



Plum Lines

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COLLECTIONS

PAUL SARGENT

Special Notice

In the highly unlikely event of the cancellation of tonight's Banjo Concert by Mr. Wooster, the following emergency entertainment will be performed in its stead.

By Jeeves

a diversionary entertainment

V

M

FO

A review by Tony Ring

The Special Notice above, copied from the theater program, indicates just how fluffy this 'Almost Entirely New Musical' is. Many members have sent reviews and comments about this popular musical and I can't begin to print them all. My apologies to all contributors not mentioned here.—OM

THE choice of *By Jeeves* to open the new Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough has given us the opportunity to see what can be done by the combination of a great popular composer, a top playwright, some ideas and dialogue from the century's greatest humorist, a talented and competent cast, and a friendly new theatre in the round. And the result is a very entertaining production which is obviously both Wodehouse and yet not

Wodehouse, with some excellent and vibrant songs, also eminently suitable for a life with rep, amateur and school companies.

First, the theatre. It seats just over 400 in four banks of seats, between which the aisles are productively used for the introduction of the deliberately home-made props, such as Bertie Wooster's car, crafted principally out of a sofa and cardboard boxes. Backstage staff are used to bring some of the props to life, such as the verges on the edge of the road, replete with hedgehogs, and the company cow has evidently not been struck down with BSE. The production is well suited to this size of theatre: it would not sit easily in one of the more spectacular auditoria frequently used for Lloyd Webber productions.

The plot, what there is of it, can, like many of the Master's short stories, be divided simply between the

frame and the story. The frame sets the action at one of Stinker Pinker's money-raising entertainments, with Bertie due to be presenting a banjo concert. Fortunately for all, the banjo has been stolen, and Jeeves suggests that instead he tells some racy anecdotes. The story, then, is an amalgam of incidents from the Jeeves and Wooster novels, not all involving the original casts, but designed to have a confused Bertie involved with three girls (Honorias Glossop, Madeline Bassett, and Stiffy Byng), to the great chagrin of their beaux (respectively Bingo Little, Gussie Fink-Nottle, and Stinker Pinker). Bertie does, though, manage to avoid the complication in the original *Jeeves*, produced in 1975, in which he ended up engaged to all three simultaneously. Also in the original a substantial part was played by Roderick Spode, but he has been replaced by an aggressive young American millionaire Cyrus Budge III (Junior), more as a gesture to political correctness than plot development, as he, like Spode, falls in love with Madeline.

There are no obvious criticisms about the performances of any of the cast, who are evidently thoroughly enjoying themselves. Woodehouse Society members, rather than the general public, will be particularly concerned to know how they stand up to one's image of the characters as derived from the books, and here one can divide them into three classes. Steven Pacey (as Bertie), Simon Day (as Gussie), Richard Long (as Stinker Pinker) and Robert Austin (as Sir Watkyn Bassett) fit perfectly into what we would expect, with an added bonus that there is no sign of a monocle anywhere near Bertie Wooster! Lucy Tregear (as Honorias) and Diana Morrison (as Madeline) played their roles in a manner only slightly muted if compared to the exaggerated characteristics given to them on the printed page, and are easily recognisable. The physical appearance of the third group, however, was less faithful. Cathy Sara, a diminutive Stiffy Byng, is extremely slim, whereas the image is of a small rotund girl. A wholly valid expedient, perhaps, in view of the dancing and other movement required: a Dawn French would have been unnecessarily distracting! Nicholas Haverson (as Bingo) reminded me of a nervous Ronnie

Fish rather than the generally optimistic Bingo of his bachelor days and is the representation with which I am least happy.

Which brings me to Malcolm Sinclair, as Jeeves. The role of Jeeves is to act as narrator and occasional interpolator in the dialogue, and he only features in one of the songs. His presence and crisp delivery is what we would expect but he is too old for my taste. My image of Jeeves is a mature man some five, possibly ten, years older than Bertie, but not someone almost double Bertie's age! The non-Wodehousean will not mind, and if one closes one's eyes there is no cause for concern whatsoever. But I hope other companies who decide to put a version in their programme of forthcoming events will bear this point in mind!

Those members who have heard the original music from *Jeeves* will be interested to learn that about half the songs have survived to some degree, though in some cases with considerable amendment: *Code of the Woosters*, *Travel Hopefully*, *Deadlier Than the Male*, *When Love Arrives*, *Banjo Boy* and *Half a Moment*. The first three of these are

in the first act, and although they are pleasant airs they are not the sort of song you leave the theatre humming. The last song of the first act, a new composition called *The Hallo Song*, seems to signify a change of pace and the second act is altogether stronger, with two good new company songs in *By Jeeves* and *It's a Pig*. The main ballad of the second half, *Half a Moment*, is a lovely song (strong enough to carry a very funny visual gag in its stride) and indeed, in a platform discussion before the performance, Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber nominated this as one of his favourites from all his com-

positions. I also liked the finale, which grasps the opportunity to encore the most vibrant tunes from the show.

This is not the sort of production which will come to a big West End theatre and run for years, but it deserves a run in an intimate theatre in London, and it is certainly capable of catching the imagination of artistic directors in all types of company. It should thus have a long life here and anywhere else where musical comedy, verging at times on farce, is appreciated.



Late word from Tony : ‘The big news is that the Press Reviews of *By Jeeves* were good enough (and some were very good indeed) to enable them to book a London season, starting on July 2, and running initially until August 24, though with the prospect of an extension. I have booked a block of twenty seats for friends and fellow-Wodehouseans to attend.’ Helen Murphy provides the last-minute information that it will run at the Duke of York’s Theatre in the West End for twelve weeks.



Tony wrote the above review expressly for *Plum Lines*, but other members have sent favorable reviews from the commercial press. Their general tone is similar to Tony’s: While not quite up there with *Lear*, it’s a well done and most enjoyable show, and the best dramatic representation of Wodehouse we have seen for a long time—it will be an enduring success. Excerpts from some of these reviews follow.

THE show is based on PG Wodehouse’s Jeeves stories, which is a massive challenge: PGW is one of the masters of English prose, and he deploys it with deadly expertise and an impeccable sense of style to create a Home Counties never-never land that is instantly recognizable and hilarious beyond anyone’s power to imitate. As a subject for a musical, compared to PGW, Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* or Kafka’s *The Penal Colony* would have been a doodle.

By Jeeves take a little while to hit its stride, but by the second half ALW’s music really begins to sparkle with an identifiable feel of the batty 1920s. I am a little uneasy about Steven Pacey’s Bertie Wooster. Partly it’s that Pacey cannot help looking intelligent, whereas Bertie’s intelligence is strictly of the Cro-Magnon variety, deploying an asinine dignity to make him impervious to common sense. Also, Bertie should sound, if not utterly upper class, at least like Noel Coward, and should suggest that he had at least been to, if not been chucked out of, a fairly pukka school. I am also perturbed to see Gussie Fink-Nottle (Simon Day, excellent) wearing a white tie with a dinner suit, and Sir Watkyn Bassett (Robert Austin) wearing a tweedy travelling cape with a black homburg.

(“J. P.” in the *Times* of London, from John Baesch.)

ALL Wodehouse adaptations are handicapped by the fact that they have to jettison his marvelous narrative passages with their inspired similes and brilliant turns of phrase. Ayckbourn does however capture the dotty innocence of Wodehouse’s world, an Eden, as Evelyn Waugh put it, that can never fade.

The dialogue often achieves a batty surrealism (“Is that Wooster as in Woostershire sauce?” “No, it’s more like

Wooster as in chicken.”) and though Ayckbourn’s lyrics aren’t going to give Stephen Sondheim any sleepless nights they are always serviceable and sometimes delightfully off the wall.

My one regret is that Ayckbourn has neglected to include one of Wodehouse’s dragon aunts (few have captured men’s fear of strong women better than kind old Plum) but there’s little else to grumble about.

(Charles Spencer in the English *Daily Telegraph*, from Pete Barnsley)

BILLED as ‘an almost entirely new musical,’ the antecedents of this affectionate plundering of P. G. Wodehouse are nonetheless clear. *By Jeeves* is a show steeped in the English traditions not just of *Me and My Girl* and *Salad Days*, but of such London long runs as Denise Deegan’s girls school comedy *Daisy Pulls It Off* and Maureen Lipman’s solo show *Re: Joyce*. In the end, you either succumb to the prevailing silliness—this is the sort of show in which someone says, ‘I staggered back, appalled,’ and then does so—or resist it altogether. Ayckbourn’s production is droll and light enough that the former option just about wins out.

