



Plum Lines

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Notes from Plum

Marge Meisinger and Plum exchanged several letters. Here's one about cats. It was written from Remsenburg, a village with enough grass and trees to make any number of cats happy.

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

May 11, 1974

Dear Mrs Meisinger.

Glad you are getting over your move and that the cats are settling down. My experience of cats is that they don't worry much about anything and have the sense to see how much better off they are in the country with no traffic. Our cat Blendie got up a very high tree and lost her nerve a couldn't climb down and had to be rescued with a ladder.

I hope this letter is addressed right. Yes, it is. I see IL stands for Illinois.

Yours

P. G. Wodehouse

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Pig tail twist: the definitive word

by Marilyn
MacGregor

In the last issue of *Plum Lines* Jimmy Heineman asked whether pig tails twist clockwise or counter-clockwise. I expected lots of responses, serious and otherwise. I received exactly one, from Marilyn MacGregor. Marilyn is most fortunately situated near the agricultural campus of the University of California, where she found abundant pig information. —OM

Professor Emeritus Hubert Heitman of the Davis campus of the University of California is widely recognized as the authority on pigs. His reputation is such that a former Dean of the College of Agriculture and several eminent faculty members agree unanimously that if there is anything about pigs Professor Heitman doesn't know, nobody knows it.

I recently consulted this Whiffle or Wolff-Lehman of the present-day pig world and obtained the following information.

Professor Heitman and his students have recorded various bits of information about pigs for many, many years. His data show that a great preponderance of tails twist to the right or clockwise (as one faces the back of the pig). Tail-twist is an inherited trait. If the boar's tail twists to the left, the piglets' tails will also twist left, but left twists are distinctly a minority. Not all pig tails twist. Chinese pig breeds have straight tails. Nobody knows why, and a pig may have some Chinese way back in its ancestry, as does the Berkshire, yet still have a curly tail. If one pulls a non-Chinese pig tail out straight (it would take a Huxley Winkworth even to imagine trying such an indignity with the Empress), it will always snap back to a curl and in the same direction it curled originally.

Now that James Hogg has found Lord Emsworth's annotated Whiffle, let us hope that the original data on the Empress herself will also be discovered somewhere in the Blandings Castle archives. Wellbeloved, however much he knew of pigs, does not strike one as being the complete record-keeper, even if his handwriting were legible. Monica Simmons, however, during her tenure with the Empress, may well have been

a conscientious writer-down in legible form—and perhaps the information she recorded will include the vital detail of the direction of the Empress's tail twist, probably right but possibly left. It could, after all, be left because the Empress was such an unusual as well an outstanding pig.

Information and new memberships
Marilyn MacGregor

Dues payments and address changes
Tom Wainwright

Editorial contributions
Ed Ratcliffe, OM

Dues are \$15 per year.

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

I am a man who can read faces, and Chuffy's had seemed to me highly suggestive. Not only had its expression, as he spoke of Pauline, been that of a stuffed frog with a touch of the Soul's Awakening about it, but it had also turned a fairly deepish crimson in colour. The tip of the nose had wiggled, and there had been embarrassment in the manner. The result being that I had become firmly convinced that the old schoolmate had copied it properly and was in love.

Thank You, Jeeves, 1934

How many books did Wodehouse write?

by Barry Phelps

Barry Phelps is an Englishman, a self-described bibliomaniac, an extraordinary collector of Wodehouse (his collection is on display in the P. G. Wodehouse Library at Dulwich College), and a former dealer in PGW's books whose informative catalogs are still treasured by Wodehouse collectors. He is also the author of a forthcoming Wodehouse biography. This article is reprinted, by permission, from the November 1991 issue of *Antiquarian Book Monthly Review* of 174B Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1UE, UK.

It is time to settle the vexing question of the number of P. G. Wodehouse books. He was a prolific author and not only "Our National Humourist" but an Anglo-American author, some of whose books were published on only one side of the Atlantic. The cowardly critic takes refuge in casual phrases such as 'Almost a hundred books.' We bibliomaniacs need an accurate answer.

Wodehouse published ninety four volumes of complete novels and short-stories in his lifetime. So far, so simple, with the added merit of symmetry as he died in his ninety-fourth year. To that should be added two books of which he was joint, but principal, author: *Not George Washington* and *The Globe By the Way Book*, bringing us to ninety-six. That total includes one collection of letters, *Performing Flea* (*Author! Author!* in the US) so we should also add *Yours Plum*, a further selection of letters published in 1990, giving us ninety-seven. Wodehouse, as always, was working when he died. This was on a novel which was edited by Richard Osborne and published, incomplete, as *Sunset at Blandings* in 1977. Do we include it in the total? Most Wodehousians do, so that gives us ninety-eight.

