



# Plum Lines

A Quarterly Publication of The Wodehouse Society

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WCY+9

## Notes from Plum

P. G. WODEHOUSE  
RENSBURG, N. Y.

Sept 26.1960

Dear Graves.

How nice hearing from you after all these years. I remember so well the time -gosh, it must be nearly fifty-five years! - when we shared rooms.

I can't imagine what Robert was thinking of when he said that I had drawn Ukridge from you! There couldn't be two more different people. Ukridge was drawn originally from what Townend told me about a man named Craxton, and shortly after that I met a man named Westbrook who was very much the same type of chap. Both now dead. Lots of people agree with you in not liking Ukridge. I suppose he is a bit too much of a crook.

Yes, I remember that stand in the Artists match. Great days!

I shall join you in being 79 next month.

Yours ever

*P. G. Wodehouse*

Norman Murphy sent me this copy of the letter that identified Craxton and Herbert Westbrook as the originals of Ukridge. Herbert Westbrook was a fellow author and friend, with whom PGW was associated in his twenties. Graves, to whom the letter was addressed, was the author Perceval Graves.

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## Christmas Everywhere

P.G. Wodehouse

Reprinted from *Town and Country*, December 1965

I wish I could thank the member who sent me this article, but I lost his or her name in a recent attack of incompetence.

...OM

Christmas! What thoughts that word brings to us. It made the late Charles Dickens think of roast turkey and steaming punch. It makes me think of yak's tails. Why? I shall be coming to that in a moment.

The American Christmas is a very different thing today from what it was when, a pie-faced lad in my early twenties, I first trod the sidewalks of New York. Then a simple festival, it now seems to have got elephantiasis of something. I don't want to do anyone an injustice, but the thought has sometimes crossed my mind that some of the big department stores are trying to make money out of Christmas. I cannot help thinking that to certain persons in New York - I name no names - Christmas is not just a season of homely goodwill but an opportunity to gouge the populace out of what little savings it has managed to accumulate in the past year. All those Santa Clauses you see. They are there for a purpose.

Christmas brings out the Santa Clauses like flies. Go into any big store and there is a Santa Claus sitting in a chair with children crawling all over him. I interviewed one of them the other day in a restaurant whither he had gone in his brief time off to refresh himself with a quick wassail bowl.

"Yours is a hard life," I said. "Don't you ever falter?"

He gave me a look.

"A Santa Claus who faltered," he replied stiffly, "would receive short shrift from his coworkers. Next morning at daybreak he would find himself in a hollow square of his fellow-Clauses, being formally stripped of his beard and stomach padding. We are a proud guild, we Santas, and brook no weakness. Besides, though the life of a department-store Santa Claus is fraught with peril (only this morning I myself had chewing gum rubbed into my whiskers by a child



named Basil), he can console himself with the reflection that he is by no means so badly off as the shock troops of his profession, the men who have to go into the offices. He says to himself that what he is suffering is as nothing to what a man like, for instance, Butch Oberholtzer has to face. Butch is the Santa Claus attached to a prominent monthly magazine, and it is his task to circulate among the advertisers during Christmas week and give them a hearty seasonal greeting from his employers. Well, you know what sort of condition the average advertiser is in during Christmas week, after those daily office parties. Let so much as a small fly stamp its feet suddenly on the ceiling and he leaps like a stricken blancmange. You can picture his emotions, then, when as the advertiser sits quivering in his chair, a Santa Claus steals up behind him, slaps him on the back, and shouts "Ho ho ho. Merry Christmas, old boy, merry Christmas." On several occasions Butch has escaped with his life by the merest hair's-breadth. Can his luck last?"

(continued next page)

We shall soon be having Christmas at our throats.  
"Jeeves and the Greasy Bird", 1966

## *A Search for Signs of Intelligent Life*

Frederick Menschaar writes:

I am delighted to be a member of the Wodehouse Society at last. I looked for such a fraternity a long time before finding it.

In 1981 I hoped to uncover the secret of the Society's existence at the Pierpont Morgan Library Centenary Celebration Exhibit. To my keen disappointment the friendly girl behind the entrance desk told me that there was no such thing as a Wodehouse Society. Sadly I added my name to the visitors' register, feeling that on that long list at least I was in the company of soulmates. Not until nine years later did I find the clue I had been looking for: Daniel Garrison's reference to TWS in the foreword of his book *Who's Who*. From there becoming a member was a piece of cake.

In her letter of welcome Marilyn MacGregor gives our membership as 400 plus and mentions the hordes of wretches who haven't heard of us and therefore lead bleak, drab lives. Having only just crossed the dividing line between the wretches and the blessed, I can identify with the plight of such a wretch: an avid Wodehouse reader yearning for spiritual development, but haplessly unaware of the only institution that can provide it. It is with the noble intention of alleviating this misery that I suggest we extend a helping hand to those in the cruel world outside our Society, specifically to those who have shown hard evidence of a will to improve their souls by visiting the Centenary Exhibit in 1981. This I propose we do by sending a belated notice of our existence to those individuals who inscribed the visitors' register of that event.

---

\* I do not see eye to eye with the misguided blighters who would spell Wodehousean Wodehousian. Take a line after Boole: he invented Boolean algebra, not Boolian algebra. It would have been different if Plum had changed his name to Wodehousi when he became a U.S. citizen. He chose not to do so. Let us respect that decision.

. . . . .  
I like Frederick's suggestion about inviting visitors to the Centenary Exhibition to become TWS members. With the passage of time some of those people may be hard to locate, but their interest in

Wodehouse is almost certain. Is there a volunteer out there willing to take on the task of obtaining the list of visitors and writing to them? A worthy deed, indeed!

On the question of spelling, I find the evidence for Wodehousian persuasive. It was provided by John Hoppe, John Fletcher, and Christine Dorffi in the Autumn *Plum Lines*.

....OM

### *Christmas Everywhere* (from page 2)

"Let us hope so," I said soberly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah well," he said, "if the worst happens, it will be just one more grave among the hills."

This man told me something that shocked me a good deal. For years I have worrying myself sick, wondering why yak's tails - I told you we should be coming to the yaks in a moment - were imported into the United States from Tibet. I could not understand there being any demand for them. I know if someone came up to me and said, "Mr. Wodehouse, I have long been a great admirer of your work and would like to do something by way of a small return for all the happy hours you have given me; take this yak's tail and make of it a constant companion," I would thank him and giggle a little and say how extremely kind of him and that this was just what I had been wanting, but I should most certainly try to lose the thing on my way home. And I would have supposed that a similar distaste for these objects prevailed almost universally.

I now have the facts. Yak's tails are used for making beards for department-store Santa Clauses, and I can never feel quite the same about department-store Santa Clauses again. Their white beards, once venerable, now revolt me. I find a picture rising before my eyes of some unfortunate yak wandering about Tibet without a tail. You don't have to know much about the sensitive nature of the yak to realize what this must mean to the bereaved animal. It is bathed in confusion. It doesn't know which way to look.