What happens hardly matters beyond one observation—“This is getting like the fourth act of *Medea*,” Bertie says—to which the Stephen Sondheim of *Comedy, Tonight* would have no doubt delivered a riposte. Ayckbourn’s production is both a send-up of, and tribute to, the empathy that takes over in the theater of impoverishment that Lloyd Webber hasn’t contributed to in an age.

(Matt Wolf in *Variety*, the American showbiz magazine, from Jim Goodrich)



Theatergoers in New England will have their pick of Bertie Woosters this fall. *By Jeeves* will receive its American premiere at Goodspeed-at-Chester/The Norma Terris Theater, in the tiny town of Chester, Connecticut, on October 17. Three Wodehouse chapters, in Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington, have booked a block of fifty seats for the 9:00 p.m. performance on Saturday, November 16. Seats are \$33.

Another version of Bertie will appear in *Betting on Bertie* at the Hasty Pudding Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts beginning on September 17 and playing through October 20. Remarkably, it’s the first presentation of the last musical Wodehouse and Bolton wrote, it includes Plum’s last lyrics and his last writing about Bertie and Jeeves, and it’s been delayed for decades by the first version of the play being performed simultaneously just down the road a piece—*By Jeeves*. The story of *Betting on Bertie*’s development begins on the next page.

BETTING ON BERTIE

By Elin Woodger

CONTRARY to popular opinion, *By Jeeves* is not the first musical based on the characters of Bertie Wooster and Jeeves—nor is it the only choice of musicals for Wodehousians. From New York comes word that *Betting on Bertie*, the last show Plum and Guy Bolton worked on together, goes into rehearsal in August, then moves to Cambridge, Massachusetts, for previews at the Hasty Pudding Theater. NEWTS, take note!

The history of *Betting on Bertie*, which unless I am very much mistaken began its life as the 1916 short story “Leave it to Jeeves,” has been provided for us by Walter Willison, co-adaptor of the book and director of the show. Walter writes:

“In the early 70’s the legendary Frank Loesser, a producer and manager as well as a terrific writer of musicals for stage and screen, moved to Remsenburg, Long Island, and discovered to his delight that Plum and Guy were his neighbors. He convinced them to create one more musical in the tradition of their legendary intimate Princess Theatre shows using, for the very first time in a musical comedy, Plum’s beloved Jeeves and Bertie Wooster characters.

“Mr. Loesser also managed a number of prominent writers, including Robert Wright and George Forrest. Messrs. Wright and Forrest had begun their collaboration when they met at ages 15 and 16, and by the time they reached their twenties they were staff writers at MGM and helped create some of the stage and screen’s most classic musicals (including *Song of Norway*, *Kismet*, and *Kean*; songs include ‘It’s A Blue World,’ ‘Always And Always,’ and ‘The Donkey Serenade’)—not to mention producing nightclub shows at the Copacabana and acts for the likes of Jane Froman, Anne Jeffreys and Robert Sterling, Celeste Holm and a string of others, as well as numerous weekly television shows.

“So by the time Mr. Loesser, who had the team under lifetime contract, approached Bob & Chet (as they are called) about writing just the music for Plum’s lyrics, it was the one thing they had never done. And they were reticent to agree—until they met Plum Wodehouse. As Mr. Wright tells it, Mr. Wodehouse was not an easy man when it came to choosing his collaborators (hadn’t he, after all, written those early shows with the likes of Jerome Kern?), but within minutes of their meeting the elder Wodehouse and the younger Wright & Forrest hit it off, and Plum called his wife into the room and introduced the young men as his ‘new collaborators.’

“The music and lyrics for the show were written in Frank Loesser’s living room, with his beautiful and talented wife Jo Sullivan Loesser (the original leading lady of Frank’s *The Most Happy Fella*) there to witness the creative powers at work, lend her encouragement, and be the first to hear every song. I have it on best authority from all parties concerned that Frank referred to *Betting On Bertie* as his ‘Darling of a show.’

“Though plans for a London production were well under way, before the book was completed, Mr. Lloyd Webber pulled up in front of Plum’s house ‘in one of the longest limousines I’ve ever seen!’, as I’m told Plum described it, and made a financial offer which Plum hesitated to refuse. After consulting Messrs. Wright and Forrest, who without hesitation urged Plum to accept the offer—after all, the characters were his creations—the ill-fated Lloyd Webber musical came into being.

“Plum expressed his dismay at the results of that show to Bob and Chet, and asked them to please someday finish their show and see it produced. However, Frank Loesser’s untimely death at an early age, and the subsequent deaths of Wodehouse and Bolton, caused the project to be put on the top shelf, where it languished until a few years ago.

“That’s where I came into the story. I had the pleasure of meeting Bob and Chet when I appeared on Broadway in 1989, in their most recent Broadway success, *Grand Hotel: The Musical*, directed by Tommy Tune. We struck up a friendship, and I subsequently Associate Produced and appeared with Judy Kaye, Len Cariou, Regina Resnik and others on a recording of their score for *The Anastasia Affaire*. They were so pleased with the results that the very next morning, after the recording session, they called and offered me the opportunity to take a look at, and see if I couldn’t ‘do something’ with, another show, one they had been sitting on for these many years. This, I am so delighted to say, turned out to be *Betting On Bertie*.

“As one of those multiple-theatrical-personalities who not only sings and acts, but who also writes and directs (not necessarily all at the same time, you understand), it was a wonderful opportunity for my partner, Douglas Holmes, and me to collaborate with not only these two very present and active theatre legends, Messrs. Wright and Forrest, but with our three absent but very present collaborators, Messrs. Wodehouse, Bolton, and Loesser. Doug and I set out to finish the book and discovered a wealth of material at our disposal, including a multitude of musical material, featuring lovely and lively melodies by Wright and Forrest set to the last lyrics ever written by that master of the form, P.G. Wodehouse himself.

“The finishing touches were put on a first draft, a staged ‘reading’ was done here in New York for a private audience which included none other than Jo Sullivan Loesser, and we immediately found the right producer

for the show. That was three years ago. We've had to go through the usual process of getting a show on, and juggling all our various schedules and other obligations, to finally arrive at today. And have been very careful not to make any of this public up till now.

"We are currently finishing up casting, but perhaps the most wonderfully karmic member of the cast is Emily Loesser—the young daughter of Frank Loesser and Jo Sullivan Loesser, who was a baby crawling on the carpet back in that Remsenburg living room when this show was first being written! I can't help but believe Frank Loesser, on that not so distant higher plane, is smiling down with joy at how fate and time and circumstances work things out, thrilled that his daughter is about to be one of the leading ladies in his 'Darling of a show.' She is a lovely, charming, and extremely talented young lady, and is so perfect for Bertie's love interest in this show—a character who is not quite your typical ingenue and who ultimatelyoops! That would be telling a bit too much, wouldn't it?

"There are, we think, a lot of surprises in this show which we hope will appeal to those wise to Wodehouse as well as newcomers. And perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the project is that this was in fact the very last adventure of Jeeves and Bertie he ever wrote. And we are all so happy that it is about to see the light of day—or perhaps one should say, more accurately, the 'footlights' of the day!"

Well, I mean to say, what? *Betting on Bertie* opens at the Hasty Pudding Theater in Cambridge on September 17 and plays through October 20. The NEWTS are planning a theater party for the evening of Saturday, September 21, but all Wodehousians should feel free to go at any time—let's make it early and often!

A MEETING WITH A LIVING LEGEND

By Alan Ayckbourn

This entertaining story appeared in the theater program for *By Jeeves* at its opening in Scarborough, Yorkshire, in May, 1996. It is reprinted here by kind permission of Alan Ayckbourn. Tony Ring wrote some of the program notes, sent us the program, and arranged reprint permission for this story. —OM

IN October 1974, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Alan Ayckbourn drove out to Long Island in the company of a representative from producer Robert Stigwood's New York office for a meeting with the 93 year old P.G. Wodehouse. This, very very vaguely, is what occurred.

The Composer and I were picked up from our New York hotel by this cove from Robert Stigwood's office. Stigwood was the show's producer who favoured the distant school of doing things. For arm's length read barge pole. Consequently, I'd never met the chap but the Composer, who'd once steered a motorised go-cart into the fellow's swimming pool, vouched for him and that was good enough for me.

On this particular sunny lunchtime we were off to meet P.G. (Plum) Wodehouse at his home on Long Island for a few quick publicity shots and in order to play the old boy highlights from the newly completed *Jeeves* score. I hailed

the Composer as he spilt out of the hotel elevator clutching a couple of loose leaf folders the size of the Manhattan phone book. "The score," he explained. "Aha," I said enigmatically, brandishing my own rather more modest offering, namely the libretto. A mere Domesday Book by comparison. "We may have a slight problem with the show," said the composer, viewing my tome. "As regards time."