However there are other posthumous books. Should they be included too? *The Parrot* is a collection of Wodehouse's early comic verse, much of it never published in book form before, only in magazines. As collections of short stories, all of which had appeared first in magazines, are included in Wodehouse's books, *The Parrot* could also be included, raising our total to ninety-nine. On similar reasoning, but a borderline case, is *Uncollected Wodehouse* which was published in the US, but

it contains several stories that appeared in *The Man Upstairs* which was never published in America. If we include it the total goes up to a pleasingly round one hundred books.

However we can't stop there. Six of Wodehouse's books were substantially rewritten; five of them for different versions either side of the Atlantic and one because the author was dissatisfied with the original version—his first adult novel and the first book he had published in America as well as England, *Love Among the Chickens*. Serious collectors need them all so we must add those to the total, making 106. (On the other hand a mathematician would probably allocate them a notional half-book each making a total of only 103.)

We can, I think, properly exclude posthumous Wodehouse-only anthologies and his one miniature book *The Great Sermon Handicap*, extracted from *The Inimitable Jeeves*. But what should we do about the four books edited by Wodehouse and the eleven Wodehouse-only anthologies published during his lifetime? For serious collectors they have to be added, giving us a grand total of 121 books.

In answer to the question, those of disputatious turn of mind can argue between ninety-four, ninety-six, ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred, 106 or 121 according to choice. The sensible answer seems to me ninety-eight. This has another merit. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother in a telegram of good wishes to the Wodehouse Centenary celebrants in New York in 1981 said 'I think I have read and enjoyed almost all the ninety-eight books he wrote.' Out of respect for The Master's most eminent fan that, for me, clinches the matter. Ninety-eight it is.

It is bad to be trapped in a den of slaving aunts, lashing their tails and glaring at you out of their red eyes.

The Mating Season, 1949

A few quick ones

Tina Griffin has found further information on Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical "Jeeves", which bombed in London in 1975. She writes:

In the recent book *Andrew Lloyd Webber: His Life and Works* by Michael Walsh (published by Harry N. Abrams) there is a section entitled "Jeeves Comes a Cropper" outlining the genesis and ultimate fiasco of the ill-fated musical. The book is a large "coffee-table" volume with numerous color photographs, including one from "Jeeves." Reportedly, Andrew Lloyd Webber is still sentimentally attached to the concept and may rework it some day.

Tina adds that a phone call to the local Public Broadcasting Station, then televising the Jeeves and Wooster series, brought "a very large, full-color poster with a drawing of Jeeves holding a salver upon which reposes Bertie's head! (Not as gross as it sounds!) The only place available to hang the poster is in the garage, where it now resides. It adds a certain *je ne sais quoi* to the dog food and the recycle bags."

According to our new membership list, Welsh and Scottish members are in the United Kingdom, but English members are not. This oddity has a parochial origin: U. S. postal clerks have often warned me that letters and parcels addressed to "England" are more likely to reach their destination promptly than those addressed to "United Kingdom." In an effort to speed the mails between the U. S. and England, I have therefore abolished the United Kingdom in certain parts of our membership list. But there'll always be an England.

This issue of *Plum Lines* is skinny. I'm recovering from a long spell of pneumonia and don't have the energy yet for a full scale production. I have no idea when I will catch up on the Wodehouse correspondence that has been piling up, unanswered, since March. To all of you who have been kind enough to send letters and contributions and have received no reply, I can only offer my sincere apologies and my assurance that you

Punch is gone

Jan Kaufman and someone else whose clipping I have misplaced send word of the death of the venerable English humor magazine *Punch*. It breathed its last in April after 150 years as a literary institution. It carried articles by the likes of William Makepeace Thackeray, A. A. Milne, and of course (and most important) P. G. Wodehouse.

Plum's first *Punch* article was published on September 17, 1902, a day before the publication of his first novel *The Pothunters* and a month before his twenty first birthday. That September marked the beginning of Plum's full-time literary career, when he gave up his steady bank job and determined to make a living entirely by his writing. *Punch* was at that time the top of the heap for writers of humor.

Wodehouse stories and articles continued to appear in the magazine for decades and many of them were used in his 1956 book *America, I Like You*.

In 1960 he was elected to the *Punch* Table, an honor given only to the magazine's most prized writers.

His association with the magazine was not merely that of a contributor. According to Norman Murphy's *In Search of Blandings*, Plum played cricket for the *Punch* team in 1903. Remember the valet who sent one of Bertie's friends out into the streets of London with no spats? Norman reports that Plum got the idea from a *Punch* cartoon.

