



Trouble for Lucia

E. F. Benson

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English novelist, biographer, memoirist, archaeologist and short story writer, best known now for the Mapp and Lucia series, written relatively late in his career.

Benson's first novel was *Dodo* (1893), which was an instant success, and followed it with a variety of satire and romantic and supernatural melodrama. He repeated the success of *Dodo* with the same cast of characters a generation later: *Dodo the Second* (1914), "a unique chronicle of the pre-1914 Bright Young Things" and *Dodo Wonders* (1921), "a first-hand social history of the Great War in Mayfair and the Shires".

Benson was also known as a writer of atmospheric, oblique, and at times humorous or satirical ghost stories, which were often first published in story magazines such as *Pearson's Magazine* or *Hutchinson's Magazine*, 20 of which were illustrated by Edmund Blampied. These "spook stories", as they were also called, were then reprinted in collections by his principal publisher, Walter Hutchinson. His 1906 short story, "The Bus-Conductor", a fatal-crash premonition tale about a person haunted by a hearse driver, has been adapted several times, notably in 1944 (in the film *Dead of Night* and as an anecdote in Bennett Cerf's *Ghost Stories* anthology published the same year) and in a 1961 episode of *The Twilight Zone*. The catchphrase from the story, "Room for one more", even spawned an urban legend, and also appears in the 1986 Oingo Boingo song, "Dead Man's Party".

H. P. Lovecraft spoke highly of Benson's works in his "Supernatural Horror in Literature", most notably of his story "The Man Who Went Too Far".

Benson's *David Blaize and the Blue Door* (1918) is a children's fantasy influenced by the work of Lewis Carroll. "Mr Tilly's Seance" is a witty and amusing story about a man flattened by a traction-engine who finds himself dead and conscious on the 'other side'. Other notable stories are the eerie "The Room in the Tower" and "Pirates".

Benson is also known for a series of biographies/autobiographies and memoirs, including one of Charlotte Brontë. His last book, delivered to his publisher ten days before his death, was an autobiography entitled *Final Edition*.

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