"Indeed," I retorted, meeting his gaze coolly, for I could sense the chap's drift a mile off. "Then they'll just have to sing it a bit faster, won't they?" He eyed me rather beadily, I thought. Not, you might think, the most auspicious of starts to the day.

Fortunately at this moment enter the Stigwood Cove, full of the joys of s. and obviously looking forward to his trip in the company of up and coming young calibre artistes such as we. He had arrived in a stretch limousine which was currently stretched for several blocks along 5th roughly between 76th and 80th. We nodded to the driver and, as we strolled the few hundred yards to the passenger door, the Stigwood Cove explained to us that time was of the essence. Our visit had to be precisely timed in order to fit in with Plum's current TV viewing habits. Apparently

the old prune was addicted to several daytime soaps and couldn't possibly miss a single episode of any of them. Luckily for us on this particular day Plum had a window, as the Stigwood Cove termed it, between episodes.

As we bowled along in our mobile bowling alley straddling a few of the million potholes that give New York streets their unique charm and New York cabs their dented roofs courtesy of passengers' heads, the Stigwood Cove slipped into his in-flight steward's guise offering us the vehicle's complete range of on-board facilities including radio, TV and cocktail bar. It crossed my mind that it might have been diplomatic to glimpse one of Plum's daytime television soaps; a surefire icebreaker if we could crack it. But with thirty-six channels screening simultaneous identical garbage the idea was fraught with imponderables.

I was aware, for the first time, of a certain tension in the air. The Composer was beginning to look decidedly shiftier. I think the prospect of auditioning the score was beginning to get to him. We had had words about this earlier when the notion of playing through the songs to Plum was first mooted. "When I worked with Tim," the Composer had said pointedly, "I played the piano and Tim sang the words." "Good for talented Tim," I said, rather savagely for me, I thought. "Well, personally, I don't sing." "Neither do I," replied the Composer. "Oh yes, you do. Well, you sing far better than I do, anyway. And even if you can't sing that well," I added, playing my master card, "at least you know what it ought to sound like. And before you ask, no, I don't play the piano either, so there." Harsh words, I know, but a chap has to acknowledge his limitations. This two-day old exchange still appeared to be rankling the air. Silence descended. The Stigwood Cove curtailed his travelogue, sensing that the creative men had entered an introspective mood. Through the limousine's smoked glass windows even the weather seemed to have taken a turn for the worse. The Composer had started to hum former triumphs under his breath. Always a bad sign.

Mercifully, suddenly we struck countryside. Or more accurately, Godalming with much, much more money. This was my first glimpse of Long Island. The limousine had respectfully slowed to a modest sixty-five m.p.h. I sensed the driver to be less certain of his bearings now skyscrapers were replaced by hedges. "Straight on," yelled the Stigwood Cove, his voice easily reaching to the far end of the car. "Next left and second right." Here clearly was a man with Long Island at his fingertips.

A sign protruding incongruously above a hedge, The Bide-a-Wee Cats and Dogs Home, confirmed we were truly in the heart of Wodehouse country.

"Ethel's place," explained the Stigwood Cove. I looked puzzled.

"Plum's wife" said the Composer who seemed to be cheering up a bit.

"She's very fond of animals," the Stigwood Cove went on, welcoming the chance to impart a bit of information. "So she opened this home for strays. The Americans think she's completely barking."

We reached the house. It was Ethel who opened the door to us. She eyed us with a look obviously reserved for convicted cat frighteners or dog stranglers. She was clutching a row of freshly roasted chickens, feet uppermost on a tin tray. Her concern for animal welfare evidently stopped a good way short of poultry. "Smells good," observed the Stigwood Cove, chattily. "Yum! Yum!" "For the cats," said Ethel rather tartly. "Plum's through there, in the garden. You'll find him pottering aimlessly somewhere. I'll be with you in a minute."

We passed through a cosy sitting room and out into a green sheltered garden complete with lawn and herbaceous borders. We could so easily have been in Surrey except that we weren't. We spotted the old boy who was indeed pottering aimlessly, very much as previously described by Ethel. A lean, fit looking nonagenarian in a light coloured cap and an alpaca jacket, he was currently prodding at the flower beds with his stick. Around his neck hung a sizeable contraption connected to a wire running up to one ear, declaring that this was a man with Occasional Difficulty in Hearing You. As it turned out, occasional was the operative word as there were certain remarks, people, or subjects which reached Plum as clear as a whistle. And others, including many voiced by Ethel, which didn't.

Plum greeted us cheerily with all the bonhomie of a man who hadn't the faintest idea who we were. Though he was clearly beside himself over the plight of some current soap heroine to whom he'd taken rather a shine. "I hope they don't let her die," he said somewhat glumly. "She's the best thing in it." We assured him that in our experience of TV soaps, companies usually kill off their lame ducks, rarely their golden geese.

We chatted for a time. The Composer was beginning to look troubled again, waving his score rather noisily, anxious to have the performance over and done with. It was then that the Stigwood Cove bowled the first googly of the day announcing that we were moving on. Plum, being strictly a words man like yours truly, had no piano to hand. We were off to someone who had.

We drove, the length of Long Island if not the breadth, leaving mid-Surrey behind us and entering instead upper America. We drew up at a place approximately the size of the White House. Our hosts were young and clean cut with a glowing beauty achieved only by the extremely rich or the very, very debauched. "Drugs," murmured the Stigwood Cove. "They've only just come back. They've

both been ... away” He winked.

“Prison?” I enquired.

“A clinic. He composes. Very seriously avant garde.”

I felt the Composer nervously shuffle his score. We entered their sitting room and in the far distance sighted a white piano. “It’s tuned regularly,” our Dorian Gray-like host reassured us. “Not that I ever play it. I hate the things.”

“He’s strictly electronic these days,” whispered our hostess. “He makes the most remarkable, exciting sounds.”

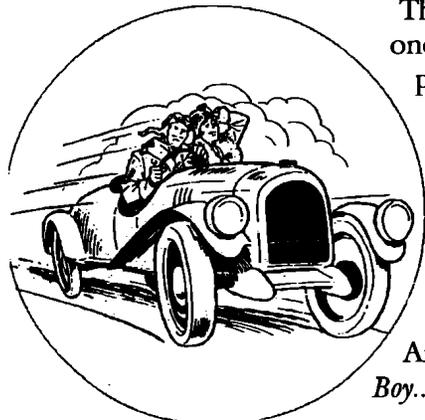
Along one wall were arranged a series of white clothed tables proclaiming that at some point food would be served. Plum, who had recently been demonstrating all the signs of a man who no longer had the faintest idea where he was going or what he was doing, brightened up. “Ah, tea!” he declared, well pleased at the turn of things. “Later, Plum, later,” bellowed Ethel bustling him past such temptation. “We have to listen to this first.”

Through one of the floor-to-ceiling windows I caught sight of a man, lying on the garden flagstones outside. He was pointing a zoom lensed camera very approximately in our direction.

“The photographer,” hissed the Stigwood Cove, somewhat unnecessarily. “Allegedly a former friend of Jackie Kennedy.” He winked again.

We gathered near the piano. It was decided that I would sit with Plum and, in case of sudden deafness, help him to follow the words on the page whilst the Composer played and sang. Ethel settling for the back seat driver’s option, placed herself immediately behind us. The Composer laid out his score and prepared to kick off. Outside I observed Jackie’s former buddy attempting to capture the essence of the occasion from upside down up a tree.

The Composer played a rousing chord, took a breath, looked up, surveyed the room and instead of singing emitted a falsetto squeak like a startled gerbil. I turned to see what had disturbed his musical equilibrium. Silently and unbeknownst to us the room had filled with a sizeable crowd. The Society for the Very Seriously Avant Garde had turned out in strength. The place was awash with beards, beads and butter muslin.



The Composer gave me one final nasty look and plunged in, a musical lemming with nothing further to lose. “*Banjo Boy*,” he warbled.

“Frightfully good,” said Plum, rather prematurely.

And applauded. “*Banjo Boy...*”

“Who wrote these words, then?” thundered Plum.

“*Play a number for me...*”

“He’s sitting next to you,” yelled Ethel.

“*Won’t you play that melody...?*”

“Who?” enquired Plum. “Who did you say?”

“He’s sitting right next to you, Plum!”

Veins were beginning to stand out on the Composer’s forehead as he struggled to top the rival side-show developing inches from his right hand. To his credit, his grip on the tune remained unwavering. His grasp of the words though became altogether vaguer as the pressure began to get to him. I was aware that for Plum’s benefit I was running my finger under lines of a lyric which increasingly had little or no relationship to what was being sung. I sensed in the ranks of the Alternative Music Society a growing bewilderment. Having flocked to hear Wodehouse they were apparently being fobbed off with sub-Lewis Carroll. Plum, too, began to show signs of restlessness. His attention had strayed away from the lyrics and towards the tea table.