The magazine, as many former readers would agree, has gotten steadily less funny. Its circulation fell from a peak of 175,000 in the 1940s to 33,000 recently, advertising dried up, and the financial losses grew too large to bear. But then, in the much-quoted words of a former editor, the magazine "never was as funny as it used to be."

will hear from me as soon as I can manage it.

The Oldest Member

New members

I took my place among the standees at the back of the concert hall. I devoted my time to studying the faces of my neighbors, hoping to detect in them some traces of ruth and pity and what is known as kind indulgence. But not a glimmer. Like all rustic standees, these were stern, implacable men, utterly incapable of taking the broad , charitable view and realising that a fellow who comes on a platform and and starts reciting about Christopher Robin going hoppity-hoppity-hop (or, alternatively, saying his prayers) does not do so from sheer wantonness, but because he is the helpless victim of circumstances beyond his control. I was gazing with considerable apprehension at a particularly dangerous specimen on my left, a pleasure-seeker with hair-oil on his head and those mobile lips to which the raspberry springs automatically.

The Mating Season, 1949

Something new

Isaac Asimov

by Doug
Stow

Before I write a single word about anything new, how about a big hand for Len Lawson, who has written this column from its inception. Many of the books in my collection are mine thanks solely to his agency. (In fact many of my finest books have come, unbeknownst to him, directly from his collection.) Len has reluctantly passed the column on to me so he can devote his full energies to planning the 1993 convention. If I can be but a candle to his bright light I will be satisfied. My condolences to the rest of you.

The Quill and Brush has issued a catalog of Walter White's Wodehouse collection, consisting of about 300 items. Drop them a line at Box 5365, Rockville MD 20848 to obtain a copy. The also have an Author price guide on Wodehouse, first done in 1985 or 86 and updated in 1990. It is available for \$9.50 plus \$1.50 for shipping and handling.

Barnes and Noble currently lists *Uncollected Wodehouse*, edited by David Jasen (item 1765775), and *Wodehouse on Crime*, with a foreword by Isaac Asimov (item 1760560), for \$6.95 each. Add \$2.95 shipping for either or both. Add state sales tax in CA (7.25%), MA, MI, NJ, NY, and PA. The address is 126 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10011.

The *Collected Essays of V. S. Pritchett*, Random House, 1991, includes a review of Benny Green's Wodehouse biography as well as six other references to Wodehouse in other essays. All this for only \$35.

Maria Sensale informs us that an audio cassette of Wodehouse lyrics is available. It's entitled "Theater Lyrics of P. G. Wodehouse" with music by Jerome Kern, with Helen Morgan, Billy Murray, and others. Order item RFS-601 from Folkways Mail Order, 416 Hungerford Drive, Suite 320, Rockville Md 20850. The price is \$10.95 plus \$2 shipping.

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

Jan Kaufman and others send word of the recent death of Isaac Asimov, prolific writer of science fiction and popular science books. He was a Wodehouse fan and had been a member of the Wodehouse Society for a number of years. Mr. Asimov was 72 years old.

Author of nearly 500 books, he was possibly the most prolific writer in history. His usual practice was to write from 7:30 in the morning until 10 at night, sometimes on as many as five books at once. He produced a steady stream of the science fiction books for which he was best known, books on popular science, books on the Bible, Shakespeare, Milton, and a variety of other subjects.

He was no mere literary drudge. "Nightfall," a story he wrote at the age of 21, was voted almost 30 years later the best science fiction short story ever written. A reviewer in the *New York Times Book Review* said of him in 1982: "He writes much better than he did 33 years ago—yet he has lost none of the verve he brought to [the Foundation] series when he and the galaxy were much younger. What more could one ask?" He received awards from the American Chemical Society and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

He was a self-confessed compulsive writer. "The longer I write, the easier it gets," he once said. "I work every day. Sunday is my best day: no mail, no telephones. Writing is my only interest. Even speaking is an interruption." P. G. Wodehouse himself wasn't as single-minded as that.

But here is Plum writing about his life at Remsenburg, Long Island, in his eightieth year: "I love it here. It's so quiet. . . I'm frightfully happy. I find that I get into a routine of work and walks and reading which makes the time fly. I never want to see anyone, and I never want to go anywhere or do anything. I just want to write." The quotation is from David Jasen's *P. G. Wodehouse: A Portrait of a Master*.

