlining the plot. It would be finished by Jill Paton Walsh and published in 1998.

October: Asked by Margaret Babington, organizer of the Canterbury Festival, to write a play for next year’s festival.

November: Rehearsals begin for “Busman’s Honeymoon.” The play opens on Dec. 16 at London’s Comedy Theatre. Reviews are positive and it runs for nine months. In an article, she writes that Lord Peter has become “a permanent resident in the house of my mind.”

1937 “Busman’s Honeymoon” published by Gollancz.

June 12: “The Zeal of Thy House,” a play about the architect who rebuilt the central portion of the cathedral after the fire of 1176, opens in Canterbury Cathedral. Sayers attends opening night with her friends. Mac stays home.

1938 BBC invites Sayers to write a nativity play for Children’s Hour. She writes “He That Should Come,” using everyday speech with no suggestion of reverence, that’s broadcast on Christmas Day.


August: Visits Venice for three weeks. During the frequent
rainstorms, passes time writing comic-romantic play set partly in Venice entitled “Love All.” It will be produced in 1940.

**1939**

“In the Teeth of the Evidence,” 17 short stories, including two involving Lord Peter, published by Gollancz.

“The Devil to Pay” about Doctor Faustus, opens at the Canterbury Festival. It is moved to London in August to His Majesty’s Theatre, where it closes due in part to the German declaration of war on Sept. 3.

**May:** Sayers offers her services to the Director of Public Relations for the War Office. Her work on two secret pamphlets was halted in September after the ministry found her difficult to work with.

**October:** “The Idea of a Christian Society,” a pamphlet based on three lectures given at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, is published by Gollancz.

**November:** Writes first of 11 letters for the Spectator about Lord Peter’s family and their response to the war on the home front. These will form the basis for Jill Paton Walsh’s second Lord Peter novel, “Presumption of Death.”

**1940**

**Feb. 5:** The director of religious broadcasting for the BBC asks Sayers to write a series of half-hour radio plays for children on the life of Christ.

**April:** The comic play “Love All” debuts at the Torch Theatre in Knightsbridge. It was not a success.

**August:** The movie “Busman’s Honeymoon” (“Haunted Honeymoon” in the U.S.) released. Robert Montgomery played Lord Peter to Constance Cummings’ Harriet and Sir Seymour Hicks’ Bunter.

**Nov. 5:** Mails first play, “Kings in Judaea,” in the “The Man Born to Be King” series to BBC producer. Despite praise from readers and promises of cooperation, the producer’s assistant suggests
changes, which Sayers rejects out of hand, refusing “to argue about my plays to a committee.”

1941  

Jan. 8: Presents paper on “The Church’s Responsibility” at a conference in Malvern, discussing the role of the Anglican Church in the reconstruction of civilization after the war.

Feb. 2: The BBC asks her to prepare six ten-minute talks on the Nicene Creed, which would occupy her until July. Sayers also lectures across the country.


December: John Anthony wins scholarship to Balliol, Oxford, Lord Peter’s college. He delays entering until 1945 by joining the Royal Air Force.

Dec. 10: At a press conference to publicize the “King” broadcasts, Sayers reads a section from “The Heirs to the Kingdom.” Her interpretation of Matthew in a Cockney accent speaking modern English causes an uproar and sparks opposition from Christian groups. Sayers resists changing the text to appease pressure groups, and the BBC sends copies of the second and third plays to its Central Religious Advisory Committee for their approval, which they give.

Dec. 21: The first play in the series, “Kings in Judaea,” is broadcast to near-universal praise.

1942  

Jan. 25: The second play, “The King’s Herald,” is broadcast.

Waits “Talboys,” her last Lord Peter short story, that would not be published until after her death.

1943  

The scripts for “The Man Born to Be King” are published by Gollancz. The Archbishop of Canterbury offers Sayers a Doctor of Divinity degree which she turns down with thanks.
June: Turns down request to submit paper to religious conference, promising to give up speaking on religious subjects. She does not always succeed.

1944 August: During an air raid, takes a copy of Dante’s “Inferno” into the shelter. Decides to translate the work, a task that will occupy the rest of her life.

1945 Sayers learns her German music mistress from the Godolphin School survived the war in Germany. Sends her food parcels and clothes until her death in 1948.

1946-1957 Occupied with lecturing on Dante and translating his works. She would finish “Hell” and “Purgatory” but die before finishing “Paradise.” She also translates “Chanson de Roland.”

1946 Writes “The Just Vengeance” for the Lichfield Cathedral festival.


Oct. 24: Writes to a fellow mystery writer that she is so “sickened by importunity” to write another Lord Peter story that the thought of doing so “fills me with distaste.”


June: Visits S.H. Benson’s to unveil a plaque commemorating the circular staircase used in “Murder Must Advertise.”

1951 Writes “The Emperor Constantine” for the Colchester Festival and participates in designing props and costumes for its production.
March: Ivy Shrimpton dies at 70 of broncho-pneumonia and measles. She wills her estate to Sayers, who turns it over to Anthony.


March 25: Writes that the last thing she wishes to be known for was as a “writer of Christian Apologetics.”