Meanwhile, out in the garden, the world was more that of Henry James as our photographer contorted his face at the window like Quint from *The Turn of the Screw*.

At length, the last song hove into view. In the silence that preceded it—for the polite ripple of applause which had started proceedings had long since evaporated—the Composer sensing the finish line, drew breath. Ethel chose this moment to lean and tap me on the shoulder.

“Plum,” she boomed, never a mincer of words, “wrote very good lyrics indeed.”

“Jolly good,” said Plum, who could resist the lure of the table no longer. “Tea!”

From all directions maids appeared, damp cloths were removed, revealing what can best be described as English tea à la Texas; sandwiches piled like the Appalachians, cakes the size of cartwheels. I felt Plum quiver.

“Splendid,” he declared. “Oh, how simply splendid!”

Ethel had other ideas. She took him firmly by the elbow. “No, home, Plum. This has all taken far too long. It’s very late. You don’t want to miss your programme, do you?”

My last sight of him was being propelled through the door, his eyes still longingly fixed on the tea table.

“Cheerio,” he called wistfully back to the sandwiches and then was gone forever.

I turned to the Composer whose features were beginning to resume a normal colour.

“Tea?” I suggested.

He eyed the table with some distaste. “No chance of a drink, is there?”

“Good idea,” I said.

After all, it’s not every day you get to meet living legends.

SEÑORA H

By David Stafford

Pete Barnsley found this amusing item in a recent English newspaper.

SEÑORA H used to come on Wednesday afternoons to learn English. Maybe in her mid-thirties—I was only twenty-two, so it was hard to judge—she was the wife of a Spanish officer in Franco’s army, on attachment to the Embassy in London. She paid well over the going rate for her lessons, even though her English was impeccable.

We would start each lesson with a few minutes of “everyday” conversation, which she liked to turn into a sort of syntactical tennis game.

“Although it is raining, your coat seems very dry,” I would say.

“I have the good fortune to possess an umbrella,” she would reply, “the impermeability of which protects me from the most inclement of meteorological conditions.”

“The umbrella in question being sufficiently sturdy, one hopes, also to resist the wind’s mightiest blast,” I would add.

She would look puzzled. “Excuse me for interrupting the ebb and flow of our discourse for a matter of such seeming pedantry, but the construction of that sentence—‘the umbrella...being sufficiently sturdy’—is that a gerund or a fused participle?” I would begin to busk and bluster. She would interrupt with a concise and cogent explanation of the issue in question. Her manner was never less than modest and charming—just checking that she had her facts right.

After a couple of lessons it was clear what was going on. It was a sex/nationalism thing. Señora H got her kicks from linguistically humiliating foreigners in their own language and paying for it. I was an English As A Foreign Language hooker. She was my john. During the third lesson, having won a tussle over the correct use of hypothetical inversion, she decided it was time to raise the stakes.

“In Spain I have a reputation for wit,” she informed me. “And yet I find that my limited command of English cruelly restrains my sense of humour.”

Even though I suspected that what passed for “a sense of humour” among the Spanish military classes of the time would, in less robust circles, be called “kicking socialists,” I knew it was a mistake to underestimate her. Somewhere about her person, I fancied, she carried a concealed mastery of epigram. I could not let her beat me: There was more than mere personal pride at stake. The opportunity to play one’s part in the long war against fascism can present itself in curious ways. Here was my

chance to continue the work of Orwell, Hemingway and La Pasionara.

“For next week’s lesson,” I suggested, trying to keep my face straight, “let us study the works of the English humorous writer P G Wodehouse.”

We settled on a Jeeves and Wooster novel, *The Mating Season*. The following Wednesday she arrived puzzled and wet, discomposure having caused her to forget her impermeable umbrella.

Together, we read chapter one. From time to time, I faked incontinent laughter and was pleased to notice Señora H attempting to join in. “Let’s take a look at the third paragraph where Bertie takes a pop at focusing the silver lining.” Señora H shot me a glance of pure malice. She knew seven different meanings for the word “pop,” including “pop the question.” She was familiar with the expression, “every cloud has a silver lining” and yet....

I explained the phrase in its every nuance... “All clear now?” I asked. “Let’s move on to... ‘You whizz off the mark all pep and ginger, like a mettlesome charger going into its routine, and the next thing you know the customers are up on their hind legs, yelling for footnotes.’ Work through it yourself.” I sat back and watched her undoing. Like Hal, the computer in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, she gradually regressed as her memory banks overloaded and crashed.

“Is very...ow you say?...ard...er...this mettlesome charger...is a horse, no?” She left a broken woman. The following day, I received a letter saying she wouldn’t be coming to lessons any more. I’m not claiming the whole thing was down to me and P. G. Wodehouse, but it is worth noting that, just three years later, Franco died. *No pasarán!*

PGW LETTERS OUT SOON

PETER Schwed tells me that his beautiful new book of letters from Wodehouse will be ready for distribution in the next month or so. (For details see page 11 of the Winter 1995 *Plum Lines*.) “The book is being excellently produced by a private press, and will look even better than I had hoped,” Peter told me in a telephone call. Peter was, as most of us know, Wodehouse’s American editor and publisher for more than twenty years. These letters, with Peter’s notes about them, promise to be extraordinarily interesting. Only five hundred copies of the sixty-four page hardcover book will be printed. The tentative price is \$30 plus postage. I expect to print an announcement of publication, with full details, in the next issue of *Plum Lines*.

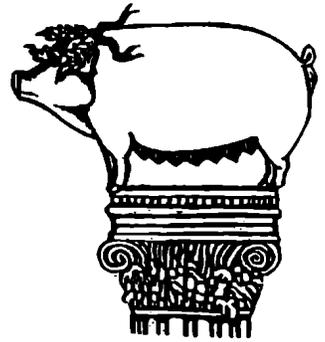
And now...



The Wodehouse Society

8th International Convention

QUIZ!



This quiz was handed out to everyone at the Boston convention last October, and Tony Ring wound up with the best score. Answers are on page 15. See what you can do!

1. According to Augustus Whiffle (or Whipple, if you prefer), a pig's daily nourishment must amount to fifty-seven thousand eight hundred calories, these to consist of _____ four pounds five ounces, and _____ twenty-five pounds.
2. What does Jno. Bodmin of Vigo St., London, make?
3. Which three companies merged to become the Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation?
 - a. Perfecto-Fishbein, Zizzbaum Celluloid, and Mellulla-Oblongata.
 - b. Zizzbaum Celluloid, Colossal Exquisite, and Perfecto-Fishbein.
 - c. The Bigger & Better Motion Picture Company, Perfecto-Fishbein, and Zizzbaum Celluloid.
4. To what is Mr. Mulliner referring when he says, "I admit that they are rarer than they used to be, but in the remoter rural districts you will still find these curious growths flourishing."
5. What is Bertie's middle name?
6. To which member of Lord Emsworth's staff is Freddie Threepwood's wife Niagara (Aggie) related?
7. In the introduction to one of his collections of short stories, Plum wrote, "Except for the tendency to write articles about the Modern Girl and allow his side whiskers to grow, there is nothing an author today has to guard himself against more carefully than the _____ habit."
8. What kind of fruit does Mr. Mulliner's cousin's son Mervyn have to buy in the middle of winter to prove his worth to the object of his affections?
9. What is the name of the Gentlemen Club located opposite the Drones?
10. In the world of Wodehouse, what is the most common effect of the divine passion on a young man (which, by the way, never fails to land him in the soup)?
11. In "Lord Emsworth and the Girl-Friend," what is the girl-friend's name?
12. List all of the Company and Product names in Wodehouse that you can think of (i.e., Mulliners Buck-U-Uppo).

THE FORWARD TILT

JOHN Baesch and Helen Murphy point with pride to the fact that Bertram Wilberforce Wooster made the front page of the august *London Times* on Boat Race Day, April 6, 1996. An article entitled “Helmets off for fans of Bertie Wooster” tells us that

Police lining the Thames today for this year’s Boat Race will be wearing peaked caps for the first time to discourage exuberant onlookers from following the example of Bertie Wooster and snatching helmets for a lark. After a growing number of Drones Club-style pranks over recent years which have seen headgear floating away down the river, officers demanded a change. They said their dignity was in jeopardy... The American-style flat caps that replaced the bobbies’ helmets are much more difficult to knock off.

