



# Plum Lines

VOL. 14 No 3

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE WODEHOUSE SOCIETY

AUTUMN 1993

## Wodehouse convention '93!

The latest and possibly the happiest gathering of Wodehousians took place on July 30 - August 1, 1993 at the Sir Francis Drake Hotel in San Francisco. Here's what went on.

Acting on the principle that collective guilt will spread the blame thinner, I asked several people to send me their recollections of the convention. They cooperated generously and I mashed the words into a pulp and forced them through a colander. What follows is a sort of haggis made up of contributions from, alphabetically, **Charles Bishop, Jan Kaufman, Len Lawson, Jon Lellenberg, Marilyn MacGregor, Toni Rudersdorf, and Elin Woodger**, in addition to the Oldest Member. We are joint authors.

I found that crediting each author with each (usually brief) contribution made the story unacceptably lumpy even as haggis. So what you will read is a choral blend of voices—a sentence from Jan, a line from Toni, a couple of sentences from Marilyn, and so on, with individual authors rarely mentioned. I am grateful to all of them, not only for their facts, but for their spirited impressions of a happy weekend.

The first activity of the convention was a sampling of beers at local brew-pubs on Thursday evening, July 29, and our story begins at that point on the next page.

Contents	Convention '93	1	A few quick ones	13
	NEWTS in Remsenburg	10	Want ad	13
	It "became him well"	11	<i>Plum Stones</i>	14
	Jackets for Jeeves and Wooster	11	New members	15
	<i>Two Little Known East Anglian</i>		Two Little Known East	
	<i>Authors Compared</i>	12	Anglian Authors Compared	16

## Thursday evening

Our brew-pub crawl was led by Sheila McGinn, a non-Wodehousian but nevertheless lovely Irish lass, who checked out brew-pubs in San Francisco and made all arrangements for our visit. Our group of fourteen gathered first at the Sir Francis Drake and cabled to The San Francisco Brewing Company in North Beach. Sampling of various brews commenced, with people trading sips. A little browsing accompanied the sluicing.

From here the group progressed to Gordon Biersch, where dessert seemed to be in order. Oddly enough, a wheat beer garnered some acclaim. A non-Wodehousian, Corey Bridges, joined us to sample the brew and fare and company.

We lost some of the east-coasters changing pubs. The time shift had claimed them.

The last pub of the evening was 20-Tank Brewery in the always exciting SoMa (South of Market) area, where we collected the crowd who had attended the play "Oh, Lady, Lady!" We managed to carry on over the din of the music, sipping, tasting, and comparing.

Meanwhile another group was enjoying a revival of the 1918 Wodehouse/Bolton/Kern musical, "Oh Lady! Lady!" at a downtown theater.

Toni: Twenty of us enjoyed the play and joined the pub crawlers afterwards. The play had us all screaming with laughter and delight. It was so well reviewed on the following day in the San Francisco papers that the Sunday matinee performance was sold out, leaving many conventioners gnashing their pearly teeth in vexation. Of course, we who had seen it filled them in, which was no doubt just as satisfactory to them.

From a review in the *San Francisco Chronicle*: "Oh Lady! Lady!" is all innocent fun done with a deadpan air and a musical flair that retains the show's original style and revives a score that alongside today's Broadway shows sounds seventy five times as rich and rarefied as it must have sounded three quarters of a century ago."

## Friday morning

This is as good a place as any to discuss the Elevator Question, a matter of continuing amusement to all of us at the Sir Francis Drake. Toni said it best: "While the Sir Francis was indeed a Drake, the elevators made noises like a Duck with a daffy sense of humour. The bellmen had the grieved faces of men with secret sorrows; they sighed and would not be consoled as elevator four consistently stopped for reasons unknown and unknowable at the twelveth floor, while cleverly erasing all calls to other floors. Elevator three had a bouncing disposition, while two took long siestas, leaving only elevator one to quack its way from floor to floor. Conversation sprang up among strangers of many nationalities, entirely about elevators and voodoo. Voodoo never quite seemed to help, somehow."

A dozen of us took the Dashiell Hammett tour of San Francisco on Friday morning. Led by Don Herron, a professional Hammett guide, we walked 3 miles up and down some of the steepest hills in San Francisco in the midst of a heat wave. (Some of the sidewalks have steps built into them). We returned to the hotel with sunburned

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 Copyright Owner, the Trustees of the Wodehouse Estate.

necks, throbbing feet, but happy hearts. Len Lawson took a direct shot to the heart at the very spot where Miles Archer was mowed down by Bridget O'Shaughnessy. (A plaque marks the spot.) Elin reports that "Len survived his gunshot wound nicely, although he wore a rather stunned expression for the rest of the convention. Unless, of course, that's the way he always looks."

### Friday afternoon

While most of us were still traveling toward San Francisco, or sightseeing, or haunting bookstores, it was a time of preparation for some. Toni unpacked and polished up her metal sculptures, destined to be prizes in The Great PGW-net Contest. Shirley Lawson assembled the kits of convention souvenirs. The intrepid Blandings Castle skit participants held a full-dress and technical rehearsal for 3 hours. The cast presented Dave Smeltzer with a director's chair with "Director Dave" stenciled on its back, in appreciation of his patience with the rankest amateurs anywhere and in admiration of his excellence as a director. Bill Franklin (a.k.a. Ronnie Fish) joined the rehearsals and performance despite a severe flu of the sort we wouldn't want to describe.

By five o'clock conventioners began converging on the Sir Francis Drake Hotel, just a block off Union Square in the heart of the city. It was a hot day in a city that's proud of its cool summers, and the young doorman who greeted us probably wished he could have worn something other than his entertaining version of a Beefeater's uniform.

Shirley Lawson had set up the registration desk in the mezzanine and as we streamed in, she, Christine Dorfii, and Nancy Leone handed us a cornucopia of imaginative and appropriate souvenirs: a tote bag containing Doug Stow's beautifully designed and printed convention program and book marks, a neat little cloisonne lapel pin featuring the Empress, a clever convention poster showing a number of PGW characters on a cable car, a mug and postcards with the same picture on them, some quite convincing

shares of Silver River stock, many Bank of England five pound notes with the Queen's picture on one side and Plum's on the other (provided for a hidden purpose), sheet music for "Sonny Boy," and The P. G. Wodehouse Song Book

Our cocktail bar was open soon afterward, the crowd gathered, conversation rose to a genial roar, old friends greeted each other, and new friends were enthusiastic.

We had hired the pianist from Beefy Bingham's Oddfellows' Hall, and the stout fellow was willing to play "Sonny Boy" many times in the course of the evening. We had no cocoa or backgammon to offer, but nearly everybody who is anybody was on hand. Seen among the throng was "Mustard" Pott, dressed in a checked suit of the same color, who managed to relieve many people of those odd five pound notes, having inveigled them into playing Persian Monarchs. (It is very like Blind Hooky. In fact, if you can play Blind Hooky. . .) More than a few lost their little all to "Mustard."