Pongo

by David
Landman

I wonder how Reginald G. Twistleton, the "slender, personable young man with lemon-colored hair and an attractive face" (*Uncle Dynamite*), acquired the sobriquet "Pongo." The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) attributes the earliest use of the word to 17th century naturalists who so designated "a large anthropoid African ape: variously identified with the Chimpanzee and the Gorilla." But surely the native impress of Twistletonian suavity and lissomeness could not (even in a lubberly schoolboy) be so defaced as to provoke that scoff from his peers.

There are three other usages (all slang) recorded in the new *OED*; they are of fairly recent origin, but Wodehouse could have heard them. They provide, however, little better prospect. In one, the word refers derisively to a marine or soldier, as in "Fourteen youths went out.... pongo bashing." In another we have equally derisive Australian and New Zealandic slang for an English person: "What were you doing walking about holding on to that bloody little pongo?" And I think Reginald's lemon-colored hair requires that we dismiss the word's third derisive slang use, this time to indicate a Negro.

But an interesting possibility (not recorded in the *OED*) emerges from a passage by Walter de la Mare (1873-1956), a Wodehouse contemporary, in his horror story "Seaton's Aunt." What is tantalizing is that here the name Pongo is attached to a schoolboy by his satiric classmates. The narrator writes of Seaton, "From a boy's point of view he looked distastefully foreign with his yellowish skin, slow chocolate-coloured eyes, and lean weak figure. Merely for his looks he was treated by most of us true-blue Englishmen with condescension, hostility, or contempt. We used to call him Pongo, but without any much better excuse for the nickname than his skin."

Tantalizing, but not very satisfactory: our Pongo has an "attractive face." Perhaps young Reggie's chums had even less excuse than Seaton's for calling him Pongo. Perhaps Reggie was schooled in Australia. Perhaps Reggie was a sallow, asthenic youth taunted by his fellows. (This might account for his uncle's untiring

efforts to invigorate him.)

Looking still further in the *OED*, we discover that "pong" means stink, both as substantive and verb. Is it possible that where rhyme demanded that Pinker be Stinker, the rhymeless Twistleton was allowed a hidden rhyme in Pong, with an "o" stuck on for euphony?

The question abides: How did Reginald G. Twistleton-Twistleton acquire the nickname Pongo?

To all these explanations, no matter how sensible, I'm tempted to reply like the Crumpet at the end of "The Amazing Hat Mystery":

"Ingenious," he said, taking a grape. "Quite ingenious. But a little far-fetched. No, I prefer to think the whole thing, as I say, has something to do with the Fourth Dimension. I am convinced that that is the true explanation, if our minds could only grasp it."

"Absolutely," said the Bear.

—OM



Pigs is pigs, not pumpkins

by Marilyn
MacGregor

Once the brain gets working there is no knowing where it will stop, and you know how it is when you get an idea. For a while it sort of simmers inside you and then it suddenly sizzles up like a rocket and there you are, right up against it.

That's how it was with me when, after several meals of fish juxtaposed, if juxtaposed is the word I want, with a re-reading of "The Custody of The Pumpkin," I began to wonder how Clarence, ninth Earl of Emsworth, had come to shift his focus from pumpkins to pigs. The splendid family record already included first prizes for roses, tulips, and spring onions, granted, but Clarence was the first of his line to strive for and win a first prize for pumpkins. And then he went on to pigs. Fat pigs. One might almost say pumpkin-shaped pigs.

Is that a clue? Did that amiable, wooly-headed earl who had one of those minds capable of accommodating but one thought at a time—if that—have initially confused two round things whose names begin with "p"? I think he did, but still, why pigs?

It is necessary here to bung in a bit of background information. One does not wish to fail to grip, but it is essential for the reader to understand the full posish, if you understand what I mean. We shall, therefore, temporarily leave the earl of Emsworth suspended between pumpkins and pigs.

On my first visit to England, Margaret and Jim Earl showed me around Shropshire, including the grounds of Blandings Castle (now apparently known as Weston Park) and told me something of the history of the countryside. Romans had been there, I heard, and, as I learned later, Celts, and the Druid statesmen-priests.

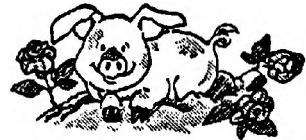
We know that the Threepwoods were an ancient and sturdy stock. The eighth earl was killed in a hunting accident at 77, another relative broke his neck trying to jump a five-barred gate at nearly 83, and yet another lived to nearly 90. Women in the family ate broken bottles. Ancestors of Clarence and Galahad went off to fight the Paynim—and returned to tell their tales. There must have been generations of prominent Threepwoods settled in and around Shropshire even before the first earl's creation. It is my contention

that the family goes back in Britain at least to the time of the Druids; and it is my belief that a love of pigs was in the Threepwood blood.

