



# Plum Lines

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## GERTRUDE TRIUMPHANT

**H**elen Murphy found the beginning of this English story began way back in April, with this cri de coeur in *The Stage* of April 27:

A film company is on the hunt, metaphorically speaking, for a swine to star in *Heavy Weather*, the P. G. Wodehouse novel. If anyone has a Berkshire weighing at least 250kg [550 pounds] lying around the house they should send details and a photo of their truffle-hunting pal to Cinema Verity Productions, The Mill House, Millers Way, London, W6 7NA. Envelopes should be marked, unsurprisingly, PIG.

**P**ete Barnsley reported, just a little later, that Verity Lambert, producer of *Heavy Weather*, was proposing to cast a *pink* pig as the Empress. Heresy of the rankest kind!

**A**lex Hemming carried the story forward with this article by Paul Heiney in the *London Times* of May 20 (excerpts are printed here):

This is Gert. At least, that is how she is known to her owner, Bob Matthews, of Tiverton in Devon. As we have hardly been introduced, it might be better if we were to call her by her full and proper pedigree name, Old Bell Stonebow XIII. Alas, being 13th looks like being unlucky for her, but it could easily have been very different. It was my painful task to break the news to her that things were not going her way.

I had rung the producer, Verity Lambert, to ask if she had found a pig to play the Empress of Blandings. 'Actually, I'm

looking for two,' she said. 'One for Lord Emsworth, and a smaller one for Sir Gregory.' So far, so good. She also knew she was looking for a *big* pig, far fatter than any kept by a modern commercial farmer. She wanted one that weighed 250 kg. A truly fat pig: 'The Empress...could have passed in a dim light for a captive balloon, fully inflated and about to make its final trip. The modern craze for slimming had found no votary in her.'

'I'm musing over the pig at the moment,' Ms Lambert said. 'I've never cast a pig before, but it hasn't got to do much. It's got to be seen in the front seat of a car at some stage, but that's it.'

Then came the blow. 'The director's a bit disturbed about the pig being black. He doesn't think it will show up well. Difficult to light. We may use a pink one. I haven't made up my mind yet.'



Gertrude of Tiverton with her owner, Bob Matthews

'But, but...' I blurted. 'Wodehouse says specifically that the Empress of Blandings was a Berkshire pig; black with four white socks, a white tip at the end of the nose and a white flash from snout to forehead. You can't use a pink pig, can you?' The fact of the matter is that Ms Lambert can cast any sort of pig she wants.

Bob Matthews has just the pig Ms Lambert is looking for. She [the pig, not Ms Lambert] lives in a magisterial situation atop a hill in Devon, overlooking the valley of the Exe; a fitting home for an empress. And she is the right size. 'How many pounds is 250 kg?' Mr Matthews asked. We reckoned more than 500. 'Then Gert will fit the bill nicely,' he declared, 'because I was looking at her the other day and thinking to myself that there's 500 lb of sausages in her, when the time comes.'

Stay your hand, Mr Matthews: she may be worth far more than that when she's a star.

Mr Matthews lives and breathes Berkshire pigs. Known at the agricultural shows as Big Bad Bob, he not only keeps live pigs but manufactures, in his garage, teapots with pigs on them, jugs and sugar bowls with Berkshire pigs. The registration number of his car is SOW 12.

'Do you think you could get her in the front seat of a car for a film?' I asked.

'It would have to be a hell of a car, but I dare say she would go in. She loves being on show. When we bath and shampoo her, and rub her in oil on show days, she loves it.'

'Wodehouse was quite specific,' says Richard Lutwyche, the secretary of the Gloucester Old Spot society, who has a soft spot for the Blandings stories and all rare breeds of pig. 'The Empress of Blandings was a *Berkshire* pig. They were hugely popular in the 1930s. If they must use a pink pig you must steer them away from a modern pink pig.'

We agreed that pink pigs look like dogs, by comparison. 'The Berkshire was a specialist pork pig. And don't forget that one of the principal things you wanted from a pig was lard.' Fashions have changed and we are now urged to think of fat meat as some kind of poison. 'It was the Government which finished off the Berkshire pig. It had to respond to the Danes, who were stealing the bacon market. The Berkshire wasn't such a good bacon pig. Pork was her thing.'

I wandered to the orchard in which Gert was truffling with her dignified snout. A boar, frothing at the mouth, possibly with anger on his beloved's behalf, watched our every move. 'She's a lovely

pig,' Mr Matthews said, 'well up on her feet, nice belly line, 14 good teats.' She is. She would be ideal.

I broke the news to him that it was possible that a pink pig would be used for a part that was rightly Gert's. He looked a little crestfallen and said: 'That's very disappointing. I like things done properly, I do. It's the annoying thing with these television people. They get things three-quarters right and then they go and spoil it. I mean, if Wodehouse had said that Lord Emsworth drove a Rolls-Royce, they wouldn't show him in a bloody Morris, would they?'

And then, in a final, generous gesture, he said: 'but they're welcome to Gert. I'm not bothered.' He won't stand in her way.

The ball is now in Ms Lambert's court. Let her cast whichever pig she wishes. But, before she makes her crucial choice, let her consider one more voice raised in strong defence of the Berkshire pig. It is that of no less a distinguished Berkshire pig breeder than Lord Runcie, the former Archbishop of Canterbury.

I rang him to break the news of the grave sin which was about to be committed. 'Terrible, terrible,' he repeated. 'Of course, I've fought this battle before, when a Wodehouse exhibition featured a painting of the Empress of Blandings, and it was of a *pink* pig! I wrote a letter which they then placed beside the picture.' He then asked to be excused for a moment: 'I'm just going to the vast porcine section of my library.' He rapidly thumbed through a copy of *Blandings Castle* and declared: 'Yes, there's no doubt about it. It's here. The Empress of Blandings was a black *Berkshire* sow. No doubt about it at all.'

Lord Runcie, somewhat like Lord Emsworth, pays regular visits to his Berkshire pigs, which are looked after by mentally handicapped children, for whom they provide therapy. 'I fell for Berkshire pigs during the war. I was in the army in France and I used to come home on leave. It was the time when people were encouraged to 'Keep a Pig for Victory'; to fatten and so on. I was always told that the Berkshire was the only *real* pig. I used to lean over the gate, looking at them ruminatively, and feel restored.'

Thinking fondly of his pigs, and the insult it would be to them if a pink pig ('pink pigs look common to me') were to steal from his beloved breed the starring role in this television production, he said: 'I suppose I could write a letter to the producer, threatening recourse to the public prints,

or something. I'm all for taking part in a campaign. Please use the authority of my name, if you wish.'

There is another way of ensuring that Gert gets the stardom that is her due. Wodehouse readers will remember that to secure a winning place for his sow, Sir Gregory Parsloe was forced to steal Lord Emsworth's Empress of Blandings to prevent her from going to the show. Not, of course, that the former Archbishop of Canterbury and I are threatening anything...

**N**orman Murphy and someone whose name I've misplaced sent the final installment of the story. It's by Quentin Letts of the *Daily Telegraph*, July 13:

Out of the the barn, at the speed of soap leaving a bather's foot, shoots a short fellow in a baseball cap. It tops a pink, agitated face. 'Jeeeesus, where are those apples?' he shouts at a sidekick with a walkie talkie. 'Rob! We need apples for Gertie up here and we need them now!'

Rob snarls into his walkie talkie: 'Rob to farmyard. Rob to farmyard. Apples for Gertie ay essay pee! Bring her a bucket of water, too.'

It is last day on location for *Heavy Weather*. Director Jack Gold is fretting about his leading lady, or rather, his leading sow: Old Bell Stonebow XIII, familiarly known as Gertie. When a star actress starts to lose her concentration you cosset her, and in moments of crisis offer her a pear drop. If that actress is a 600 lb, prizewinning Berkshire Rare Breed pig, you give her an apple.

