



Plum Lines

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE WODEHOUSE SOCIETY SPRING 1992

Notes from Plum

Ronnie Levine sends this important Wodehouse letter. The letter was probably written in August 1909, according to the McIlvaine bibliography, and was addressed to L. H. Bradshaw, a fellow writer whom Wodehouse met in America. In it Wodehouse declares his intention of making the great

transition in his career, from school stories to adult stories. True to his word, his last school story, *Mike*, was published a month later. In May 1910 appeared *The Intrusion of Jimmy*, his second adult novel (the first being *Love Among the Chickens* of 1906, solitary in a thicket of school stories).

The Earle
103 WAVERLY PLACE
One door from Washington Sq. North
NEW YORK
DAVID H. KNOTT

Tuesday.

Dear Bradshaw.

Thank awfully for your letter. Worrying of you wanting to give me a leg-up, but I'm afraid it ~~wouldn't do.~~ So far from wanting to get my boys' books published this side, I look on them as a guilty past which I must

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rush up. I want to start here with a
clean sheet as a writer of grown-up
stories. The Captain books are all right
in their way, but their point of view
is too immature. They would kill my
chances of doing anything big. I don't
want people here to know me as
a writer of school-stories. I want to
break into the big league. It wouldn't
do me much good people saying I
was better than Andrew Horn when I
want them today I'm better than O.
Henry. The school stories ^{have} covered their
time, and it would hurt my chances to
have them hobbing up when I'm trying
to do bigger work. I have given up school
stories absolutely.

I think I saw the Pilgrims in
Broadway today. At least there was a
group of apparent Britons, with
one man on crutches.

I hope the serial is going strong. I
return the syndicate.

Yours ever

P. Wodehouse

This letter is part of a collection of
letters written by Wodehouse to Bradshaw
and purchased by Levine at Sotheby's
"about 10 or eleven years ago." The collec-
tion is listed, with many quotes, on pages

356-358 of the McIlvaine bibliography.
Osborne discussed the collection in "New P.
G. Wodehouse Material: Letters & Notes of
His Apprentice Years," *Encounter* LXV no. 2:
(July/August 1985) pp 60-66.

New England chapter

by David
Landman

The region which brought you Puritan rigor and Transcendental loopiness makes amends by announcing the formation of a New England chapter of the Wodehouse Society. The first meeting, co-sponsored by Maria Sensale and Marty Gottlieb, attracted a dozen of the area's finest. The first item of business was a round-robin of introductions, after which Marty Gottlieb, the unofficial chairman, discovered he had misplaced his clipboard with the agenda. All agreed this was an auspicious beginning. The remainder of the meeting was spent eating, drinking, and exchanging favorite Wodehouse gags. The next meeting is scheduled for April, at which time the chapter's name will be determined.

This is very good news. I think the formation of the chapter was inspired by the discovery at the New York convention of how much fun it is to get together with other Plummies and take trivial things seriously. We wish you much happiness in your plain thinking and high living, and shall follow your future career with considerable interest. Please keep us informed of whatever you're up to.

I have joined three literary societies in the last ten years (Wodehouse, Jane Austen and Dickens) and have made in each case the same curious discovery: they do a lot of eating and drinking. And here I thought they were dedicated to the intellectual life. —OM

\$\$\$ or £££?

Just a reminder to our recent convention leers: our treasury is looking pale and wan these days because of the extra expenses of the convention. If you haven't sent in your voluntary contribution of \$25 per person to make up the overrun, why not do it now? Think how virtuous you'll feel!

TWS pins are here!

Judy Finnegan writes:

Dear Ed,

Due to the impertunity of the members and the delightful correspondence I received regarding the lapel pins, I was able to wheel and deal and procure another set of 100 pins, while they last at the old price of \$10 each. They are now available.

Sincerely,
Judy Finnegan

This is welcome news indeed. Judy designed these beautiful little pins and had them made as welcoming presents for members who attended our 1989 convention in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The few she had left were sold out some time ago.

The pins measure $\frac{3}{4}$ " by 1" and display a glossy black top hat, w and the gold letters TV colored cover of a book with gold-edged leaves. Snazzy!

Order yours from Judy Finnegan, 3414 Fleetwood Drive, Kalamazoo MI 49008, for \$10 each, including postage and packing.

Information and new memberships
Marilyn MacGregor

Editorial contributions
Ed Ratcliffe, OM

Dues payments and address changes
Tom Wainwright

All quotations from P. G. Wodehouse are reprinted by permission of the Trustees of the Wodehouse estate.

Dues are \$15 per year.

Financial report, 1991

Yellow means dues

by Tom
Wainwright,
treasurer

Beginning balance, Dec 31, 1990	\$4703.15
Income	
Dues, back issues, etc	\$5870.00
Interest earned	138.37
Contributions to cover convention overrun	<u>520.00</u>
	6528.37
Expenses	
Plum Lines (copying, mailing)	\$3815.84
Computer equipment and software (Note 1)	950.00
McIlvaine bibliography	138.94
Correspondence with members (stationery, postage)	360.13
Convention overrun (Note 2)	<u>2953.17</u>
	8218.35
Ending balance, Dec 31, 1991	\$3013.17

Note 1. Ed Ratcliffe found last summer that better equipment was needed to produce the newsletter, and bought a computer, monitor, keyboard, printer and software at his own expense for about \$4500, expecting to use it almost entirely for the newsletter. The society reimbursed him for the \$950 cost of the monitor and software, with the understanding that he will repay the money, pro-rated, if he resigns as editor within three years from the date of reimbursement.

Note 2. The convention overrun occurred because some expenses of the convention were underestimated during planning and some unexpected expenses were incurred at the last moment. New York is an expensive city, and planning and arranging the convention from across the continent was an uncertain matter. A contribution of \$25 from each conventioneer is needed to wipe out the overrun. (About 115 people attended.)

Many of our members owe dues this time of year. If your dues are due, a yellow sheet has been attached to the front of your newsletter.

Dues are US \$15 per year for an individual or a family. Please send your dues promptly—it makes life easier for our treasurer. The reinstatement process is particularly grueling, involving as it does an all night vigil under an oak tree for each lapsed member and the recitation of certain Druidical incantations.

Your check or money order should be made out to The Wodehouse Society. Please send your dues to:

Tom Wainwright

Members outside the United States can pay dues in any of three ways: (a) with an international money order, (b) with a check specifying US dollars, drawn on a US bank or the US branch of a bank outside the US at which the check may be cleared, or (3) with \$15 in US currency.

Few things in life are more embarrassing than the necessity of having to inform an old friend that you have just got engaged to his fiancée.

Big Money, 1931

In a pig's eye

by Mindi
Reid

Bacon,
headcheese,
pork pie,
ham;
At times I've sunk as low as
Spam;

Bratwurst, pork chops...
I've lived convinced
that omelettes MUST contain hamlettes,
minced;
What country breakfast could be complete
without its share of porcine meat
But something now disturbs my peace
whenever I sit down to feast

with a trencherwoman's true élan
on members of the piggy clan:
I seem to see the august brow
of Shropshire's celebrated sow....

its majestic Berkshire blackness creased
with sorrow for its kin deceased!
She seems to shake her massive head
In mourning for her brethren dead:

"Oh, Cruel Girl! O Bitter Pill!
It's enough to put one off one's swill!
The sight of YOU, devouring pieces
of Cousins, Uncles....Aunts and Nieces!"