Helen provides assurance that, at least in London, the traditional helmet is here to stay. In a recent letter to *Country Life* the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service wrote: “Other forces may have decided to abandon the traditional helmet, but not the Metropolitan Police Service. I can assure you that as long as I am Commissioner, police officers in London will continue to wear the helmet.” He states that safety reasons are paramount.

“WODEHOUSE PLAYHOUSE”

NOT AVAILABLE

BILL Norman and several other people have recently written to ask whether the excellent British TV series entitled “The Wodehouse Playhouse” is available on videotape. It presented several Mulliner stories, as you may remember, and appeared about 1975. I asked Len Lawson for an answer—Len is the kind of person referred to as “a usually well-informed source”—and here it is:

No videotapes of the shows were released commercially. Some fans may have taped the shows off the air for their own viewing, but selling or giving the tapes or copies of them to anyone else is a violation of copyright.

So I’m afraid the answer is no. I’m just as inconsolable as you are—I think the series was the best version of Wodehouse yet to appear on television.

CHAPTERS CORNER

THE Drone Rangers of Houston, Texas, are issuing an impressive Old West style newsletter (sometimes in color!) every six weeks under the able editorship of **Toni Rudersdorf**. The Drones meet nearly every month and consider one book at each meeting. At their April meeting **Catherine Statler** presented her paper, “Classical Drones.” I especially like her conclusion:

But [Wodehouse’s] works are not the tragedies of the Greeks. The Greek and Roman writers took the wildly dysfunctional families and hopeless escapades of their gods and heroes and turned them into tragedies. PGW took the wildly dysfunctional families and hopeless escapades of the Drones and turned them into splendid comedy. If Aristotle were writing his treatise on comedy, PGW would surely be his model.

THE NEWTS of Boston are knee-deep (and the water is rising rapidly) in their Great Newt Project and hope to have newts installed, happy and prosperous, at the Franklin Park Zoo by the time this is published. Newt-Mother **Jean Tillson** and Newt-Father **Max Pokrivchak** have been at the library recently, stuffing their skulls with all manner of Newt-Lore in order to be good parents to the little critters.

The NEWTS also volunteered two evenings of fundraising service in March and August with local public television station WGBH. That station gave our convention much good publicity last fall and our society a couple of on-air mentions during the volunteer evenings.

THE Pdrone of St. Louis report lunch in the Tap Room where the ploughman’s lunch and fish and chips were most popular. Mulliner stories were discussed along with other PGW stories, the TWS photo album was circulated, and new member **Jerilyn Cohen** was initiated—with secret and dreadful rites, I presume.

The “fourth annual typical country picnic” of the Pdrone was held on May 11. Suggestions for the picnic include prawns, pheasant, woodcock, and courgette, with an egg race and discussion of *Psmith in the City*. Plans for later in the year include a PGW video and dinner, a “Brunch and Bring Your Own Dinner,” and an Anniversary Dinner.

Jon Lellenberg’s entertaining historical review of the activities of the Capital! Capital! chapter appears on the next page.

CAPITAL! CAPITAL!

WASHINGTON D.C.'S CHAPTER OF THE WODEHOUSE SOCIETY

"He stated specifically that the thought of living in Washington gave him the - what was the expression he used?" "The pip?" "The pip. Precisely." - *Indiscretions of Archie*

Now that *Plum Lines* has a Chapters Corner, I suppose it is incumbent upon us to provide some account of ourselves. Rather like standing up before the Boshier Street beak, and trying to explain away the questionable incidents of the night before.

Very well then, your Worship, my name is Leon Trotzsky, and it was in the summer of '92 that the notion arose for a Wodehouse Society chapter in Washington, D.C., the city with laughter in its heart. While this and that intervened until November 10th that year, it was on that night that eight local members of the Wodehouse Society toddled into the art deco surroundings of the Kennedy-Warren Apartments on Connecticut Avenue and made each other's acquaintance. A rummy letter of greeting from then-Society president Len Lawson was read ("This is the second time I have been asked for words of encouragement for the first meeting of a new chapter. I really don't have any.") after which it was the work of a moment for Wade Hinkle to give our new chapter its name, one expressive of a sunnier attitude toward the nation's capital than the Master's, whose sole known comment appears above.

Since then we've met every six to eight weeks, depending upon the notorious forgetfulness of the defendant Trotzsky. For some time now we have rallied round at Mrs. Simpson's, a café dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Wallis S. and her friend, His Royal Highness Edward VIII, Prince of Wales. In its atmosphere of Mayfair in the 'Twenties our chapter has thrived, growing in an amiable won't-be-hurried manner, and browsing and sluicing deeply at Mrs. Simpson's Sunday champagne brunches. We have effervesced our way through many of Bertie Wooster's misadventures, acted out the merits of various and sundry tales to be a (not *the* — how could anyone choose a single tale) perfect P. G. Wodehouse short story, hissed Russell Baker's rather peculiar efforts to interpret Wodehouse for the masses, and failed in our attempts to vocalize a convincing Policeman's "Ho!" For some reason the staff of Mrs. Simpson's think us eccentric, but they have yet to ask us to take our custom elsewhere.

Nine of us infested the Society's convention in Boston last October, and I am pleased to say that two of us won prizes in the costume competition, John "Barmy" Phipps as the Russian writer Vladimir Brusiloff, and Cathy Oliveri as a vamp Bertie wouldn't have dared take home to Aunt Agatha, if that had been his home, which of course it wasn't, perish the thought. This seems to be as good a time as any to staunch certain rumors which arose from our display in the Chapters Corner at the Boston convention. No, P. G. Wodehouse was not banned from the Army & Navy Club here in 1937 for waking up the members by imitating incoming artillery rounds. And, well, yes, that *was* FBI stationery, but no, it wasn't actually his FBI dossier linking him to the Black Shorts and Heralds of the Red Dawn. No, we don't actually sponsor an annual Fat Congressman Contest, but it *is* a good idea isn't it. But yes, that *was* an aerial photograph of the maze at Blandings Castle, not the Pentagon. Many people make that mistake.

CAPITAL! CAPITAL! seems to be on the map now, judging from a stream of curiosity-seekers over the past year, including Mrs. Tom Travers (Elin Woodger), Pongo (Shamim Mohamed), Green Swizzle Wooster (John Coo), and our old friend Donald "Catsmeat" Pollock, who nobbled Pongo ever so handily in the card-tossing competition in Boston. (If you think he's a hard-boiled egg in that department, try playing darts with him.) We are now working our way through the Blandings Castle saga, though even the most charitable of observers would say that our gatherings partake more of *espièglerie* and *joie de vivre* than scholarship. We have fun, and look forward to you joining us on some occasion, since most everyone comes to Washington sooner or later to visit their money.

WODE

by David Landman

(with apologies to John Gay)*

Says my uncle 'I pray you discover,'
As down Piccadilly we strode,
'This writer of whom you're a lover,
Do you call him Wodehouse or Wode?'

The knotted hairs on my head (I swear it!)
Like quills on the porpentine showed,
'Dear Nunc as I hope to inherit
The name is said Wodehouse not Wode.'

'My dear boy,' he sobbed, 'I've been weak yet
One has to be true to his code,
So it's time you knew of the secret
Curse on our family bestowed.

'It has gnawed and has stapped at my vittles
On my nerves it has stomped and banjoed,
It has soured my beer and my skittles
And rendered me quite pigeon-toed.

'At the moment your diction is Attic,
Your "talley's" and "what's" are well hoed,
But before the year's out there'll be static,
And you'd Wode if you could, but you'll Wode.

'Though like Demosthenes you gargle with gravel,
It shall be as the gypsy Tarot-ed;
Before long, my poor boy, you must travel
Down that wearisome long dusty Wode.

Here he broke down and wept in his passion
Right in the Tottenham Court Road;
Then he said, 'I really must dash on,'
And was off in a mode indigoed.

Since then under accentual harrow
I'm sliced like the proverbial toad;
One half of me's true as an arrow,
The other half twitches out Wode.

'I know Yeats is not Yeets and Keats is not Kates,
That Winnie is Pooh-ed and not Poe-d;
At Oxford I have mastered the Greats,
Yet my Wode sounds immensely like Wode.

To master that name my wealth I'd outpour;
If I owned a vast motherlode
I'd give up my gold and shove in my ore
And feel quid-absolutely-pro-quoed.

I've a dream that for Honours I'm listed;
With joy my cup's overflowed;
The Queen Mother has graciously twisted
Round my knee a Garter she sewed.

Kowtowing I say, 'Ma'am,
All the horses of passion I've whoa'd,
But I'm no chevalier for old Windsor
The House that I'm preux for is Wode.'

Aghast she starts back overpowered;
'Gor Blimey,' she says, 'I'll be blowed!
Take this twister and see him well Towered
In a dungeon without a commode.