True to form, the weather is heavy. 'Shropshire had become a Turkish bath,' wrote Wodehouse. 'The sky seemed to press down like a poultice.' So the heat is authentic, even if this is Turville Park, Oxon, not Blandings Castle, Salop. Most of the interior scenes for *Heavy Weather* have been shot at Sudeley Castle, Glos, but for the piggy scenes we came to dusty Turville.

Down at the lower farmyard are parked the paraphernalia of film locations: wardrobe wagons, Dormobiles for the stars, and a caterer's truck. Lunch — rather coarsely, I thought — includes sausage, bacon and black pudding. The stars'

Dormobiles are identified by name strips Peter O'Toole, Richard Briers. Gertie's accommodation is no less handsome, a spacious sty fashioned to look like a castle.

Above Gertie's crenellated sty is the inscription from Tacitus, *Return potiuuntur porci* — Pigs have Power — and this pig has certainly held sway over the emotions of the crew from Cinema Verity/Juniper Films. Eyes welled with tears when Bob Matthews, Gertie's owner, decided not to dispatch her to the slaughter house after filming.

Producer Verity Lambert, better known for the soap opera 'El Dorado,' says Wodehouse is 'much more fun', but adapting it for film is difficult. Wodehouse's genius lay in his language, something past scriptwriters have failed to match. The adapter for *Heavy Weather* is farce writer Douglas Livingstone. 'We're playing it to the hilt,' Lambert says.

Peter O'Toole, playing Lord Emsworth, reflects on the danger of seeking to impose comic acting on Wodehouse, as 'it is all there in the book.' He borrows my copy of the novel and reads out a passage. The words leap off the page.

This, discloses O'Toole, was how he and his ex-wife Sian Phillips spent their best days.

'We would zoom off to Venice with a bag containing ten Wodehouse books, find ourselves a pretty hotel, have a silly lunch, then retire for a siesta. Afterwards we would lie in bed and read Wodehouse to each other. Try *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*. Go to bed and read it to someone you care for.'

The dreamy mood is shattered by Gertie. O'Toole offers her an apple and she bites into his hand. Gertie's approach on set is marked by a whiff of vinegar, dabbed be-

hind her ears to keep her cool.

David Bamber, playing private detective Pilbeam, appears in a Thirties haircut with centre partings. Bryan Prinkle grunts the few words given to Wodehouse's pig keeper Pirbright.

A few miles down the road at Henley-on-Thames, regatta-goers dressed in boaters and blaz-



ers are living out an overdone modern fantasy of what they imagine to be Wodehouse's world. But the Master's real flame is being kept burning by Gertie.

**P**ete Barnsley, rounding out a gloriously happy story, informs us that producer Verity Lambert has written porcine rhymes about Gertrude:

The very fine Empress of Blandings  
Was a pig of superior standing.  
Now anyone who could think  
That the Empress was pink  
Is completely beyond understanding.

Middle England can now sleep at night  
And no longer wake up in fright  
So hold up the flak  
'Cos our pig is black  
And is truly a wonderful sight.



We of the Wodehouse Society salute Ms Lambert's magnificent action in choosing Gertrude of Tiverton, and look forward eagerly to supporting her nomination as the next Poet Laureate.

## SOMETHING NEW

by Doug Stow

**M**ichael Emmerich reports that *Paris Review* still has copies of its Winter 1975 edition with that Wodehouse interview. The price is about \$6 or \$7.

Marilyn MacGregor writes that *The Penguin Book of Modern British Comic Writing* contains not only Wodehouse's Thrillers, but a new-to-her Wodehouse pastiche by Julian Maclaren-Ross entitled 'Good Lord, Jeeves' which postulates the ennoblement of Jeeves. It's compiled by Patricia Craig, paperback of course, 1995.

Four audio tapes of Wodehouse stories are listed in the current Audio Editions catalog: *A Damsel in Distress*; *Right Ho, Jeeves*; *Very Good, Jeeves*; and *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*. The first three are six cassettes long, the last is five cassettes, so they seem unabridged. All are read by Frederick Davidson and prices are from \$35.95 to \$39.95. For more information call (800) 231-4261.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF

by Richard Boston

Pete Barnsley found this column in the *English Guardian* not long ago. 'In our little circle,' says the narrator of the Anglers' Rest, 'I have known an argument on the Final Destination of the Soul to change inside forty seconds into one concerning the best way to preserve the juiciness of bacon fat.' Such a mental gymnast is Boston. His comparison of *The Importance of Being Earnest* with any Jeeves story you can name changes within four seconds to a review of an audio tape that sounds like a must-get item. I regret that I can't tell you any more about the source of the tape than is contained in this column.

**I**t's extraordinary how much P G Wodehouse there is in *The Importance Of*. There's an Aunt Augusta who in name, appearance and demeanour could be an elderly female relative of Bertie Wooster's (and probably was); and the Jeeves-like resourceful manservant Lane, who says: 'I do my best to give satisfaction, sir'; and the dizzyingly intricate plot that depends on something as unimportant as someone's name; and the mistaken identities, and wards of court and the pastoral setting, and perfect manners and perfect weather, and the *bons mots* and the epigrams, and the endless leisure. But most of all is the unspoken assumption that there is something called happiness, and that it is not somewhere sometime, but here and now.

Wodehouse's vast and international fame rests mostly on the Jeeves and Wooster books, but I find that the most discerning readers (which means the ones who agree with me) prefer the Mulliner and Blandings works. It was to the last of these that I turned to sample audio Wodehouse, and the ones I hit on were the 1947 *Full Moon* and the 1969 vintage *A Pelican at Blandings* (Random House, two cassettes, three hours, £8.99 each). What can I say? Wodehouse is Wodehouse, and in that department there is no further praise available. And the reading is by John Wells.

His talent is really very exceptional, and this is not said often enough. These tapes could easily be something of a backwater in his career, but he brings to them the highest standards. The timing, the voices, the clarity of the reading are all exemplary. His repertoire of voices is getting on for that of Alec Guinness, and in the lower register he often sounds like Guinness.

For P. G. Wodehouse D. Lit.  
The head of my profession  
from Evelyn Waugh  
Christmas 1961

The inscription on this fly-leaf reads: 'For P. G. Wodehouse D. Lit. The head of my profession. From Evelyn Waugh Christmas 1961' A note pasted opposite reads: 'This book was inscribed and given by Evelyn Waugh to Plum. It was one of Plum's most treasured possessions.' The book, Waugh's *The End of the Battle*, is in a private collection.

# P. G. WODEHOUSE AS CRIME READER

by William A. S. Sarjeant

**P**elham Grenville 'Plum' Wodehouse (1881-1975) was one of the most productive writers of this century, as well as being arguably its greatest humorist. His creation Jeeves, the wise and paternal manservant—or, as he would prefer it, 'gentleman's personal gentleman'—of Bertie Wooster, is one of the figures of fiction who has truly entered popular consciousness—though often misconsidered 'the perfect butler'! Both Jeeves and Bertie have attained further eminence on television, as has another of Wooster's creations, the gentle and sempiternally bewildered Lord Emsworth of Blandings Castle. Yet these are but three among a rich array of characters tugging at the Wodehouse enthusiast's memory, from the one hundred and fifteen books, sixteen omnibus volumes, and uncounted magazines in which The Master's writings are to be found.

Like most great writers, Wodehouse was also a great reader. He and his close friend William Townend, himself a prolific writer of adventure stories, were schoolboys together at Dulwich College, London. At that time, according to Townend's account in Donaldson's biography, Wodehouse's favourite authors were James Payne, Rudyard Kipling, the humorous essayist Barry Pain, and W. S. Gilbert. Townend also noted, in his introduction to *Performing Flea*, that his own 'vast knowledge of the novelists of the late Victorian era' was a direct result of his early association with Wodehouse.