She makes me feel the lowest cur,
this ebony sow-dowager;
My spirit stirs....I would protest!
For pork lends mealtime zip and zest—

Such aromas! flavours!—alas, I trow
my pig-attuned palate must "Just Say No":
Like Bertie under Dahlia's glare
my weaker will can't take the wear.
Other fauna yet must quail
when I attack the dinner pail:
kippers shiver in their tins
chickens won't forgive my sins;

Yet I can lift my head at last,
sit down, clear-browed to my repast
A sacrifice it is, but I
Can look the EMPRESS in the eye.

Pig tails

Jimmy Heineman plunges us once more
into the murky depths of Wodehouse
scholarship with the following letter:

Dear Sir:

I have often pondered upon, and long endured the
uncertainty of whether or not a pig's tail twists
clockwise or counter-clockwise; and more especially
the direction taken by the tail of the Empress of
Blandings. Even James Hogg in his philosophical and
scholarly tome, *Lord Emsworth's Annotated Whiffle*,
avoids the subject and leaves it unelucidated. Can
anyone with a sufficiently catholic knowledge of pigs'
tails help me out of this quagmire of porcine ignorance
in which I am wallowing?

I am, Sir, your obedient servant.

James H. Heineman

The question is complex and difficult—a
quick look at your friendly neighborhood pig
won't solve it. The direction of twist may be
breed-dependent, sex-dependent, even (and I
think this is quite likely) hemisphere-depen-
dent: clockwise in the northern hemisphere,
counter-clockwise for pigs observed by our
Australian and South African members. Or the
direction may be random, in which case a vital
fact about the Empress is forever beyond our
knowledge.

My *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is no better than
Whiffle—tail twist isn't even mentioned.

Jim Earl, situated as he is in Shrewsbury,
practically in the pig sty of Blandings Castle
itself, may be uniquely qualified to answer
such a question as this about a Berkshire sow.
I await his word with breathless anticipation.

To avoid ambiguity I propose that respon-
dents specify the direction of twist as seen by
an observer situated *behind* the pig—a view
from aft forward, as it were.

I was compelled to remind myself that an
English gentleman does not swat a sitting
redhead. *Jeeves in the Offing*, 1960

For "oink" read "nghawghghnk"

Auberon Waugh thinks this slice of Wodeshousian ham is the literary find of the year

Lord Emsworth's annotated Whiffle

Edited by James Hogg. Michael Joseph, £12.99

All devotees of the Blandings Castle series of novels by P. G. Wodehouse must have brooded, in their time, about Lord Emsworth's favourite, and possibly only, reading—Augustus Whiffle on *The Care of the Pig*. There he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one.

Hundreds of thousands of people who read *Galahad at Blandings* or *Pigs Have Wings* or *Lord Emsworth and Others* in snatched moments between the frenetic study of newspapers, colour supplements, review sections and magazines, must have envied him his simple pleasures. Even so, it strikes me as exceptionally brave of James Hogg and Michael Joseph to have produced a drastically pruned re-issue of the masterpiece for our delectation, even with Lord Emsworth's annotations.

Wodehouse may be going through something of a revival, but few of those who have enjoyed the Jeeves series on television have heard of Blandings, or Beach, or Emsworth, the Efficient Baxter, Lady Constance or Gally or Freddie Threepwood. Even fewer have much interest in pigs. And Whiffle, of course, is uniquely interested in pigs.

Perhaps it is not necessary to be interested in pigs to enjoy James Hogg's high, esoteric *belles lettres* of the Nineties, but it is certainly necessary to have an exceptional awareness of the comic possibilities of the pig, an acceptance of the proposition that jokes about pigs, when piled one on the other for 139 pages, can be funnier and funnier rather than less and less funny. The country will divide, no doubt, into two schools. Let them contend, as Mao Tse-Tung might have said. I am totally converted by these efforts of Hogg (I believe it is his real name) to the first school.

Jokes about pigs, about the Edwardian attitude to pigs, and about jokes about the Edward attitude may not start life with any great advantage in the England of Mr Major, Dr George Carey and Andrew Neil, but they get funnier and funnier and funnier as time goes on. I shall try to demonstrate this, but it may not be possible in the space available.

We start with a joke which has nothing whatever to do with pigs, possibly to soften us up. In the fly-leaf Lord Emsworth has written (obviously in a distressed moment): "When Plimsoll arrives, tell him that Veronica used to be engaged to Freddie."

This joke is not explained until 10 pages later in the course of a *dramatis personae* in Hogg's Preface. Freddie, we are told, is Lord Emsworth's not very bright younger son. Plimsoll is explained thus: "Tipton Plimsoll was the rich American suitor of Veronica Wedge, daughter of Colonel and Lady Hermione Wedge (q.v.) and niece of Lord Emsworth." The *aide-memoire*, jotted by Lord Emsworth on the fly-leaf of this volume, should have read: "When Plimsoll arrives, *don't* tell him that Veronica was once engaged to Freddie."

Neither Plimsoll, nor Freddie nor (I think) Lady Hermione is ever mentioned again. There is a Wodehousian casualness, not to say a Nabokovian stylishness about this little jest which emerges again and again in the writing and reassures the reader, just when the tension is beginning to flag, that he is in the hands of a master. From internal evidence I infer that Hogg is over 50. What has he been doing all this time?

For the most part, as I say, the book is a treatise on the Care of the Pig as it might have been written by an officer-class enthusiast in 1898 and revised in 1915. To convey some idea of the cumulative humour of Whiffle's approach, perhaps I should start with his suggested list of pig remedies: "The *strangles or quinsy* (a dosing with ipercacuanha, white hellebore and tartar). *Wild Fire* (*gangrenous erysipelas*) (a purgative of Epsom salts in soapsuds will often clear the trouble). *The scours* (for piglets, a little soot in the feed, and a teaspoonful of alum water twice a day). *The blind staggers* (causes the pig to gyrate, nearly always in the same direction. Pour melted lard or castor oil into one of the ears, preferably that towards which the pig turns. Another remedy is a sharp blow in the middle of the

forehead). *Inversion of the anus* (apply a little laudanum to the affected part, and push it back whence it came). *Lice* (rub in a mixture of one part lard to two parts kerosene)."