A number of us gathered round the piano in one corner of the large mezzanine and let fly with enthusiasm. Neil Midkiff, Helen Murphy, Toni Rudersdorf, and Elin Woodger formed the hard core, with a number of others drifting by. Neil Midkiff took over when the hired hand left, playing and singing with gusto. We had a perfectly wonderful time, some of us singing, some of us making strange noises.

Elin: Ralston McTodd, cleverly disguised as Seymour Axelrod, quoted poetry at anyone within earshot. Rosie M. Banks was seen gathering material for her next book, insisting all the time she was only Ann Whipple, a simple homebody. The revels could have gone on for hours and hours, such was the good time being had by all the participants

Elin: Games broke out all over the place. Don Pollock was conscripted to run the darts game, and the winners were Steve Roberts in the advanced category and Elizabeth Hamilton among the beginners. Imagine my surprise to find Charles Bishop handing me a carton of eggs and a bunch of spoons and informing me that I was to run the egg-and-spoon race. I had failed to properly fortify myself with spiked orange

juice beforehand, but we Travers can rise to the occasion. [Elin uses the nom de net of Aunt Dahlia Travers on the PGW-net.] I recruited John Fletcher, a recognized expert in the field of egg-and-spooning, and he and I quickly cleared away enough furniture for three lanes of contestants in the softly-lit and rather luxurious surroundings of the Sir Francis Drake, and the contest began, with Toni Rudersdorf winning the first heat. There was a good deal of excitement and cheering, and I'm afraid some illegal off-track betting went on in the shadows. Toni was ousted in the final race by Toby Roberts, a dark horse with an English accent. I regret to say that not one egg escaped violent contact with the carpet. Fortunately, Charles had had the foresight to hardboil them first, or the good people of the Sir Francis would have sent Officer Garroway and P. C. Potter after us.

The toss-the-playing-cards-into-the-top-hat-from-a-distance-of-several-feet contest generated a great deal of excitement. It's a lot harder than it sounds. Cards don't toss—they float and slide and drift and dive, amid shrieks of laughter and wild cheers. I have no idea who won, but as I heard so many contestants say, it is better to toss cards hopefully than to win.

And then there was the hit-the-top-hat-with-the-Brazil-nut contest. Sorry, I missed this altogether and haven't the foggiest notion how it came out.

## Saturday

Our meeting was held in the Something-or-Other-Room of the Sir Francis. You know what I mean—the kind of room they build for these occasions: coffered ceiling, lofty pilasters with imposing capitals, terrifying Old Testament beasts, in gold, camouflaging the air conditioning ducts, carpet with a pattern guaranteed to hide even a pile of bodies, and so on. All quite as it should be.

The lovely and talented Charles Bishop, president of our Blandings Castle chapter and chief organizer of the convention, welcomed us and introduced Len Lawson, outgoing president of the society. Len presided over the sit-down portion of the

day.

Jeremy Thompson, our first speaker, was a favorite with everybody. Jeremy, who claims improbably to be a Los Angeles doctor, spoke on "Straws in the Hair, Straws in the Wind, and the Short Straw." A great deal went on in Jeremy's talk—P. G. Wodehouse, Pat and Mike jokes, hunting your own Easter eggs, and much else that I'm hazy about. As Jon Lellenberg said, "I am not altogether certain what his talk was about, but I enjoyed it immensely." And so did

Barry Phelps demonstrated in convincing detail that Bertram Wooster, the eminent diarist of Mayfair life between the wars, and P. G. Wodehouse, a serious writer heavily influenced by the classic Greek tragedians, were two distinctly different authors with different styles and aims. He demonstrated, as well, the "superior authorial merits" of Bertram Wooster. Barry's revelations must be considered a major contribution to the literary criticism of the age.

His talk, entitled "Two Little Known East Anglian Authors Compared," is printed in a shorter form, at his request, elsewhere in this newsletter. The talk was based on his recently published book of the same name, described in this issue.

James Chatwin, who had just graduated from Dulwich, delivered his winning essay, "School Days at Dulwich," comparing life in the present-day school with Plum's experiences there, which began just ninety nine years ago in May. Plum's school life sounded, to me, on the whole more interesting and more demanding than modern life at the school.

Kristin Thompson discussed "Writing about Wodehouse"—preparing and publishing her recent book, *Wooster Proposes, Jeeves Disposes*, an analysis of Wodehouse's work on his longest and best known saga. (The book was reviewed in the last *Plum Lines*.)

**Marilyn:** Kristin demonstrated in her talk that one can analyze humor without tearing its wings off. I found her account of

her search for a publisher fascinating and saddening, in that university presses appear to think Wodehouse isn't worthy of scholarship and commercial presses don't want to print anything him, but only want to keep reprinting his books.

Kristin read her first Wodehouse book in 1982 and so immersed herself in the subject that three years later (or was it only two?) she was working as a scholar in Edward Cazalet's Wodehouse Archive in England. Just shows what you can do if you give up trivial pleasures like eating and sleeping.

Toni Rudersdorf presented prizes won by members of the PGW-net, a computer network that links together some dozens of Wodehouse fans. Toni, an enthusiastic PGW-netter herself, provided the prizes in the form of handsome cut metal sculptures. Charles Bishop and Neil Midkiff were joint winners of The Great PGW-net Quiz, a truly fiendish thing. (An abbreviated version was offered at the convention.) Len Lawson and Elin Woodger also won PGW-net prizes.

Lunch followed, giving us another chance to attach faces to those names we've been corresponding with, and renew friendships with far-away friends.

Len Lawson, our doughty president, got us through the necessary business of our business meeting—the election of president and vice president—in admirably short time. Our new officers are Toni Rudersdorf, president, and Elliott Milstein, vice president. Continuing officers are Tom Wainwright, treasurer, Marilyn MacGregor, membership secretary, and Ed Ratcliffe, editor of *Plum Lines*.

Two discussions followed, one on a plaque to honor P. G. Wodehouse, the other on possible ties and scarves for our members.

Florence Cunningham, a past president, suggested some time before the convention that our society honor P. G. Wodehouse with a plaque in The Little Church Around the Corner in New York City, where he and Ethel were married in 1914. Wodehouse mentioned the church more than once in his

writings, always with pleasure, and most memorably in *Uneasy Money*.

Prior to the convention Florence wrote to the church to sound them out on the possibility of a plaque. The response was favorable, and Len Lawson asked Frits Menschaar, a New Yorker, to make personal contact with the proper authority at the church to discuss the procedure and the cost. Frits found that the church requires a contribution, in this case \$1200, and the estimated cost of the plaque is \$300, for a total of \$1500.