## *A Search for More Signs.... Phone Numbers, Anyone?*

President Phil Ayers writes:

"James Heineman thought it would be a good idea if we had a list of all the Wodehouse societies and clubs world wide. Could we publish a known list in the next issue and put in a request for information on those not listed."

A splendid suggestion. I'd like to go a little further and list all the local groups within our own Society.

First, the societies. I've asked several friends, and we know of only two Wodehouse societies in the whole blue-eyed world: our own, and the P.G. Wodehouse Society of The Netherlands. The address of the latter group is

Rob Kooy, Secretary  
The P.G. Wodehouse Society

### The Netherlands

If there are other societies anywhere in the world, please let me know about them so I can spread the word.

Next, the local groups in our own Society. Here our list is even shorter. We know of just one group that meets with any regularity, and that is our own San Francisco Bay Area group. Its president is:

Tom Wainwright

If this list of local groups is complete, it means that nearly all our members are disconnected, so to speak. What a shame - our group meetings consist of browsing and sluicing, laughing and talking about P.G. Wodehouse and his stories, occasional readings from his works, and similar light-hearted activities. I've never belonged to another group that's so much fun.

If there are other groups out there in the void, let me hear from you so I can add you to our list. There may be lost souls nearby who would love to join up if they only knew about your group.

Dan Garrison writes:

It has occurred to me a number of times that the world would be a kinder, gentler place if the membership list included phone numbers. At present, for example, I need to talk to Norman Murphy about our radio broadcast coming up in Chicago on Oct 5, but short of calling Directory Assistance in Cumbria (which I think the show's producer is doing as I write) I can reach him only by mail.

If given the chance to do so, many of us would willingly divulge our phone numbers for the next membership list. I propose we draw the line at fax numbers as anachronistic: Bertie never received messages in this form from Aunt Dahlia. Also, no car phones (even if the car is a roadster), for the same reason.

I think it's a great idea. I call members in distant areas several times a month. Worse yet, some phones are unlisted.

If you are willing to have your phone number included in our annual membership list, published with the Summer issue of *Plum Lines* early in June, please send it to:

Tom Wainwright

Please be sure to include your Area Code in the United States and your City Code elsewhere in the world.

Please understand that this listing is purely voluntary. Some of us, for good and sufficient reasons, don't list our phone numbers anywhere. If you are part of that group, we will love you just the same.

"Frederick won't be staying here long, will he?" Lord Emsworth asked with a father's pathetic eagerness.  
*Full Moon, 1947*

## *Emsworth Lives!*

Bill Blood sent me the following letter more than a year ago. I promptly misplaced it, and discovered it last month in a collection of papers I was filing. My apologies to Bill and to the Emsworth Maritime Historical Trust for burying this interesting information so long.

### *Emsworth maritime & historical trust*

From the Vice Chairman Oysters 25 Tower Street Emsworth Hampshire  
PO10 7BH UK

K/C/MISC/89

5 May 1989

William W Blood Esquire  
President  
The Wodehouse Society  
82 Evergreen Drive  
New Britain PA 18901  
USA

Dear Mr Blood

Thank you so much for replying to my enquiry about The Wodehouse; I regret not having answered your letter sooner.

It was very interesting to hear about your Society and its activities and I have read your letter to our Committee.

We will certainly arrange to apply for membership in some form and one of our people, Kenneth Mason, a book publisher who has links in the USA, will be arranging this.

Our Emsworth Museum contains a variety of artefacts reflecting the town's maritime history; in the 19th century it was a flourishing seaport, with a large trade in oysters and a long standing smuggling tradition.

We do not at present have a great deal of material about PGW, but we do know where he lived in Emsworth for several years and are digging further! There is little doubt that he had a soft spot for the area, as he returned many times to stay with his friend, Baldwin King-Hall, at Emsworth House School.

Should you or any of your members be able to visit Emsworth, do let me know, so that we can open the museum and show you the spots that PGW knew so well.

My best wishes

Yours sincerely  
*Michael Kennett*

Michael Kennett

Secretary, The Emsworth Society  
The Wodehouse Society, 82 Evergreen Drive, New Britain, PA 18901  
Secretary, The Emsworth Society, 25 Tower Street, Emsworth, Hampshire, PO10 7BH UK

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Emsworth is a small town on the south coast between Portsmouth and Chichester. Plum moved to Emsworth as a very young man in 1903, at the invitation of his friend Herbert Westbrook, and lived there off and on for many years. In 1910 he bought Threepwood, a house he had previously rented. Plum and his wife visited Emsworth at least as late as 1921.

## Something New

Len Lawson

Pauline Blanc, Donna Loyd and David Albert have sent information and/or inquired about PGW stories on audio cassettes. I am in the process of putting together a list of those currently available. Send me a self addressed stamped envelope and I'll return it with the list enclosed. (See my notes at the end of this column....OM)

David Albert sends along the following info from the 9/22/90 issue of *Billboard*:

Conductor/scholar John McGlinn has done another big service to musical theater buffs, offering a studio version of a rare 1924 Jerome Kern/P.G. Wodehouse-scored musical McGlinn presented in a concertized version last year in New York. The score, with charming Kern melodies throughout, most notably the engaging "The Enchanted Train," is performed with great appeal. And - leave it to McGlinn! - the last four tracks of the two-CD package contain material McGlinn unearthed that didn't make it to the show's Broadway run.



WOW! The title is "Kern /Wodehouse: Sitting Pretty" and it is from New World., number 8037. No price mentioned. Check with your local CD store.

Pauline Blanc tell us of J.C. Soares, who has edited three books on cats. They are *The Literary Cat*, Berkeley Windhover, 1977, *Great Cats*, Bantam Books, 1981, and *The Indispensable Cat*, Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1983. The first contains "The Story of Webster," the second contains character sketches of famous cats and, of course, includes Webster, and the third book, although it doesn't contain anything PGWish, is necessary in order to make three in all.

As you have undoubtedly read elsewhere, Col. Norman Murphy came through the San Francisco area in October, registering 8.5 on the Richter scale. Doug Stow, who does fine letterpress, printed up a keepsake for the dinner in Norman's honor. With the permission of the Wodehouse estate, Doug printed PGW's "Printer's Error," with original art Doug printed PGW's "Printer's Error," with original art work done especially for this limited edition of 250 copies. He is offering them to members of the Society for \$5.50 each postpaid, and to the general public for \$7.50. Those of you fortunate enough to get Doug's *Plum Pie*, now long out of print, are well aware of Doug's commitment to quality.

Doug also informs us of *The Enthusiasms of Robertson Davies*, edited by Judith Skelton Grant. The book is a collection of articles Davies wrote for various Canadian periodicals. It includes an article on PGW which appeared on *Saturday Night* on January 30, 1954. The book was first published in the U.S. by Viking in 1990, so it should still be available.

Daniel H. Garrison's *Who's Who in Wodehouse* was offered by Barnes & Noble in mid November for a mere \$7.95. Anyone who hasn't got this book yet doesn't deserve to get it at this price. Send your order (catalog number 1603919) to Barnes & Noble, 126 Fifth Avenue, New York NY10011, with \$4 for shipping and insurance, and sales tax if you live in CA(6.25%), MA, MN, NJ, NY, and PA.