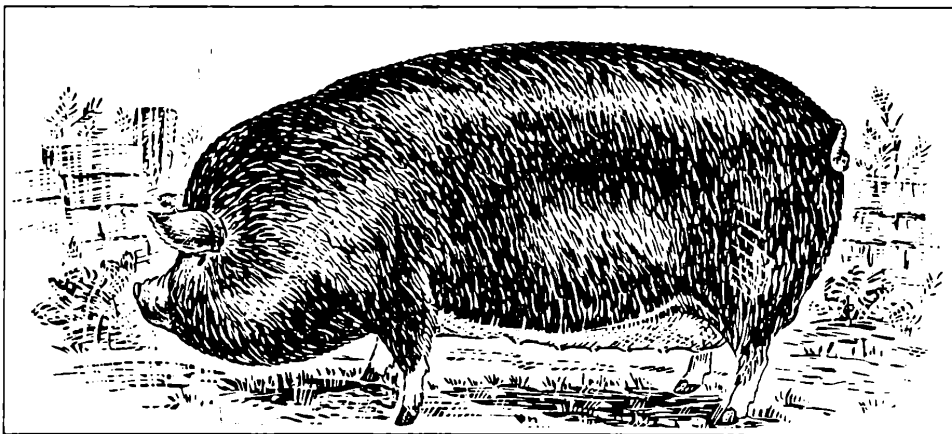
And so we go on, through a *catalogue raisonné* of principal pig breeds, pig dishes, (black puddings, chitterlings, stomach, skin, lardy Johns, Lincolnshire chine, brains, brawn, hog's pudding) and pig calls: "*Threat Call*: a short, barking 'khaargk,' as if testily clearing the throat....*Fear*: Shakespeare's 'Weke! Weke!' So cries a pig prepared for the spit....*Feeding*: a muttered 'ghwoosh, ghwoosh, ghwoosh'....*Sow summoning piglets to feed*: a rapid sniffing 'phghwoo-phghwoo-phghwoo-phghwoo'....*Contentment*: Mr Treadgold believes the oft-used 'oink' altogether lacks the richness of the actual sound. After much thought, he renders the grunt of a pig at ease as 'nghawghghnk'."

Some people won't find this book at all funny. I must admit that some of the jokes are funnier than others. The accumulation of comic names seems a bit relentless at the beginning, but they get better as the book proceeds. I particularly like the occasional burst of pig enthusiast's fine writing: "Finally, what have been called the Dark Ages of pig-rearing drew

to a close. Men of destiny came forward ready to devote their lives to the service of a neglected animal. They were to bring order out of chaos, comeliness out of monstrosity, and turn ridicule into acclaim." For my own part, I feel that Hogg's *Annotated Whiffle* is one of the very few worthwhile literary books of the year. Anybody who does not receive it for Christmas must resign himself to the fact that his friends think he has no sense of humour.

Norman Murphy sent this enthusiastic review from the English *Daily Telegraph* of December 15, 1991. Its author, Auberon Waugh, is the son of Evelyn Waugh, whose praise of Wodehouse appears on the back cover of every Penguin Wodehouse: "Mr Wodehouse's idyllic world can never stale. He will continue to release future generations from captivity that may be more irksome than our own. He has made a world for us to live in and delight in."

The English edition of *Whiffle* is available in America from Charles Gould, Kent School, Kent CT 06757. An American edition has just been published by James Heineman and can be ordered by phone from its distributor at (800) 343 3531. Its price is \$16.95 plus postage; credit cards are accepted.



The Berkshire: 'The plain fact is that an exaggerated facial contour means a corresponding deficiency in the flank,' says Whiffle

Something new

by Len
Lawson

I have just received *A Common Reader*, catalog 67, from the company of the same name at 141 Tompkins Ave, Pleasantville NY 10570. It contains quite a few PGW paperbacks plus most of the books about PGW that have been published in the last few years. You should get on their mailing list.

Tony Ring and William Hardwick write that Random Century Audiobooks in England has recently published these Wodehouse books as audio cassettes:

Uncle Fred in the Springtime ISBN 1 85686 047 7
Lord Emsworth and Others ISBN 1 85686 067 1
Leave It to Psmith ISBN 1 85686 046 9

All are read by Martin Jarvis, a well-known British actor. All are double tapes, lasting about three hours. The two novels are abridged. Price is £7.99 per book. Tony says the tapes may be ordered from The Century Sales Department, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA, phone 071 973 9740, fax 071 828 8881. I do not know of an American distributor for the tapes.

Jan Kaufman—of course—discovered two recordings of the musical *Anything Goes* in the latest Barnes and Noble catalog. The price of the EMI compact disc (No. 1767268) is \$16.95; the cassette (No. 1767276) is \$10.95. (The Barnes and Noble address is given below.)

John McGlinn has resurrected the original 1934 version of the musical and recorded it here for the first time. The original book, by Wodehouse and Guy Bolton, had to be rewritten because a disaster at sea, such as was hinted at in the play, actually occurred just before the play went into production. The rewriting was done by Lindsay and Crouse and hardly a trace of the original remained. That little was profitable, however, as shown in a letter from Wodehouse to a friend (in *Performing Flea*) several months after the opening:

Just got the *Anything Goes* script from America. There are two lines of mine left in it, and so far I am receiving £50 a week apiece for them. That's about £3 10s [or \$17] a word, which is pretty good payment, though less, of course, than my stuff is worth.

Jan also found the *World of Jeeves*—which includes all the Jeeves short stories—in the

Daedalus Books catalog. Number in the catalog is 11102, price is \$12.98 plus \$4.50 postage, plus tax for Maryland residents. The Daedalus address is given below.

The newly published Whiffle pig book is now available from an American as well as an English publisher. See details with the "For 'oink'..." article elsewhere in this issue.

A Man of Means, recently published in a limited edition of 200 by John Fletcher in England, is now also available from Frederick Menschaar in New York. The book was written by Wodehouse and C. H. Bovrill and serialized in *The Strand Magazine* in 1914, but never before published in book form. Menschaar's price is \$90 plus \$3 postage. His address is given below. The Winter 1991 *Plum Lines* tells how to order from John Fletcher.

The following is a list of book dealers who carry Wodehouse material. This column often lists a few of these dealers when they send catalogs, but a comprehensive list such as this, published occasionally, should also be useful.

Wodehouse specialists

(These dealers generally carry a full range of material from reading copies to rare first editions.)

Bertie Books, Box 8874, Lowell MA
01853

Charles Gould, Kent School, Kent CT
06757

Frederick Menschaar, 140 Cabrini Blvd,
Apt 132, New York 10033

Nigel Williams, 196 Court Lane,
Dulwich, London SE21 7ED, England

Modern 1st editions, including PGW. These dealers generally carry a wide selection of authors, but usually in first or rare editions only.

Limestone Hills Book Shop, Box 1125,
Glen Rose, TX 76043

Hawthorne Books, 7 College Park Drive,
Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol BS10 7AN,
England

The following two men also deal in modern first editions. Neither issues catalogs, but they welcome want lists and each had an impressive stock of PGW material at our Kalamazoo convention.

Wilfrid de Freitas, Box 883, Stock Exchange

Tower, Montreal, Canada H4Z1K2
Address for US correspondents:
Box 819, Champlain NY 129191
Thomas Taylor, Box 85386, Westland MI
48185

New paperbacks

A Common Reader, 141 Tompkins Ave,
Pleasantville NY 10570

Remainders

These companies also carry many new books,
usually at discounts.

Barnes and Noble, 126 Fifth Ave, New
York NY 10011

Daedalus Books, Box 9132, Hyattsville
MD 20781

Edward R. Hamilton, Falls Village CT
06031

Catalogs received (addresses listed above)

Bertie Books

Charles Gould

Limestone Hills Book Shop

Frederick Menschaar

Nigel Williams

Chepe laugh

William Hardwick sends this item, with
the above headline, from the English
Daily Telegraph :

Jeeves may have thought it a rum do, but
one of his master's finer moments, in the P. G.
Wodehouse story "The Great Sermon Handicap,"
is being translated into Swedish, Romanian,
Afrikaans, Old Norse, Middle English and almost
any other language one cares to mention.