'Away with this malaprop courtier
(I do this young man for your goad)
And see if some innocent torture
Will to Wodehouse change his vile Wode.

'Make him cease his horrible blather,
Affix to his brains electrode'
Then I wake in a navy-blue lather
Like a Briton tricked out in woad.

For in Boston before TWS
As a speaker I'm portfolioed.
Oh, think of the shame of my maiden address
When I blurt out not Wodehouse but Wode.

Should I gag on a morsel of endive?
Should I slink about mustachioed?
At the mike should I coyly pretend I've
A terrible code in duh node?

Should I wear a frond of green whiskers?
Should I drown in my pic a la mode?
Should I suffer reproving tsk, tskers?
Should my remarks be Marcel Marceau'd?

Well the end of my story's disaster
For my uncle has since westward-hoed
Summoned to join the great Master
Up in his celestial abode.

Towards the end his complaint became chronic,
And the last words that he tremuloed
Were 'twas neither on Royal nor Monarch
Plum typed, but an old Underwode.'

And I fare nowadays like poor Hamlet
My spirit like his o'er-crowed,
For I've struggled ad nauseam yet
Have achieved but a worse antipode;

For though Wodehouse I say with conviction,
My success has done me no good;
For I've got the counter affliction,
When I want to say 'woad' I say 'wood.'

I'm thinking of becoming a Trappist
And wearing a coarse woolen hood
To conceal that my deplorable hap is
To laugh not at Spode but at Spode.

Envoy

Someday my tongue will untangle,
In a paradise where Plum's name is pat,
Where an angel's an angel not angle
And a Spode is a Spode for a' that.

* In *Mist's Weekly Journal* of 20 August 1726 a ballad entitled 'MOLLY MOG: or the Fair Maid of the INN' attributed to John Gay, but probably the joint production of Gay, Pope, and Swift, was published. The poem is a crambo, one designed to exhaust the possibilities of rhymes on a name, in this case Molly Mog, the beauteous daughter of the host of the Old Rose at Ockingham. It begins:

Says my uncle, I pray you discover
What hath been the cause of your woes?
That you pine and you whine like a lover?
—I have seen Molly Mog of the Rose.

It continues for twelve more stanzas, the fourth line of each ending with 'Mog,' and the fun of the piece is in employing clever rhymes for it in line two. I take the opening line, the meter, and the crambo idea from this poem.

WODEHOUSE

Others abide our question—thou are sure
The eel's left eyebrow; Shakespeare leaves
Us guessing; yet like some almighty Jeeves
Thou stand'st in lonely splendor, silent, pure,
To save us from the dull and mirthless lure
Of lesser joy; and if perchance we fall
Into the soup, there's nothing but to call
For thy stiff pick-me-up to be our cure.
And thou, whose club doth rough and fairway know,
Hath swung with goofs, and clicked with Cuthbert Banks,
Dost share our bunkered sorrows. Better so!
High and serene thou fliest beyond our thanks:
Ukridge and Wooster, Psmith, and other such
Find their sole laughter in thy happy touch.

Jon Lellenberg sent this sonnet. It's from the "Books Alive" column of the great Sherlockian and journalist Vincent Starrett, in the *Chicago Tribune* of March 17, 1946. Starrett wrote: "I venture to pass on a Wordsworthian sonnet that I have been saving for a number of years; it should find place in somebody's next anthology of bookly verse. Its author is the amiable bookman who signs himself 'Old Fag' in *John O'London's Weekly*; I don't know his private name. The sonnet, titled simply 'Wodehouse,' appeared in 1937."

WANT AD

For Sale (prices include postage within the U.S.)

1. The Man Upstairs. Barrie and Jenkins reprint, 1980, with new preface by Wodehouse not found in the first edition nor in paperback reprints. Fine copy in dust jacket. \$25.
2. Louder and Funnier. Faber and Faber. Reprint of first issue with cream-colored dust jacket. Fine copy in dust jacket. \$150.
3. Jeeves Omnibus. Herbert Jenkins, 1931. First issue of the collected short stories with a frontispiece photo of PGW. Overall, very good. \$65.

A FEW QUICK ONES

The opening of *By Jeeves* reminds **William Hardwick** that the original version, in 1975, was so bad that the *Guardian's* drama critic urged Wodehouse fans to set fire to the producer's trousers.

Peter Cannon brings word that St. Martin's Press has just published *The Resurrected Holmes*, edited by Marvin Kaye. It's a collection of Sherlock Holmes pastiches as if written by other famous authors, including "The Adventure of Ricoletti of the Club Foot (and his abominable wife)" ascribed to P. G. Wodehouse (in fact Roberta Rogow). There is a butler named Reeves.

David McDonough was pleased to discover three Wodehouse musicals listed in the recently published *Ganzl's Book of the Broadway Musical: 75 Favorite Shows from HMS Pinafore to Sunset Boulevard*. The three are *Oh, Boy!* of 1917, *Oh, Kay!* of 1926, and *Anything Goes* of 1934. Three out of seventy-five isn't bad, but some of us think that's hardly enough for the man who, with his collaborators, invented musical comedy.

The English butler may be vanishing, but at least one American butler has flourished. **Elliott Milstein** notes that Ronald Marcelle, a majordomo in a household in the Detroit area, was in 1993 responsible for several residences, a staff of seventeen, and a budget of more than one million dollars, and received in compensation \$180,000 a year plus benefits.

Susan Cohen proudly announces that she recently "defended Plum with the passion of an avenging angel" in the Philadelphia edition of *TV Guide* magazine. Her letter to the editor shows that she has much in common with the angel of death who gave Sennacherib such trouble: "In reviewing Masterpiece Theatre's presentation of P. G. Wodehouse's *Heavy Weather*, Susan Stewart refers to Wodehouse as 'shallow.' I am offended by her attempt to be a literary critic. No one should judge that great humor writer and master of epigrammatic prose based on a scriptwriter's interpretation of his writing."

Pete Barnsley asks whether anyone has ever thought of investigating Plum's interest in popular music. He notes

that, for example, "Little Grey Home in the West" is mentioned in at least three stories. Wodehouse might have mentioned a song once because its title was appropriate for a plot situation; does this much use of a single title indicate his own liking for the song? Pete suggests that a recording of Wodehouse's favorite songs might be popular.

My own memory of his musical interests is confined to the remark he made somewhere that a certain violin concerto had the property, common to all violin concertos, of seeming to last much longer than it did.

William Hardwick reports that the memorial service for Alfred Wight (alias James Herriot) in York Minster last October included a reading from *The World of Jeeves*. According to a newspaper account, P. G. Wodehouse was Wight's favorite author, and the selection was read by Robert Hardy, who played Herriot's senior partner in the television series 'All Things Bright and Beautiful.'

Jay Weiss writes: Whenever I come across a book I haven't read before, the first thing I do is check the index to see if Wodehouse is mentioned. Then, of course, I read the reference. But I have found that occasionally Plum will turn up in a book even if his name is absent from the index. P.G. Wodehouse does not appear in Brendan Gill's entertaining *Here at The New Yorker*, but Bertie Wooster does, I discovered the other day. Describing the very properly English race track writer, George T. Ryall, Gill says, "Ryall resembles a character out of some sunny Edwardian novel. Bertie Wooster might well have stumbled against him in the press of the crowd on a corking afternoon at Goodwood. Bertie would have burst out, "Sorry, old chap!" and Ryall would have told him what he thought of him, in a courteous, sidelong snarl.

So, without mentioning Wodehouse, Gill pays him the greatest of all possible compliments. He assumes that every reader will know instantly who Plum's immortal creation, Bertram Wilberforce Wooster, is, without a word of explanation. Only a handful of other characters from literature—Hamlet and Sherlock Holmes spring to mind—have achieved this lofty status of instant, universal recognition.

Paul Schnacke found in a recent issue of the *National Review* an article by a congressman who mentioned the therapeutic effects of PGW: "I cannot tell you how often I restored perspective on the House floor during the turbulent days of the last two years by going up to a Member and just reminding him that no matter how dark things seem, there is never a time when ties do not matter."

John Mortimer, of Horace Rumpole fame, is praised thus in an item **Barbara Helling** found in a recent *New York Times* book review: "In his happy ability to play a seemingly infinite number of diverting variations on the same theme, in the fluidity and panache of his prose, his combination of high intelligence and low foolery, John Mortimer is worthy of comparison to P. G. Wodehouse."

Was Jeeves wrong? **Elliott Milstein** has found disturbing evidence that this paragon may at least have misjudged. An article on Nietzsche in the October 1994 *Economist* begins with Jeeves's well-known demur: "You would not enjoy Nietzsche, sir. He is fundamentally unsound." But goes on to say that even among the "hard-headed" lot of analytical philosophers in Britain and America "the standard view of Nietzsche is changing."