A proposal to raise money for the plaque was discussed favorably at the business meeting, and the result of two motions was the formation of a committee (Frits Menschaar, John Graham, and if necessary Francine Kitts) to make all necessary arrangements. Edward Cazalet, grandson of Ethel Wodehouse, has offered to contribute \$500, and the society voted to advance the remaining funds from its treasury, to be made up later by member's contributions. Len remarked that if we each give only \$3 to \$5 we will have made a significant statement about our favorite author.

The design of the plaque is underway. Wording will be as follows

---

PELHAM GRENVILLE WODEHOUSE, 1881  
- 1975, AUTHOR

married Ethel Rowley Wayman on 30 September 1914, in this church, which he fondly remembers in his works, as in his novel *Uneasy Money*:

"...the only church that anybody could possibly be married at. It's on Twenty-ninth Street, just around the corner from Fifth Avenue. It's got a fountain playing in front of it, and it's a little bit of Heaven dumped down right in the middle of New York.

In loving memory, THE WODEHOUSE SOCIETY

---

(Note: Words on the plaque will appear in long lines, not the short lines required by these narrow columns. OM)

Send your contributions to Len Lawson,

1206 Notre Dame Court, Livermore CA  
94550-4931.

We discussed a proposal that the Wodehouse Society adopt a distinctive necktie for men and a scarf (or ascot, etc.) for women with a pattern similar to the English school ties.

Len Lawson and others had corresponded with the Ben Silver Company, an American source of regimental and school ties, which had offered to supply TWS with a tie of our own design, made of a heavy English silk fabric. A variation of the Alleyian tie was proposed: alternating wide stripes of black and navy separated by narrow silver stripes, with the addition of a third wide stripe in plum color. Ben Silver offered them at \$34 each plus \$6 shipping and handling per order. (I believe there is a minimum order of two dozen ties.) Two members at the convention owned Alleyian ties made by Ben Silver and said they were nearly indestructible.

The company can provide ascots or floppy bows for women at similar prices, but the fabric is probably too heavy for scarves.

The consensus of the meeting was that Ben Silver ties were too expensive for items that might be worn only once every two years. Frits Menschaar and Charles Bishop offered to look for a less expensive source of quality, custom neckwear for men and women. Please contact them if you have suggestions.

**T**ony Ring, assisted by his dashed squiffy daughter Melanie, spoke on building a specialized Wodehouse collection. Tony, an income tax advisor, knew that Wodehouse had had many problems with wildly unreasonable income tax authorities. His search revealed more than 200 references to income tax in PGW's public and private writing. Tony decided to prepare "the comprehensive review on Wodehouse and income tax," and for that purpose to build a collection of sources. Tony discussed the questions and adventures he encountered in building his collection, and showed slides of his library, devoted entirely to Wodehouse material.

Especially pleasant as accompaniment was Wodehouse's musical comedy song "Bongo

on the Congo." Bongo, it seems, was a veritable paradise, and one thing that made it so was the absence of income tax.

**H**elen Murphy talked about "School Prizes and the People Who Won Them," illustrated with slides of her own remarkable collection of children's books of what can only be called the Age of Hyper Morality, roughly the Victorian period. Books for boys were dreadful and books for girls were worse. She helped us understand why Plum's wholly un-moral school stories were so popular with school boys. Stanley Ukridge, adopting the clever ruse of appearing as Dan Garrison, remarked that Helen's "stunning talk made the ginger-beer wire fall from my nerveless hands."

(Yes, this is the daughter of our own Norman Murphy, author of *In Search of Blandings*.)

We had now reached a time of day when a little restorative was indicated, and many of us sought a quiet refuge to gather strength for the evening's banquet. Some haunted book stores, others conciliated the natives with gifts of brightly-colored beads and trade gin. A few, maddened by the game-playing frenzy of the previous evening, sought relief by playing darts and hurling Brazil nuts at top hats once again. Meanwhile a considerable group, The Clients of Adrian Mulliner, held their first Senior Bloodstain in the S. Holmes, Esq. cocktail lounge of the nearby Union Square Holiday Inn. The Clients, I should perhaps explain to those of you who have just taken your seats and haven't even got to your popcorn, are fans of both P. G. Wodehouse and Sherlock Holmes. **Jon Lellenberg** will tell you about the fearsome-sounding event (I've abridged his account):

Some thirty five toddled in, and Bob Steele, long-time Bodymaster of the Scowrers and Molly Maguires, welcomed the clients to San Francisco. Old General Malpus read a passage from P. G. Wodehouse's *Performing Flea*, in which he wrote about his enduring awe of Arthur Conan Doyle. Susan Cohen presented a list of names which appear in both the Sherlockian and Wodehousian canons, with the thought that clients may

wish to select investitures. The Adrian Mulliner Players presented a clean, bright entertainment, a dramatic reading of Anthony Berkeley's 1925 Wodelockian parody, *Holmes and the Dasher*. After further feast of reason and flow of soul, not to mention some fast hands of Persian Monarchs by Eric Otten, the Bloodstain faded away.

### Saturday evening

**W**e gathered again, at 6:30, in one of those Named Rooms for the sluicing that comes before the browsing.

**Elin:** Many conventioners came dressed as a Wodehouse character, and this made for a wild and crazy time. Toni Rudersdorf wore a wig and backless dress that had to be seen to be believed. Jeeves would have been proud of Neil Midkiff: Neil and Neil alone dressed for dinner in the full soup and fish, and he was positively resplendent. My only regret is that he lives on the West Coast. Can somebody shanghai him and send him east? Perfection is so hard to find here. Phil Ayers wore an immense black beard and plus fours as Comrade Vladimir Brusiloff. He openly sneered at everybody, saying that he "spit myself of" this and that. It must be noted that Susan Cohen brought a pail-full of corncobs on the plane to top off her costume.

**Marilyn:** Florence Cunningham appeared as Dolly Molloy in a white "Twenties dress with an elegant hair decoration.

**Ann Whipple:** I'm awfully glad the Heralds of the Red Dawn didn't inflict any damage on the elegant parties present in their formal evening clothes, most particularly our new president Toni in Edwardian finery.

After a sufficient period of lubrication we trickled next door to the Empire Room, where we found beautifully arranged tables awaiting us, decorated by Ella Driscoll, Ed and Dorothy Sherman, and Pauline Blanc. Pauline had made, for each place setting, a small hand-colored drawing of the Empress with a brief quote, such as "There had recently been published a second version of his chin." A pot of brilliant cyclamen formed the centerpiece of each table. At this critical juncture, when all Nature cried out for food,

the Blandings Castle chapter insisted on first performing a Wodehouse skit at the hungry diners. For the record, 110 people attended the banquet, equal to the record number at our 1991 New York convention.