I now approach the nub of my argument. The recent book *The Life and Death of a Druid Prince, The Story of Lindow Man, an Archeological Sensation* contains an examination of Celtic and Druid society during the years of Roman contact. On page 153 I came upon the following astonishing sentence: "Pork seems to have been the meat most commonly eaten, and the Celtic aristocracy is known to have had a passion for pork."

I don't pretend to be a Sherlock Holmes or anything of that order, but suddenly a ripe and fruity idea struck me. I saw that all through the Threepwood generations the pork gene had lain dormant. What's bred in the bone will come out in the wash, and all that kind of thing, you know, and it took pumpkins to start the master of Blandings off in the right direction. It was a short step from large pumpkins to fat pigs. It had been well said of Clarence that he had an I.Q. some thirty points lower than that of a not too agile-minded jelly-fish.

Yet as he stared reverently at his prize pumpkin's golden roundness lying in one of the largest packing-cases ever seen in Shrewsbury, something stirred in his mind. He began dimly to make the grand transition from packing-case to sty, from pumpkin to pig. So you see: his obsession with pigs was his natural heritage, and winning those silver medals ensured that the ninth earl was, as we all know, a worthy descendant of his ancient line of noble ancestors.



Barry Pain, an influence on P. G. Wodehouse

by David Landman

A wonderful name for a comic writer—Pain. One supposes the single devotional treatise he wrote was an attempt to redeem it from paradox. Barry Eric Odell Pain (1864-1928) is a name studious admirers of P. G. Wodehouse will have encountered as an “influence,” though biographers and critics are unanimous as to just how inconsequential that influence was, for he merits but a single flying reference each by Donaldson, Green, Jasen, Osborne, and Wind. But Wodehouse read Barry Pain early and late in his career, and the extent of his indebtedness to the older writer is certainly greater than those brief notices would suggest. Aside from the influence on the boys’ books which Wodehouse acknowledges in a 1955 letter to Richard Osborne (quoted in Donaldson), the reader of Pain will discover in his pages the germs of some of the best gags in Wodehouse’s later work, and the irrepressibly academic in us urges that Pain’s clear influence on Wodehouse, particularly of low and middle-class characters, ought to be acknowledged. Besides, Wodehouse enthusiasts would enjoy Pain in his own right, for Pain is very funny. (Pardon. The name cries out for such high wit, and, though I do us all a disservice, I shall try to refrain from like hilarity for the rest of this sketch.)

Take for example Pain’s venal French-Swiss waiter Alphonse, whose fractured idiom and mingling of limey argot and gallic patois prefigures that crest-gem in Aunt Dahlia’s crown of glories, Anatole. Here is Alphonse:

My friends, listen. Make attention a little. I am a man that knows on which side is the buttered toast. If you think you see some green ion my eyes, you do the bloomer. I know my interest. It is that one day I—I who speak to you shall be the proprietor of the restaurant.

Here is Anatole in *Brinkley Manor*:

Hot dog! You ask me what is it? Listen. Make some attention a little. Me, I have hit the hay, but I do not sleep so good, and presently I wake up I look, and there is one who makes faces at me

through the dashed window. Is that a pretty affair? Is that convenient? If you think I like it, you jolly well mistake yourself. I am so mad as a wet hen. And why not? I am somebody, isn’t it? This is a bedroom, and what-what, not a house for some apes?

Alphonse speaking of sophisticated wine: “To give them the real thing would be like throwing pearls on a duck’s back.”

Anatole speaking of the unsophisticated Fink-Nottle: “He remain planted there, not giving any damns, and sit regarding me like a cat watching a duck.”

And here is perhaps the original of one of Wodehouse’s best gags. Alphonse is speaking from his long experience at the Restaurant Merveilleux:

I know now when an Englishman is going to say some words of French even before he begin: there comes always a look of anxious shame into his eyes. That means he is going to say *omelette aux fines herbes* or something a little like it. And the worse a Englishman speak French, the more he pay you for understanding and not laughing.

