

Ye Olde Plum News

No 64 January 16th 2025 *Extra!* Congratulations Frans!

PLUM AND TIME

A THING OF EMOTIONS

Time is a thing of emotions, not of hours and minutes, and I had certainly packed a considerable number of emotional moments into my stay at Sanstead house.

(The Little Nugget, 1914)

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### ASTRONOMERS AND TIME

*There are, as everybody knows, many ways of measuring time; and right through the ages learned men have argued earnestly in favour of their different systems, with not a little bad blood, one is sorry to say, arising between the representatives of the various school of thought. Hipparchus of Rhodes, for instance, who had his own ideas on the way time should be measured, once referred to Marinus of Tyre, who held different opinions, as "Marinus the flat tire" which, though it was extraordinary witty, was pretty bitter: and when Purbach and Regiomontanus were told the views of Achmed Ibn Abdallah of Baghdad, they laughed themselves cross-eyed...*

All these names are real ancient astronomers.

*Tycho Brahe, the eminent Dane, measured time by means of altitudes, quadrants, azimuths, cross-staves, armillary spheres and parallactic rules, and the general opinion in Denmark was that he had got the thing down cold.*

The things Plum listed are tools and terms which astronomers used to measure places and movements of celestial bodies.

*And then in 1863 along came Dollen with his Die Zeitbestimmung Vermittelst Des Tragbaren Durchgangsinstrumenten Im vertikale Des Polarsterns – a bestseller in its day, subsequently made into a musical by Rogers and Hammerstein, who called it North Atlantic.*

The German title of Döllens work is correctly quoted!

Plum's conclusion: *The truth is that time cannot be measured.*

(The Old Reliable, 1951)

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TIME CANNOT BE MEASURED

Already in The Small Bachelor, 1927, Plum used the formulation: *The truth is that time cannot be measured.*

Plum's view is that time is essentially subjective and impossible to measure. It sounds like an echo of St Augustine: "What then is time? Provided that no one asks me, I know. If I want to explain it to an inquirer, I do not know." St Augustine meant that future and past don't exist as physical phenomena, but only in our minds. "So it is in you, my mind, that I measure periods of time." As both past and future are intangibles, they are impossible to measure. (<https://www.thecollector.com/what-is-time-st-augustine/>)

Plum and St Augustine have very similar views. However, I don't think Plum consciously allude on St Augustine. If so, wouldn't he have made some funny twist as he usually did?

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### EINSTEIN AND SPACE/TIME

Wodehouse once referred to Einstein's relativity theory. He didn't mention his name but referred to an important concept in Einstein's theory: "the fourth dimension", or space/time: *The general consensus of opinion is that it has something to do with the Fourth Dimension. You know how things do. I mean to say, something rummy occurs and you consult some big-brained bird and he wags his head and says "Ah! The Fourth Dimension!"*

The inexplicable problem was that not only one, but two Bodmin-hats didn't seem to fit! Bodmin was the best of hatmakers. A Bodmin hat *always* fitted perfectly. An exchange between the two hats was offered as a possible explanation of the mystery. "Ingenious," he said, taking a grape. "Quite ingenious. But a little farfetched. No, I prefer to think the whole thing, as I say, has something to do with the Fourth Dimension. I am convinced that that is the true explanation, if our minds could only grasp it."

Einstein published his special relativity theory 1905 and his general relativity theory 1915 and was famous. Plum knew that his readers would recognize the phrase "The fourth dimension", but

not understand it. This new theory was said to be able to explain observed phenomena unexplainable by classic Newtonian physics.

(The Amazing Hat Mystery, 1933)

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IMPORTANT AT ALL TIMES

"What do ties matter, Jeeves, at a time like this?" ... "There is no time, sir, in which ties do not matter." (Very Good, Jeeves, 1930)

"There are moments, Jeeves, when one asks oneself 'Do trousers matter?'" "The mood will pass, sir." (The Code of the Woosters, 1938)

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### THERE IS A TIME FOR EVERYTHING

Ecclesiastes Ch. 3 says: "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted..." (King James Bible). Plum added own observations on time for different down-to-earth activities:

- *There is a time for studying beetles and a time for not studying beetles.* (Right Ho, Jeeves 1934).
- *There is a time to speak of eggs and a time not to speak of eggs.* (Young med in Spats 1936).
- *There is a time for worrying about pigs and a time for not worrying about pigs.* (Galahad at Blandings 1965).
- *There is a time for reeling and a time not for reeling.* (Scratch Man, 1940)
- *There is a time for girlish frivolity and a time when it is misplaced.* (Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves, 1963)
- *There is a time for tickling cats under the ear and a time for not tickling cats under the ear.* (The Old Reliable, 1951)

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