James Heineman, an American, wants to
introduce Bertie Wooster to foreigners, and
selected this particular story, in which Bertie and
chums run a book on the length of sermons.
Bertie's musings on London provided translators
with a challenge. "All my pals were away," runs
the original. "Most of the theaters were shut, and
they were digging up Piccadilly in spadefuls."

In Chaucerian English this becomes: "Alle
my goode felawes waren away, many hostelries
weren yshet, and the dycheres swonken alday in
the Chepe." Nynorsk, a Scandinavian dialect,
yields: "Alle kompisane mine var borke, die flestre
teatre var stendge, og vegarfeidarane moke opp
Piccadilly spastikk for spastikk."
Sounds like the Drones Club late on any Monday
evening.

I'm afraid the writer was a little
mistaken about Jimmy's motives. There
aren't many foreigners, or natives for that
matter, who can be reached only through
Chaucerian English, Ancient Hebrew, or
Old Norse, and these are just a few of the
47 languages in which Jimmy has made the
story available so far.

Piccadilly was "one of the ancient
highways leading westward out of Lon-
don," says the *London Encyclopædia*, but it
acquired its present name only in the 17th
century. The Chaucerian translator, thus
denied Piccadilly, took refuge in the market-
place.

Bob Elliott offers this quote as a rare example of what "purports to be a joke" in a Wodehouse story: "Do you remember that story of the people on the island who eked out a precarious livelihood by taking in one another's washing?" "The Man Upstairs," 1914

A few quick ones

Just Past President Phil Ayers asks me to tell you that he enjoyed his term as CEO, with its enormous power and all its attendant perquisites and privileges, and he wishes to thank everyone who contributed to our activities during that period. "I look forward," he says, "to the new officers leading us onward and upward to even greater heights, much like the chamois of the Alps.

A Reuters dispatch from London says the butler business is picking up after a long slump. "Before World War II," says Reuters, "there were 30,000 butlers in Britain." By 1980 the number had declined to only 100 or so, but the boom of the 1980s livened the market. Ivor Spencer's well-known Butler School was set up in London 11 years ago and seems to be thriving. Some butlers today, according to Reuters, are trained to use weapons and act as security guards, while Beach merely used an air gun. Thus civilization advances.

William Hardwick writes (happily) that "the BBC radio are dramatising *Galahad at Blandings* with Ian Carmichael playing Gally." He adds (unhappily) that "they are broadcasting it at 12.25—lunchtime—making it almost impossible for me to record." The adaptation was done by our own Richard Osborne.

Tony Ring rides to the rescue with the news that the dramatization "is now available on twin cassette, presumably in the BBC Radion Collection series."

Tony adds that "we [lucky Britishers!] are due to see the third *Jeeves and Wooster* series on television starting in March. I have not been able to trace the release of the second series on video.

Louise O'Connor read Charles Gould's recent letter in *Plum Lines* about the updating of "diabolo" to "yo-yo" in *Mike and Psmith*, and was reminded that a similar update had probably occurred in the companion book, *Mike at Wrykyn*. (These two were originally one book, *Mike*, published in 1909.)

She writes that "there is a passage in *Mike at Wrykyn* that refers to Freddie Trueman the

cricketer. This presumably was also an updating, Trueman being a famous cricketer in the 1950s and 1960s. The original [*Mike*] would I suppose have named some cricketer famous in the 1900s. I have never seen the original; I expect it is as rare as gold dust."

Len Lawson answered the question. The one reference to Trueman he found in a quick look at *Mike at Wrykyn* was at the end of Chapter 4. In Len's 1932 reprint of the second (1924) edition of *Mike*, the cricketer at the end of Chapter 4 is not Trueman, but N. A. Knox. So Louise has found another "silent" update, possibly made by Plum himself, an avid cricket fan.

William Hardwick sends this notice posted by a fishmonger in the village of Emsworth, Hampshire: "All our fish are free range." He notes that "it's good to see there is humour still in Emsworth, where Wodehouse lived and whose name he made famous."

Shirley and Len Lawson have been doing the dull but necessary job of mailing *Plum Lines* for the past three years: folding hundreds of newsletters, stuffing, sealing, and stamping the envelopes, sticking on the address labels, and finally hauling the big box of mail to the post office. They deserve a rest, and Charles Bishop and Christine Dorffi have now taken on the job. My heartiest thanks to all four of them.

This issue of *Plum Lines* has been largely redesigned by Christine Dorffi. Christine has been an editor, has designed a number of other newsletters, and is now manager of the publication department of a large computer software company. The pages are clean and bright, and I like them.

o/n

The Oldest Member

New members

Did Wodehouse coin words?

by Marilyn MacGregor

In my latest *Plum Lines* John Hannah asks whether Wodehouse ever coined words. Ed's answer was "Not as far as I know. Does anybody know better?"

I don't have an Oxford English Dictionary [OED] handy to check for the words I'm about to fling in your direction, and some, I suppose, aren't words within the meaning of the act, if "act" is the word I want. Probably some more knowledgeable egg will respond instantaneously with complete derivations back to the Old Finnish, but could crafty old PGW have been inspired to make up any of the following words?

doodah: "a good deal of doodah stirred up" and "all of a doodah" *The Code of the Woosters*, 1938

gruffle: "he heard a low woofly gruffle" "The Reverent Wooing of Archibald," 1929; "the stern and censorious gruffle of a man who" and "gruffling to himself like a not too sunny bulldog" *Thank You, Jeeves*, 1934

oomps: "Here you are with oomps and good wishes." *Full Moon*, 1947

oompus-boompus: "handful of men. . . swifter to spot oompus-boompus" *Joy in the Morning*, 1946

rannygazoo: "unwilling to stand any rannygazoo" "Jeeves and The Kid Clementina," 1930; "One does so wish, does one not, to avoid rannygazoo." "Anselm Gets His Chance," 1940; "had hoped that to-night's rannygazoo would have" *Joy in the Morning*, 1946; "If such rannygazoo is to arrive, I do not remain" *Right Ho, Jeeves*, 1952

squiggle-eyed: "He now looked definitely squiggle-eyed." "Jeeves and the Kid Clementina," 1930

tiddly-om-pom-pom: (This isn't, as it sounds, someone trying to remember the words of a song. In context, it's more like Scarlett O'Hara's "fiddle-dee-dee" or Annie Hall's "La-di-dah.") "Well, be that as

it may, tiddly-om-pom-pom." And "why I say—and with all the emphasis at my disposal—tiddly-om-pom-pom" *Joy in the Morning*, 1946

woofle: "uttered a stricken woofle like a bull-dog that has been refused cake." "Jeeves and the Impending Doom," 1930

Personally, I'm fondest of "gruffle," "woofle," and "rannygazoo" and would be delighted to find they were original Plums, to say nothing of "Tinkerty-tonk."

Marilyn opens up a whole new field of research here. I've done a little preliminary digging in response. The books available were the OED, first edition with supplements; the fairly monumental *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8th edition, Eric Partridge, New York, Macmillan, 1984; and *Dictionary of American Slang*, second supplemented edition, Wentworth and Flexner, Crowell, New York, 1975. They have this to say:

doodah: OED says the word means "in a state of excitement" and came from "the refrain of the plantation song 'Camptown Races.'" Quotes from 1915 through PGW's *Pigs Have Wings* of 1952.