One would like to say that Wodehouse brought Pain’s undeveloped hint to fruition when he wrote that socko opening line of *The Luck of the Bodkins*: “Into the face of he young man who sat on the terrace of the Hotel Magnifique at Cannes that had crept a look of furtive shame, the shifty, hangdog look which announces that an Englishman is about to talk French,” but that is not the case. Patently, Pain’s humor is fully realized and brilliantly crafted. That subtle “or something a little like it” is a topper, a corking Pelion on a priceless Ossa that identifies Pain as a first-class technician. The last line’s admixture of shrewd insight into human nature is sheer Pain (sorry) in which he lives up to his own dictum, “A fine humorist is more than a humorist.” Pain’s generous acceptance of human foible is perhaps what appealed to Wodehouse and what he most imbibed from Pain—at the least we can say that both men beam the same sunny benevolence upon their creations. But that conscious infusion of sage observation into the funny stuff in Pain’s work, so graceful and unobjectionable

in the passage quoted, occasionally mutates into sentimentality, and in those instances Pain falls from his celestial bemusement over the comic complexity of things into bathos, something that never happens to Wodehouse. Pain's *Diary of a Baby*, for instance, lets us in on the inner thoughts of a despotic and literate suckling. Witness the following as Rosalys Ysolde Smith expresses her opinion of a man who thinks to amuse baby by letting it hear his pocket watch go tick-tick:

I did not wait; I started the first moment I got the watch in my hands. One quick jerk and it flew over my head into the fireplace. At the same time, with a sideways scoop of my right foot I sent his cup of tea over his light spring trousering, and, before, he could recover, a good drive with my left caught him clean on the point of the jaw. The careless beggar nearly dropped me.

Priceless slapstick. But the piece ends with baby afflicted with a mortal fever and records from the uncomprehending infant's point of view the agonized night watches of the mother, the impotent anguish of the father, the hand-wringing of Nurse. In the end, all turns out well, of course, but by then the delicious stinker of the early pages has become one of those rosy-cheeked cherubs who infest Victorian greeting cards.

I trust it will be understood I am not crying plagiarism in the comparisons I have made between Pain and Wodehouse. Lord knows, any similarities may have been coincidental or an unconscious memory. Besides, they occur as fleeting echoes in a brilliantly complex plot with a thousand other strokes of original wit and wackiness. Pain's comic work, for the most part, consists in a string of discrete vignettes with only the slenderest connecting thread (for example, how Alphonse finally inherits the Restaurant Merveilleux) and for its length plays variations on the same quirks of character and linguistic humor. It has been said that Pain had "all the gifts of a novelist," and he did write serious novels (supernatural and detective stories as well), but, in my view, the static comic monologue instinct with incisive and witty insight into character is Pain's forte. He never achieved the dazzling concatenations of a Wodehouse novel, nor did his comedy achieve supreme moments of

sustained hilarity like the Market Snodsbury speech. For this reason Pain's comic writing, with some justification, has been called "facile and ephemeral." Be that as it may, the point I hope to make is simply that those who appreciate the finesse, style, and craftsmanship of P. G. Wodehouse will enjoy those same qualities in Barry Pain, one of his favorite writers.

Did Wodehouse coin words!

The Spring issue of *Plum Lines* included an article by Marilyn MacGregor. Its headline was the same as you see above, but followed by a question mark. Marilyn listed a number of unusual words from the canon and asked whether PGW could have coined them. I looked in a couple of reference books and replied, with proper scholarly caution, that three of those words "seem on the present evidence to be Wodehouse coinages." I received a prompt response from Barry Phelps:

Tut, and again, tut. Really Ed—you should be ashamed of yourself having the headline "Did Wodehouse coin words?" in *Plum Lines*. Does the sun rise in the East, is the Pope a Catholic, does a cat like cream? The Master is cited some 1255 times in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and 143 of those citations refer to words invented by him or used by him with a unique new sense or sub-sense.

Mea culpa: I am at home to no one and skulk in dark alleys. This is news to me, but hardly surprising—Wodehouse was a master of language. The subject deserves more attention in *Plum Lines*; I must speak to the editor. Unless Barry is a most remarkable reader of this 20-volume dictionary, I expect he (or his source) obtained the data by scanning one of the new CD-ROM discs of the dictionary with a computer.

Bertie Wooster, knight of Mayfair

by Toni
Rudersdorf

Toni read a shorter version of this paper at our convention in New York on October 12, 1991. OM

Over the years I have read many comments about P. G. Wodehouse by writers who knew him. One observation recurs—he had “a schoolboy code of conduct.” That he drew on that code when creating Bertie Wooster seems clear. Many of the dilemmas that confound Bertie also confounded PG, and for the same reason—their shared view that a man had certain chivalric obligations.

As a boy Plum read Conan Doyle (who was steeped to the eyeballs in stories of chivalry from earliest youth), the Arabian Nights, Kipling, Tennyson, Mallory and similar authors. These writers often used the naive, heroic figure and drew upon the ancient Persian and French ideals of chivalry when creating their stories. It is possible that they planted the seed of Bertie in Plum’s mind.