Charles Gould found an interesting item in *Crypt of Cthulu*, a "pulp thriller and theological journal" devoted to Lovecraftian lore. The item is "Scream for Jeeves; or, Cats, Rats, and Bertie Wooster" in issue 72, and it can be yours for \$4.50 +\$0.50 postage and handling from Cryptic Publications, 216 Fernwood Ave., Upper Montclair NJ 07043.

Charles Bishop has run across *English Country House Murders*, edited by Thomas Godfrey, which contains "Jeeves and the Stolen Venus." It is a paperback published by Mysterious Press in 1990 and sells for \$4.95.

Bob Gifford has just sent me info on *The Jeeves Omnibus - Vol. 2*. It comes from Century Hutchinson and has the same arrangement as Vol. 1: two novels and one short story collection. Vol. 2 contains *Right Ho, Jeeves*, *Joy in the Morning*, and *Carry On, Jeeves*. No price mentioned.

Let me know if you see anything by or about P.G. Wodehouse.

. . . . .

Jay Weiss has discovered what might be an audio gem from the 1930s, and Vic Bolwell has had great pleasure from some recent BBC radio airings. We must add these to Len's list of audio cassettes if and when they are available:

Jay writes: "Whenever I come across a new book I look to see if there's an index and if Plum is mentioned. This is not an infallible method. *Cary Grant, The Lonely Heart*, by Charles Higham and Roy Moseley, Avon Books, seems to show a fairly extensive index with no mention of Wodehouse. But, wait. On page 103 we read that on November 21, 1937, Cary Grant appeared for the Columbia Broadcasting System in an audio version of "Medicine Girl" from a story by P.G. Wodehouse, with Constance Bennett. That would be a lovely item to have in one's collection of cassettes."

Does someone have this on tape already? Who wants to see if it's available? How can we encourage CBS to issue the tape? Grant, Bennett, and Wodehouse, all on one tape - what a combination!

Vic Bolwell writes: "In the late spring [of 1990] the BBC gave us on radio "Heavy Weather" as a serial at mid-day, spread over several weeks. People must have thought me mad when they saw a car driver stuck in

jams laughing away....Also, at present [Sep 1990] the BBC is giving us readings from some of the golf stories." Vic sent along a newspaper clipping describing them as "three two-part tales from *Wodehouse's Golf Omnibus* (sic). Does anybody know whether these radio broadcasts are, or might become, available on tape?"

Now, about video tapes: Len says he knows of no source of video tapes which are connected in any way with Wodehouse. Neither do I. I've just looked through video catalogs from six mail order companies, and found no Wodehouse of any kind. Things are tough all over. Does anybody know where we can get Wodehouse video tapes?

....OM

"*Oh, Kay!*"

Bill Horn informs us, by way of a magazine clipping, that the current revival of this Bolton-Wodehouse smasher of 1926 is doing well on Broadway. Not breaking records, maybe, but doing all right.

*Newsweek* reviewer Jack Kroll says, "'Oh, Kay!' deserves to live. It also deserves to be improved in certain areas. The original book, by Guy Bolton and P.G. Wodehouse, was pure jazz-age fluff. Fluff won't sustain [director] Siretta's new concept; he and adaptor Racheff founder in the quicksands of vaudevillian humor that just won't wash today. Even Groucho couldn't have gotten away with gags like: "What's a poltergeist? Any geist that polters." But in almost every other respect, the show has a fresh energy and easy, winning style that comes from its largely youthful cast."

We who admire anything even remotely Wodehousian cannot but rejoice.

## *With a Friend Like This*

Mindi M. Reid

We've all had a friend of the Ukridge-y kind  
 A schemer, a dreamer, of too-fertile mind -  
 Who tries to involve us in all of his plots,  
 Believing new schemes will bring gold forth in pots;

We've all had a friend of the Ukridge-y sort  
 Adept at the wounded, self-righteous retort  
 (When we express frankly that we don't approve  
 Of his latest "Get Rich Quick" behavioral move);

We've all had a friend of the Ukridge-y bent  
 Who does dreadful things that are OH-so-well-meant;  
 Who treats all our things as if they were his own,  
 Our flats, socks, and breakfasts; the money we loan;

We've all had an Ukridge-y friend, I am sure  
 Who think he's the Great Global Entrepreneur;  
 Who's certain at last he will make all our fortunes  
 And will NOT desist, though On Knee we importune;

We've all had an Ukridge-y friend, I'm afraid,  
 He's a bottomless pit of largesse unrepaid;  
 A someone who speaks with a forked silver tongue  
 Who - if there's a soup - will you into it bung;

We've all had a friend of the Ukridge-y ilk  
 Who could make you believe sow's ears ARE made from silk;  
 A friend who seems frequently more like a foe  
 (When he makes your home his and can't BE made to go);

He may not wear a mac, make book or train dogs,  
 But I'll bet he's a wheel in which friends are the cogs;  
 A walking disaster, but never uncowed,  
 A Phoenix of Failure, yet never unbowed;  
 He comes to our hearths, all his fractures to mend -  
 That UKRIDGE-Y, UKRIDGE-Y, UKRIDGE-Y FRIEND!!!



## *New Members*

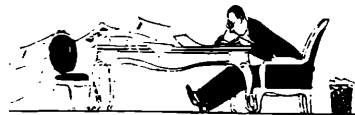
## *Call for a Letterhead*

John Hoppe writes:

"As you can see, I've appropriated a Jeeves illustration in order to create stationery that denotes my Wodehouse Society affiliation. I certainly wish that someone whose intake of fish exceeds mine would put his or her considerable brain power to the task of marketing REASONABLY PRICED TWS stationery. Could that marvelous pin design be adapted?"

. . . . .  
An excellent suggestion, John. I think stationery like that would be popular. This is an appeal for help to all you letterhead designers out there (I'm sure the Society is crowded with them): send me your designs! The "marvelous pin" John refers to is the beautiful little lapel pin designed by Judy Finnegan for our Kalamazoo conventioners last year.

An expert aesthetician, deep within the bowels of the Society, has offered to choose the design he considers best and get stationery printed at quantity prices he assures me are quite reasonable. This is not meant to limit anyone's use of whatever Wodehouse stationery he or she prefers - it is only intended to provide stationery at a lower cost than an individual might arrange for himself. I assure you the expert aesthetician is not your humble servant, OM.



## *Pig Fanciers Unite!*

John Hoppe

Book Bag #457, the *Washington Post's* Book World quiz for February 7, 1988, contained the following question: "What do the following have in common: Napoleon, the Empress of Blandings, Freddy and Wilbur?" "They're all pigs!" you say. "Right!" I say, even though I prefer to think of the Empress as THE pig much as Sherlock Holmes thought of Irene Adler as THE woman.

Whether the Empress should be cloistered in a quiz question with the likes of the nefarious Napoleon or the wimpy Wilbur is for others to discuss. The point I would like to raise is that Freddy the Pig deserves our support, not only as a good pig in a dark world, but as a personage (pigonage?) who promotes the very Plumlike tenet that language can be enjoyable as well as functional.