The bastions are crumbling. What's next—scarlet cummerbunds?

Psmith lives! **Susan Cohen** found that a man with this most unlikely name has surfaced as the author of a book about English fox-hunting: *Lords of the Chase: Tales of the Shires and Beyond*. It's published by Wordpecker and it's mostly in rhyme. (I'm not sure I believe either end of that sentence, but there it is in the paper.) A review of the book appeared in a recent English *Sunday Telegraph*.

One writer's high praise for another was included in *Magic*, the final collection of Isaac Asimov's fantasy stories (Harper Prism, 1996). **Phil Ayers** found this challenge to the reader:

Suppose you wanted to portray an amiable nitwit, a pleasant simp with about as much brains as you can pack into a thimble. And suppose you want him to be the first-person narrator. Do you suppose you can find yourself an amiable nitwit or a pleasant simp and have him write the book? After all, he is one; whatever he writes is what an amiable nitwit or a pleasant simp would say.

Let me point, then, to P. G. Wodehouse's books about Bertie Wooster and Jeeves. Bertie Wooster tells the story and with every line reveals himself to be an amiable nitwit, a pleasant simp. But those books are perfectly written by someone who was nothing of the sort. It takes damned clever writing to have someone betray himself as a silly ass in every line and yet do it so smoothly you never ask himself, 'How is it that that silly ass is telling the story so well?'

Tony Ring provides this sidelight on *By Jeeves* from the *London Times* of July 4, 1996:

Researching for his part as Gussie Fink-Nottle, newt-fancier, for the musical *By Jeeves!* at the Duke of York's Theatre in London, Stephen Day had to turn no further than his girlfriend of seven months, Susie Paisley. Miss Paisley, a native of North Carolina, is a biologist who is in this country gearing up for a PhD on pond life.

"Before we opened in Scarborough, Susie drew me an extremely elaborate diagram explaining the breeding patterns of

the newt. The female, she told me, emits a low plaintive sound when she's in the mood. All very useful."

Plans to keep some real live newts for Day's perusal during the show collapsed after rotting leaves in the newtery stank out the props room.

JM

The Oldest Member



Answers

1. Protein; carbohydrates. ("Pig-hoo-o-o-o-ey!")
2. Hats. ("The Amazing Hat Mystery")
3. B. Zizzbaum Celluloid, Colossal Exquisite, and Perfecto-Fishbein. ("The Rise of Minna Nordstrom")
4. Moustaches. ("Buried Treasure" or "Hidden Treasure")
5. Wilberforce. (*The Mating Season*, Chapter 4.)
6. Angus McAllister. ("The Custody of the Pumpkin")
7. Saga.
8. Strawberries. ("The Knightley Quest of Mervyn")
9. Demosthenes. (*Cocktail Time*, chapter 1)
10. The desire to do acts of kindness to others.
11. Gladys.
12. Donaldson's Dog Joy, Peterson's Pupfood, Mulliner's Raven Gypsy Face Cream, Mulliner's Snow of the Mountains Lotion, Briggs's Breakfast Pickles, Haddock's Headache Hokies, Popgood & Grooly Publishers, Slingsby's Superb Soups—to name a few. (Tony Ring named forty-five and ran out of space.)

Maiden Eggesford, like so many of our rural hamlets, is not at its best and brightest on a Sunday. When you have walked down the main street and looked at the Jubilee Watering-Trough, there is nothing much to do except go home and come out again and walk down the main street once more and take another look at the Jubilee Watering-Trough. *Tried in the Furnace, 1936*

NEW MEMBERS

FINANCIAL REPORT, 1995

By Tom Wainwright, Treasurer

Balance Dec 31, 1994		\$5306.31
Income		
Dues	\$8903.00	
Interest	49.32	
1993 convention surplus	<u>928.35</u>	
Total income		9880.67
Expenses		
<i>Plum Lines</i>	\$5350.41	
Correspondence, telephone	1308.09	
Bank fee (blank checks)	<u>9.10</u>	
Total expense		<u>6667.60</u>
Balance Dec 31, 1995		\$8519.38

Note: The 60% increase in our funds during 1995 occurred because we published only three issues of *Plum Lines* instead of the usual four. The Winter 1995 issue should have been published in November 1995, but did not appear until early 1996 and was our most expensive issue yet. The five issues we expect to publish in 1996 will eliminate all need for embarrassment about our wealth.

GERTRUDE LIVES!

REMEMBER Gertrude of Tiverton, the magnificent black Berkshire pig in the recent TV version of *Heavy Weather*? Now, say **Tony Ring** and **Susan Cohen**, you can bring Gertrude into your own home and give her an honored place by (or, like the Infant Samuel, above) your fireside.

Bob Matthews, Gertrude's owner in Devon, runs a pottery as well as a piggery, and offers numerous versions of Gertrude and many other agricultural fauna handpainted on mugs, jugs, teapots, tea plates, garlic pots, marmalade pots, spoon rests, and a dizzying variety of other ceramic and non-ceramic items.

ELIN WOODGER, EDITOR

It's been clear for some time that *Plum Lines* needs more attention than one person can give it. I recently asked Elin Woodger, of the Boston NEWTS, to work with me as an editor and she kindly agreed to do so. Elin is eminently qualified in about sixteen ways, and I'm feeling very lucky to have her as a colleague. The arrangement is somewhat experimental. Ideally two editors of the same publication ought to be arguing with each other across the same desk in the same room. How on earth can we work together across a continent? That remains to be seen, as the undertaker said, but modern high-tech communications will ease the problems. (Elin and I have been getting some very good results with hilltop signal fires.) We'll see how it works out. In the meantime, as far as I'm concerned Elin and I are co-equal co-editors.

In case you're wondering, I'm not preparing to leave *Plum Lines*. I just hope that Elin and I together can make it a better publication, produced with less frenzy and fewer gallons of midnight oil. —OM

FROM RICHARD USBORNE

RICHARD Usborne, Wodehousian extraordinaire and Resident of The Charterhouse, London, was unable to attend our Boston convention last fall. A number of convention attendees sent him personal greetings and a tote bag of convention souvenirs by way of Norman and Helen Murphy. He responded with thanks in the next *Plum Lines*. The following poem is, he says, "a postscript."

I have a bag, a bag I swing a-swagger,
signed by some great names of the Wodehouse creed.
Filled (as with books) it makes me sway and stagger,
empty, it hangs that those who run may read.

It's mostly book-work this last winter season..
I'm changing rooms in this establishment.*
Also, I'm 85. . .sufficient reason
to stay at home and get my thank-yous *sent*.

Thank-you, bag-givers: thank-you across the ocean
(You mix your sexes, here we're only men),
Greetings in true Wodehousian devotion!
I wish I'd been in Boston with you then.

*The Charterhouse

THE WODEHOUSE GOLF COURSE (OR FOLLOWING THE PGW TOUR)

By Charles E. Gould, Jr.

Pauline Blanc found this article in *Book Source Monthly*, Vol 11, No. 12, March 1996. It is reprinted here by kind permission of the author and the publisher. —OM

WHEN I was a child, an old friend of my mother's used to recite a verse which consisted of the following dialogue:

*"Who's that stranger, mother dear?
Look! He knows us! Ain't he queer!"*

*"Hush, my child, don't talk so wild;
That's your father, dearest child."*

*"That's my father? No such thing!
Father died away last spring!"*

*"Father didn't die, you dub!
Father joined a golfing club."*

The idea of the Golf Widow here so powerfully conveyed must be as old as the game itself, and that's pretty old: while, according to my Eleventh Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "it is uncertain at what date golf was introduced into Scotland, in 1457 the popularity of the game had already become so great as seriously to interfere with the pursuit of archery," and about a century later the threat had spread to the extent that in 1592 the town council of Edinburgh

ordainis proclamation to be made threw this burgh, that na inhabitants of the samyn be seen at ony pastymes within or without the toun, upoun the Sabboth day, sic as golfe.

The *Britannica* entry goes on to say, at what seems an uncyclopaedic risk of facetiousness, that "the following year the edict was re-announced, but with the modification that the prohibition was 'in tyme of sermons.'" Even allowing that in those days "tyme of sermons" might have been somewhat more consuming than it is today, that still opened up a considerable stretch of the Sabbath, especially between May and October, and one sees at a glance the enormous power Golf had attained even before the metaphysical onset of the 17th century.