Partridge has nothing. Wentworth defines it as "excited" with no date.

gruffle: OED has nothing. Partridge says it is "echoic," not recorded before 1825, dialectical, but had become colloquial by 1900.

Wentworth has nothing.

oomps: OED, Partridge, and Wentworth have nothing. But the similar "oomph" meaning vitality and enthusiasm as well as sex appeal (OED), may have suggested the other word to Wodehouse. OED's first "oomph" quote is from *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1937.

oompus-boompus: OED, Partridge and Wentworth have nothing.

rannygazoo: OED, Partridge and Wentworth have nothing.

squiggle-eyed: OED says "squiggle," meaning waviness or wiggling, was used as early as 1804, but notes that "squiggle-eyed" is used only by (a fanfare here, if you please!) P. G. Wodehouse. His quotes are from 1927, 1941, 1960, and 1972. OED says the phrase means "to view askance or unfavorably." Until we get word to the contrary this seems to be a Wodehouse coinage.

tiddly-om-pom-pom: OED says this represents "the sound or regular beat of a brass-band or similar music." Quotes are from 1909, when the phrase appeared in a popular song, to 1973. No Wodehouse quote is included and this definition does not match his use of the phrase.

Partridge has no such word, but does have "tiddly push," defined as a short-hand for someone whose name momentarily escapes one, or a phrase used to replace any statement considered too long or too involved to be expressed in full. Not recorded, says Partridge, before 1923. Wodehouse may have deliberately combined the form of one phrase with the meaning of the other. But Partridge lists several other "tiddly" phrases, indicating their popularity, and PGW's phrase may have been an evanescent and unrecorded version floating about at the time.

Wentworth has nothing.

tinkery-tonk: OED says (another fanfare, please!) this is "A farewell current among 'bright young people...P. G. Wodehouse, *passim*" with no dates. A. G. Macdonell also used the phrase, in 1933, but he probably pinched it from Plum and we will loftily ignore him. Partridge and Wentworth have nothing.

tinkerty-tonk: OED, Partridge and Wentworth have nothing. Surely a variant (or the original) of tinkery-tonk.

woofle: OED has nothing.

Partridge defines it incongruously as "the syncopated beat of a twin-cylinder engine, later C.20." Well, not exactly.

Wentworth has nothing.

Of the ten words and phrases, three (squiggle-eyed, tinkery-tonk and tinkerty-tonk) seem on the present evidence to be Wodehouse coinages. Two (doodah and gruffle) predate Wodehouse. I have no information on the other five. —OM

Sluice talk

William Hardwick and Alex Hemming sent the following item, with the above headline, from the English *Daily Telegraph* of January 18, 1992:

The talk at the Garrick Club on Thursday night turned to Lord Emsworth's porkers, Gussie Fink-Nottle's newts and the terrors of aunts. "The only criterion was that you had to be a P G Wodehouse addict," said Sir Edward Cazalet, the author's adoptive grandson, who threw a vigorous party to honour the Wodehouse scholars, Richard Usborne and James Heineman.

"It was to mark the immense contribution that they've made in spreading the Wodehouse gospel for so many decades," says Cazalet. "It was thought appropriate because none of us is getting any younger." Leading players in the lively exchange of Wodehouse anecdotes were his biographer Frances "Frankie" Donaldson and jazzman Benny Green, whose own contribution to Wodehousian studies is an appreciation of the writer's influence on music.

"It was, as Plum would have said, 'vintage browsing and sluicing'," says Cazalet.

The Garrick may have been chosen for the dinner because Wodehouse was once a member—or possibly in spite of his membership. Norman Murphy notes in his *In Search of Blandings* that Plum was indeed a member of The Garrick, and Tom Sharpe remarks in his preface to the book that Plum "called The Garrick 'The Pesthole' and stayed loyal only to the dullest and quietest [clubs] where he could work in peace." —OM

Plum's last letter?

Alex Hemming sends an interesting exchange of letters between Plum and a Dulwich College cricketer. The letters were written shortly before Plum's death. Alex wrote as follows in a cover letter to me:

In one of last year's issues of *Plum Lines* you included some correspondence between PGW and my friend A. C. Shireff, about cricket at Dulwich College. Enclosed now is a third letter that Shireff received from PGW and which he had mislaid but came across, this month, with some old papers.

The first two letters from Wodehouse to Shireff, in 1938, congratulated Shireff and his team on their perfect record in the 1938 cricket season. (These letters appeared in the Summer 1991 *Plum Lines*.) Decades later, near the end of his life, Plum was knighted by Queen Elizabeth on January 1, 1975. A few

days later Shireff wrote to Wodehouse as follows:

The very welcome news of your knighthood has encouraged me to write this letter to you. I do not suppose you remember me but I was captain of Dulwich College Cricket XI in 1937 and 1938 and with the guidance of 'Father' Marriott the School managed to win all its school matches in 1938. As a result you were very kind and wrote me a personal letter enclosing a 'purse of gold' with which the whole team had a party. May I send you my very warm congratulations on your recognition by the Queen for your service to humanity over these very many years.

My wife and I saw you being interviewed for the television screen this week and I must say you certainly carry your years extremely well. I wish you continued good health and may you be spared many more years to delight us with your humour.

Once again, sincere congratulations from an aged Old Alleynian cricketer who will always be grateful to you.

Plum's answer follows:

P. G. Wodehouse
Remsenburg
Long Island, New York 11960

Jan 20.1975

Dear Shirreff.

Of course I remember you, and I can still see the way you used to make that ball bend. I was delighted when you got your Blue. (I also remember you dropping a goal, though I don't recall what match it was!).

Life has been very hectic since the announcement, every interviewer and photographer in the USA having looked in. I wouldn't mind being interviewed, but my wife makes the blighters feel so at home that they stay all the afternoon.

I am very fit except for my legs, which have gone back on me to such an extent that I now hobble about with a stick. Still, I suppose something like that has to be expected at ninety-three.

Yours

P. G. Wodehouse

A. C. Shireff writes that "In February of that year [Wodehouse] went into hospital in Long Island suffering from a circulatory problem from which he died on 14th February, 24

days after writing my letter. It might just possibly be the last or very nearly the last letter he ever wrote, but the P. G. researchers would be able to determine that."

A study of the openings of the novels of P. G. Wodehouse

by Elliott Milstein

Elliott read this paper at our convention in New York City, October 12, 1991. As far as I am aware it is the first consideration of the subject. Elliott's compilation of the opening sentences is available from me for the small price of a self-addressed, stamped envelope. —OM

Some time ago, when I decided to compose a paper on the works of the Master whom we are all here to honor, I knew that, given the exigencies of my busy life, whatever topic I chose would have to require very little research—a daunting prospect, when one contemplates the task of reviewing the works of a man whose lifetime output includes 70 novels, some 200 short stories, and over 40 plays and musicals, not to mention extraneous song lyrics, essays, articles and other morceaux.

I could, of course, choose a minor topic such as "The Accuracy of the Characterization of Swans in 'Jeeves and the Impending Doom'" or "Ukridge and the Theory of Supply-Side Economics," either of which would require but a single evening's research, but would, I fear, be a shade narrow and pedantic.