Freddy was created in 1929 by Walter Brooks, who continued writing the stories until his death in 1958. I began reading the Freddy books in the first or second grade, and went on reading them at least through the sixth grade. They were the first books so enthralling that I had difficulty in putting them down. I used to sneak them into church and read them during particularly boring sermons, sometimes laughing out loud at incredibly inappropriate moments.

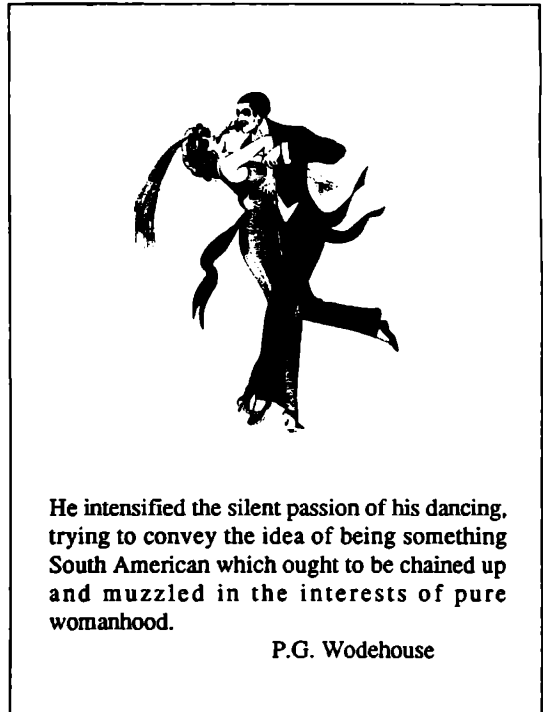
There are entertaining similarities with Wodehouse. Freddy's friend Mr. Camphor has two aunts, and this to say about them: "I've made quite a study of aunts. There's two kinds: there's the regular kind, and then there's the other kind. Mine are the other kind..."

These are not "cute" books. Brook's anthropomorphism leaves quite a few animal traits intact. There are no heavy-handed morals, and humor is broad: slapstick, sarcasm, word-play, piggerel (doggerel written by a pig). Most important, Brooks did not write down to his readers. He stretched my vocabulary as well as my imagination and for that I will always be grateful.

I recently rediscovered the joys of reading the Freddy books and was thrilled to find that as an adult I enjoyed them in an entirely new way. I did discover a major hindrance to their enjoyment: most of the 26 Freddy books are out of print.

Which brings me (FINALLY!) to the crux of this letter. I wholeheartedly urge my fellow members of the Wodehouse Society to support a noble cause: Let's get these wonderful books back into print! If you come across a Freddy book and enjoy it (I'm sure you will), clamor to your library or bookseller for more of the books. Ask them to urge the publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, to republish the stories. And write to Knopf yourself. You will be supporting literacy and humor (not cloying cuteness) and imagination in children's books.

Freddy's cause is indeed a worthy one. Freddy was (is!) a brave and gallant pig - of lower birth than the Empress, it's true, but possessing the same nobility of character.



He intensified the silent passion of his dancing, trying to convey the idea of being something South American which ought to be chained up and muzzled in the interests of pure womanhood.

P.G. Wodehouse

## PGW vs. A.A. Milne

Bill Horn sends a review of a new biography, *A.A. Milne: The Man Behind Winnie-the-Pooh*, by Ann Thwaite. The reviewer, Helle Bering-Jensen, includes some information about the less-than-friendly relationship between PGW and Milne after World War II:

As readers of P.G. Wodehouse will recall, he...sent a few barbs Milne's way. In his 1949 novel *The Mating Season*, Madeline Bassett is described as "the sloppiest, mushiest, sentimentalest young Gawd-help-us who ever thought the stars were God's daisy chain....Her favorite reading is Christopher Robin and Winnie the Pooh."

Wodehouse, in fact, was only repaying Milne for his attacks after the former's ill-judged broadcasts from Germany in 1941. It had taken Hitler to convert Milne from pacifism, but then he converted with a vengeance. Wodehouse had spent almost a year in a German internment camp, and when he was offered the possibility of broadcasting to England and the United States he did so mainly to let his friends know that he was free. In England, however, many saw it as high treason.

George Orwell and Malcolm Muggeridge have defended Wodehouse essentially as a gentle innocent, and Milne's reaction in the *Daily Telegraph* says perhaps as much about his own doubts as it does about Wodehouse. Wodehouse "encouraged in himself a natural lack of interest in "politics" - "politics" being all the things the grown-ups talk about at dinner when one is hiding under the table," Milne wrote. "Irresponsibility in what the papers call "a licensed humourist" can be carried too far."

Before the war Wodehouse and Milne had been at various times friends and business associates, and Wodehouse had been a warm admirer of some of Milne's non-Pooh work.

David Jasen, in *Portrait of a Master*, states that the broadcasts were intended for America, not England. He also notes that "the Americans took quite a different view of what Plum had done. Throughout the war, the United States War Department used recordings of his broadcasts....as models of anti-Nazi propaganda."

...OM

## Dues Information

A number of members have asked for clarification about how and when we collect dues. Some were in high dudgeon, the lower dudgeons being filled with paynims and poor white trash from the Third, or Crucial, Crusade\*. I haven't been making our dues policy clear.

(1) We ask for dues once a year, in the Spring *Plum Lines* issued early in March. Quite a few members overlooked the call for dues last spring. I must give the request much greater prominence next year. I have several fiendish schemes in mind.

(2) Your check or money order should be made out to The Wodehouse Society.

(3) Your check or money order should specify U.S. dollars. Otherwise American banks will charge us huge sums of money to handle these items.

(4) Please send your dues by the first of May. It makes life easier for us.

(5) Family and individual dues are the same, \$15 a year.

(6) Send your dues to: Tom Wainwright

\* I wish I'd thought of that line. James Thurber did.



## *Yours, Plum*

The Letters of P.G. Wodehouse

Edited by Frances Donaldson

Hutchinson, 269 pages, £16.99 and \$21.95

"No other writer has given so many people so much sheer light-hearted, innocent pleasure. He died at 93, working on his 96th book. The thought that there can be no more such books is sad. But at least his fans now have some more words from Plum's pen".

So begins one of the many reviews of this remarkable book. The letters were not meant for publication, and even with the editor's selections and excisions, they show us the man behind his work more clearly than we have ever seen him.

The letters begin in 1920 when Wodehouse was 38, and almost all were addressed to four people: his beloved stepdaughter Leonora; Bill Townend, author; Guy Bolton, collaborator; and Dennis MacKail, novelist.

The editor has grouped the letters by subject matter (Dogs, Critics, Lyrics, etc.) except those to Leonora, which form a separate section. One reviewer spoke for most when he wrote of this grouping, "It plays merry hell with the chronology. We are continually dodging back and forward over the decades in a way that makes a fellow want to reach for the Dramamine."