The skit, entitled "Fish and Prawns," concerns a critical evening at Blandings Castle that is never fully presented in the Master's works. Ronnie Fish wants to marry Sue Brown, who is present at the Castle this evening pretending to be a rich young woman. As the skit begins, Galahad creates panic among his sisters by announcing that he is about to publish his memoirs, thus outraging many stuffy elders when their youthful escapades are revealed. The lights go out in an electric storm. When the lights come on, we see Beach making off with Gally's manuscript, and Gally (who alone among his family is aware that it is gone), maneuvers his sisters into consenting to Ronnie's wedding by promising to delay publication of his memoirs for one hundred years. Gregory Parsloe, in youth and middle age, appears in a subplot, and we learn that the mysterious episode of Gregory and the Prawns occurred when the youthful Gregory took a couple of chorus girls named The Prawns to Ascot and outraged his aunt. This flashback was shown in a videotaped scene on a huge video projection screen. The skit ends with a videotaped scene of the Empress (a real, live, black pig) happily eating the manuscript (a real, live, white paper) by moonlight.

Toni described The Prawns as "...two very flashy chorus girls in feathers of salmon pink, dresses of pink and white, and fluffy hats. They wriggled on Gregory's arms, squealing and cooing to make one have a giggling fit."

Toni on the pig: "I laughed so hard I lost my lady license for three days following."

I can say, since my part was so small, that the skit was very well received. Some of the audience even stood up as they applauded—not all of them to have more freedom for their throwing arms.

Dave Smeltzer wrote the script with contributions from Jan Kaufman, Tom and Beth Wainwright, Missy Ratcliffe, and P. G. Wodehouse, who provided—though he

wasn't aware of it—about 80% of the dialogue, all the characters, and many of the incidents, which we swiped shamelessly from *Heavy Weather* and *Summer Lightning*. Dave also directed the skit (cheerfully and with great competence) and recorded it, all with assistance from his wife Susanna.

We had so much fun doing the skit that I've decided, quite illogically, that our names should be graven in stone. Here goes, in order of speaking or grunting:

Narrator	Edith Gladstone
Galahad Threepwood	Tom Wainwright
Lady Constance Keeble	Beth Wainwright
Lord Emsworth	Ed Ratcliffe
Ronnie Fish	Bill Franklin
Sue Brown	Christine Dorffi
Sir Gregory Pasloe	Mel Gladstone
Young Gregory Parsloe	Allan Pratt
Penelope (a Prawn)	Gail Smith-Walker
Priscilla (a Prawn)	Odile Sullivan-Tarazi
Lady Charlotte	Missy Ratcliffe
Constable	David Wainwright
Beach	Carl Wells
Lady Julia Fish	Jan Kaufman
Empress of Blandings	Oliver Sears

I said earlier that my part was slight. In fact it was hardly there at all. Lord Emsworth roused himself from somnolence only when spoken to sharply by his sister or brother, or when a lady walked by and the better angels of his nature stirred in their sleep. Otherwise his mouth hung open "like a letterbox" and he gazed vacantly at the ceiling—an action I found quite natural.

The banquet followed hard upon the skit, with no objections from the diners, who were emitting low growls. A brief flurry of roll-throwing began early and died out almost at once; many of us were disappointed. Do I need to tell you about the banquet? It was like most banquets, only better. The food was good enough, the wine was good enough, and the company was excellent, which is what the banquet was all about.

After the banquet President Len Lawson elevated these members (here listed alphabetically) to the rank of honorary membership: Phil Ayers, Dan Garrison, Barry Phelps, Doug Stow, and Kristin Thompson. Dan, Barry, and Kristin have promoted P. G. Wodehouse through their published books,

Phil is a past president, and Doug has contributed a great deal to the society in the form of his beautifully designed and printed programs, menus, bookmarks, and other items, for the past ten years.

Len has asked me to add the following remarks to the newsletter, representing his feelings about honorary memberships, and I do so gladly.

"It is our duty as members of The Wodehouse Society to promote P. G. Wodehouse and his writings. We can do this by encouraging others to read his books and by persuading libraries and bookstores to carry books by and about him. Some members do much more than this, and Bill Blood, our founder, began granting honorary memberships to members who gave special service to the society or who wrote books about Wodehouse or his writings. It is important that we show our gratitude to such people and the only means at our disposal is the granting of honorary memberships. This is very little to offer, but it does show our appreciation of their exceptional contributions."

In his last act as president, Len presented several awards and prizes. David MacDonnough won the abbreviated version of The Great PGW-NET Contest (a short version is printed elsewhere in this issue). Phil Ayers, with the Best Costume, was awarded a bag of Donaldson's Dog Joy Biscuits, which he reluctantly agreed to share with us at breakfast. Jim Earl, who had to cancel his trip from Shrewsbury at the last minute, won the Writing-Like-Wodehouse contest and was awarded—I can't remember what. Dorothy Sherman and Ella Driscoll were recognized for their beautiful table decorations, Pauline Blanc for providing many of the prizes, Ann Whipple for arranging the souvenirs, Jan Kaufman and Marilyn MacGregor for their work with our excellent speakers, Doug Stow for all his splendid letterpress printing for our society, and I was very pleased to be given a copy of *My Man Jeeves*, a gift from Nigel Williams, a Wodehouse book dealer in London.

Norman "Emsworth" Donaldson concluded the evening with his memorable reading of "Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend." This is the one Kipling called an almost perfect short story.

With the end of the formal proceedings a couple of dozen of us remained in the banquet room, reluctant for the evening to end. Some gathered in small conversational groups and there was plenty of singing around the piano. John Fletcher, Jan Kaufman, Toni Rudersdorf, the Wainwrights, and Erin Strauch were some of those present, joined soon by Dan Garrison and Charles Bishop, who approached the piano in a grand jeté I cannot soon forget, try as I will. We sang Sonny Boy, Old Man River, Sonny Boy, My Wild Irish Rose, Sonny Boy, I Love You Truly, The Street Where You Live, and—oh yes, Sonny Boy. When the hired pianist left, Neil Midkiff, still resplendent in white tie and tails, took over the playing, and the singing did not stop until the management ejected us, ever so gently, from the dining room.

Twenty or so of us adjourned vertically to the Starlight Roof, where the tinkle of ice in our glasses and dance music in the background did nothing to impede our literary talk (Dan Garrison, I remember, made several trenchant remarks about the existential subtext of *The Code of the Woosters*) until the management kicked us out, again ever so gently, when the joint closed at 1:30 a.m.

We five remaining stragglers adjourned vertically once again, this time to my room on the nineteenth floor, where we discussed this and previous conventions until the last bottle of wine was emptied at 3:15 a.m., at which time we parted with expressions of mutual esteem and goodwill.

## Sunday

We met for the last time over breakfast at Lori's Diner, across the street from the hotel. Lori's is a very good revival of a 1950s diner, with red Formica tables, Marilyn Monroe pictures on the wall, and a real live Edsel just to prove the place is serious. We gathered in a secluded area ("We can't let these people be seen from the street!"), listened to rock and roll, and relived the joys of the convention before we drifted away to the real world. It was all over.