It was while attempting to find a topic that I picked up the new Flashman book by George MacDonald Fraser. Eagerly I tore the book open, as I always do with the latest Flashman, for you see, Fraser has the knack of beginning his novels with great opening sentences. It was while I was mentally picking apart his latest effort that an electric shock shook the frame and I leaped a clear six inches into the air, shouting, if I remember correctly, "Eureka," for the answer to my difficulty hit me squarely in the glabella: why not analyze Wodehouse's openings? While it might be a tad time-consuming to read the opening sentences of every Wodehouse book, it was certainly a lot less time-consuming than rereading the entire canon. And with luck some interesting patterns might emerge.

I have divided Wodehouse's career into three periods, which I quite cleverly call Early, Middle and Late. The Early period, from 1900 to 1923, ending with the publica-

tion of *Leave It to Psmith*, began with what Osborne calls the apprenticeship years, when Wodehouse used the school stories to learn his craft, and continued with what I call his years of search, breaking into the adult market as he cast about for a style of his own. I think he found his style in *Leave It to Psmith*.

The interval from the completion of this work through the composition of the first third of *Full Moon*, published in 1947, I call the Middle Period. Some call these his "vintage years" because his plots are so complex and his prose so rich and full-bodied. In the 20s and 30s Wodehouse was clearly writing at the height of his powers. His narrative voice was very much like Psmith's, fruity, loquacious, and tinged with a bemused insouciance.

After *Full Moon*, in the Late Period, the style becomes leaner, less complex, a little more jargonistic. I think of the late period narrative voice as Bertie Wooster's. Also, the Late Period is marked with an interest in breaking the rules he set up in the Middle Period, an exploration of new patterns, a period of experimentation and change. Could one, for example, imagine even Bertie Wooster joining a club like the 1973 Bachelors Anonymous in 1932? And only in the post-World-War-II Wodehouse world could we meet a Mortimer Bayliss or a Howard Saxby.

When I examined the opening lines of the novels I found that they tended to follow the pattern of his plot structure, characters, imagery and narrative voice; namely Early Period: experimentation and growth; Middle Period: standard rich Wodehouse style with a Psmithian voice; Late Period: change and experimentation, crisper style with a Wooster voice.

I believe it is proper to submit the openings of the works of a popular author to such scrutiny as this. Let us never forget that, while a master craftsman dedicated to his art, Wodehouse was always deeply concerned about his sales figures. I think he wrote from the heart when, in *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, he penned the following:

"I think he found his style in *Leave It to Psmith*."

Shakespeare describes the poet's eye as rolling in a fine frenzy from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven, and giving to airy nothingness a local habitation and a name, but in practice you will find that one corner of that eye is generally glued on the royalty returns.

No one knew better than good ol' Plum that when a member of the general public goes to the store to purchase a book, he generally looks at the flyleaf and reads the first sentence or so before deciding whether to buy. So in writing, rewriting and polishing his works, Wodehouse certainly gave especial care to the opening, hoping to grab his prospective customer and persuade that honest fellow to part with his hard-earned cash for the latest Bertie or Blandings story, thereby keeping our favorite author in those two basic necessities of life: tobacco and golf balls. Bill Townend makes this point in *Perform-ingFlea*:

I had always thought that if there was one thing he excelled in more than another it was the way he began his stories. As a reader I felt that my attention and interest were captured from the very first sentences.

He then quotes the opening of *The Luck of the Bodkins*, described by others (Richard Usborne among them I believe) as Wodehouse's very best opening sentence. While certainly a finely constructed sentence I think it is his second best; but it is still a good place to begin:

Into the face of the young man sitting on the terrace of the Hotel Splendide at Cannes there crept a look of furtive shame; the shifty hangdog look which announces that an Englishman is about to talk French.

The Luck of the Bodkins is, of course, vintage Wodehouse, written in 1935, the heart of the Middle Period, and I think we know right from the opening that we are in for a treat. But I think the sentence misses something in that it does not flow smoothly—there's that full stop after "furtive shame." Other than that it is quite delightful. Notice how the first half of the sentence is so like a camera reverse zoom: it begins with a tight close-up of a face and pulls out as we see that it is the face of a young man, then we see that he is

sitting, then pulling out more he is on a terrace; further, the Hotel Splendide, and now the camera is all the way back and we see the coastline of France and realize we are in Cannes; suddenly now we are back at the face and recognize the look of furtive shame. That's quite a good expression too: furtive shame. Not the open shame of a man who has already done something wrong but the furtive shame of a man who is about to do so.

That look, along with the hangdog look, fits just about every male in this story from beginning to end—from Monty Bodkin, here about to talk French, later trying to hide his former romance with Lottie Blossom from Ambrose Tennyson and Gertrude Butterwick; to Ickey Llewellyn, the most incompetent smuggler on earth; to Reggie Tennyson, about to start work in Montreal but about as suited for labor as Bertie is for matrimony; and finally to Ambrose Tennyson, who through no fault of his own is not Alfred, Lord Tennyson. So we have here a nice complex sentence which sets the scene, amuses us, and gives us a good central image for all the male characters of the novel. Truly the work of a mature Wodehouse.

Notice too how the sentence flows in a nice rhythm and then hits a spondee beat as the joke comes to an end. Let's hear it again:

Into the face of the young man sitting on the terrace of the Hotel Splendide at Cannes there crept a look of furtive shame; the shifty hangdog look which announces that an Englishman is about to talk French.

[Most of the audience joined in and it became a choral reading.]

Parenthetically, we know that Wodehouse himself spent much time on the French coast and was certainly called upon to *parlez-vous* a bit. So we are aware that he himself was tortured by the exact emotion which is wringing the soul of Monty Bodkin in this opening sentence.

Early Period

Of course such delightful bon mots as this did not flow easily from pen of the *young* Wodehouse. In later life he expressed dismay at critics or scholars who cast too close an eye on his early works, as he wrote to Bill Town-

"Wodehouse gave especial care to the opening, hoping to grab his prospective customer."

end complaining about George Orwell: He is apt to take some book I wrote in 1907 and draw all sorts of portentous conclusions from it. Dash it all, in 1907 I was practically in swaddling clothes and it was extremely creditable to me that I was able to write at all.

Be that as it may, it is still a worthwhile experience glancing back at those early years. However, out of deference to Wodehouse's feelings I will keep it short. During his apprenticeship Wodehouse was clearly most interested in getting his adolescent readers into the story as quickly as possible, as this opening line from *The Head of Kay's* (1905) shows:

"When we get licked tomorrow by half-a-dozen wickets," said Jimmy Silver, tilting his chair until the back touched the wall, "don't say I didn't warn you."

"Psmith's way out of any dilemma is to mix story or description with humor."

Wodehouse said it best: swaddling clothes. Only later in *Mike* (1909) does he bother to set the stage at all and even then it is done without much panache:

It was a morning in the middle of April, and the Jackson family were consequently breakfasting in comparative silence. The cricket season had not begun, and except during the cricket season they were in the habit of devoting their powerful minds at breakfast almost exclusively to the task of virtualizing against the labors of the day.