The temptation is to quote endlessly. It's true that the letters are unpolished, but unpolished Wodehouse is smoother than the polished work of many another author.


"I go off the rails unless I stay all the time in an artificial world of my own creation. A real character in one of my books sticks out like a sore thumb."

"You're quite right about my books being early Edwardian. I look on myself as a historical novelist...I don't believe it matters and I intend to go on hewing to the butler line, let the chips fall where they may."

"The only way a writer can keep up to the mark is by examining each story quite coldly before he starts writing and ask himself if it is all right *as a story*. I mean, once you start saying to yourself, "This is a pretty weak plot as it stands, but I'm such a hell of a writer that my magic touch will make it all right," I believe you're done."

To Ethel, on their 59th anniversary: "Isn't it wonderful that we still love each other as much as ever except when I spill my tobacco on the floor, which I'll never do again."



Edited by  Frances Donaldson

"Listen, laddie, as life goes on, don't you find that all you need is about two real friends, a regular supply of books, and a Peke?"

"If only these blighters would realize that I started writing about Bertie Wooster and comic Earls because I was in America and couldn't write American stories and the only English characters the American public would read about were exaggerated dudes. It's as simple as that."

"My loathing for all critics...continues unabated. Damn their impertinence. Don't they know that I just write the[m] for you to read?"

He tried to to pay a French shopkeeper "with a piece of toilet paper which I thought was a 50 franc bill."

A writer and nothing but a writer: "I have never yet seen any spectacular spot that didn't disappoint me."

Notably the Grand Canyon. Personally, I've always liked wandering around in the background. I mean, I get much more kick out of a place like Droitwich, which has no real merits, than out of something like the Taj Mahal. I suppose what it is really is that one only likes the places which appeal to one as having possibilities in the way of locations for stories."

From Remsenberg: "This morning they are putting in a bar....God knows why we want a bar, but E. thought it a good idea. What is supposed to happen is that the County saunter in for a drink, and we mix it at the bar. The County little know that if they come within a mile of us we shall take to the hills."

He agreed with Kipling that the "the principal thing in writing is to cut." He thought of his characters as actors. "When I invent a good character for an early scene, I say to myself: if this were a play, we should have to find someone darned good to play this part, and if he found he had only a short scene in act one he would walk out."

"A thing I've never understood about these Victorian birds is why the hell they didn't they finish their novels before putting them out in serial forms. Why wait till the June number was on the bookstalls and then say, "By Jove, I must be thinking of something for the July instalment. Damn fools."

From Hollywood: "What a curious place this is. Directly I go outside my garden and see those miles of mining-camp houses, my heart sinks. But as long as I am in the garden I love it. Thank Heaven I don't have to go to the studio much.

There's no doubt about it, this is the abode of the damned. Every now and then I get very homesick. Still, the garden is lovely."

There are surprises: his great concern with plot instead of style; his bluntness about his critics; his interest in spiritualism; his eventual lack of resentment of William Connor, whose BBC attack so stirred up anger about PGW's Berlin broadcasts; his ordinary human dislikes, so easy to forget in an author who created the sunniest of worlds.

Wodehouse was an insatiable reader, but he had his limits. He disliked the works of Dickens ("I can't read it"), Jane Austen ("I was bored stiff"), Angela Thirkell, and Henry Fielding, among others. He greatly admired the novels of his friend Dennis Mackail, now nearly forgotten.

Anthony Lane, writing in the *Independent*, is severe on the editor:

"Wodehouse fiends have been sharpening their talons against Lady Donaldson ever since her 1982 biography of him, when she declared that she had never found his work very funny. This was like Boswell confessing that personally he found Johnson a bit of a dumbo, but he'd have a crack at him anyway. Time has done nothing to mend Lady Donaldson's cloth ears. Technically her editing is wobbly, with greetings and signoffs given for some letters but not others, footnotes that read like a postscript, and no indication that her chosen chunks are complete letters or snippets from something else. These things matter, and if Lady Donaldson can't be bothered to clarify them, then no one else will ever get the chance."

Whatever her faults as an editor, we can only be grateful to Lady Donaldson and the publisher for providing this treasure. It may be the last of Plum's writings we will ever see. We must rejoice and be glad in its possession.

. . . . .

I'm grateful to the following people who sent book reviews: Ellen Bentsen, Pauline Blanc, Donald Daniel, Bob Griffin (and his sainted mother-in-law), Bill Horn, Norman Murphy, Toni Rudersdorf, and Seth Sharpless. .

## A Few Quick Ones

We all know Plum's great line, "Although he was not disgruntled, neither could he be described as grunted." It has an echo in the essayist Joseph Epstein's "...the man who could not be described as irascible because he was permanently irasced." I don't know which author has priority; I came across Epstein's line in an old undated newspaper column by, I believe, George Will.

Dorothy Sherman found this on the back of a Bix Beiderbecke record jacket: "Bix had some unusual things in common with us, says Ashcroft. We discovered that he could quote long passages from P.G. Wodehouse as well as we could, and he could spot the approximate page and the exact character who said any chosen line from his books - he had written 48."

Donald Daniel writes that his parents "knew Thelma Cazalet and played tennis with her. A formidable lady, my father told me!" She was the sister-in-law of Plum's beloved stepdaughter Leonora, and a woman of considerable achievement off, as well as on, the tennis court. A note about her death appeared in *Plum Lines* last year.



Charles Bishop's admiration for the works of the great author P.G. Wodehouse found expression in a literary tea he provided at the Burlingame Public Library, near San Francisco, on Saturday afternoon, October 20. A white cloth was laid and cucumber sandwiches, fancy cookies, several kinds of tea and other goodies were provided in abundance. Several Wodehouse books were prominently displayed in a missionary effort directed at the unwashed. Many of the quality were in attendance. A good time was had by all.

Jan Kaufman found The Anglers Rest last year. I tell you truly: she was exploring Ireland just before our Wodehouse Pilgrimage when she came upon The Anglers Rest (no comma) in Knockmaroon, Chapelizod, Dublin, and stopped in for a beer. The proprietor had never heard of Wodehouse's pub. The flier she brought back invites us to "Come down to the Strawberry Beds and enjoy a relaxing lunch." Where we will find Colonel Carteret waiting for us, I suppose..

Bill Horn sends word of the death of Malcolm Muggeridge in a nursing home in Sussex on November 14. He was best known, of course, as a journalist and social critic. Wodehousians have long been grateful for the aid and comfort he gave to P.G. Wodehouse and his wife at the end of World War II, when the Wodehouses were "detained" by the French on the false accusation that Plum had aided the Germans with his wartime broadcasts. Muggeridge found sleeping quarters, food, and other creature comforts, and provided physical and moral support in a time of great need. "It was the only worthwhile thing I did in the war," Muggeridge said later.

In the Autumn *Plum Lines* I added the initials TWS to the names of all members and asked for opinions on the experiment. I had one positive vote and a number that were negative. The nay-sayers felt that the initials cluttered up the page and TWS membership was usually sufficiently clear from the context. I agree, and I've gone back to the TWS-less form in this issue.