In later years, as Wodehouse's published letters reveal, his reading ranged through many fields of literature. Prominent in this reading were detective and mystery novels; as Connolly's biography expresses it, 'intrigue intrigued, and thrillers rather thrilled him.' Though he was also quite a passionate Shakespearean, Wodehouse noted ruefully in one of his Berlin broadcasts, quoted by Donaldson:

Reading the Complete Works of William Shakespeare was a thing I had been meaning to do any time these last forty years, and...I had bought the Oxford edition for that purpose. But you know how it is. Just as you have got Hamlet and Macbeth under your belt, and are preparing to read the stuffing out of Henry the Sixth, parts one, two

and three, something of Agatha Christie's catches your eye and you weaken.

He was a great admirer of Agatha Christie and long in correspondence with her, treasuring her letters enough to keep them, though most others were thrown away. The admiration was mutual. Christie dedicated her Hercule Poirot novel *Hallowe'en Party* (1969) to him, writing:

*To P. G. Wodehouse*

whose books and stories have brightened my life for many years. Also, to show my pleasure in his having been kind enough to tell me that he enjoys *my* books.

Despite Wodehouse's admiration of Christie, there was one occasion at least, shortly after World War II, when her writings indirectly aroused a sense of amused frustration (the following six quotations are from *Performing Flea*):

I, too, have had my troubles. In *Joy in the Morning*, Bertie speaks of himself as eating a steak and Boko is described as having fried eggs for breakfast, and Grimsdick of Jenkins is very agitated about this, because he says the English public is so touchy about food that stuff like this will probably cause an uproar. I have changed the fried egg to a sardine and cut out the steak, so I hope the situation is saved. But I was reading Agatha Christie's *The Hollow*, just now, presumably a 1946 story, and the people in it simply gorge roast duck and souffles and caramel cream and so on, besides having a butler, several parlour-maids, a kitchen-maid and a cook. I must say it encouraged me to read *The Hollow* and to see that Agatha was ignoring present conditions in England.

Raymond Chandler, who was a contemporary of Wodehouse at Dulwich College, was another of his enthusiasms. Writing to Townend from France in 1947, he grumbled:

I wish I could get hold of some of Raymond Chandler's stuff. It sounds from what you say just the kind of thing I like. An occasional new book creeps through to Paris, but it is very difficult to get hold of anything except pre-war books. I have just got the new Peter Cheyney, and it makes one realize there has been a war on to look at it. It is about an inch thick and printed on a sort of brown paper and the price is nine and six. Before the war no publisher would

have put out a shilling edition like that. I think the paper shortage is worse than the food shortage.

Peter Cheyney is nowadays almost forgotten, but he was for a time much admired as the premier British exponent of the 'hard-boiled' school of crime fiction writing. There were times when Wodehouse had reservations about its exponents, as when he wrote to Townend:

I've just read Raymond Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely*. It's good. But a thing I've never been able to understand is how detectives in fiction drink so much and yet remain in the hardest physical condition. And how do Peter Cheyney's detectives manage to get all that whisky in London in war-time? They must be millionaires, as I believe the stuff is at about four quid a bottle.

Another great American writer seems to have come early to Wodehouse's attention, when he was himself regularly publishing stories in the *Saturday Evening Post*. In that same letter, Wodehouse asks:

Do you ever read Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe stories? A good many of them came out in the *Saturday Evening Post*. They're good. He has rather ingeniously made his tough detective drink milk.

The 'tough detective' was, of course, Archie Goodwin, not Nero Wolfe himself. Though Nero could also be unexpectedly tough at times, he is not recorded as ever drinking milk!

Wodehouse's reading was certainly very wide, within and without this particular genre. Arthur Morrison, one of the earliest writers of mysteries, gained praise during a discussion of possible story plots for Townend:

Arthur Morrison once did a very good one where a caller was shown over the house by bloke who had just murdered the owner, whose body was lying in next room. Couldn't we do something on those lines?

Like most Englishmen in the twenties and thirties, Wodehouse was an avid reader of Edgar Wallace, dedicating his book *Sam the Sudden* (1925) to Wallace and receiving a reciprocal dedication in Wallace's *The Gaunt Stranger*. There was a note of envy in one of Wodehouse's letters to Townend:

Edgar Wallace, I hear, now has a Rolls Royce and also a separate car for each of the five members of his family. Also a day butler and a night butler, so that there is never a time when you can go into his house and not find

buttling going on. That's the way to live!

Jasen, however, describes an incident at a dinner that might have aroused Wodehouse's resentment, but instead merely provoked his lasting glee:

Plum found himself embroiled in parties galore. One gathering in particular impressed itself upon his memory of those days. 'I was seated next to an elderly woman at a dinner party given by Ethel,' he recalled, 'when she turned and spoke to me. 'This is a great moment for me,' she said, 'I can't tell you how proud I am. I think I have read everything you have ever written. We all love your books. My eldest son reads nothing else. And so do my grandsons. The table in their room is piled high with them. And when I go home tonight,' she added, 'and tell them that I have actually been sitting at dinner next to Edgar Wallace, I don't know what they will say.' Plum didn't know what to say, either. With a look that might have struck the lady as strangely cold, he nodded his appreciation.



A person whom Wodehouse both liked and admired was E. Phillips Oppenheim, once a best-selling author and considered 'the great storyteller' but now almost forgotten. In a letter written in the fall of 1945, Wodehouse expressed this admiration very frankly to Townend (the following four quotations are from *Performing Flea*):

I see in the Paris *Daily Mail* that E. Phillips Oppenheim has managed to get back to his home in Guernsey by getting a lift on a yacht. He is seventy-nine, but must still be pretty fit, if he can dash about like that.

I have always been devoted to Oppy. I saw a lot of him when I was living at La Freyere. I remember him coming to lunch one day not long after he had had a slight sunstroke, and he was taking no chances on getting another one. There was one of those Riviera trees on the terrace, a dense mass of leaves through which no ray of light could penetrate, and he sat under it with a sun helmet on his head holding a large umbrella over himself. Did you know that he used to dictate all his stuff? I found him in a gloomy mood one day. He had had the perfect secretary, who used to squeal with excitement as the story got going on the international spies and mysterious veiled women, which bucked him up enormously, and she had left to get married and in her place had come one of those tall, statuesque, frozen-faced secs who took his dictation in an aloof, revolted sort of way as if the stuff soiled the paper of her note-book. He said it discouraged him.

Wodehouse and Oppenheim were good friends while neighbors on the Riviera and they played much golf together. Indeed, Oppenheim devotes four pages of his autobiography, *The Pool of Memory*,

to Wodehouse's golfing exploits and considered him the longest driver among golf amateurs he had ever seen.

Lord Dunsany, whose incredibly diverse literary output included some of the most succinct and memorable mysteries ever penned, was a particular enthusiast:

To fill in the time before Edgar Wallace writes another one, I am re-reading Dunsany. I never get tired of his stories. I can always let them cool off for a month or two and then come back to them. He is the only writer I know who opens up an entirely new world to me. What a mass of perfectly wonderful stuff he has done. (All this is probably wasted on you, as I don't suppose you have read him, unless you were attracted to his stories by the fact that they used to be illustrated by S. H. Sime. He has exactly the same eerie imagination as Sime. In fact, he told me once that quite a lot of his stuff was written from Sime's pictures. They would hand him a Sime drawing of a wintry scene with a sinister-looking bird flying over it and he would brood on it for a while and come up with *The Bird of the Difficult Eye*.)