In fact, for the remainder of the Early Period, Wodehouse seems to be torn between getting the reader into the story as quickly as possible and setting the stage properly. He expresses this concern at the opening of his 1919 novel, *A Damsel in Distress*. Although Wodehouse was by then an author of stature and experience, having written 17 novels, he was still having difficulty resolving this dilemma. But at least he feels comfortable enough to let his readers in on it:

Inasmuch as the scene of this story is that historic pile, Belper Castle, in the county of Hampshire, it would be an agreeable task to open it with a leisurely description of the place, followed by some notes on the history of the Earls of Marshmoreton, who have owned it since the fifteenth century. Unfortunately, in these days of rush and hurry, a novelist works at a disadvantage. He must leap into the middle of his tale with as little delay as he

would employ boarding a moving tramcar. He must get off the mark with the smooth swiftness of a jack-rabbit surprised while lunching. Otherwise people throw him aside and go out to picture palaces.

Middle Period

As with so many of Wodehouse's stylistic signatures, the answer to this problem came in the composition of *Leave It to Psmith*. While written in the third person the narrative voice of this novel is very much Psmith's own, and this voice continues to narrate all but the Bertie and Jeeves stories for the next 20 years. Psmith's way out of any dilemma is to mix story or description with humor. I think the beginning of *Leave It to Psmith* can be considered the first truly humorous opening:

At the open window of the great library of Blandings Castle, drooping like a wet sock, as was his habit when he had nothing to prop his spine against, the Earl of Emsworth, that amiable and bone-headed peer, stood gazing out over his domain.

Here we have the stage being set only moments away from the story's opening, and we are entertained by a humorous description of Lord Emsworth. I particularly like that "drooping like a wet sock" image. It was Evelyn Waugh, I believe, who, when challenged to defend his statement that Wodehouse was the master of English literature, declared that such a title belonged to any writer who can generate three completely original metaphors per page. With *Leave It to Psmith* we have a beautiful example of such mastery with the opening line.

He has also clearly abandoned any pretension to realistic characterizations, another sign of the Middle Period. Lord Emsworth was, you remember, described in the earlier *Something Fresh* as "dreamy" and "absent-minded." In this second Blandings story, right from the start Wodehouse lets us know that Emsworth is "bone-headed." And that is significant, for his bone-headedness becomes the key to several plot twists later on. Wodehouse is now using his openings not just to entertain, or to set the scene or the mood, but to foreshadow.

If complex sentences with a lot of humor

can be considered the hallmark of the Middle Period, then Wodehouse gives us this in spades in his first full Middle Period novel, *Sam the Sudden*, 1925. Here are its first four sentences. Sit back. This will take a while.

All day long, New York, stewing in the rays of a late August sun, had been growing warmer and warmer, until now, at three o'clock in the afternoon, its inhabitants, with the exception of a little group gathered together on the tenth floor of the Wilmot Building on Upper Broadway, had divided themselves by a sort of natural cleavage into two main bodies—the one crawling about and asking those they met if this was hot enough for them, the other maintaining that what they minded was not so much the heat but the humidity.

The reason for the activity prevailing on the tenth floor of the Wilmot Building was that a sporting event of the first magnitude was being pulled off there—Spike Murphy, of the John B. Pynsent Export and Import Company, being in the act of contesting the final of the Office Boys' High Kicking Championship against a willowy youth from the Consolidated Eyebrow Tweezer and Nail File Corporation.

The affair was taking place on the premises of the former firm, before a small but select audience consisting of a few stenographers, chewing gum, some male wage slaves in shirt sleeves, and Mr John B. Pynsent's nephew, Samuel Shotter, a young man of agreeable features, who was acting as referee.

In addition to being referee, Sam Shotter was also the patron and promoter of the tourney; the man but for whose vision and enterprise a wealth of young talent would have lain undeveloped, thereby jeopardizing America's chances should an event of this kind ever be added to the programme of the Olympic Games.

Well. If it weren't for the humor we might think we were deep into something by Henry James. Perhaps he overdid it a little here—certainly no other opening is quite this prolix—but I think that penning sentences of this complexity with a lot of humor is very much the work of a Master.

There is of course a lot of subjectivity in deciding what is a good opening and what is less than good, and you may notice a prejudice on my part for complex, humorous sentences, but an opening sentence need not be terribly complex nor riotously funny to be considered in my opinion a great opening. One of my favorites is that of *Summer Lightning*, 1929 [American edition, *Fish Preferred*].

It was while contemplating *Summer Lightning* that I realized that there is a bit of a problem defining how many sentences compose an opening. In this review I tried at first to limit myself to the opening sentence only, but *Summer Lightning*—and most of the Bertie Wooster books—make that impossible. The first sentence alone is sometimes only a fragment of a thought, and I decided that an opening should be at least long enough to form a complete thought. With *Summer Lightning*, as with others, it is the first paragraph. Once again, this novel has a singularly simple opening sentence and paragraph, but is no less beautiful for all that:

Blandings Castle slept in the sunshine. Dancing little ripples of heat-mist played across its smooth lawns and stone-flagged terraces. The air was full of the lulling drone of insects. It was that gracious hour of a summer afternoon, midway between luncheon and tea, when Nature seems to unbutton its waistcoat and put its feet up.

Isn't that nice? Once again we have a beautiful metaphor in the third sentence with Nature unbuttoning its waistcoat, but otherwise the first paragraph consists of four simple declarative sentences that do nothing but say "Summer at Blandings." But can anyone here dream of any other way to say it as perfectly as this.

Here too we have the most common Wodehouse opening image: sunshine. Of the 70 Wodehouse novels, 11, or about one sixth, begin with an image of sunlight. Nearly half the Blandings Castle books begin with sunlight. It is, of course, a fitting image for the Master of sweetness and light and he uses it extensively. So it is not surprising that sunlight is his most common opening image as well.

As one might expect, this image begins to appear in the latter half of the Early Period, was used extensively in the Middle Period, and less extensively in the Late Period. We see it for the first time in the opening of the first Blandings novel, *Something Fresh* (1915). This is also the first opening to use a string of independent clauses. Again, a complex sentence with a little humor:

The sunshine of a fair Spring morning fell graciously upon London town. Out in Piccadilly its heartening warmth seemed to infuse into traffic and

"sunlight is his most common opening image"

pedestrians alike a novel jauntiness, so that bus-drivers jested and even the lips of chauffeurs uncurled into not unkindly smiles. Policemen whistled at their posts, clerks on their way to work, beggars approached the task of trying to persuade perfect strangers to bear the burden of their maintenance with that optimistic vim which makes all the difference. It was one of those happy mornings.

There's that little joke about the beggars, but otherwise nothing terribly exciting here, and the last sentence, rather than capping it off, is really rather weak. All in all, typical of an Early Period piece. Let us compare this with the Middle Period opening of *Heavy Weather* (1933), which also gives us a view of London sun:

Sunshine pierced the haze that enveloped London. It came down Fleet Street, turned to the right, stopped at the premises of the Mammoth Publishing Company, and, entering through an upper window, beamed pleasantly upon Lord Tilbury, founder and proprietor of that vast factory of popular literature, as he sat reading the batch of weekly papers which his secretary had placed on the desk for his inspection.

While perhaps less funny, this is I think far superior craftsmanship. The sun does not just beam down, it acquires a character of its own, takes us into the offices of Lord Tilbury, introduces us to a main character of the novel, amuses us, and finally drops us right into the action of the story, the review of periodicals which will ultimately lead to Monty Bodkin's great opus, "Uncle Woggly to His Chicks."