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### The Oldest Member

He gazed at the girl like an ostrich goggling at a brass doorknob.

*Uncle Fred in the Springtime, 1939*

## Norman Ward

Norman Ward, perhaps Canada's leading humorous writer of the last three decades, a member of the Wodehouse Society and a contributor to *Plum Lines*, died on February 4, 1990.

Norman's own assessment of his career was given on a 1960 dust jacket:

At various times I have been a soda jerk, a production chaser in a wire mill, a secretary to a royal commission, a cartoonist's gag-writer, a journalist, a chairman of countless boards of conciliation in labour-management disputes, and a holder of all academic ranks from tutorial assistant to professor. I never actually wanted to be any of these things - the only ambition I ever had was to be a singer; and when you consider that many of the things I have done have involved a lot of work, while nowadays it takes neither talent nor experience to be a singer, there are times when I wonder where I got off the track. Part of the trouble, of course, is that I was born so lazy that I am ashamed of it, and I have been working like a dog since early youth to keep people from finding out about it.

Norman was born in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1918, and taught at the University of Saskatchewan for 41 years. He was a distinguished political scientist and the author of important books on Canadian politics and political history. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and was awarded the Order of Canada.

However, a much wider audience loved and respected Norman as a humorist. Three collections of his humorous writings have been published, one winning for him the Stephen Leacock Medal in 1960.

He ranked P.G. Wodehouse highest in his personal pantheon of writers. His two letters and autographed book from "Plum" were particularly prized; but his collection of Wodehousiana was extensive and included some rare play-scripts and programs.

We who were privileged to know Norman personally will long miss him. Yet we can treasure the generous inheritance of his writings, to be read and enjoyed again and again.

Note: This is an edited version of a considerably longer obituary provided by Norman's friend, Dr. William A.S. Sarjeant. ....OM

## Wodehous(e)(i)an ?

Jimmy Heineman was distraught over this spelling question when he raised it several months ago - sticking straws in his hair and so forth. If we don't get it settled soon I'm afraid he will break under the strain and develop bots and glanders. John Hannah provides the latest evidence in the discussion.

Dear OM,

As I have only recently received my copy of the summer issue of *Plum Lines*, I'm late in joining in the discussion of Wodehousean vs. Wodehousian. Of which you have doubtless already received many irrefutable opinions on both sides.

There will be those who have said that nouns ending in *e* should be made into adjectives by the addition of *an* (Shakespearean, Chilean, or even Herculean after sweeping an *s* under the rug). And I expect you've asked those people how they would spell adjectives meaning: of, or pertaining to, reptile and college. To which these same authorities have replied that they were referring only to proper names which end in *e*. Whereupon you no doubt asked them about such adjectives as Georgian, Augustinian, and Castilian.

Perhaps nobody has yet come up with Hannah's Rule: In English the combination of letters *ean* is never preceded by the letter *s*; except, of course, in the name Sean.

Rationale: If *ean* were allowed to follow *s*, Irish people, and some Scots, would be confused and go around pronouncing words like Malthushawn, Dickenshawn, Keynshawn. Also Wodehoushawn.

Consequently, the correct form is Wodehousian.

Or if you think that is a lot of baloney why don't you just decree, by OM fiat, which is proper, and inform the membership? Who would have more authority to decide the issue?

Best regards,

John Hannah

I agree with you about the spelling. I'm flattered, but you vastly overestimate my authority. I just work here. ....OM

## Norman Murphy Visits America

Col. Norman Murphy visited America in October, hitting the high spots in a quick swing around the country. (For those who came in late and are just settling down with their popcorn I should explain that Norman is a leading Wodehousian, our guide on *The Wodehouse Pilgrimage* last year, and author of *In Search of Blandings*, a book describing his investigations into the real-life origins of such places as Blandings Castle.) Three of his hosts wrote the following accounts - all of them, I suspect, were still slightly dazed in the wake of his visit.

After a couple of days in New York and Philadelphia he was off to Evanston, near Chicago, for a visit with Dan Garrison. What happened next is best told in Dan's own words:

### "Spud" Murphy in Chicago

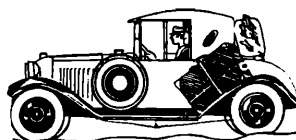
Norman arrived at the Second City's second airport, Midway, straight from the City of Brotherly Love. Better here than in Philadelphia, I thought, as we raced into the city at highly illegal speed. We had just 20 minutes to make a studio date with Milt Rosenberg of WGN Radio's "Extension 720" talk show. The plan was to discuss Wodehouse for two hours of a call-in program, but we had been pre-empted, so we got one hour of taping time instead. [The program was to be aired some time in November.] Norman Murphy, as those of you who have met him will already have guessed, is an ideal partner on a talk show: no awkward silences trying to remember who is betrothed to Sir Roderick Glossop in "Jeeves and the Greasy Bird," or the name of the story in which Bertie sports a David Niven moustache - no silences at all, awkward or otherwise, but a well-controlled radio voice.

After the taping, I took Norman outside to have a look at the Tribune Tower, which is studded with architectural fragments taken from lesser monuments of world civilization such as the Parthenon, the Great Wall of China, Taj Mahal, and St. Peter's Basilica. No kidding: it is a monument to American rapacity at its most sophomoric, and it is an understatement to say that Norman was more impressed than if he were viewing the original themselves. I could tell we were going to have a terrific weekend.

The main business Saturday was to see the great American prairie, about which Wodehouse was so lyrical in his unwritten works. The Master must have spent hours looking at this landscape on his rail trips

between New York and Hollywood, but he had only the foggiest notion of where it lay. He has Spectatia Huskisson, for example, training her voice in Snake Bite, Michigan by calling the cattle home "in the teeth of the Western hurricanes."

For a crash course in the prairie, we visited the local botanic garden to inspect some real six-foot prairie grass; then north and west through farm country to Walworth, Wisconsin (another state for The Colonel), a charming and truly rural prairie town. At exactly ten minutes to four, as we were getting out of the car to photograph a twelve by fifteen foot tonsorial palace with a false front



(Oh joy!), Norman came up with the absurd suggestion that we should stop in somewhere for tea. I tried to explain that midwestern farmers were not in the habit of stopping for tea, but he would have none of that, and lo and behold what should we find but a little cafe run by an English emigrée whose courteous and efficient waitress produced some highly suitable tea ("Do you have it in a pot?" asked Murphy. "A what?" replied the prairie Postlethwaite).

Whatever you call those metal vessels with hinged lids that hot water comes in over here, The Colonel had considerable trouble persuading his tea to come along peaceably into the cup, much to the amusement of the steak and eggs sitting at a nearby table. After a polite interval our servitor returned with a new supply of hot water to replace what had found its way onto the table: "Well, we've made quite a little mess here, haven't we?" I think The Colonel took it all pretty well, but I was hiding my face in my napkin.