Well, not quite over for some of us. At least twenty people went to see "Oh Lady! Lady!" on Sunday afternoon, and at least

twenty seven took a chartered bus across the bay to see a cricket match in the town of El Sobrante. The cricket players courageously allowed the Wodehousians to play a little cricket during their extended tea break, and Philip Ring demonstrated his prowess as a fast bowler. The bus returned to San Francisco over the Golden Gate Bridge, giving visiting Wodehousians an excellent view of San Francisco and the bay.

Then, alas, home. It *was* all over.

Elin Woodger summed it up best, I think: "Nonstop pleasure from start to finish. An absolute corker of a convention! A dazzling, wonderful, mind-boggling, witty, altogether perfect experience, and it ended too, too soon."

And so say we all.

Most members who helped prepare for the convention have been acknowledged above, with one exception: Charles Bishop, the man most responsible for its success. Only those who have made such preparations themselves can know how much forethought is needed, how many details must be seen to, how many phone calls must be made, to make a large gathering such as this successful. Charles was the chief planner and organizer of the convention, and we are all grateful for the excellence of his work.

Most of all we are grateful to

**Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse**

whose life and work we meet to celebrate.

# NEWTS in Remsenburg

As all dedicated Wodehousians know, Plum and Ethel lived in the village of Remsenburg, Long Island, for the last twenty three years of his life. A number of us have made pilgrimages there, singly and in groups. What follows is an enthusiastic report on a recent pilgrimage by the NEWTS, or members of New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society. The "Alexandra Seibert" referred to below is Mrs. Alexandra Seibert, a friend and neighbor of the Wodehouses, and our gracious and well informed guide on all these visits.

**I**t was great to see Alexandra Seibert's letter in *Plum Lines* reporting on her visit with a few NEWTS recently, and we hasten to add a few details about that wonderful day.

Our pilgrimage to Remsenburg was an unqualified success, thanks to Alex. We arrived at her house in Basket Neck Lane on Saturday afternoon, May 22, and from there popped down the lane two houses to the home of the Weiss family, who now inhabit the home in which Plum and Ethel resided. There have been a few changes, of course, since the Wodehouses lived there [Plum died in 1975, Ethel in WHEN???]—an addition put on, a swimming pool installed, and the house is no longer white. Nonetheless, one had a feeling of something-or-other about being there.

After a stroll around the grounds, during which a family member, unaware that we had permission to stroll at will, came out and said "Ho!" until convinced we were nothing more than a harmless bunch of NEWTS, we went back up the lane to the chapel and cemetery where Plum and Ethel are buried. We planted a couple of flowers (brought by John Kareores, who also brought a trowel on which we all, including Alex, inscribed our names with a permanent marking pen) and also ensured a profitable quarter for Kodak by snapping off approximately 3.6 million photos in less than half an hour. The number of ways in which a gaggle of NEWTS can be arranged around a tombstone and then photographed had Alex in stitches, and it was her considered opinion that Plum would have found our group to be the cat's pajamas. We can't help but agree, of

course.

We walked back down the lane that Plum walked so often to stretch his legs and collect his mail, marveling as we went that we were on what amounted to sacred ground. Alex brought us into her house and proudly showed us some Wodehouse mementos, including Plum's teacup and a vase she had received as a gift from Ethel. Again, Kodak could hear the cash registers ringing as we clicked away. Finally it was time for tea, and our gift to Alex of a rhubarb pie, which went over big. Joining us at this time was Margaret Zbrozek CHECK SPELLING, who had been Ethel's housekeeper after Plum's death. Alex and Margaret regaled us with stories about the Wodehouses, and enthusiasm ran so high that Alex led us in singing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" for Plum, followed by "For She's a Jolly Good Fellow" for Ethel. We all signed a postcard to the Cazalet family [the English grandson of the Wodehouse's], and Alex was good enough to mail it on our behalf.

Thus, as you can see, there was more than met the e. in Alex's letter, and we just want to set the record straight: For she's a jolly good hostess!

The letter was signed by all six pilgrims: Christopher Riff, Elizabeth Hamilton, John Kareores, Maria Sensale, John Fahey, and Elin Woodger.

## CONVENTION SOUVENIRS

WITH WODEHOUSE CHARACTERS ON A SAN FRANCISCO CABLE CAR

Coffee mug. Poster. Postcards and tote bag. Cloisonne pin (pictured here). Alas, some souvenirs (the coffee mug and tote bag) are in short supply. You are advised especially if you order early, you want the mug or tote bag.



SEE THE ORDER FORM IN THIS ISSUE

# It "became him well"

May I appeal, through *Plum Lines*, for another feather to be put onto the feathery cap of Colonel Norman Murphy, Wodehousian Extraordinary?

In his *In Search of Blandings* and elsewhere he has identified people and places in the sacred texts. He has located a philosophical publication by one of Plum's cousins, Helen Marion Wodehouse, head of a Cambridge Ladies College, a publication which must surely have been in Plum's mind when he made Lady Florence, then, and not for the last time, Bertie's fiancée, instruct him to read *Types of Ethical Theory*.

In 1982 I gave a talk at the Lyttleton Theatre in London's South Bank during the Centenary Wodehouse Exhibition. In it I begged for identification of the provenance of a form of words which Plum used significantly often. I was sure it was a parody, or mockery, or tease, or echo of somebody (as with "it was the work of a moment," or "showering kisses on her upturned face"). The core phrase was/is "became him well" and I instanced three variants of it from a stock of six or seven I have noted:

a) Bertie, speaking of himself, "'Oh,' I replied, with a suavity which became me well."

b) His vicar, in anger, asks Augustine Mulliner, "'Are you a curate or a harlequin?'," and Augustine met his gaze with an unfaltering eye. 'I am a curate,' he replied with a dignity that well became him."

c) In a golf story, Miss Forester, seen knitting what looked like a sweater, "It is not a sweater" replied Miss Forester, with a womanly candour that well became her, "It's a sock."

Colonel Murphy, unknown to me, accepted the challenge, and he has come up with an answer which I believe to be right. I quote from his letter to me:

I am proud of this one, because I went off and looked for it. I found it by a long process of elimination. By every rule I could think of, it had to be post-Dickens and pre-Ruby M. Ayres/Ethel M. Dell.

It also had to be someone so popular that PGW could parody it, and that means a turn of phrase so well known that people would recognise the parody. And that meant, I reckoned, Ouida or Marie Corelli. (I did have a bash at Ethel M. Dell and Ruby Ayres as well, just on the off chance.)

I found it in Marie Corelli, on the penultimate page of her best-known book, *The Mighty Atom*. Fitted every aspect of my theory since the book went into hundreds of thousands. A simple, honest farm lad is addressing his social superior over the graves of two innocent children, but the professor recognises the sterling worth etc. in the honest lad's eyes etc. The quote is

"'Ye mistake me, Sir. . . ' he said with a simple dignity which became him well."