1957  Dec. 17: Dies quickly from a stroke at Sunnyside Cottage, Witham, Essex. She is cremated and her ashes buried beneath the tower of St. Anne’s Church, Soho, London, where she had been a churchwarden.


THE LORD PETER NOVELS
AND SHORT STORIES

THE NOVELS
Whose Body? (1923)
Clouds of Witness (1926)
Unnatural Death (also published as The Dawson Pedigree) (1927)
The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club (1928)
Strong Poison (1930)
Five Red Herrings (also published in the U.S. as Suspicious Characters) (1931)
Have His Carcase (1932)
Murder Must Advertise (1933)
The Nine Tailors (1934)
Gaudy Night (1935)
Busman’s Honeymoon (1937)

With Jill Paton Walsh
Thrones, Dominations (1998)
A Presumption of Death (2002)
The Attenbury Emeralds (2010)

THE SHORT STORIES
(Collected in Lord Peter)
The Abominable History of the Man With the Copper Fingers
The Entertaining Episode of the Article in Question
The Fascinating Problem of Uncle Meleager’s Will
The Fantastic Horror of the Cat in the Bag
The Unprincipled Affair of the Practical Joker
The Undignified Melodrama of the Bone of Contention
The Vindictive Story of the Footsteps That Ran
The Bibulous Business of a Matter of Taste
The Learned Adventure of the Dragon’s Head
The Piscatorial Farce of the Stolen Stomach
The Unsolved Puzzle of the Man with No Face
The Adventurous Exploit of the Cave of Ali Baba
The Image in the Mirror
The Incredible Elopement of Lord Peter Wimsey
The Queen’s Square
The Necklace of Pearls
In the Teeth of the Evidence
Absolutely Elsewhere
Striding Folly
The Haunted Policeman
Talboys
When Harriet Vane is advised in “Gaudy Night” that we know when we have an overmastering passion for a subject when it has overmastered us, I recognized a bit of wisdom that has served me well through the years. The amusing irony is that my overmastering passion has been for the works of Dorothy L. Sayers, which inspired my annotations on my website at www.planetpeschel.com as well as this book. If I had known that this project was going to require an understanding of Greek philosophy, the works of Shakespeare, Robert Burns and John Donne, the rules of royal precedence, British society of the 1920s and a dozen other subjects, I would have paid more attention to my education.

But one can do only one’s best, and this is mine. Fortunately, “The Complete, Annotated Whose Body?” was improved with the help of many hands, and to them I owe my thanks and gratitude.

To John Mark Ockerbloom and Mary Mark Ockerbloom, whose transcription of the first edition of “Whose Body?” was the basis for this edition.

To Dan Drake, who published the first annotation to the novel many years ago.

To Michael Rawdon, whose timeline of the Lord Peter stories inspired and formed the basis of my effort.

To the contributors to the Lord Peter Wimsey group at Yahoo for providing insightful commentary on the works.

To Barbara Reynolds, whose biography “Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul” and editions of Sayers’ letters are well worth reading and re-reading.
To the many contributors and fans of the Annotated Wimsey at www.planetpeschel.com, whose praise, advice and suggestions have kept the still unfinished project alive these many years.

Finally, to Teresa, my enabler and inspiration. My acushla.

Bill Peschel
Hershey, Pennsylvania
May 22, 2011
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True-Crime Cases (Adolf Beck, Brides in the Bath, Edmond De La Pommerais, William Palmer)


**Argentina**


Cable Codes

Jews in England


Omnibus
One of the great mystery novelists of the 20th century, **DOROTHY L. SAYERS** was born in Oxford in 1893 and was one of the first women to be granted a degree by Oxford University. She wrote more than a dozen Lord Peter novels and short stories, and three more novels were written by Jill Paton Walsh. Sayers was also noted for her Christian writings and plays and her translation of Dante. She died in 1957.

**BILL PESCHEL** is a longtime editor and fan of Dorothy L. Sayers whose Wimsey Annotations at www.planetpeschel.com has delighted mystery fans for over a decade. Peschel is also the author of “Writers Gone Wild: The Feuds, Frolics and Follies of Literature’s Great Adventurers, Drunkards, Lovers, Iconoclasts and Misanthropes” from Penguin Books.
We've Got A Body In The Bath

When a church architect finds a naked man in his Battersea bathroom, Lord Peter Wimsey is on the case! The aristocratic amateur detective, accompanied by his camera-bearing manservant Bunter, follows a trail of blood as he pursues stock market manipulation, medical malpractice and Lord Brocklebury's edition of Dante. But the curious case of the bathing body turns darker and deadlier as Lord Peter uncovers a ghastly crime.

Published in 1923, Whose Body? was Dorothy L. Sayer's debut novel. Bill Peschel has provided hundreds of footnotes to guide the reader through Lord Peter's world, describing words, objects and ideas that were familiar to Sayers' readers but obscure or unknown today.

The Complete, Annotated Whose Body? contains:

* More than 500 notes on English history, aristocracy, religion, society and literature.
* Three maps of London showing locations important to the novel.
* Essays about England in the 1920s, such as anti-Semitism, finance and crime.
* Timelines of the life of Dorothy L. Sayers and Lord Peter Wimsey's cases.

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Front Cover: Detail from "The Death of Marat"
by Jacques-Louis David (1793), modified by Bill Peschel

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