His secret sorrow is that he wants to write plays and can't get them put on. I spent the afternoon with him once at his house down in Kent, and he read me three of his plays one after the other. All awfully good, but much too fantastic. One of them was about an unemployed ex-officer after the War who couldn't get a job, so he hired himself out as a watch-dog. He lived in a kennel, and the big scene was where he chased a cat up a tree and sat under it shouting abuse. I laughed heartily myself, but I could just picture the fishy, glazed eye of a manager listening to it.

Highest of all, however, was ranked Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In one of his earlier letters to Townend, Wodehouse wrote of him at length:

Conan Doyle, a few words on the subject of. Don't you find as you age in the wood, as we both are doing, that the tragedy of life is that your early heroes lose their glamour? As a lad in the twenties you worship old whoever-it-is, the successful author, and by the time you're forty you find yourself blushing hotly at the thought that you could ever have admired the bilge he writes.

Now, with Doyle, I don't have this feeling. I still revere his work as much as ever. I used to think it swell, and I still think it swell. Do you remember when we used to stand outside the bookstall at Dulwich station on the first of the month, waiting for Stanhope to open it so that we could get the new *Strand* with the latest instalment of *Rodney Stone*... and the agony of finding that something had happened to postpone the fight between Champion Harrison and Crab Wilson for another month? I would do it today if *Rodney Stone* was running now.

And apart from his work, I admire Doyle so much as a man. I should call him definitely a great man, and I don't imagine I'm the only one

who thinks so. He was telling me once that when he was in America, he saw an advertisement in a paper: 'Conan Doyle's School of Writing. Let the Conan Doyle School of Writing teach you how to sell'—or something to that effect. In other words, some blighter was using his name to swindle the public. Well, what most people in his place would have said would have been 'Hullo! This looks fishy'. The way he put it when telling me the story was: 'I said to myself, Ha! There is villainy afoot.'

When advising Townend on the techniques of writing, Wodehouse used Doyle's writing to furnish an effective example:

Last night I went to bed early and read your story, *Peter the Greek*. For the first half I thought it was the best thing you had ever done, full of action and suspense. But, honestly, as you seem to think yourself from your letter, it does drop a bit after that. Mogger (my Heaven! what names you give your characters!), whom you have established as a sinister menace, is weakened by the scene where Teame hits him. It is an error, I think, ever to have your villain manhandled by a minor character. Just imagine Moriarty socked by Doctor Watson. A villain ought to be a sort of scarcely human invulnerable figure. The reader ought to be in a constant state of panic, saying to himself: 'How the devil is this superman to be foiled?' The only person capable of hurting him should be the hero.

Yet Wodehouse's admiration of Doyle was by no means uncritical, as a letter to his stepdaughter Leonora, quoted by Donaldson, demonstrates:

Aren't writers extraordinary. I simply gasped when Wells said that the Bulpington of Bupp was as good a character as Kipps. It meant that his critical sense was absolutely dead. The Bulpington of Bulp isn't a character at all. I felt the same when Conan Doyle used to say that the later Sherlock Holmes stories were as good as the early ones. It's a relief to me to know that I've got you to tell me if I am going cuckoo in my work.

After release from interment by the Nazis in August, 1941, Wodehouse did the most unwise thing in his amiable, innocent life by allowing himself to be persuaded to make some broadcasts from Berlin. His release had been solely on grounds of age, not from any other cause, and those broadcasts were not in the least political; rather, they were amusing and poked gentle fun at the Germans. Nevertheless, in the tense climate of the war years, it was assumed that the broadcasts had been the price of his release. Consequently, poor Wodehouse was branded as a collaborator.

Among the writers who rallied to his de-



fence were Dorothy L. Sayers and Sax Rohmer. (Rohmer and Wodehouse were later to be associated in unsuccessful attempts to subvert the extortions upon royalties of the U. S. Internal Revenue Service.) Since Wodehouse was perfectly prepared to forgive writers for poor literary style, provided they told entertaining stories, it is likely enough that he read cheerfully of the exploits and frustrations of Dr. Fu Manchu; but I have found no evidence for this.

For Wodehouse's reading of Lord Peter Wimsey's adventures, the evidence is indirect but convincing. In the early pages of Wodehouse's *Uncle Dynamite* (1948), Reginald 'Pongo' Twistleton is having an amiable dinner with his remarkable uncle, Frederick Altamont Cornwallis Twistleton, fifth Earl of Ickenham:

They also touched on such topics as the weather, dogs, two-seater cars (their treatment in sickness and in health), the foreign policy of the Government, the chances of JuJube for the Goodwood Cup, and what you would do—this subject arising from Pongo's recent literary studies—if you found a dead body in your bath one morning with nothing on but pince-nez and a pair of spats.

Quite evidently Wodehouse was remembering the gruesome discovery by the unfortunate Mr. Thripps, recounted in Sayers' *Whose Body?* (1923):

The body which lay in the bath was that of a tall, stout man of about fifty. The hair, which was thick and black and naturally curly, had been cut and parted by a master hand, and exuded a faint violet perfume, perfectly recognisable in the close air of the bathroom. The features were thick, fleshy and strongly marked, with prominent dark eyes, and a long nose curving down to a heavy chin. The clean-shaven lips were full and sensual, and the dropped jaw showed teeth stained with tobacco. On the dead face the handsome pair of gold pince-nez mocked death with grotesque elegance; the fine gold chain curved over the naked breast. The legs lay stiffly stretched out side by side; the arms reposed close to the body; the fingers flexed naturally. Lord Peter lifted one arm, and looked at the hand with a little frown.

'Bit of a dandy, your visitor, what?' he murmured. 'Parma violet and manicure.' He bent again, slipping his hand beneath the head. The absurd eyeglasses slipped off, clattering into the bath, and the noise put the last touch to Mr. Thripps's growing nervousness.

'If you'll excuse me,' he murmured, 'It makes me feel quite faint, It reely does.'



Another line of evidence on Wodehouse's reading is furnished in *The Code of the Woosters* (1938). Bertie Wooster is reading a mystery story—'a particularly good one, full of crisp clues and meaty murders'—as a distraction from the worrisome problem of locating the leather-covered notebook purloined by Stephanie Byng. He announces:

'Jeeves, I have come upon a significant passage. . .It points the way and sets the feet upon the right path. I'll read it to you. The detective is speaking to his pal, and the "they" refers to some bounders at present unidentified, who have been ransacking a girl's room, hoping to find the missing jewels. Listen attentively, Jeeves. "They seem to have looked everywhere, my dear Postlethwaite, except in the one place where they might have expected to find something. Amateurs, Postlethwaite, rank amateurs. They never thought of the top of the cupboard, the thing any experienced crook thinks of at once, because"—note carefully what follows—"because he knows it is every woman's favourite hiding place."'

Bertie's 'goose-flesher' is not named in the book, but I can now identify it for Wodehousians who have wondered: E. R. Punshon's *Mystery of Mr. Jessop*, published just one year earlier. The detective in whom Bertie has such faith is Superintendent Ulyett, superior officer of Punshon's principal hero, Sergeant Bobby Owen. It is to Bobby that Ulyett grunts that the crooks had:

'Looked nearly everywhere.... Amateurs though—complete amateurs; never thought of the top of the cupboard any experienced crook thinks of at once, because he knows it's every woman's favourite hiding place.'

Thus we can add E. R. Punshon to Wodehouse's reading list!