We took it easy Sunday while Norman got his circadian rhythms straightened out. He had been going at warp speed since leaving England, and the excitement of life in the Midwest was more than he had counted on. Besides, I have a two-foot stack of uncollected Wodehouse fiction and essays (photocopies supplied mainly by Chas Gould and Len



Lawson for my Whowhouse II project) that Norman had seen and was eager to read before leaving. Show me someone who carries on about the speed of Murphy's speech, and I will show you someone who has not seen him read. He romped through some fifteen hundred pages of minutely printed Wodehouse and took notes in a total of three hours. It would have taken him less, but for the conversation he was holding with me at the time; the fact is, I was afraid the tip of his index finger would overheat and I thought if he could wave it in the air a little it would cool off.

Ellen and Bill Bentsen were our hosts for supper that evening; they had visited the Murphys in Cumbria a month earlier, cementing a friendship that I hope will bring Norman and his wife to the Midwest many times in the future.

It is always a pleasure to talk with Norman Murphy about Wodehouse; it was a special delight to talk with him about other things as well: his life in the British army (where his military nickname "Spud" - for the digging tool, not the tuber exhumed by it - was given him in honor of his Irish name), his work as a sleuth of English tradition, and his close understanding of how things work in the Royal household. In a weekend of reflection about things English and American, I was reminded that England is a collection of odd traditions inhabited by natives.



Norman's next stop was in the San Francisco area, where a motley crew of Wodehousians met him at the airport. It was here on the Pacific coast that the Great Hat-Dipping took place. Norman carried a battered forty-year-old felt hat with him throughout the trip. (Wore it, in fact. In public.) He had previously dipped it into some of the most highly respected oceans of the world. Here he finally dipped it into the Pacific.

A quick tour of windy, hilly San Francisco, then a happy band of Wodehouse followers gathered in a downtown hotel for dinner with Norman, followed by his "insider" lecture and slide show on Wodehouse. (He can show the same slides with altered commentary for those wretched outsiders unaware of Plum and his works.)

Norman spent the next couple of days making a great many small discoveries about America: wooden houses that don't rot, the operation of Doug Stow's letterpress printing shop, earthquake remains, escrow, a historical hollow redwood tree, and so on and on. I've never met anyone else so interested in gathering facts, so curious about his surroundings.

Then he flew off to Los Angeles to investigate the three houses in Beverly Hills where PGW lived during his two stints in Hollywood in the 1930s. Then to Tombstone, Arizona where he "felt fifteen years old again." And to Houston, Texas, where he spent a couple of days with Toni and Bill Rudersdorf. Here's Toni's report:

Dear Ed:

This morning, far too early, I stood aside and allowed a Continental airplane to take our Norman from us. Already he was snorting and pawing the turf listening for the starting gun at the arrival gate in Shreveport, Louisiana, his next stop. As he bounded away in that mettlesome way of his I had a sharp vision of the intrepid Pilgrimage hurrying to keep up. What a guy!

You were right, Norman is a "curious fellow." He has a talent for making things as commonplace as square washtubs objects of curiosity and interest. And few before him have made so many friends by poking along asking questions. Even a common pier fisherman flickered briefly in the spotlight, "Expert for a day" on Gulf of Mexico aquatic life.

By the evening of Norman's lecture my dog had shifted to the guest room, my cat had decided Norman's shoulders were the proper resting place for her, and every other word my husband spoke was some quote or other from this brainy fountain disguised as a guy in a floppy hat. The Wodehouse readers of Houston never had it so good. At the end of the presentation, when they ought to have been clustering around the reception tables and getting theirs, they stuck like limpets to their chairs, spouting

questions as if it were a competition. No one in that eager crowd belonged to The Wodehouse Society but Norman and me, but everyone gave a most satisfactory indication that this sort of gathering was a consummation devoutly to be wished and not too dusty! Some are even planning to get together and further pursue the club-spirit.

What luck for Bill and me to share a couple of days in the happy whirlwind Norman brings with him. What luck he didn't forget his hat because, as he raced for the airplane, I saw him pause. Turning, he lifted his hat and gave it a wave. A simple gesture but cheering to remember.

What fun we have had. I wish you had been here.

Pip-pip

Toni



At that point Norman disappeared into the Great Beyond: the American Deep South, from whose bourn no traveler returns without a certain pleasant softness of speech, an occasional mellifluous y'all. (Standard English has needed this second person plural for centuries.) He must have skeeddaddled, on from city unto city at the gateways of the day: Shreveport, Vicksburg, Natchez, New Orleans, and finally the little town of Middleburg, North Carolina, where he visited Ann Nicholson. She writes:

"One has not lived until he has had "The Colonel" as a house guest. I am delighted that he chose Middleburg as one of his stops. His visit gave new meaning to P.G. Wodehouse. I took him to a bar-b-que restaurant, where I introduced him to hush puppies and bar-b-que as it is prepared in this part of

North Carolina (we have minced, not sliced, bar-b-que). Also had him eat some Brunswick stew. To be honest, I'm not really sure how he liked this fare!"

Ann lives on a 400-acre tobacco plantation. She took Norman to a local tobacco auction, and I strongly suspect he left Middleburg knowing more about tobacco auctions than most of the local people.

Washington D.C., Gettysburg, New York, and Remsenburg completed his trip. If you have read this far and still need to be told that Norman Murphy is a remarkable man, I haven't done my job as editor. Norman visited America, and America will never be the same again.

Information and New Memberships  
Marilyn MacGregor

Dues Payments and Address Changes  
Tom Wainwright

Editorial Contributions  
Ed Ratcliffe, OM

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## The Queen Mother's Ninetieth

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother celebrated her ninetieth birthday in August. It was an event of importance, not only in the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, but in many other parts of the world where the Queen Mother has been for more than half a century a symbol of continuity and of the enduring heritage of the sceptred isle. It was an event of special interest for the devoted followers of P.G. Wodehouse.

An unexplained dedication appears in my Penguin paperback reprint of *The Pothunters*, Plum's first novel, published on September 18, 1902, shortly before his 21st birthday. The dedication reads as follows:

To Joan, Effie  
and Ernestine Bowes-Lyon

Who were these people? No identification appears in the book. Nor in three Wodehouse biographies and five other books that might be expected to reveal the secret. I finally unearthed it in Norman Murphy's *In Search of Blandings*. Norman got at it, typically, by way of a Wodehouse novel, *Mike*, whose hero has three younger sisters, only one of whom has a part in the plot. So why, Norman wondered, did Wodehouse put all three little girls into the story?

At this point Norman remembered the unusual dedication of *The Pothunters*, looked up the three Bowes-Lyon girls in *Burke's Peerage*, and found that they were the grand-daughters of the thirteenth Earl of Strathmore. Two letters written by Effie Bowes-Lyon in her old age reveal that she and her two sisters, as little girls, had known Plum well when he was a schoolboy and for several years after, when he was beginning his writing career. She wrote that "...he used to come to tea with us in London and we used usually to play card games or writing games. PG did once come down to stay with us at Lyme Regis." Also, "...he asked our advice as to whether he should give up his job and take up writing as a full-time career and of course we said "yes."... I think it was important to remember that we were all little girls when he used to visit us....I think he could be friends with us because we were little girls." And so came about the dedication of his first novel.