Another and quite different figure in the literature of a late Victorian schoolboy was, I believe a source of Jeeves. That figure is described by students of literature as the “wily lad,” and he is far from noble. He is *Ali Baba in the Den of the Forty Thieves*, he is *Aladdin*, he is Jack of beanstalk fame—he wins against giants, gangsters, and penny-pinching “uncles” by trickery and sometimes by outright dishonesty.

It is only rarely that the heroic innocent is teamed up with the wily lad in literature—*Puss and Boots*, the *Thief of Bagdad*, and Arthur and Merlin are examples. Usually each has his own story type and few writers bring them together as allies....and none so well as Plum.

In a letter to his friend Bill Townend, PGW said he drew upon *Ruggles of Red Gap* in creating Jeeves. Reading *Ruggles*, I saw some similarities. The story is written in the first person by the unworldly valet, Ruggles. As long as he remains unworldly, the story is funny. His observations on pre-WWI America; his bulldog insistence on proper dress and decorum for his master, despite

that good fellow’s sordid attempts to thwart him; the aunt-like women who seemed to be the only species of female in the New World; all these combine to refresh and fizz up the reader. Then the change: the Bertie-like Ruggles acquires wisdom achieves a prestige based mainly on his clever mind, and finally opens a restaurant, moving into the hopelessly mundane.

I can imagine Plum reading Ruggles, laughing as I did, and winding up as disgruntled. He surely asked himself where Leon Wilson dropped the funny ball and found that it occurred when Ruggles either was ground beneath the ungentle heel of young America or wised up. If a heroic figure is to survive with youthful ideals intact, with gentlemanly behavior, an easy mark to appeals to his better nature, he must somehow be protected from the harsh realities.

To create the sublime hero that is Bertie, Plum took a line through the chivalric code of a knight of the Middle Ages. He was so successful that Bertie could have stepped into the circle of the Round Table, no questions asked.

A knight who followed that code was loyal to his superiors, courteous, protective, gentle to the weak, and honorable to all, including his enemies. Love and glory were to be sought, but only after all selfish desire for them had been purged; consequently, when a knight entered the field of combat any glory that he might gain would accrue to his lord and lady. The knight was expected to be courageous, chaste, humble, and obedient, to cultivate all the Christian virtues.

Of particular importance were the chivalric attitudes toward women: respect and reverence, at times approaching worship. If a knight desired the love of a lady, his suit was governed by a rigid code of conduct known as courtly love. Central to the was the knight’s abject subservience to his lady; her least whim or desire, in theory, took precedence over the knight’s personal comfort or safety.

To pursue this code with any degree of rigor a knight would need to live in a society

different from ours—or the lonely 20th century *preux chevalier* would need a wily lad to protect him.

The sheer genius of the Bertie character lies in the fact that although Bertie is severely limited in his actions by his self-imposed code, Plum manages to make him an entertaining and sympathetic figure. Not only is he chivalrous, Bertie strives to be always *preux*, a term which means proud and respected because of one's virtue. The *preux chevalier* must never glance aside, yield the field, or fail to stand in the light—and Bertie never glances, never yields, and never fails.

Jeeves, it may be argued, could get along just fine as a literary figure without Bertie. Hardly. Without Bertie, Jeeves would find it hard to approach the demigod status we so readily grant him. Wily lads need noble causes. A fellow like Jeeves needs to save his country, lend a hand to Scotland Yard, or protect the rarest kind of human on the planet.

People who laugh when I compare Bertie to Parcial possibly assume that knights were like astronauts, brainy as well as bold. But when you look over stories like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or *Ivanhoe* you conclude that a knight couldn't be particularly bright.

Bertie and the knights of old had other common ground. It is usually a relative who stands in need of knightly aid. I have the feeling from the tales of Mallory that the Round Table gang were all related (they certainly called each other cousin often enough). The castles seemed to belong mostly to relatives as well. So not only were the knights doing the right thing, they were doing at least some of it for the "family."

The tales of knightly service are often told in the first person, just as Bertie's are. They include the knight's blunders, and his happy accomplishments as well. In stories such as *Ivanhoe* it is usually some miracle that saves the hero's trouser seat, and in others such as *Sir Gawain* a woman mightily contributes to the trouble.

In many tales of glory the knight receives a call for help (from, say, the country seat of his friend, Lord Roderick of Glossop) about the impending arrival of an Ogre (young

Thomas, son of the famous Ogress, Aunt Agatha). Lord Roderick is in trouble—and Sir Bertie will be too if he goes to lend succor to his former foe. But he does not hesitate. He instructs his squire to pack the jolly old cheval. Then, singing a few notes of a popular lay or adding a bit of color to his knightly costume, he goes right out and gives of his best.