A knottier problem is presented by 'Pongo' Twistleton's reading, in *Uncle Dynamite*, a mystery thriller entitled *Murder in the Fog*. Now, Wodehouse strewed the titles of entirely fictional works of crime fiction throughout his novels and short stories—Usborne has listed twenty-four of them in his *Wodehouse Companion*—but most of those titles have a much more imaginative ring. (Typical of Wodehouse's invented 'goose-fleshers' are *Inspector Biffen Views the Body*, *The Case of the Poisoned Doughnut*, *Blood on the Bannisters*, *Excuse My Gat!* and *Gore by the Gallon*.) This particular title sounds genuine, somehow; moreover, the plot outline sounds pretty typical of a mystery of

the 1920s or 1930s:

In times of spiritual disturbance there is nothing like a brisk mystery thriller for taking the mind off its anxieties. Pongo's first move after parting from Sir Aylmer Bostock had been to go to his room and get his copy of *Murder in the Fog*; his second to seek some quiet spot outside the grounds, where there would be no danger of meeting the ex-Governor on his return, and soothe himself with a good read. He found such a spot at the side of the road not far from the Manor gates, and soon became absorbed.

The treatment proved almost immediately effective. That interview with Sir Aylmer in the hall had filled him with numbing fears and rendered him all of a twitter, but now he found his quivering ganglia getting back to mid-season form: and, unlike the heroine of the tale in which he was immersed, who had just got trapped in the underground den of one of those Faceless Fiends who cause so much annoyance, he was feeling quite tranquil....

A check reveals four books that might have been on Wodehouse's reading list: Paul Thorne's *Murder in the Fog* (Penn, 1929); Elaine Hamilton's *Murder in the Fog* (Paul, 1931); Henry Leford Gales' *Murder in the Fog* (McCaulay, 1932: British title *Murder in the Mist*); and, slightly less likely, Richard Worth's *The Murder in the Fog* (Aldine, 1927). I have been able to find none of these works but, if one did indeed contain a heroine trapped in an underground den by Faceless Fiends, we can add another author to Wodehouse's reading list!

Not only did Wodehouse invent fictional titles of crime stories, but several of his humorous novels had crime writers as principal characters. The earliest is one of his most sympathetic heroes, Ashe Marson (pseudonym 'Gridley Quayle') in *Something Fresh* (1915), the first of the Blandings Castle stories. Another is Percy Gorringe (pseudonym 'Rex West') in *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, whose willing intercession averted the danger that Bertie Wooster might be forced to marry Lady Florence Craye, herself an authoress. Both of these two seem to have been writers of mysteries of the classic English style: but Jerry Vail, who intrudes inadvertently in the affairs of Lord Emsworth and his pig, writes 'hard-boiled' thrillers of the equally classic American mode. As a nonenthusiast for that form, I relish Wodehouse's comment in *Pigs Have Wings* that

stories about New York private detectives, involving as they do almost no conscious cerebration, take very little time to write.

Also to be found in Wodehouse's works are an array of criminals. Only a couple of them are really unpleasant: the crooked politician satisfactorily frustrated by the inimitable Psmith in *Psmith Journalist*, and the blackmailing Heloise, Princess von und zu Dwornitzchek, unexpectedly casting her shadow across the otherwise cheerful plot of a much later novel, *Summer Moonshine*. Most others, though sufficiently morally reprehensible to deserve to be so amusingly frustrated, are fairly amiable creations. Of these, the prime examples are the smooth Gordon 'Oily' Carlisle and his wife Gertrude 'Sweetie' in *Hot Water*, and another husband-and-wife criminal team, Thos. G. 'Soapy' and Dolly Molloy, together with the latter pair's sometime ally, sometime competitor Alexander 'Chimp' Twist, alias J. Sheringham Adair, in *Sam the Sudden* and five other novels. Others are entirely endearing. The little New York burglar Spike Mullins set this style in Wodehouse's earliest 'adult' novel, *A Gentleman of Leisure* (1910). The next to appear was also a New Yorker—Bat Jarvis, the cat-loving leader of the Groome Street Gang, who became so helpfully entangled in Psmith's altruistic campaign in that city, in *Psmith Journalist*. The purloining poetess Aileen Peavey and her inept innamorata, Edward Cootes, were to regret their entanglement with Psmith in *Leave It to Psmith*. After that, the type became international and too numerous in Wodehouse's writings to itemize

here, though two butler-burglars, the bibulous Phipps in *The Old Reliable* and the beleaguered gangleader Horace Appleby in *Do Butlers Burgle Banks?*, perhaps merit special mention as exemplifying Wodehouse's gentle parodying of classic British mystery plots.

Though Bertie Wooster and many others play the amateur detective at times (usually, and entertainingly, with small success), professional detectives are not frequent in the Wodehouse canon. Indeed, only one springs to mind—Adrian Mulliner, a member of that numerous clan whose adventures were recounted at the Angler's Rest. Of the many members of the official police forces of England, France, and the United States whom we encounter, none are in the least formidable—though the Paris Sergeant of Police in *Frozen Assets* (1964) must cause a reminiscent *frisson* to pass down the spine of anyone who has encountered French bureaucracy at its tortuously obstructive worst. Moreover, most of these officers of the law suffer in varying degree



Wodehouse's heroes and heroines. In a life where most of us have much to endure from the interferences of officialdom, it is delightful and cathartic to read of any twistings of their spiritual tails!

Yet the greatest benefit that Wodehouse derived—and thus, that we derive—from his reading of detective and mystery stories is its contribution to the colourful and elaborate weave of his plots. In his stories, as in classic crime fiction, whatever the vicissitudes the hero and heroine might undergo, we know that all will come right for them in the end—a particular comfort in a world where, in real life, there is no such guarantee. We who enjoy his writings may be wholeheartedly grateful for the breadth and quality of his reading in this literary genre.

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The small 'Sherlock' on page 8 was provided by Marilyn MacGregor.

## WHEN ARE DUES DUE?

Several members have asked lately just when they should pay their annual dues. Maybe the questions come up because we changed the dues-paying system a couple of years ago. We used to ask every member for dues in the spring because that was the simplest system, but it was often difficult to 'catch up' new members who joined at other times of the year. Now, because of our treasurer's whiz-bang computer, it's easy to keep a separate record for each member, and we send you a dues notice with your newsletter near the anniversary of the date you joined.

So the answer is: Please pay your dues when you find a 'Dues are due!' notice enclosed with your *Plum Lines*.

The valet withdrew like a duke leaving the Royal Presence, not actually walking backwards but giving the impression of doing so.

*The Girl on the Boat, 1922*

## MULLINER: WODEHOUSE AT THE ANGLERS' REST



Yes, that did get your attention, didn't it? It's an illustration in the forthcoming second volume of the new Wodehouse Concordance by Tony Ring and Geoffrey Jaggard. It will be published by John Fletcher and named, as you have already guessed from the headline, *Mulliner: Wodehouse at the Anglers' Rest*. It will be ready in October. Those of us lucky enough to go to the Boston Convention can buy a copy there.

You can still get the first volume, *Golf: Wodehouse in the Clubhouse*, from the sources listed above. A writer in *Oxford Today* says the series 'is set fair to be the most amusing and comprehensive concordance ever...'

# THE SONNY BOY CHAPTER OF TWS

by Bill Bruce

While I consider Kristin Thompson's *Wooster Proposes, Jeeves Disposes* one of the very best of the half dozen critical studies I've read of Wodehouse writing, the book left me with a disturbing sense of ennui. The thought sneaks into my mind: Who needs Wodehouse scholarship?

Ms Thompson, a University of Wisconsin-Madison scholar, credits her husband, David Bordwell, for her interest in Wodehouse. Having read and roared at *The Code of the Woosters*, he suggested she read it. But whereas he read it and laughed, she read it and analyzed. And analyzed. And then she started on the entire Jeeves oeuvre. In reading her book, I got the idea she became so engrossed in the Russian Formalist theory of defamiliarization as it applied to Wodehouse that she couldn't laugh about Bertie's narrow escape from marrying a girl who thought the stars were God's daisy chain. I imagine David Bordwell understood the book less than his wife and enjoyed it more. But perhaps this is just my take on it.