Who but the gallant colonel would have tackled such a haystack and found such a needle?

According to a biographical dictionary Marie Corelli published *The Mighty Atom* in 1896, whereupon, as noted above, it sold by the ton. One of the copies was surely read by the teenage Wodehouse, who read everything.

## "Jackets for Jeeves and Wooster"

Elin Woodger has just received word of what should be an interesting Wodehouse exhibit in New York City in October and November. Steven Guarnaccia, an artist who has done jacket illustrations for Wodehouse books published by Harper Collins, will exhibit those illustrations in a presentation entitled "Jackets for Jeeves and Wooster." Details:

The Harper Collins Exhibition Space  
10 E. 53rd Street, New York  
October 13 - November 5, 1993  
8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

"Mr. Guarnaccia hopes members of the Wodehouse Society will want to take in his work," says Elin. "I intend to be there with bells on."

# Two Little Known East Anglian Authors Compared

Barry Phelps, Wodehouse biographer, Wodehouse collector *par excellence*, and former Wodehouse bookseller whose uniquely informative catalogs are still treasured, is just about to publish another of his Wodehouse books. Its title is shown above. His speech at our recent San Francisco convention was based on its text, and a portion of that speech, reduced at his request, is printed in this *Plum Lines*. The distributor's announcement follows.

We are honoured to have been entrusted with the distribution of Mr Barry Phelps' forthcoming work of literary scholarship — the full text of the speech written by Mr Phelps for his address to the 1993 Wodehouse Convention in San Francisco, from which a much shorter version was delivered.

This work follows Mr Phelps' genealogical study, *Wooster of Yaxley & Wodehouse of Kimberley: Parallel Peerages*, which compared the remarkable similarities in the family backgrounds of Mr Wooster and Sir Pelham, touching but briefly upon their writing. "While both authors are highly regarded a wise man will hesitate to adjudicate (CHECK SPELLING IN OED) on which is the better writer: *de gustibus non est disputandum*."

In *Two East Anglian Authors*, available late this year, Mr Phelps examines the great differences in the prose styles, output, methods of work and attitudes to their craft of Sir Pelham and Mr Wooster — notwithstanding their common heritage. Mr Phelps' research drives him, courageously, to the conclusion that, between the two, Mr Wooster must be awarded the *palme d'or*. As many critics consider *Wooster of Yaxley* to have an excessively intellectual tone — making the work impenetrable to tenured academics — *Two East Anglian Authors* abstains from the footnotes and sourcenotes supporting its predecessor. However, a

bibliography of authors cited, from Miss Carmen Flores to C. P. West, is appended to the text.

*Two East Anglian Authors* will be privately published by Mr Thomas J Wise. Text printed in Swiss 721 Roman 11 pt on pale-cerise 110 gsm wove cartridge; 20cm by 24cm [7.87 inches by 9.45 inches], 32 foliated leaves, red eps, bound in maroon buckram covered boards lettered in gilt on the spine and front cover with dw of Transmarque 130 gsm pink-marbled, semi-opaque paper. Illustrated. The single edition is limited to 99 numbered copies worldwide, each signed by the author: \$99.00 post inclusive. There will be no second edition before the start of the next millennium.

(We regret that Mr Phelps' other recent books, *Trans-ocean Irrigation in Greater Micronesia* and *Sermon Trappistes de L'Abbe Charles Michel d L'Epee* are not in print.)

Author's inscriptions to named recipient gratis upon request.

Cheque with order. On approval to cheap, humourless bibliophiles.

lon

## Book Barn

I came across a most interesting bookstore in rural New York State recently. It's called Book Barn of the Finger Lakes, it's in an old restored barn with 1.25 miles of shelves, and those shelves are filled, the owner says, with "50,000 used, rare, and scholarly books." It has, as far as I could see, no junk. I could spend uninterrupted days and nights in the place, emerging starved, sleepless, and happy, unaware of the passage of time. When I was there the Wodehouse section held a few first editions, a few paperbacks, and more reading copies than I've seen in one place in a long time. The prices were moderate. The owner, Vladimir Dragan, is a Wodehouse fan and will gladly accept want lists. The Barn is located at 25 Cortland Road, Dryden NY 13053, phone (607) 844-9365. Open Wednesday through Sunday, and Monday and Tuesday "by chance." —OM

# A few quick ones

Jim Earl, our racing correspondent, has for several years kept us informed of the quite respectable efforts of the elderly English race horse named Bertie Wooster. Now, turning to the younger generation, he reports that another Wodehousian equine has appeared on the English tracks. Winsome Wooster ran at Sandown on May 30 and, says Jim, was "unplaced but ran well for the first time out." We solemnly rejoice in the knowledge that the great name of Wooster shall not perish from the turf.

Jim also notes the disturbing fact, revealed in the *Sunday Times*, that "a fearsome product called Dr Harris's Original Pick-me-up bears the Royal Warrant of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother." The Queen Mother is an honorary member of our society, and we did hope (said the Great Editor wistfully) that that honor would be accorded Jeeves's own concoction, so highly recommended by Bertie on many occasions of need.

Tina Griffin's mum, Mrs. Edwards, who lives in England, kindly sent these notices about the latest and last "Jeeves and Wooster" series. They appeared in the *Mail* of May 16, 1993.

It's a bally shame, chaps, but this fourth series with Hugh Laurie and Stephen Fry will be the last, as it uses up all the remaining P. G. Wodehouse material [all ninety six books!—OM]. Looking very elegant and expensive, it's going out in style.

The first three (of six) episodes are set in America, and you'd never guess Thames Water's building stands in as the Waldorf foyer, while Ruislip Lido doubles as the Long Island locations. Tonight, Bertie is lumbered with twin cousins who are in love with the same nightclub singer.

His pal, Tuppy, is trying to sell the recipe for cock-a-leekie to Slingsby's Superb Soups. And there are various romantic complications. Plenty here for Jeeves to sort out. Fast-paced, neatly written nonsense, with Laurie and Fry a perfectly polished double act.

Charles Bishop asks me to tell all of you who are interested in buying convention souvenirs that the tote bags and coffee mugs are in short supply. Order now and beat the

rush!

My wife and I haven't been to England since the Wodehouse Pilgrimage in 1989, and that's too long. So we're planning to go back in the spring of next year to where Pippa passes and where it is always high summer at Blandings Castle.

A word about this issue of *Plum Lines*: It's already a month late because of other demands on my time. The demands are continuing, and I've put this issue together hurriedly rather than delay it for three weeks. It's ragged and incomplete, but at least it's published. Some items delayed from previous issues are delayed until next time. My apologies to the patient contributors.

The Oldest Member

## Want ad

Offered:

The following prices include postage within the US.