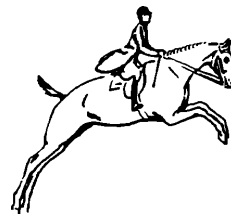
The Queen Mother is the first cousin of those three girls.

Another link between the Queen Mother and PGW began in 1932 when his stepdaughter Leonora married Peter Cazalet, owner of a large estate near Tonbridge in Kent. Peter rode as an amateur in steeplechases for a number of years after the marriage, and became a trainer in 1939. "Later," says Plum's biographer Frances Donaldson, "he had the honour to train for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother."

Another connection was made public on June 8, 1988, when the Queen Mother unveiled a blue plaque on the house in Mayfair that had been the Wodehouse residence from 1924 to 1934. In her remarks she stated publicly what had been known for many years - that she was a Wodehouse fan of long standing. She put it more gracefully:

"I am particularly pleased to have been invited to unveil this plaque as for many years I have been an ardent reader of P.G. Wodehouse. Indeed, I am proud to say that his very first book *The Pothunters* was dedicated to members of my family."

We are very happy that the Queen Mother is an honorary member of the Wodehouse Society.



## "Jeeves and Wooster"

The newest television version of these two gentlemen appeared on British TV last spring and is now showing up on American screens. It has received mixed but generally favorable reviews. My own unscientific opinion poll indicates that Wodehouse fans like it quite well.

Here's a sample of critical opinion from the British *Weekend Telegraph*:

When the TV chips are down, you can't really adapt P.G. Wodehouse. More than any 20th century writer I can think of, his humour is of a peculiarly literary kind. Every syllable, every simile, every piece of period slang, has long been canonised as an untouchable whole...

Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie, the stars of "Jeeves and Wooster," concede that their new series...may fail to give ultimate satisfaction to "Wodehouse maniacs." Speaking as one who discovered the Master at the age of 12, I have to say they are absolutely right.

Clive Exton, the adaptor, thinks the appeal of the series will be principally to non-Wodehousians. "There's no way," he says sensibly, "that you can please those for whom the original texts are carved in stone."

Adapting "Plum" Wodehouse for an audience likely to range from dyed-in-the-wool fanatics to total novices was, says Exton, "fairly terrifying. I didn't have any clearly thought-out system - I just picked the bits that stuck in my mind."

He was sufficiently encouraged by the reaction of Wodehouse experts like his biographer, Richard Osborne, to take on a second series, which will include..."The Purity of the Turf."

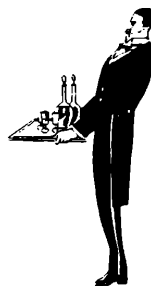
From the *Daily Telegraph*:

I thought Fry and Laurie gave definitive performances in their roles. Their joyous rapport and obvious deep affection for a writer whose work unites the generations transfigured the television screen.

Stephen Fry, who plays Jeeves in the series, has been a deep-dyed Wodehouse fan since an aunt gave him *Very Good, Jeeves* for his 11th birthday. "The following day," he says, "I went out and bought every Wodehouse book I could find. I now own about 150 original editions and 300 to 400 ordinary hardbacks."

Here are some of his comments about the series:

Playing an immortal fictional character like Reginald Jeeves places something of a burden on an actor. With Wodehouse, as with Dickens, the problem is especially acute. The physical description that exists is comically hyperbolic and hard to embody. We are told that Jeeves is darkish and respectful looking: no more.



But how about "imperceptible flickers around the lips" which are all that pass for a smile from the man. If they are imperceptible then *de facto* no one is going to notice that I am attempting them. How about Jeeves giving small coughs that sound "like a sheep clearing its throat on a blade of grass"? Go on, I dare you. No one's listening, have a bash at such a cough. You see? And while you're at it see if you can make yourself look like an affronted stuffed frog without attracting the attention of the constabulary.

These are just surface details. Imagine the realities of such a life: having a man to fold your clothes, run your bath, powder your tooth-brush, bring your breakfast, extricate you from romantic entanglements. How, in this democratic age, do we enact such a relationship?

Wodehouse's world is a world of the mind, an Eden that can be no more precisely located in time than Illyria. Every attempt to put flesh on such a dream is only a gesture. But it is such a happy world, peopled by such eminently companionable and interesting creatures that to have lived in it, even under camera lights and at the slow pace of filming, was an unthinkable luxury, like diving into a soufflé. If it inspires just one more new reader to go to a bookshop and try the real thing then bung ho and jilly-willy-hoo.

A letter writer in the *Daily Telegraph*, critical of Hugh Laurie, had a response from Laurie himself:

Sir: ...not all lovers of P.G. Wodehouse are...affectionately inclined towards Laurie's physical contortions as Bertie Wooster.

In earlier days his performance would not be described as acting as all, but "mugging," the pulling of faces,...grimaces, scowls and popyeyed surprise....

In the books Wodehouse limits Bertie to a severely brief range of expressions, usually dumb lack of understanding or unexpected delight, and these would have been enough for an earlier generation of comic actors....

RONALD HASTINGS  
London SW13

Sir: I am humbled by Mr Hasting's remarks on my attempt at Bertie Wooster. On quite a few accounts I am inclined to agree with him and promise to do better if I am given another chance. But where does he get the idea that Wodehouse "limits Bertie to a severely brief range of expressions"? Have I gone mad, or are the books written in the first person? How would you expect a narrator to describe his own facial expressions, and if he did, how could you be sure he was accurate (I asked with a huge, sneering frown? Or did I?)

HUGH LAURIE  
London WC2

From Maidenhead in Berkshire, John Fletcher writes that the series "was controversial because they mixed up the characters and made up a lot of new stuff. But they were remarkably faithful to the spirit; I took them just as a brand new set of Jeeves stories. You may know the French view that translations are like women; the faithful ones are uninteresting and the interesting ones are unfaithful. It isn't true of women, but it is remarkably true of attempts to translate Wodehouse into another medium. In one of the following interviews, the actor playing Jeeves said that Wodehouse enthusiasts were all mad. I thought you would like to know."

In Texas the *Houston Post* critic called the series "dashedly amusing" and found that "British comics Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie are excellent as the valet and twit."

Also in Houston, Toni Rudersdorf described her

reactions: "These Wooster/Jeeves alter egos are flavour and substance, they are the real thing, they do it well and properly. One is compelled to bellow Bravos! at the television screen and let the dog share the cookies."

In Minnesota, Bill Horn inserted a notice in the monthly program guide of the local station that televises the series, informing viewers of the existence of our Society and including a name and address where they could write for more information.

After watching three episodes my response has changed from "Well, it's not bad," to "It's really good, and generally as well done as it can be done." Note carefully that I'm one of those Wodehouse fanatics who are supposed to be impossible to please. I'm looking forward to the last two episodes, and more next year.

I must thank a number of members who sent material for this article: Vic Bolwell, Jim Earl, John Fletcher, Bob Griffin, Bill Horn, Norman Murphy, and Toni Rudersdorf.