In the Thirties as a teenager I started reading Wodehouse stories in the *Saturday Evening Post*; had I first read literary critics' pontifications on these rowdy, sidesplitting stories, I probably would've switched to Superman comic books. In those days part of the sport lay in thinking that this stuff was far too funny to offer a smidgen of intellectual uplift or redeeming social quality.

Nowadays many Americans feel a need for pedagogues to vet their tastes in art, music, and baseball. Even we TWS members sometimes appear to beg for the approval of scholastics to sanction our love of the hilarious tales of Bertie and Reginald, Uncle Dynamite, Lord Emsworth, Bobble Wickham, Madeline Basset, Lady Florence, and Aunt Dahlia. We delight to hear Plum compared to Shakespeare, Dickens, and Jane Austen in the hierarchy of English letters.

How would Plum have reacted to all this analysis of his work? I like to think he'd have taken a long stick, stuck a darning needle on the end, and punctured the pomposity like Glossop's hot water bottle.

I acknowledge that in the past I've been one of the best customers for scholarly Wodehouse ap-

praisals, but now—saturated with highflown reasons for believing it's OK to break up over a plastered Gussie presenting the prizes at the Snodsbury Grammar School—I blush at my submissiveness to condescending critics.

This need for a pedantic stamp of approval reminds me of all the scientific and intellectual efforts made to establish the historicity of Christ and His life or of Moses and his Tablets or of Noah and his Flood. Somehow I feel those efforts detract from the beauty of a pure faith, and I feel the deconstruction of Wodehouse humor detracts from a pure laugh.

I'd rather read the Psalms than their theological or literary justification, and I'd rather read 'Jeeves and the Song of Songs' than an academic defense of my taste. And the beauty of Plum's stories and novels is that, like the Psalms, they can be read with profit dozens, even scores of times. Both Plum and the Psalms offer short phrases and long passages good for memorizing.

I live in an Anglo enclave of retirees in Ajijic deep in the interior of Mexico. A group of us Wodehouse fans decided recently to form the Sonny Boy Chapter of TWS, and we took as our guide, not some learned evaluation of Wodehouse works, but the pure and unannotated writings of the genius himself.

We are the 'saving remnant' (if that is the phrase I'm looking for) of Wodehouse laughter, bearing witness to a principle that others have betrayed, guarding that pure flame that must be passed on at all costs undimmed.

To be initiated into our chapter, the novitiate must stand on the stage in front of an aroused audience of oldmember costermongers who sit there armed with bananas, potatoes, tomatoes, and cabbages, and he must sing 'Sonny Boy' after at least three other versions of same tune. (I don't know why but somehow I get the idea in my head that the first thing to be thrown will be a potato. One gets these fancies.)

Now that's a piece of the True Cross.

## A FEW QUICK ONES

**A**lex Hemming sends an item from the English *Daily Telegraph* noting James Hogg's efforts to get just a little immortality for the original Jeeves. Jeeves was, as we all know, a Warwickshire cricketer whose name Plum picked up for his fictional valet before World War I. What the editor of Wisden doesn't seem to know is that (1) Jeeves's excellence at cricket and (2) his contribution of a name to the Wodehouse pantheon merit the inclusion of his name in the Wisden listing of births and deaths of prominent cricketers. 'My argument, writes James, 'is that a man who played forty-nine matches for Warwickshire, and whose name has gone into the language, has a greater claim than some of the relative nonentities who are included.'

Rita Anton has discovered a sixteenth-century English saint named Thomas Woodhouse (1546-1573). It's possible, I suppose, that he was related to the Wodehouse family. Norman Murphy's *In Search of Blandings* mentions an ancestor, John Wodehouse, who was made constable of Castle Rising in 1402, 144 years before Saint Thomas was born, so it's likely that any connection was earlier than that date.

St Thomas had an engaging Wodehousian eccentricity of behavior: While in prison, 'he wrote short essays urging his fellow countrymen to adhere to the true faith [in the time of Elizabeth I], then he tied the essays to a stone and when he saw a suitable individual pass his cell, he gently threw the essay out the window.' 'The chronicle does not hint,' says Rita, 'at his hitting a policeman on the head and knocking off his helmet—but I'll bet it occurred to the Blessed Thomas, given the circumstances.'

Phil Ayers found several references to P. G. Wodehouse in the latest Isaac Asimov collection, *Gold*, published after his death. He also found two references to Wodehouse in Janet Asimov's *Murder at the Galactic Writers' Society*. In that book a character, a thinly disguised Isaac Asimov, is discovered in bed 'reading the ancient writer Wodehouse' whose writings have put him in a good mood. Isaac Asimov was, and Janet Asimov is, a member of TWS.

Daniel Cohen has found a likely source of the name Steggles, surely one of Plum's most memorable and unattractive names:

'While reading a late Victorian detective story, "The Loss of Sammy Throckett" by Arthur Morrison, I jumped at the following lines: "He's quite a new lad. I've got young Steggles looking after him—sticks to him like wax." The "him" is Sammy Throckett, a runner of considerable ability who is being kept under wraps so that he can get a good price when he wins the big race. He disappears before the race, and it turns out that young Steggles is the villain of the piece.

"The Loss of Sammy Throckett" was one of Morrison's Martin Hewitt stories and was first published about 1894. Though he is almost entirely forgotten today, Hewitt was, after Sherlock Holmes, the best known fictional detective of his day. The Hewitt stories appeared in the *Strand* and other popular magazines as well as in book form. It is difficult to imagine that Plum, always a fan of detective fiction, could have missed him.

Rupert Steggles, Plum's race-fixer, first appeared in "The Great Sermon Handicap" in June, 1922, and just a month later in "The Purity of the Turf." The stories appeared simultaneously in *Cosmopolitan* and the *Strand*. Could this name be simply a coincidence? I don't think so.'

David McDonough writes that the compiler of *Men in Sports: Great Sport Stories of All Time, from the Greek Olympic Games to the American World Series*, 'had the great good sense to include only one golf story. It is "The Awakening of Rollo Podmarsh" from *The Heart of a Goof*. Of course.' The compiler is Brandt Aylmar, Crown Books, 1994.



The Oldest Member

# WHERE WE ARE

San Francisco Bay Area, California  
Blandings Castle group

by Charles Bishop

**B**elow is a listing of local chapters, or groups, of the Wodehouse Society. Should you find that you are near one or another, you are encouraged to join it for a meeting, sojourn, or Boat Race Night.

**The Wodehouse Society**, the parent organization, is open to all whose voices have not broken before the second Sunday in Epiphany (and to others by special application).

## **Boston, Massachusetts**

New England Thingummy Society (NEWTS) meetings are held every two or three months, depending on our whim. Outings and special events from time to time.

## **Houston, Texas** The Drone Rangers

'We D-Rangers are reading our way through the Wodehouse canon. This is because some of our members have only seen the TV shows—we feel it is a kindness to expose them to the real thing, not to mention giving all the rest of us the pleasure of another dip into the wonderful world of Wodehouse.'

## **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania** Chapter One

Meetings are held approximately every two months at the Dickens Inn in Philadelphia.

Dues are US \$10 per year, payable at the above address. Meetings are quarterly, more or less. Our newsletter includes notices of future events. You may receive a complimentary copy of the newsletter, *The Argus Intelligencer and Wheat Growers' Gazette*, by application to the above address.

## **Washington, DC**

Capital! Capital!

Meetings every six to eight weeks.

## **Los Angeles, California**

As the date for the October 1995 Wodehouse Convention draws near, noises are being made to the effect that local chapters of TWS ought to have an official presence there. There seems to be no Los Angeles chapter, though, a sad state of affairs I would like to remedy.

If you live in or near Los Angeles and are interested in becoming a charter member of the Perfecto-Zizzbaum Corporation, or in coming up with a better name for the Los Angeles chapter of TWS, please contact me. Once your check has cleared, you'll be on the board until next year's dues are due.