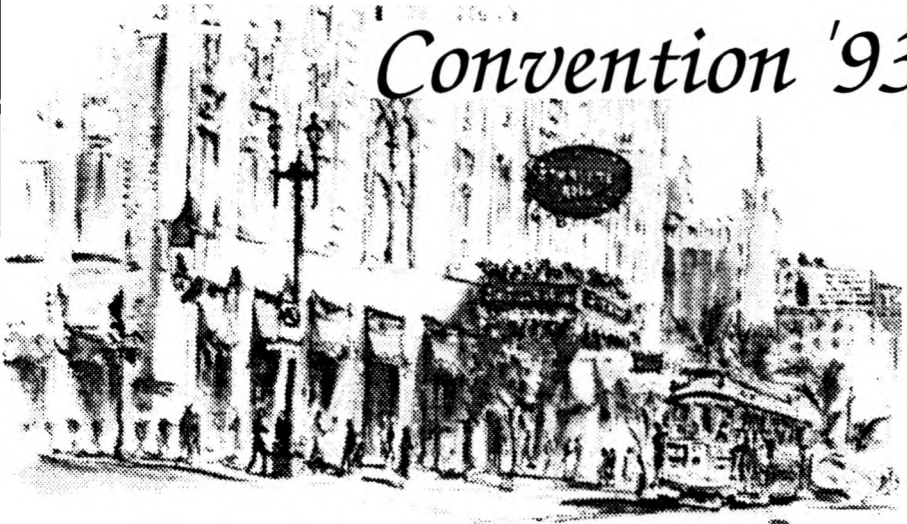
Squires, like Jeeves, had it pretty good, especially those who didn't hanker to be knights themselves. Here they were in service to a saintly, if intellectually negligible, knight who paid well, took trips to interesting places, and had reasonably predictable needs. It was doubtless in the squire's interest to be less high minded than his master. If the squire could loosen the girth on the opponent's horse just before the joust, he would do it with his hair in a braid and it wouldn't disturb his sleep.

The only threat to the carefree life of a squire, or to Jeeves, was the possible marriage of his master. Then his traveling days and most of his fun would be over. This may explain the strict adherence of so many knights to the tenets of courtly (i.e., platonic) love. A squire who daily reinforced this adherence might achieve the happy result of continued bachelorhood on the part of his master.

Bertie Wooster may not, like Ruggles, have the option of acquiring wisdom. On the other hand he has Jeeves, who has wisdom enough to share and no impulse to stifle his options. That Plum never allowed Bertie to deviate from the code of chivalry, or made Jeeves less than a *Thief of Bagdad* in proper gent's dress, are miracles inherent in the design of the Bertie and Jeeves stories.

So I see Bertie Wooster as a noble creation, a heroic figure, the musical comedy equivalent of Sir Galahad. Perhaps some think laughter and the heroic spirit don't make a good mix. But it is a little-known fact that heroes laugh a great deal, and not only in the face of danger.

Convention '93



The Wodehouse Society will hold its 1993 convention on July 30 to August 1, 1993, at the Sir Francis Drake Hotel in San Francisco, California. Events are planned for Friday evening, Saturday day and evening, and Sunday morning.*

The Sir Francis Drake was built in 1928 and is a block off of Union Square, down-town's hub. The famous cable cars stop right outside its front doors.

We have received room rates of \$102 to \$113 a night (price depends on whether single or double, etc., and includes the 11% city hotel tax), for very nice rooms that are part-way through a year-long renovation program. The meeting and reception rooms are elegant, and there is a large lounge area (with room for dancing) with a piano for itchy-fingered guests. The art-deco Starlite Roof bar has live music and a dance floor. Nearby hotel rooms of varying quality can be had for \$60 to \$90 a night; a list will follow in a future issue of *Plum Lines*.

Here are some approximate costs per person: Friday night cocktails \$10; Saturday night dinner \$35; Sunday breakfast \$16; and convention costs \$50.

While local TWS president Charles Bishop continues to nail down details, he would appreciate your comments on the following items:

Would you like to attend the 1993 convention? How many people would attend: _____

Would you be staying at the convention hotel or at a less expensive alternate hotel?

Would you attend a cocktail reception on Friday night, July 30, with a no-host bar?

* Would you attend daytime events on Friday, July 30 Sunday, August 1 Monday, August 2?

Any suggestions for activities or events? _____

Are you interested in any tours of the San Francisco area? If so, on what day would you prefer to do touristy things: _____ Any specific tours: _____

Please send your reply to Charles Bishop