1. LAUGHING GAS, New York: Doubleday Doran, 1936. First edition. Near Fine in DJ (lightly faded on spine) which states 2nd edition on inside front flap, but matches first edition DJ in every other detail. \$65.
2. QUICK SERVICE, London: Herbert Jenkins, 1940. First edition. very good minus (gold on spine rubbed). \$30.
3. COCKTAIL TIME, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1958. first American editin. Near fine in near fine DJ. \$40.
4. A FEW QUICK ONES, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959. First edition. Near fine in near fine DJ. \$40.
5. SERVICE WITH A SMILE, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1961. First edition. Near fine in near fine DJ. \$40.

John adds this note: My previous ad went well. I sold five books to four buyers. I hope more members start to place ads.

# Plum Stones—The Hidden P. G. Wodehouse

A new set of Wodehouse booklets is about to appear with the above title. The publisher's announcement follows.

**G**alahad Books has secured permission from the Trustees of the Wodehouse Estate to reissue twenty-five stories by P. G. Wodehouse which have never appeared in book form in the United Kingdom. They range from detective stories and Sherlock Holmes pastiches through sports stories to prototypes of mainstream Wodehouse plots and characters, and first appeared in numerous different publications between 1901 and 1965.

There will be twelve booklets, 145mm x 210mm [5.71 inches by 8.27 inches], each of which contains a commentary on the stories by Tony Ring. Galahad Books has been informed that no further consent will be given for projects of this kind, and printing must be limited in total to 250 copies of each booklet. Sixteen sets will be used for an Omnibus edition finely bound in full leather, to be published a day before the first booklet is made available.

The series of booklets will be issued at approximately two monthly intervals and advance subscribers to the whole series will receive priority booking and qualify for a post-free price.

This series of publications will effectively represent Wodehouse 'FIRST EDITIONS' and will not be further reprinted. Only twelve copies of the Omnibus Edition will be for sale, a scarcity similar to that of the legendary *The Globe By The Way Book*.

*Plum Stones—The Hidden P. G. Wodehouse* (with commentaries by Tony Ring) will be published in twelve booklets in an edition of 250 each, as follows:

Numbers 1 to 16, of which only twelve are for sale, bound in full leather into an Omnibus Edition by The Fine Bindery, lettered A to P and signed by Tony Ring.

Numbers 17 to 250 bound in stiff wrappers.

The booklets will cost £10 each plus £1 towards postage and packing (£2.50 overseas). Advance orders for the whole series will be £120 post-free (£135 overseas). The Omnibus Edition will cost £395 post-free worldwide and will be published a day before the first booklet.

## Contents of Each Booklet

1. WODEHOUSE DETECTIVE WRITER  
64 pages  
The Strange Disappearance of Mr Buxton-Smythe  
The Adventure of the Split Infinitive  
Death at the Excelsior  
Mr McGee's Big Day

2. UNREPUBLICISHED REGGIE PEPPER  
76 pages  
Disentangling Old Percy  
Concealed Art  
The Test Case

3. THEATRICAL STORIES  
64 pages  
The Colour Line  
Back to the Garage

4. KEGGS, THE BUTLER  
36 pages  
Love Me, Love My Dog

5. FIRST IMPRESSIONS, MATURE REFLECTIONS  
52 pages  
A Job of Work  
Ways to Get a Gal

6. THERE BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD GOES BAXTER  
28 pages  
Creatures of Impulse

7. SELF-DERIVATIVES PAR EXCELLENCE  
60 pages  
Big Business  
Joy Bells for Barmy  
The Right Approach

# New members

---

## 8. BERTIE'S FRIENDS

44 pages

Dudley is Back to Normal  
The Great Fat Uncle Contest

## 9. "IN THAT SHAPE, ROTTEN"

40 pages

Reggie and the Greasy Bird

## 10. ETHICS AND EUGENICS

52 pages

A Prisoner of War  
The Pro

## 11. WRYKYN HAVOC

36 pages

Jackson's Extra  
The Deserter

## 12. FIRST DRAFTS

44 pages

Reginald's Record Knock  
Tom, Dick and Harry

The books may be ordered from Galahad Books, c/o Nigel Williams (Books), 7 Waldeck Grove, London SE7 0BE, England. Telephone or fax (081) 761 4025. Note that settlement by credit card carries a 5% surcharge. Make cheques payable in sterling to Galahad Books.

# Two Little Known East Anglian Authors Compared

by Barry Phelps

A brief version of the speech delivered  
at the 1993 San Francisco Convention of the Wodehouse Society.

Only those who actually heard Barry Phelps deliver the following speech received its full effect. His speaking style had on this occasion a gravity, a measured tread, befitting the really *very* serious subject matter of his speech. The following is, at Barry's request, an abbreviated version of the speech given at the convention. That, in turn, was a greatly abbreviated version of the text of Barry's new book *Two Little Known East Anglian Authors Compared*. See the publisher's announcement in this issue for information on the book.

The prudent speaker addressing the 1993 convention of the Wodehouse Society either praises Sir Pelham as the finest writer ever produced by the English speaking peoples of the world, or places himself in grave peril. Yet Sir Pelham's prose — while not without some slight merit — cannot match the sublime writing of another East Anglian author — Mr Bertram Wooster.

Mr Wooster is a non-fiction writer whose comic genius flowers in the garden of autobiography. His output is small — just fourteen books from the first, *My Man Jeeves*, to the most recent, *The Catnappers*, or *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen in England* — yet all of them are stars in the galaxy of English literature.

On the other hand Sir Pelham is a prolific fiction writer, the author of over eighty books. His work — mainly concerned with the stark grey tragedy of life — is, therefore, properly compared with other masters of the genre such as Blair Eggleston whose whole tone is that of a disillusioned, sardonic philanderer who has drunk the wine-cup of illicit love to its dregs but is always ready to fill up and have another. There are passages in some of Eggleston's books, for example *Worm i' the Root*, which simply make you shiver, so stark is their cynicism, so brutal the force with which they tear away the veils and reveal Woman as she is. One might usefully compare Sir Pelham's work to that of Wilmot Royce, author of *Sewers of the Soul* and *The Stench of Life*, or to that of Stultia Bodwin, author of *Offal*. Let me read one paragraph to you.

Black branches like a corpse's withered hand, waving against the blacker sky. Chill winds, bitter like the tang of half remembered sins. Bats wheeling mournfully through the air — and on the ground worms, toads and nameless creeping things — and all around desolation, doom, dyspepsia and despair.

Those dismal words, which could have come from any of the anguished writers I have just mentioned, are, in fact, a paradigm of Sir Pelham's prose from *Came the Dawn*.

In our authorial comparison let us now consider the rude yardstick of quantity.

While we cannot condemn Sir Pelham's writing simply because of his huge output we must pause and ask ourselves "Can any author produce so much work and maintain the highest standard?" *Verbum sapienti sat est*, as Mr Wooster's valet might say.