This opening can be contrasted as well with the opening of *Bill the Conqueror*, which, though published after 1923, was written almost entirely before the publication of *Leave It to Psmith* and, for all intents and purposes, is an Early Period piece. Here we have an introduction to the main action in the very same office with the very same character but much less cleverly done:

With a sudden sharp snort which, violent though it was, expressed only feebly the disgust and indignation seething within him, Sir George Pyke laid down the current number of *Society Spice* and took up the desk—telephone.

Typical of the Early Period, it achieves only one objective—it gets us into the story. Late

enough to be written with a strong ear for sound and cadence (again that spondee beat at the beginning of the sentence), but lacking the cleverness of having the sun introduce the character to us.

Late Period

Perhaps Wodehouse himself noticed how often he used the image of sunlight, and consciously chose to open a new era of writing by switching to moonlight for his central image in *Full Moon*, 1947. Still it is a pleasant irony that the first novel of the Late Period, that period of experimentation and change, is the only novel to begin after nightfall, and it is the reflected rather than the direct rays of the sun which introduce us to the characters.

The refined moon which served Blandings Castle and district was nearly at its full, and the ancestral home of Clarence, ninth Earl of Emsworth, had for some hours now been flooded by its silver rays. They shone on turret and battlement; peeped respectfully in upon Lord Emsworth's sister, Lady Hermione Wedge, as she creamed her face in the Blue Room; and stole through the open window of the room next door, where there was something really worth looking at—Veronica Wedge, to wit, Lady Hermione's outstandingly beautiful daughter, who was lying in bed staring at the ceiling and wishing she had some decent jewelry to wear at the forthcoming County Ball. A lovely girl needs, of course, no jewels but her youth and health and charm, but anybody who had wanted to make Veronica understand that would have had to work like a beaver.

Later on, in *Service with a Smile* (1962), Wodehouse returns to the sun to introduce his characters, and rather than implying a roll-call as he does in *Full Moon*, he deliberately calls our attention to it.

The morning sun shone down on Blandings Castle, and the various inmates of the ancestral home of Clarence, ninth Earl of Emsworth, their breakfasts digested, were occupying themselves in their various ways. One may as well run through the roster just to keep the record straight.

And this he proceeds to do, over the next two paragraphs, introducing us to each of the characters in turn.

But by and large, in his Late Period Wodehouse is less concerned with a clever or finely crafted opening. Once again he is ready to get down to the story and not waste any time grabbing the reader. Perhaps he knows that whatever he writes, he is going to get his 25,000 or so sales from libraries and faithful fans and not much else. But clearly his novels were getting shorter and his openings less stylistic, as these examples show.

Barmy in Wonderland, 1952:

J. G. Anderson took up the telephone. "Give me the desk," he said. They gave him the desk.

Ice in the Bedroom, 1961:

Feeding his rabbits in the garden of his residence, the Nook, his humane practice at the start of each new day, Mr Cornelius, the house agent of Valley Fields, seemed to sense a presence.

Company for Henry, 1967:

Fork in hand and crouched over the stove in the kitchen of his large and inconvenient house, Ashby Hall in the county of Sussex, Henry Paradene had begun to scramble eggs in a frying pan.

I do not mean to disparage these books; in fact I happen to like all of them very much. It is just that Wodehouse no longer cared, in the Late Period, how compelling his opening lines were—he just wanted to get on with the story at hand.

Bertie/Jeeves Novels

So we see that in the main Wodehouse's novels begin by dropping us directly into the novel, or setting the stage, or providing atmosphere, or telling us how difficult it is to start a novel (see also *Laughing Gas*). But you will notice that I have omitted any mention of the Bertie Wooster/Jeeves novels.

This omission has occurred because, first of all, Bertie and Jeeves were initially con-signed to short stories only. I have chosen in this review to deal only with novels—not that short stories lack exciting openings, but because there is a considerably different dynamic at play in a short story: the author is constrained by space. As an example, most Jeeves stories take place at one or another country estate. In a short story we typically arrive at the location within two pages, while

in a novel we're lucky if we pull up the main drive by the beginning of Chapter 4. In *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* the old two-seater doesn't make it through the gates of Brinkley Court until Chapter 9. If one is studying how the Master goes about introducing us to a story, it is only fair to concentrate on that genre which allows him full rein. Hence, no short stories.

But it is important, I think, to realize that during all this time he is writing short stories like nobody's business, and it is in that medium that Wodehouse hones Bertie's narrative voice.

Secondly, Bertie, as narrator, does not follow the patterns of the other novels, including the patterns of their openings. By and large, Bertie begins his stories by telling us about his feelings. The very first Bertie/Jeeves novel, *Thank You, Jeeves*, (1934) is typical:

I was a shade perturbed. Nothing to signify, really, but still just a spot concerned.

We have here no complex sentences, no introduction to the narrative. We cannot tell if Bertie is in London or at Brinkley Court, having breakfast, smoking a cigarette, or in the bath. All we know is his mood.

The Late Period *Mating Season* (1949) tells us a little more, but still we are centered on Bertie's mood:

While I would not go so far, perhaps, as to describe the heart as actually leaden, I must confess that on the eve of starting to do my bit of time at Deverill Hall I was definitely short of chirpiness.

The language is fruitier here than in the last example and, typical of the Late Period, we are already, with the first sentence, on our way to the scene of action. But again Bertie's mood is the center of the opening.

And this is true, by and large, of all the Bertie novels. The two main exceptions are *Right Ho, Jeeves*, where Bertie begins by, in his own words, going off the rails, and *Code of the Woosters*, which the eminent Wodehouse scholar Curtis Armstrong credits with the biggest laugh right off the bat:

I reached out a hand from under the blankets and rang the bell for Jeeves.

"Good morning, Jeeves."

"Good evening, sir."

"Bertie begins his stories by telling us about his feelings."

There is still another Bertie novel to consider: *Joy in the Morning*. It begins with what I consider his best opening sentence. Richard Usborne described the novel as Wodehouse's finest, and it is certainly his most finely crafted. We all know the sad circumstances that allowed Wodehouse to polish this gem to its purest ray. Well, the glow begins with the first sentence:

After the thing was over, when peril had ceased to loom and happy endings had been distributed in heaping handfuls and we were driving home with our hats on the side of our heads, having shaken the dust of Steeple Bumbleigh from our tyres, I confessed to Jeeves that there had been moments when Bertram Wooster, though no weakling, had come very near to despair.

Yes, I do like this opening sentence. I like the fact that it begins with five—count 'em, five—prepositional or independent clauses before we even get to the subject and predicate. I also like that touch of bravado: "...Bertram Wooster, though no weakling..." I like how he sets the tone by telling us that all is well, but ends with a note of despair, so we know we have another roller-coaster ride before us. I like how the rhythm is uninterrupted—in fact the first two phrases are almost in meter: "After the thing was over, when peril had ceased to loom..."

And it was only after reading it several times that I noticed that for the first and only time in the entire canon Wodehouse begins the novel at the end of the story and proceeds to flash back.

Now if this were a thesis and not just a paper to be read and completed before the audience pelts one with rotten vegetables, this would be a good time to begin an examination of Wodehouse's endings. But I will spare you that. Besides, endings are not nearly as important as beginnings. For one thing, endings don't sell books. And the ending of a Wodehouse novel leaves the reader a little sad, I think—beginning a Wodehouse we have so much to look forward to, but finishing a Wodehouse we are conscious that the joy is drawing to a close.