I see great things in Perfecto-Zizzbaum Corporation's future. Soon, membership will be de rigueur for the higher positions in management and the entertainment industry. 'Eton, I see, and honors at Oxford,' the interviewer will say. 'And Perfecto-Zizzbaum as well, of course? No? I see...Thank you for your time. We'll be in touch. Next!'

And to think, you can be in on the ground floor. Apply to (there is no snail mail at this time) [tak@bushrat.jpl.nasa.gov](mailto:tak@bushrat.jpl.nasa.gov)

## **The Clients of Adrian Mulliner**

Devotees of P. G. Wodehouse and Sherlock Holmes can find a spiritual home here. We meet annually at the Baker Street Irregulars weekend in January in New York City (Junior Bloodstain), and biennially during the Wodehouse Society convention wherever it may be (Senior Bloodstain). The Clients publish the *Detectives Notebook* four

Finally, there is a rumor of a St. Louis, Missouri chapter, and of a group in jolly old England as well, but I have no information on these. If you do, or if you have information on other TWS chapters, please send them to me and I will include them in future postings.

## A TRIBUTE TO PGW

David Landman sends the following tribute to Wodehouse by the noted Irish poet Seamus Heaney. It's an extract from a conversation reported in the Summer 1994 issue of *Bostonia*, 'the magazine of culture and ideas' published by Boston University. The participants in the conversation included three Nobel Laureates—Saul Bellow, Joseph Brodsky, and Derek Walcott.

There is a form of postcolonial resentment, which is understandable, which says that if the colonist literature has, say, Christopher Marlowe, I should be anxious because they are in a sense in step with the Elizabethan armies in Munster, and are expatriating the Irish language out of Ireland. And to relish the mighty lion is somewhat to commit a sin against one's ethnicity. I think that's completely wrong. Rejoicing in the cultural goods is to put it at its most materialistic, but rejoicing in the extension of spirit and rejoicing in the melody is what it's all about. I think of myself and my first language, which was more at the back of my throat than it is now, at the age of twelve or thirteen being totally pleased by the melodies of P. G. Wodehouse, and I keep reminding myself that this is a model of extension and rejoicing that's possible.

# TWS CONVENTION 1995

by David Landman and Elin Woodger

**W**ise birds will be migrating to Boston this Fall as the 1995 TWS Convention promises to heat things up! The Athens of America will be rocked to its Brahmin foundations starting October 20th, when a plumage of Plumies descends for three days of convivial high spirits and revelry at the Copley Plaza, the grande dame of Boston hotels. For the uninformed—and there can't be too many of you left—the dates are October 20-22. A detailed program of events can be found in the Summer 1995 *Plum Lines* (Vol. 16, No. 2).

What's on tap, you ask? Well, for starters, there will be brainy speakers, including (in order of appearance):

**Anne Cotton**, otherwise known as Lady Bassett, who will share a fond look at 'school', both the reality as reported by recent notable survivors of the system and Plum's view of that institution as it appears in his school stories.

**David Landman**, NEWT extraordinaire, who will expound on Wodehouse's song lyrics, a musical presentation made brighter by the able assistance of Elizabeth and Rosalind Landman.

**Dan Cohen**, co-founder of Chapter One and co-sponsor of the Great Non Political Newt Project, who offers us a very special and Wodehousian kind of ghost story.

**Jan Kaufman**, a convention veteran whose talk on 'What the WellDressed Man is Wearing' is based on an article she read in *Milady's Boudoir*, although Jan has forgotten the name of the author.

**Tony Ring**, who is preparing a special talk on cricket that is certain to delight even those of us who haven't the foggiest idea what that mysterious sport is all about.

**Peter Schwed**, well-known diaskeuast, who will regale us with a lighthearted look at Plum's poetry, aside from the song lyrics, and remind us of Plum's talent even in verse.

**Charles Gould**, who will crack the *The Code of the Woosters* and analyze Bertram Wooster and the English novel since 1740 in 30 minutes or less.

**Daniel Garrison**, who proposes to show that Wodehouse ranks with Mark Twain, James Thurber, and E.

B. White as masters of 20th century writing.

If time allows, a panel of speakers will field questions from the audience in a unique round table discussion. If you would like to know what a pale parabola of joy is, now's your chance to find out!

**W**e will also be blessed with a plethora of musical entertainment, including a special performance by Mr. Hal Cazalet, the Wodehouses' great-grandson. To cap the proceedings, two skits are in store: 'Pig-hoo-o-o-o-ey!', as only the Blandings Castle chapter can perform it, and an original play by Max Pokrivchak entitled 'Agatha Agonistes'.

And that's not all! Saturday night will feature a wholesome and nourishing banquet (fancy-dress optional) with games, prizes, and musical interludes, and, above all, plenty of opportunity to carouse with old friends, meet face to face with fellow Internetlings, and make new friends (with whom you can exchange addresses and phone numbers at the traditional brunch on Sunday morning).

Moreover, there will be all the delights of New England in the fall. We have planned an expedition to Lexington and Concord, where along the way you will enjoy spectacular New England autumn foliage, as well as a tour of Boston By Night on foot. **Important!** If either of these tours interest you, mail in your registration immediately! *We will be cutting off all further reservations after the maximum number for each tour is reached.*

Boston graciously offers you the Freedom Trail, Harvard Yard, Old Ironsides, and the Old North Church in the North End. And, not entirely by chance, the convention coincides with the Head of the Charles Regatta, America's answer to the Henley. Easy viewing from the banks of the Charles is no more than a five-minute stroll from the Copley. The more adventurous can join the legendary carnival of Regatta Night in Harvard Square.

For those who are not going on the Lexington/Concord tour, we have a special treat in store for Friday morning. Mr. Peter Schwed is generously lending us copies of 'Wodehouse Playhouse' on videotape. Episodes will begin playing in the meeting room after 10:00 A.M. Also on hand in the meeting room will be tables for book dealers and a 'Chapters Corner' featur-

ing the deeds and derring-do of various TWS chapters (including Chapter One, the Drone Rangers, Capital! Capital!, the Chicago Accident Syndicate, Blandings Castle, and, of course, your hosts, the NEWTS).

There is still time to return your registration at the 'bargain basement' prices! **The lower registration/banquet fees will be extended until October 1, 1995**, after which late fees will apply. You are welcome to wait until the convention to register for the talks; however, **please be advised that we cannot accept any reservations for the banquet after October 15, 1995.**

Meanwhile, hotel rooms are going fast, and if you haven't yet reserved a room, we strongly recommend that you do so now! If you need registration materials or want information regarding hotels, convention activities, or whatever, please apply to NEWTS Convention Coordinator Elin Woodger at (617) 389-7244.

Record attendance is expected—don't miss the fun! Send your registration in now, old bean, and tally-ho for Boston!



Puzzled by that 'diaskeuast' tag applied to Peter Schwed? If you hadn't allowed your Greek to get so rusty, you wouldn't need to be told that Peter is merely a διασκευαστής.

## YOU SIMPLY HIT THEM WITH AN AXE

**T**ony Ring tells me that his study of PGW's involvement with the US and UK tax authorities, to be called *You Simply Hit Them with an Axe*, is set for publication in September or October. It uses contemporary correspondence and court reports to explain two grossly unfair claims which were made against Wodehouse, and tells why he was forced by the threat of double taxation in the US and UK to take certain innovative tax planning steps, some successful and some not. It illustrates the impact which his tax disputes had on his writing, with more than a hundred quotations (many never published before) from his books, plays, poems, essays and lyrics which refer to the unpleasant subject. This book, like Tony's *Mulliner: Wodehouse at the Anglers' Rest*, will be available at the convention.