One need not be a golfer oneself to have gathered, then, that Golf has held almost from the first the power to wreck homes and religions, and it is no surprise that in the thirty-one stories P.G. Wodehouse wrote on the subject, these are the central themes. Indeed, in *The Coming of Gowf*, Gowf is explicitly the "species of savage religious ceremony" which sweeps through the kingdom of Oom, putting out of joint the noses of the High Priests of the sixty-seven gods of that kingdom. The ceremony, which grew up "in an inhospitable part of that country at a spot known to the natives as S'nandrews," consists of making curious mystic passes with a hoe or a stick over a rounded stone until, the celebrant uttering the "strange melancholy cry" of "Fo-o-ore," the hoe or stick descends on the stone and drives it through the air. The king goes crazy over the new religion, and the orthodox shake their heads. That is how it all began; and Wodehouse records a number of latter-day manifestations of the power of Golf on the spiritual life. In "The Rough Stuff," for example, when Ramsden Waters misses the ball, "Rich oaths surged to his lips, and blistering maledictions crashed against the back of his clenched teeth." But little Wilberforce Bray, the brother of Ramsden's beloved Eunice, uttering a merry laugh, says "Never hit it!" Ramsden's number 11 golf shoe "wavered in mid-air, then crashed home," and Ramsden addresses an outraged Eunice: "Madam," he said, "in similar circumstances I would have kicked the Archangel Gabriel."

As is typically the case in stories of epiphany, such as James Joyce's *Dubliners* (though they are comparatively light reading because of the lack of golf-interest), Ramsden's spiritual intensity is what gets the girl. Eunice sees the truth about this man: "He might not look like a Viking, but after all it is the soul that counts and, as this afternoon's experience had taught her, Ramsden Waters had a soul that seemed to combine in equal proportions the characteristics of Nero, a wildcat, and the second mate of a tramp steamer." Similarly in "Chester Forgets Himself," it is Golf which brings about the great spiritual liberation which allows Chester Meredith to win the heart of Felicia Blakeney. Chester is about to make an approach-shot when one of the Wrecking Crew (consisting of the First Grave-Digger, the Man with the Hoe, Old Father Time and Consul, the Almost Human), drives,

with the shot of a lifetime, directly into him.

Chester Meredith gave one look at his ball, one look at the flag, one look at the Wrecking Crew, one look at the sky... And then, with his whole soul seething like a cistern struck by a thunderbolt, he spoke.

"!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" cried Chester.

Dimly he was aware of a wordless exclamation from the girl beside him, but he was too distraught to think of her now. It was as if all the oaths pent up within his bosom for so many weary days were struggling and jostling to see which could get out first. They cannoned into each other, they linked hands and formed parties, they got themselves all mixed up in weird vowel-sounds, the second syllable of some red-hot verb forming a temporary union with the first syllable of some blistering noun.

"!—!!—!!!—!!!!" cried Chester.

Felicia stood staring at him. In her eyes was the look of one who sees visions.

"****!!**!!**!!**!!**!!**!!" roared Chester, in part.

A great wave of emotion flooded over the girl. How she had misjudged this silver-tongued man! She shivered as she thought that, had this not happened, in another five minutes they would have parted forever, sundered by seas of misunderstanding, she cold and scornful, he with all his music still within him.

"Oh, Mr. Meredith!" she cried, faintly.

Such is the religious fervor's power to liberate the soul and show forth its vision to former doubters.

In a more secular fashion, Golf in the stories has enormous power over love, to unite or separate lovers. "I refuse," says Charlotte Dix in "The Magic Plus Fours," "to marry a man who treats me as if I were a kronen at the present rate of exchange, merely because I slice an occasional tee-shot. The afternoon I broke off the engagement...the afternoon I broke off the en-gug-gug-gagement, he told me I ought to use an iron off the tee instead of a dud-dud-driver." Rodney Spelvin is able to say, with manly frankness: "You are right. I am not a golfer. But with the help of this splendid girl here, I humbly hope to be one some day," though he has wasted his life so far writing poetry. Mortimer Sturgis in "Sundered Hearts" contemplates (needlessly, as it turns out) the supreme sacrifice: "I love you better than life itself. I would sooner have smashed my pet driver than have had you leave me," he says to his wife Mabel. And it is the prowess of Cuthbert Banks on the links that wins the heart of Adeline Smithurst, thus proving to the skeptic in *The Clicking of Cuthbert* that there is at least one "single case where this pestilential pastime has done a man any practical good."

The books of golf stories collect them from their original magazine appearances in various ways, but in effect there are five volumes: *The Clicking of Cuthbert* (London, 1922), published in America as *Golf Without Tears*; *The Heart of a Goof* (London, 1926), published in America as *Divots*; *Wodehouse on Golf* (New York, 1940), published only in America, containing the two afore-

mentioned volumes and four other stories; *The Golf Omnibus* (London, 1973, 5000 copies issued on this side by Simon & Schuster), containing all of the stories from the first two volumes above and twelve others; and D.R. Bensen's *Fore! The Best of Wodehouse on Golf* (New Haven, 1983) which assembles twelve stories from the various groups just mentioned. All of these books are now scarce as first editions; the first five titles just listed are now rare, especially *Divots*; and their dust wrappers (for those who are interested) are extremely rare—rarer than others of their vintage. They are sought not only by Wodehouse Collectors but also by Golf Collectors; and it is not an irony that Golf Collectors are even more fanatic than Wodehouse Collectors. P.G. Wodehouse would have thought us all crazy. In "High Stakes," Gladstone Bott laughs aloud ("Ha, ha, ha, ha!") at Bradbury Fisher's offer of two million dollars for "the authentic baffle used by Bobby Jones in his first important contest—the Infants' All-In Championship of Atlanta, Georgia, open to those of both sexes not yet having finished teething."

Wodehouse was a hugely successful writer, but he didn't care any more about a first edition than he did about a baffle: he lived just long enough to suspect, perhaps, but not long enough to see how valuable the physical objects would become. Leonora Wodehouse, to whom P.G. dedicated *Divots* ("without whose never-failing sympathy and encouragement this book would have been finished in haft the time"), wrote in the *American* magazine (October, 1931): "All Plum wants is an occasional dollar to buy tobacco with." Barry Phelps, in his definitively iconoclastic biography (London, 1992), suggests that Plum wanted, and got, huge cheques for his work. Either way, Wodehouse would chuckle at the prices his books fetch now, as he re-read a well-thumbed Agatha Christie.

The appeal of the golf books to tradesmen and collectors is parallel to their appeal to readers. One needn't worship Gowf to find the stories accessible, sublimely ordered, beautifully written and hilariously funny. In fact, next to the Jeeves and Blandings sagas, the Golf Stories are Wodehouse's most polished achievements, far surpassing, I think, the Mulliner stories, though the narrative device is the same. The Mulliner stories are told by Mr. Mulliner, who replaces the author as the third-person narrative voice; the Golf Stories are told in similar fashion by The Oldest Member, but there are complexities here for the literal-minded. "Dr. J.H.C. Morris has postulated four distinct personalities, three British and one American," Tony Ring points out in *Wodehouse in the Clubhouse* (Maidenhead, 1994), including in the same volume an Appendix, "The Oldest Member's Home Course" by my friend the late Walter S. White. Walter Golfed and Collected, and found ("by the wonders of his art," as Shakespeare wrote of him) The Oldest Member's

Home Course: the Sound View Golf Club in Great Neck, Long Island, New York. Setting, with reluctance, the oxymoron of *Sound View* aside, I return to the cliché turned into a living truth by Lt. Col. Norman Murphy: Wodehouse knew what he wrote about. My subscript to that undeniable truth is simply that he then went on to make it all up.

Thirteen years ago, as I sorted and catalogued a largish collection of P.G.W. papers which had made their way to New York in the wake of the Morgan Library Centenary, I ran across a Wodehouse manuscript which took some time to define, six holograph pages hard to read, referring repeatedly to the *H.M.* I transcribed the thing, with no little effort; and a few weeks later, thanks to my friend John Saumarez Smith at G. Heywood Hill, Curzon St, London, I learned that '*H.M.*' must refer to *The Haunted*

Major, by Robert Marshall. (Edinburgh: The Moray Press, Grant and Murray, Ltd., 1902.) Barry Phelps later sent me a 1937 copy of the book which I have not read. But the super-natural element in *The Magic Plus Fours* came to Wodehouse long before he'd read *The Haunted Major* in 1973. What Wodehouse had written was a Foreword to a new printing of *The Haunted Major*, which I don't think ever got printed.

I honestly don't know who owns this manuscript now; but with deference to the Wodehouse Estate and to Sir Edward Cazalet, I hope I may be permitted to quote one line Wodehouse wrote that he didn't publish:

I sometimes wonder what would have happened if I had tried a comic golf story. Probably nothing.

Of course, P.G. Take another look at your handicap.

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