On the other hand Mr Wooster's slim *oeuvre* classes him indisputably among the great men of letters such as Rosie M. Banks, authoress of *Mervyn Keene*, *Clubman* and other revered titles; Florence Craye, authoress of *Spindrift*, who looks on modern enlightened thought as a

sort of personal buddy; and Gwendoline Moon, authoress of *Autumn Leaves* and *'Twas on an English June*.

So much for quantity.

But before adjudicating between the merits of these two authors one must compare the quality of their prose. To that end I had intended to compare Mr Wooster's feature article, "What the Well Dressed Man is Wearing," with one of Sir Pelham's non-fiction pieces, "Wodehouse on the Niblick," but it then occurred to me that there is an ideal book for the task, one which shows the awed admiration which Sir Pelham felt for the writing of Mr Wooster — an admiration so intense that Sir Pelham tried his hand at writing in a style reminiscent of his more famous colleague and even expropriated Mr Wooster's valet to serve his hero. But this tale, written in the third person, proved far less felicitous than the original. I refer, of course, to *The Return of Jeeves*.

This book shows clearly that Sir Pelham is fighting his natural inclinations when attempting to write humour. The scholar Gould has argued that the Great Russians are the obvious and major influence upon Sir Pelham's prose. If Mr Gould had my knowledge of the classics he would have concluded that it is in fact the Tragedians of Ancient Greece who are the dominant influence upon Sir Pelham's writing. Indeed, the Homeric structure of *The Return of Jeeves* is made for tragedy. But Sir Pelham cannot write against the inclination of his muse and the plot fails to adapt successfully to the more lighthearted technique of Mr. Wooster.

My last example is taken from Sir Pelham's *Love Among the Chickens*.

We were quiet at the farm that night. Ukridge sat like Marius among the ruins of Carthage and refused to speak. Eventually he took Bob with him and went for a walk.

Half an hour later I, too, wearied of the scene of desolation. My errand took me in the direction of the sea. As I approached I was aware of a figure standing in the moonlight, gazing moodily out over the waters. Beside the figure was a dog.

I would not disturb his thoughts. The dark moments of massive minds are sacred. I forbore to speak to him. As readily might one of the generals of the Grand Army have opened conversation with Napoleon during the retreat from Moscow.

I turned softly and walked the other way. When I looked back he was still there.

There the story closes but we worldlings can foresee the inevitable downward spiral of ignominy about to engulf the protagonists, Ukridge and his Millie. Even the author was tormented by the anguish awaiting Mr and Mrs Ukridge and never wrote of them in their later life — only about Ukridge before his marriage. A similar tragic structure will be found in all Sir Pelham's work by those who intend to find it.

Let us now examine random quotations from three of today's most highly esteemed authors:

For an instant Lester Gage thought that he must have been mistaken. Then the noise came again, faint but unmistakable — a soft scratching on the outer panel.

His mouth set in a grim line. Silently, like a panther, he made one quick step to the desk, noiselessly opened a drawer, drew out his automatic. After that affair of the poisoned needle, he was taking no chances.

Still in dead silence, he tiptoed to the door; then, flinging it suddenly open, he stood there weapon poised.

As the door opened a dying man fell to the floor, gasping "The beetle! Tell Scotland Yard that the blue beetle is . . ." and expired on the hearth mat.

Our second example:

Stop me if I've told you this before, but once when I was up at Oxford and chatting on the river bank with a girl called something that's slipped my mind there was the sound of barking and a great hefty dog of the Hound of the Baskervilles type came galloping at me, obviously intent on mayhem, its whole aspect that of a dog that has no use for Woosters. And I was commending my soul to God and thinking that this

was where my new flannel trousers got about thirty bob's worth of value bitten out of them, when the girl, waiting until she saw the whites of its eyes, with extraordinary presence of mind opened a coloured Japanese umbrella in the animal's face. Upon which, with a startled exclamation it did three back somersaults and retired into private life.

#### Our third example:

"What can prevail" — Millicent's eyes flashed as she faced the stern old man — "What can prevail against a pure and all consuming love? Neither principalities nor powers, my lord, nor all the puny prohibitions of guardians and parents. I love your son, Lord Mindemere, and nothing can keep us apart. Since time first began this love of ours was Fated, and who are you to pit yourself against the decrees of Fate?"

The earl looked at her keenly from beneath his bushy eyebrows.

"Humph!" he said.

You do not need me to tell you the authors of each of those distinctly different quotations. The first is obviously by that great thriller writer, James Rodman, from his *The Secret Nine*.

The second could only be from Mr Wooster's talented pen.

The third, clearly from Miss Rosie M. Banks, is from her novel *The Woman Who Braved All*.

Each of those three quotations has a unique voice: None could have been penned by anyone other than the actual author. But now let us consider the following three.

Firstly:

One of the most serious troubles with Grand Opera is that you have no means of telling what the deuce it is all about. A stout gentleman comes onto the stage and sings "La-who ta zoom ba hump na ree" etc, and you have no means of knowing whether he is trying to tell you that the only girl he has ever loved has married a social gangster or whether the trouble is that he came home after leaving his office and found that the butler has been at the port again and that the cat had stolen the remains of the cold chicken.

Secondly:

The past season has been a trying one for dramatic critics. It is a nerve-wracking experience to draw a bead on a play and then, just as you are going to fire, have the thing duck into the storehouse before you can pull the trigger. This happened so often that, towards the end, one took it for granted that one's scholarly essay on the latest productions would never appear in print owing to the sudden decease of the l.p.'s within a couple of weeks of their birth.

Thirdly:

A manager, we will say, wishes to produce a musical comedy. Does he call up a librettist on the telephone and ask him to become busy on a script? That would be contrary to all the etiquette of the profession. The preliminary negotiations are conducted in a series of lunches. There is the lunch at which the writers of the lyrics are introduced to each other. There is the lunch at which the authors make the acquaintance of the actor selected to play the role of leading comedian; and on the following day after the violent quarrel which ends in his throwing up the part, the lunch at which they meet his successor. . . . it is this that makes musical comedy writing the perilous occupation which it is . . . .no step in its manufacture can be undertaken save after a preliminary meal.

Nobody here can name the author of each of those quotations. They are, in fact, J. Plum, Sir Pelham and C. P. West, but so similar are the writing styles that they could have been written by the same person. Clearly Sir Pelham's pen lacks the unique voice that Mr Wooster's enjoys.

If my demonstration of the superior authorial merits of Mr Wooster over Sir Pelham distresses any among you here today I must warn you that worse is to come. Already, in

England today many more people have heard of Mr Wooster than of Sir Pelham — helped by the fact that Mr Wooster's adventures make ideal material for television.

I fear, ladies and gentlemen, you are going to have to change your name to The Wooster Society and move your headquarters to the capital of Wayne County, Ohio: the city of Wooster.

---

Copyright © Barry Phelps 1993