## TRIANGULAR NOVELS

**H**elen Murphy found, in the London *Times* of June 7, a column by Alan Coren about a new novel by no less than three novelists. 'It brings home to us,' he points out, 'how limitless were the opportunities our earlier novelists missed.'

He asks us to consider the result if P. G. Wodehouse, D. H. Lawrence, and John Buchan had 'convened in, say, 1921... in an upstairs Bloomsbury room before a serried trio of Underwoods and a firkin of Johnny Walker. Would you not die for *Lady Glossop's 39 Lovers*?

'Here is Sir Roderick Glossop, cruelly cut half-off in his prime by a ghastly croquet accident, leaving his succulent and distracted consort climbing up the curtains in a welter of phallogentric metaphor, until that fateful day when, nipping out to the kitchen garden in her filmy peignoir tremblingly to pluck a couple of big brassicas, she stumbles across Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright, trapped in the cold frame by a flapping spat.

His monocle mists, and in a trice he is gathering forget-me-nots for early transplanting. We learn much, as the breakers crash upon the shore, of this and that, and not a little of the other, but only when the door of their humble toolshed tryst is summarily unhinged by six members of the international conspiracy bent on snaffling blueprints of the Fink-Nortle Torpedo do we learn that Catsmeat is, in fact, all that stands between the League of Nations and a heinous plot to discredit it by substituting the Empress of Blandings for Woodrow Wilson.'

I can hardly wait.

The task of composing a sermon which should practically make sense and yet not be above the heads of his rustic flock was always one that caused Augustine Mulliner to concentrate tensely. Soon he was lost in his labour and oblivious to everything but the problem of how to find a word of one syllable that meant Supralapsarianism.

'Gala Night,' *Mulliner Nights*, 1933



A CLASS-ROOM INDIGNATION MEETING.

When Jimmy and Tommy entered the room order had been restored to a certain extent.  
(You will find the names of everyone of these amusing chums mentioned in our splendid school serial on page 71.)

This illustration is from the cover of the October 7, 1908 issue of the magazine *Chums*. It was drawn for Plum's serial *The Luck Stone*, which ran in eighteen installments in that magazine from September 1908 to January 1909. It was the only Wodehouse work ever published in *Chums*. The illustration was reprinted on the cover of A. A. Cotes's Wodehouse catalog for February 1995, from which this copy was made. *The Luck Stone* was unusual in a number of ways. Here's some of what Richard Osborne has to say about it in his *Penguin Wodehouse Companion*:

The author was given as 'Basil Windham,' who was P. G. Wodehouse with an assist from W. Townend. *Chums* commissioned the story. Wodehouse paid Townend a tenner for his help. It is an off-beat Wodehouse. His other school stories, expertly tailored for the *Captain*, were still of the stuff of his own schooldays. *The Luck Stone* was

fiction born of fiction, professionally written and produced from wide and purposeful reading of *Chums*. *Chums* asked him for a blood-and-thunder school story, and Wodehouse gave it to them

He had shown in breezy asides throughout his school novels that he had read acres of catchpenny fiction, had enjoyed it all, and knew all the tricks of it. *The Luck Stone* shows that he could imitate it too, at the rustle of a cheque... Inside the magazine were a number of editorial features, mostly instructive ('This is the right way to carry a bo-constrictor. This is the wrong way.') But the main guts of the magazine were the five or six fiction stories, of which two or three were serials. Captain Frank Shaw's *The Vengeance of the Motherland* had London invaded by the Russians. 'Suppose your home were shelled. Have you ever considered what you would do? Get next week's *Chums*.'

# WODEHOUSE ON THE ENGLISH STAGE

by Tony Ring

There can not have been many summers in which it has been possible to see three separate Wodehouse theatrical productions in the space of 32 days, but we British found ourselves in that fortunate position this year.

On 10th June, a party of seventeen, including eight TWS members, followed a picnic in Watford with a trip to the Palace Theatre to see the latest production of *Good Morning, Bill*. With an excellent cast, and an extra degree of inspiration in the action, this was the best of the four versions I have seen, and the hour we were able to spend with the cast afterwards, discussing the play, was not only rewarding but the icing on the cake.

Just ten days later I went to the Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich, to see *Summer Lightning*, an adaptation by Giles Havergal (Director, Glasgow Citizens Theatre) from the novel. To reduce the cast size (and thus the cost of the production) most actors play two or three roles, and although this worked well in general, it did contribute to the weakest part of the performance. One actor played both Ronnie Fish and Gally Threepwood and in trying to maximize the differences between the two persona had provided Gally with a walking stick. A cane would have been fine, but the stick became a prop while he was standing or walking, and instead of a small, dapper, correct, upright and fit young man of fiftyish summers we were presented with a caricature who was a bit hunched and moved in an even more elderly way than his fictional years.

The other technique adopted, to preserve as much as possible of Wodehouse's own narrative, was to have the players turn to the audience and tell us what their characters were doing or thinking. Once you got used to it, this worked very well. The play was supported by an excellent set, including a small model car moving across the scenery on the backcloth, supposedly bringing guests to the castle, and by a wonderful mechanical black Empress.

The extra-special treat this year, though, was what is believed to be the UK première of *Leave It To Jane*, the 1917 Bolton-Wodehouse-Kern musical about an American college football team. The musical was performed by final year students at the

Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and they will go far. Vim and vigour, verve and vivacity in abundance, skilled choral work and choreography, excellent solos and fine acting made the evening supremely enjoyable. The Chairman of the Board of Governors of the School, who was sitting next to us, approved: 'The vibes are good.' *The Times* reviewed it very favourably and suggested that if put on professionally in the West End it might achieve cult musical status. The cast enjoyed themselves and the audience loved it.

By great good fortune, I was able to talk to the cast after each of the three shows and the unanimous view is that playing Wodehouse is Fun! The directors allow the players a little extra freedom to emphasise, exaggerate, engage in 'business,' go a bit over the top, and they respond enthusiastically. The students at the Guildhall perform in about eight productions in their final year, all serious-ish apart from the graduation musical, and when asked which they enjoyed most, there was only one reply.

A musical, nearly eighty years old, about American football, never performed in this country. The authors and composer must have had something!

## THE PLAYS THE THING

David Landman sent along a review of a new production of this play at New York's Roundabout Theater. The review, dated July 10, is by Vincent Canby of *The New York Times*. It reminds me of the old chestnut about a small-town musical performance: 'The local symphony played Beethoven last night. Beethoven lost.'

The play, writes Canby, 'retains the potential to enchant...What's missing is any sense of the securely sophisticated style that defines high comedy. Most of the time the production is like something put on by college students, not all of whom appear to be the right age for the roles they're playing, even when they are....*The Play's the Thing* seems slight. Yet when it's performed by the right company, it can be as much dreamy fun as a fireworks show: a gorgeous if ephemeral display of the way in which civilized behavior can briefly triumph over life's usual chaos.'

# KIND OF AN ODE TO DUTY

by Ogden Nash

**Frank Axe** found this reference to PGW. These are only the concluding lines of a hilarious poem.

I seem to be the one person in the world thou art perpetually preaching at who or to who;  
Whatever looks like fun, there art thou standing between me and it, calling yoo-hoo.

O Duty, Duty!

How noble a man should I be hadst thou the visage of a sweetie or a cutie!

Wert thou but houri instead of hag

Then would my halo indeed be in the bag!

But as it is thou art so much forbiddinger than a Wodehouse hero's forbiddingest aunt

That in the words of the poet, When Duty whispers low, Thou must, this erstwhile youth  
replies, I just can't.

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## VOLUNTEER OFFICERS

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Information and new memberships	Marilyn MacGregor.
Dues payments and address changes	Tom Wainwright
Contributions to Plum Lines	Ed Ratcliffe, OM

Dues are \$15 per year.

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